

Generations of Despair: Theocracy, Masculinity and Patriarchy as Reflected in *Kirwant*

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ABSTRACT

Patriarchy, when held as one of the highest forms of virtues or universalised truth of society subjugates women, children, and particularly men. '*Kirwant*' compels an observation of quintessential Indian men, their children, and women within one such system. Originally published in Marathi, it voices exploitation of the kirwants, brahmin-subcaste. Their suffering remains a cyclical phenomenon under a theocratic structure. The burden of legacy in the masculine-patriarchal framework remains as much of an issue as the broadly elaborated caste context. This probe into the masculine values of *Kirwant's* theocratic society is undertaken through the text's close analysis. The textual data signifies the imposition of patriarchal norms as the cause of despair for many generations. Additionally, it seeks to explain how the lead male characters were at stake in the hands of patriarchy regardless of being male themselves. The paper explores Indian society's socio-cultural aspects of the lives of kirwants as reflected in Gajvee's drama.

KEYWORDS

Patriarchy; Casteism; Female subjugation; Religion; Theocracy.

Introduction

Dominance under the pretext of religion or God remains an interesting political subject. Besides the pronounced caste stigma in the drama *Kirwant*, originally published in Marathi, patriarchy and theocracy stay affixed. The relationship is so tangled and essentially co-dependent that it becomes critical to separately identify these attributes. Deep within the insight of the backward caste system of India exists a concealed basal heritage of patriarchy and theocracy. Countless men of Indian history are represented through a few characters in

this drama. It is but a window into the pain of not just children and women, but primarily men in a patriarchal system.

Various studies talk about it within socio-cultural concerns with respect to the caste system; the division and stratification of flesh and blood. The need for caste, however, brings forth the need for elaboration on where it stems from and how it is accomplished in the given context. Being born into a male-dominated society means the inheritance of the father's title by both male and female heirs. With title comes the occupation which predominantly classifies as identity

too. The root and reference of the term 'Patriarchy' here for the drama is remarkable due to its origins signifying the familial male heads or religious Fathers.

The men of *Kirwant* exemplify the inherited despair which comes along with merely being a man who is one of the designated scapegoats of society's institutions. This is particularly true in religiously stringent nations such as India. Fiercely proposed by Premanand Gajvee, the helplessness felt due to the overpowering burden of being within a patriarchal society leads to a tragic conclusion in Siddheshwar's family. Siddheshwar, his brother Vasudev and his son Madhu all share the same fate. The idea of a strong possibility is what denotes 'fate' here, a harsh, strong possibility that they bear by just existing as children of Kirwants. As seen in the lives of Siddheshwar's family, something as abstract as the stratification of flesh over purity holds more power in their lives than the existing proof of their contribution towards society. All this is because of the patriarchal values within and around them.

Patriarchy functions effortlessly here with something that could be identified fairly as a theocracy. Theocracy is perceived in *Kirwant* through the display of power held by its Brahmin pandits. Their word is taken for law in the religiously dominant society. The influence of high-caste Brahmin pandits is sought so seriously that it subjects Siddheshwar's family to severe boycott. The dialogues highlight their pain which largely voices the lives of real-life kirwants, the ones who perform 'Kriya Karam' / cremation rites. Through the experiences of the characters, below is a discussion that presents Kirwants' fate as a cyclical despair when at the mercy of a society engulfed in patriarchy and theocracy.

Literature Review

Kirwant offers deep insight into Indian society and its predominant nature. It has been popular in Indian tabloids and discussions for Gajvee's progressive vision. The writer gives voice to many of those who had been living without one. The play is especially discussed in the context of caste injustice and the irrevocable damage it causes.

Kadam speaks of *Kirwant's* upper caste brahmins as an establishment that desires to outlive their relevance. They try to retain their existing order by having the rebels battle amongst themselves while others can safely enjoy the slaughter. Digambarshastri would try to nullify the rebellions by going to any extent. He even advises Siddheshwar to kill his younger brother Vasudev for having gone against religious beliefs and refusing his 'dharma'/duties. (186)

M. Dahat elaborates on Siddheshwar as a traditionalist and reasons that he hence doesn't much mind the ill-treatment meted out by the older and higher caste Brahmins. In fact, if it were up to him he'd have his younger brother and son embrace this culture and occupation, but his brother doesn't agree with him on this. (83)

M. Arun Mohan discusses how Vasudev rebels against society by refusing to carry forward the Kirwant lineage by marrying a girl from the same caste. He states:

According to Vasudeo, inter-caste marriage is the only way to annihilate the caste-system which seems to be correct. India has a male-dominated society where father's caste is considered as the children's caste by birth. (106)

The writer intends to convey about the rigid caste system in our nation. It was futuristic writing for the time. Besides the caste system, the previous findings discuss about dominance of a pro-

traditionalist mindset wherein political control too is deemed. On the contrary, Vasudev's rebellion becomes a mirror to contemplate the influential patriarchy.

