

THE THEME OF REALISM, PATRIARCHY, SUBJUGATION AND OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *GHASIRAM KOTWAL*

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“As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods,
They kill us for their sport.” (*King Lear* Act 4, scene 1, 3237)

Abstract:

Vijay Tendulkar is known for his writings that are true to life. Ghasiram Kotwal, a play in Marathi that deals with multiple themes such theme of revenge, the political system of India, and alike. Yet, a different underlying aspect is also revealed in the drama, theme of Realism and deterioration in the position of woman. This paper deals with the meaning of Realism and its implication on drama, Ghasiram Kotwal. The paper deals with various problems like objectification, subjugation and repression that are political, economic and social in the life of a woman with Realism as the centre of interpretation.

Keywords: *Realism, Subjugation, patriarchy, marginalisation and objectification of woman.*

Introduction

Realism was an artistic movement that finds its emergence in France in the 1840s, near about the incident of the 1848 Revolution. Realist ejected the idea propounded by Romanticism. Realism, “revolted against the exotic subject matter and the exaggerated emotionalism and drama of the Romantic movement. Instead, it sought to portray real and typical contemporary people and situations with truth and accuracy, and not avoiding unpleasant or sordid aspects of life” (“Realism”). The movement focused on the realistic subjects that were chiefly pessimistic, gloomy and cynical in nature. Realist critic J.P. Stern argues, “Realism in life and literature alike (I have argued) depends upon a balance between mind and world, inner and outer, at a certain point in time. It is the balance of inward making and outward matching which creates the fiction of a shared reality” (142). Realism depicts life as it is, negating the romantic elements that are uncooperative, apathetic and bleak. Vijay Tendulkar in this drama deals with the subjugation of women, objectification and problems faced by women in a patriarchal society.

Society has divided into various binaries of self and others. In the structure of race, caste, religion and gender inequality they find expression. One group remains dominant and other remains subjugated, oppressed and cowed down by superior self. The work of Realism not only shows the plight of women, down-caste, and Blacks but also gives us understanding regarding their set of circumstances. Stern comments that “the works of realism live, often without any manifest relevance to our own situation. They draw on our 'spontaneous capacity for understanding others'” (183). Realism rejects unnatural, contrived and pretentious world literature depicts rather is shows honest, an absolute image of life. Realist critic Furst is of opinion that, “Realism denotes above all the serious portrayal of everyday occurrences among the lower social strata at a specific moment in the history of their time” (06). This paper gives an insight into the various aspects of Realism that are true to the life of Gauri and woman like her as depicted by Vijay Tendulkar.

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar (6 January 1925-19 May 2008) was a leading Marathi playwright, who also contributed his writings to movies and televisions serial. His play *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972) is a

play that primarily deals with power politics and the theme of revenge. There is also an underlying theme that deals with the plight of women in a patriarchal society. Women have remained marginalised, subjugated and have suffered immensely.

The binaries into which the world is divided in which the male are given more importance to that of the female are highlighted in these plays. The standard of morality is different for men and eventually, this becomes the cause of the problem to Gauri, Ghashiram's daughter. Tendulkar in *Ghashiram Kotwal* depicts the women in the play as oppressed, subjugated and demeaned in the status of life. Such is deterioration in the status of women in the society that it becomes difficult for women to think apart from the patriarchal constriction.

Ghashiram ruthlessly suppresses and insults the women of Pune and all the people around him. He practices his force with such limitless power that it becomes impossible for the residents to carry out their lives in a normal way. Such is the aggression and overpowering revenge in the mind of Ghashiram is against the denizens that he even uses his daughter as bait and captures licentious Nana in the act. His conscious struggles, but revenge overpowers his mind, "look at this father. Putting the child of his heart up for sale. Look at my innocent daughter-a whore. The old overripe bastard! Look at him, eating her like a peach" (Tendulkar GRK 381). Women to men are nothing but an object of pleasure that is needed during the time of urge. Something that Gauri is both to her father as well as to Nana. They both use her at their will and dispose of her at their will. Individuality is completely dismantled and becomes the means to serve and meet the political ends for her father and physical needs for Nana. Gauri has lost even the reason to oppose her father against atrocities inflicted on her and her modesty and honesty towards her father become the root cause of death of Gauri. Gauri remains submissive and follows the words of her father in the puppet-like nature. Much of the women that are depicted in the play are of similar category. They have lost the voice and determinations to oppose forget about the protest against the patriarchy.

