

Breaking the Mold: Challenging Gender Stereotypes in Mahesh Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen*

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Abstract:

Mahesh Dattani's play Bravely Fought the Queen is a thought-provoking exploration of gender dynamics and societal expectations in contemporary India. Through nuanced characterizations and intricate plot developments, Dattani challenges conventional gender stereotypes, inviting audiences to critically examine the ways in which patriarchy shapes individual identities and relationships. This research article analyzes Dattani's portrayal of gender roles and power dynamics in Bravely Fought the Queen, highlighting the subversion of traditional norms and the potential for social transformation through theatrical representation.

Mahesh Dattani's Bravely Fought the Queen through the lens of gender stereotypes and patriarchy, this research article aims to deepen our understanding of the play's thematic complexity and its implications for contemporary discourses on gender, identity, and social change

Keywords: Stereotype, Gender, patriarchy, Feminism, Urban, Modern, Masculinity.

Mahesh Dattani is renowned for his insightful portrayal of contemporary Indian society, particularly in the context of gender and sexuality. "Bravely Fought the Queen" stands as a compelling example of Dattani's exploration of gender stereotypes and their impact on individual lives. Set against the backdrop of a traditional Indian household, the play challenges entrenched patriarchal norms, exposing the complexities of power dynamics and the struggles faced by individuals who resist societal expectations

Mahesh Dattani's topics and characters are inherently difficult to categorise, which is precisely his intention. Undoubtedly, he is an author who demonstrates a strong commitment to addressing the plight of the oppressed, marginalised, and stereotypically portrayed individuals. The plays written by Dattani often explore the recurring subject of gender stereotypes and its consequences. These prejudices are either directly or indirectly examined through the

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characters in the plays. In this context, gender does not exclusively pertain to the feminine gender. Men, like women, are subject to cultural conditioning of masculinity and societal expectations regarding their appearance and behaviour. A man's inherent masculinity does not necessarily need to exhibit hyper-masculine traits such as aggression, competitiveness, or emotional detachment. Dattani's literary piece, "Bravely Fought the Queen," scrutinises and questions prevailing assumptions and entrenched biases through various means. Although the family patriarch consistently seeks to assert his authority, the attitudes and reactions of the other characters differ based on their social status, level of contentment, and the burden of adhering to traditional norms, cultural expectations, gender awareness, and suppressed longing.

Dattani's characters defy simplistic categorizations, embodying a spectrum of gender identities and experiences. Through the central protagonist, Savitri, Dattani challenges the traditional roles assigned to women in Indian society. Savitri's journey from a submissive wife to a defiant individual illustrates the transformative power of self-discovery and resistance against patriarchal oppression. Similarly, other characters in the play disrupt gender norms, complicating the narrative and prompting audiences to question their own assumptions about masculinity and femininity

The plight of women has been extensively documented in all of India's literary traditions, spanning across all languages. By doing so, they have expressed their dissent against the cruel penalty inflicted upon women. This also applies to Indian literature written in English, which is not an anomaly. Feminism has elicited diverse responses from individuals across. Postmodern feminism has given rise to two contrasting positions, specifically, the pro-feminist and anti-feminist perspectives. Pro-feminist authors are individuals who take a favourable stance towards feminism, whereas anti-feminist writers are those who maintain an unfavourable stance towards feminism, and vice versa. Mahesh Dattani is an author with a staunchly feminist perspective. "Dattani is part of a group of writers who placed women at the forefront of their fictional universe and can be described as avant-garde feminists" (Jha 31). Regarding his perspective on women, he adopts a notably progressive position, which is praiseworthy. He is endeavouring to comprehend the multifaceted facets of the female psyche. The speaker does not intend to deliver any specific message regarding feminism or women to his audience, as it is not his objective. The persistent clash between the female self-perception and the male-dominated societal structure is evident in numerous pieces of his artwork.

Dattani establishes a constant between the psyche of feminism and the patriarchal order in his work. Dattani portrays metropolitan women who are educated and intellectual, but who are nevertheless subject to the dictates of their family patriarchs' will. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the most important struggles fought by feminists were to secure the right to education and the right to vote for women, regardless of their gender. Even the notion of their sexual independence was conceived some years later.

However, Dattani demonstrates without a shadow of a doubt that education and the ability to vote alone will not be sufficient to end the oppression of women so long as the patriarchal system is in place.

