
UNIT 24 BACKGROUND AND PLOT

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24.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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

24.1 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 reinforce what you have already learnt.

24.2 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 Brahmans, 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 Dr. 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.

24.3 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 mean time 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 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.

24.4 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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24.5 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 pelf. 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 characters. In some plays he has a limited role and makes only one or two appearances. 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 a witty dialogue with one of the Brahmans who try to sneak away from the human wall. In a series of crisp and brief questions, 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 inspite 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 Brahmins' – 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 Brahmin 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 Brahmins. 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 Brahmins. Dances add a spectacular touch to the performance, provide dramatic relief after tense situations.

- 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 thoughts 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 the 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 at 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 brothers-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 of 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 further insists that Ghashiram should stop grieving 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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24.6 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, meme soliloquy 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.

24.7 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Refer to Section 24.3.

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, this 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. Ghashirams may come and go but the real power rests in people like Nana who despite their decadent, unjust, authoritarian and inhuman behaviour get away with all their sins.