

Vijay Tendulkar, best known for his emotionally charged protest plays and filmscripts, chooses a different genre for *Ghashiram Kotwal*—that of the musical historical. Set in Maharashtra in the late eighteenth century, it recounts a power game played out in terms of caste ascendancy in politics. The work draws on several Maharashtra folk styles, and has an obvious relevance in the context of individuals playing the game of politics, taking advantage of situations, rising to power, and crashing to impotence at the whims of more powerful players in the same game—a typical phenomenon in almost any political complex. The play has been widely known in its Theatre Academy production directed by Jabbar Patel, with more than three hundred performances to its credit, in India and abroad.

In the translation by Eleanor Zelliot and Jayant Karve it retains its racy vigour and musical charm. Production notes and relevant explanations are added to give readers more of its original flavour.

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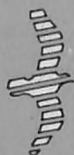
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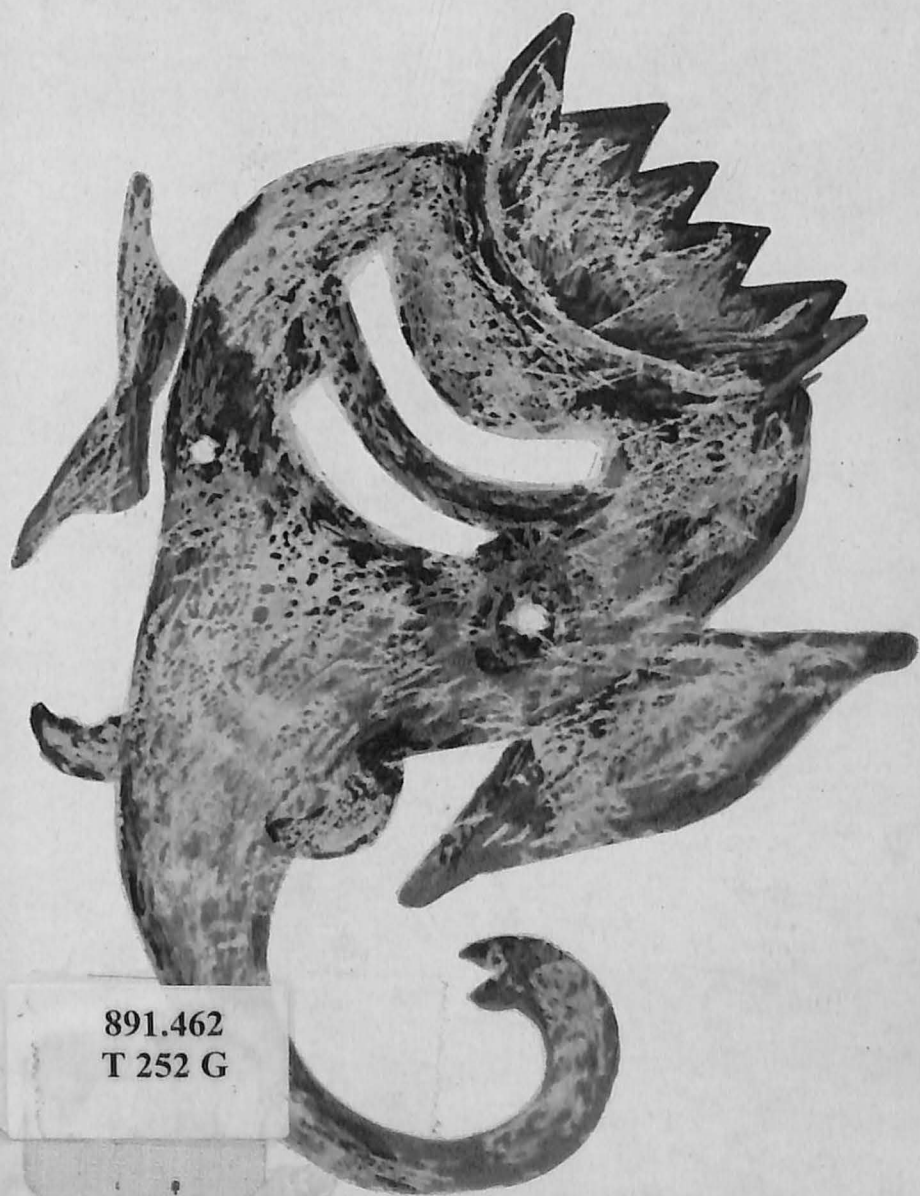
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GHASHIRAM KOTWAL

Vijay Tendulkar



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Ghashiram Kotwal



*For those who value taste.*



# GHASHIRAM KOTWAL

VIJAY TENDULKAR

Translated from the Marathi by  
JAYANT KARVE AND ELEANOR ZELLIOT



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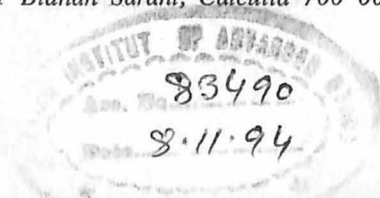
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## INTRODUCTION

With his plays and more recently with his filmscripts, Vijay Tendulkar is only too often at the centre of controversies. In fact, in the dogged bitterness of the controversies, one tends to miss the thinking that he brings to bear upon his work. Over the years he has become more and more concerned with the machinations of power in its several interfaces. In *Silence! the Court is in session*, perhaps his best known play, male dominant politics assumes a legalistic pose in the setting of a theatric game—a group of actors, playing at courtroom drama, turn on a fellow actress, exposing her private life to a moralistic critique, and tear her down in the process. The drama lies more in the play-acting, in the shrewd pretences that barely cover up the direct hits at the woman, and the claustrophobia of a room locked up by chance from outside. Tendulkar lets chance play its part to give the unpremeditated violence a more terrible look. There have been the lighter plays too, when Tendulkar has relaxed into the lighthearted fantasy of *Ashi Pākhrey Yeti*, where the young stranger gives the plain young girl in the house her first ever spell of self-confidence (shades of *The Rainmaker!*). In *Ghashiram Kotwal*, the two Tendulkar styles converge, and find in the form of the rumbustious musical a plane of irony.

*Ghashiram Kotwal* came up against resistance soon after it had turned into a stage success in a production by the Progressive Dramatic Association of Pune. First performed on 16 December 1972 at the Bharat Natya Mandir, Pune, *Ghashiram* won several awards in 1972-73 at the Maharashtra State Drama Competition. But after nineteen performances, the President of the Progressive Dramatic Association banned the play. The executive committee of the Association passed a resolution supporting the President's decision. They objected to the play on the grounds 'that (a) it was anti-Brahman; (b) the character of Nana Phadnavis as conceived by the playwright was not historically correct;



and (c) there was a fear of revolt in the audience, and a strong possibility that the play would be publicly abused by the audience if the performances continued.' Most of the actors resigned from the Association and formed Theatre Academy on 27 March 1973. The production was revived on 11 January 1974 and has been performed by the group more than three hundred times. Theatre Academy performed the play in France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the U.K., the Netherlands and Italy on a tour in 1980.

In spite of its popular success all over India in the Marathi production by Theatre Academy and in productions in other Indian languages too, the controversy around the play has not really subsided. As it happens so often with a work that questions contemporary values and phenomena from a radical position, *Ghashiram* has been attacked on peripheral counts rather than on its basic assumptions. Tendulkar has been attacked for having shown Nana Phadnavis, a cult hero, in an unsavoury light. But the play is not really about Nana, the late eighteenth century Marathi Machiavelli who was the Peshwa's chancellor in Pune, the royal deputy's deputy—but a deputy who 'no longer owes his position so much to solid popular or military backing as to the diplomatic address with which he can play one party off against another' (Percival Spear, *The Oxford History of Modern India*, Delhi 1978, p. 54). In an author's note, Tendulkar says:

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.

When I asked Tendulkar—'Did you really conceive the play as an exposé of Brahman corruption and pretensions, or as a study of the power game in more general terms?'—he wrote back:

It is rather difficult to go back to the point when I thought of writing this play and recollect everything that happened to me on the conscious and subconscious levels. Broadly speaking, I had in mind the emergence, the growth and the inevitable end of the Ghashirams; also those who create, and help Ghashirams to grow; and the irony of stoning to death a person pretending that it is the end of Ghashirams. The rest just happened; or if that sounds pretentious, happened at a subconscious level. The decadence of the class in power (the Brahmans, incidentally, during the period which I had to depict) also was incidental, though not accidental.

In *Ghashiram*, power is defined 'horizontally' (in the sense in which Maurice Duverger uses it in *The Idea of Politics*, London 1966), in terms of individuals against individuals; from humiliation, to revenge in assertion, to eventual victimization; played out against a background of political and moral decadence and degeneracy, with sexuality impinging on strategies of power. A whole aura of hymns and religious ceremonial provide the ironic screen that is pierced through and through by the crudest exercises of power. A typical scene is the one in which Nana tries to seduce the girl praying before Ganapati, at the end of one of the ceremonies, and when the girl points to the god, saying, 'He will see,' he says mockingly, 'that idol of holiness? . . . ' and the facade of ceremony collapses at once. Religion manifest in caste dominance and ceremony is a device of power in *Ghashiram*, but more as an abstraction of awe than as material force. The material force is provided by the agents who construct and operate hierarchies that they can topple or reshuffle at will. Significantly enough, the omnipotent Nana fails to catch the girl, and in symbolic impotence, 'in blind lust grabs the servant at the door'—with whom he has to work out a deal, to get his girl. Tendulkar suggests the sexuality implicit in power in the brilliant innuendo that caps the situation: 'Our grandeur's gone if she's not had.' Nana needs Ghashiram, and Ghashiram needs Nana; but in the shifting game of power, it is only a temporary adjustment that

Nana exploits as long as necessary and can drop unceremoniously the moment it has served its purpose.

Like ceremony, both religious and secular, the deceptions of deputation constitute yet another device of power. The real power uses the masks of deputation to mediate the exercise of power, to hide from the victims the real face of power, so that all resistance is effectively deflected. Intermediate democratic institutions, or the paraphernalia of bureaucracy, too often regarded as repositories of at least executive power, are more often than not masks or mediations that veil the actual exercise of power and hide the perpetrator from the eyes of the victim. Even as Ghashiram, the fool that he is, thinks that the Kotwali will be power in his hands, Nana knows, 'What'll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account.' Earlier, Tendulkar has shown religiosity and sexuality combining in the strategies of power. Now he shows sexuality and the strategy of deputation working hand in hand. Once again, Tendulkar has his quip to drive it home.

*Nana.* Bastard. You've got me in a narrow pass.

*Ghashiram.* Yes, the narrow pass of my only daughter.

Tendulkar, in his social criticism, is more concerned with the *mechanism* of power operating within society than with the economic and political implications and sources of that power. That is a point on which Marxists can question Tendulkar's analysis and understanding of the social reality. But there will always be those who would defend Tendulkar on the lines of Foucault who said: 'One of the first things that has to be understood is that power isn't localized in the State apparatus and that nothing in society will be changed if the mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level, are not also changed.' (Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, NY 1980, p. 60). Tendulkar, in *Ghashiram*, observes the operations of religiosity, sexuality, and deputationist politics as devices of power.

The Theatre Academy production is a lively affair, using conventions from several folk theatre traditions like the Khela, the Dashavatar, the Tamasha, the Gondhal, the Bharud, the Bahu-rupee, and the Waghya-Murli. In a production note, the Theatre Academy says:

The basic structure of the play is a human wall which is basically a singing and dancing chorus, impersonally commenting on the episodic developments. But it also breaks into smaller tableaux, grouping and regrouping endlessly. The human wall ceases to exist when its back is turned to the audience. The Sutradhar or Narrator interposes in the proceedings to keep the audience abreast of things, the actors switching parts with perfect timing. A touch of opera with verse, music and prose fusing into one another in a strange, compelling alchemy. The ballet, blending with the traditional folk dances, sets the mood and tempo of the decadent and bawdy era.

The human wall serves as an excellent symbol of the mechanism of secrecy, hiding and revealing happenings by human devices. It is the wall again that as the singing chorus uses the chant of saints' and gods' names as yet another screen of complacency/consolation cast over the yawning horror of corruption and tyranny. While the tortured Brahman groans, the Brahman line chants the gods' names and drowns his screams. Institutionalized sexuality and institutionalized religiosity are brought together into an unholy complicity in the reiterated image of Bavannakhani, the red light district, turned to the pleasure garden of Krishna. *Bāvannakhani Mathurā avatarli*—'Mathura descends on Bavannakhani.' Still the sheer thrill of the musical does to a certain extent weaken the thrust of the satire, and the sting is blunted. Tendulkar himself admitted:

The criticism has a point. Even then the sting was felt in Maharashtra. The Delhi production (done by Abhiyan in Hindi) had a somewhat different impact. It had less 'entertainment values', i.e. less music, and more impact as a serious play. . . . The musical form has its advantages and disadvantages, like all other forms. I could not think

of an alternative when I had to write the play. The form had a certain inevitability.

I asked Tendulkar:

Why did you choose the form of the musical for this play? Just because you wanted to experiment with the musical, or because you felt that the folk musical could give history just that bit of deglamorization that you needed for this subject?

Tendulkar answered:

Not that I was not interested in a musical but I cannot think of a form first and then look for a subject that will suit the form. I am having a couple of folk forms (not the popular ones) in my mind for the last few years and yet have not been able to do anything with them. *Ghashiram* started with a theme, then came the specific 'story' or incident which was historical and then the search for the form began. I knew that the usual naturalistic treatment was out of question. By a series of accidents I discovered the present form which is a combination of a variety of ingredients from different folk forms of Maharashtra.

Though the incident was historical I did not have an historical play in mind. The context had a universal and timeless quality.

The take-off point was contemporary. There was no conscious calculated thought of using the present form to deglamorize the historical incident. 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.) De-glamorization of the historical incident incidentally happened because of the form and I liked it. I meant it.

Tin gods propped up by the Establishment masquerading as despots have played a disproportionately important role in Indian

politics in the recent past. And people have heaved a sigh of relief every time they have crumbled to their fall. But in their all too short careers in power they have vitiated the political atmosphere to a point where politics seems to have lost its political locus and tends to veer around personalities—a dangerous trend for any polity that claims to define itself in terms of democratic norms. The fall of a Ghashiram, as Tendulkar shows so effectively, is too often regarded by the people as a political relief; and it is the powers that be that take advantage of that delusion to tighten the stranglehold of their power.

