

BEGC -114
Postcolonial
Literatures

Block

4**DRAMA: VIJAY TENDULKAR'S GHASHIRAM KOTWAL****UNIT 1****Theatre in India****181****UNIT 2****Reading *Ghashiram Kotwal*****193****UNIT 3****Plot and Technique****205****UNIT 4****Themes and Characterization****217**

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

In the previous blocks you have read Postcolonial literatures from different parts of the world, primarily from South Africa. Block 4 of the Postcolonial Literatures focuses on the modern drama from India. This block titled Drama: Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* is structured as below:

Unit 1 Theatre in India presents a background reading of the modern Indian theatre. By tracing the evolution of Indian theatre the unit brings out the shifts in the paradigms. A brief discussion on the life and works of Vijay Tendulkar has been done.

Unit 2, Dramatic Techniques, analyses the interactions between music and dance, various folk forms, etc. Translating a text demands a lot of care and seriousness from the translator since it is more than a text that is in translation, keeping this in view a discussion of the play's translation has been presented.

Unit 3 discusses the plot and technique of the play *Ghashiram Kotwal*

Unit 4 titled Themes and Characterisation analyses the important themes discussed in the play. Art of characterisation and the role assigned to women in the play as also society have been described. Gender concerns of the text is one of the primary concerns in this unit.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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UNIT 1 THEATRE IN INDIA

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Indian Drama
- 1.3 Marathi Theatre
- 1.4 Modern Indian Theatre
- 1.5 Vijay Tendulkar: Life and Works
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Suggested Readings
- 1.8 Answers to Exercises

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we shall briefly discuss the growth and development of Indian theatre, especially Marathi theatre so that we can understand *Ghashiram Kotwal* in its proper context. In addition to this, we shall also take up the intellectual, social and political reasons that influenced Indian theatre in the fifties and sixties and gave a certain direction to its subsequent development.

After reading the Unit carefully, you will be able to:

- have a view of the main trends in Indian drama;
- describe the development of Marathi theatre;
- discuss the historical background of the play; and
- outline the life and works of Vijay Tendulkar.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the last Block in your course. In all the previous blocks, we have discussed Western drama which comes from a different culture, a different tradition. In the previous blocks you read fiction, poetry and short stories from different Postcolonial spaces in the west. Here we turn to *Ghashiram Kotwal* which is quite different from all the plays you have read so far. Modern Indian theatre has emerged from a different tradition. It is for this reason that we shall discuss Indian and Marathi theatre to give you the introductory background which you will find useful.

Vijay Tendulkar, the well-known playwright wrote *Ghashiram Kotwal* in Marathi (first published, 1973). It has been translated into different languages –the Hindi translation was done by Vasant Dev (Delhi, 1974). Jayant Karve and an American professor Eleanor Zelliot jointly translated *Ghashiram Kotwal* from the Marathi into English (Calcutta, 1984)

Even though this is a play from our own country, yet we know that India is very large with diverse cultures and language. It is this diversity that we must keep in mind while approaching the play. Some of us, who belong to different regions,

may not be aware of the specific features of Maharashtrian culture. However, we shall try to highlight these course of discussion over the next few Units. You will find *Ghashiram Kotwal* an interesting play, but before we begin to read it we need to know something about Indian theatre, something about Marathi theatre. We also need to find out who Vijay Tendulkar is and what is the historical background of the period in which the play is set. All these aspects will us in understanding the play better.

Drama, as we know, is quite different from a novel or a poem. We usually read a novel or a poem when we are alone. But drama is something more than simply words on the page –it is meant to be performed or enacted. The audience is an active participant in the theatrical presentation. So we respond to a play not alone but along with other members of the audience. It is quite another matter that other people will respond in their own specific ways. But then there are some plays which we do not see performed but read them as literature. How will we approach such plays? We must remember that playwrights usually expect their plays to be performed. It is for this reason that they present their themes through dialogue, action, music, song and dance so that the play is visually captivating. When reading a play we have to make full use of our imaginative powers. We must try to see the action and scenes as well as hear the voices of the characters. It is only then that we will be able to experience the play in its multiple dimensions: as ‘literature’ as well as ‘theatre’.

You may face a slight problem trying to relate the English dialogues to traditional Marathi characters of the eighteenth century. As you know, the play was originally written in Marathi and comes to you in translation. We shall discuss this aspect in a later section.

Do go through all the sections and answer the questions given in ‘Check Your Progress’. This will help you to remember what you have read and also give you some practice in expressing yourself in your own words. We do hope you enjoy working through this Unit.

1.2 INDIAN DRAMA

You may have heard that the tradition of Indian drama is very old. It goes back to the Sanskrit drama of ancient India and encompasses contemporary Indian theatre in Hindi, English and the regional languages. Modern Indian drama is influenced not only by classical Sanskrit drama or local folk forms but also by Western theatre, following the establishment of British rule in India.

Sanskrit Drama

Sanskrit drama flourished in ancient India and produced Bharata’s *Natyashastra*, the great treatise on all aspects of drama. Bharat’s book comparable in range and scope to Aristotle’s *Poetics*. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle prioritizes tragedy as a higher art form as opposed to comedy. But in classical Sanskrit drama there cannot be a tragic end. This is because of the Hindu worldview which considers the world a ‘maya’ or an ‘illusion’ and death not a final end, but a release of the soul into higher forms of being –an event to be celebrated rather than lamented. So you will find no tragedies in Sanskrit drama.

People in the West first heard of Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala* (circa 5th century) when Sir William Jones translated it into English in 1789. His excellent translation

brought Sanskrit drama to the attention of the Western world. Goethe (1749-1832), the German writer was so impressed that he borrowed the convention of the Prologue from *Shakuntala* and used it in his own play 'Faust'. Kalidas, however, was not the only playwright that ancient India produced. In the Hindu period of the first nine centuries, we have three kings Shudraka, Harsha and Visakhadatta who wrote plays that now form part of our great cultural heritage. Shudraka (circa 4 A.D.) wrote the famous *Mrichkattakam* or *The Little Clay Cart* which features regularly in contemporary drama festivals as *Mitti Ki Gadi*.

The Little Clay Cart is a social play. Vasantsena the beautiful courtesan loves Charudatta a noble Brahmin who is already married. Sansthanaka, the brother-in-law of the king tries to make overtures to the courtesan who repulses him. His wicked schemes to implicate Charudatta in Vasantsena's alleged murder come to nought as Aryaka, a shepherd rebel overthrows the king and sets both Charudatta and Vasantsena free to marry and live a happy life.

Visakhadatta wrote the powerful play *Mudraraksasa* (Raksasa captured through the Signet Ring). The play deals with two rival ministers – Chanakya and Raksasa. Chanakya represents intelligence and intrigue whereas Raksasa is a man of noble ideals and integrity. The play gives us an insight into the minds of power-hungry politicians.

Bhasa wrote 134 plays comprising monologues, one-act plays, and six-act dramas. His masterpiece is *Swapana-Vasavadatta* (Vasavadatta Seen in a Dream). The story is about King Udayana who is torn between his love for his wife Vasavadatta and the political necessity of marrying Padmavati, the daughter of a neighbouring king. Harsha's (7th century) best-known play is *Ratnavai*. *Ratnavai* is somewhat similar in plot to *Swapana-Vasavadatta*.

Sanskrit drama was eclipsed with the advent of the Mohammedans in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Sanskrit drama, with its ornate language, was addressed to sophisticated courtiers. Moreover, it has many rules and regulations. For instance, according to the conventions adopted by it, there could be no tragic end, no violent or repulsive act that could be depicted on stage, the hero and heroine had both to be charming and noble and that the jester had to be greedy and fat. As opposed to this, folk theatre with its flexible and free from has changed, developed and adjusted itself to the changing social conditions reflecting the lives of the people. But before we examine some of the different types of folk theatre, let us briefly consider some of the basic principles of drama as laid out in the *Natyashastra*.

Natyashastra

In the West, Aristotle's (4th century B.C.) *Poetics* is taken as a basic classic that states the principles of poetry in general, and gives a more detailed account of the epic and tragedy. In India Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* (circa 200 BC to AD 200) is regarded as a comprehensive book that discusses all aspects of dramaturgy. Not only does it touch upon production and direction, but it also deals with make-up, costumes, jewellery, movements of the eyes, neck, as well as body postures.

This exhaustive study is directed at the playwright, director and actor because these three were considered inseparable in drama. Sanskrit plays began with a ritual of music and dance performed on stage. The *Sutradhara* or stage manager

dressed in white came in with two assistants and offered homage to the presiding deity at the centre of the stage by scattering flowers and sprinkling water. This was not only an appeal to the deity for the success of the performance but also helped to create an atmosphere of austerity. Then the *Sutradhara* called the leading actress and opened the play with a prologue that announced the time and place of the action. For example, Balwant Gargi in his book *Theatre in India* (1962) tells us how Shakuntala begins:

Sutradhara: Our audience is very discriminating, and we are to offer them a new play, called Shakuntala, written by the famous kalidasa. Every member of the cast must be on his mettle. Actress: Your arrangements are perfect. Nothing will go wrong.

The Sutradhar not only introduced the play but took one of the chief roles as well. In fact, we shall see the Sutadhar assuming different roles in Ghashiram Kotwal. The Sutradhar provides a link between the different episodes in the play. Another stock character in Sanskrit drama is the clown or Vidushaka. Both the Sutradhar and the Vidushaka are found in Folk theatre.

Four Kinds of Representations

In Sanskrit drama, an actor expresses himself through four kinds of abhinaya.

Angika: Representation of action physically by moving hands, fingers, lips, neck and feet.

Vacika: Expression through speech, song, intonation to evoke various sentiments in the audience.

Aharya: Use of specific costumes and make-up

Sattvika: This is the most important of the four representations. The actor must feel the role and the emotion that he is to convey. This emotion is the bhava which has to be expressed to convey the rasa (taste or flavour) to the spectator. Rasa literally means 'taste' or 'flavour' and is an important concept in Hindu drama.

What are the character types in Hindu drama?

Some characters are sublime like the epic heroes Rama and Krishna. Others are impetuous like demons and fierce characters. Soldiers and kings usually fall under the category of gay and cheerful characters while subdued characters are the ministers and merchants. The sutradhar not only introduced the play but took one of the chief roles as well. The clown, a stock character, was called the Vidushaka. This comic figure spoke in Prakrit (the local dialect) while the other characters spoke in Sanskrit. Did women act in plays? The Sutradhar's wife, the Nati, helped her husband in looking after the production and also acted. Actresses were not regarded highly in society.

Types of Drama

There are 10 types of drama categorized but the two important ones are nataka and prakarana. The themes of nataka or heroic drama are taken from history or mythology and feature gods, kings or heroes. Prakarana or social drama deals with the common man. *The Little Clay Cart* that deals with a courtesan and a Brahmin belongs to this category. But whatever the types of play, there are no tragedies in ancient drama. The hero cannot die or be defeated. This is quite

different from the Western view where great tragedies were considered a more elevated genre than comedy.

Time of the Performance

The time of the performance was determined by the theme of the play. If virtue was the theme, the play was performed in the morning, while a story of strength and energy was usually enacted in the afternoon. Plays of erotic sentiments were performed in the first part of the night whereas one of pathos in the fourth part of the night. Performances usually lasted four or five hours.

Many great dramas have been produced in ancient India covering a wide range of subjects. According to Kalidasa 'Drama provides satisfaction in one place to a group of people whose taste may differ a great deal.'

Folk Theatre

Folk theatre is usually based on mythological tales –of Rama, Sita, Krishna and other popular episodes from the great Hindu epics –*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The performances usually take place in the open air and the specific feature of folk drama is improvisation. Improvised stage, improvised dialogues often refer to something of topical interest. There is extensive use of song, dance and music including a great deal of slapstick humour. The emphasis is on audience participation and interaction with the performers and the performance is conducted in an informal manner.

Let us look at some of the popular regional forms of folk theatre.

Nautanki is an operatic drama popular in Rajasthan and even Gujarat and Maharashtra. The hero is usually a character from history, a lover or warrior, and the story is based on old ballads. The language used is the local dialect –music is folk melodies. The stock character is the buffoon and there is usually a stage manager, the Ranga. This is a very informal kind of performance and there is a free intermingling of the actors with the audience.

Jatra is peculiar to Bengal and this again is operatic in form. Initially, Jatra dealt with incidents in the life of Krishna but gradually, as improvisations began to take place, it became more secular and offered comment on contemporary life. The action is stylized and vivid and the chorus which is an integral part of it interrupts the action and sings.

Bhavai is popular throughout Gujarat and parts of Western India. It is a series of playlets which deal with medieval tales of chivalry. Bhavai actors must be experts in dance, music and mime. The make-up is exaggerated making use of soot and red and white pigments in oil. Bhavai usually starts late in the evening and lasts all night.

Tamasha is similar to bhavai in many ways. It is popular in Maharashtra and you will see elements of it in Ghashiram Kotwal. These plays are based on love stories and tales of chivalry presented through dance and music. These are basically musical plays but prose dialogues are also used to make social and political comment. These are performed by roving troupes –men and women – and the sound of their drum attracts large crowds to the venue of the performance. It is interesting to note that while women do act in a 'tamasha', they are not usually allowed to witness it because of the abusive language that is used freely.

