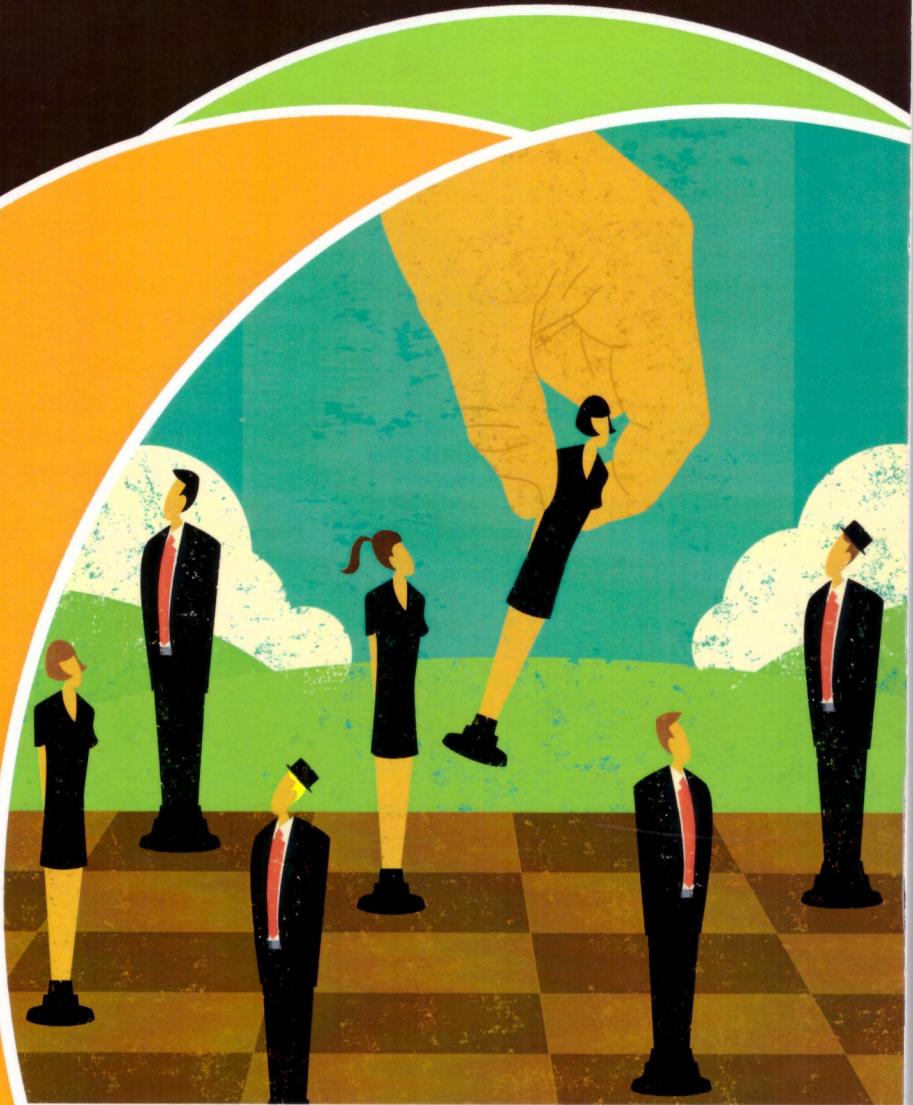


Gender Diversity and Development



Prin. Dr. Ancy Jose
Editor-in-Chief

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Politico-Sexual Use of Women in Vijay Tendulkar's 'Ghashiram Kotwal' And 'Kamala'

Nita U. Dhote

Dept. of English NAGINDAS KHANDWALA COLLEGE,

Malad, Mumbai

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to make a comparative study of two of Vijay Tendulkar's famous plays: 'Ghashiram Kotwal' and 'Kamala'. Tendulkar, the well-known Marathi playwright, has been the vanguard of not just Marathi but Indian theatre too, alongside Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh and Girish Karnad. Written in Marathi and subsequently translated into English, his plays were trailblazers because they introduced modernity into Indian theatre. 'Ghashiram Kotwal'(1973) and 'Kamala' (1981) – one, a political play replete with Marathi folk forms, song-dance-percussion and the other, a topical drama written in the naturalistic mode, depict how the Indian woman – be it in the 18th century or in the 20th, has always been an object of sexual pleasure, to be 'sold' for political motives by the men who control them. Whenever it fancies them, they make use of these submissive women to further their careers, use them or offer them as sexual playthings only to dispose them off when they either tire of them or when their purpose is served. In this patriarchal society where the man's word is law, it reflects on the moral turpitude of such power-wielding men who have absolutely no respect for the women around them – indicating thereby, the degenerating values of such a society.

