



Parallel Interplay between Tradition and Folk Theatre: A Study of select works of Vijay Tendulkar

Md. Alemul Islam

Department of English Literature, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

Received: 07 Sep 2023; Received in revised form: 12 Oct 2023; Accepted: 20 Oct 2023; Available online: 30 Oct 2023
©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— Folk theatre is the root of modern Indian drama, and with the advancement of modernity, folk theatre keeps balancing the dynamic aspect of modernity. Most of India's well-known playwrights overcame the limitations of regional language throughout the 1970s and produced a number of excellent plays on a national scale. The majority of their experimental productions were focused on incorporating Indian folk theatre components or performance traditions into mainstream theatre. As a result, we see Utpal Dutt using Jatra in *Surya Sikar* and Girish Karnad adopting Yakshagna, a traditional type of theatre, in his play *Hayavadana* (1972). In order to create a new type of theatre that he called the "Third Theatre" or "Street Theatre", Badal Sircar experimented with incorporating folk elements into proscenium theatres. Similar to his contemporaries, Vijay Tendulkar also experimented with many types of folk drama in *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972) and other plays. The current study is an integrated effort to concentrate on how tradition and modernity are portrayed in Vijay Tendulkar's plays. Another way to put it is that modernity has economic, social, cultural, and political ramifications. A cultural driving force with social, economic, and political ramifications is tradition. Vijay Tendulkar explores both conventional and contemporary tendencies in his plays through folk theatre. In his plays, he combines elements of heritage and modernism. They are entangled with both modernity and tradition. One may easily notice Tendulkar's keen observation of life in his plays. He strikes a delicate balance between tradition and contemporary in expressing the social realities. The purpose of this article is try to understand how Tendulkar employed various folk theatre styles to express power dynamics and the outcome of oppression, a very modern and postcolonial subject, on stage.



Keywords— Contemporary issues, Folk theatre, Modern, Traditional Folk, Urban Folk.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indians have recently gained a resurgence of interest in folklore and regional cultural expressions that has caused the rediscovery and reappraisal of indigenous performance and literary arts. This is particularly clear in theatre. Since independence, the traditional theatres have had a spectacular reform, including Yakshagana, Tamasha, Ras Lila, Nautanki, Bhavai, Jatra, and Khyal. The national and state Sangeet Natak Akademics have lately drawn attention to these provincial theatres, which were considered decadent and generally ignored during colonial times. An academic re-evaluation that views them as the last representatives of the old Sanskrit theatrical tradition, based on characteristics like introductory rituals, stylized acting

and gestures. Their prestige has increased as a result of stock characters like the stage director (sutradhara) and clown (vidushaka), as well as stylized acting and gestures as well as a lot of dance. Urban audiences have seen performances by folk theatre companies from all across India at festivals held yearly in the capital, and Western academics have been drawn to the cultures to study them. Cities have become more acquainted with folk theatrical traditions as a consequence, and their attitude towards them has changed from derision to interest and appreciation. In India, interest in folk theatre first emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The works of Vijay Tendulkar deal with persons from the mainstream, the authority or upholders of norms, who were

tasked with establishing a modern society, rather than just representing the voices of the marginalised. Tendulkar skillfully applied the Brechtian alienation effect to expose the relationship between violence and power in Indian institutions and make critical observations on the reality of the social conditions in his immediate surroundings. In order to inspire the audience to think critically and act against the status of society rather than accept it passively, Brecht's Epic theatre aimed to in still a critical distance and attitude in them. He employed the "estrangement effect," which deviated from the rules of that era's naturalistic mainstream theatre and allowed viewers to become emotionally separated from the play and think more logically. The same thing occurs in *Ghasiram Kotwal*, a play that recognises the real violence ingrained in society and uses alienating tactics to keep the audience informed while also making them feel exceedingly uncomfortable. The mechanics of power is the subject of the play, and they have become so messed up that there is no simple way to fix them. Since Tendulkar accepts violence as reality rather than loathes it, the play can be seen as political satire since it encourages audience members to reflect and engage in critical analysis. The play's plot and characters show how tradition and modernity are perfectly woven together in *Ghashiram Kotwal*, which is a superb example of this interweaving in an artistic way. Tendulkar's focus is on disclosing the truth; the audience must come up with the solution. He maintains the relevance of a minor historical figure for India in the 1970s and even today.