Terukoothu is a street drama popular in Tamil Nadu. Peasants and their women perform it in the fields and village streets after the harvest is over. Usually mythological plays are performed. Song, dance and prose are all mixed together. The costumes are splendid and the make-up is of sandal and rice paste with colours extracted from herbs and leaves.

Yakshagana from Karnataka is also performed in the open air. These performances with songs and prose-dialogues are by man only. The Bhagavathar or the singer introduces the characters as they come dancing on to the stage. These are usually based on mythological tales.

Kuchipudi is a dance drama from Andhra. These dance dramas are usually based on episodes from the life of Krishna. The performances usually take place at night in an open-air stage. Speech, dances, songs, mime and music all form part of this performance.

Ramlila, popular in Uttar Pradesh and all over India, is a pageant play based on the life of Rama, and take 14 days to stage. The songs linking the various events in the plot are rich in narration and description. The actors wear splendid costumes and lavish make-up. The stage is arranged for multiple settings. The Kathakar sings of coming events helping the movement of the plot and heightening the emotional impact. Masks, effigies and fireworks are often incorporated in the play.

Krishnalila: The stories of Radha and Krishna are popular all over India and performed across the length and breadth of the country, even though the real home of Krishnalila is Vrindaban and Mathura in U.P. The role of Krishna is played by a young boy before his voice bleaks. The boy is raised in a religious atmosphere and made to believe that he is Krishna himself. This creates the necessary conditions for the boy to act out his role with sincerity and conviction, moving the audience to tears and ecstasy. The audience begin to chant the hymns with the chorus and this audience participation is a specific feature of these religious dramas.

Folk theatre still has a base in religious mythology but has moved towards a more secular orientation. It represents the cultural life of the community –its songs, dances, beliefs, customs and dresses. The bare stage makes for innovation and improvisation and contributes to the vitality of the form. It also leads to directness of action and therefore a close actor-audience participation.

Let us now look more specifically at Marathi theatre. But before we do that, let us first answer the following questions.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Outline the functions of a Sutradhara in a Sanskrit play in your own words. (50-60 words).

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- 2) Name and define the four kinds of Abhinaya as described in the Natyashastra.

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- 3) What are the popular folk theatres in Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra? Give brief description (50-60 words each)

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1.3 MARATHI THEATRE

Marathi theatre is now about 150 years old if we take as its starting point Vishnudas Bhave's play *Sitaswayamvar* (1843). He used grotesque masks made from wood and papier mache to make his gods look superhuman. Bhave worked in the theatre for 60 years and when he died in 1901, he left behind 50 plays, among them *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha*. In 1885, the Indian National Congress began its struggle for independence. The nationalist sentiment was expressed in plays based on historical and mythological themes. *Keechakavadha* (1906) by Khadilkar is one such play. This incident from *Mahabharata* tells of how Keechaka, the brother-in-law of king Virata, steals into Draupadi's room in the dead of night only to find Bhima, one of the Pandavas waiting for him. Bhima kills Keechaka and when the faces are revealed it is Lokamanya Tilak, the national leader, as Bhima, who kills Keechaka who is recognizable as Lord Curzon. Another favourite by the same author is *Bhau Bandaki* that describes palace intrigues when Anandibai, very much in the manner of Lady Macbeth, causes the Peshwa to be murdered. Anandibai often features in several folk tales in Maharashtra.

Gadhari's (1885-1919) *Akach Pyala* (Only One Glass) is the best known among his six plays. It is the story of the life of a drunkard and sermonizes on abstinence from wine and women. This play leans heavily on melodrama. Under the influence of Ibsen and Shaw, a touch of realism was added to Marathi theatre with the plays by Mama Varerkar. *Satte Che Gulam* (Slaves of Power) has a political message of social reform and Gandhi's philosophy. In *Sonya Cha Kalas*. (the Pinnacle of Gold) we have the son of a mill-owner taking up the cause of the workers. Warerkar's *Bhoomi Kanya Sita* (Sita, Daughter of the Earth), highlights the cause of Indian women by projecting Sita's revolt against some of Rama's values –she cannot condone some of his battles or denial of the privileges of reading the Vedas to lower-caste people. Another play with feminist overtones is P.L. Deshpande's 3 Act *Sunder Mee Honar* (I Shall Be The Beautiful) which depicts the struggle of a crippled woman-poet who regains her strength, beauty and love life.

According to Balwant Gargi, 'It is in the boisterous comedies that the true Marathi acting and theatre are reflected. These comedies, which also deal with social

problems, have mass appeal (Theatre in India p. 129). Tendulkar, tends to agree with Gargi that 'Marathi theatre-goers don't have the concept of 'identification'. They don't want to identify with characters in plays, or see a representation of their own lives. They prefer to see a romanticized version of life, to escape into fantasy. They don't see the things they are looking for in my plays.' (Interview with Priya Adarkar, Enact 49-50, Jan-Feb 1971).

In the last two decades Marathi playwrights such as Sai Paranjpe, Mahesh Elkunchawar, C.T. Khandekar and Vijay Tendulkar have made significant contributions to the development of Indian theatre by experimenting with new forms. Let us now briefly look at some of the trends in modern Indian theatre.

1.4 MODERN INDIAN THEATRE

The production of Mohan Rakesh's "Aashad Ka Ek Din" by the Anamika Mandali gave a new direction to Hindi drama. Even though Dharamvir Bharati's "Andha Yug", an important landmark in Hindi theatre, was published in 1955, yet it was produced much later. And the establishment of the National School of Drama in New Delhi gave an added impetus to the development of theatre in India. The Shri Ram Cultural Centre, New Delhi, organizes National Drama Festivals which feature plays in Urdu, Sanskrit, Kannada, Marathi and Bangla. National and state level awards for drama also provide the necessary encouragement and patronage for the art. Rajendra Paul's Enact and Nemichandra Jain's *Natrang* are journals that have provided the forum for the most recent and up-to-date information on theatre. *Enact* however, is no longer printed.

Translation of plays from English, German, Sanskrit, French, Russian and regional Languages into Hindi have also enriched the field of Indian theatre. The theatre goer can see the plays of Moliere, Brecht, Ibsen, Shakespeare, Kalidasa, to name a few, in the language that they understand. Similarly Indian plays have been translated into various foreign languages. For example, Peter Brooks presented the *Mahabharata* in French in the South of France with an international cast. The importance of translation in drama is clear from the fact that you will read *Ghashiram Kotwal* in English. If it was not for the translation, you would have to read it in the original Marathi. How many of us can claim to know the language?

There are various trends in modern Indian theatre. There is the theatre in English which caters to a select audience and produces adaptations of the Western masters Brecht, Becket, Shaw, Ibsen, to name a few. The theatre in English also takes up light comedies or musicals that have been successfully produced in the West. Another trend is to revive classical Sanskrit plays, not as adaptations but by reconstructing medieval stage sets and approximating to the spirit of the original. The use of folk forms for providing a commentary on the current social and political situation is also popular. You will be able to appreciate this when you read *Ghashiram Kotwal* because you will see how Tendulkar has used the 'Tamasha' form to expose the socio-political ills in contemporary society. Yet another trend in modern theatre is the engagement with problems of inequity and the anguish and disillusionment of modern life. Rather than providing escapist fare by projecting a romantic or comic attitude to life, most contemporary playwrights display concern and commitment. This means that they wish to highlight the place of the individual in a society that is becoming increasingly hostile to individual aspirations. The sham and humbug of political institutions

is also exposed. Some of these concerns you will find reflected in Tendulkar's Ghashiram Kotwal.

1.5 VIJAY TENDULKAR: LIFE AND WORKS

Born in Bombay on 7th Jan., 1928, Vijay Tendulkar started as an apprentice in a bookshop, read proofs and managed a printing press and later took up journalism as a profession. He was assistant editor of Marathi dailies such as *Navbharat*, *Maratha* and *Loksatta*. At 11, when Tendulkar was still at school he wrote his first play. As he says in an interview with Priya Adarkar (Enact 49, 50, Jan 1971), 'It had a mythological theme, and some of us at school performed it....My childhood writing was unimportant in itself. But because of it, when I eventually started writing seriously, I wrote with great ease. I had acquired a certain colloquial sense.' His first full-length play *Grihasta* only came in 1955. A versatile writer, Tendulkar has written plays, short stories, features, translations of drama and novels as well as television serials in Hindi and screenplays for films in Marathi and Hindi. He has received many awards for his plays. In 1969 he received the Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya Play of the Year Award for *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe!* Which Girish Karnad, another distinguished playwright has described as 'the best play written in the last thousand years'. He was also given the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for playwriting in 1970. He received the Kalidas Samman for 1991 instituted by the Bharat Bhavan Trust, Bhopal. On this occasion he called for cultural freedom saying: 'Culture needs to be nourished by patronage. It must not be overwhelmed or stifled by the state. In case this happens the sole motive of the patronage to culture will be self-defeating and suspect.'

Shantata! Court Chale Ahe is a satire against male-dominated society in which a woman can neither get a sympathetic response nor win over a man to give legitimacy to her child. Translated into English by Priya Adarkar, this version was first put up by the Muslim Theatre, Madras, in March 1971. The play was also broadcast in English by the BBC.

Sakharam Binder has also been translated into Gujarati, Hindi and English and is one of Tendulkar's popular plays. It is about Sakharam, a womanizer who uses women and then discards them. He drinks heavily, abuses them and inflicts all kinds of violence on them until he meets his match in the bold and rebellious Champa.

His most controversial play is perhaps *Kanyadan*. The daughter of a socialist politician marries a young dalit poet with the approval and encouragement of her father. But what seems a politically sound match turns into a nightmare as the dalit beats his wife mercilessly even when she is pregnant. The play has been seen by many as anti-dalit just as *Ghashiram Kotwal* is considered anti-Brahman. We shall discuss this aspect in later Units.

Tendulkar's plays alongwith Girish Karnad's have changed the face of Indian theatre by demolishing the 3-act play and creating exciting new moulds. For developing this flexible as well as carefully crafted form, he took up folk forms, modes of recitation and story-telling specific to his region. He has managed to bridge the gulf between traditional and modern theatre by creating a vibrant new theatrical form, an example of which is the play in your course *Ghashiram Kotwal*.

Selected Works

DRAMAS

ASHI PAKHARE YETI. Pune: Nilkanth Prakashan, 1970.

GHASHIRAM KOTWAL. Pune: Nilkanth Prakashan, 1973

GIDHADE. Pune: Nilkanth Prakashan, 1971

KAMALA. Pune: Nilkanth Prakashan, 1982

KANYADAN. Pune: Nilkanth Prakashan, 1983

SAKHARAM BINDER. Pune: Nilkanth Prakashan, 1972

SHANTATA! COURT CHALU AHE, Bombay: Mauj Prakashan Griha, 1968

SHRIMANT. Bombay: Anand Pai 'Meghaduti', 1955.

ONE-ACT PLAYS

AJAGAR ANI GANDHARVA. Bombay: Mauj Prakashan Griha, 1966

CHITRAGUPTA AHO CHITRAGUPT. Bombay: Ramkrishna Book Depot, 1958.

THIEF POLICE. Bombay: Ramkrishna Book Depot, 1970.

SHORT STORIES

DWANDWA. Bombay: B.L. Pathak Prakashan, 1961.

KACHPATRE. Bombay: Nav-Lekhan, 1958.

PHULAPAKHARU. Pune: Nav Maharashtra Prakashan, 1970.

SCREENPLAY/DIALOGUES

MARATHI

GHASHIRAM KOTWAL (1976); SHANTATA! COURT CHALU AHE (1972);
UMBARTHA (1981).

TRANSLATIONS (DRAMA)

ADHE ADHURE. (translation of Mohan Rakesh's Adhe Adhure). Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1971.

VASANACHAKRA (Translation of Tennessee William's A Streetcar Named Desire). Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966.

NOVELS

KATHA EKA VYATHECHI (Translation of Henry James's Daisy Miller). Bombay: Nav-Lekhan.

PREMPATRE (Translation of Henry James's The Aspern Papers). Bombay: Nav-Lekhan.

TELEVISION SERIAL

SWAYAM SIDDHA (HINDI), 1987.

Check Your Progress 2

Read the following questions and answer the questions in the space that follows:

1) Name five Marathi playwrights mentioning at least one play by each.

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2) Has Tendulkar only written plays? If not what other forms of writing is Tendulkar also famous for?

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3) Name five plays written by Tendulkar.

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1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have discussed certain topics that will be helpful in approaching the text of the play. We have given you:

- a brief introduction to Indian theatre which includes both ancient Sanskrit plays as well as folk theatre.
- an idea of the concepts of theatre in Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra*, an ancient Sanskrit text that takes into account all aspects of drama from costume to make-up to performance.
- an outline of the developments in Marathi theatre since its inception about 150 years ago.
- an introduction to the life and works of Vijay Tendulkar.

In the next Unit we shall read the text. After we have given you brief guidelines on how to read a play, we shall discuss the text.