Keywords: *Objectification of Women, Sexual Playthings, Moral Turpitude, Reflex, Degenerating Values in a Patriarchal Indian Society*

INTRODUCTION

Vijay Tendulkar (1928 – 2008) was a leading Indian playwright, movie and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist, and social commentator primarily in Marathi. With his contemporaries, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh and Girish Karnad, he infused a new quality in Indian theatre – modernism. He deals with the complexities of human relationships. Contemporary in his concerns, his plays critique the oppression of the weak by the powerful. His vast oeuvre of 28 full-length plays, 7 collections of one-acts, 6 of children's plays, 4 of short stories, 3 of essays, a novel and 17 film scripts – were all produced in a career spanning fifty years. He is best known for his plays *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe* (1967), *Ghashiram* 370. **Gender Diversity and Development**

Kotwāl (1972), and Sakhārām Binder (1972). Many of Tendulkar's plays derived inspiration from real-life incidents or social upheavals. His artistic consciousness gave his plays a ring of socio-psychological truth.

OBJECTIVE OF THIS PAPER

This paper attempts to make a comparative study of two of Vijay Tendulkar's famous plays: 'Ghashiram Kotwāl'(1973) and 'Kamala'(1981) - [hereafter referred to as GK and K, respectively] the first, a political play replete with Marathi folk forms, song-dance-percussion and the second, a topical drama written in the naturalistic mode, depict how the Indian woman - be it in the 18th century or in the 20th, has always been an object of sexual pleasure, to be 'sold' for political motives by the men who control ^{her} them. Whenever it fancies them, they make use of these submissive women to further their careers, use them or offer them as sexual playthings only to dispose them off when they either tire of them or when their purpose is served. In this patriarchal society where the man's word is law, it reflects on the moral turpitude of such power-wielding men who have absolutely no respect for the women around them - indicating thereby, the degenerating values of such a society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several critics have analysed these plays independently. According to Shanta Gokhale, 'it is his women, on account of their unique position in society, who help to reveal his (Tendulkar's) social conscience ...' ¹ According to her, all men exploit women- even the so-called educated and liberal minded ones. She sees in Tendulkar a compulsive humanist, whose abiding concerns have been man's fight for survival (e.g. Ghashiram Savaldas, the Brahmin from Kannauj), the varied moralities by which people live (Nana Phadnavis, Ghashiram, the Pune Brahmins in GK and Jaisingh Jadhav or his band of journalist colleagues - like Jain- in K) the social position of women (like Gulabi & Ghashiram's young daughter, Lalitagauri in GK and Sarita Jadhav & the tribal slave Kamala in 'K'), the covert or overt violence in human beings (Ghashiram, Nana & Jaisingh). M. H. Siddiqui opines that besides being an aspiration for power, GK "shows a confrontation between the materialistic and the spiritual power."² (pg. 81: '**Sex, Power and Ambition in Ghashiram Kotwāl**' - article by M. H. Siddiqui, appeared in '**The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar- Critical Explorations**' Eds: Amar Nath Prasad and Satish Barbuddhe - Sarup & Sons Publication - 2008) Ghashiram Savaldas deadens his God-gifted spiritual and moral consciousness by sacrificing his daughter, the young Lalitagauri, on the altar of the voracious sexual appetite

of the Peshwa's Chancellor (chief minister/administrator), Nana Phadnavis (Balaji Janardhan Bhanu [1742-1800]) for the gratification of his material power, his lofty ambition to become the Kotwal of Poona in order to avenge the humiliation he had undergone at the hands of the Poona Brahmins as a newcomer there. Mrs. P. Pramila Devi asserts that in K, "Tendulkar's aim is to probe into the characters of the play as much as required for the exemplification of the theme of exploitation of women by the educated male society. And he has successfully done it through Jaisingh's egoism and his domination over the women characters."³ (pg.117: 'Vijay Tendulkar's "Kamala":The Theatre of Cruelty - article by Mrs. P. Pramila Devi, appeared in 'The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar- Critical Explorations' Eds: Amar Nath Prasad and Satish Barbuddhe - Sarup & Sons Publication - 2008)