SAMIK BANDYOPADHYAY

## GHASHIRAM KOTWAL; A PRODUCTION CASEBOOK

*Satish Alekar, who assisted Dr Jabbar Patel in directing the Theatre Academy production of the play, gives an account of how the newly formed group revived the play after the first production had been banned by the Executive of the group that had originally produced it.*

Now to *Ghashiram* again. 9 September, 1972, Ganesh Chaturthi, was the auspicious day chosen for the beginning of rehearsals. The first public show was fixed for 12 December 1972, at Pune. For three full months and three days the group rehearsed rigorously. Fifty-five characters in all had to make an appearance on the stage. Since the play was close in spirit to the traditional style of the Dashavatar and the Khele all the characters on the stage had to act, sing, and dance. This production was unlike any of the usual run of productions. We realized that it was a difficult task that we were undertaking to do. But we took it up as a challenge.

We made it a point to choose young artists, their average age was twenty to twenty-three years. To sing, dance and act for a duration of three and a half hours demands a fund of energy and strong lungs. The most interesting part of our endeavour was that except for the Sutradhar and the other two important singers, not one of us had any previous training in music or dance. We could barely distinguish notes. But we were all of us exceedingly fond of music. Besides, this was Dr Jabbar Patel's maiden attempt at producing a musical play.

Alive to all the difficulties he would have to face, Dr Jabbar Patel decided to break up the rehearsal schedule into four categories: (i) learning to take every pace in rhythm; (ii) learning to sing in tune; (iii) working out the actions and gestures to

accompany a song without actually uttering the words; (iv) blending all these elements to set the pace for the production, leading up to a climax. He decided to cut out drastically any element which seemed superfluous or out of place.

At first sight all these factors seem elementary, basic. But we were not used to producing such plays; none of us could sing a note with any degree of confidence. So it was necessary to create an atmosphere like one that obtains in a training camp before an actual contest, and to implement the specific tasks entrusted to us.

One cannot afford to forget the fact that the play was produced by amateurs. Most of the actors came to rehearsals after a full day's strain of work. Certain difficulties were to be anticipated: shortage of funds; good artistes for female roles (in Pune it is almost impossible to find a girl who knows dance and music and is prepared to take part in a play); the demands of a regular job; the hardships faced by some of the artistes; a place where the rehearsal could take place undisturbed.

We had to change the venue of the rehearsals twice. In one case the 'enlightened' citizens of the neighbourhood threatened to call in the police if we did not stop rehearsals near their house. Then we found a hall near a swimming pool. If anyone was likely to be troubled at all, it would be the water in the tank and the café across. As soon as the rehearsals began, a crowd began to collect outside the café. And they began to respond to the rhythm of the songs in the play. The rehearsals picked up in pace and the crowd outside the hotel began to swell. One day there were as many as hundred persons watching the rehearsals.

The main problem in a play such as this is one of casting. An actor might have a small part; he has to merge with the team and yet leave an imprint of his own identity on the spectators. Dr Jabbar Patel tried out two or three individuals for a role before taking the final decision on assigning it. To find artistes and expect them to rehearse for more than three months at a



stretch was quite a problem. But the rehearsals started and we began to find the sort of actors we needed.

The entire production depends a great deal on rhythm, pace and tone. It is the Sutradhara who ultimately binds these three elements. And perhaps it would have turned out to be too heavy a responsibility for a single individual. So it was decided to introduce two singers as support. The trio, the harmonious blend of three voices, brightened the charm of the production. Shriram Ranade, the Sutradhara, had a voice with a limited range. Ravindra Sathe's was a trained voice, deep and resonant. His rendering of the thumri, *Jagi Sari Ratiya*, invariably won him the applause of the audience. Chandrakant Kale's voice had a lyrical appeal. The voices of the other Brahmans joined in to make the chorus. There were two important roles where the characters had to speak in prose; Nana Phadnavis (played by Dr Mohan Agashe) and Ghashiram (played by Comrade Ramesh Tilekar). Their voices had a different ring, but were in keeping with the musical element in the enunciation employed by the other characters.

Now the rehearsals. The first step was the director himself reading out the play to the actors. The reading was accompanied by gestures, action, by a full explanation of the theme of the play and the nature of the characterization. The majority of our artistes were acting for the first time in their lives. Then Dr Jabbar Patel consulted the music director, Bhaskar Chandavarkar, and the dance director, Krishnadev Mulgund. They worked out that correct blending of music, dance, and *abhinaya* which the play demanded. Mulgund trained the actors to take each pace in a particular rhythm. Chandavarkar started on the score and taught us the tunes. Dr Jabbar Patel concentrated on the correct enunciation of words, on the facial expression and gestures that were to accompany them. All these three elements were harmonized by him at a later stage.

(i) *Learning to take every pace in rhythm.* The rehearsals began at nine-thirty at night and went on till two-thirty in the

morning. The first fortnight the artistes stood in a row, wearing vests and shorts, and learnt to take every step in a specific rhythm. Mulgund had fixed four or five kinds of steps. Their pace varied. He took great pains to correct any faulty execution of his instructions. The tabla was played all along. This procedure continued till ten-forty at night. Initially the artistes used to feel the strain of this physical activity. The steps were varied or completely altered to suit the mood of a sequence. This constant practice helped the artistes a great deal. Their work became lighter. The pace and tempo increased. Later, when *Ghashiram* used to be staged twice on the same day, and without a break, the actors realized how much this regular practice had helped to make their task easier. They had to wear the same costumes, have the same make-up throughout the two performances. They used to don the pink top to indicate their shaven heads and get into their costumes at two o'clock in the afternoon and they stayed clothed till one o'clock at night. But no one complained of fatigue or discomfort.

(ii) *Learning to sing in tune.* We used to begin practising the tunes at eleven o'clock every night. This was because Dr Jabbar Patel had his dispensary at Dhond, a distance of forty miles from Pune. His train used to get in round eleven and he used to catch the train going back to Dhond at three in the morning. This routine continued for full three months. Dr Jabbar Patel and Bhaskar Chandavarkar supervised the music rehearsals. Chandavarkar used to demonstrate the notes; sometimes Dr Jabbar Patel would suggest an alteration. After the music was finalized, we began to rehearse the tunes. In this production 'humming' has been employed on many occasions. Chandavarkar examined the voice quality of every single individual before choosing the note for this 'humming' refrain. The music rehearsals went on from eleven-thirty to about twelve-thirty or one at night.

(iii) *Learning to sing the tunes (without words) and accompanying them with the right gestures.* This part of the schedule began at about one o'clock. Most of the prose pieces are said

by Nana Phadnavis and Ghashiram. Ramesh Tilekar, who played Ghashiram, is the Secretary of the Pune branch of the Communist Party, and Dr Mohan Agashe is attached to the Sassoon Hospitals. They could only come to the rehearsals at about midnight. Dr Jabbar Patel used to rehearse the dialogue with them and work out the gestures. The most important feature of this production (which has in it fifty-five characters) is the breathtaking quality of the actors' movements, particularly in the scenes of Nana's wedding and the ordeal by fire. In the first scene there are about fifty characters dancing on the stage.

(iv) *Blending all these to set the pace for the production.* One character might be singing a song, the other would stand like a human curtain or, in fact, became a part of its rhythm. Sometimes the gestures had to blend with the song. For instance the entire human curtain would be swinging to a rhythm and singing a tune at the same time, or in the sequence of Nana's wedding demonstrate the tempo of its preparations in their action and sing at the same time; or walk in a funeral procession humming a tune; or enter Nana's place shouting at the top of their voices. After a month of rehearsals other details began to demand our attention, namely the merging of *abhinaya*, music and dance. Two months of rehearsals, and the actual process of editing began. The sequences were joined. The phrases in the music which sounded superfluous were chopped. And the total impact of such revision was analysed. The process lasted a month. And the time schedule remained the same, nine-thirty at night to two-thirty in the morning. One day was set aside for rest.

After this rigorous round of rehearsals, it was decided to test the effect of the production on audiences and a show was arranged at one of the housing colonies in Pimpri, a suburb of Pune. This trial performance was indeed a great help. We understood the nature of the difficulties which we were likely to encounter in the actual course of a performance. We grasped at once where the pace tended to slacken. After the ordeal by fire the tempo tended to slow down a little. But with the introduc-

tion of the 'Malhari' song, the tense atmosphere created by the sequence was reinforced.

The first performance after this trial took place on 12 December 1972 in Pune. We had nineteen performances in all in Bombay and Pune. One such performance was witnessed by five thousand spectators of the Namdev Shimpi community.

(v) *The costumes.* Two special tailors were engaged to prepare the costumes. The dresses were housed in ten special tin trunks. Two of the backstage men were given the task of ironing the clothes. A dhobi had to be employed to wash them. We always had with the troupe two porters to carry the outfit. There were three make-up men and they began their work three hours before the performance.

The rehearsals and the performance of this tremendous play was a great experience in itself. Three months of rigorous rehearsals without a break was no mean achievement. There will be, I am sure, many performances of the play in the near future. But the sheer labour that went into the rehearsals left its imprint on all of us. For this reason each one contributed in equal measure to the success of the play.

SATISH ALEKAR

## A NOTE ON THE TEXT

We traced this translation of *Ghashiram Kotwal* through the playwright himself. The translators agreed quite enthusiastically to let us publish the text. Mohan Agashe and Satish Alekar of Theatre Academy, Pune, were helpful at every stage of the production of the book. Ms Kamal Sanyal helped us compare the translation with the original, and also provided us with informative notes on a number of names and terms in the text. The stills came from Theatre Academy who also sent us a cassette of the songs as sung in their production.

For those not quite familiar with Marathi history and conventions, the following notes provided by Ms Sanyal and Mr Alekar will be helpful.

**NANA PHADNAVIS.** Balaji Janardan Bhanu (12 February 1742—13 March 1800) became Phadnavis (administrator) at the age of fourteen by hereditary right at the death of his father. After the great defeat at Panipat and the sudden death of Madhavrao Peshwa, Nana took part in the conspiracy against Raghunath Peshwa (a conspiracy known in history as the Barbhai Karas-than), and became the chief administrator of the Peshwa empire. After a temporary fall from grace Nana returned to power on 11 July 1778 as chief administrator and retained his authority till his death. He was married to nine wives and had no children.

**ABHANGA.** A devotional song.

**BHATJI BUWA.** A Brahman who conducts religious ceremonies.

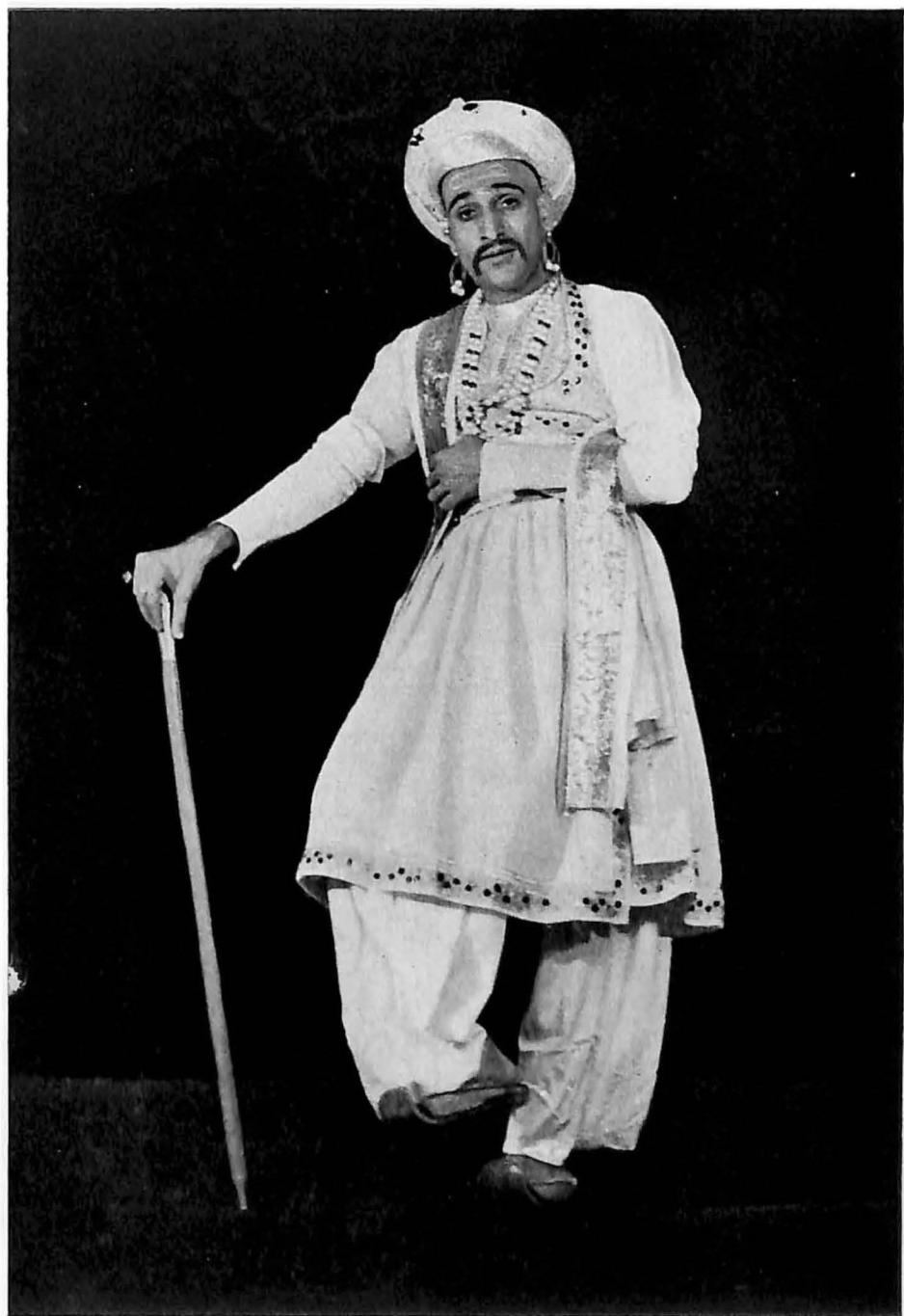
**LAVANI.** A love ballad about a parrot and a mynah.