Concept of Patriarchy

Patriarchy is not only the dominance of the male in the life of female with respect to marriage. The interference is deep-rooted in which the very behaviour, daily actions, education, freedom to wear clothes, to eat, to laugh, to sit, to walk, to dance, to speak, to smile, to sleep; the very existence from the beginning is curtailed that increases the complications for the women in our society. Patriarchy becomes ingrained in her subconscious and that becomes the guiding force for all her conscious action. In fact, her conscious is curtailed by the action of the subconscious and it becomes the main guiding force of her action. Gauri's action is also curtailed by the same sub-conscious mind in which men are treated as supreme. In the Indian tradition, they are omnipotent. All power rests in man's hand and the entire course of development depends on them and nothing else matters. Men are the one who takes all the important decisions, right or wrong the option of questioning them remain absent from the female world. The position of the male in the Indian society in practice has been made the most powerful institution. Apart from those double standards of morality is laid for men and for women in society. Women are checked at every step of development and their freedom is curtailed. This becomes an absolute barrier and cause for their subjugation. Polygamy is one of the many problems that are prominent in the society. Polygamy is sanctioned in the religion if not directly then indirectly and this influence the actions of Nana. Nana receives all the attention from his people and no one raises the questions against his action. They are in fact participant in his activity and support his actions. Rai says in his essay regarding the position of women in the polygamy society, "Woman has no choice of her own in the patriarchal society and the situation is the same whether she is Gulabi or Gauri or the newly married bride or the old wives of Nana" (83).

The status of the women was no better in the British era as compared to the medieval age. There were a number of factors responsible for the continuation in the deterioration of the position of the women in society. Sociologist C.N. Shankar Rao is of opinion that, "Crime against women is an ever-increasing problem" (Rao 175). Crime against women includes violence against women, rape, molestation, eve-

teasing, cheating young women on the pretext of marriage, etc. These features are still prevalent in India and they were the main factors which led to the degradation of the women in society. The deterioration of women is not the outcome of the single event rather numerous elements coming together to a single point and eventually led to the derogatory position of the women in India.

Religion and Subservient Position of Women

Many of the conventions that were popular in the Hinduism are responsible for the suppression of the Indian women and dominance of the male in the Indian society. Hinduism insists on the different roles attributed to males and females. The roles attributed to female are centred to serve the male as the primary and inevitable duty. The life of the wife is expected to be around her husband. It is this mentality that has trapped the women within the premises of their house and put a hurdle in the development. The main values that were placed in the minds of women were that of obedience and submission. It was this attitude that sidelined political ambition and also economic liberty was something that not known to women.

Vedic Women

In the matter of family, Vedic women were in some way guided by the norms of the patriarchal society and the convention somewhat guided the lives of women. Though the husbands had greater power in terms of the household yet women, were treated as equal to men. In this context they both were considered as the head of the family known as *dampati*. But there used to be strong conventions regarding the conduct of women that needed to be strictly followed by the women. The women were expected to be completely devoted to their husbands and to be loyal with all her duties. In terms of participation in the family matters and religion too they were to accompany her husband.

In terms of economic freedom, they were attributed with liberty within the vicinity of the home. As a matter of fact, most of the economic contribution made by women apart from the household services they gave was to engage in a number of economic activities such as weaving and spinning the clothes. They also got involved in the farm work as they helped their husbands in agrarian pursuits. Even some of the women were known to engage in the profession of teaching, but anyhow the rate of involvement was comparatively lower than that of men engaged in such errands.

In terms of property rights, there is a discrepancy regarding the distribution of the property among men and women. In terms of inheriting the property, no greater rights were conferred upon women rather it was generally focused upon the men and it was they who dominated the scene in terms of property rights. Some sort of protection, on the other hand, was offered to women who were destitute and in deplorable conditions. Such as in case of the forsaken wife, she was entitled to one-third of her husband's property. Even there were instructions for the maintaining cost that was to be provided to the poor wife, in case if a husband abandons her. While there are a few instances that assistance was provided to the women who were in need.

Polygamy, Child Marriage and Trauma

Polygamy is also being depicted in play *Ghashiram Kotwal*, which was common in the ruling class. The practice of polygamy was common in all religious groups. It was basically the status in class and economic empowerment that was responsible for the practice. The young brides suffered the repercussions of polygamy as they were ignored after few intercourses. Carelessly, they were treated and no proper attention was paid to them. Rather than some dignified position they were turned into some entity, demining their stature as human. They needed to adjust to the situation for they were like objects of ostentatious and licentious living. The narrator also forgets the count of the number of wives and says, "Seven or eight women of different ages, all Nana's wives, make a dancing circle around them" (Tendulkar GRK 381).