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

If you would like to read more about Indian theatre you may consult:

Mulk Raj Anand, *The Indian Theatre* (London: Dennis Dobson)

Balwant Gargi, *Theatre in India* (NY: Theatre Arts Books, 1962)

Prabhakar Machwe, *Four Decades of Indian Literature* (New Delhi, Chetana Publications, 1976)

These are only suggested as additional reading and are in no way compulsory. If you would like to buy your own copy of *Ghashiram Kotwal* and if it is not available in bookshops, you could write to Seagull Books, 36 Circus Avenue, Calcutta-700017.

1.8 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

For all answers refer to 23.2

Check Your Progress 2

For your answers refer to 23.3 and 23.4



UNIT 2 READING *GHASHIRAM KOTWAL*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Language and Style
- 2.3 Dramatic Techniques
 - 2.3.1 Music and Dance
 - 2.3.2 The Human Wall
 - 2.3.3 The Use of Folk Forms
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 Suggested Readings
- 2.6 Answers to Exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading the Unit carefully, you will be able to:

- outline Tendulkar's use of language and style;
- discuss the different dramatic techniques used by Tendulkar;
- outline the special theatrical effects projected by the human wall;
- explain how song and dance taken from Indian folk forms create a special blend of the old and new in this play.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the last Unit in your Block and it also happens to be the last one of the course. You have read one-act plays, three-act play as well as longer plays like Shakespeare's 5-act *Julius Caesar*. *Ghashiram Kotwal* is not divided into the conventional demarcations of act and scene. Nor is it as long as *Julius Caesar*. But it has two parts separated by an interval. The scenes change smoothly, orchestrated and directed by the subtle commentary of the Sutradhar and the configuration of the human wall that arranges and re-arranges itself on stage. As such there is no need for a curtain that is usually required in a conventional performance. While reading the play, you must have noticed the innovative techniques used by Tendulkar. It would seem that the director's task is easy for the variations and dramatic effects seem to be inbuilt.

So far, we have given you a brief introduction to Indian theatre in general and Marathi theatre in particular in the first unit. We also read about the life and works of Tendulkar. Then we discussed the background of the play, i.e. the historical situation and the people on whom it is based as well as the central theme of power and how it is constructed in a society interested in maintaining the status quo. By this we mean the hierarchies of class, caste and gender by which some dominate and oppress others. In this Unit, we shall take up questions relating to form –i.e. techniques by which the playwright effectively communicates his vision. In short, how and by which methods the theme is expressed.

First we shall discuss the use of language and style, and the other dramatic techniques by which Tendulkar achieves his ends.

Please complete the exercises we have prepared for you. Remember that in literature there can be more than one interpretation. As such you may come up with a fresh response to the play which may be different from ours. Please read the play as well the discussion carefully and critically so that you are able to decide for yourself whether you agree/disagree with the points being made and whether you have alternative readings to propose.

2.2 LANGUAGE AND STYLE

We are often told: 'Style is the man himself'. And every literary piece carries the particular stamp of the specific idiom of the writer. For example, we can say that the style of one playwright is different from the style of another. For example, the style of Shakespeare is different from that of Shaw. But in a play the writer is speaking through the person of the different characters. And so the style has to vary according to the personality of the character. In fact, an educated person speaks differently from an uneducated one. In short, each person has his/her/own style of speaking. And the success of a playwright lies in the extent to which he/she can script the dialogues to suit the personality of the character.

In Ghashiram Kotwal we have a range of characters from the powerful Nana to a member of the chorus. How far has Tendulkar succeeded in giving us a variety of dialogues to suit his characters? But before we do that, let us consider the fact that what we have before us is a play translation.

The Play in Translation

Translation does not simply mean rewriting the Marathi text into English. It also means translating the cultural context of eighteenth century Poona into an English version. There is no doubt that Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot have succeeded in rendering the translation as faithful to the spirit of the original as possible. While translating drama, the translator often adapts the play according to the demands and expectations of the audience in the target language. It is not possible to translate literally and some degree of adaptation is required in literary texts. As Eleanor Zelliot, the translator has said that Tendulkar's play demands and inspires a great deal of creativity, gives the example of a Marathi abuse which translates literally as 'O you worthless one'. As this sounded somewhat weak, the translators felt that an original substitute with the necessary punch would be 'you shape piece of shit!'.

Most serious theatre is enacted in Hindi itself and in Delhi theatre groups usually perform the works of world famous dramatists like Brecht and Beckett in Hindi translation. English theatre usually confines itself to Western plays written in English or in translation. However, urban theatre groups are increasingly taking up the production of English translations of various plays written in Hindi or the regional languages. For example, the theatre groups of Bombay took up the production of Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*. English translations ensure that the play reaches out across different linguistic barriers to different parts of our own vast country. In addition, a foreign readership can also have access to it. Do we ourselves not read the plays by the great Greek dramatists in translation? The play begins with a hymn to Ganapati and Saraswati and the translators have tried

to keep to the rhythm of the original: 'Ganapati dances the Ganapati dance. We the Poona Brahmans bow and prance'(p.2.). The rhyming adds to the musical quality. Culture specific words as 'Bhatji buwa', 'sindur', 'lavani', 'kirtan' are retained as in the original. Instead of translating them, notes explaining these are given at the beginning of the text. The flavour of the idiom of the original is retained as in the abuse 'May you itch without cause' and 'I would have you riding backward on a donkey with sindur all over your head'. The arrogant Nana refers to himself in the plural as 'we'. For example, he tells the servant 'We'll have you killed'. He promises Gauri 'But our devotion is –only to this graceful image...' This reference to oneself in the plural is a convention among the royalty in India as well as in the West. For example, Victoria was often known to say 'We are not amused'.

You will have noticed that the dialogues are short and crisp. No long speeches but quick exchanges often laced with wit. The 'tamasha' convention of using abusive language is also used here. It is only the Sutradhar who has slightly longer dialogues. The Nana in a moderately long soliloquy reveals his evil intentions to use Ghashiram to serve his own infamous purpose. There is the use of colloquial language and a feel for the spoken word. When asked by Priya Adarkar about his craft of writing, Tendulkar said: 'But this is a question of my playing with various styles and levels rather than of conscious planning. I am in fact at ease in many styles of language' (Enact 49, 50 Jan-Feb 1971 ed. Rajinder Paul).

This irony and play with words is also evident in the following exchange:

Nana: Bastard. You've got me in a narrow pass.

Ghashiram: Yes, the narrow pass of my only daughter.

Wit and irony is also evident in the following:

There are several other examples of the use of pun in the play. Can you recognize the pun in:

There's only one Nana

The rest are na-na-na-na. (p.21)

The element of slapstick comedy is clear in one of the early exchange between the Sutradhar and the Brahman:

Sutradhar : Ho Ho Ho Bhatji Buwa!

Wait now, wait now. Hold your horses! Must you go?

Brahman : Forces? Whose forces? Foreign? English?

Sutradhar : Not forces! Hold your horses!

Brahman : So I'm stopped. What do you have to say?

Sutradhar : Where is your honour going so late at night?

Brahman : Nowhere, nowhere. It's all right.

Sutradhar : Where is nowhere?

Brahman : Just near somewhere.

Sutradhar : Somewhere is near where?

Brahman : Go away. Don't wait. Its getting late (p.3)

This kind of exchange continues until the Brahman unwittingly reveals his destination. Note the use of pun and irony in this passage. The rhyming dialogues add a rhythmic quality and establish the light mood that this scene creates.

The Sutradhar's dialogues are full of tongue-in-cheek irony.

'The Brahmans have lost themselves in the cemetery, in kirtan; the Brahman women are sentenced to solitary confinement'(p.8). We are shown a Brahman woman embracing her lover while the husband is away in Bavannakhani. Also consider his comment:

The thief is a simple thief.

The police are official thieves? (p.16)

Sutradhar: Yes, this is the brutish city.

Stranger (not understanding): What, the British city?

Notice the pun on the word 'brutish' which is misunderstood as 'British'. In the eighteenth century, the British were a tangible presence in India and to use 'brutish' and 'British' exchangeably may offer a subtle comment on the nature of Empire.

In fact, there is another reference to the British in the play. You will recall that when Ghashiram is beaten up by Gulabi's thugs and the necklace given to him by Nana forcibly taken away from him we are told that a 'palanquin of a white man comes on the stage... In front, a Brahman with ash on his forehead shouts. 'The Sahib is coming Get aside (p.2). Then the Brahman says – 'Get aside, you dog. Can't you see the Sahib is coming?... (Turns to the Sahib). The natives of this country have lost all their manners nowadays, sir, i swear, no one has any self-respect or pride. Come on sir. Now you'll get to see the ceremony of the giving of royal gifts to the Brahmans, from the inside. I'll sneak you in. Only three silver rupees, sir'.

What is the significance of this scene? Is it introduced purely for spectacle value? It might seem so at first. But if we catch the underlying irony, we understand that the real function of the scene is to:

- a) prove the sycophantic character of the Brahman;
- b) expose his lack of manners which he confirms by abusing the humiliated Ghashiram and;
- c) his hypocrisy: while he blames others for the lack of self-respect and pride, he himself has none as he tries to wheedle and coax money out of the Sahib.

The presence of a white Sahib observing the execution of Ghashiram also urges us to analyse the phenomenon of his rise and fall more objectively.

But in addition to the dialogue, gestures and silence can sometimes speak more than a thousand words. Tendulkar makes effective use of mime –especially in the ordeal scene: 'Brahman yells. Mime of placing the ball forcibly in his hands. Brahman yells. Mime of the ball falling off (p.35). This indicates the convention of not showing violent action on stage. And even though this is a very violent play, the audience would not be shocked whereas in the American production where the violence was depicted realistically, the effect was one of deep shock.

As we said in the first Unit of this Block, reading plays is a challenge. Not only does the reader have to visualize all the scenes but he/she has also to listen to the voices with all the modulations of tone and inflexion to catch the nuance of what is intended within a particular context. For example, if we say "How wonderful!" to a person who tells us that she has stood first in a competitive exam our tone will be full of delight, wonder and appreciation. But if we respond in the same way to a person who has just failed an examination, it is clear that we mean to be sarcastic. Thus, it is important to relate the speech to the context and understand the significance of the meaning intended. For example, the sarcasm implicit in the Sutradhar's tone is evident in the following exchange:

Brahman: Oy. Oy. You son of the both. Don't you have goes eyes and ears?

Sutradhar: I'm sorry, O priestly Brahman.

Brahman: Don't you have any manners?

Sutradhar: I'm so sorry, O lordly Brahman.

Brahman: Don't you have any brains.

Sutradhar: I'm very sorry. O honoured Brahman (p. 4)

The abusive language, as you know, is part of the Tamasha convention that Tendulkar makes use of.

In this play we have poetic dialogues as well as prose exchanges alternating with the narration of the Sutradhar. In addition there are songs and humming, silence and mime. All these variations help to create a complex and rich dramatic piece.

2.3 DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

The first question that we so often ask about a novel or play or poem is "What is it about? This leads us to think about the theme of the play. We can also ask ourselves 'Does it have a message or function? Like all art, a play is usually not meant to objectively enquire after truth. It may aim 'to instruct by pleasing'. (*Studying Drama: An Intro*. Malcolm Kelsall, London: Edward Arnold, 1988, p. 57). As such it makes the audience angry or moves them to tears or to laughter and sometimes to think. Talking about the function of theatre the famous playwright Mohan Rakesh has said:

'To my mind the function of theatre today is not just to entertain, nor just to reveal certain ironies and contradictions of man's mind and behaviour nor just to philosophise or sermonize over certain socio-political issues. For me the major function of theatre today is to help man to know and discover himself in relation to his environment'. ('Changing Role of Words in Theatre', in an interview with M. Maharishi Enact 73-74 Jan-Feb. 1973). Thus a play has several dimensions and effects. How does the playwright achieve his/her effects? This is done by using the various techniques of his/her craft. Visual delight is contributed by the scenery, lighting, colours, costumes as well as special effects. In addition to all this, we have quick racy dialogues, often ironical and witty. Then there are songs, music and dances that add another dimension to the play. All these are part of the playwright's craft. Let us examine some of these techniques.

2.3.1 Music and Dance

Folk theatre, as we have seen, makes use of song, dance and music. No other major playwright before Tendulkar had made such extensive and innovative use of folk theatre. In addition to the songs and music, Dr. Jabbar Patel also made use of humming so that we have what Vasant Rao Deshpande, a classical singer and composer himself, calls 'the first sangeet natak in the real sense of the term'. (in Pushpa Bhavé, '*Contemporary Indian Theatre: Interviews with Playwrights and Directors*' (New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1989, p.47).)

