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Balancing Tradition and Modernity: A reading of Tendulkar's *Ghasiram Kotwal*

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Abstract

India, the country of cultural diversity, has a long tradition of dramatic performance with regional specificities. More commonly, it is known as folk tradition/folk theatre. It is the folk theatre that gives the essence of the Indianness. During the 1970s, most of the prominent playwrights of India broke the barriers of regional language and produced many good plays at the national level. Most of their experimental works were centered on bringing the performance tradition or elements of folk theatre of India into the popular theatre. Thus we find Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* (1971) using theatrical devices of Yakshagana, a traditional form of theatre, widespread in Karnataka, Utpal Dutt using jatra in *Surya Sikar* (1972). Badal Sircar, experimented with folk elements of theatre and incorporated them into the proscenium theatre to evolve a new kind of theatre which he called the 'third theatre' or 'street theatre'. Similarly Vijay Tendulkar, like his contemporaries, experimented with various forms of folk theatre in *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972). But *Ghasiram Kotwal* is also a different and more important play in balancing tradition and modern in the history of Indian theatre. For an eminently successful and subtle realization of its importance in the long run, it is necessary to discuss the play critically. This paper is therefore an attempt to read how Tendulkar adopted the different folk forms of theatre and used it to represent on stage a power politics and the effects of oppression, a very contemporary and modern/postcolonial issue.

[**Keywords:** Vijay Tendulkar; *Ghasiram Kotwal*; Indian theatre Yakshagana, Indianness, folk]

With the formal end of European colonialism in the 1940s in various parts of the globe a new revisionary phase in literary and cultural productions began. This was true for India as well. But as India is a land of varied culture and language, the search of an Indian culture and tradition that could represent the nation was difficult. After 1947 and during the fifties, therefore, the imaging of a 'nation' particularly in the Indian context of negotiating between tradition and modernity became one of the major preoccupations for several Indian playwrights. Vijay Tendulkar's plays in translation emphasize such ideological concerns very prominently.

Emerging as a Marathi playwright during the 1950s, more specifically known to be the post-Independence or transitional or experimental period of the history of Indian theatre, Vijay Tendulkar, along with his contemporary playwrights began experimenting with various forms in search of a 'new'

theatre – the theatre that could break the barriers of regional traditions and represent the ‘nation’. The search for the new theatre continued with experiments in both content and form. In the 1970s, by suitable mixing of various styles and techniques from Sanskrit, medieval folk and western theatre, modern Indian theatre saw another major experiment – the harnessing together of tradition and modernity. This gave modern Indian theatre a new, versatile and broader approach at every level of creativity.

India, the country of cultural diversity, has a long tradition of dramatic performance with regional specificities. More commonly, it is known as folk tradition / folk theatre. It is the folk theatre that gives the essence of the Indianness. During the 1970s, most of the prominent playwrights of India broke the barriers of regional language and produced many good plays at the national level. Most of their experimental works were centered on bringing the performance tradition or elements of folk theatre of India into the popular theatre. Thus we find Girish Karnad’s *Hayavadana* (1971) drawing on a twelfth century folk tale using theatrical devices of Yakshagna, a traditional form of theatre, widespread in Karnataka. Karnad’s *Nagamadala* incorporates two separate Kannada folktales but does not follow any particular folk form but gives human representation to inanimate objects through dance and music and with an extensive use of mime dispels the illusion of realistic action. Again, Utpal Dutt in *Surya Sikar* (1972) extensively used devices of Jatra¹, another form of folk theatre popular in Bengal. Badal Sircar, another very prominent playwright of the 1970s experimented with folk elements of theatre and incorporated them into the proscenium theatre to evolve a new kind of theatre which he called the ‘third theatre’ or ‘street theatre’². In addition to the above mentioned productions, there was also Karanth’s production of Chandrasekhar Kambar’s *Jokumaraswami* (in the bayalata form³) and *Barnam vana* (a Yakshagna version of *Macbeth*), Vijaya Mehta’s production of Brecht’s *Caucasian Chalk Circle* (as *Ajab nyaya vartulacha*) and *The Woman of Setzuam* (as *Dewajine karuna keli*) with the conventions of Tamasha. Similarly Vijay Tendulkar, like his contemporaries, experimented with various forms of folk theatre in *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972). Through the use of elements of folk theatre, *Ghasiram Kotwal* is at par with the other experimental plays of the 1970s. But *Ghasiram Kotwal* is also a different and more important play in balancing tradition and modern in the history of Indian theatre. For an eminently successful and subtle realization of its importance in the long run, it is necessary to discuss the play critically. This paper is an therefore attempt to read how Tendulkar adopted the different folk forms of theatre and used it to represent on stage a power politics and the effects of oppression, a very contemporary and modern/postcolonial issue.