**LEZIM.** An instrument fitted with bells used by sportsmen and dancers as accompaniment for exercises to rhythm.

**MAHAR AND MANG.** The lowest castes among the untouchables.

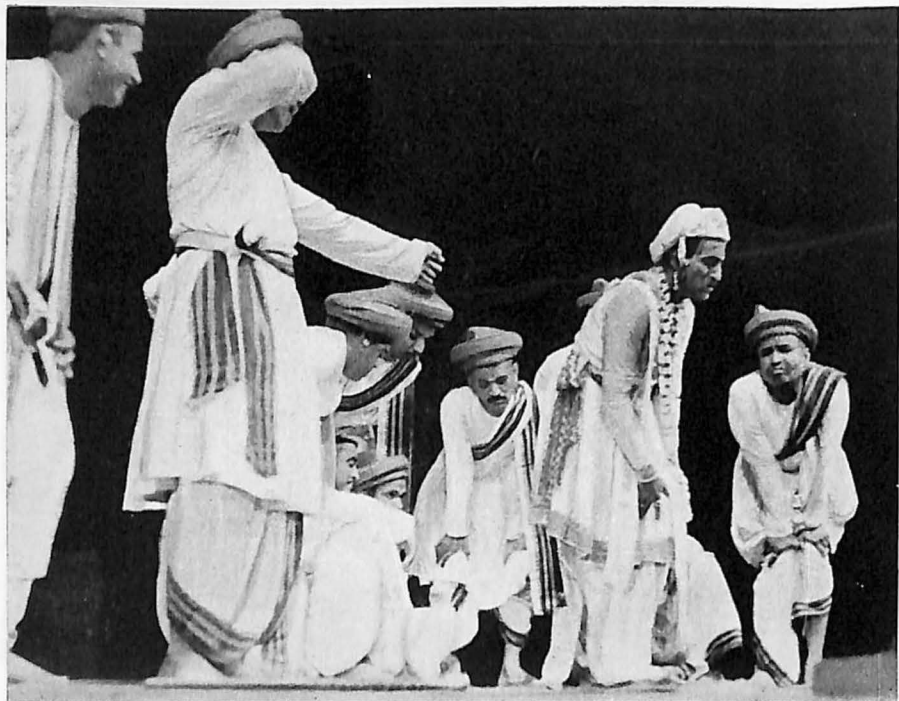
**PUNDALIK VARDA.** 'Hail god Pundalik'.

**RANGAPANCHAMI.** The day of the festival of colours.



Nana Phadnavis.

Photo : Bal Paranjpe.



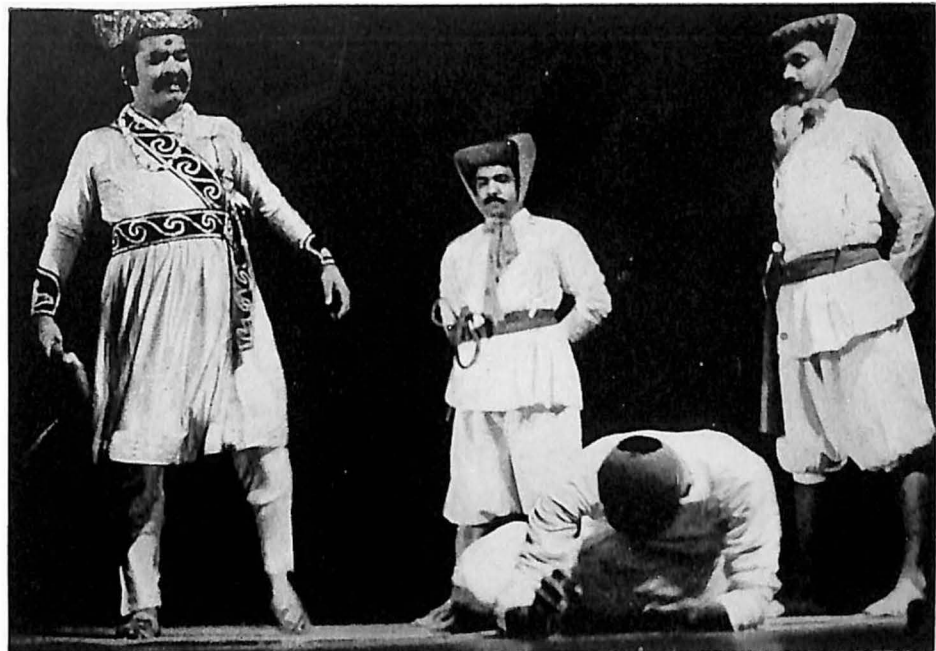
Nana in the dancing hall.

Photo : Shyam Bavikar.



The courtesan.

Photo : Saroja Parulkar.



The torture.

Photo : Shyam Bavikar.



The wedding

Photo : Shyam Bavikar.





Nana Phadnavis.

Photo : Shyam Bavikar.

*Twelve men standing in a line, sing. Ganapati comes in.*

ALL (*swaying to and fro*).

Ganapati dances the Ganapati dance,  
Brahmans of Poona bow and prance. (*Repeat.*)  
Pious Brahmans,  
Keep on dancing,  
Holy *Ganapati*,  
Keep on dancing.  
Now let the drum beat!  
Now let the drama heat!  
Heaven, hell and earth complete!  
Heaven, hell and earth complete!  
Saraswati-devi,  
Goddess of wisdom.

*Saraswati enters dancing. Ganapati and Saraswati dance.*

Goddess of wisdom,  
Wife of the Great One.  
Shri Ganaraya,  
Image of good luck,  
Even the mountains  
Bow to your name.  
Play, Saraswati,  
Goddess of music.  
Come, Lakshmi-devi,  
Wife of the Great One,  
Bow to the good God.  
Both of you dance.

*Lakshmi comes in and dances with the two.*

Shri Ganaraya,  
Now you must bless us.  
All that we ask for—  
Success for this play!  
Blessed image—morya!

Ganapati bappa—morya!  
 Blessed image  
 Ganapati bappa!

*This is repeated. The tempo increases. It ends with 'mor . . .  
 ya'! Ganapati, Lakshmi and Saraswati go off stage.*

Blesser of Pundalik, Hari, Vitthal,  
 Dnyanadev, Tukaram.

*(Again, slower, deeper, rhythmically)*

Ganapati dances the Ganapati dance.  
 We the Poona Brahmans bow and prance.  
 We the pious Brahmans bow and prance.  
 SUTRADHAR *(saying Ho Ho to all, stops the singing)*.  
 These are all Brahmans from Poona.  
 Who are you?

ONE MAN. A Vedantic scholar.

SUTRADHAR. You?

SECOND. A Vaidya doctor.

THIRD. A logician.

FOURTH. An astrologer.

FIFTH. A linguist.

SIXTH. I am a baron.

OTHERS. I come from Shringeri.

I come from Tanjore.

I come from Rameshwar.

I come from Kumbhakonam.

I come from Banaras.

We're Poona people.

SUTRADHAR. Good Good Good!

*A Brahman from one side of the swaying human curtain of  
 people stealthily tries to sneak off stage.*

SUTRADHAR. Ho Ho Ho Bhatji buwa!

Wait now, wait now. Hold your horses! Must you go?

BRAHMAN. Forces? Whose forces? Foreign? English?

SUTRADHAR. Not forces! Hold your horses!

BRAHMAN. So I'm stopped. What do you have to say?

SUTRADHAR. Where is Your Honour going so late at night?

BRAHMAN. Nowhere, nowhere. It's all right.

SUTRADHAR. Where is nowhere?

BRAHMAN. Just near somewhere.

SUTRADHAR. Somewhere is near where?

BRAHMAN. Go away. Don't wait. It's getting late!

*Brahman starts to go.*

SUTRADHAR. Bhatji buwa. . . .

BRAHMAN. The hell with you—a. You're making me late, late, late, late.

SUTRADHAR. Late for what?

BRAHMAN. Fool, you're in the way.

SUTRADHAR. Whose way?

BRAHMAN. My way.

SUTRADHAR. Where does your way go?

BRAHMAN. To the graveyard.

SUTRADHAR. Then I'm coming.

BRAHMAN. He says, 'I'm coming', What for, to die?

You look better here. I say 'goodbye'.

I go. You stay. That's all. Call it a day.

*He begins to go.*

SUTRADHAR (*goes through the line and comes in again as if he has caught him farther on*).

Bhatji maharaj!

BRAHMAN. May you itch without cause!

Idiot—what more?

SUTRADHAR. To the graveyard with such speed?

BRAHMAN. You'll never understand my need.

SUTRADHAR. What's in the graveyard?

BRAHMAN. Idiot—wood to burn the dead.

SUTRADHAR. I need wood for my stove. I'll go ahead.

BRAHMAN. Put your head in the stove! (*Begins to go.*)

SUTRADHAR (*comes in front of him*). What else is there?

BRAHMAN. Spirits, smoke, genies and air!

SUTRADHAR. I'll come there. I need four genies to fill a bottle!

BRAHMAN. Stuff yourself in it and your brother and your old man!

I'll put a curse on you—believe me—I can!

*Begins to go.*

SUTRADHAR. Ho Ho Bhatji buwa, Bhatji buwa.

BRAHMAN. Now, son of a bitch, what do you want?

SUTRADHAR. I need a fourth genie. Will you come?

In the bottle? No, no, not in a bottle! In Bavannakhani?

Where the girls are? Dancing? Singing?

BRAHMAN. What! How did you know? Just you wait! I'll slap your face. I'll get you!

*A chase. In and out of the Brahman line. The line begins to sway: 'Shri Ganaraya' begins. Brahman disappears behind Brahman curtain. From the side of the line, a portly Brahman hurriedly goes out. Sutrathar is in his way. They collide.*

BRAHMAN. Oy Oy. You son of a bitch. Don't you have eyes and ears?

SUTRADHAR. I'm sorry, O priestly Brahman.

BRAHMAN. Don't you have any manners?

SUTRADHAR. I'm so sorry, O lordly Brahman.

BRAHMAN. Don't you have any brains?

SUTRADHAR. I'm very sorry, O honoured Brahman.

BRAHMAN. You bumped me, you son of a bastard.

SUTRADHAR. I touch your feet, O Brahman.

BRAHMAN. Oh you monkey! Is this the Peshwai or the Mughal Kingdom?

Bumps a holy Brahman?

SUTRADHAR. But not a Brahman's wife!

BRAHMAN. Enough! Enough! Then I would have you riding backward on a donkey with *sindur* all over your head!

SUTRADHAR. But there is no donkey.

BRAHMAN. No donkey? No donkey in the Peshwa's Kingdom? What do you think the Peshwai is? If the Peshwa wanted, he could have one thousand donkeys all lined up in the city of Poona.

SUTRADHAR (*gesturing towards the line*). All lined up! But O Brahman, where are you going?

BRAHMAN. Why do you ask?

SUTRADHAR. Because.

BRAHMAN. One does not ask where another is going. It's a bad omen.

SUTRADHAR. I'm sorry, O Brahman. Can one ask another where he is coming from?

BRAHMAN. He may.

SUTRADHAR. Then are you coming from your home?

BRAHMAN. And going to Bavannakhani! (*He bites his tongue.*) (*Aside*) Oh Oh Oh, I shouldn't have told him. Confound it! I'm going . . . I'm going . . . I have to go to the temple. I'm late.

*Goes behind the line in a hurry. The curtain of men sings 'Shri Ganaraya' and sways. Now two or three handsome Brahmins come hurriedly in front of the curtain.*

SUTRADHAR. Aho gentlemen! Moneyed men! Mansioned men! Carriaged and horsed men! Where are you going?

THE THREE (*together*). To the temple.

SUTRADHAR. Wah Wah. What's in the temple at this hour?

THE THREE. Kirtan. Sermon.

SUTRADHAR. Sermon on what?

THE THREE (*together*). Temptation. That's the plot. Vishva-mitra and Menaka. Yes, that's it.

SUTRADHAR. What man is giving the sermon?

THE THREE. Not a man, a woman. (*All three bite their tongues.*)

SUTRADHAR. A woman? Since when have women been giving kirtan?

THE THREE (*confused*). Not a kirtan, a dance.

SUTRADHAR. A dance! Since when did a dance need a topic?

THE THREE. Not a topic, a lavani—a love song.

SUTRADHAR. Since when was the temptation of Vishvamitra by Menaka in a lavani?

THE THREE (*confused*). Not Vishvamitra and Menaka. Raghu and Myna, the love birds.

SUTRADHAR. And since when did they start singing love songs in the temple?

THE THREE. Not a temple! In Bavannakhani! You're a fine one! You got it out of us. That's enough. Let's go.

*One by one the Brahmans of the curtain start to go out quickly. The human curtain dissolves. We now see their backs as individuals.*

SUTRADHAR (*to the beat of the dholki drum*).

Night comes.

Poona Brahmans go

To Bavannakhani.

They go

To Bavannakhani.

They go to the cemetery.

They go to the kirtan.

They go to the temple—as they have done every day.

The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani.

*The Brahmans make a curtain with backs towards audience. The curtain sings and sways.*

Ram Shiva Hari

Mukunda Murari

Radhakrishna Hari

The street of Bavanna became for a while

The garden of Krishna.

*Sutradhar plays the mridanga-drum to accompany this.*

SUTRADHAR (*as the singing is going on in the back*).

The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani

And the Brahman wives stay at home.

They stay at home.

Oh! they stay at home.

They wait.

They cannot sleep.

Do you know what's happening in Bavannakhani in the house of Gulabi, Gulabi the courtesan?

THE BRAHMAN CURTAIN. It's like Mathura.

Ho! Bavannakhani!

Ho! Bavannakhani!

It's like Mathura.

*The Brahman curtain is transformed into a group sitting in Gulabi's hall in Bavannakhani. A dancer dances. The dance is erotic. Ghashiram is dancing with her. He is her foil. Sycophant. Ludicrous. All are involved in the erotic mood, attentive to her. They hum:*

BRAHMANS. It's like Mathura

Bavannakhani. . .

*After the dance, they whistle and throw turbans in the air.*

We want the Brahman/Brahman-wife dance. . .

*Gulabi and Ghashiram bow, go to one side, and reappear as Brahman and Brahman-wife. Big stomach and long tuft of hair. They sing lavani and dance. The Brahmans drool. Peals of laughter. Then voices become inaudible.*

SUTRADHAR. Night comes, night comes.

The gun of eleven booms.

Two watches of the night are gone.



*Brahmans at Gulabi's stand with backs towards audience, swaying and humming 'Bavannakhani . . . Mathura avatarli'.*

SUTRADHAR. The Brahmans have lost themselves in Bavannakhani and the Brahman women are at home; they stay at home; oh yes, they stay at home. The Brahmans have lost themselves in the cemetery, in kirtan; the Brahman women are sentenced to solitary confinement.

*'Radhakrishna Hari, Govinda Murali'—in front of the curtain of Brahmans humming this comes a Brahman woman with a saucy air. She waits. A sardar (Maratha landowner) comes in a Maratha turban. He knocks at an imaginary door. She opens the door. He goes in. They embrace, and go further inside.*

SUTRADHAR (*beating the mridanga-drum*). Here a Brahman woman in solitary confinement; there the crowds waiting for a glimpse of Gulabi . . .

