
UNIT 25 THEMES AND CHARACTERISATION

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25.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this play you will be able to:

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

25.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

25.2 THEMES OF THE PLAY

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

What then is the main theme in *Ghashiram Kotwal*? The personality clash between the Nana and Ghashiram may appear to be the theme at the surface level but we know that Tendulkar has examined the relationship between religion, caste, sexuality and violence to expose the structures of power that maintain the status quo. As you will have noticed, Tendulkar is concerned about the politics of power and its various implications. According to Saimik Bandhopadhyay, 'In *Ghashiram*, power is defined 'horizontally' in terms of individuals against individuals from humiliation, to revenge in assertion, to eventual victimization....' (*Ghashiram Kotwal*, Seagull, Calcutta, 1984, p.v.) Do you agree with this? It might seem on one level that an individual is pitted against another. However, at another level it is clear that the forces of state and society remain supreme even after individuals have perished. For example, Ghashiram, an innocent newcomer to Poona is unjustly accused of stealing and is beaten up by the Poona Brahmans. This incident makes Ghashiram vow to revenge himself on them.

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

Who is really powerful; Nana or Ghashiram? We notice that the power is only deputed in Ghashiram who does not realize this and begins to mistake it for real power. When he loses Lalita Gauri and his game is up, he realizes his error and the reality of his position. It is Nana's misdeeds that have been "credited to his account". It seems then that power conceals itself behind its agents and continues to thrive unchallenged. Does the power rest with Nana? It would seem so but even Nana can be summoned at any moment by the Peshwa. The Peshwa himself is a symbol of power within the context of feudal society. Thus the power vested in him is underpinned by the social set-up which functions on the basis of maintaining the status quo. The king or the Peshwa in this case has the power by virtue of the Divine Right. His position is maintained by various state apparatuses like the army, the police, religious and social institution, etc. Here the power is delegated in the Nana who further deposes it to Ghashiram by making him the Kotwal who then operates through a police force. Thus, there is a whole hierarchy of power positions. It seems then that it is an individual against an individual. For example, if a person is beaten up by the police, he can see the evil face of that particular policeman alone. He does not realize that the policeman is backed by the police force which again is maintained by a particular state. The state itself functions according to a certain ideology. A society structured in such a way ensures that power is maintained and supported by such hierarchies. The attention is focused on individuals who are passed off as culprits. But the real culprit, the social set-up continues unchallenged as individual is pitted against individual. And even if Ghashirams are created and destroyed, society remains unchanged. The attention is diverted from the real problem which still remains untouched. And Tendulkar's play very subtly makes us think about and analyse this phenomenon.

We have seen how power operates more overtly through violence and oppression. At a subtle level, it functions through such social attitudes that help in maintaining

hierarchies and hiding the real source of power which is delegated in agents such as Ghashiram who are also victims of that same power. Religion and sexuality are also used as the strategies of power.

Religion

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

Take the case of *Ghashiram Kotwal*. The play begins with a religious hymn and the popular gods dancing on stage. This sets the context against which the drama unfolds itself. The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani to see the dancing girls and say they are going 'to the temple' to give a sermon on 'Vishwamitra and Menaka'. They justify their decadence by comparing Bavannakhani to holy Mathura. The 'abhanga' or devotional song is often sung with the 'lavani' or love song in his play. Scenes of violence and cruelty are alternated with devotional songs. When Nana tries to seduce Gauri in front of the statue of the holy Ganapati, he simply dismisses her fears saying: 'That all holy Ganapati? The maker of Good? Look, he has two wives. One on this side, one on that side'. Further on in the play, when Gauri is dead and the distraught Ghashiram confronts Nana and accuses him of his daughter's death, the latter reassures him: 'He – the Omnipresent – He makes everything happen..... We are merely instruments

He then urges him to 'forget what's happened. All merges into the Ganga. Thou shalt not grieve over what is gone. The Vedas have said that' (P 44). 'Don't you think here is a case of the devil citing scriptures to suit his purpose? Religion then becomes a useful alibi in covering people's misdeeds. By invoking religion, all kinds of evils are glossed and even sanctified. Rituals are encouraged to fill the pockets of the greedy Brahmans. Moreover, their position as the 'twiceborn' is reinforced by the prevalence of the caste system.

Caste

Alongwith religion, caste is also a major factor in the play. Is it a comment on the decadence of the Brahmans? When the play was first performed it was banned for being anti-Brahman and for fear of there being a revolt in the audience. Is it really meant to expose Brahmans, their corruption and moral degradation? According to the playwright he was more interested in 'the emergence, the growth and the inevitable end of the Ghashirams..... The decadence of the class in power (the Brahmans, incidentally, during the period which I had to depict) also was incidental though not accidental. Caste is used as an instrument of power. The Sutradhar reports that according to Ghashiram 'to eat with a lower caste person is a crime' (p. 26). To sleep with a 'Mahar woman' (a lower caste among the untouchables) is also considered a crime. On the other hand, the Brahmans, have no hesitation in chasing and pestering a white Sahib for money. This shows that race and colour constitute a higher position in the social hierarchy. And the white Sahib ranks higher than the privileged Brahman who is feasted and showered with gifts in the Peshwa's Poona.