Ghasiram Kotwal is based on the machinations of power and effects of oppression which was/is a very contemporary issue. To deal with a contemporary and avant-garde theme was not new during the 1970s. *Ghasiram Kotwal*’s uniqueness lies elsewhere. The clever dramatist skillfully dealt with popular and contemporary issues by setting it against the backdrop of the

history of late eighteenth century Maharashtra and using elements of folk theatre subsequently.

The concept of 'time' in Indian philosophy is like a 'wheel' that forever rotates and brings back the same situations again and again. Only the persons to enact those situations change. Tendulkar's *Ghasiram Kotwal* represents such a concept of 'time'. Time repeats itself to play the same game of power politics over and over again. Tendulkar works around a three-fold framework of 'time'. Set in the late 18th century, the plot deals with the time frame of the rule of Nana Phadnavis⁴ and documents the degeneration of the socio-political fabric during the last days of the Peshwa rule. Within the perimeters of this historical 'time' frame, the current political situation of the 1970s, – the Shiv Sena and the whole mechanism of that 'time', how everything worked/works, how everything functioned/functions, is explored. Such is the power politics explored in the play that it even has its relevance today in the twenty first century and can probably also go into the future suggesting the 'timelessness' of the theme. The play therefore suggests that the players can change from Nana Phadnavis to Shiv Sena and probably to some Mr. X in the future, but the situation and the game of power politics remain the same.

The plot of the play begins with the first visit of Ghasiram, a Brahman from Kanauj. He finds himself falsely accused of theft and slighted by the Pune Brahmans. This arouses anger in Ghasiram and he swears to take revenge on the city. He snares Nana Phadnavis, the Peshwa's chieftain and magistrate of the city using his young daughter Lalita Gauri. In return, Ghasiram demands to be appointed the Kotwal of the city. He is therefore put in charge of the law and order of the city by the Nana. He unleashes a reign of terror on the city and its Brahmans. These include pulling off the nails of people and then chopping off their hands. While in power, he doesn't even realize that the Nana is using him only to keep the Brahmans in check and that he himself will become a convenient fall guy for Nana once he has accomplished his mentor's dirty job. Thus Ghasiram scourges the city of Brahmans while the Nana savours the innocent charm of young Gauri. When it is quite late, Ghasiram learns that Gauri has died mysteriously when she had gone to the midwife, and Nana is marrying for the seventh time. Insane with rage, the livid father confronts Nana only to be reminded that his daughter's life was a small price to pay for power and privilege. By this time the city Brahmans have also united in a bloodthirsty demand for Ghasiram's death. Nana signs the death warrant as casually as he had granted Ghasiram the kotwali⁵. In the final scene Ghasiram is mobbed by the irate crowd where, semi-crazed, he asks for death. As crowds gather round Ghasiram's lifeless body, Nana appears to herald the end of an age of terror and proposes festivities to mark the purging of the city.

From the outline of the plot it is clear that the 'content' of the play deals with a universal issue. Though it portrays historical figures, it operates at an allegorical level, commenting acerbically on the political situations of the present day India where scores of Ghasirams are made and marred each time the political scene is cast anew. The key success of any play is a proper balance between its content and form. The form of any play should be such that it

enhances an easy understanding of the content. The choice of a suitable form and performance style is therefore very important.

The performance style of *Ghasiram Kotwal* is heavily influenced by the conventions and folk theatrical devices. Tendulkar made ingenious use of folk art to launch an attack on negative societal elements. But unlike *Hayavadana* that used only devices of Yakshagna; or *Surya Sikar* that used elements of Jatra, *Ghasiram Kotwal* is an attempt to integrate various musical forms into Marathi theatre. Tendulkar experimented not only with the Sangit Nataka genre but also borrowed ingredients from folk theatre that includes Tamasha⁶, Dashavatari Khel⁷, Yakshagna⁸, Lavani⁹ (love ballad), Abhanga¹⁰ and kirtan¹¹ (devotional songs). The dramaturgy of the play therefore appears in fact to be consciously constructed around ironic shifts between the elements of various folk traditions so as to prevent the privileging of any one performance code.