Gauri in the State of Hopelessness

The deplorable condition of Gauri can be described in the words of Ghashiram, "look! I've given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf!" (Tendulkar GRK 381) though Ghashiram laments that he

has deteriorated the position of his daughter to a whore, yet, he is determined that he would continue this path and leave no stones unturned so as to take his revenge. In the subsequent days, Nana's main preoccupation was Gauri and there was no other topic that came to his mind. The Sutradhar repeatedly articulates that Nana got engrossed with Gauri and leaves the work of administration due to his feckless nature. "If she is not found, no one will keep his head!" (Tendulkar GRK 380). Such is the infatuation, Nana develops for Gauri that he is unable to keep the daily routine properly. Lecherousness of Nana develops day by day; his lust knows no limit, no age and no shame. Nana becomes desperate to see and touch Gauri and he is ready to part away with anything.

Ghashiram makes Nana desperate for his daughter and then snaps a deal with him. Ghashiram pretends that he would take his daughter back, as these developments would ruin the future of his daughter and also the two parties are unequal that Nana is so high in stature and Ghashiram so low economically. Ghashiram also projects that the marriage of his daughter would be completely ruined if the words go around the state of Poona. These protestations are deceptive in nature and Ghashiram is not really concerned about his family, the stakes the honour of his daughter for the sake of the revenge at first hand and secondly, to become powerful he uses Machiavellian principles. Kalindi Deshpande in her essay writes, "It is saddening to know that almost all his women characters meekly submit to injustice, violence and harassment done to them" (Deshpande 91).

Objectification of Women and Repression:

Nana desperation reaches to its height and knows no boundaries and is ready to surrender everything for the sake of Gauri, Ghashiram's daughter. The objectification of women is predominantly is the main theme in this section, Gauri is treated as commodity earlier by her father and later by Nana, her liberty and her discretions are of no value. Gauri's protestations are of no value and she becomes a valued commodity for both and means for Ghashiram and to quench his lust Nana is ready to take care for her. Though Nana is the same as the age of his father and even more than that, Nana is blind due to his licentious nature and his infatuation knows no limit.

Nana ironically exclaims to Ghashiram that, "don't you have a heart?" (Tendulkar GRK 383) when the latter projects that he would not suffice his daughter to him. Nana is a heartless person and his only concern is Gauri. Ghashiram's malevolent nature is only revealed when he reaches to final negotiation with Nana in his demand, to become the Kotwal of Poona "to shut people's mouths" (383). In a single stroke he wants to change his fortune, this he achieves by using his daughter. "Lovely Gauri will not come to this palace again" (384) is enough to dismantle the constitution of Nana. For Nana, now Gauri becomes everything, therefore, he allows Ghashiram to rise as the Kotwal of Poona. The sudden stroke of malicious plan results in the spontaneous emergence of Ghashiram, whose identity remains obscure and tainted from the beginning of the drama, rises at the end of Act One.

The philosophical speech and articulation by Nana to pacify Ghashiram on the event of the death of Gauri show the sheer hypocrisy of Nana that is based on false presumptions and nothing else. He tries to pacify Ghashiram by recollecting some philosophy from Vedas and other daily proverbs. Nana says, "Death is without meaning, Ghashya. Life, too, is without meaning. No one belongs to anyone. No one is anyone's daughter. No one is anyone's father" (Tendulkar GRK 405). The false condolences Nana expresses is devoid of any meaning and is baseless. Nonchalantly Ghashiram leaves in the state of dilemma.

He ponders over the death of his daughter unable to take revenge against Nana he falls in the state of confusion and unleashes his wrath on the hapless citizens. At the end of the drama, the fate of Gauri becomes the main cause of aggression of Ghashiram Kotwal that he unleashes on hapless citizens of Pune. The other women characters remain inarticulate and bereft of speech.

Conclusion

The Realist critic Pam Morris comments in her book, *Realism*, "Realism as a literary form has been

associated with an insistence that art cannot turn away from the more sordid and harsh aspect of human existence” (03). In *Ghashiram Kotwal*, the very concept of the individuality of woman is curtailed and male-dominant forces act as social hegemonic forces. These hegemonic forces are by reason responsible for the dominance of the male on the female. The condition of women is depicted in the play and the pathetic treatment they suffer in their lives. The two major women characters in the play, Gulabi and Gauri are nothing but an object of pleasure for Nana and others. Gulabi earns her living by urging men sexually and Gauri is used as bait by her father to gain power. The other Brahmin women remain in subjugated position for they hardly are able to express themselves and enjoy any pleasure like men. A critic like Vani Devulapally comments in his book, *Vijay Tendulkar: The Playwright Champion of Social Justice*, regarding the situation of Gauri as, “The audience or readers understand Gauri's passive submission to the old lechery in a sympathetic way which is nothing but the social reality” (147).

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