BRAHMAN LINE (*humming*). Bavannakhani!  
Mathura avatarli  
Ho! Bavannakhani . . .

*The line splits to let us see the Brahman/Brahman-wife dance we saw before.*

SUTRADHAR. The night progresses  
The night progresses  
The night progresses  
And the Peshwa's Chief Minister,  
Nana of the nine courts,  
Nana of the wealth and power,  
Nana Phadnavis  
to Gulabi's place proceeds.

*The curtain turns towards us. Sways. Splits. Nana comes through the opening to a tabla rhythm.  
Loud chant:*

Bavannakhani  
Mathura avatarli  
Ho, Bavannakhani . . .

*Nana: silver handled walking stick. Garland of flowers on wrist. Dancer comes dancing from back of line. Both dance. Ghashiram stands to one side, in Brahman dress.*

ALL TOGETHER. Radhakrishna Hari  
Govinda Murali  
Ramashiva Hari  
Mukunda Murari . . .

*The dance goes on. The gathered Brahmans dance. Ghashiram also. The dance moves to the back. Brahman ladies and their Maratha lovers dance in front. Both dances are on the stage at the same time. Brahman lady and her lover dance off.*

NANA (*grabs one foot while dancing*). Oy oy oy oy oy oy oy oy.

*Confusion. Dance goes off beat. 'Radhakrishna Hari Mukunda Murari'—Nana dances in the middle, holding one foot.*

SUTRADHAR. What happened in the midst of the dance?  
The great man, Nana, hurt his ankle.  
The pain began to throb, to rankle.

*The dance goes faster. Tune: Mukunda Murari. Ghashiram in Brahman dress looks at Nana's hobbling and bends to the injured leg, making Nana put it on his back. Nana feels better. All look on in surprise. All gesticulate . . .*

SUTRADHAR (*gesturing in inquiry around him*).

What happened?

How did it happen?

Did he fall?

Tumble down?

Slip down?

Trip down?

He put his foot wrong?

ALL (*to Nana*). Your highness. What happened?

NANA (*balancing on his stick with one foot on Ghashiram's back*).

Nothing. Sprained my ankle a little bit. Oh!

(*Notices Ghashiram and lifts his foot with difficulty*).

Who's this?

(*Ghashiram sits back with the foot in his hand*.)

Looks like a Poona scholar.

(*All watch*.)

Get up, Bhatji. We are pleased with you.

(*Takes off his pearl necklace and holds it out*.)

Bhatji, take this reward.

(*Ghashiram does not take it*.)

Bhatji—a reward—

GHASHIRAM. Your highness, I have been rewarded.

(*Gestures towards the slippered foot he holds in his hands*.)

In my hands has fallen—grace!

All here envy me my place.

This is a gift to last me all my days.

*(Sits in great deference.)*

NANA (*very pleased*). Wah! Wah! What words! what ready wit! What sweetness in his speech! Rise.

You look as if you came from the North.

GHASHIRAM. Ji! (*Stands.*)

NANA. Your name?

GHASHIRAM. Ghashiram Savaldas. (*Takes off his wig with the long tuft of hair in the style of Poona Brahmans.*)

NANA. It seems you are a Brahman from Kanauj.

GULABI (*coming forward with a coquettish air.*) He came four days ago. He dances with me. He was a foreigner, going without food. I said: let him stay here. He washes my utensils. Sings for me. Does all sorts of things.

NANA (*pats her cheek*). Thik. Thik. (*Claps for a servant.*) Bring my palanquin.

ALL SING (*as the palanquin is brought in*). It is brought.

*Nana goes hobbling into the palanquin formed by the Brahmans.*

ALL SING. Nine Court Nana sits in the palanquin.

He goes. . . .

NANA (*as if speaking from the palanquin*). What is your name again? Ghashiram. Here!

*Takes off necklace and throws it. Ghashiram easily catches it. Nana departs in the palanquin.*

ALL. Nana goes . . .

SUTRADHAR. Nana goes. The Brahmans stay. No restrictions now.

No reverence now. No modesty now. No protocol now.

None at all. None at all. None at all.

*Three or four try to play with Gulabi. She erotically keeps them all at a distance. Her hair, sari become dishevelled.*

CHORUS. Radhakrishna Hari. Mukunda Murari.

*Ghashiram caresses the necklace with great joy.*

:SUTRADHAR. Night is over . . .

The sky lightens.

Dawn comes to Poona.

*Classical raga: Bhupali to rhythm. Gulabi goes inside. From one wing Brahmans, from another Marathas—cross as if going home. Sleepy faces. Yawning and stretching. Turbans on, any which way. Crossing, the two lines turn and look at each other.*

*Ghashiram with necklace begins to go; Gulabi comes out and blocks his way. Binding the end of her sari around her waist, she demands the necklace. He does not give it to her. Harshly: 'Give me that necklace'. He won't.*

•GHASHIRAM. This is mine. Nanasahib gave it to me. It is mine.

•GULABI. I hired you as a dancer. That's why you could get as much as a glimpse of Nana's shoes. I should have that necklace.

*Bangs her foot on the floor. Gestures for someone. Two or three come in, rolling up their sleeves. To the rhythm of the mridanga: Ghashiram: 'This is mine. It's mine'. Clutches the necklace. Is beaten. The thugs take the necklace, throw Ghashiram to the front of the stage. He gets up after a while. Dusts his sleeve. Wipes blood off his face. Air of humiliation. To the beat of the drum, the palanquin of a white man comes on the stage. Two Brahmans walk alongside and talk to the Sahib. In front a Brahman with ash on his forehead, shouts: 'The Sahib is coming. Get aside'. A Brahman makes way for the palanquin.*

•BRAHMAN. Get aside, you dog. Can't you see the Sahib is coming? You shapeless piece of shit! Sleeping on the street! (*Turns to the Sahib.*) The natives of this country have lost all their manners nowadays, sir. I swear, no one has any self-respect or pride. Come on, come on, sir. Now you'll

get to see the ceremony of the giving of royal gifts to the Brahmans, from the inside. I'll sneak you in. Only three silver rupees, sir.

ANOTHER BRAHMAN. Go away, Rambhata. Give *me* two! Let's go, sir, I'll get you in.

THIRD BRAHMAN. Give me just one rupee! Come on, come on. (*To the others*) Misbegotten bastards! Shut up!

SECOND BRAHMAN (*to the first*). Who asked you to butt in, you graveyard stink!

FIRST BRAHMAN. Both of them are shysters, sir. Come on, with me. The ceremony today is in the Brahmans' honour. There's a feast. They give out money. Come on. Come on.

*The palanquin of the white man with the Brahman running behind moves off. Other Brahmans in groups, talking, hurrying, follow them.*

SUTRADHAR. All the Brahmans go, all the Brahmans go once more to the great *dakshina* ceremony in the park at the foot of the holy hill of Parvati. Now the Peshwa will honour the Brahmans. There'll be a great feast. . . . The Brahmans have started to fight. They're gulping down the food. They're laden with gifts.

*Ghashiram stares with hungry eyes. The Brahmans who had gone in come out and stand in line again. Soldiers try again and again to keep the line straight. Ghashiram stands to one side. He looks hungry. Soldiers accost him.*

FIRST SOLDIER. Hey, who are you?

GHASHIRAM. I am Ghashiram Savaldas from Kanauj.

SECOND SOLDIER. Go on, get to one side. Why do you come here?

GHASHIRAM. They're honouring Brahmans. There's a feast.

FIRST SOLDIER. What does that have to do with you?

GHASHIRAM. I'm a Brahman too.

SECOND SOLDIER. You a Brahman!

Where is your shaven head?

Where is your holy thread?

Where is your pious look?

FIRST SOLDIER. Where is your holy book?

Recite the hierarchy of caste!

Tell us, when did you last fast?

SECOND SOLDIER. Looks like a thief!

FIRST SOLDIER. Looks like a scoundrel!

GHASHIRAM. No. I'm a Brahman. From Kanauj. New to Poona—

*Coming back from the ceremony, a Brahman pats the pocket of his shirt and suddenly yells: 'Thief, thief. My pocket's been picked. My prize money's gone. It's gone. I'm lost, I'm dead, I'm drowned'. Hubbub on the stage. Ghashiram is beaten. Soldiers drag Ghashiram, fighting, off the stage. Ghashiram yells: 'Let me see Nanasahib! Take me to Nanasahib!' The Sahib comes from the festival and watches.*

SAHIB. What happened? Why are you beating that man?

BRAHMAN. It wasn't a man, sir, it was a thief. That corpse stole my prize money! May maggots eat his hand. May the hand of that bastard fall off . . .

SAHIB. The thief was someone else. I saw it. He was behind you at the ceremony and ran away with your money. Poor fellow! Ah well, take this. (*He gives him coins.*)

BRAHMAN. Thank you. Thank you, huzur (*in Indian English accent*).

*Goes off happy. The Sahib goes. Several hungry looking Brahmans go running after the Sahib.*

*Now the Brahmans in the line turn their backs towards the audience and sing: 'Shri Ganaraya . . .*

*Shri Ganaraya . . .*

*Shri Ganaraya dances, dances . . .*

*Soldiers drag Ghashiram, covered with blood, in.*

FIRST SOLDIER. Lie down in this cell, you bum.

SECOND SOLDIER. Be quiet or you'll be bound hand and foot.

Maybe I should kick you in the balls. You'll wiggle like a butchered goat. (*Both go.*)

SUTRADHAR (*as if he were a fellow prisoner coming to Ghashiram*). What's going on? What happened?

GHASHIRAM (*moaning*). I might have died.

I'm just barely alive.

SUTRADHAR. What brought you here?

GHASHIRAM. Fortune. Came to find my fortune. Wife came too and my dear daughter; because of them God stopped the slaughter. But I'm not a thief.

SUTRADHAR. Maybe you are,

Maybe you're not.

In this place

Matters not a jot.

In this damned spot

We're in the same pot.

I'm a thief

You're a thief.

Lie down easy,

Save yourself grief.

The bed's of stone.

Rest easy, don't moan.

The bloody body rests well on cold stone. I speak from experience.

GHASHIRAM. How did you get here?

SUTRADHAR. Just the opposite of what you said. You say you didn't do it. I say I did do it. Just a difference of a negative. Otherwise it's all the same.

I'm a thief.

You're a thief.

Our only hope is

The mercy of the police.

Your theft

is their bribe.

If their mercy ends

we end

so we bend.

GHASHIRAM. But I didn't steal. I swear to God I didn't. I'm



not a thief. I'm from Kanauj. I'm a Brahman. I've been here two weeks. I came here to find my fortune—and lost my reputation. How did it happen? What will happen to my wife? to my daughter? What will they say when they hear of this?

SUTRADHAR. They'll say whatever they want to say.

GHASHIRAM. That's right. Won't they say that I've become a thief? Enough. Well, I'll be one. I'll be a thief.

SUTRADHAR. If the police let you!

Friend, the thief is dependent on the police.

If not—they'll soften your bones.

Sometimes they break your bones.

Sometimes they crack your bones.

Sometimes you lose your life.

The thief earns what he thieves.

It's easy income for the police.

It's a partnership.

The thief is a simple thief.

The police are official thieves.

If a thief wants to live  
to the police he's got to give.

You need protection money

and on top of that

their mercy might end any time

and so will you.

You'll get kicks and blows,

You'll see the cell.

No one will know your address, Baba.

That's how the play will end one day.

No one will weep.

No one will remember you, Baba,

What's the use?

One petty thief less in a world of big thieves.

So, little servant,

go to the feet of God.

*A Hindi devotional song with the mridanga-drum begins.  
The Brahman line, with no turbans, hands to ears, do*

*accompaniments. End of Kawali, all turn backs. Soldier enters. Throws Ghashiram out in audience with force. On stage: Brahmans, Brahman women, Gulabi, the Maratha lovers, etc., all stand and look down on Ghashiram.*

**SOLDIER.** Get lost. Hey! thief, monkey. If you so much as put a foot in the holy city of Poona, you'll lose your head. Go away. Take your ugly face and go far away. Don't come back to Poona. Not even your shadow should fall on the city of Poona. Get lost. Go.

*Soldier wipes his hands. Those on stage, go. In the audience, the tormented Ghashiram.*

**GHASHIRAM** (*takes off his sash, throws it on the ground*). But I'll come back. I'll come back to Poona. I'll show my strength. It will cost you! Your good days are gone! I am a Kanauj Brahman, but I've become a Shudra, a criminal, a useless animal. There is no one to stop me now, to mock me, to make me bend, to cheat me. Now I am a devil. You've made me an animal; I'll be a devil inside. 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. Then I'll be Ghashiram again, the son of Savaldas once more.

*The mridanga gives a forceful beat. Ghashiram dances to that beat, a war dance, banging his fist in the dust. He storms out through the audience. On the stage, the Brahmans again sing: 'Ganapati dances; we are Poona Brahmans', swaying slowly. Ganapati comes in, sits with folded legs in the middle. Two Brahmans form a human God House around him. Drum and shehnai sound.*

**SUTRADHAR** (*he throws a cloth over his shoulder like a kirtankūr, a teller of sacred stories*).

Whereas in the realm of time we bow today before Shri Ganesh. . . .

*Audience cannot hear the rest in the din of drum and*

shehnai, but we can see his gestures. He is telling a religious tale. All the people on the stage, except a few, become the audience for the story. Four stand as accompanists for the kirtan. Some Brahman women come from inside and sit in the stage audience. Nana Phadnavis comes in, dancing a little. He holds a flower, All rise. Nana gestures: Sit down. Sit down. The music stops. Nana sits on a high seat. All are below him. Nana ogles the women. Smells the flower. Does not pay attention to the kirtan. The Sutradhar as a Haridasa—a special kind of religious storyteller-singer—sings an ābhanga. Nana leers at the women. They are uneasy. Some adjust their saris. No noise now; just gestures.

The ābhanga changes to a lavani—a change from a religious song to a love ballad. The Haridasa sings a lavani. Suddenly an ābhanga. Back to lavani. Nana in lavani state of mind. The last of the sermon—repetition of God's names—comes loudly. Nana looks unblinkingly at a pretty girl. She is beautiful, shy, innocent. Everyone falls at the feet of the Haridasa. Nana walks towards the girl. The girl goes to bow at the Haridasa's feet. Falls at his feet. Nana steps towards her like a cat. All go but the girl stays behind, prays before Ganapati. Nana gestures to the servant to close the door. The Sutradhar who played the Haridasa role comes forward from the scene.

NANA (voice of lust). Child, what do you want?