Ghashiram Kotwal begins with a devotional song and Ganapati, Saraswati and Lakshmi come in dancing. This immediately establishes a link with Dashavatar (a form of folk theatre) which begins with these three deities. This opening ritual also has links with classical Sanskrit drama and likewise has a certain function, this is, to arouse the interest of the audience, instill a feeling of seriousness in them and to arrest their attention. Here we do not have music for its own sake. According to Pushpa Bhavé, 'The music and the dance numbers are not embellishments to the narrative....The changing musical notes express the changing mood'. (Contemporary Indian Theatre –p. 46). In a lecture, the music director of the successful Marathi production Bhaskar Chandavarkar has said that the music in the beginning of the play was used innocuously in the Shri Ganaraya song. But after the Intermission, when Ghashiram has become the Kotwal, the music for the same song becomes much more revolutionary. Let us look at some of the functions performed by the use of music, song and dance. We note that

- the use of traditional songs and dances effectively sets the background of the decadence of the Peshwas' Poona of the eighteenth century;
- the strategic placement of songs and music help to provide dramatic relief after an unusually tense situation;
- music and dance sometimes serve to reinforce the tense atmosphere, as Satish Alekar assistant director to Dr. Jabbar Patel said, 'After the ordeal by fire the tempo tended to slow down a little. But with the introduction of the 'Malhari' song, the tense atmosphere created by the sequence was reinforced'. (Ghashiram Kotwal: A Production Casebook, Ghashiram Kotwal, xiv, xv);
- the lavani highlights the sensuous, passionate element but at the same time provides a comment on the social corruption;
- the juxtaposition of the lavani or love song with the abhangas or devotional song serves to bring out the contradiction in social values and norms;
- the musical form helps to 'deglamorize' history –history has an element of grandeur, distance, formality, which gets reduced by the introduction of song and dance, visible in the great Nana who struck terror in the hearts of many but is made to look ridiculous in the play.

We have also seen that at a deeper level, *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a serious play, a satire on the hollowness of society. Do you think the music weakens the thrust of the satire? Tendulkar himself admits: 'The criticism has a point...the form had a certain inevitability'. Are we to agree with Tendulkar? Trust the tale and not the teller, we are often told. And as we know, the play has been considered extremely disturbing. In this play we have seen that laughter can be as much an element of

subversion and change as anger. The grotesque figure of the Nana dancing effeminately demystified the power he represents and thereby, shows the hollowness of what he represents so that we are made aware of the fact that the possibility of change exists. The form and content subvert logical and authoritarian structures. We have seen in the play how folk forms with the abusiveness represent irrepressible vitality and freedom, and as we can see in *Ghashiram* it very subtly subverts the hierarchy of caste in the following exchange:

Brahman : Oy. Oy. You son of a bitch. Don't you have eyes and ears?

Sutradhar : I'm sorry, O priestly Brahman.

Brahman : Don't you have any manners?

Sutradha : I'm so sorry, O lordly Brahman.

Brahman : Don't you have any brains?

Sutradha : I'm very sorry, O honoured Brahman.

Brahman : You bumped me, you son of a bastard.

Sutradhar : I touch your feet, O Brahman.

Brahman : 'Oh you monkey! Is this the Peshvai or the Mughal Kingdom?
Bumps a holy Brahman'.

Sutradhar : But not a Brahman's wife! (p. 4).

You can note the sarcasm and insult intended in this exchange. Thus, laughter can be seen as a political mode.

As we have also seen, music and dance have not been used for its own sake. The songs sung or hummed by the chorus establish the appropriate mood and comment on the action. What we have here is a blend of folk forms with mainstream urban drama which has created a unique landmark in the history of Indian theatre.

2.3.2 The Human Wall

We have already discussed the character of the Sutradhar in 2.3.1. Let us now briefly look at the function of the Human wall which is seen as 'the basic structure of the play'. The play opens with the members of the human wall walking up to the stage from the hall. The twelve men dressed as Brahmans form the human wall which can be used in diverse ways.

- Producer Rajinder Nath used this wall to form 'kaleidoscopic patterns'. Reviewing the play, Rajinder Paul tells us:
"From an aesthetically clothed backdrop, he (Rajinder Nath) rhythmically removes one Brahman like a brick to make a cut-out window, from behind which emerges a female figure on the look-out for a noble catch".
- The human wall is an innovation and takes the place of a curtain in a conventional stage. Here the stage is stark and empty without any props and when the members turn their backs, to the audience, the wall ceases to exist. As there is no conventional demarcation of the play into acts and scenes, the human wall helps in the transition from one scene to another.
- The wall serves as a chorus in the play. As you know the chorus is a convention found and used very effectively in ancient Greek drama also. It

was usually a group of village elders, dressed in masks, who gave an account of the event that had happened either offstage or a long time ago. In Greek drama, the chorus moved from left to right and back again. In *Ghashiram Kotwal* the 'Chorus' of twelve men comprising the human wall sway in unison. Not only do they sing and dance establishing a link with folk theatre, but they also comment on the action of the play.

The Brahmans make a curtain with backs towards the audience. The curtain sings and sways:

Ram Shiva Hari

The Street of Bavannakhani, became for a

While

The garden of Krishna. (p.6).

The song exposes the debauchery of the Brahmans who in the name of God Krishna, in this case, wish to justify their erotic dancing with the courtesan.

- The human wall is also a binding factor that holds the different scenes together. The plot has several episodes which make it different from naturalistic plays in which one scene follows necessarily from another. Instead of artificially engineered exits and entrances, the play then assumes a semblance of continuity and motion. What cannot be represented realistically is projected through mime and the stage is never empty.
- The human wall also takes on individual roles. At times it is transformed into a group sitting in Gulabi's hall; at others, they sneak off stealthily as individuals, in a hurry to get to Bavannakhani. At another the Brtahmans form a human god house round Ganapati, and when the Nana chases a girl, the human wall becomes a garden. Throughout the play you will notice the human wall assuming new and visually stimulating configurations. And finally at Ghashiram's execution, the human wall becomes the fierce mob of angry Brahmans shouting with sadistic glee.

2.3.3 The Use of Folk Forms

We have seen that Tendulkar has made extensive use of folk forms in *Ghashiram Kotwal*. Because of this the play is visually exciting. What effect does the play have? Folk theatre invites audience participation and in this play we have the Sutradhar and Ghashiram addressing the audience directly. According to Jabbar Patel, this is different from the effect that Brecht, the German playwright intended to create. But before we examine whether this is true, let us understand what Brecht had to say.

According to Brecht 'Modern theatre is epic theatre'. (quoted in John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht* (Lond) Eyre Methuen, 1981, p.170). He further lists nineteen points of difference between dramatic and epic form of theatre in No. 2 of the new volumes in notes to *Mahagonny*, of which five are listed below:

- | Dramatic form of theatre | Epic form of theatre |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Implicates the spectator in a stage | turns the spectator into an observer |
| | Situation arouses |

- Wears down his power of action
- The human being is taken for granted the human being is an object of enquiry
- he is unalterable he is alterable and able to alter.
- Eyes on the finish eyes on the course.

The aim of this Epic form of theatre for Brecht was 'to develop the means of entertainment into an object of instruction, and to change certain institutions from places of amusement into organs of public communication'. (p.170). What Brecht tried to achieve through his plays was a feeling of alienation in the audience rather than identification or empathy with the characters. He achieved this by stressing the artificial nature of the stage but also demanded of his audience a critical appraisal of the social causes and results of their action. In order to achieve this 'alienation effect' Brecht punctuated the action with songs, montage, (the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated images) captions (for example, a character could well carry a placard saying 'cousin' to indicate his/her status), verse, projections etc. These are meant to jolt the audience out of empathy so that he/she is distanced and begins to look at the situation in a new light. Brecht's objective is political –to make the audience unmask the contradictions of society and so help open up the possibilities for change.

From your reading of *Ghashiram Kotwal* do you think Tendulkar had any intention of creating Epic Theatre on Brechtian lines? According to Dr. Jabbar Patel, as Ghashiram speaks directly to the audience, the effect achieved is the opposite of that usually created by Brecht. (Preface –Hindi translation of Ghashiram Kotwal, Vasant Dev).

In any case, this is a difficult question because the effect of a play is highly variable and different audiences respond to it in different ways. In fact the same production can have a new effect every time it is staged. Even Brecht's own productions sometimes failed to create the alienation effect.

However, the setting of the play in eighteenth century Poona helps to create a sense of distance. Characters in period costume produce the effect that the people portrayed are removed from us in time and space. Moreover, Nana depicted in the play is quite different from the revered Nana of history. This grotesque dancing character reinforces the fact that the spectator is watching a play rather than witnessing reality. Tendulkar has used the folk form which is predominantly interactive and ensures active audience participation. But here the folk form is used in mainstream theatre and the use of songs and dances further creates a sense of distance from the action.

In the first reading of the play, it seems that the personality clash between Nana and Ghashiram is the main theme. Nana promotes Ghashiram and when his protégé becomes a maniacal monster as is evident in the climactic ordeal-by-fire scene, the Nana decides that the time is ripe for destroying the creation that is now of no more use to him. But on a more careful reading, we realize it is the social system that throws up such aberrations that is being probed. So while the song, dance and visual configurations of the human wall provide for sheer entertainment, the juxtaposition of dialogue, verse, hymn, love song, dance, narration and mime make us probe beyond surface appearances to understand the subtle and complex social processes that dehumanize individuals. And unless

the system is changed, such a situation will continue. The end of the play with its revellery may project the false illusion that all is now well with the world on one level but on another, it is clear that this is a mere facade and the real danger continues to thrive. So, for such a complex play which operates on many different levels, it may not be suitable to pin down the effect to either 'empathy' or 'alienation'. It seems that the play veers between the two. And you will agree that the dominant impact is one of shock at the violence and cruelty depicted. Can it also be related to Antonin Artaud's 'The Theatre of Cruelty'?

What do we mean by the Theatre of Cruelty? According to Artaud, 'The Theatre of Cruelty has been created in order to restore to the theatre a passionate and convulsive conception of life, and it is in this sense of violent rigour and extreme condensation of scenic elements that the cruelty on which it is based must be understood'. (Second Manifesto 'The Theory of the Modern Stage. Eric Beaulieu ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1983, p. 66). Such a theatre must create a dynamic language of expressions that will arouse general attention. This would include the visual language of movements, attitudes, gestures, music, dance and mime. This language of theatre must transgress the usual limits of art and speech so that what results is 'a kind of total creation in which man must reassume his place between dream and events'. (p. 58). What are the themes of this Theatre of Cruelty? According to Artaud, the subject and themes that will be chosen would correspond to the 'agitation and unrest characteristic of our epoch'. (p. 66). If you look at the play in the light of such observations you will find that there are certain similarities between what Artaud proposed and what Tendulkar achieved.

As we have seen, *Ghashiram Kotwal* admits of several interpretations. Literature, as we know, contains a plurality of discourses, and it is this that allows us to read a text in different ways. It is not simply a case of taking up a particular aspect of what is in the text. Reading is an active process in which all aspects of our own personality also come into play. For example, a person reading this play twenty years from now will look at it differently from the way we do now. Also a person from another culture will have a perspective that is not the same as ours. As reading and interpreting is a highly variable and subjective phenomenon, we should try to look at a text from different angles. For example, if there is a picture on the wall, you will find that it looks different if you stand on a table/stool/floor. Similarly there are different angles of looking at a literary text. This is something that we would like to encourage and would request you to inculcate. Let us now do the following exercise.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Outline the role of the human wall giving examples from the text.

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 2) Tendulkar has made use of song, dance, music, mime, dialogue and narration in the play. Illustrate the extent to which these elements contribute to the total effect of the play.

.....

3) write a short note on the language and style of the play.

2.4 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have discussed:

- the language and style of the play, keeping in mind the fact that it has been translated from Marathi into English. The play works more by visuals rather than by words and it is here that we notice the effective use of folk forms by Tendulkar;
- song and dance are integral to the action of the play and not just super added to provide entertainment alone. Rather than subverting the satirical thrust of the play, song and dance serve to make it more effective by overturning accepted norms in terms of theatrical forms;
- the human wall is an innovative-device that not only dissolves into visuals and exciting configurations but also serves to control the flow of the story;
- the effect produced by the play can be seen as neither of 'empathy' as in the dramatic form of theatre nor one of 'alienation' as in the Epic form of Theatre but also akin to the Theatre of Cruelty so that the audience can understand the social processes that lead to violence and cruelty, a malaise that Tendulkar studied as a research project and effectively depicted in artistic form in this plays.

2.5 SUGGESTED READINGS

For an introduction to modern theatre and drama, you could look at: Eric Bentley (ed) – *The Theory of the Modern Stage* (Harmondsworth: 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).

2.6 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- To answer this question, you will need to go back to 2.3.2. In addition, you will have to go through the text and mark the examples. Then you will write down the answer in your own words.

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- ii) This answer requires some thinking on your part. You will have to consult the text as well as the discussion in 2.2, and 2.3.2, 2.3.3. Remember that originality in interpretation will be appreciated.
- iii) Look at the discussion in Section 2.2, select suitable examples from the text and write down your answer in your own words.



UNIT 3 PLOT AND TECHNIQUE

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Production of the Play
- 3.3 The Historical Background
- 3.4 How to Read the Play
- 3.5 Critical Summary
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Answers to Exercises

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit carefully, you should be able to:

- discuss the plot of *Ghashiram Kotwal*; and
- outline the themes in the play.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the second unit of this Block. So far you have read a brief introduction to classical Sanskrit drama, folk theatre and Marathi theatre. You have also read about the life and works of the playwright Vijay Tendulkar. Tendulkar's plays, as you know, have made a major contribution to the development of contemporary Marathi theatre. *Ghashiram Kotwal* described as 'a major event in the history of modern Indian theatre' (Dnyaneshwar Nandkarni, 'Ghashiram Kotwal' Enact 73-74 Jan–Feb 1973) was originally written in Marathi and has been translated into several Indian languages including Hindi. The English translation, which is prescribed for you, is done by Jayant Karve and an American academic Eleanor Zelliot, who also knows Marathi well.