Methodology

The presented matter is obtained through a close textual analysis of the cited data that ranges over the translated work of *Kirwant* alongside both English and Marathi language secondary sources. The data is thoroughly read and compared within itself for any patterns which direct towards the scope of further discussions. Thus, a breakdown of how patriarchs both submissively and obstinately keep their legacy alive is put forth. It also includes a supporting elaboration of theocracy as reflected in the drama.

The findings are presented in a descriptive sense to efficiently be able to lay out the instances of patriarchy and theocracy. These may have been overlooked earlier due to most of the research on caste stigma.

Discussion

A social issue cannot remain universal in itself, and instead may covertly indicate an underlying crisis which remains an essential factor for it. This applies to the framework of Indian society too. The infamous caste system is essentially patriarchal. Inheritance of wealth, name, identity and the need for masculinity is its regular commandment. Mankind's social foundations which initialised on these grounds are also the best reflection of its survival instinct. The ultimate need of life is survival and for this, throughout the years there have been alterations in social foundation. It develops with synchronicity to the demands of time. Nevertheless, patriarchy pursues. It is pursued as men continue validating it internally as a bearing of their survival instinct.

This is especially true when analysing the lives of the characters in

Kirwant. Drawing us to the real-life experiences of the kirwant sub-caste, we see that amidst the emphasised caste system what is to be held accountable is patriarchy which is taken no notice of. Besides, the caste system also reflects upon the control of religion over the human mind. People find mental security in submission despite the social injustice that happens under the pretext of religion. A detailed examination of the patriarchal standards and the political cum social dominion of the Brahmin priests/pandits is presented hereafter.

Patriarchy

As observed in Siddheshwar's family, he is the decision maker being the eldest son alive. His forefathers too were kirwants by profession and hence, he desires for Madhu to acquire the same skills. Indulged in a patriarchal lifestyle by default, the conflict thus arises as Vasudev wishes for a different life. He does not submit to the society's expectations of being a scapegoat like his elder brother. The Kirwant subcaste carries forward its tradition of performing cremation rites by passing on the parentage to its children. A male heir ought to carry forward the legacy by performing the rites, whereas the female child is later married off to a suitable groom from another Kirwant family. Revati herself had to be a daughter of Kirwant to have been able to get married to Siddheshwar.

She has also been wanting to marry her younger sister to Vasudev. Whereas, being someone reluctant about religious involvement, Vasudev wishes to marry someone outside of his caste. Owing to his troublesome experiences as the son of a Kirwant, his faith lies in practicality rather than religious resurrection. Neither does he wish to continue his family's legacy, nor does he wish for his nephew to take it forward. He takes charge of his nephew's education and insists that he be educated only in a regular school and not one propagating Hindu philosophy.

He intends to break the patriarchal chain by marrying outside of his caste. Upon his refusal to marry her younger sister, Revati challenges his ideology by asking him how he plans to get rid of the shackles of caste. After all, marrying a girl from another caste won't suffice, since his offspring will still be that of a Kirwant:

Vasudeo: How? Simple! The girl I marry won't be a kirwant girl.

Revati: Okay, but what about you?

Vasudeo: What do you mean?

Revati: What of your being a kirwant? What about the children born to you? Your children will bear your name. Because you are a kirwant, your children will always be considered kirwants. (63)

Vasudev unlike others is a fearless individual. Despite the display of toxic masculinity around him, he does not submit to the gender roles a male child has to adhere to. His being comfortable marrying outside of his caste shows that he wishes to get rid of the caste trauma as much as not finding it belittling for a husband to incorporate into his wife's culture. However, after much contemplation, he realises that Revati points out the harsh truth. He can never stand a chance against the system despite trying to pave a way across the 'loopholes. The ultimate outcome cannot be manipulated even if the journey is. He may set himself free from the patriarchal burden by marrying a girl from a different background, but society will always have his child bear the paternal identity. Besides, the girl he desires to marry comes from a higher stratum so he knows the odds are against him. He then announces that he better stay unmarried.

Most of the characters function as patriarchs willingly or unwillingly; the victims and the suppressors both. Siddheshwar for instance insists that they continue living in the same place despite their boycott as it is the only home left

behind by his forefathers. He compares embracing his forefathers' duties and occupation to God's purpose. He fears ever abandoning them as it will be the gravest sin according to him.

Siddheshwar: Why are you tormenting me? Should I neglect my duty and incur the sins of disgracing my forefathers by disobeying them? I shall not do it as long as I am alive. Whenever I as much as think of abandoning my religious duty, I get nightmares and experience the stranglehold of Death. I feel like I have been flung into a cauldron of boiling oil. (24)

His wife Revati too spends most of her time in the kitchen. She has her own views but is not seen as being too fixated upon them. Revati, Mohan states, is not as rebellious and morally strong as Gajvee's other women characters (212). Despite sensing injustice towards herself and her family, she has no power to change it as she depends on her husband's decisions. Although women are not benefited under a patriarchal system, sometimes accustomed to the traditional ways they too facilitate its persistence.