II. DISCUSSION

Folk theatre forms like Jaatra, Nautanki, Bhavai, Tamasha, and puppet shows are the traditional and most effective ways to communicate with rural populations. These forms, along with electronic media, should be used to spread a message about social, economic, and cultural development because it will aid in the overall development of the country. These media sources started to be utilised to educate the public and launch government efforts on subjects like adult education, rural health care, the elimination of untouchability, access to contraception, women's empowerment, anti-dowry customs, and a number of other socio-economic issues.

The Sutradhar character comes from Indian classical theatre in Vijay Tendulkar's play. The Sutradhar initially comes at the start to introduce the Pune Brahmins. The Sutradhar idea is improved by Tendulkar so that it may operate on several levels. Connecting the different story elements together is its most important role. The Sutradhar also takes numerous personas, such as the Kirtan-chanting Haridasa or, more crucially, serves as a liaison between the spectators and the players and the many remarks made on the play's

events. The dramatist does a good job of handling Sutradhar's contact with the audience as well. The kirtan mode is used to render Sutradhar's songs. While a "kirtan" is intended to provide moral and spiritual guidance, in the play, the name "kirtan" alludes to the lustful tunes performed by ladies, and the word "darshan" denotes a sight of those dancing women. Tendulkar must be commended for his conviction in the inevitableness of the musical form and his masterful use of it, even when the sheer joy of music tends to lessen the satire's gravity. . Tendulkar has utilised a beautiful combination of classical music, dancing, abhanga, and lavani in a scene when Ghasiram is accused of stealing and hurled into the crowd where he rises again to reiterate his determination to get revenge on the Brahmins of Pune. The playwright's advice makes it clear.

The forms of indigenous folk tradition are ideally suited to reflect power politics. The twelve guys Tendulkar refers to as "all" or the "human curtain" can be compared to the term "chorus" used in Western theatre. Tendulkar uses the chorus technique occasionally to depict the guys as Pune Brahmins and other times as the human wall. This demonstrates that Tendulkar was knowledgeable about contemporary Western theatre techniques and skilled at utilising them. However, Tendulkar cleverly adapts these conventional tools to produce a culture of decadence, intrigue, and hypocrisy. Even when a fellow Brahmin is being tormented, the Brahmins acting as the human curtain sing, dance, and chant with their backs to the audience. This human wall also serves as a powerful metaphor for the use of human tools to achieve secrecy and revelation. It conceals the oppression and depravity of Brahmin control behind a veil of complacency. For instance, when the curtain dissolves, we can hear the Sutradhar speaking to the tortured Brahmins while the curtain muffles their screams. The group seated in Gulabi's hall in Bavannakhani is created by the curtain. The precise synchronicity of the human wall's movement, which was influenced by a traditional folk dance, and the music, which establishes the tempo and mood of the bawdy era, is what makes it so fascinating to use.

The cultural matrices that connect rural and urban areas are becoming increasingly urbanised because of a fast shift in value paradigms. Traditional folk , on the other hand, are commonly used in metropolitan theatre productions, albeit diluted in the guise of improvisation. Traditional folk dance and song adaptations for the big screen, especially when performed by amateurs, distort the originals and harm their long-term survival and development. Herein lies the dilemma and the very real threat of degeneracy and revivalism's worst manifestations, according to M K Raina:

“Since this urban activity is typically one of the shortcuts, it is aggressive and exploitative. Even though the urban

theatre employee has taken up the product, he or she has failed to consider its origins, including its history, ethnography, religion, and other factors that tie it to the past” (Raina 453).

Vijay Tendulkar is considered a realist, humanist, and experimentalist playwright by critics and literary historians. Tendulkar's plays are representative of cultural and political reality since they include real-life circumstances, events, and happenings, according to those who study them. Take, for example, his *Silence! The Court is in Session* is based on actual dialogues heard by the dramatist at a mock trial enacted by a group of actors; *Kamala* is based on true events reported in the daily paper; “*Ghashiram Kotwal*” is based on a historical incident during the Peshwa regime. Consequently, all that he created and performed on stage was based on real-life experiences. His plays have become increasingly lifelike as he has incorporated more and more details from real life (Tendulkar, *Ghashiram Kotwal*)

Tendulkar incorporated form and its defining linguistic patterns into the play. With the exception of *Mukunda* (Krishna), who was given a sarcastic treatment of modern urban life in the dialogue, the play's traditional *gan* (invocation to Ganapati), *gaulan* (sc Krishna and the milkmaids), and *povada* (a song form) were not used. Tamasha, and he found that the metropolitan performers he chose lacked the spontaneity and casualness of traditional actors. This issue brought to light for him one of the key distinctions between urban and rural theatre: whereas the actor is crucial in folk theatre, the urban play relies on the playwright.