In this Unit, we shall briefly discuss the production of the play and its historical background. Then, we shall give you some guidelines regarding how to read a play. After this we expect you to take up the text of *Ghashiram Kotwal* and read it very carefully, making notes wherever necessary. After you have done that, we shall discuss the play in some detail.

We have given you some exercises so that you can check your progress as you go along as well as reinforced what you have already learnt.

3.2 THE PRODUCTION OF THE PLAY

The play was first performed on 16 December, 1972 at Bharat Natya Mandir, Pune by the Progressive Dramatic Association. But after nineteen successful performances, the play was banned on the grounds that:

- the portrayal of Nana Phadnavis's character was a distortion of historical facts:

- the play was anti-Brahman;
- violent audience reaction was feared.

Balachandra, Kelkar founder president of the PDA, said when banning the play: "The whole drama has been written with an animus for Brahmins, the patriotic Maratha Chancellor Nana Phadnavis has been portrayed as a lecherous character and a golden period of the Peshwa rule has been shown as a period of decadence". (Veena Nobledass, *Modern Indian Drama in Translation* Hyderabad, 1988, p. 121).

In reaction to Kelkar's statement, most of the actors who resigned from the Progressive Dramatic Association formed the Theatre Academy and the play was revived on 11th Jan, 1974. It has been performed successfully more than three hundred times not only all over India but in France, Germany, UK, Netherlands and Italy. Dr. Jabbar Patel directed fifty-five actors in this musical play.

The photographs of the play that you find in your units are taken from this production of the play. The Hindi version of *Ghashiram Kotwal* was directed by Rajinder Nath and put up by Abhiyan in New Delhi in October, 1973. The English version of the play was enacted in America. Satish Alekar who helped R. Jabbar Patel in directing the play, was invited to direct the English version in New York.

Tendulkar's plays are often controversial –Kanyadan raised a great deal of protest in Maharashtra for being anti-dalit as Ghashiram did for being anti-Brahman. But as you will discover after reading the play, it is far too complex to be simply dismissed as anti-Brahman or a distortion of history.

Tendulkar often bases his plays on real incidents. For example, *Kanyadan* is supposed to be based on the life of the dalit poet, Namdev Dhasal. *Grashatha*, his first full-length play was based on a friend's experience. Similarly *Shatata Court Chalu Ahe* was modeled on a mock-trial enacted by a group of players close to Tendulkar's house in Bombay. *Kamala* was based on a newspaper report. As you have already seen, Tendulkar is accused of distorting history in his play *Ghashiram Kotwal*. Let us first examine the historical background of the play before we are able to conclude whether such a charge is justifiable or not.

3.3 THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Ghashiram Kotwal is set in eighteenth century Pune at the time of the Peshwa rule. The play features the Peshwa's chancellor Nana Phadnavis and when it was first staged it met a lot of criticism for showing the revered Nana's character in a derogatory light. But according to Tendulkar:

This is not a historical play. It is a story, in prose, verse, music and dance set in a historical era. Ghashirams are creations of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place. Although based on a historical legend, I have no intention of commentary on the morals, or lack of them, of the Peshwa, Nana Phadnavis or Ghashiram. The moral of this story, if there is any, may be looked for elsewhere. ('Introduction, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1984, p.iv).

However, it would be well to look very briefly at the history of the period. If we look at the *New History of the Marathas Vol II Sun Over Marashtra* by G.S. Sardesai, we note that a North Indian Brahmin Ghashiram was appointed the police prefect of Poona on 8 Feb 1777 and continued to hold office till his death which took place on 31st August, 1791. He enjoyed the full confidence of Nana Phadnavis and unleashed a reign of terror in Poona. His downfall came when he ordered the arrest of 35 Brahmans who were locked up in a small cellar. Due to lack of ventilation, 21 died of suffocation. A Marathi chief passing that way discovered the dead and reported the matter to the Peshwa. In the meantime Ghashiram told the Nana that they had died due to opium poisoning. Upon the Peshwa's orders, Nana ordered an enquiry but the news had already spread and the Brahman community clamoured for the arrest of Ghashiram. Nana did not shield the Kotwal who was handed over to the crowd who stoned him to death on 31st August. (pp. 358-60).

We have a similar incident in the play where history has been transformed into a lively situation full of theatrical potential. How does history rate Nana Phadnavis? In the history books, he is described as 'secretive, exclusive and often vindictive, his exacting and stern methods, his insistence more upon the form than the essence in a thousand and one matters of administration, did in the long run harm to the Maratha State'. (p. 66) Nana, we are told was born on 12th Feb, 1742 and lived to be 58 years 1 month. He married several wives, of whom the names of nine are available. His last wife named Juibai who became a widow by his death, was then nine years of age'. (p. 358)

Just as Shakespeare has made use of history from North's Plutarch's Lives and transformed historical facts creatively into great drama that has withstood the test of time, so Tendulkar appropriates history to create a powerful play that raises questions of the politics of power that have a great relevance to Indian society today. At first glance it may seem a historical play, a period piece but its success lies in the fact that it challenges contemporary values by exposing them and therefore, becomes meaningful to us, who are reading it in the 1990s. This becomes clearer when we read the play more than once. In the writer's note to Vasant Deo's Hindi translation, Tendulkar said:

In my view, *Ghashiram Kotwal* indicates a particular social situation which is neither old nor new. It is beyond time and space. Therefore 'Ghashiram and Nana Phadnavis are also beyond space and time'. (New Delhi: Radhakrishnan, 1983, p. 8 *My Translation*)

The significance of the play does not lie in its depiction or distortion of historical reality. As such, these questions become irrelevant. Tendulkar has created his own artistic world and it is within this context that we should read the play.

3.4 HOW TO READ THE PLAY

Drama, poetry and the novel are different genres or kinds of literature. Of these, drama can be said to be the most complex and multi-dimensional. Why? Drama is a complex form because it is not simply meant to be read like poetry or a novel but is written for production in the theatre. It is multi-dimensional because it incorporates other literary genres such as poetry and other forms of fine art like music and dance. But when we talk about the inclusion of these forms, we are speaking of drama in its totality from its text to the theatre production.

A story, poem or novel is written for a readership and the poet or novelist is free to give rein to his/her imagination, taking liberties with time and space. But a playwright has to write for an audience which will provide an immediate response. He also has to keep the basic principles of stagecraft in mind –the use of time and space, the use of dialogue, action, tone of voice, facial expression, costumes, setting and so on.

The basic thing that we must remember is that a play is to be read imaginatively so that we are able to picture the whole action in our mind's eye. In short, we must be able to see and hear the plot unfolding itself in front of our eyes. It is only then that we will be able to appreciate a play in all its dimensions.

What then are the aspects of a play that we are to keep in mind while reading it? We first need to consider the title of the play. What does it signify? Our next question is: What is the play about, that is, what is the theme? In what time is it set? Where is it set? Who are the main characters? In what sequence has the playwright arranged the events and to what effect? In short what is the plot of the play? What about dialogue? Has the playwright made use of other fine arts like song, music, dance etc? What use has he made of action costume, setting and spectacle? What kind of play is it –is it a tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy or poetic play? What is the influence of classical or folk theatre on the play? If we keep these questions in mind, we will be able to read the play perceptively. Now let us take up the text of Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*. It is a short play, that does not have any formal divisions into acts or scenes.

It just has 2 parts –part 1 ends at the intermission and after a break, the second part begins. You will find the text in your Study Centre Library –do go through it once, and during your second reading make notes regarding themes, characters and dramatic techniques. You will be reading a Marathi play in English in which the characters are Poona Brahmans living in the eighteenth century and the cultural context is specifically Maharashtrian. How then do the English dialogues sound?

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Do you think *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a historical play? Give reasons to justify your answer.

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3.5 CRITICAL SUMMARY

We assume that you have read the play thoroughly. Let us examine it at some length.

The Title

The title suggests that the play is about a man called Ghashiram who is also a Kotwal. But is he the only important character in the play? You may have felt that Nana Phadnavis is a more important character. The Sutradhar is there from

the beginning to the end. Why then is the play called *Ghashiram Kotwal*? The title is similar to another play by Tendulkar called *Sakharam Binder*. The play is not simply about a man called Ghashiram but it is about the way in which power operates to create and destroy people like Ghashiram. The play is not so much about real historical characters like Ghashiram and Nana Phadnavis but about the hypocrisy, shame and decadence of those in high places who are willing to sacrifice anything for the sake of power and self. It is also about those who use power to grab whatever they wish and destroy those who would oppose them. For those who would play the power-game, people are pawns to be used when the need arises and to be discarded when there is no longer any use for them. How does power operate? Through social institutions like caste and religion. It is for this reason that the play is so relevant to our own social situation today.

The Story

Briefly, the story is about Ghashiram, a Brahman from the North, who comes to eighteenth century Poona. It was at that time that the Peshwa's chief minister Nana Phadnavis ruled supreme. Implicated in a false charge of theft, Ghashiram is insulted and humiliated by the Poona Brahmans and he vows to take revenge. His moment comes when the ageing lecherous Nana takes a fancy to his beautiful young daughter Lalita Gauri. He sacrifices his daughter's virtue to Nana's lust and manages to become the Kotwal of Poona. Now he unleashes a reign of terror on the Brahmans. His cruelty crosses all limits and the death of 22 innocent Brahmans results in his downfall and leads to his ignominious end when he is stoned to death. The Nana who has used Ghashiram's daughter and discarded her when he moves on to fresh pastures goes scot free. After Ghashiram's death he announces public rejoicing for three days.

The play is a satire on a society which shields the powerful and the corrupt and punishes people like Ghashiram. Justice is seen to be done, and the equilibrium of society seems to be restored. But is it really justice? Is justice possible at all in a corrupt social system?

Part 1

The Opening of the Play

The play opens with twelve men standing in a line, singing. At this point Ganapati comes in dancing and is later joined by Saraswati. Prayers are offered to Ganesh or Ganapati at the beginning of any undertaking in order to invoke his blessings for good luck. This is a traditional ritual. Ganapati is an especially popular deity in Maharashtra. Saraswati is the goddess of wisdom and music. Lakshmi the goddess of wealth also comes dancing to the stage and is asked to shower her blessings for the success of the play. This spectacular opening helps to arrest the attention of the audience who will later be called upon to appreciate as well as analyse the events as they occur. Let us further try and understand the significance of this opening.

- 1) The line of 12 singing Brahmans forms a human curtain that will be employed in many ways throughout the play to indicate changes in scene. This play thus does not require a curtain like in a conventional stage. Proscenium theatre requires stage props and a certain degree of formality. In this play, because of the human wall, the play can be staged with equal success and facility on a city stage or a village green.

- 2) The arrival of Ganapati, Saraswati and Lakshmi and the prayers offered to them for the success of the play is similar to the ritual performed on stage before the commencement of a classical Sanskrit play. That ritual was performed by the Sutradhar and some others but in this play there is some adaptation.
- 3) It is only after the three deities go dancing off stage that the Sutradhar enters and stops the singing. A Sutradhar is important in folk theatre and introduces all the character. In some plays he has a limited role and makes only one or two appearance. But in Ghashiram Kotwal, the Sutradhar plays several roles:
 - i) he introduces the characters and initiates the action of the play;
 - ii) he comments on the action throughout the play;
 - iii) he is not simply an objective observer but also takes active part in the performance by assuming different roles;
 - iv) acts as a cohesive device stringing together the many and often disparate scenes of the play.

After asking the Brahmans who they are the Sutradhar indulges in witty dialogue with one of the Brahmans who try to sneak away from the human wall. In a series of crisp and brief question, the Sutradhar is able to extract the information from him that he is going to Bavannakhani, infamous for its wine, women and songs.

Another Brahman sidles out of the curtain apparently in a hurry to get to Bavannakhani. Meanwhile the holy chant of 'Shri Ganaraya' continues. On the one hand the holy Brahmans, the custodians of social morality and religious ritual sing hymns publicly and on the other they indulge their lust and illicit passions in private. This exchange not only exposes the hypocrisy of the Brahmins, their arrogance and use of abusive language in dealing with the Sutradhar but also comments on the decadence of eighteenth century society in Poona. This scene has another purpose. It has introduced us to the main characters, the societal background and by mentioning Bavannakhani repeatedly, provided a smooth transition to the next scene.

Nana Phadnavis

In Bavannakhani where we see the famous courtesan Gulabi dancing with Ghashiram. At this point our main protagonist Nana Phadnavis comes in joins the dance in the course of which he hurts his foot. It is Ghashiram who, true to his sycophantic character, offers Nana his bent back to place his injured leg. In gratitude Nana gives him a pearl necklace. But when Nana goes away, Gulabi demands that the necklace be given to her. When Ghashiram resists, he is beaten up and sent away. Outside, he is accused of picking a Brahmin's pocket and in spite of an English Sahib's testimony to his innocence, he is beaten up and put in jail. All his protestations regarding his innocence fall on deaf ears following which Ghashiram vows to avenge his humiliation saying 'I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs'. How do you think he will do this? What was the role of the English Sahib who passes by in a palanquin? Don't you think his presence further exposes the subservience of the Brahmans to the white people and their greed as they try to coax money out of him? The sahib also testifies to Ghashiram's innocence but in spite of that the unfortunate man is beaten up. The corruption of

the brutal police is also highlighted here. But in addition to all this, the presence of the English Sahib in the palanquin serves to underline the fact that we are in colonial India.

