

THE ROLE OF PATRIARCHY IN MAHESH DATTANI'S *BRAVELY FOUGHT THE QUEEN*

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Abstract:

Mahesh Dattani, the first Indian English playwright to win the Sahitya Academy Award, writes plays on the themes relating to the complex workings of the modern urban Indian family. His protagonists search for their identities within the oppressive structures of custom, tradition, patriarchal domination, gender discrimination, sexual identity etc. Most of his works built around a social issue that in a sense helps to locate the moorings of his characters within the religious or national identities embedded with the individual or familiar identities. So a bias towards the contemporary fringe issues seems to be of paramount significance in Dattani's work. Dattani, a true feminist, writes for the betterment and upliftment of women. He never writes for the art's sake, but for the sake of women and the social underdogs who always considered to be misfit in the modern Indian urban society. Thus in Dattani's writings we come across the humiliated and tortured lives of the female protagonists who belong to the conservative middle class or upper-middle class society. Their stories become the forte of all the suffering women in India, who are beaten from pillar to post, insulted and treated like the beasts of burden.

Keywords: *Patriarchal domination, gender discrimination, identity crisis, sexual identity, fringe issues, feminist, female protagonists, social underdogs, social underdogs.*

To relocate the position of women in the patriarchal order has been a persistent effort of the writers and thinkers in the post-colonial India. As far as the Indian society is concerned, there prevailed a deep-rooted custom of considering and worshiping the women as 'goddess'. Under this cover, she was treated only as a lifeless doll devoid of will and choice. In fact, most of the post-colonial critics are united on the issue that the marginalization of women is a part of sexual politics because a woman is also essentially a human being, endowed with infinite potentials of head and heart. Dattani had no intention of spreading feminism through his plays. Most of his plays, female protagonists play a prominent role. The female images presented in his plays are unconventional and most of the time, he tries to discover the different facets of feminine psyche. He interprets woman as a human being gifted with equal sensibility to reciprocate the sensibility of their male counterparts. In spite of their preoccupation in the periphery of family, they are capable enough to turn back to their oppressors. Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen* is concerned with the theme of gender differences and the rupture between the world of men and that of women.

The title of all the three acts namely 'Women', 'Men', 'Free for All' is of highly significant. The world of Act one shows the female world that has been pushed to periphery and this world is pitted against the business world of Act two for men. The third act is a brilliant creation of Dattani as a playwright as it exposes the characters and it is in Act three that the two world of men and women clash and collapse. Here, the home is the battlefield and each characters of the play fought bravely like a queen. The play *Bravely Fought the Queen* is all about exposing or bringing the gruesome truths in the limelight that lies behind the mask of conservative Indian morality. The play is pregnant with questions of gender, sexuality and identity. What is noteworthy of Dattani's technique is that he brings the unseen to the forefront and makes it

visible.

The first Act of the play vividly delineates the claustrophobic situation of the women in the seemingly affluent and civil household. The monotony, frustration, indifference of the women is revealed. In the first Act, Dolly is in the stage in her mud mask. Latha, the wife of Sridhar who is an employee in Trivedi office, comes to Dolly to discuss the masked ball which will promote the Re Va Tee ad, the business venture of the Trivedis. Lalitha is not expected and it is evident in Dolly's reply. She is quite uncomfortable to talk with Lalitha. But Lalitha is keen to mix with the wives of her husband's employers as it will help her husband in the business. Dolly's sister Alka also joins in the conversation as she comes to her sister's house. It is evident in their conversation that they share a common experience of loneliness, boredom and frustration. Lalitha is quite dynamic to ward off her monotony as she keeps her engaged in many words like meditation, creative writing. She takes an active interest in her husband's work as her husband is quite obsessed with his work. Her greatest hobby is growing bonsai. The bonsai has a very significant value in the play. Lalitha elaborates the process of creating bonsai in her conversation. It is the method of stunning the growth of the plants purging their branches and binding their roots. In the first Act Dolly and in the second Act Nitin represents the bonsai as it can be understood that their growth in the play are stunned.