Tendulkar has depicted the hypocrisy of the Brahmans, their arrogance, authoritarianism and their, debauched and adulterous behaviour. Rather than being identifiable by their good deeds and noble behaviour, the Brahmans are known by their 'shaven head', 'holy thread' and 'pious look'. It is this pious look that

conceals their petty deeds. Nana himself a Brahman is marrying for the seventh time not to mention his lusting after numerous young girls, Lalita Gauri among them. Though full of revenge and hatred for the Brahmans, Ghashiram is himself a Brahman. And his conduct in bartering his daughter's virtue for the dubious distinction of becoming the Kotwal of Poona, can hardly be justified and speaks of his inhuman opportunism as well as total lack of paternal sentiment and sensitivity. The total picture of the Brahmans that emerges from this play is one of hypocrisy, double standards, self-indulgence and moral degradation. It exposes the rottenness of the caste-system that privileges a person on the basis of birth rather than merit and maintains the rigid hierarchy to control and suppress persons.

Sexuality

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

Violence

Tendulkar did research on violence in India because of which he has explored its many dimensions. He is not only concerned about the violence of the State against the people but against the violence of people against other people. This is clear in Ghashiram's torture of innocent Brahmans and the belligerence of Gulabi's men against Ghashiram when he is forcibly divested of the necklace that Nana had given him. A stark example of this violence is the ordeal-by-fire episode. An innocent Brahman, accused of theft, unsuccessfully tries to convince Ghashiram of his innocence. Even though the evidence indicates that the Brahman has been unjustly implicated, Ghashiram has an ordeal set up to test his innocence. The nails of the Brahman's right hand are pulled out and his fingers are washed with lemon juice and soap and then hands are sealed in a bag. Seven Rangolis are drawn on the floor and an iron ball is heated red hot. The ball is then placed forcibly on the hands of the protesting Brahman. Naturally, his hands burn and the cruel Ghashiram triumphantly proclaims that this would not have happened had he told the truth for only liars get burnt. He then urges the agonized man to 'confess' or else the ordeal would be repeated. Left with no choice, he falls into the trap – 'I confess that I stole'. (p.36). Instead of letting him off Ghashiram orders the soldiers to 'cut off his hands and drive him out of Poona'. (p.36). Here is an example of the extreme physical and mental violence that can be perpetrated by one human beings on another. How does this square with the so-called religious commitment of the Brahmans? In addition to this is also the more subtle violence that human beings are capable of. This is the violence of mental cruelty-the kinds we witness when Nana subdues Ghashiram's agony and anger at the death of his daughter by invoking protocol.

But what is Tendulkar's aim in portraying this violence? According to Sudhir Sonalkar 'It [violence], has to somewhere grasp the tragic human condition, it has to have a poetic dimension to itThe violence of greek tragedy, moves and enriches. Tendulkar's violence shocks and even when it disturbs, the ethical question remains both untouched and unanswered'. ('Vijay Tendulkar and the Metaphor of violence' *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. Nov. 20, 1983, p.21). By leaving the ethical

question open, Tendulkar is perhaps inviting his audience to think about the solutions for themselves.

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

Before we move to the next section, let us do the following exercise.

Check Your Progress 1

Answer the following question in your own word: (About 200 words each)

- 1) Which is the main theme in the play? What does Tendulkar try to depict through the story of the rise and fall of Ghashiram?

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

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

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25.3 CHARACTERISATION

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

- i) the character appears directly on stage as opposed to a character in a novel or story. In a novel or story the character can be described in detail but in a play this cannot be done;

- ii) other characters talk about him/her;
- iii) the character is shown in dialogue with others;
- iv) the character may soliloquize to speak his/her thoughts out aloud on stage;
- v) the character's actions may reveal his/her traits.

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

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

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

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

25.3.1 Sutradhar

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

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

'This thief is a simple thief.

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

At other times he leads the chorus.

Sutradhar: Nine court Nana only thought of Gauri.

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

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

'And in the end came the End'

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

25.3.2 Nana Phadnavis

This character of Nana is based on that of the historical character Balaji Janardhan Bhanu (12 Feb. 1742 – 13 March 1800) who inherited the post of Phadnavis or administrator at the age of fourteen when his father died. Nana was the Peshwa's chief minister until his death on July 11, 1778. How does Tendulkar distance his Nana from the Nana of history? By Making him dance on stage and behave in a ludicrous manner. The Sutradhar introduces Nana's arrival by focusing on his status and wealth –

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

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

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

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

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

The Nana has all the cunning and connivance of his tribe. Even when he capitulates to the demands of Ghashiram by making him Kotwal, he still has the upper hand: ‘What’ll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do, our Kotwal pays’. By giving Ghashiram the false illusion of being powerful the Nana continues to use him and discards him when he feels, ‘there was no use for him anymore’. (p.52) When Ghashiram accosts him with his daughter’s disappearance, he very piously states: ‘Thou shalt not grieve over what is gone. The Vedas have said that’ (p.44). The juxtaposition of what is being said with what has already been done, is an effective device in un-masking Nana further.

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

25.3.3 Ghashiram

Ghashiram is the historical character of the same name as we have already stated in our second unit. The whole play is a story of the rise and fall of Ghashiram, who from the position of an unknown visitor to Poona rises to become the Kotwal of the city striking terror in the hearts of the Brahmans. It is on account of his indiscriminate cruelty that he is discredited and meets an ignominious end.

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

‘In my hands has fallen-grace!’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

25.3.4 The Women in the Play

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

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

We see women from time to time on stage but merely as mute characters, Lalitha Gauri, Gulabi and Chandra the midwife have a few insignificant dialogues in the

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

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 2

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

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25.4 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have discussed how:

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

25.5 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

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

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Look at Section 25.3.3 and Section 25.6 in the previous Unit before you write your answer.