It is rather surprising that Vijay Tendulkar, who always preferred to use naturalism as a technique for his plays, would use folk elements in *Ghasiram Kotwal*. Not just in *Ghasiram Kotwal*, he has used the style in a couple of other plays as well. One was initially a play for children, *Raja Rani ko Chaiye Pasina*. Even before that he tried the form of 'Tamasha' in legitimate theatre but did not succeed. And after *Ghasiram*, Tendulkar's *Vittela* (1985) too has music as a key component. This shows that Tendulkar had an obvious interest in the musical form. But the question that arises here is - why did he choose the form of the musical for a play with such a serious content? Tendulkar himself answered-

...not that I was not interested in a musical but I cannot think of a form first and then look for a subject that will suit the form. I had a couple of folk forms (not the popular ones) in my mind for the last few years and yet have not been able to do anything with them. *Ghasiram* started with a theme, then came the specific 'story' or incident which was historical and then the search for the form began. I knew that the usual naturalistic treatment was out of the question. By a series of accidents I discovered the present form which is a combination of a variety of ingredients from different folk forms of Maharashtra. (Intro. *Ghasiram Kotwal*)

Though the incident of *Ghasiram Kotwal* is historical, the context has a universal and timeless quality. The play exploits the machinations of power politics, also called deputationist politics, where the person in power uses certain institutions to carry out tasks for him so that the common man does not see the real perpetrator of the crime. When the need arises the men at the lower rungs are removed to pacify the people for some time and the person in power become their saviour, protector, an upholder of their rights. Further the game of power politics is a class phenomena and not individual-oriented. So, this particular form, using elements of folk tradition, perfectly fits the playwrights' agenda of representing a class or a multitude as the central character. According to the dramatist, the present title also therefore suggests the incident and not the character Ghasiram Kotwal. It unites the public and the private beings of a man. It is the transformation of Ghasiram from a simple

unassuming man into a hubristic power-crazy monster. He is the unsuspecting victim of a Machiavellian system embodied in the machinations of Nana. The true villain, Nana, emerges unscathed from turmoil that marked the rise and fall of Ghasiram. Therefore, the form of indigenous folk tradition has become a very appropriate form for the representation of the context of individuals playing the game of politics, taking advantage of situations, rising to power, and crashing to impotence at the whims of the ones more powerful in the same game – a typical phenomenon in almost any political complex.

The opening of the play follows more or less exactly the rituals of the Dashavatari Khel where a song of invocation is sung by the sutradhar¹² and his orchestra. Tendulkar begins the play with the group of twelve men chanting the invocatory song as Ganapati, Saraswati and Lakshmi, impersonated by actors enter the stage dancing. This song of invocation prays for a successful performance.

All that we ask for—

The success for this play! (Act I, 11)

Though Tendulkar begins the play with the rituals of Dashavatari Khel, his dramaturgy is completely innovative. He cleverly calls the group of twelve men as 'All'. The 'All' can be equated to the idea of 'chorus' of the western theatre. Though this group of twelve men is never called the "Chorus" by the dramatist, like the Chorus of the ancient Greek drama, this 'All' too is used by the dramatist to introduce, comment on the actions of the characters as well as itself play the role of a character. He only uses the concept of the Chorus sometimes breaking it to portray them as the Brahmans of Pune while at other times they form a line to represent the human wall. This shows that the dramatist is well aware of the western plays and possesses the capability of using the western form according to his own convenience.