The play can be perceived as an allegory of struggle between the individual and society, between power and exploitation. The content of the play is woven in songs and music. Vijay Tendulkar the play wright has described the play as a non-historical myth presented with dance and music. For this purpose, he has used a combination of a variety of ingredients from different folk forms of Maharashtra Kirtan, Abhanga, Tamasha, Lavani and Khele are used in particular. The folk forms helped in articulating and expressing the content of the drama. The play has shades of folk arts consequently folk music was used as a critical vehicle of the theme.

The play is dominated by Nana Phadnavis, Ghashiram and the chorus and Sutradhar with their implications of folk art. *Ghashiram Kotwal* is incomplete if the text is divorced from the performance. The Theatre Academy production, that performed the play in India and abroad, used conventions from several folk theatre traditions like the *Khela*, the *Dashavatar* the *Tamasha*, the *Gondhal*, the *Bharud*, the *Bahurupee* and the *Waghya Murli*.

Tendulkar's play “*Sari Ga Sari*,” blended two different elements, 'Tamasha' and 'Natak,' into one. The play turned

out to be experimental using the new techniques because of this fresh endeavour. The notion of a middle-class drama presented in the manner of Tamasha, which was used to reveal social and political ills, looked to be incredibly important from the standpoint of experimenting in this play. As a result, his contribution to modern Indian theatre is one-of-a-kind and hence stands alone (Tendulkar, “*Sari ga Sari*”). “*Sari Ga Sari*,” Tendulkar's Marathi play, was originally staged in Bombay in 1964.(r)

The drama was written by Tendulkar using the Tamasha literary genre's unique linguistic idioms. The play had traditional elements such as the *gaan* (incantation to Ganapati), *gaulan* (the scene between Krishna and the milkmaids), and *povada* (song form), but characters like *Mukunda* (Krishna) were parodied, and allusions to modern urban life were thrown in here and there. Tendulkar was mainly interested in capturing the spontaneity of Tamasha, but he saw that the urban actors he utilised lacked the casualness and 20 improvisational skills that traditional actors had. This conundrum highlighted for him a crucial difference between urban and rural theatre: in urban theatre, the author is the most significant character, but in folk theatre, the performer is the most significant character.

The play turned out to be experimental using the new technique as a result of this fresh attempt. The idea of a middle-class drama shown in the manner of Tamasha, which was used to reveal social and political issues, looked to be highly important in the form of experimentation in this play. As a result, his contribution to contemporary Indian theatre is one-of-a-kind and unrivaled. Tendulkar is a virtuoso when it comes to characterisation. Characters are important to him, and his plays are character driven. Many reviewers split plays into three categories: action, character, and ideas. Because Tendulkar's plays are characterdriven, they are known as "character plays." "Tendulkar's play is character-centered and examines the personality of a character." “*Sari Ga Sari*,” a play by Vijay Tendulkar, is a good example of merging Indian heritage with western theatrical features.

Tendulkar thoroughly takes up a modern political dilemma – the rise of demons in public – using the *Dashavatara*, a classic semi-classical genre. These demons, which were originally developed for the advantage of political leaders, have gotten out of control and are represents a danger to their creators. The demons are rendered "indestructible by the perks of gods and subsequently turn against the gods themselves," according to Indian mythology (Dorson 107).

Political authority, the institution of marriage, and individual disenchantment with power are all topics of satire. Although the *Sutradhar*, as well as the chorus, are typical theatrical features, they are not characters in the play, as Ghasiram and Nana are. They are dramatic devices

that change depending on the narrative. In the drama, the sutradhar watches, remarks, offers information, signals scene changes, and weaves into or out of the plot. In contrast to Bharatmuni's notion, the sutradhar appears in "Ghashiram Kotwal" from the start to the finish of the narrative.

"Tendulkar slightly deviates in Ghashiram Kotwal by enhancing the role of the Sutradhar from that of an active participant in the action of the play and an interlocutor who acts as a cohesive device bringing together the different and often disparate scene of the play" (Ramdevi 94).

Tendulkar's plays reflect his deep discontent with the current societal system. They deal with the misery and suffering brought on by society's merciless forces and norms. He aspires to depict the modern man's situation, problems, difficulties, and complexity. The world around you is presented as it is.