(She turns around, startled.)

All your dreams, this Nana will fulfil.

(He puts a hand on her shoulder. She pulls back.)

Oh, don't be shy. This is our house. This is a private hall. No one will see. No one in Poona today has the audacity to watch the great Nana Phadnavis!

GIRL. He will see.

NANA. He will see? Who?

GIRL (points at Ganapati). He.

NANA. That idol of holiness? That all holy Ganapati? The maker of Good? Look, he has two wives. One on this side, one on that side. If you sit on our lap, he won't say anything about that!

GIRL. You are like a father!

NANA. Only by age. But our devotion is—only to this graceful image . . . . Don't lose any more time. Youth will not come again; the bloom will not last. (*He comes close and tries to put an arm around her.*) My dear, you are like a daughter to us—someone else's.

GIRL (*pulling back*). I'm afraid.

NANA. Afraid? But we feel only love, my dear. Oh ho ho, such shyness, such shyness.

*Tries to grab her. She pulls away. Nana is totally drawn to her. He chases her. She runs like a frightened deer. She escapes him. Nana in blind lust grabs the servant at the door. This is Ghashiram in servant's dress. The lower part of his face is covered with the end of his turban.*

NANA (*eyes shut*). Oh ho ho! Oh ho ho!

SERVANT. Sir, I am a man. The woman has run away.

NANA (*opens his eyes with disappointment, becomes furious*).

Damn you. We'll have you killed. (*Claps for his attendants.*)

SERVANT. By Your Majesty's orders, there's no one else in the hall. This servant is on guard.

NANA. Lumphead! Dolt! (*Rubs his hands together.*)

SERVANT. This servant is sorry, Majesty.

NANA. Sorry! You've ruined it all! It was so close! Why did you interfere? Speak!

SERVANT. Your Majesty grabbed *me*!

NANA. How could we know? We had it in our hands—then the prey fled.

SERVANT. You'll get her back.

NANA. How—after this!

SERVANT. If the hunter is ready, the prey will be found.

NANA. But not that one!

SERVANT. Even she will be found; that very one will be found.

NANA. Oh, can we? can we find her? How beautifully she is formed! What a lovely figure! Did you see? Erect! Young! Tender! Ah! ho ho! We've seen so many, handled so many, but none like that one. None her equal. We wonder who she is.

SERVANT. Whoever she is, if the order is given, this servant will bring her.

NANA. Would you? We'll be grateful. We will give more than enough in return. But—when?

SERVANT. Tomorrow. Or the day after. Or the day after that.

NANA. Maybe tonight, eh!

SERVANT. Majesty, I will try, but there's no certainty. Don't wait. You may be disappointed.

NANA. We can't bear the idea of waiting. What a precious thing!

SERVANT. If one keeps one's head, one can in time wear fifty hats!

NANA. If she is not found, no one will keep his head! Our grandeur's gone if she's not had. We tell you, if she is found, then this Nine Court Nana will conquer Hindustan! What a bosom! Buds just blossoming. . . . We'll squeeze them like this!

SERVANT (*bites his lips but acts with humility*). Put your sword back in its sheath, Majesty. The prey is far away.

NANA. Is tomorrow a certainty?

SERVANT. I'll try.

NANA (*taking the ring from his finger*). Take this. Keep it. It's a diamond and there's more if you get her. Don't worry about anything else.

SERVANT. Ji!

*Mangalamurti morya-singing Ganapati immersion procession comes on the stage. Group plays lezim, throws red powder; horse and elephant-masked participants, one like a fierce demon, etc. Nana, Ghashiram and Ganapati are hidden by the procession. The procession lingers for a little while, goes off stage. Some come back as chorus.*

SUTRADHAR (*takes off the Haridasa shawl*).

Ganapati goes to his home—to his home—to his home.  
 Whatever Nine Court Nana says—the Peshwai obeys.  
 Fear of Nana grows day by day—day by day.  
 Even his enemies say  
 There's only one Nana  
 The rest are na-na-na-na.

(*Brahmans standing in a line behind sing:*)

There's only one Nana  
 The rest are na-na-na.  
 Radhakrishna Hari Ho! Govinda Murali  
 Ram Shiva Hari Ho! Mukunda Murari. . .

*The chant continues. Nana comes in dancing to this rhythm. The young girl comes in, ready to dance. She moves to the rhythm, makes sensuous gestures, moves around Nana elusively, driving him berserk. She doesn't touch him. Every now and then, Ghashiram is seen. Nana throws him favours and dances behind the girl. Brahmans sing to the rhythm of drum and cymbals. Turning their backs to the audience, the Brahmans form a garden. Nana chases the girl through the garden.*

The garden of Hira  
 The garden of Saras  
 The garden of Moti  
 The gardens of Poona  
 Become the gardens of Mathura  
 Where Krishna played.

*The beat becomes stronger and faster. In the end, Nana throws his silver knobbed walking stick to Ghashiram and disappears with the girl. Ghashiram catches it, biting his lips, bends it. Nana and the girl reappear and dance like Radha and Krishna. Seven or eight women of different ages, all Nana's wives, make a dancing circle around them.*

*Ghashiram walks into the audience, looks at the scene on the stage and laughs viciously.*

GHASHIRAM (*suddenly cries out loud*). Now he's in my hands. . . Oh, my daughter . . . The beast . . . (*Then yells at the audience.*) Oh you people. Look! I've given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf! Look. Look at this father. Putting his heart's child up for sale. Look at my innocent daughter—a whore. That old overripe bastard! Look at him, eating her like a peach . . . Spit on me. Stone me. Look, look, But I will not quit. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs.

*The Brahmans' song and the dance of Nana and the girl go on. Going out of the audience, Ghashiram cries: 'Look, look at this tamasha. Look, look at this travesty. Applaud. Clap. Applaud'. The dancers leave the stage. The Brahman garden becomes the chorus.*

SUTRADHAR. Nine Court Nana only thought of Gauri.

ALL. Thought of nothing else.

SUTRADHAR. Nine Court Nana only dreamed of Gauri.

ALL. Dreamed of nothing else

SUTRADHAR. Nothing but Gauri for Nana

ALL. No one but Gauri for Nana

SUTRADHAR. Couldn't think about his home

ALL. Couldn't think about his people

SUTRADHAR. Couldn't think about his work

ALL. Couldn't think about his God

SUTRADHAR. Wouldn't do without Gauri

ALL. Not a clue without Gauri

SUTRADHAR. For Nana no labour, just lust.

ALL. Lust knows no age, no shame.

SUTRADHAR. Pundalik varada Gauri Viththal

ALL. Gauri Viththal, Ghashiram Tukaram.

*All step back, turn their backs. Nana enters. Helpless. Ghashiram comes.*

NANA. Just one more time, Ghashiram.

Just one more time, you bastard.

GHASHIRAM. That will not do, Majesty. This is too much. The waters have come up to my chin. Better that we stop before the water rises over my head. Otherwise I will be humiliated all over Poona. What will people say about me? About you, Majesty? Your Majesty goes around in a palanquin. Ghashiram walks on the street among the people. That won't do. I cannot do any more. Now that's all. I was carried away by my love of your Majesty. If the Peshwa hears about this, my hundred years will be over. Whatever has happened has happened, has flowed into the Ganga. My daughter will not come again to Your Highness' house. Now I'll get her married. Now I'll search for a bridegroom.

NANA. But—a few more days. . . . After that, we ourselves will see that she marries well with one of our men.

GHASHIRAM. No.

NANA. Ghashya, you know the price of disobedience.

GHASHIRAM. This servant is ready, Highness. That humiliation can be borne, but no more of the other. Think about the mother of the girl. After all, it's her own child, nurtured from the womb, the breast. . . .

NANA. We'll feel that way about her too, after a few days, Ghashiram. Tell your wife, tell her we'll take on all of Gauri's worries. We'll think of her children as our own. . . .

GHASHIRAM. It won't do, Highness.

NANA. Don't say no, you outcaste! Don't you have a heart?

GHASHIRAM. The heart that gives a daughter to your whims and fancies, Highness.

NANA. Remember who you are arguing with!

GHASHIRAM. I remember. Please allow your servant to leave.

NANA. I'll have her caught and brought to the palace.

GHASHIRAM. The Peshwa is still alive, Highness.

NANA. Then what can I do?

GHASHIRAM. Sir, there is a way. People will not talk, my daughter will not be humiliated openly in Poona—if you make a clear arrangement.

NANA. How?



GHASHIRAM. People's mouths must be closed.

NANA. All right, but how?

GHASHIRAM. If I give you an answer, will you accept it? No excuses?

NANA. Tell me. But first let me meet her.

GHASHIRAM. All right, Sir, to shut people's mouths, make me the Kotwal of Poona.

NANA (*jolted*). What! Kotwal! But Kotwal means guarding the whole city of Poona.

GHASHIRAM. If you don't agree, forget it. I'm not itching for it.

NANA. Oh, but it will be very hard to do.

GHASHIRAM. What's hard for Nana? In Poona the sun rises whenever Nana tells it to.

NANA. Suggest something else.

GHASHIRAM. This is the only way. Otherwise the lovely Gauri will not come to this palace again.

NANA. No! Send her. I'll make you Kotwal. When will you send her?

GHASHIRAM. After I have the order, signed and sealed, in my hand!

NANA. Bastard. You've got me in a narrow pass.

GHASHIRAM. Yes, the narrow pass of my only daughter.

*(Suddenly he looks murderous.)*

NANA (*frightened*). Ghashi . . .

GHASHIRAM (*suddenly calm*). Give me the order.

*A servant brings the order to be signed. Nana signs it indifferently. He hands it to Ghashiram.*

NANA. Go. Send her quickly. (*Ghashiram folds the paper neatly, bows and leaves.*)

NANA (*suddenly brightening*). Go, Ghashya, old bastard. We made you. We made you Kotwal. Raise hell if you wish. But you don't know the ways of this Nana. This time, there are two bullets in this gun. With the first one, we'll fell your luscious daughter. But with the second we will make

the city of Poona dance. Ghashya, child, you're a foreigner. I have put you on Poona's back. Why? As a countercheck to all those conspirators. You'll not be able to join them; they'll never trust you even if you do. Because you're a stranger, you're an outsider. We just raised a dog at our door to the Kotwali! We are your sole support. Oh, you're a bastard, Ghashya. Your manner will be more arrogant than that of the Chitpavan Brahmans. You'll manage the deference nicely. You'll create a court—and a half! No worry about that. What'll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do; our Kotwal pays. (*He claps his hands.*) The opportunity comes in the shape of Ghashiram. And that luscious peach is at hand to be bitten by Nana. Excellent! Yes, Ghashya, be Kotwal. This Nana blesses you. (*Turns around. Drummer comes on stage.*)

DRUMMER. Listen, listen. Ghashiram Savaldas has been decreed Kotwal of Poona.

*Nana disappears in the mob of Brahmans that comes forward talking loudly. The din grows louder and louder. Suddenly it stops. Trumpets. Horns. All on the stage bow and straighten up. Some people enter, walking backward, gesturing in deference, hand towards forehead. Behind them—Ghashiram, wearing the glittering clothes of the Kotwal. On his head an elegant turban. Arrogance in his step. Seems different, larger than life. Trumpets and horns sound.*

#### INTERMISSION

*As at the beginning, twelve people stand, playing cymbals. Sutradhar comes in. After a few lines of the Shri Ganaraya song, they keep repeating the first two lines.*

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram became Kotwal of Poona.

OTHERS. Kotwal of Poona.

SUTRADHAR. His work goes on, his work goes on, his work goes on.

OTHERS. Goes on.

SUTRADHAR. Gauri says, Nana does, Ghashiram's reign is here.

OTHERS. His reign is here.

SUTRADHAR. Gauri dances, Nana dances, Ghashiram's got his chances.

OTHERS. His chances.

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram Kotwal gave an order.

OTHERS. Gave an order.

SUTRADHAR. All the old orders will be implemented strictly.

OTHERS. Implemented strictly.

SUTRADHAR. No whoring without a permit.

OTHERS. Without a permit.

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram Kotwal gave an order.

OTHERS. Gave an order.

SUTRADHAR. No cremation without a permit.

OTHERS. Without a permit.

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram Kotwal says to eat with a lower caste person is a crime.

OTHERS. Is a crime.

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram Kotwal says to kill a pig, to do an abortion, to be a pimp, to commit a misdemeanour, to steal, to live with one's divorced wife, to remarry if one's husband is alive, to hide one's caste, to use counterfeit coins, to commit suicide, without a permit, is a sin. A good woman may not prostitute herself, a Brahman may not sin, without a permit.

OTHERS. Do no wrong, without a permit.

SUTRADHAR. Whoever does wrong will be punished severely, will not be pitied.

OTHERS (*humming*). Will not be pitied, will not be pitied.

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram Kotwal started making the rounds of Poona at night, after the eleven o'clock cannon. Started ruling in person. Accosted anyone he met in the streets. Whipped people. Arrested people. Demanded people's permits. Imprisoned people. Sued people.

OTHERS. He sued people.

SUTRADHAR. The prisons started filling.

OTHERS. Started filling.

SUTRADHAR. Gauri says, Nana does, Ghashiram rules.

OTHERS. Ghashiram rules.

SUTRADHAR. All of Poona loses heart.

OTHERS. Loses heart . . . oh! loses heart.

SUTRADHAR. At night they have to stay at home.

OTHERS. Stay at home . . . oh! stay at home.

SUTRADHAR. They have to stay with the wives they married.

OTHERS. The wives they married.

SUTRADHAR. They have to sleep with the men they are married to.

OTHERS. The men they married.

SUTRADHAR. They are compelled to be moral, not to abort, to be wholesome, to stay alive.

OTHERS. They are compelled . . . oh! they are compelled.

SUTRADHAR. Prostitutes' Lane was desolate.

The chasing of women was halted.

Pimps turned into beggars.

Counterfeit coins were worthless.

OTHERS. Sin was worthless.

SUTRADHAR. Gauri dances, Nana dances, Ghashiram's reign has come.

OTHERS. Has come.

SUTRADHAR. Without a permit, nothing can be done.

OTHERS. Nothing means nothing!

*Ghashiram enters accompanied by two lamp bearers and two patrolmen. The police call out the time of night. The twelve Brahmans stand with their backs to the audience. The Sutradhar tries to escape.*

GHASHIRAM (grabbing his neck, laughing). Idiot! It's a good thing I caught you. Where are you going?

SUTRADHAR. Nowhere, my lord.

GHASHIRAM. To steal?

SUTRADHAR. No, sir.

GHASHIRAM. To whore?

