



Dichotomies: An over-view of Masculinities and Femininities in Vijay Tendulkar's "Ghashiram Kotwal and Mohan Rakesh's "Aadhe Adhure (Halfway House)"

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ABSTRACT

The major purpose of this paper is to understand and comment upon the social underpinnings of gender and to locate how socialisation affects the communal understanding of gender in a society. This done by analysing two texts: Mohan Rakesh's "Aadhe Adhure" and Vijay Tendulkar's "Ghashiram Kotwal." The paper aims at bringing to the forefront the gender inequalities that are prevalent in a highly patriarchal setup.

Key words: gender, socialisation, Aadhe Adhure, Ghashiram Kotwal

The major purpose of this paper is to understand and comment upon the social underpinnings of gender and to locate how socialisation affects the communal understanding of gender in a society. This done by analysing two texts: Mohan Rakesh's "Aadhe Adhure" and Vijay Tendulkar's "Ghashiram Kotwal." The paper aims at bringing to the forefront the gender inequalities that are prevalent in a highly patriarchal setup. Modern criticism has stated that despite being a contemporary play, "Ghashiram Kotwal" fails to give a commentary about the marginalised status of women. Indeed the play deals with corruption and moral decadence that plagues the Poona Brahmins, however the women still remain silent spectators. Angelie Multani has suggested that "All the women in Ghashiram Kotwal are silent. The Brahmin wives act in a group when they are implicated in the decadence of Pune, but they don't have a separate voice or space." (115). However what they have failed to notice is the reason why the men in this particular society behave the way they do. It is out of sheer humiliation and the pressures imposed by hegemonic masculinities that Ghashiram Kotwal makes a sacrifice out of Gauri. In the play, Ghashiram is at first ridiculed and denied a space that is equivalent to his prestige just because he is an outsider. It is only after bartering Gauri and gaining the Kotwali of Poona that he is able to assert himself both socially and politically. Saraswat in her article 'The Quest of Completeness: Mohan Rakesh's Aadhe Adhure' states that the play ponders on the materialistic compulsions of the modern man; resulting in the disintegration of human relations, the loneliness of man, the sense of suffocation and disgust, boredom and the search for quick and easy escape routes. The desire to look for —completeness may look like everyman's essential and irresolvable problem. According to Prakash, Savitri, an understandably bitter woman who, for the past several years, has been doing the balancing act between her work and her family responsibilities, her unemployed husband Mahendranath, and their problematic children. (202).

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In the quest of searching different parts of one-self, each character works on the basis of power relations. Who is an ideal woman? In her book *The Second Sex*, Simone D' Beauvoir not just explores but also critically examines the notions that have constructed the 'feminine' gender. What is the 'ideal woman'? If the man is the 'transcendent' then the woman is immersed in 'immanence'. In an ideal set-up of patriarchy, a woman is everything that a man is not, in other words a man is the norm while the woman is the deviation. Savitri is the bread-winner of the house, even though she is not confined to her household, she finds her married life to be very dissatisfying. Mahedranath's character negates the ideal of man as declared under hegemonic masculinities. He is unemployed, stays within the four walls of his house and has succumbed to the mundane routine of his life.

Continuing on the strand of the notion of the 'eternal feminine' as suggested by Beauvoir, Ghashiram's daughter Gauri, fits perfectly into this ideal. She bows down before authority and remains a passive object to her fate. However, despite bowing down to the authority which was supposed to protect her, it is this self-same authority that buries her. Gauri then, becomes a pawn for her father. Despite being the 'gift' or rather the medium of exchange, the exchanged good in itself has no value. Although the entire play "impinges on Gauri's sexuality" (Multani 113), she herself barely has any dialogues in the play, making her a silent witness and bearer of her fate. Even her death takes place off-stage and is covered up by the midwife.

Furthermore we see, the only woman who has some sort of voice in the play is Gulabi, the courtesan. One needs to understand the dynamics of this. The only woman who gets to speak in such a debauched framework is herself a debased woman, hence her word does not count. This is further substantiated by Krashna and Rane who quote Beena Mahida in saying that: "Meaning of gender in patriarchy is not just "difference" but division, oppression, inequality and inferiority for women." (18)

In "Aadhe Adhure" we see that the economic prowess lies with Savitri. The idea of man being the bread-winner is completely over-turned. However, having economic prowess has not allowed Savitri the opportunity to follow her heart. After a long discussion with Juneja (her husband's friend), she ultimately decides against running away with Jagmohan and instead tries to work on her marriage, something that society expects of an 'ideal' woman. In that sense, despite having dialogues and a 'voice', the play hinges on an ultimate silencing of Savitri's desires.