The 'human wall' or the 'human curtain' that the group of twelve men forms is another very attractive and innovative a technique used by Tendulkar. According to Shanta Ghokale, "the human curtain of a dozen rhythmically-swaying Brahmans, which closes to hide or parts to reveal action, is not merely a theatrical device." (Gokhale, *On Ghasiram Kotwal*) The device is modified by the playwright from the curtain dance of the Yakshagna tradition. In the Yakshagna, people hold a small curtain and use it to hide the entry of the characters. Then they dance with the curtain. But in *Ghasiram Kotwal* the twelve men form a line to give it the shape of the human curtain. Tendulkar has used this device to create an environment of intrigue, hypocrisy, greed and brutality. This Brahman line or the Brahmans of the human curtain sing and dance the chants of saints and gods with their backs towards the audience. Again it is this curtain that serves as a screen of complacency or consolation cast over the yawning horror of corruption and tyranny. There are instances when the curtain drowns the scream of the tortured Brahmans, while at other times it is this curtain again that dissolves and the Brahmans stand as individuals with whom the Sutradhar converse. The same Brahman curtain that chants is made again at times to transform into a group sitting in Gulabi's hall

in Bavannakhani – the reiterated image of the red light district. Thus the formation and breaking up of the human wall serves as an excellent symbol of secrecy, hiding and revealing happenings by the human devices. What is most notable in the use of the human wall is the excellent harmony of its movement, taken from the traditional folk dance, with that of the music that sets the mood and tempo of the decadent and bawdy era.

The idea of the character of Sutradhar is also taken from Indian traditional theatre. In the traditional theatre, the Sutradhar appears only in the beginning of the play to introduce the play to the audience. Tendulkar uses the concept of the Sutradhar in a modified form. Tendulkar's Sutradhar functions at multiple levels. The Sutradhar enters the stage only after the benedictory scene is over and the impersonated Ganapati, Saraswati and Laksmi leave the stage. He is present throughout the play as a Sutradhar, linking the various parts of the plot as well as assuming various characters, like the Haridasa chanting the Kirtan or a city Brahman. At other times, the Sutradhar acts more as a coordinator between the audience and the actors and comments on the action of the play. In the very first entry the Sutradhar addresses the audience to introduce the Brahmans of Pune:

SUTRADHAR: (saying 'Ho Ho' to all, stops the singing)
 These are all Brahmans from Poona.
 Who are you? (Act I, 12)

This interaction with the audience as well as playing a part of the play by the Sutradhar itself is handled very technically by Tendulkar.

Ghasiram Kotwal is in most places termed as a musical historical play. But as pointed out earlier, Tendulkar never intended to write a historical play. But he also admits to have extensively used music and dance as well as a mixture of prose and verse to make the play entertaining. A close observance of the music and dance clearly reveals the author's implicit purpose of using it in the play. On behalf of the playwright's comment, the music and dance signify a lot.

Most of the songs used in the play are reintegrated into the narrative. They do not just indicate the mood of the situation but are also vehicles of comment, most often ironic.

SUTRADHAR (*to the beat of the dholki drum*):
 Night comes.
 Poona Brahmans go
 To Bavannakhani.
 ...
 They go to the temple – as they have done every day.
 The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani.

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

Ravi Shiva Hari
 Mukunda Murari
 Radhakrishna Hari

The street of Bavanna became for a while
The garden of Krishna.

(Act I, 16-17)

These and many more songs throughout the play ironically comment on the morals of the Brahmans of Pune. The lyrics, too, are written in several forms and prosodic meters therefore adding layers of ironical meaning to the text. For example in the above quoted song the Sutradhar sings is written in Kirtan mode. Kirtan, the traditional performing art, is meant to impart spiritual and moral instructions in the form of tales. The idea of the Kirtan leads to 'darshan' - a glimpse of the divine idol through its lyrics is its real meaning. But in this case the playwright wants by the use of the word 'kirtan' to hint at the lascivious songs sung by the dancing women and the 'darshan' indicates the glimpse of the dancing women. Sex, death and worship are all bound together in this song.

This song is followed by the swaying human curtain chanting the names of Krishna. This is again of the manner of the kirtankar¹³ who punctuates his narrative. The lyrics ironically bring together the images of institutionalized sexuality and institutionalized religiosity in an unholy combination - the reiterated image of Bavannakhani, the red light district, turned into the pleasure garden of Krishna.

Bavannakhani Mathura avatarli - Mathura descends on Bavannakhani.
(Act I, 18)

Here again the playwright juxtaposes the Brahmans nocturnal visit to the courtesans' quarters with Krishna sporting with the milkmaids in Mathura.