SUTRADHAR. No, no, sir.

GHASHIRAM (*slaps his face*). Tell the truth.

SUTRADHAR. No, no, sir.

GHASHIRAM. Then where?

SUTRADHAR. Home.

GHASHIRAM. Whose home? (*Hits him.*) Tell the truth. Which where were you going to?

SUTRADHAR. No, sir, to my own house.

GHASHIRAM. Then why are you out this late? (*Kicks him.*) Speak quickly.

SUTRADHAR. Sir, I was going to fetch the midwife.

GHASHIRAM. Midwife. Who's delivering?

SUTRADHAR. My wife.

GHASHIRAM. Why does she deliver in the middle of the night? (*Slaps him.*) Speak up.

SUTRADHAR. Her time had come!

GHASHIRAM. Where is the midwife?

SUTRADHAR. She wouldn't come. Said she didn't have a permit. Said she'd come after the four o'clock cannon.

GHASHIRAM. Good. Have you got a permit? Speak.

SUTRADHAR. No, sir.

GHASHIRAM. Why not? You go out on the road at night without a permit and you'll get whipped.

SUTRADHAR. Have pity, sir.

GHASHIRAM (*hits him*). Why didn't you get a permit?

SUTRADHAR. I didn't know she was going to deliver at night.

GHASHIRAM. What! You didn't know when your wife would deliver? She's your wife, isn't she?

SUTRADHAR. Yes, sir, don't hit me.

GHASHIRAM (*to a soldier*). Go with him. Go to his house and make sure. If he's lying, take off his shirt and give him twenty-five lashes. If he is a thief, an adulterer, a whore-monger, then tie up his hands and feet and throw him in a cell.

*Sutradhar and soldier go. The twelve men are still standing with their backs to the audience. Ghashiram stands twirling his moustache.*

GHASHIRAM. I'll straighten out this adulterous city in six months! (*Suddenly*) What's that noise? Again! Again! What are they doing in their homes at this hour of the night? (*Knocks at the back of the seventh Brahman as if he were a door.*) Open the door! (*That man turns around and 'comes out' rubbing his eyes.*)

SEVENTH MAN. What's this?

GHASHIRAM. What's going on inside?

SEVENTH MAN. I don't know.

GHASHIRAM (*grabs his arm*). Give it to me straight! Tell the truth! If you lie I'll cut out your tongue. What noise did I hear?

SEVENTH MAN. Nothing.

GHASHIRAM. Swear by God. We heard something with these ears!

SEVENTH MAN. But what are you asking about?

GHASHIRAM (*catches his hair*). Tell me or I'll tear your hair out.

SEVENTH MAN (*confused*). Nothing, something, really nothing. What noise would you hear in a family man's house? We were sleeping . . . woke up . . . and so . . .

GHASHIRAM. Who's inside?

SEVENTH MAN. Wife.

GHASHIRAM. Are you telling the truth?

SEVENTH MAN. Oath of Rama! Just today she came back from her mother's house.

GHASHIRAM (*to the second soldier*). Go in and look. If you see something funny, get it out here. (*To the seventh man*) You stay here. (*The soldier goes through the doorway of the line. Ghashiram fingers his moustache.*) All of them, to the last man, whoremongers, fuckers—I'll straighten them out.

*Soldier comes outside bringing a respectable woman. She is dishevelled, comes whimpering, straightening out her clothing.*

SOLDIER. She was inside, sir.

GHASHIRAM (*looking her over*). You're the wife in this house, are you? (*Woman bites her lip and nods with her head bent.*) Show me your wedding necklace. (*She shows it.*) Is it fake or real? His or someone else's?

WIFE (*nervous*). His.

GHASHIRAM (*looking at seventh man and woman alternately and twirling his moustache*). I don't believe you. Do you have any evidence?

SEVENTH MAN. Evidence . . . ?

GHASHIRAM (*to soldier*). Bang on his neighbour's door. Wake them.

*Soldier bangs on the back of the eighth man. He turns around, comes forward sleepy eyed.*

EIGHTH MAN (*in a Kannada accent*). What is it? (*Soldiers knock on the backs of some others. Almost all turn around.*)

ALL (*in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu*). What happened? What happened? (*The woman almost dies of embarrassment.*)

GHASHIRAM (*gesticulating*). This woman, she was found in his house. Is she his wife by marriage? If you don't tell the truth I'll break your bones! Is she? She isn't, is she?

*(All shake their heads.)*

GHASHIRAM (*happily*). That's better. How did I catch you liars? (*To police*) Tie them up and bring them to the station. I'll judge them tomorrow. They are immoral.

*Soldier shoves the couple ahead. The others return to their places as if going to their homes and stand with their backs to the audience.*

GHASHIRAM (*to the lamp bearers*). Your ears should be sharp like mine. If there's the slightest squeak, you must know something bad is going on. The Kotwali should be respected. Let's go. (*Ghashiram and all go. The eleven in the line turn around.*)

THE LINE. Ghashiram Kotwal's harshness was like that.

The trouble he brought was like that.

Poona lost heart, Poona lost heart.

SUTRADHAR (*comes forward through line.*) Poona—lost—heart.

OTHERS. But who will do what about it? Who can do what?

SUTRADHAR. Behind Ghashiram Kotwal is Nana's power. If you lay a hand on Ghashiram, Nana will smash you. If you don't, then Ghashiram will get you anyway. Ghashiram Kotwal . . .

OTHERS. Big-headed.

Pig-headed.

Impossible.

There is no limit, there is no end.

SUTRADHAR. To his arrogance.

But what's the remedy?

SUTRADHAR. Come on—let's sing: Rama Shiva Hari.

Radhakrishna Hari.

Govinda Murali.

*The singing goes on. The line turn their backs and stand. During this song for the celebration of Rangapanchami, Nana and Gauri and Nana's wives dance, throw colours, laugh, make merry. A Rangapanchami lavani begins. The dancer Gulabi comes in and dances an erotic dance to the tune of the lavani. Nana, pleased, gives her a golden bangle from his wrist. Gauri is ecstatic. Nana too. In a corner down stage, a British officer in military dress stands watching all this. The people from the line who were standing with their backs to the audience come forward and hide this scene. The lavani continues a bit and then fades. In front of the human curtain, Ghashiram and his soldiers are walking the streets of Poona.*

GHASHIRAM. If anyone is seen throwing powder at anyone but his wife, bind his hands. Morality must be protected. Take away the Brahmans who are having too good a time! Just a little fun without any vulgarity is all right. Keep a sharp ear out. Keep a sharp eye out. Demand permits.



*Ghashiram and the police leave. The line of Brahmins which has divided the two scenes goes behind the Rangapanchami play. This scene with Nana and Gauri and the lavani goes on. A woman comes in running.*

WOMAN. Sir, listen to my complaint. My husband and his brothers have been arrested by the Kotwal's soldiers. My father-in-law died. They won't let them hold the funeral. The permit is real, but they call it counterfeit. Sir—the corpse has been lying in the cremation ground since morning. The dogs are gathering. Sir—please—give us justice . . .

NANA (*as if his fun has been spoiled*). Where are the guards? Take this woman away at once. Who let her in without a permit? Complaints and all that go to the Kotwal. Go. Don't let anyone in. (*Sevants take the woman away. To the lavani dancer*) All right, go on, go on . . . O you're a sweetheart! Wah! Wah!

*Song and dance go on. The Brahman line comes dancing forward to the tune, in front of the other dance. Music fades as all go off but the line of Brahmins.*

SUTRADHAR. The days went by. The months slipped by. As they do every year, the Poona gentility, the Poona intellectuals, the pandits, the priests, the beggars, gather in the special gardens for the royal favours.

OTHERS. Gathered in the garden . . .

*Ghashiram comes forward through the line. In the name of discipline, he shoves and pulls and pats and straightens. He swears. Some Brahmins with contented faces since they have received money, cross the stage. One of them yells: 'Thief! Thief! I've been robbed . . .' Confusion. Pandemonium. Ghashiram becomes alert. The Brahman behind the one yelling panics and runs.*

GHASHIRAM. Catch him. Catch the bastard. Get the son of a bitch. Don't let him get away. Get him!

*The guards and other Brahmans run after him, bring him back. He is frightened. He cowers.*

GHASHIRAM. Got you! You were born a Brahman and you steal? (*Slaps him.*) Misbegotten bastard!

BRAHMAN. No sir, no, oh! no. I didn't steal. I swear by Rama. I've never done that. I swear by the *tulasi*. (*He begs.*)

GHASHIRAM. Search him. (*The other Brahmans search him, don't find anything.*)

GHASHIRAM. Who says he couldn't have thrown it away some place? Search for it. Go. (*To the Brahman*) Just wait a moment. I'll show you the other side of the universe today. Goddam piece of dung! Betrayer of Brahmanhood!

SOLDIER. Your honour, we couldn't find any evidence.

GHASHIRAM. What? Couldn't find any? (*Twirls moustache.*) No matter. Hit his balls and you'll find it. Where could it go?

BRAHMAN (*crying*). Your honour, I'm not a thief, I'm not. (*Falls at his feet.*)

GHASHIRAM. Would that noble Brahman yell 'Thief' without any reason? Where is he? (*They all look for him.*)

SOLDIER. Your honour, he's nowhere to be found.

GHASHIRAM. What? Nowhere? How can that be? Why would he yell 'Thief'?

BRAHMAN (*crying*). Because he was trying to get me. I got four of his Shravana commissions—but is that a crime? They say he sleeps with a Mahar woman. He thinks I started that rumour. But I didn't do anything. I swear by Rama. He started a feud with me for no reason. Save me! (*He cries out.*)

GHASHIRAM (*twirling his moustache*). Very well. Will you pass an ordeal, Brahman? (*The Brahman is staggered.*) Are you telling the truth? Let's see. Let's test you. (*Brahman trembles.*) Confess your wrongdoing, or undergo an ordeal. (*Claps for a guard.*) Throw him into the dungeon. Set up an ordeal for the first watch tomorrow. Go.

*They take the Brahman out. Ghashiram exits on the other side. The Brahman line chants 'Pundalika varda'. They turn their backs and stand. The Brahman comes in and sits down as if in a cell, puts his head between his knees.*

SUTRADHAR. Night comes.

OTHERS (*faintly*). Night comes.

SUTRADHAR. Midnight . . . after midnight. . . . The Brahman can't sleep.

OTHERS. Can't sleep.

SUTRADHAR. The soldiers come! (*Soldiers enter. Mime according to the Sutradhar's line.*) The nails of the Brahman's right hand are pulled out. The fingers are washed with lemon juice and soap. All the lines and signs of his hand are noted. His hands are wrapped in a bag and the bag is sealed. The ordeal is prepared.

OTHERS (*quietly*). Dnyanaba . . . Tukaram . . . (*The soldiers go.*)

SUTRADHAR. The first watch comes.

OTHERS. It comes. (*One person does a cock crow. Then another. The dozing Brahman comes awake.*)

SUTRADHAR. The time of the ordeal is night.  
Seven rangoli are drawn on the floor.

*(One from the Brahman line mimes it.)*

I bow before thee, O Agni.

*(One mimes fanning the fire.)*

The ironsmith comes. A steel ball is heated red hot.

*(One mimes turning the ball.)*

The ball is heated. The ball is heated.

It is so hot that if you drop a piece of grass on it, it will catch fire.

The seal on the bag is checked and the hands drawn out.

Six leaves are placed on his hands.

Oil is rubbed on them.

Chirapatra leaves, Bhal leaves are tied to the Brahman's head.

OTHERS. Dnayanaba . . . Tukaram . . .

SUTRADHAR. His Honour the Kotwal has arrived.

*(Ghashiram comes in and stands.)*

SUTRADHAR. The Brahman makes his statement. Water from a Mahar house, water from a Mang house is brought. An oath is sworn on the water by the Brahman. The ordeal begins, it begins.

OTHERS. The ordeal begins.

*They begin to chant some mantras. The ironsmith mimes lifting out a red hot ball. He approaches the Brahman. The seriousness of the occasion should be felt. The Brahman's hands are brought forward. They are trembling.*

BRAHMAN *(suddenly bleating like a goat)*. No! No! My hands will burn.

GHASHIRAM *(twirls his moustache and laughs)*. Hold him tightly: Get hold of his hands. *(Soldiers do it.)* Now what? Did you tell the truth or not?

BRAHMAN. Yes. On the oath of the *tulasi*.

GHASHIRAM. Then why are you afraid? The true are never frightened.

The ordeal shall be done.

BRAHMAN. No! Let me go! Mother! No!

GHASHIRAM. The ordeal shall be done. The ordeal shall be done. You heretic! Bring that hot ball over here. Hold his hands. Tightly. If he yells, don't let go. Let his hands burn. You should smell them burning. Smell them!

*Brahman yells. Mime of placing the ball forcibly in his hands. Brahman yells. Mime of the ball falling off. The*

*Brahman falls to the ground and writhes in agony. Ghashiram watches, enjoying it all. He smooths his moustache.*

GHASHIRAM. Speak. Didn't you tell a lie?

BRAHMAN (*crying*). No.

GHASHIRAM. You didn't tell a lie? Then why are the hands burnt?

Didn't you tell a lie?

BRAHMAN. No. No.

GHASHIRAM. Another lie. Bring the ball and put it in those damned hands again.

BRAHMAN. Don't. Don't.

GHASHIRAM. Then confess, Brahman. Did you steal or not?

BRAHMAN (*moaning*). No.

GHASHIRAM. No? Then take the ball in your hands. Take the test. Pass the ordeal. Bring the ball over here. Grab his hands.

BRAHMAN (*in fear of his life*). Don't! I did it! I confess that I stole. (*Ghashiram laughs loudly.*)

GHASHIRAM (*to those around him*). You should be so clever! See how a thief confesses. Go. Cut off his hands and drive him out of Poona. I'll see to it that no Brahman steals!

*(Ghashiram goes out smoothing his moustache.)*

BRAHMAN (*in torment*). I did not steal, I did not steal, I did not steal. O Ghashiram. You have tormented a poor innocent Brahman. You'll die without children! You yourself will endure torment greater than mine. You'll die a dog's death, grinding your heels in the dirt.

*While he is groaning this, Sutradhar and the Brahman line suddenly start chanting:*

Radhakrishna Hari Mukunda Murari.

*They begin the chant with instruments as if wanting to drown the screams. The Brahman line stands, covering the*

*stage. The scene disappears behind the line and the sound fades, except for the chant.*

SUTRADHAR. Revenues.

OTHERS. Increased.

SUTRADHAR. Crime.

OTHERS. Decreased.