In "Ghashiram Kotwal" the sutradhar narrates as to how the men go to the Bavanakhani (home of the courtesan) whilst the women go to kirtan (holy ritual where they chant songs about Gods), however are we to assume that the women know about this? The fact that their men go to the Bavanakhani, if yes then, why do they keep mum about it? According to Khobragade: "In reality, the Brahman women are confined to solitary confinement at home, and it deciphers their marginalisation. (223)." In Act 1 Scene 5 of the play, the chorus chants: "Lust knows no age, no shame." This is very true of Nana. An idea regarding the concept of gaze can be employed here. Gaze is not a simple 'looking' at something. The gaze probes and masters. It penetrates the body. The objectification of the body, happens through gaze. Indeed the way Nana Phadnavis talks about Gauri: "What a bosom...buds just blossoming...we'll squeeze them like this.", serves to objectify her. She is rendered as a passive object of the masculine gaze. Nana also makes use of sophistry to get Gauri to sit on his lap and indulge his lust.

Similarly in Mohan Rakesh's "Aadhe Adhure" we see Savitri being reduced to an object of gaze by her employer Mr. Singhania. Despite having economic prowess as mentioned earlier, Savitri's power so to say still emanates from her body. It is not her intellect that Singhania appreciates, it is indeed her body. It is interesting to note that her boss only comes and visits her while her husband is away. Savitri invites him over for dinner on the pretext of getting her son placed with the company. Singhania's body language and dialogues seek to establish that he wants more than just a professional relationship with Savitri.

In the journal "Muffled Voices: Women in Modern Indian Theatre", Savitri too is described as someone who "...breaks the traditional image of chaste wife and looks for relationship outside of marriage. (Subramaniam 79). Although the sutradhar in "Ghashiram Kotwal" is focussed more on socio-political identities, the narrator in "Aadhe Adhure", problematizes personal identity as well. In the prologue itself, the narrator or rather the "Man in the Black Suit" asks an interesting question as to how he is to go on defining himself, however further in his monologue he suggests that he has given up trying to answer that question. The narrator then establishes himself as an amorphous entity. He suggests that we are all people who go on putting different masks to suit our needs.

Vijay Tendulkar and Mohan Rakesh also make use of mythological symbolism whilst naming their characters. In "Ghashiram Kotwal" the protagonist's daughter is called Gauri, to whom he can ascribe the notions related to 'gau-mata', she is as innocent and docile. At the same time she is also very malleable and very easily gives into; first her father's and then Nana's whims and fancies. Contrary to this Savitri in Mohan Rakesh's Aadhe Adhure, does not act like the Savitri of lore i.e Savitri as represented in "Satyavaan and Savitri". "She represents a new Savitri. This Savitri is not like that of Hindu mythological Savitri who chased Yamraj to get her husband back. But the character of Savitri depicted by Rakesh has made her husband feel that he is a big failure in his life. She never adores and appreciates him. Right from the beginning she has taken all the responsibilities on her shoulder and forced her husband to accept that he is good for nothing." (Lata 3)

However, before we criticise the men in "Ghashiram Kotwal" one also needs to look at the kinds of pressures they face. Hegemonic masculinity at this point of time dictates that men were supposed to hold positions of power. It mattered little whether they engaged in other nefarious activities, but their outward appearance, especially if they were Brahmins should garner respect. Ghashiram being a Brahmin from Kannauj, has to set up his respectability in this regard and it matters little to him or to the society if he pawns his daughter for achieving that purpose. However, Ghashiram is not all bad, he does repent bartering Gauri and has terse words for Nana, when he cannot answer satisfactorily about her whereabouts.

"The image of women in contemporary Indian literature has changed drastically. Modern writers have tried to transform the image of woman as seen in the myths by portraying them in a more modern and realistic manner. Now the roles played by women are different from the characters of traditional literature." (Lata 1). However what is interesting to note is that neither of the two plays do much to uplift the women in their societies. Although Mohan Rakesh's Savitri and Vijay Tendulkar's Gulabi do voice their opinions and hold their ground, they ultimately have to situate themselves in a patriarchal setup where in their voices even if they are heard are not necessarily responded to or made sense of. This is substantiated by Angelie Multani who says: "Despite the radical nature of the texts, somewhere both of them fail to set themselves apart from the mainstream and conventional working of the power hierarchy they oppose when that power operates against women." (Multani 110).

Coming to the institution of marriage we see that in “Ghashiram Kotwal”, marriage is reduced to a mere socio-economic transaction and has no emotional connect. Gauri is married to Nana simply for her father's upliftment and to satiate Nana's lascivious desires. Similarly in “Aadhe Adhure” we see Binny, Savitri's daughter who eloped with her lover and got married. However even that has left her unsatisfied. A simple want, such as chopping off her hair is denied to Binny because Manoj (her husband) likes her with long hair. Savitri and Mahendranath, unable to make sense of their marriage questions the institute of marriage itself. The virtual break-down of their relationship questions the principles and values that guide the institution itself. The crisis of each character is symbolic of the individual ‘Self’ as the humanists would define it. The individual question of searching one’s own identity creates disintegration within the family unit. In conclusion, one cannot fail but note that at the end of the day gender is fluid and the conceptions of femininity and masculinity are nothing but constructions.

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