THE PLOT

Ghashiram Kotwal (1973) draws on history to illustrate the major issue of power politics and to reflect on contemporary reality. The play dramatizes the conflict between Ghashiram Kotwal, the eponymous hero and Nana Phadnavis, the Chief Minister of the Peshwa of Pune in the nineteenth century.

Ghashiram, an innocent Brahmin of Kanauj, comes to Pune to try his luck. But he suffers unexpected humiliations at Poona when he is wrongly accused of theft and, therefore imprisoned - despite vehement protests. He is released from the jail with a warning never to set foot in Poona again. He vows vengeance - this urge converts him into a fiend. He exploits Nana's weakness for women. He buys the post of the Kotwal of Poona at the cost of his beautiful unmarried daughter. She lives with him as a concubine, while Ghashiram rules over Poona with an iron hand and complete arrogance. He misuses (and abuses) his power to have his revenge; as a result, he is widely hated and cursed.

Nurturing dreams of finding a good bridegroom for his daughter and of celebrating her wedding, with pomp and show, he is shocked to learn that his daughter has died during an attempt to abort an unwanted pregnancy. But far from becoming mellow and wise, Ghashiram grows even more vindictive in his actions. One day, he gets some Brahmins arrested and put in a small cell merely for plucking flowers. Twenty-two of them die as a result of suffocation. He is held responsible for the deaths. The law of retribution starts working and a mob of angry Poona Brahmins, with Nana's sanction, surround and beat Ghashiram severely. Bloodied and disfigured,

realisation dawns, and in his dying words, he reconciles with his lot:
"....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. Hit me...Crack
my skull....."⁴ (Tendulkar Vijay: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, Seagull Books,
Calcutta, 2002 p- 61)

In the play *Kamala* (1981), Kamala, a tribal woman of Karimsharif near
Luhardaga, Bihar, is purchased from a flesh trade market there, by a self-
seeking journalist of New Delhi, Jaisingh Jadhav. He buys her for 250
rupees, to prove that such auctions are a reality. He presents Kamala in
a press conference in New Delhi, in the same torn sari that she has been
wearing throughout. His intention is to create sensation at the expense of
the poor Adivasi woman. Kamala is presented as an item of entertainment
and the pressmen make vulgar enquiries of her. After proving his point,
Jaisingh sends her to a women's home. When Sarita, Jaisingh's wife, asks
him whether he has thought of Kamala's feelings, he tries to convince her
that Kamala will find the home a luxury. In a 'use and throw' manner, Kamala
is discarded like a piece of scrap paper and forced to seek refuge in an alien
city among total strangers. But the viewer realises that Jaisingh exploits
not only Kamala but also his wife, Sarita. This sensation-seeking journalist,
who claims to be the champion of Adivasi women's rights and wants to bring
about a revolution in the outlook of society through his articles, is utterly
selfish, cruel and insensitive to the feelings of his wife. He treats her like a
slave – an unpaid Personal Secretary to handle all his phone calls. He never
cares for her pain or pleasure and frequently insults and distrusts her.

Kamala's innocent but incisive question, "How much did he buy you for?"
(pg. 34, K) opens Sarita's eyes and, for the first time, she finds no difference
between herself and Kamala. Sarita now realises her self-worth and comes
into her own. Her self- awareness helps her grow into an independent and
assertive woman. She decides to convene a press conference at which she
intends to expose to the world, the real state of affairs at home.