Ghashiram's opportunity for revenge comes when Nana is captivated by the sight of his beautiful daughter Lalita Gauri. Ghashiram tantalizes him by postponing the gratification of his lust and exultantly claims 'Now he's in my hands.....' The innocent Lalita Gauri is bargained away so that her father can become the Kotwal in order to gratify his vengeful desire to "make this Poona a kingdom of pigs'. But Ghashiram does not realize that not only has he bartered away his daughter but he has also ransomed his freedom to the wily Nana who means to turn this concession to his advantage as he spells out in a soliloquy – 'what'll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do, our Kotwal pays. The opportunity comes in the shape of Ghashiram.' Following Nana's statement, we find Ghashiram dressed ceremoniously as the Kotwal of Poona and the scene draws to a close.

The Soliloquy

Up to this point, we have seen Nana as a hedonist indulging himself in the pleasures of the senses. His penchant for girls young enough to be his daughters is more than clear in his pursuit of Lalita Gauri. In this soliloquy we see another aspect of his character.

A soliloquy as you know, is a speech in which a character shares one's innermost thoughts with the audience. The other characters do not know these and in the action that follows this ignorance results in situations full of dramatic irony.

Ghashiram feels he has won a major concession from Nana. But Nana is a sinister and wily politician. He has given him an inch to take away an ell. By making Ghashiram the Kotwal, he will kill two birds with one stone. He will gratify his desire to possess his beautiful daughter and unleash terror on Poona through his Kotwal. In addition, by making an outsider like Ghashiram the Kotwal, he will be able to check the conspirators. Moreover, Ghashiram cannot join the conspirators because as an outsider they would not trust him and he would be forced to turn to the Nana for support. Nana, astute politician that he is, can see that Ghashiram will become more arrogant than the 'Chitpavan Bhrahmans' - a prophecy that is soon fulfilled as we see an arrogant Ghashiram appear on the stage as soon as Nana's monologue is over.

What purpose does this soliloquy serve?

- Another dimension of Nana's character is highlighted
- His evil motives are revealed
- Provides dramatic irony when we see the oblivious Ghashiram strutting in his finery. His arrogance rings hollow to the audience who can see him as a pathetic pawn in Nana's game.

Thus ends the first movement of the play.

- Here we are introduced to the main characters by the Sutradhar who does not simply appear at the beginning of the play but stays throughout, giving the many scenes a certain coherence and continuity.

We have indications that Ghashiram is an opportunistic and sycophantic character. Initially, he is just a newcomer, a Brahman from Kannauj who has come to Poona with his wife and daughter. But due to a false charge of theft, for which he is convicted, he vows to revenge himself upon the Brahmans. This vindictive streak in Ghashiram will ultimately be the cause of his rise, downfall and destruction, as we shall see. Nana Phadnavis is projected as a weak effeminate character whose primary aim seems to be the pursuit of women much younger than himself. Behind his dancing, pleasure-loving exterior is a scheming powermonger who can manipulate circumstances to suit his own selfish ends.

We have also seen that Tendulkar has made creative and multiple use of a line of human beings –(i) they act as a human curtain on stage; (ii) this line also functions as a wall; (iii) they sing as a chorus and (iv) provide interesting and innovative visual effects.

- Tendulkar has also made extensive use of song and dance which seems to bear the influence of the Tamasha form of folk theatre popular in Maharashtra. Abusive language and slapstick humour are all used in the Tamasha form. Lavani, the traditional love song is sung in alternation with religious hymns. This highlights the fact that religion is used as a façade to hide the decadent habits of the Brahmans. Dances add a spectacular touch to the performance, provide dramatic relief after tense situation.
- Nana's final soliloquy exposes his Machiavellian schemes. A soliloquy, as we know, is a monologue in which the character speaks to him/herself. The character's innermost thought are revealed to the audience while the rest of the people remain unaware of his thinking.

The context of the play is set by the period costumes and we are taken into eighteenth century Poona during rule of the Peshwas.

Part 2

Now turn to the second part of the play which moves at a faster pace.

The play re-opens with the twelve people singing the Ganaraya song. The Sutradhar walks in and a chorus of people confirm the fact that Ghashiram is already performing his duties as Kotwal. We are told of how he has 'whipped people', 'arrested people' and how 'Poona loses heart'. Innocent people are punished and forced to accept crimes not committed by them. They are tortured in jails. For instance, the Sutradhar who now plays the role of a Brahman is caught wandering on the streets at night without a permit. For him, it is a crisis situation as he has to fetch a midwife to help in the delivery of his child. His truthful explanation is dismissed as lies by Ghashiram who has him thrown into the prison.

In another instance, hearing some noise from a house, Ghashiram knocks as the door and demands to know what is going on. A bewildered Brahman opens the door to say that nothing was wrong at all. But Ghashiram refuses to believe him and despite evidence proclaims that the woman was not his wife and the innocent couple is arrested. These are only some of the examples of the injustice and terror that are perpetrated by Ghashiram.

Nana, meanwhile is oblivious to all this. He is enjoying himself with Lalita Gauri and his support has driven the Kotwal to ruthless cruelty. A woman cannot cremate her dead father-in-law because her genuine permit has been declared counterfeit by the Kotwal. Her husband and brother-in-law have been arrested instead. The unattended corpse has been in the cremation grounds and the distraught woman comes to Nana for justice. Instead of a hearing, she is ordered out by Nana who cannot bear to have his song and dance interrupted. This incident not only underscores the cruelty and inhumanity of the Kotwal but also the utter self-indulgence and decadence of Nana.

The woman is dismissed and dramatic relief is provided by a song and dance sequence which also indicates the passage of time as confirmed by the Sutradhar. Ghashiram's cruelties only increase. Innocent Brahmans are tortured, the nails of their hands pulled out and their fingers washed in lemon juice and soap. Hot iron balls are placed on the hands of an innocent Brahman to make him admit of a theft he had not committed. When under pressure he does admit of it, orders are passed for his hands to be cut off. All this violence is depicted on stage through mime. As the tormented man screams, the line of Brahmans begins to sing hymns as if to drown his groans and the scene shifts. This is also symbolic of the way that cruelty and oppression are swept under the carpet or religious rituals.

From accounts of Ghashiram's violent oppression, the focus shifts to the Kotwal's ambitions for his daughter's marriage. Soon after, we see preparations being made for Nana's wedding. Needless to say the bride is a very young girl bought in exchange for 'three hundred gold coins' and 'a great gift of land'. The depiction of the wedding on stage produces a spectacular effect. But in addition, it offers a contrast to the suffering of Ghashiram who is panic-stricken for no one had seen his dearest child Gauri for the last ten days. And we see the oppressor becoming the oppressed. When he confronts Nana about where his daughter is, he is told, with some reluctance, that she had gone to Chandra, the midwife. Shocked, Ghashiram hurries in the direction of Kasba Peth only to find that his child had already been buried. Here, Tendulkar works by suggestion for even though no details are given, yet the meaning of what could have happened to cause Gauri's death becomes clear. Ghashiram is ready to react murderously but loses his nerve when face to face with Nana who insists that protocol must be maintained. He farther insists that Ghashiram should stop relieving for his daughter for 'Death is without meaning.....No one belongs to anyone'.

This incident leaves a mark on Ghashiram whose cruelties assume horrendous proportions. The climax comes when a group of Brahmans, newcomers to Poona, are caught stealing fruit from the Kotwal's garden. They are arrested and all herded into a prison cell too small to accommodate them. By daybreak twenty two had died of suffocation and the rest were half dead. This is reported directly to the Peshwa by Sardar Phakade, who happened to be passing by. The Brahmans of Poona are furious and are up in arms against the Kotwal. Thousands of them rush to the Nana's house. The cowardly Nana is willing to promise them anything. When he finds out that they want the Kotwal's head, he is greatly relieved that it is nothing more important than that. He happily signs the paper for Ghashiram's execution and sends the message to the mob 'to humiliate him' and do all they want.

The angry mob sets out in search of Ghashiram. What follows is a scene full of dramatic irony. Ghashiram does not know of his fate and tries to disperse the crowd but they surround him menacingly. Later, we are told that he was publicly beaten up, his head shaven off and 'sindured' and he was taken around on a camel after which he was tied to the leg of an elephant. The disgraced, disfigured and battered Ghashiram comes on stage. He is stoned by the Brahmans and this action is again depicted by mime. At this moment, just before his death, realization dawns upon him and he admits: 'I should be punished for the death of my daughter'. Sadistically, the crowd pounces upon him and beats him up.

The pleasure in violence is shocking and speaks of the degeneration in the society of the time. Tendulkar has done a project on violence in society and the depiction of violence in all his plays is a comment on the direction which our own society has taken. From the non-violence and pacifism of the days of Gandhi during the struggle against the British, Indian society has veered towards violence which has now come to the surface. The society depicted may be eighteenth century Poona but the phenomenon of violence is real and has relevance here and now. In our daily lives we can see violence everywhere –in films, entertainment, on the street, in the home, at work. Commenting on his liberal use of violence to shock the audience, Tendulkar said:

Violence cannot be a spectacle. If it's recurring factor, it is so because violence is around us, it is within us, our times happened to be violent times. It is bound to reflect in any creative work in some form or other even if it is ugly and unpleasant.

Once Ghashiram is dead, Nana makes an appearance. He condemns Ghashiram and orders that his corpse be left to rot and all his relatives expelled from the city. He then declares three days of festivities to mark the end of the 'demon Ghashya'. The crowd cheers and Nana joins the dancing. The play ends with the song with which it had begun. The wheel has turned full circle.

Ghashiram, the cruel Kotwal is dead. Evil has been punished but does good triumph? What about Nana and the decadent Brahmans with their façade of religiosity? Does the ending leave you feeling uneasy? What is Tendulkar trying to say? Think about these questions and we shall discuss them in the next two Units. Meanwhile, let us complete the following exercise.

Check Your Progress 2

Let us now answer the questions in the space given below. Make sure to write the answers in your own words.

- 1) Define the role of the Sutradhar in the play. (About 200 words)

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- 2) Describe the fate of Ghashiram's daughter and the role Ghashiram plays in her ruin and death.

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- 3) What was Ghashiram's attitude to the Brahmans of Poona? Can we justify his actions?

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- 4) Explain with reference to the context the following lines:

'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'.

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3.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have gone through the play analytically. We have discussed:

- the production of the play;
- the historical background;
- the traditional opening of the play with a song and dance and the Sutradhar who introduces the characters;
- some aspects of Tendulkar's technique with regard to use of song, dance, monologue and the use of contrast in alternating the violent scenes with those of song and dance.

We shall discuss some of these topics in greater detail in the next two Units.

3.7 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Refer to Section 3.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The 'Sutradhar' is a familiar figure in ancient Sanskrit plays as well as in folk theatre. His role is generally to perform the opening ritual on stage and

to introduce the characters. In some plays the Sutradhar appears on stage in the beginning and then at the very end of the play. In Ghashiram Kotwal, the role of the Sutradhar is much more extended. Not only does he introduce the characters but he remains throughout the play binding the different scenes together with the necessary commentary.

- 2) Lalita Gauri, Ghashiram's young daughter, is a marginal character in the sense that she has no dialogues to deliver or any direct participation in the action of the play. However, she is important because she is the catalyst who sets the main events in motion. Her extreme youth and budding beauty catches the attention of the lecherous old Nana, who in his passion, is willing to give anything, to get her. And it is this lustful passion that Ghashiram exploits by exchanging his daughter's virtue for the position of Kotwal of Poona city. The innocent girl is used as a pawn in this nefarious deal. It is she who finally suffers an ignominious death at the midwife's after being discarded by the Nana whose roving eye has alighted on yet another young beauty who is to be used and then cast away like Lalita Gauri. That a father can compromise the honour of his innocent child is inconceivable but the lust for power can make an individual inhuman, as it does in the case of Ghashiram.
- 3) Ghashiram was a newcomer in Poona, a Brahman from Kannauj. He had come in search of a respectable life for himself and his family. However, all he got at the hands of the Poona Brahmans is insults and humiliation. The necklace given to him by Nana is forcibly taken away from him. In another incident he is charged with theft and beaten up mercilessly. It is then that he vows to avenge himself upon the Poona Brahmans. Once he becomes the Kotwal, he unleashes a reign of terror on the Brahmans beating, humiliating and torturing them on the slightest pretext. Even if he had been maltreated by the brahmans initially, his subsequent actions cannot be justified on moral grounds.
- 4) These lines have been taken from the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* by Vijay Tendulkar, the famous Marathi playwright. Written originally in Marathi, his play was translated into English by Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot. Set in eighteenth century Poona, it deals with the Peshwa's chief minister Nana Phadnavis and the Kotwal of Poona Ghashiram. Even though it draws upon history, the play is a fictional dramatization of real-life events the play deals with the themes of violence in society and of the stranglehold of power that continues unabated. Ghashiram may come and go but the real power rests in people like Nana who despite their decadent, unjust, authoritarian and inhuman behavior get away with all their sins.