SUTRADHAR. The city of Poona began to tremble at Ghashiram's name.

OTHERS. Just his name.

SUTRADHAR. Thieves and adulterers went straight!

OTHERS. Even the big ones were cowed!

SUTRADHAR. The bad deeds were cooled down—

The good deeds were cooled down too!

OTHERS. Ghashiram Raj is here. Ghashiram Raj is here.

GHASHIRAM (*enters smoothing moustache*). I've got the Kotwali and I've got Poona straightened out! All these hard, proud Brahmans are soft as cotton now. No one dares to look at Ghashiram straight in the eye! Now once I find a fitting husband for my darling daughter—that piece of my heart named Lalita Gauri—and get her married, then everything will be the way I want it. I'll make such a show of the wedding that no one's tongue will move to utter one bad word about my daughter. And if some tongue starts wagging, it's easy to cut it off! Now—first—I'll look for a bridegroom. It's easy to find a bridegroom when one has money, jewels, and respect! And my daughter's beautiful—one in a million! I'll send my men right out to look for a husband and I'll arrange everything. (*Goes.*)

*At the back of the stage, the Brahman line starts singing 'Shri Ganaraya'. A mendicant—one of the men from the Brahman line, the one from the first scene—begins to walk off in a hurry.*

SUTRADHAR. Bhatji buwa! Bhatji buwa! Stop.

BHATJI. Go away. I have no time.

SUTRADHAR. What's the big Brahman work you've pulled off today?

BHATJI. Asking me's a bad omen. You've done me wrong!

SUTRADHAR. Born? Who's been born? Daughter or son?

BHATJI. Enough of your fun.

Come on, let me go.

SUTRADHAR. Bhatji buwa! Who?

BHATJI. Who what? How who?

SUTRADHAR. Whose?

BHATJI. Whose what? Carriage?

SUTRADHAR (*claps his hands*). I've got it!

It's just popped in my head!

BHATJI. Drop dead!

I'd better go.

SUTRADHAR. Who's marrying whom? Bhatji buwa! Tell me.

BHATJI. Your mother is marrying her husband! I've got to go.

I'm late. I'm gone. (*Stays.*)

SUTRADHAR. Looks like a big fee.

BHATJI. So? But look who's getting married! (*Pause.*) But how did you know?

SUTRADHAR. You told me!

BHATJI. What! Me? I told you Nana's getting married? O Shiva, Shiva!

SUTRADHAR (*claps hands*). Nana's getting married!

BHATJI. You! You! (*Comic, prissy, impotent rage.*) Awful man!

SUTRADHAR. Nana's having his seventh marriage! True or false, Bhatji buwa?

BHATJI. Oh not so loud. It'll cost me my life.

SUTRADHAR. How so?

BHATJI. Now go! I'm going to the palace. They're making plans. It's almost ready to happen. But it's still a secret. If he knows I told, he'll peel my skin raw. Pretend you never saw. I'm going. The girl is just turning fourteen. How about that!

SUTRADHAR (*groans*). Oh no! Yes. You may go. This ear does not know what that ear heard. (*Bhatji hurries off.*)

(*Sutradhar tries to follow.*) Bhatji buwa! Bhatji buwa!

(*Then he stops.*) Hey! Another Bhatji buwa is going. That's two. A third! fourth! fifth! sixth! seventh! twenty-seven and a half! (*In all sorts of comic ways, the various pandits go off the stage.*)

SUTRADHAR. On this day, Nana's seventh wedding is almost ready.

OTHERS. Almost ready.

SUTRADHAR. The wedding is ready, the wedding is ready, Nana's wedding is ready.

OTHERS. It is ready.

*On stage the traditional rites and hubbub that precedes a wedding are mimed.*

SUTRADHAR (*sings to rhythm of hand drum*).

My Nana's wedding!  
The bride's a young one!  
My Nana's wedding!  
A tender blossoming bride.  
A slender willowy bride.  
A shy lily-white bride.  
A just this year ripened bride.  
My Nana's wedding!

(*Miming of wedding preparations on stage.*)

Brahmans come to check the stars.

(*Repeated until mime catches up.*)

The guests arrive.  
The pavilion rises.  
The jewels are brought.  
With all due ceremony.  
The trumpets sound.  
My Nana's wedding!  
Just ripe this year!  
My Nana's wedding!



*(On stage: pre-wedding rites.)*

SUTRADHAR (*traditional song*).

Let's go to the wedding.

Let's go to the wedding.

*(The Brahman line chants during the mime.)*

Let's go to the wedding (*four times*).

Sakhubai.

Salubai.

Kalubai.

Saibai.

Let's go to the wedding.

The Peshwa's chief minister.

Still young enough to marry!

His moustache's turned gray.

But not all his teeth are gone—

not all of them are gone.

He's got six wives.

Look—that's not enough!

So he's got a new one.

She needs a companion.

So—

Sakhubai, Salubai, Kalubai, Saibai.

Let's go to the wedding.

*The mime goes on. The bride is brought in. Her face is not visible under the garlands. The Sutradhar keeps on singing the traditional song. Suddenly he stops and all sing.*

ALL TOGETHER. Let's go to the wedding.

Sound the cymbals.

Shake the tambourines.

Beat the drums.

Dance to the wedding.

*(Head garlanded, Nana is brought in.)*

The groom comes over the threshold.  
How did the groom get his bride?  
He gave three hundred gold coins.  
He bought the bride that way.  
My Nana's wedding.  
The groom has come near the altar.  
How did the groom get his bride?  
He gave a great big gift of land!  
That's how he bought his bride.

*On the stage, they hold the cloth between the two. The Sutradhar sings the wedding shloka. The Englishman comes in and watches. At the end, the line: 'Shubh mangala sawadhan—Make sure the sacred omen!' The band plays—loudly. Ghashiram comes in hurriedly, terribly perturbed. People disperse. Nana and his bride go in procession around the stage and into the wings, not noticing Ghashiram. The Englishman is in the procession.*

GHASHIRAM (*while the procession goes into the wing*). Where is my daughter? Where is she?

*The procession disappears. Ghashiram is left alone on the stage.*

GHASHIRAM (*disturbed*). Where is my baby, where is she?  
Nana, now you and I have to decide this.

*Goes off as if on Nana's trail. The Brahman line chants from the wing: 'Ramashiva Hari, Mukunda Murari'. On the other side, Nana and the new bride come in as if entering a bedroom. She stands to one side, trembling. Nana takes off his coat. He pushes up his sleeves. Full of lust. He goes to her and starts fondling her. She trembles even more.*

NANA. Now, now, don't be shy. Don't be shy. Womenfolk shouldn't be so shy. Enough of your shyness! (*He tries to*

*embrace her. Ghashiram springs in from the rear like a tiger, sword in hand.)*

GHASHIRAM. Nanasahib, where is my Gauri?

NANA. Eh! *(Startled, too startled to speak.)* Who? Gha. . .  
Ghashi?

GHASHIRAM. Where is my daughter, Nanasahib?

NANA. She might be . . . she might be . . . anywhere. I haven't  
seen her. I was busy with the wedding.

GHASHIRAM. Nanasahib, tell me the truth . . .

NANA *(noticing Ghashiram's state)*. No . . . No . . . Ghashi. . .  
No . . . Listen!

GHASHIRAM. Just tell me where my child is, Nanasahib. That's  
all. No one has seen her for ten days.

NANA. I really . . . don't know . . . Ghashi.

GHASHIRAM *(aggressive)*. Tell me right now. Or . . .

NANA. Yes. I'll tell you. She . . . She . . . She . . . To Chandra  
the midwife!

GHASHIRAM *(a terrible cruel face)*. What!

*(Nana is scared. His new wife is frightened. For a moment  
it looks as if Ghashiram will tear Nana apart. But he  
doesn't.)*

Chandra the midwife in Kasba Peth?

NANA *(still scared)*. Yes, that one.

*(Ghashiram gets hold of himself and hurries off. Nana  
draws a deep breath, then becomes composed. Speaks to his  
wife).*

Are you afraid, dear? What could that Ghashya have done  
to this Nana? All his ancestors would have to descend and  
help him. All of them. We could finish him off with just a  
gesture of this hand. Come on. Let's go. *(He takes her  
inside. As he goes one of his legs trembles a little.)* One of  
my legs has fallen asleep. *(Stops and claps his hands.)*

Someone come!

SUTRADHAR *(comes in)*. Yes?

NANA. Don't let that Ghashya enter these chambers again. Do you understand? Add more watchmen. Increase our bodyguards. Go.

*Nana leads his bride towards the wing. From the other side of the stage, Ghashiram enters. He pushes in front of him a dark woman who is hiding her face in the end of her sari. Chandra the midwife.*

GHASHIRAM. Where is my dear child? Tell me, where is she?  
CHANDRA (*frightened*). There—we buried her there . . .

GHASHIRAM. Where? Here? (*He sits and acts as if digging in the soil like an animal. Then he goes aside, mimes bringing a spade and digging in short stabs. He sees something and covers his face.*)

Oh my child. My Gauri. A piece of my heart. Oh Oh Oh Oh. What has become of you? What happened? What did that devil Nana do? That monster. (*He stands up. Pushes the soil with his feet. Murder in his eyes. He becomes aware of Chandra. She trembles in fear.*)

You took the life of my dear child. . . (*He grabs her throat, chokes her to death, throws her down.*)

Die. Go to hell! (*He sits and cries like a child.*) Gauri, my dear—what happened to you, my daughter? How can I face your mother? What have I done? No, I didn't to anything. I didn't. Nana did all this. Nana, my enemy. Come on, you bastard, come. (*Nana comes, frightened, but with defiance. He stands still. Ghashiram looks at him murderously for a moment and then with incredulity.*)

Who? Nana—sahib . . .

NANA (*gulping but with courage*). It is I. (*Comes forward.*) Ghashya, how much more will you grieve? Now be calm. Whatever happened, protocol should not be forgotten. Don't forget that. Whom do you stand before? First you must bow. Now—bow. (*Ghashiram acts like a tamed animal. He bows, but murder is still in his eyes.*)

That's right. Good. We acknowledge your loyalty. By our

favour, you have become Kotwal. We are pleased with that.

GHASHIRAM. But, Nanasahib . . .

NANA (*comes towards Ghashiram gingerly. Ghashiram looks at him unblinkingly with wide-open red eyes. Nana cautiously puts his hand on his back.*)

We understand what has befallen you, Ghashya.

GHASHIRAM. But, Nanasahib, what have you done?

NANA. This is your misapprehension, nothing else. He—the Omnipresent—He makes everything happen . . . We are merely instruments . . . Enough, Ghashya. We offer our condolences.

GHASHIRAM (*pulls back with a jerk*). You deceive me, Nanasahib. You did this. You took my child's life. My only child. My innocent darling . . . You killed . . .

NANA (*drawing back*). Are you mad, you fool! Ghashya, child. These hands have never killed even an insect . . . In these hands is only the flute of Lord Krishna which made the Gopis forget hunger and thirst. (*With a flourish*) And you should think before you accuse the Peshwa's chief minister. Are you thinking correctly, Ghashya? To whom do you speak with such insubordination? The Peshwa's chief minister stands before you, Ghashya—

GHASHIRAM (*murder has not left his mind but he is numb*). Nanasahib.

NANA. Oh, now, what's this 'Nanasahib, Nanasahib!' Let's forget what's happened. All merges into the Ganga. Thou shalt not grieve over what is gone. The Vedas have said that. After all, Ghashya, will we live forever? (*Sighs.*) We too, every one of us, will leave, Ghashya. . . . This body is earth, just dirt. You cannot rely upon it. What comes, that goes. Four handfuls of ash remain.

GHASHIRAM. But . . . my daughter.

NANA. It is a misapprehension to think that she was here. It was illusion. The body will burn. It is misapprehension to think that she is no longer here. Death is without meaning, Ghashya. Life too is without meaning. No one belongs to anyone. No one is anyone's daughter. No one is anyone's

father. In the end, only oneself belongs to oneself. Life is a dance of four days' charm. One must do one's duty. That's enough. I am the Chief Minister. You are the Kotwal. These are our duties. So go, go to your duty. There is a great trust given to you, Ghashya. The responsibility of all Poona is yours alone. Ghashya, we are very pleased with you. Go—go to your work. We also go. Before you go, don't forget to bow . . . (*Nana stands with much more self-confidence, but his leg is trembling.*)

And yes, no more need be said concerning this. What has happened, happened. All the world need not know. Your good name. Your reputation is our reputation. Anyone's saying strange things about the Peshwa's Kotwal would be unbrahmanical. Every care should be taken that no one anywhere speaks of this. If you hear a gossip-monger, don't wait a second longer—cut off his head! This shall not come to the Peshwa's ear—that is my responsibility. Now go, Ghashi. Go. (*Ghashiram goes numbly.*)

Stay, Ghashi, you've made a mistake. You forgot to bow, you fool. (*Ghashiram bows.*)

Very good. It should be done right. You didn't mean it as a slight, now, did you? (*Ghashiram goes humbly. Nana claps his hands. Sutradhar comes in.*)

NANA. Remove Gauri's corpse and throw it in the river. If anyone finds so much as a bone, I'll break your bones . . .

*Nana begins to dance with a flourish. Sutradhar stands. Three men come. They sadly mime wrapping Gauri's body in a cloth and throwing it in the river. In the rear, the line forms and sings tenderly: 'Radhakrishna Hari, Ho, Mukunda Murari'. (Repeat.) This low singing goes on. Sutradhar comes forward.*

SUTRADHAR. Gauri went. Nana stays. Ghashiram engraved the sorrow of Gauri on his heart. The Kotwal's work must go on.

OTHERS. It must go on.

SUTRADHAR. Reputation—must be preserved.

OTHERS. Be preserved.

SUTRADHAR. Authority—must be preserved.

OTHERS. Be preserved.

SUTRADHAR. Trouble-makers must tremble.

OTHERS. Must tremble.

SUTRADHAR. So that crime may be prevented.

All—thieves and good people, the religious and the irreverent—All must be ruled strictly.

OTHERS. Ruled strictly, without a second thought.

SUTRADHAR. Without a second thought.

No one should pity Ghashiram Kotwal because his unmarried daughter died when she was pregnant.

OTHERS. No one should pity him.

*In the wings Ghashiram growls: 'Son of a pig. You are laughing at me. You laugh. Why? Tell me, why? You just wait. I'll smash your face'. Someone bellows like a cow in pain. Ghashiram says: 'Go. Die. I warn you—don't touch him'. He comes on stage. Looks different. Blood on his hands.*

GHASHIRAM (*looking at the blood the audience does not see*).