Mahesh Dattani questions and challenges many universal questions regarding the traditional and stereotyped gender roles in his plays. Through his plays Dattani explores the multiple facets of human relationships and their validity in today's world. Many of the subjects that he chooses cannot be comfortably or directly discussed in an orthodox social milieu as in India. Issues like incest, lechery and female subjugation amongst others are strongly condemned in India in public and Dattani very tactfully raises his voice on these social taboos in an oblique manner through a plethora of symbols. *Bravely Fought the Queen* deals with a good number of symbols which distinctly signify the inner sense of the situations. We find the reference of the mud-mask used by Dolly on her face, sitting on a sofa and filling her nails abstractedly. This is nothing, but, a concealment of her real identity, because apparently it seems that she is applying the mud-mask on her face in order to clean it up, which can be effective to increase her beauty. But actually it symbolises the concealment of her tremendous loneliness and deprivation in her personal life, by engaging herself in the task of beautification. Whereas, Lalitha also uses the mud-mask, which equally symbolises that she too tries to reconcile with the boredom of her monotonous life.

The title of the play *Bravely Fought the Queen* is much significant, because it distinctly suggests that a woman who ought to be the chief female character of the play, fights against the domination of the dogmatic patriarchal society and the domination done upon her by her tyrannical husband and a bed-ridden mother-in-law. Dolly, the wife of the elder brother Jiten of the Trivedi household, that Dattani deftly brings to light the miserable plight of a middle-class house wife tortured and exploited by the patriarchy. While she has to project the image of a happy wife of a prosperous husband, in reality she is an absolute victim. She leads a subjugated and claustrophobic existence, confined within the four walls of the house. Dolly and her sister Alka are compelled by their respective husbands to take care of their perpetually ill and senile mother, reducing their lives to that of mere nurses. Even the smallest recreation of attending a dinner is cancelled without their knowledge. Patriarchy finds a ruthless and brutal representation in Jiten, who becomes the embodiment of sexual corruption. Dolly's miserable plight is basically the result of being the wife of not only one who exercises a tyrannical and brutal control over his wife but also a man who often indulges in sexual adventures and because of his innately lecherous and promiscuous nature, brings prostitutes to the office, to satisfy his lust. A common picture of domestic violence is exposed by Dattani, when he unfolds the history of Dolly's pregnancy and the subsequent crippling of her daughter. In the final act of the play Dolly vehemently accuses Jiten of having kicked her ruthlessly when she had been in an early stage of pregnancy, solely because being instigated by his mother. Consequently, the ensuing daughter Daksha was born as spastic and hence had to be sent away to a special school.

Besides portraying the ruthless power of men, *Bravely Fought the Queen* also shows the facade of

the Indian society where women assist the men to continue their brutal domination over men. Baa in *Bravely Fought the Queen* is a replica of the several mothers-in-law found in almost every Indian middle class family who assist their sons to torture their daughters-in-law. We learn that Baa too is responsible like Jiten and Nitin for several injustices committed upon Dolly and Alka. It was Baa who incited Jiten to beat Dolly during her pregnancy that their only child being born a spastic. Again it was due to Baa's incitement that Nitin had once turned Alka out of his house. Though Baa is considered as a symbol of patriarchy, we learn from her past history that she too was comes under the victim of mental and physical brutality by her husband. He was also a wife beater. Baa's husband was dependent on her for her money and exploited her mainly for her money. Like Dolly and Alka, Baa too had to sacrifice her passion for her brutal and cruel husband.

Thus, Indian women are still under domination and oppression that the long sustained patriarchy is still going on and will be going on and on for men are not going to get themselves reformed. The subjugation, the torture or the way our women suffer may be different but age old system of dominance over women by men will never end and they are and will always be victims in our male chauvinistic society. In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Dattani shows that though these women attempt to fight against the patriarchal domination of men, their efforts are not only muted by the chauvinistic men but they are also denied love and freedom of expression by them.

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