UNIT 4 THEMES AND CHARACTERISATION

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Themes of the Play
- 4.3 Characterisation
 - 4.3.1 Sutradhar
 - 4.3.2 Nana Phadnavis
 - 4.3.3 Ghashiram
 - 4.3.4 The Women in the Play
- 4.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.5 Answers to Exercises

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this play you will be able to:

- discuss the themes of *Ghashiram Kotwal*;
- outline the relevance of the characters in the overall scheme of the play.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first two Units of this Block, you have read the general background to the play as well as a fairly detailed summary. In this Unit, let us discuss some of the main themes. We shall also discuss the characters in the play. By now you have read both the complete text of the play and its summary. While reading the text, you must have made some notes regarding themes, characters, style etc. Compare these with our discussion and see how far we agree or disagree.

As we have told you, *Ghashiram Kotwal* is often referred to as ‘total theatre’ which indicates that the playwright has used all the techniques of his craft to create a spectacular theatrical experience. All the directions are given in such detail that the play has been envisaged in its totality by Tendulkar.

As you read the play, the story of the rise and fall of Ghashiram unfolds itself. It is an interesting story set in a specific period in history. Even so, it is not a historical play though it is based on specific people in a particular time and place as well as certain incidents in history. It is contemporary in the sense that it makes us reflect on the state of our society by highlighting violence, the intrigues of power, the use of religion for the oppression of women and people of the lower castes. The oppressor survives in spite of his tyranny, decadence and authoritarianism. These are some of the themes that continue to perplex us throughout the play.

4.2 THEMES OF THE PLAY

A theme is the subject of the play –the view and message that the playwright communicates. A play may have more than one theme and it is quite possible to have a main theme and several sub-themes that originate from it.

What then is the main theme in *Ghashiram Kotwal*? The personality clash between the Nana and Ghashiram may appear to be the theme at the surface level but we know that Tendulkar has examined the relationship between religion, caste, sexuality and violence to expose the structures of power that maintain the status quo. As you will have noticed, Tendulkar is concerned about the politics of power and its various implications. 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 this? It might seem on one level that an individual is pitted against another. However, at another level it is clear that the forces of state and society remain supreme even after individuals have perished. For example, Ghashiram, an innocent newcomer to Poona is unjustly accused of stealing and is beaten up by the Poona Brahmans. This incident makes Ghashiram vow to revenge himself on them.

It is interesting that Ghashiram, himself a Brahman, has turned against his other brethren. The opportunity for getting even with the Brahmans presents itself when the lecherous Chief Minister of the Peshwa, the ageing Nana Phadnavis desires his beautiful daughter Lalita Gauri. Then begins the game of power in which Gauri is made a pawn and sacrificed to Nana's lust. In return, Ghashiram is made the Kotwal of Poona. This serves two purposes: one, it gives Ghashiram the opportunity to take his revenge and unleash terror on the people of Poona and two, it allows Nana to have his cake and eat it too. He has Gauri on the one hand and on the other his own tyranny is obscured by Ghashiram's cruelty. It is clear even at this stage that the deal is an unfair one as the benefit lies mainly on the side of Nana. And finally, Nana sacrifices Ghashiram to the bloodthirsty crowds without the slightest compunction or regret and at the end of the play, we find that he himself continues to thrive.

Who is really powerful; Nana or Ghashiram? We notice that the power is only deputed in Ghashiram who does not realize this and begins to mistake it for real power. When he loses Lalita Gauri and his game is up, he realizes his error and the reality of his position. It is Nana's misdeeds that have been "credited to his account". It seems then that power conceals itself behind its agents and continues to thrive unchallenged. Does the power rest with Nana? It would seem so but even Nana can be summoned at any moment by the Peshwa. The Peshwa himself is a symbol of power within the context of feudal society. Thus, the power vested in him is underpinned by the social set-up which functions on the basis of maintaining the status quo. The king or the Peshwa in this case has the power by virtue of the Divine Right. His position is maintained by various state apparatuses like the army, the police, religious and social institution, etc. Here the power is delegated in the Nana who further deputed it to Ghashiram by making him the Kotwal who then operates through a police force. Thus, there is a whole hierarchy of power positions. It seems then that it is an individual against an individual. For example, if a person is beaten up by the police, he can see the evil face of that particular policeman alone. He does not realize that the policeman is backed

by the police force which again is maintained by a particular state. The state itself functions according to a certain ideology. A society structured in such a way ensures that power is maintained and supported by such hierarchies. The attention is focused on individuals who are passed off as culprits. But the real culprit, the social set-up continues unchallenged as individual is pitted against individual. And even if Ghashirams are created and destroyed, society remains unchanged. The attention is diverted from the real problem which still remains untouched. And Tendulkar's play very subtly makes us think about and analyse this phenomenon.

We have seen how power operates more overtly through violence and oppression. At a subtle level, it functions through such social attitudes that help in maintaining hierarchies and hiding the real source of power which is delegated in agents such as Ghashiram who are also victims of that same power. Religion and sexuality are also used as the strategies of power.

Religion

While the army and police are used by the state to maintain control within societies, there are other subtler strategies that are also used. For instance, religion. Most religions tell us to turn the other cheek if we are hit. This prevents us from reacting against tyranny and injustice. When we imbibe these values during childhood, first in the family, then in the school and finally in society at large, they become so deeply ingrained in us that they do not allow us to challenge or change our social situation. Such values are imparted to us so subtly that we do not question if they are right or wrong.

Take the case of Ghashiram Kotwal. The play begins with a religious hymn and the popular gods dancing on stage. This sets the context against which the drama unfolds itself. The Brahmins go to Bavannakhani to see the dancing girls and say they are going 'to the temple' to give a sermon on 'Vishwamitra and Meneka'. They justify their decadence by comparing Bavannakhani to holy Mathura. The 'abhanga' or devotional song is often sung with the 'Iavani' or love song in his play. Scenes of violence and cruelty are alternated with devotional songs. When Nana tries to seduce Gauri in front of the statue of the holy Ganapati, he simply dismisses her fears saying: 'That all holy Ganapati? The maker of Good? Look, he has two wives. One on this side, one on that side'. Further on in the play, when Gauri is dead and the distraught Ghashiram confronts Nana and accuses him of his daughter's death, the latter reassures him: 'He –the Omnipresent –He makes everything happen..... We are merely instruments.....' He then urges him to 'forget what happened. All merges into the Ganga. Thou shalt not grieve over what is gone. The Vedas have said that' (P 44). 'Don't you think here is a case of the devil citing scriptures to suit his purpose? Religion then becomes a useful alibi in covering people's misdeeds. By invoking religion, all kinds of evils are glossed and even sanctified. Rituals are encouraged to fill the pockets of the greedy Brahmins. Moreover, their position as the 'twiceborn' is reinforced by the prevalence of the caste system.

Caste

Along with religion, caste is also a major factor in the play. Is it a comment on the decadence of the Brahmins? When the play was first performed it was banned for being anti-Brahmin and for fear of there being a revolt in the audience. Is it

really meant to expose Brahmins, their corruption and moral degradation? According to the playwright, he was more interested in 'the emergence, the growth and the inevitable end of the Ghashirams..... The decadence of the class in power (the Brahmins, incidentally, during the period which I had to depict) also was incidental though not accidental. Caste is used as an instrument of power. The Sutradhar reports that according to Ghashiram 'to eat with a lower caste person is a crime'(p.26). To sleep with a 'Mahar woman'(a lower caste among the untouchables) is also considered a crime. On the other hand, the Brahmins, have to hesitation in chasing and pestering a white Sahib for money. This shows that race and colour constitute a higher position in the social hierarchy. And the white Sahib ranks higher than the privileged Brahmin who is feasted and showered with gifts in the Peshwa's Poona.

Tendulkar has depicted the hypocrisy of the Brahmins, their arrogance, authoritarianism and their, debauched and adulterous behavior. Rather than being identifiable by their good deeds and noble behavior, the Brahmins are known by their 'shaven head', 'holy thread'and 'pious look'. It is this pious look that conceals their petty deeds. Nana himself a Brahmin is marrying for the seventh time not to mention his lusting after numerous young girls, Lalita Gauri among them. Though full of revenge and hatred for the Brahmins, Ghashiram is himself a Brahmin. And his conduct in bartering his daughter's virtue for the dubious distinction of becoming the Kotwal of Poona, can hardly be justified and speaks of his inhuman opportunism as well as total lack of paternal sentiment and sensitivity. The total picture of the Brahmins that emerges from this play is one of hypocrisy, double standards, self-indulgence and moral degradation. It exposes the rottenness of the caste-system that privileges a person on the basis of birth rather than merit and maintains the rigid hierarchy to control and suppress persons.

Sexuality

Women too, as we have seen, have become a pawn in the power game. In fact there is a close nexus between sexuality and power. Consider, for example, Nana's statement with reference to Lalita Gauri: 'Our grandeur's gone if she's not had'(p.20). A man's self-image, identity and machismo is definable only, it seems, in relation to the conquest and oppression of women. There is a close connection between sexuality and religion as *lavanis* (love song) and *abhangas* (devotional song) are sung at the revelries in *Bavannakhani* which is likened to *Mathura* and the erotic dances to *Krishan Lila*. The garb of religion helps to justify and whitewash the debaucheries of the Brahmin men. *Gulabi's* tantalizing dances, the Nana's lustful pursuit of *Lalita Gauri*, the clandestine meeting of the Brahmin wife with a *Maratha* lover, all serve to create an underlying strain of eroticism throughout the play.

Violence

Tendulkar did research on violence in India because of which he has explored its many dimensions. He is not only concerned about the violence of the State against the people but against the violence of people against other people. This is clear in *Ghashiram's* torture of innocent Brahmins and the belligerence of *Gulabi's* men against *Ghashiram* when he is forcibly divested of the necklace that Nana had given him. A stark example of this violence is the ordeal-by-fire episode. An innocent Brahmin, accused of theft, unsuccessfully tries to convince *Ghashiram* of his innocence. Even though the evidence indicates that the Brahmin has been

unjustly implicated, Ghashiram has an ordeal set up to test his innocence. The nails of the Brahman's right hand are pulled out and his fingers are washed with lemon juice and soap and then hands are sealed in a bag. Seven Rangolis are drawn on the floor and an iron ball is heated red hot. The ball is then placed forcibly on the hands of the protesting Brahman. Naturally, his hands burn and the cruel Ghashiram triumphantly proclaims that this would not have happened had he told the truth for only liars get burnt. He then urges the agonized man to 'confess' or else the ordeal would 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 Poona'. (p.36). Here is an example of the extreme physical and mental violence that can be perpetrated by one human beings on another. How does this square with the so-called religious commitment of the Brahmans? In addition to this is also the more subtle violence that human beings are capable of. This is the violence of mental cruelty-the kinds we witness when Nana subdues Ghashiram's agony and anger at the death of his daughter by invoking protocol.

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 Mataphor 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 trying to convey a 'message'? As we know the function of art is not to provide answers or solution but to raise questions. If indeed it begins to have 'palpabale designs on us' as Keats would say, it becomes mere propaganda. In this play, as we can see, Tendulkar provides us with a blueprint for an unforgettable theatrical experience by satirizing the utter decadence of feudal society. By exposing the foibles and hypocrisies of Brahmans, he forces us to think about the situation of our own society. There are no easy answers. Underlying the entertainment is a thread of seriousness and you may have felt slightly confused after completing the play. The 'end' in fact makes you think –How has Nana got away scot free? How can the celebrating crowd be so oblivious to the fact that the real evil remains? And the fact that such questions come to mind proves the success of Tendulkar's enterprise.

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 mains theme in the play? What does Tendulkar try to depict through the story of the rise and fall of Ghashiram?

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

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

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4.3 CHARACTERISATION

After reading the play, you must have formed some impression about the different characters. How do we 'know' a character in a play? The playwright uses several techniques to present a character:

- i) the character appears directly on stage as opposed to a character in a novel or story. In a novel or story the character can be described in detail but in a play this cannot be done;
- ii) other characters talk about him/her;
- iii) the character is shown in dialogue with others;
- iv) the character may soliloquize to speak his/her thoughts out aloud on stage;
- v) the character's actions may reveal his/her traits.

Any playwright has to be very careful with regard to the status, class, age, nature, style of dress, gestures and habits of the character as he will be observed and his voice and speech will be heard with attention.

Thus, when we draw a character sketch, we must remember not to simply describe what the character has "done" but to say what he "is". In short, we must pick out the character's traits. For example, if a particular character spends the better part of the day preening in front of a mirror, we can conclude that such a person is 'vain'. This is the trait that is manifested by one's action.