Tendulkar even used the Lavani, or the love songs accompanied by the dance of Gulabi to create an erotic mood. The lavani, the beatings of the Mridanga-drum and the entrance of the Nana in rhythm with the beats of the tabla is a classic creation where Tendulkar suggests the sexuality implicit in power. The dancing steps of the Nana, followed by his spraining of his foot, his limping a few steps on one leg and the string of rhythmical questions by the Sutradhar suggests the use of double visual pun by Tendulkar. While the dance steps create the pace of the play and Nana's hopping around on one leg becomes a visual image of lechery, the string of questions hints that the fall and spraining of the leg is the result of Nana's being where he ought not to have been.

In another scene, where Ghasiram is accused of being the thief and thrown into the audience so that he could rise up again to promise his revenge on the Brahmans of Pune, Tendulkar has used an excellent blend of classical music, dance, the abhanga and the lavani. And this is noted in the directions of the playwright itself.

A Hindi devotional song with the Mridanga-drum begins. The Brahman line, with no turbans, hands to ears, do accompaniments. End of Kawali, all turn backs. Soldier enters. Throws Ghasiram out in audience with force. On stage: Brahmans, Brahman women, Gulabi, the Maratha lovers, etc., all stand and look down on Ghasiram.

(Act I, 26)

This particular note of the playwright gives a complete picture of the scene. Tendulkar has used a Kawali¹⁴ here to depict the pathetic condition of innocent Ghasiram. Such is the condition of Ghasiram that he can recover only under the mercy of God. So probably, Tendulkar has used Kawali here to show how Ghasiram struggles and pines for a way to receive justice against the wrong. This is juxtaposed with the turning of the innocent Ghasiram into a devil. The Kawali is followed by a forceful beat of the Mridanga and Ghasiram's dance to its beat. The dance is vigorous and is called a 'war dance' which entails Ghasiram's banging his fist in the dust. This dance depicts Ghasiram's conversion from an innocent Kanauj Brahman to the revengeful Kotwal. Merged with this dance is another note of the playwright which features the blend of the different types of songs to explain the scene.

... Four stand as accompanists for the kirtan. Some Brahman women enter and sit in the stage audience. ...

The abhanga changes to a lavani – a change from a religious song to a love ballad. The Haridasa sings a lavani. Suddenly an abhanga. Back to lavani. Nana in lavani state of mind. The last of the sermon – repetition of God's names – comes loudly. Nana looks unblinkingly at a pretty girl. She is beautiful, shy, and innocent. .. The girl goes to bow at the Haridasa's feet. Falls at his feet. Nana steps towards her like a cat. All go but the girl stays behind, prays before Ganapati. Nana gestures to the servant to close the door. (Act I, 27)

In the above quoted direction of the author, the whole scene becomes distinct to the readers as well as to the performers of the play. At the same time this scene can be seen as the playwright's best experimental spot where he mixes almost every element of performance art that he has used elsewhere in the play. We find here the enactment of a Kirtan with the Sutradhar as the kirtankar narrating a religious tale. Amidst this narration another tale of lust and lechery is gestured by Nana and the women around. The whole scene depicts that it is time for the kirtan to begin, and time for Nana to eye the young maidens who come to listen. The blend of the abhanga – a devotional song and the lavani – the love song, by the Haridasa is also noteworthy. The mixer of the "abhangas" (devotional songs) with the "Lavanis" (Love songs) actually highlights the moral corruption of the Brahmans as they try to hide their lust behind the respectability of religion. Moreover the Abhanga also becomes a metaphor for the oppressor, who uses piety as a façade.

Tendulkar has also used the form of "Tamasha" in this play. In Tamasha, music and dance is the central attraction that reveals the story. *Ghasiram Kotwal* too has used a lot of singing and dancing. The use of the Tamasha also ensures the presence of some colourful language. For example, when Nana and Ghasiram are talking about the barter of Gauri for the kotwal-ship,

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

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

(Act I, 34)

we find in the conversation a repetition in dialogue. The same appears at other places of the play. Tendulkar specifically uses this repetition in dialogue to bring a comic relief in the play as it speaks ironically about a serious situation.

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

SUTRADHAR: I'm sorry, O priestly Brahman.

BRAHMAN: Don't you have any manners?

SUTRADHAR: I'm very sorry, O lordly Brahman.

BRAHMAN: Don't you have any brains?