"I am going to present a man who in the year 1982 still keeps a slave,
right here in Delhi. Jaisingh Jadhav. I am going to say this man's a great
advocate of freedom. And he brings home a slave and exploits her. He
doesn't consider a slave a human being—just a useful object. One you can
use and throw away. He gets people to call him a sworn enemy of tyranny.
But he tyrannizes his own slave as much as he likes, and doesn't think
anything of it—nothing at all. Listen to the story of how he bought the slave
Kamala and made use of her. The other slave he got free—not just free—the

slave's father shelled out the money—a big sum."⁵ (pg. 46 – 'Kamala' tr by Priya Adarkar, Vijay Tendulkar- Five Plays, OUP, Bombay, 1992)

At this point, she learns that Jaisingh's boss has dismissed him from his job. He has got the sack for making things problematic for the powers that be in the journalism world. Sarita defers her own decision to provide Jaisingh the moral support he needs. She decides to stop being a slave; but not a compassionate human being. The play ends on a note of optimism with Sarita's words echoing in our ears, "But a day will come, Kakasaheb, when I will stop being a slave. I'll no longer be an object to be used and thrown away."⁶ (Ibid – pg 52)

THE POLITICO-SEXUAL ELEMENT: A DOUBLE EDGED SWORD AGAINST WOMEN

'Feminism' believes that women should have the same right, power and opportunity that men have. In this way, it serves as an aid to women empowerment. It is an ideology which seeks not only to understand the world but also to change it to the advantage of women. In order to understand women's position in the world, one has to understand the system of patriarchy. Not only have men looked at women from this viewpoint; "they have even forced women to look at themselves from the male point of view.....(And) basic to patriarchy is the division of sex and gender roles."⁷) (pg. 169 article by Vijay Kumar Sinha: **Feminist Concern in Vijay Tendulkar's Plays** appeared in 'The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar- Critical Explorations' Eds: Amar Nath Prasad and Satish Barbuddhe – Sarup & Sons Publication – 2008

Milton's line, 'He for God only, she for God in him' could well be an example of the almost universally held assumption that while man's purpose in life is to serve God, the state and society, woman's purpose is to serve man. He is seen as the norm, woman as the 'other' - different, inferior and lacking. Personality traits too are similarly distinguished - men are considered to be bold, strong, assertive, independent, aspiring, rational, logical (Ghashiram, Nana, Jaisingh and Kakasaheb); women, on the contrary, are considered to be timid, yielding, gentle, dependent, self-sacrificing, emotional, intuitive (Lalitagauri, Sarita and Kamala). Women are therefore relegated to a secondary position - one wouldn't know what women feel and experience except for what men have thought women to be.

And - the tools men use to subjugate women are: politics (via ambition) and sex. (When these are in conjunction, violence is never far.) Women

are 'sold' for political motives by the men who control them. Whenever it
fancies them, they make use of these submissive women to further their
careers, use them or offer them as sexual playthings only to dispose them
off when they either tire of them or when their purpose is served. In this
patriarchal society where the man's word is law, it reflects on the moral
turpitude of such power-wielding men who have absolutely no respect for
the women around them - indicating thereby, the degenerating values of
such a society. "Tendulkar's case is that all men are exploiters of women,
even those who wear the garb of education and liberalism."⁸ (pg. 95:

**'Tendulkar on His Own Terms'- article by Shanta Gokhale, appeared
in 'Vijay Tendulkar' - Katha Publication - 2001).** (like Jaisingh Jadhav
in K). They thus disregard all norms of a civilised society by their shabby
treatment of women. Tendulkar debunks and defies the male hypocrisy and
their supposed authority in his plays - all his plays deal with complex human
relationships and the social individual tensions that result. Let us see how.

'Ghashiram Kotwal' is a discourse of power, power grabbed through the
nastiest of barter arrangements, by selling his daughter's modesty. This
power game is 'played out against a background of political and moral
decadence and degeneracy, with sexuality impinging on strategies of power'
(Bandyopadhyay: Tendulkar, 2002, 3). Tendulkar's lessons of perceived
history drawing upon ~~received history about the~~ lecherousness of Nana
going in for as many as nine marriages enable him to create a dirty hypocrite
who wagers on prestige for grabbing Ghashiram's daughter, 'Our grandeur's
gone if she's not had..... What a bosom! Buds just blossoming.....We'll
squeeze them like this!' (pg. 24 GK). In his desperate pursuit of Lalitagauri
(Ghashiram's youthful daughter), the aging Nana is not afraid to express his
lust even in front of a Ganesh idol.