"Tendulkar presents modern man in all complexities. He portrays life as it is from different angles without trying to moralise or philosophise in any way. All the works contain a latent critique of modern Indian society, mostly middle class, and lower middle class though from different angles" (William).

Contemporary issues mostly concern with power politics and lust for power. In Ghashiram Kotwal, Ghashiram Savaldas is not primarily a power-hungry individual. To pursue his fortune, he travelled to Poona with the company his wife and daughter. However, the humiliations endured by him have left him craving power. He tries to win Nana's favour, but Poona Brahmins stop him. Violence and power go hand in hand. Using goons, Gulabi, the courtesan, steals the necklace from Ghashiram. In the 19th century, Nana Phadnavis, the Peshwa of Pune's chief minister, gave him that necklace in appreciation for aiding him after he hurt his leg while dancing with Gulabi. She has captured the hearts of every Brahman, including Nana, who is eager to lay down their lives at her feet. By grabbing the jewellery from Ghashiram with force, she demonstrates her strength. There used to be a large feast at the grand dakshina ceremony at the base of the sacred hill of Parvati. Nana will also respect the Brahmins. Ghashiram is waiting in queue with ravenous eyes. However, he is charged with robbing a Brahman of his prize money. He is misidentified as a thief. He is beaten and then jailed in the prison. This insult forces Ghashiram to take a vouch,

"I'll come back like a boar and I'll stay as a devil. I'll make pigs of all of you. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs." (377)

To gain control and carry out his promise, Ghashiram uses his young, lovely, and innocent daughter Gouri as a lure. He chooses to give his daughter to Nana as payment for power.

III. CONCLUSION

Ghashiram Kotwal accurately portrays the brutality and persecution of rulers in the years before independence. But the fact that it has achieved such great success to far shows how applicable its topic is. Every official who abuses their position of power in any political complex may be seen in Ghashiram Kotwal's persecution of the people of Pune as an example of how to do it. The tyrants of Pune might be seen as a metaphor for the lawlessness and eradication of the oppressed, untouchables, Blacks, subalterns, aboriginals, the disadvantaged, peasants, small merchants, manufacturers, and the like around the world. Even the post-modern practices of neoliberalism and globalisation may be appropriately conveyed with the use of a human curtain made out of Pune Brahmins, a Marathi traditional theatrical technique. The Pune Brahmins serve as the greatest analogy for the world's ruling elite and Hindu hegemonic practices. The author who is completely relevant to the circumstances in the present is Ghashiram Kotwal.

As a result, Ghashiram Kotwal is an exceptional and cutting-edge experiment that gives contemporary Indian theatre a new direction, both in terms of its subject and technical approaches. Traditional forms need not be considered as priceless artefacts, as demonstrated by Ghashiram Kotwal and Sari Ga Sari, but can instead be used to explore contemporary issues appropriate for an urban audience.

REFERENCES

- [1] Tendulkar, Vijay. "Ghashiram Kotwal." Oxford University Press, 2003.
- [2] Tendulkar, Vijay. "Sari ga Sari." Popular Prakashan, 1964
- [3] Chakravarti, Dabnita. "Review of the Abhimanch production of Ghashiram Kotwal."
- [4] Abhimanch: A Social Theatre Movement. <http://www.abhimanch.com>
- [5] Ghokale, Shanta. "Playwright at the centre." In *Marathi Drama from 1843 to the*
- [6] Prasad, Neeru. "Folk Media: An Active Media For Communication Campaigns In Digital Era." *Global Media*
- [7] *Journal: Indian Edition*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2013.
- [8] *Present*, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2000.
- [9] Lal, Ananda., ed., *Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, Delhi. OUP, 2004
- [10] Spear, Percival. *The Oxford History of Modern India*. Delhi: OUP, 1978.
- [11] Tendulkar, Vijay. *Ghashiram Kotwal*, translated from Marathi by Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2002.

- [12] Velu. "Viewing Comments for Ghasiram Kotwal – a Vijay Tendulkar Play."
- [13] Raina, M. K. "Cross-cultural differences." Encyclopedia of creativity, vol. 1, 1999, pp. 453-464.
- [14] Ramadevi, N., "Folk Theatre in Vijay Tendulkar's Ghashiram Kotwal." Asia Bank Club, 2003, p. 94
- [15] Bascom, William. "Contributions to Folkloristics." Archana Publications, 1981.