SUTRADHAR: I'm very sorry, O honoured Brahman. (Act I, 14)

The technique of repetition is partly derived from the tradition of children's tales and partly from the tradition of Tamasha. Tendulkar twists the repetition from its normal shape with the questions in between. This kind of quick repartee occurs in the Tamasha, where the songdya, the comic character, generally has the upper hand over the sutradhar. Here of course the situation is reversed. The Brahman represents the establishment and the sutradhar has taken the role of the comic character.

It is therefore observed that Tendulkar has used various folk forms but twisted and turned it into the shape that suits the play best. The dramaturgy of the play appears in fact to be consciously constructed around ironic shifts between these elements so as to prevent the privileging of any one performance code.

The concept of traditional Indian theatre immediately brings into our mind the thought of the *Natyashastra*. "*Natyashastra*" is the compendium of Sanskrit dramatic and theatrical theory and practice. To some extent, most of the folk traditions have also incorporated the theory of *Natyashastra*. According to this *Natyashastra*, the whole aesthetic of Hindu drama and art comprises the conception of *bhava* and *rasa*. The grammar book of the Indian theatre describes 'bhava' to be of nine types: love, laughter, pathos, anger, energy, fear, disgust, wonder and quietude and 'rasa' to be also of nine types: erotic, comic, pathetic, furious, heroic, terrible, odious, marvelous and spiritual peace. Tendulkar's use of music and dance added ample scope to the expressions of the *bhava* and *rasa* of the play. Thus we find expressions of love and the erotic mood through the Lavani and Gulabi's dance in Bavannakhani, the expressions of anger, furious and terrible through the forceful dance steps of Ghasiram and in the very movement of characters on the stage. Through their dialogues all the *bhava* and *rasa* is expressed consistently in the play.

Moreover Hindu theorists from the earliest days conceived the plays in terms of two types of production: *lokadharmi* - realistic i.e., the re-production of human behaviour on the stage and the natural presentation of objects, and *natyadharmi* - conventional, which is presentation of a play through the use of stylized gestures and symbolism and was considered more artistic than the realistic mode. *Ghasiram Kotwal*, in that sense, can be said to be both *lokadharmi* and *natyadharmi*. The depictions of contemporary realistic issue of power politics make the play *lokadharmi* whereas the use of folk forms, music and dance to present the theme in stylized gestures and symbolism makes it *natyadharmi*.

Traditional theatre is predominantly an audience conscious theatre. There is always an intimate relation between the actor and the audience. Tendulkar paid attention to this aspect of actor-audience relationship as well. In the traditional theatre most of the performances used to take place in the open air theatre. The devices used were the entries and exits of the actors from the audience, addressing the audience during the action of the play, commenting upon a situation while the action takes place on the stage. Tendulkar managed to use these devices in a proscenium theatre. This was challenging as well as unique. In a scene, where Ghasiram is accused as a thief, the soldiers throw Ghasiram out in the audience with force.

...soldier enters. Throws Ghasiram out in audience with force. On stage: Brahmans, Brahman women, Gulabi, the Maratha lovers Etc., all stand and look down on Ghasiram. (Act I, 16)

And again it is the new, raging, tormented, changed, revengeful Ghasiram that rises from the audience.

Soldier wipes his hands. Those on stage, go. In the audience, the tormented Ghasiram. (Act I, 16)

In another instance:

Ghasiram walks into the audience looks at the scene on the stage and laughs viciously.

GHASIRAM: (suddenly cries out loud). Now he's in my hands ...Oh, my daughter...the beast ... (*then yells at the audience.*) oh, you people. Look! I've given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf. Putting the child of his heart up for sale. Look at my innocent daughter- a whore. ... spit on me. Stone me. Look, look, but I will not quit. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs. (Act I, 31)

Tendulkar used the 'actor-audience relationship' technique of the traditional theatre with a broader prospect. Ghasiram's throwing into the audience symbolically indicates that Ghasiram is no one, historical character but a common human being who at times becomes the toy in the hands of the power players. Again Ghasiram's walking into the audience and delivering his dialogue as one of them clearly involves the audience also into the action of the play. The audience cannot sit back and relax but studies the situations on the conscious level.