Feels good! (*Wanders on the stage, looking at the blood on his hands.*)

SUTRADHAR. Days go by, nights go by.

The Kotwal's style has changed.

OTHERS. His style has changed for the worse. (*Repeat.*)

SUTRADHAR. The way a wounded tiger becomes addicted to blood so the Kotwal has come to love the smell.

OTHERS. The Kotwal has acquired a penchant for human blood.

SUTRADHAR. Satisfaction he'll never find but nothing else delights his mind.

OTHERS. Nothing else delights the mind.

SUTRADHAR. The Kotwal for the slightest reason beats and kills in any season.

SUTRADHAR. The mouths of Poona people were dry with fear.

OTHERS. Dry with fear.

SUTRADHAR. No one's life was guaranteed.

Fear cut life in half, indeed!

OTHERS. Half a life, half a life, indeed.

*(During this, Ghashiram has gone inside.)*

SUTRADHAR. The situation was thus: no one knew where to complain.

*Brahman line suddenly starts: 'But the red light district was full of fun and games. Radhakrishna Hari, Govinda Murali'. Chanting goes on. Others from the line put on their turbans and join the two in the dance. The Bavannakhani scene is like the earlier one. From the wing come moaning, shrieks, hubbub. But Gulabi dances and sings lavani. Nana gives her his bracelet, pearl necklace. Both dance off stage.*

SUTRADHAR. Pundalika Varda Hari Viththal, Namdev, Tukaram.

*Half the line disperses and comes forward acting out a group of foreign Brahmans coming to Poona. The other half start singing in South Indian style. After they stop, one says in a Tanjore accent: 'Pandit—this is the city of Poona, isn't it?'*

SUTRADHAR. Yes, this is the brutish city.

STRANGER *(not understanding)*. What, the British city?

SUTRADHAR. What they call the city of Poona, this is it.

THIRD STRANGER. Much pleased, much pleased. Place to stay found.

FOURTH STRANGER. City of Poona. City of future. City of luck.

SUTRADHAR. Bad luck.

THIRD STRANGER. We've heard—lucky city.

SECOND STRANGER. Peshwa is merciful. Lion of giving. We heard—far away.

FIRST STRANGER. We poor. Came here asking way.



SUTRADHAR. You've come. (*Sarcastically*) That's just great. I hope fate shows you what you want. This is the city of Poona, gentlemen.

SECOND STRANGER. So happy. Free place to stay?

SUTRADHAR. There's no *dharmasala* near here. But stay in that garden. . . . No, no, not that one. That's the Kotwal's. Don't ever go anywhere near there. Stay in the one by the Ganesh temple. Spend the night. Find your fortune, if you can. But be careful. Ram. Ram.

*Sutradhar goes. The others relax as if they have reached the gardens. They lie down, sit down. One or another: 'Poona City'. 'Very beautiful'. 'Very nice'. 'Like the gold city of Lanka'. They point at one place or another. 'Parvati'. 'Chaturshringi'. 'Very beautiful'.*

ONE (*agitated*). I'm hungry.

ANOTHER. Hungry.

THIRD. Hungry. (*Looking upstage, brightens.*) Mangoes! Fruit!

FOURTH. Sweet fruit! (*They all happily wander over to the other garden.*)

GHASHIRAM (*bellowing from inside*). Who's that? Who's stealing fruit? (*Enters on a horse. All come confusedly together, eating imaginary fruit.*)

Now I've got you. Caught you red-handed, bastards. Who stole the fruit from the Kotwal's gardens? Rogues, thieves, rascals.

(*No one knows this is the Kotwal. They look at each other.*) Straighten up, all of you. (*They stand up wherever they are, but keep on eating the fruit.*) Stand up, I said. (*They don't pay much attention. Putting his hand to his moustache and biting his lips*) Breaking the Kotwal's rules! And disrespectful! (*Summons guards. Sutradhar and others become guards and come.*)

Take them all. Lock them all in the empty cell by the Kotwal's office for the night. I'll do justice to them in the morning. Take them off. (*The soldiers grab them roughly. Now*

*they are startled. They don't understand what has happened. The guards shove and push them along.)*

GHASHIRAM. Bastards—stealing the Kotwal's fruit! (*Goes out on his horse. The soldiers put the Brahmans in a cell offstage and shut and lock an imaginary door on stage.*)

SUTRADHAR (*coming back from the wings, says to his companion, coughing, as if he were the guard who put them in*). Ranba, the cell is too small and there are too many people, I think. I had to pack them in. They didn't fit until I shoved them in—like this. What days! Not enough prison cells in Poona. This is the Kali Yuga, the Dark Age. Come on, let's have a pipe and sleep until morning. (*He goes coughing. They all go and come back as Sutradhar and Brahman line.*)

SUTRADHAR. Night falls.

OTHERS. Falls.

SUTRADHAR. Midnight comes.

OTHERS. Comes.

SUTRADHAR. The city of Poona is lost in sleep.

OTHERS. Lost in sleep.

*Someone imitates a howling dog. And another. A third imitates a night patrol cry. The sounds become faint. From the cell: 'Help me. I'm dying. Can't breathe. Let me breathe. Mother! Somebody help . . .' Noise of suffocation.*

SUTRADHAR. The Brahmans in the cell can't get enough air. They are suffocating. They are moaning. They are in torment. They're calling for help. But who will help? Everyone's asleep. The guards are full of opium. During the night, some of the Brahmans died.

OTHERS. Died.

SUTRADHAR. Some of them half dead, were unconscious, started counting their last moments.

OTHERS. It's daybreak.

*From the wings, moans. Someone from the line crows like*

*a rooster. A Brahman hurriedly puts his turban on, muttering mantras. A cowherd calls his imaginary cows. Some more moans. Now a Maratha landowner comes in on a horse, hears the moans and pauses. Gets off his horse and goes to the prison. Runs back to the stage, excited.*

SARDAR (*calling*). Hey, is anybody there? Come! Run! Come here quickly! Run! Run! (*A Brahman from the line runs up.*) Break open that cell. People are suffocating inside. Break it open! Break it open! Bring them out. (*All run to the cell.*)

SUTRADHAR. The cell has been opened.

OTHERS. Opened.

SUTRADHAR. Twenty-two dead, the rest half dead. All are brought out.

*A mime of pulling out corpses. A mime according to the lines:*

OTHERS. Brought out.

SUTRADHAR. The Sardar begins to ask questions. Who put them in the cell?

OTHERS. Ghashiram Kotwal.

SUTRADHAR. Sardar Phakade is Ghashiram's enemy. He has a ready-made opportunity now.

OTHERS. A golden chance!

SUTRADHAR. He picked up the corpses, threw them down before the Peshwa, said 'Sir, give justice. Ghashiram suffocated these men. The crime?'

OTHERS. Stole fruit.

SUTRADHAR. 'Your Highness, a penalty of death for stealing fruit. What kind of justice is this?'

OTHERS. 'The justice of the dark city.  
That of the dark city.'

SUTRADHAR. 'What sort of reign is this?'

OTHERS. 'It's a Mughal reign, a Mughal reign, a Mughal reign.'

SUTRADHAR. 'And who rules here? You or—'

OTHERS. 'Ghashiram.'

SUTRADHAR. His Highness became furious, sent a message to Nana: 'Come to the palace now, as you are.'

OTHERS. But . . .

*Nana comes on stage, dancing a little and muttering his morning ritual. He calls to the wing: 'Tell him we got the message. Tell His Highness we'll finish our morning prayers and come'. Holding his sacred thread and muttering prayers he goes to the other wing and sits as if doing puja.*

SUTRADHAR. The chief minister is busy. The Peshwa waits for him. When will the minister come? The news spreads through Poona . . .

*In the Brahman line, low voices: 'Twenty-two', 'Brahman', 'Ghashiram', 'Murdered', 'Suffocated'—such words are muttered back and forth. Suddenly all this rises to a din. A tone of anger. Fists in the air. Pandemonium.*

SUTRADHAR. Poona Brahmans are furious.

OTHERS. Furious.

SUTRADHAR. They come to Nana's mansion.

*On the side, Nana is doing puja. On the other side, the mob grows louder. Sutradhar runs over to Nana.*

SUTRADHAR (*bowing*). Sir, bad news. Angry Brahmans have gathered in front of the palace.

NANA (*confused*). Huh! Angry Brahmans have gathered? . . .

What are you waiting for? Close the doors. Put on some more guards.

SUTRADHAR. The Brahmans are furious, sir. They are chanting. 'Let's go in'. There are thousands of them.

NANA. Entering my m-m-mansion? Don't let them.

SUTRADHAR. It's a serious situation!

NANA. Do a special *puja*. Pray to the Gods. Make a deal with the gods. Promise them anything.

SUTRADHAR. The Brahmans don't listen.

NANA. What do they want? What do they want?

SUTRADHAR. An order to behead Ghashiram Kotwal.

NANA (*stands in suspense. Suddenly a little jump*). O shit, is that all? Bring my pen, you idiot. Bring paper. (*Takes the instrument and writes.*) Take this. Take it. Give it to them. The order for Ghashya's death. Give it to 'em. Tell them to be happy. Tell them to humiliate him all they want. Run!

(*Sutradhar goes to the other corner of the stage.*)

SUTRADHAR. Brahmans Ho! Listen! Listen! As per your demands, the Peshwa's chief minister Nana Phadnavis has given the order for Ghashiram Kotwal's execution. First shave his head and anoint it with *sindur*. Then run him around town on a camel. Tie him to an elephant's leg and lastly give him the sentence of death. At the very end, tie one of his hands behind his back and let Ghashiram Savaldas face the mob.

*The Brahman line shouts with glee. At the other end of the stage, Nana is happy. The mob goes inside to the beat of a dholki.*

NANA. 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. (*Dances a little as he moves off stage.*)

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram's time has come.

OTHERS (*coming on stage*). The tide has turned. His good luck's gone.

SUTRADHAR. But—he doesn't know it yet! Even though Ghashiram ordered the Brahmans to be arrested, he didn't put them in jail himself. But . . .

OTHERS. His good luck's gone; his time has come.

SUTRADHAR. The Kotwal doesn't know. The Kotwal doesn't. . .

*Ghashiram comes in.*

GHASHIRAM. Who's there on watch? Who's there? Where have

all the bastards gone? (*Sutradhar as guard comes in coughing, rubbing eyes.*)

GHASHIRAM. Bastard, what have you been doing? Come on, open the cell. I'll show those fruit stealers what justice is!

(*The Sutradhar goes to the wings coughing and rubbing his eyes and comes back hastily.*)

SUTRADHAR. Sir, terrible news. The cell is empty.

GHASHIRAM. What! (*Stiffens.*) Idiot. And what were you doing! Who broke into the cell? How? Tell me! I'll skin the culprits, I'll hang them upside down—over a fire. I'll have their heads on a pike!

*Suddenly, on stage and off stage, angry shouts. In a moment the mob gathers aggressively, fiercely, in front of Ghashiram. Ghashiram is confused. Loud mob sounds.*

GHASHIRAM (*shouting*). Stop! Stop right there. What is it? What's happened? What's all this noise? Quiet, you fools.

(*For a moment the mob is rooted to the ground.*)

Go on back. Go back. Go on. Or I'll rip up every one of you.

*The mob begins to surround him one step at a time. Ghashiram starts backing, as if surrounded by animals, and the mob encircles him. Suddenly, a great shout. Ghashiram cannot be seen. The mob's jungle sounds fade out. The mob members with their backs to the audience turn around and the line forms. Ghashiram has disappeared.*

SUTRADHAR. The mob got Ghashiram Kotwal.

OTHERS. They got him. They got him.

SUTRADHAR. They beat him.

They shaved his head.

They *sindured* his head.

They rode him around on a camel.  
They tied him to the leg of an elephant.  
The city of Poona watched it all.

OTHERS. They watched it all. They watched it all.

With big round eyes they watched it all.

SUTRADHAR. And in the end came the End.

*Ghashiram, one hand tied behind his back, comes on stage.  
He has been beaten. Disfigured. Bloody.*

Ghashiram was thrown in front of the Brahmans with one hand tied behind his back.

*The Brahman line crouches like hunters. Once in a while they give a shout or mime an action such as throwing stones.*

GHASHIRAM. Hit me. Beat me. Beat me some more. Hit me!

*(Suddenly Ghashiram shields his face as if a stone hit him.)*

Why stay so far away? Come on, you cowards. Still scared? I spit on you. Beat me. Come on, beat me. Come on. Come on. Stone me, Cowards. Pig shit! Come on and beat me. I dare you. Hit me. Look—one of my hands is tied. And you're scared! Come on, beat me. Crush me! *(The mob yells.)*

Ghashiram Savaldas! Ghashiram Savaldas! I danced on your chests but I wasted the life of my little daughter. I should be punished for the death of my daughter. Beat me. Beat me. Hit me. Cut off my hands and feet. Crack my skull. Come on, come on. Look! I'm here. Oh, that's good. Very good.

*The mob shouts. The drums beat loud and fast. Ghashiram begins to move in a sort of dance as if dying to the beat of the drum. Falls, gets up, falls, growls like an animal. Crawls. Tosses his body around. Jerks in spasms. Falls and falls*

*again while trying to rise. Death dance. The crowd's shouting continues. Finally Ghashiram lies motionless. Nana comes in a palanquin with the chief minister's pomp. Royal clothing. Gets down from the palanquin and raises one hand to calm the crowd.*

NANA. Ladies and gentlemen. Citizens of Poona. A threat to the great city of Poona has been ended today. (*The crowd cheers.*) A disease has been controlled. The demon Ghashya Kotwal, who plagued all of us, has met his death. Everything has happened according to the wishes of the gods. The mercy of the gods is with us always.

*(He nudges the corpse of Ghashiram with his walking stick.)*

Let the corpse of sinful Ghashya rot. Let the wolves and dogs have it. Let the worms have it. Whoever attempts to take away this corpse will be punished. Whoever mourns for him will be hanged. All living relatives of Ghashya Savaldas will be found, bound, and expelled from the city. We have ordered that from this day forward, not a word, not a stone relating to the sinner shall survive. We have commanded that there be festivities for three days to mark this happy occasion.

*The crowd shouts. Cheers. The line forms. Cymbals. Red powder. Festivity. Now Gulabi comes dancing. Nana's wives come dancing. Nana joins, dancing, in all of this. The crowd dances.*

ALL TOGETHER. Ganapati dances the Ganapati dance.  
Brahmans of Poona bow and prance.  
Now sound the drum beat!  
Now let the drama heat!  
Heaven, hell and earth—complete!  
Shri Ganaraya . . .