Nana: (Voice of lust) Child, what do you want? All your dreams this Nana
will fulfil. (He puts a hand on her shoulder. She pulls back.) 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 to Ganapati) He.

Nana: That idol of holiness? That all holy Ganapati? The maker of Good?
..... If you sit on our lap, he won't say anything about that! (pg. 22, GK)

This shows Nana's spiritual emptiness. Though he calls her a child, he is
a wolf seeking to satisfy his lust. He knows that the religious idol can do

nothing to save the girl. It is ironic that the idol the girl prays to, also fails to save her chastity. Thus, an innocent girl is misused in the presence of the idol. The religious atmosphere created by the Haridasa's kirtan just before this scene and the sexual rhythms have been deliberately intermingled to heighten the tragedy. The fact that the Haridasa's abhanga changes to a lavani foretells the imminent fall that the unsuspecting Gauri will face. The religious note of the play is actually a facade.

The reader is quite shocked to see the monstrous, metamorphic change in the humiliated Ghashiram. The man who "came here to find my fortune - and lost my reputation ... What will happen to my wife? To my daughter? What will they say when they hear of this?" (pg. 19 GK) craftily (and shamelessly) tells Nana, "If the hunter is ready, the prey will be found." (pg. 23 GK) He does this only to attain his moot goal - retribution for the inhumanity of the Poona Brahmins. He manoeuvres Nana's uncontrolled sensuality for his own benefit, rejecting the voice of his conscience and sense of morality. With Nana's blessings, he assumes the powerful position of the Kotwal, and then, unleashes a reign of terror in the city.

Nana: No! send her. I'll make you the 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." (pg.29 GK)

Ghashiram feels that the Kotwali will bring him absolute power but he fails to realise that he has played irrevocably, into the hands of Nana Phadnavis, a higher power centre. Even in this sinister bargain Nana enjoys twofold benefits - personal and political. He has the privilege of having Ghashiram's daughter along with using him as an instrument against the Poona Brahmins. He shrewdly says: "What'll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do; our Kotwal pays. 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." (pg. 29 GK)

But by failing to recognise the true face of Nana Phadnavis, Ghashiram loses his ways in the labyrinths of power. In this play the victim victimises the victimiser but the tables are turned, & ultimately, the victimiser victimises the victim again. Ghashiram meets his tragic doom as he transgresses the law of God (sinning against his daughter) as well as that of Nana whose power remains unchallenged till the end. Ghashiram exerts power over his

powerless daughter by handing her over to the all-powerful Nana (but the plan eventually boomerangs on him). Thus, both, Nana and Ghashiram- the paternal figures in Gauri's life - use her for their own selfish motives.

Vijay Tendulkar in Kamala makes use of satire to scoff at the hypocrisy of the urban upper middle class - the suffering, victimisation and commodification of women.

Kamala was inspired by a real life incident—the Indian Express expose by Ashwin Sarin, who actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market and presented her at a press conference. Using this incident as a launching pad, Tendulkar raises certain cardinal issues regarding the value system of a modern, success-oriented generation who are ready to sacrifice human values in the name of humanity itself. He explores the position of women in contemporary Indian society through Sarita, Jaisingh Jadhav's wife, who is, in her own way, as exploited as Kamala. Tendulkar exposes the chauvinism intrinsic in the modern Indian male who pretends to be liberal minded. Jadhav never stops to think what will happen to Kamala after this expose. Tendulkar makes a jibe at the modern concept of journalism which stresses the sensational. For this he uses Kakasaheb, a journalist of the old school, who runs a small vernacular paper with his own resources. Kakasaheb represents the true ideals of journalism and in contrast to these, Jadhav's concept of newspaper reporting is shown in a critical light. This shows the elitist nature of the journalism practised by Jadhav. By introducing Jadhav's colleague into the play, Tendulkar depicts the true nature of the rat race and power politics that goes on in this milieu. At the end, Jaisingh himself becomes the pawn for he is cast off (dismissed from his job) for displeasing political superiors in the system. So the victimiser (like Ghashiram in GK), becomes the victim - he gets a taste of his own medicine. Unable to stomach the humiliation, he collapses.