A conscious attempt to utilize the kinesics and gestural codes of the Indian theatrical traditions has enabled Tendulkar to question the contemporary values and phenomena from a radical position. This ironic commentary through the use of traditional performance code made the play a great success worldwide. At the same time, it is for this ironic commentary that the play faced a number of objections during its first performance. It was objected to on the grounds that (a) it was anti-Brahman, (b) the character of Nana Phadnavis, a cult hero, was portrayed in an unsavory light and (c) there was fear of revolt in the audience.

These observations show that *Ghasiram Kotwal* is attacked on peripheral counts than on its basic assumptions. The basic assumption and intention of the playwright was to depict the power game in general terms. Tendulkar had in his mind the emergence, the growth and the inevitable end of the Ghasiram; also those who create, and help Ghasirams to grow; and the irony of stoning to death a person pretending that it is the end of Ghasirams. Incidentally, during the period that Tendulkar depicts in the play, the Brahmans were in power. So in order to set up the atmosphere of the late 18th century Maharashtra, Tendulkar had to expose the corruption and pretensions of the Brahmans then. This depiction, as the playwright admits is to recount the power game played out in terms of caste ascendancy in politics rather than to humiliate the Brahmans.

Again, the character of Nana Phadnavis has been used by Tendulkar for the sole purpose of highlighting all those who are in power and thus can exploit the downtrodden. It is true that Nana Phadnavis is a historical character. But in *Ghasiram Kotwal*, the character of Nana is historical only in his name. As a character, both Nana and Ghasiram are part of twentieth century society and their actions are therefore not melodramatic but in keeping with the form, expressing the natural.

Though the play faced a number of objections initially it still remains as the most popular Marathi/Indian drama of the twentieth century. Tendulkar's achievement resides in his ability to refashion a universal theme of power politics using traditional performance techniques in such a way that the play can stand up to the severest critical scrutiny.

It is true that *Ghasiram Kotwal* showcases the oppression and cruelty of rulers in the pre-Independence era. But its great success till date shows the universality of its theme. When Ghasiram, in *Ghasiram Kotwal*, uses the power to oppress the citizens of Pune, it can be seen as a glimpse of each power drunk official in any political complex. The metaphor of Pune tyrants can be visualized with the anarchy and annihilation of the marginalized, untouchables, Blacks, subalterns, aboriginals, the underprivileged, peasants and small traders and manufacturers and the like world over. Even the post-modern practices of Neoliberalism and Globalization may be explained well with Marathi folk theatrical device of human curtain containing Pune Brahmans. Again the Pune Brahmans are the best metaphors for the global ruling class and Indian Hindu hegemonic practices. In all respects, *Ghasiram Kotwal* happens to be most relevant in the present day scenario.

Therefore, both in its thematic and technical strategies, *Ghasiram Kotwal* is an outstanding and innovative experiment that offers a new direction to modern Indian theatre. *Ghasiram Kotwal* proves that the traditional forms need not be treated as precious artifacts, but can be adopted to explore modern themes suitable for the urban audience.

Endnotes

¹ **Jatra:** Jatra corresponds to folk theatre. It is the enactment of a play with a cast and comprises music, dance, acting, singing and dramatic conflict. Earlier, religious values were communicated to the masses through the powerful medium of jatra. Today, the style of writing or jatras has undergone changes. Jatra plays are now no longer limited to the mythological, historical or fantastical subjects but include social themes to suit modern theatre. Jatra is performed on a simple stage with the spectators surrounding it on all sides. The chorus and musicians take their position off stage. It is a great source of entertainment because of its traditional music with simple melodic lines, dance sequences, songs, action and humour.

² **Third theatre/street theatre:** Street theatre as a form of art and culture has its strength in the writings of Badal Sircar. He also calls it third theatre or free theatre. According to him, first and the second theatre describe the normal folk art form and the Victorian art form respectively. His plays bring out the social and political message in a more straight and simple way having a definite rhythm of its own. It is mostly performed in areas such as the market place, the parks, the playgrounds and even in front of office or house. It is a vehicle to provide social, political and domestic showcase. It is the parameter to develop more consciousness among the people.

³ **Bayalata form** or bayal atada is a form of Yakshagna found in the southern Indian region of Karnataka, featuring stories of Hindu mythology and Puranas rendered as dance/drama. Bayalata literally means open theatre drama, and marks the end of harvest season. The most popular theme for bayalata is the story of *Koti Channaye*, which has deep rooted mythical significance in Tulu Nadu.