Compelled onto institutions as a default law, patriarchy lays out the socio-cultural proceedings as repetitive. Pain arises due to the conflict in choices. Many people who wish to help themselves out of the indifference experienced by them find it difficult to do so due to the unsupportive distribution of power and toxic masculinity.

Vedant: Be quiet, Dhabushastri. I told you we should have turned back. Not only have you been insulted, thanks to you, so have I. That too by a woman-and a kirwant woman at that! (51)

Masculinity at its disastrous best potential is perceived in most characters. Dhabushastri and Vedantashastri visit Siddheshwar's house amidst the chaos

happening lately. Revati attends to them in a state of being emotionally disturbed. Upon being confronted for causing a disturbance in her household by unnecessary mud-slinging, both brahmins feel corrupted and humiliated as it was a woman questioning them. Since Revati is a Kirwant woman, they feel all the way more humiliated.

Theocracy

In present times many forms of extremities are recognised in leaderships across the world. One such extremity is ruling in the name of God. Many Middle Eastern countries and other regions of the world consider the religious code as the manuscript of life. In Vedic India and up until now religious scriptures were sought as life manuals. Regardless, as witnessed time and again, religious extremities shape into political motives and control. The situation in *Kirwant* is no different as Siddheshwar's family is alienated by everyone in the community under the insistence of some influential and older Brahmins.

Digambarshastri, Vedantshastri, and Dhabushastri are three main brahmin priests who dream for Peshwa period. They decide to take revenge of refusal of the last rite of Vedantshastri's mother. Hence, they excommunicate Sidheshwar. (Mohan 109)

Dhabushastri, Digambarshastri and a whole lot bunch associated within this circle hold greater power accounting to their religious position and privilege. With their influence, they convince others to boycott the family. The local grocer refuses to provide them with supplies as he fears the other Brahmins and people will stop buying from him. The family has survived on the bare minimum for days. This torture is afflicted to assert one's own dominance over the other.

The question which is usurped is the purpose of exercising such social and political control through religion. Mankind is egotistical in nature. As perceived in the dialogues, most of the elder priests seem entitled and exhibit narcissistic behavioural patterns. With closed perspectives and a lack of consideration for others around, a disorder such as narcissism is only due.

Besides maintaining their dominance, the purpose is to control knowledge. For the longest time control of knowledge remained the reason for Brahmin supremacy. Designated roles were maintained stringently since early India which inevitably structured the distribution of resources and functions of an individual. Education in Sanskrit was limited only to the ones at a higher stratum. Despite being a Brahmin, under this stratification scheme, Madhu is positioned a level beneath as he is a son of Kirwant hence, any other puranas/scriptures except Garud Purana (read at the time of cremation rites) are irrelevant to him.

In the second scene, Dhabushastri visits Siddheshwar's home to find Madhu reading Dnyaneshwari, a Hindu holy scripture. He insists Madhu has no business with the sacred scripture owing to his familial position in this stratified religious foundation.

Dhabu: Go ahead and learn it by heart but you cannot make a living out of Dnyaneshwari. For that you have to learn how to perform the last rites. (15)

Furthermore, Madhu's education at a regular school is frowned upon. Vasudev also expresses how the Brahmin legacy continues regardless of lack of substantiality. He believes that the value other people invest in the make-believe is what supports the Brahmin legacy. Madhu is discriminated against and expected to stick to the scriptures of cremation rites prescribed to a Kirwant

Brahmin, whereas it is also unbearable that he goes to a regular school. So, it means that against his best interests, he is expected to refrain from a regular school alongside choosing the path of being discriminated against only because it keeps the supremacy of these Brahmins and their future generations alive.

Conclusion

Patriarchal values remain the foundational element of the much-discussed caste theme in *Kirwant*. Theocracy is another prominent observation in the development of the story. Amidst such male-centric values, power lies in the hands of the men and religious heads. Brahmins believed to be the mediators with Gods, were appointed for pujas and secured the highest place in

the Indian hierarchy. The story of *Kirwant* is unique as it voices the despair of generations of Kirwants, the lower sub-caste Brahmins. Siddheshwar's life is destined to have the same painful experiences as his father's. His younger brother Vasudev who constantly rebels against the patriarchal and theocratic standards of his society fails relentlessly. Towards the end of the drama, Madhu, Siddheshwar's son, is seen ending up with the same constrained fate his father had once lived. Patriarchy is not a threat for just women and children, but men too. It causes generations of trauma. The destruction faced by Siddheshwar, hopelessness in Madhu's future and futility of Vasudev's rebel testifies to this end.

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