Like Kamala, Sarita too functions as a mere pawn in Jadhav's game of chess. However, she becomes aware of her real condition only through an unexpected conversation with Kamala. Though highly educated, Sarita has let herself be reduced to the status of a slavish, docile wife - a mere Personal Secretary. Jaisingh is very peremptory, insulting and dictatorial with her. He represents male egoism and domination causing exploitation and mistreatment of women.

Only women understand the problems of women—this fact emerges from the frank and unreserved conversation between Sarita and Kamala.

Tendulkar demonstrates the bestiality and monstrosity possible in a family. The Sarita - Jadhav relationship represents the decomposing state of family where even the outward facade of decency has evaporated. Only the desire to possess fame remains. The play ends on a hopeful note - for, Sarita questions and defies male standards and patriarchal domination in the family system. We find Kamala being denied her right of choice, the right over her own body, the right as a human being and as a citizen of free India. Family becomes the site for the subjugation of women. It emerges as the space where their inner self will be destroyed.

Woman is seen as the plaything of men - reduced to an object which can be bought, sold or traded, for the satisfaction of men's lust or for their monetary benefit. Kamala becomes the proverbial sacrificial goat, an unfortunate slave who is victimised by the males who control her life. The play shows how men degrade and disrespect women. We understand this from Sarita's words when Jadhav asks her to accompany him to a party (44-45):

JAISINGH: You don't want to come? Why?

SARITA: That is my will.

JAISINGH: (Rather surprised) Your will?

SARITA: Aren't I allowed to have a will of my own?

JAISINGH: (Sarcastically) Never noticed any signs of it before. ...

Thus, the fate of an Indian woman-whether tribal or urban or educated-is basically the same. For Kamala, the division of labour is fairly simple. She will give birth to children and produce heirs for the Master's property while Sarita can go out with him and provide him with intelligent company. Here Tendulkar seems to be critique the concept of compassionate marriage which had been popularized so much by canonized literature. The play universalises the predicament of so-called helpless women and highlights the gender stereotyping that is forced upon them.

CONCLUSION

It is significant that in most of Tendulkar's plays, women are portrayed as helpless victims of the conspiracies hatched by men. Many of these female characters are wiser and more mature than the men whose bidding they follow. The condition of women points out the pervasive influence of fate in life, the unending struggle between man and woman - the latter, who, in spite of their supposed inferior status in Indian society, rebel against all odds and command our admiration.

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Editor-in-Chief



Dr. Ancy Jose pursued her M.Sc. (1980) and Ph.D. (2009) from University of Kerala and University of Mumbai respectively. She is a recognized teacher in Post-Graduation of University of Mumbai, since 1997. Dr. Jose is the Principal of Nagindas Khandwala College, Malad (W), Mumbai, since 1993. Dr. Jose has been appointed as the Director of all educational institutes run under the umbrella of Malad Kandivali Education Society, Mumbai (M.K.E.S.) since 2013.

Dr. Jose has participated in various national and international seminars. She has organized numerous workshops, seminars and conferences. She has been the Peer-Team Member and Member Coordinator for NAAC. She was the Academic Council Member of University of Mumbai (2000-2010). Dr. Jose is the Senate Member of the University of Mumbai. She also visited academic institutes of USA and United Kingdom as Panel Chair and for several other academic commitments. She has won many prestigious awards such as Bharat Vidya Shiromani Award (2015), Rajiv Gandhi Education Excellence Award (2015), Most Admired Principal of the Year in Asia (2013-14), Best Principal Award (2013), Best Ensemble Faculty (Academic Brilliance Awards, 2013) and Eminent Educationist Award by Indus Foundation, U.S.A.

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Dr. Moushumi Datta is an Associate Professor in Geography with twenty one years of experience. She has PhD in Geography and a Ph. D in Management Studies. She is a recognised PhD Guide (Geography) of University of Mumbai. She has successfully completed research projects funded by UGC, ICSSR and University of Mumbai. She has organised conferences and workshops at national and international levels and also visited various countries to present research papers.

Santosh C. Hulagabali is Librarian and pursuing PhD from University of Mumbai.

** All are faculty members of Nagindas Khandwala College, Malad (W), Mumbai*