⁴ **Nana Phadnavis**, according to history, was the chancellor of the Peshwa during the period 1773-1800. The Maratha Empire remained free of British aggression with Nana's astute political strategy and statesmanship. In an extant letter to the Peshwa, even Marquess Wellesley described him thus: "The able minister of your state, whose upright principles and honourable views and whose zeal for the welfare and prosperity both of the dominions of his own immediate superiors and of other powers were so justly celebrated."

⁵ **Kotwali:** the work of the city guard. It also means the authority holding the power of law and order of the city.

⁶ **Tamasha** literary means 'fun' or 'playful entertainment'. It is the most popular folk form of Marathi theatre. There are two main types of Tamasha, *Dholkibari* ('dholak's turn: private and outdoor) and *Sangitbari* ('music's turn: private and indoors). The *Dholkibari* is performed in an open air theatre and is accompanied by song and dance. In most cases the style of dance resembles the spinning movements of Kathak. Several instruments are used of which the Dholak is primary – from which it gets its name. The *Sangitbari* Tamasha is performed mostly by women. They do not dance but sing and act out in seated style and the Songadhya creates humour. Some researchers do not consider it to be true Tamasha.

⁷ **Dashavatari Khel** is another very popular Marathi and Konkani theatre form depicting the story of any one of Vishnu's ten avatars – from which the form gets its name. The original story of the Marathi theatre is traced to this folk tradition. The structure of the Dashavatari Khel retains some feature of the Sanskrit theatre. It

consists of two parts the Purvaranga or the prologue, and the Uttaranga or the latter performance. It begins with the Sutradhar sitting in front of a small curtain with his orchestra of musicians playing harmonium and other instruments. The Uttaranga deals with the mythological comic episodes of killing Sankhasur, a demon who had stolen the Vedas. This episode also satirizes contemporary socio-political life. The play proper presents an instructive dramatization of an avatar's story.

⁸ **Yakshagna** as a generic term refers mainly to a traditional form of Kannada theatre predominant in coastal Karnataka. 'Yakshas' form a class of demigods in Hindu mythology, but their connection to this genre remains unclear. It is generally performed in a plot demarcated on the ground or a raised platform with green rooms at the back and the audience sitting around the other three sides. The musicians sit on a table at the rear of the stage. No stage props are used. "the absence of scenery is made up for by theatrical conventions: a small hand-held curtain conceals the entry of characters, who then execute an elaborate and attractive curtain dance."

⁹ **Lavani** is a form of musical discussion popular in Maharashtra and southern Madhya Pradesh. The word Lavani comes from the word 'lavanya' which means beauty. It is a combination of traditional song and dance, which is particularly performed to the enchanting beats of Dholak. In most of the songs, meaningless chants are introduced to fill up the gaps between the lines. This music of the folk performance is called Maanch and has a texture of its own. Being a kind of love ballad that is sung, traditionally, the Lavani has been associated with prostitution to some extent.

¹⁰ **Abhanga** is a devotional hymn.

¹¹ **Kirtana** is generically Hindu devotional singing, but specifically an ancient Marathi performing art, popular even today. Its basic impulse is to impart spiritual and moral instructions in the form of tales. In Maharashtra two traditions exist: Naradiya, in temples and Varkari, taking place anywhere.

¹² **Sutradhar** in the traditional theatre, "it is the title given to a person whose role is to create a link between the performer, the performance and the audience. He introduces the play and never comes back. But in the modern plays, we find the functions of Sutradhar on multiple levels. He not only introduces the play but also raise certain issues which are to be discussed in the total scheme of the play.

¹³ **Kirtankar**- the main performer of kirtan

¹⁴ **Kawali** is a genre of Muslim devotional songs originating with Amir Khusru and sung mainly by Sufi devotees. The word Kawali comes from the Arabic word 'Qaol' which means "axiom" or "dictum". The language of the kawali is Urdu. It is usually sung in a group with a main singer, or kawaal and a chorus. The dholak is used to maintain the rhythm which is accompanied by clapping, a distinct peculiarity of kawali songs. There is a change of pace and tune between the kawaal and the chorus which claps in time to the rhythm. The clapping increases in tempo as the song proceeds. The development of the kawali up to the latter part of the Mughal empire closely parallels the development of the Hindu religious songs known as bhajan.

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