There are many kinds of characters: tragic, comic, or those who have both traits. Earlier the main character in a play was called the 'hero' as characters in Greek tragedy and other plays were persons of high rank and status. They were usually kings, princes or people who controlled the destinies of other. In the twentieth century when the characters became more ordinary and were people from common life, the main characters came to be known as protagonist. Who is the protagonist in *Ghashiram Kotwal*? Think for a moment before you answer this. If we were to ask you the same question regarding *Macbeth*, *the Doll's House* or *Arms and the Man*, you may be able to answer it without any difficulty. But who is the main character in this play? Is it the Sutradhar with whom the play begins and

ends? Or Ghashiram himself? It seems that all are equally important and constitute a totality that focuses on the aberrations of society.

In addition we have the women, who are there as catalysts rather than full-fledged characters. According to Tendulkar, the aim was not to develop any one character but 'The urgency was of finding a form in which a class or a multitude could become the central character. (The present title came only to suggest the incident and not the character Ghashiram Kotwal'. (p viii)

4.3.1 Sutradhar

As we have already told you in the first Unit of this Block, the Sutradhar is an essential part of Sanskrit drama and can be found in many folk plays such as Tamasha. The traditional role of the Sutradhar is to introduce the characters and initiate the events as well as comment on the action, wherever necessary. Let us now discuss the role of the Sutradhar in *Ghashiram Kotwal*.

As in traditional theatre, the Sutradhar introduces the characters and sets the context for the action. He remains on stage continuously, becoming a different person at different times. In the beginning, he plays the role of interlocutor who shops and questions the Brahmins as they sneak about slyly trying to get to Bacannakhani. As the Brahmins crowd round Bavannakhani, a lonely Brahmin woman is shown embracing her lover and the Sutradhar comments ironically on the scene: 'Here a Brahman woman in solitary confinement; there the crowds waiting for a glimpse of Gulabi...' (p.8). This role of Sutradhar as commentator continues throughout the play. When Ghashiram is thrown in jail, the Sutradhar masquerades as a 'fellow prisoner' and after commiserating with his lot, observes wisely:

'This thief is a simple thief.

The police are official thieves'. (p.16): a wisdom that will strike a sympathetic chord in many in the audience.

At other times he leads the chorus.

Sutradhar: Nine court Nana only thought of Gauri.

All: Thought of nothing else; etc. (p.22).

Then again the Sutradhar becomes a passing Brahmin who is caught roaming the roads at night by Ghashiram. When the Kotwal apprehends him he explains 'Sir, I was going to fetch the midwife' (p.28). It is through the Sutradhar's persistent probing that Nana's wedding plans are revealed dramatically. An account of Ghashiram's final humiliation and punishment is provided by the Sutradhar's running commentary. And his final comment is loaded with meaning:

'And in the end came the End'

The Sutradhar thus has a variety of roles. In addition to all these his function is to act as a cohesive device between the different scenes and the different modes such as song, dance and music which contribute to the total effect of the play.

4.3.2 Nana Phadnavis

This character of Nana is based on that of the historical character Balaji Janardhan Bhanu (12 Feb. 1742 – 13 March 1800) who inherited the post of Phadnavis or

administrator at the age of fourteen when his father died. Nana was the Peshwa's chief minister until his death on July 11, 1778. How does Tendulkar distance his Nana from the Nana of history? By Making him dance on stage and behave in a ludicrous manner. The Sutradhar introduces Nana's arrival by focusing on his status and wealth -

‘Nana of the nine courts, Nana of the wealth and power
to Gulabi's place proceeds’(p.8)

We are given no physical description or Nana's Personality except that he has a ‘silver handled walking stick’(p.9) and a ‘garland of flowers on his wrist’. We can conclude that he is quite a dandy and when he hurts his foot while dancing and makes a fuss, we also know that he is an effeminate character who can also be generous as he is to Ghashiram who offers his back for him to rest his foot on –the reward being his own necklace.

That Nana is old is nowhere stated but is implied through subtle hints. The walking stick, for instance. At the time of his wedding to a ‘slender willowy bride. A shy fair lily-white bride’(p.39). We are told that he is still young enough to marry! His moustache's turned gray. But not all his teeth are gone’(p.40).

We can see Nana as a lustful and lecherous old man from his presence at Gulabi's dance in Bavannakhani. He then tries to seduce the young and beautiful daughter of Ghashiram. He is furious when he finds that the ‘prey fled’(p. 19) and comments “Our grandeur's gone if she's not had’. Why does he say that? For him the girl is not an individual but merely a ‘prey’. And if he is able to snare it, his self-image as a macho man, a ‘Nine Court Nana’ will be enhanced. If for some reason, he cannot get her, this Bavannakhani. He then tries to seduce the young and beautiful daughter of Ghashiram. He is furious when he finds that the ‘prey fled’(p. 19) and comments ‘Our grandeur's gone if she's not had’. Why does he say that? For him the girl is not an individual but merely a ‘prey. And if he is able to snare it, his self-image as a macho man, a ‘Nine Court Nana’ will be enhanced. If for some reason, he cannot get her identity is called into question. The power that he boasts of is not located in his character but in the people around him by belittling whom he can define himself in positive terms. And when the girl is finally delivered to him, Ghashiram cries out ‘Look! I've given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf!..... That old overripe bastard! Look at him, eating her like a peach..... (p.22.)

The Nana in the play dances and sings. While this is in keeping with the rest of the characters in this play it also distances the Nana from the imposing historical character on whom he is based. Thus he is not simply an individual but also a type –a type of the corrupt Brahman community as well as a symbol of those in position of power. It is this power which makes him immune to the laws and requirements of justice.

The Nana has all the cunning and connivance of his tribe. Even when he capitulates to the demands of Ghashiram by making him Kotwal, he still has the upper hand: ‘What'll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do, our Kotwal pays’. By giving Ghashiram the false illusion of being powerful the Nana continues to use him and discards him when he feels, ‘there was no use for him anymore’. (p.52) When Ghashiram accosts him with his daughter's disappearance, he very piously states: ‘Thou shalt not grieve over what is gone.

The Vedas have said that....'(p.44). The juxtaposition of what is being said with what has already been done, is an effective device in un-masking Nana further.

What is your impression of Nana? Write it down in your own words in the space given below.

4.3.3 Ghashiram

Ghashiram is the historical character of the same name as we have already stated in our second unit. The whole play is a story of the rise and fall of Ghashiram, who from the position of an unknown visitor to Poona rises to become the Kotwal of the city striking terror in the hearts of the Brahmans. It is no account of his indiscriminate cruelty that he is discredited and meets an ignominious end.

When does Ghashirama first appear in the play? We see him in Brahman dress as he offers his back to Nana to rest his injured foot on. His sycophantic nature is already in evidence as he vey deferentially holds Nana's slippered foot and comments ingratiatingly.

'In my hand has fallen-grace!'

In return for his deference, the Nana gives him a necklace. But because he is a mere foreigner, the necklace is forcibly taken away from him by Gulabi for whom he has been performing all sorts of odd jobs to earn his keep, and he is thrown out.

Ghashiram is next seen looking hungrily at the Brahmans being fed at a feast. Even here his credentials are questioned and the soldiers arrest him as a thief. Despite his protest, he is thrown into goal and he piteously tells a fellows-prisoner: 'I've been here two weeks. I came here to find my fortune –and lost my reputation'(p.16). When he is finally released after his humiliation and torment, Ghashiram vows to "make this Poona a kingdom of pigs"(p.17)

Is he able to keep his vow? Yes, as we know the opportunity of becoming powerful presents itself to him when his daughter's youth and beauty catch the attention of the lecherous but all-powerful Nana. He trades her virtue to become the powerful Kotwal of Poona. But this power that he has achieved at the cost of his daughter is only an illusion. His strings are in the hands of Nana who wishes to kill two birds with one stone: 'We'll fell your luscious daughter.... we will make the city of Poona dance'. Not only will Nana be able to satisfy his lust but he will also be able to unleash terror in Poona through the Kotwal who can never really become powerful as he is an outsider. The opportunistic and short-sighted Kotwal cannot see that he and his daughter are being exploited. Not only is the Nana exploiting his daughter but he himself as a parent has bartered her away as an object for his own selfish ends. This is a subtle comment on the status of women in society as it existed then and society as it exists now.

As Kotwal, Ghashiram becomes unbearably arrogant and insufferable. His misplaced sense of morality ("I'll straighten out this adulterous city") makes him absolutely blind to reason and he indicts innocent people on various charges. Even without the least shred of evidence, people are imprisoned and put through the worst kinds of torture such as forcibly putting a red hot iron ball on a brahman's hands to make him 'confess' a wrong he has not committed.

When he hears that his daughter has been sent off to a midwife in Kasba Peth, Ghashiram sheds his deference towards Nana and confronts him aggressively only to be soon placated by Nana who reminds him that 'protocol should not be forgotten' (p.43). Though numb with grief, Ghashiram can no longer accuse Nana for causing the death of his beloved child and finally we see him bowing humbly before the ruffled Nana. Love for his child on the one hand and love for his position on the other find expression in this paradoxical behaviour.

When Ghashiram catches some hungry Brahmans stealing mangoes from his orchard, he has them all locked up in a small cell. Twenty two Brahmans suffocate to death and all hell breaks loose. The incident comes to the notice of the Peshwa and Ghashiram can no longer escape punishment. The Poona Brahmans would be satisfied with nothing less than Ghashiram's head and Nana cheerfully signs the order for his death as there was no use for him any more (p. 52). It is here that we find that Ghashiram the cruel administrator of law and order himself a victim of a system in which people like him are created and destroyed when they outlast their utility. Does the evil lie in the individual or the system?

Ghashiram, as we have seen, is a character who does not win our sympathy. The first impression of subservience is maintained in his relationship with Nana. As a father, he not only fails to protect his daughter but willingly hands her over to Nana, into 'the jaws of that wolf' (p. 22). In his role as Kotwal, he oversteps his brief and instead of protecting the people of Poona creates terror and destruction. In short, he fails as a father, a husband, a Kotwal but what's more as a human being, becoming a pawn of the system that creates and destroys him. Ghashiram develops from a harmless newcomer into a ruthless and sadistic Kotwal and it is only when he repents of his deeds before his violent death that he earns our sympathy. His moment of revelation comes when he says, 'I should be punished for the death of my daughter' (p. 54) But you will notice that this sympathy is not for Ghashiram the individual but for people like him who become victims of circumstances.

4.3.4 The Women in the Play

You will have noticed that even though women are mentioned, they hardly exist in the play. The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani to the house of Gulabi the courtesan. Gulabi is seen dancing with Ghashiram and providing entertainment both to the characters and the audience. She tantalizingly keeps the men who want to touch her at bay. In addition to this seductive image, Gulabi is also a determined woman who forcibly takes the necklace given to Ghashiram by Nana.

While the Poona Brahmans are lusting after Gulabi, their wives remain at home. But are they alone? The Sutradhar informs us that they 'are sentenced to solitary confinement' (p.8) but this turns out to be an ironical comment in the light of the fact that a Brahman woman waits with a saucy air for her lover, a Maratha landowner. Would this imply that Brahman women had the freedom to take lovers in feudal Poona? Certainly not. What is depicted is a transgression and within the play serves to expose the contradictions that exist between the public and the private.

We see women from time to time on stage but merely as mute characters, Lalitha Gauri, Gulabi and Chandra the midwife have a few insignificant dialogues in the play. What does this imply? Does the fact that women are totally marginalized in

the play in some way reflect social attitudes towards women? Even though women are ‘hardly there’, the violence and oppression against them is clear throughout. That they are treated as objects is also evident in the Nana’s various relationships with different women –Gulabi, Lalita Gauri and the young bride that he marries. He does not see them as individuals but as “playthings” to be trifled with and then discarded.

In plays like *Kamla*, *Kanyadaan*, and *Silence the Court is in Session*, women play a central role. But because Tendulkar seemingly shows them as losers and always exploited and used, some critics have called him anti-women. But Tendulkar presents his own point of view.

‘When I show the struggle of a woman, it is not one woman’s fight. The individual must have name and identity and caste and background to be credible, but she is not just a woman on stage, in a particular play. I am, in writing of her situation, showing that the possibility of a struggle against it exists....By not giving a solution, I leave possibilities open for whatever course the change may take. When the members of my audience go home and chew on the situation, they might be able to see their daughter or sister in the woman’s position and come up with a way of changing the situation to her advantage’. (Femina: Interview with Satya Saran and Vimla Patil –June 8-22, 1984, p. 37).

Do you think the women in *Ghashiram Kotwal* are important? Or are they important only in so far as they are able to offset the characters of Nana and Ghashiram? Or are they a useful structural device in exposing the hypocrisies of society? How does Tendulkar make us think about their plight—by empathy or identification with them or by alienation or distancing us from their situation? These are some of the questions for us to think about and discuss in the next unit. Meanwhile, let us complete the following exercise.

Check Your Progress 2

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

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4.4 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have discussed how:

- Power operates through both overt and covert means;
- Religion, caste and sexuality interlock to maintain the status quo;
- The characters, though based on real historical persons do not develop or come to life as they do in “*Macbeth*” or “*The Doll’s House*” but remain unidimensional. Tendulkar’s aim seems to be not to provide us insight into individuals but into social processes and as such the development of character is not his main concern.

4.5 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- Refer to Section 25.2
- Refer to Section 25.2
- Read the ending of the play once more before you write your comment.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Look at Section 4.3.3 and Section 4.6 in the previous Unit before you write your answer.