Bravely Fought the Queen is a stage production in which the males take complete power and authority over the ladies on the stage. However, if the ladies in *Final Solutions* represent the good qualities of femininity, the women in *Bravely Fought the Queen* serve as negative representations of womanhood. Although the drama mostly focuses on the current generation couples Jiten and Dolly, Nitin and Alka, and Nitin and Alka, it also includes brief glimpses of Baa's suffering at the hands of her husband. Jiten and Nitin Trivedi, the Trivedi brothers, inflict agony and misery on their wives in a variety of ways. Since Nitin is a homosexual and has no interest in his wife Dolly, Jiten has kicked her in the stomach many times throughout her pregnancy, and Nitin ignores his wife entirely. A horrible example of what a woman should not be is provided by the ladies in *Bravely Fought the Queen*; these are women who endure and suffer their circumstances without displaying any self-respect.

The novel *Bravely Fought the Queen* explores the marginalisation and disempowerment of women, as they struggle to assert themselves against patriarchal laws that oppress and devalue them in society. The march aims to protest the emotional and financial abuse of women within the family dynamic. Although the female characters in the play exhibit different emotions and perspectives, they all have a common feeling of discontentment and disillusionment towards their lives. Their profound sense of despair and disappointment has compelled them to seek solace in alternative substances, such as alcohol and escapist fantasies, as a means to alleviate their profound dissatisfaction.

Baa and Dolly are highly susceptible victims of their husbands' conventional and oppressive behaviour towards them. Their male colleagues subjected them to abhorrent abuse. Both individuals are enduring domestic abuse and have made the decision to withhold information about their ordeals. Unlike Dolly, the younger lady, Baa, the older woman, is not given the chance to express herself at the end of the movie. She endures silently under the oppression of her spouse till he is removed from her presence. Being a mature woman who was raised with traditional country values, she refrains from engaging in conflict and instead embraces her predetermined fate. The drama also illuminates the anguish experienced by the wife due to her husband's realisation of his homosexuality. Alka's sorrow intensifies when she discovers that Nitin, her spouse, is engaged in a homosexual relationship with her own brother, Praful. She has experienced negative consequences due to her brother's homosexual relationship. The brother's harsh attitude towards women serves as a prime example of the male's controlling disposition towards women. In order to maintain an uninterrupted romantic relationship with Nitin, Praful arranged for his own sister to marry his partner. This enables him to sustain his relationship effortlessly and without any disruption.

This injustice meted out to Alka by her brother and husband incites her indignation and fury, which she expresses in the following words:

Our saint of a brother used to warn us against men like you. (Points to Jiten) And what does he do? The saint gives his sister to the sinister and disappears! (Makes a motion of wiping her hands) Finished. Matter over. Or is it? The saint has another sister who is (slaps her own face) bad, bad, bad. He beats her till she gets better. (BFQ 257).

Alka has developed a dependency on alcohol as a method of escaping from the stresses of her life. Nitin states that when he looks at her hunched body passing out after drinking, he thinks, "He told me that you knew. That he told you about me. And that it didn't matter to you.... I am sorry. It wasn't my fault" (BFQ 314). Praful had already subjected Alka to excruciating therapy, which she recounts in detail. Alka used to ride a scooter to her house with the kid of her next-door neighbour before she got married. Praful became enraged by this and took her into the kitchen without saying anything. He put her face in front of a hot stove, causing her hair to catch on fire. Despite his roughness, Dolly believes her brother to be a model of virtue and goodness. Alka has been ejected from her home for a period of time by her husband, Nitin; Baa has also verbally assaulted and humiliated Alka on several occasions.

As a medium of artistic expression, theater has the potential to challenge societal norms and provoke meaningful dialogue about pressing social issues. Dattani's "Bravely Fought the Queen" exemplifies this transformative power, offering audiences a space to confront and interrogate entrenched gender stereotypes. By depicting characters who defy conventional gender roles and assert their agency, Dattani invites viewers to imagine alternative ways of being and relating to one another, thus contributing to broader conversations about gender equality and social justice.

Throughout *Bravely Fought the Queen*, the characters of Baa, Dolly, and Alka symbolise a generation of women who have been utterly subjugated by the patriarchal society. Old Baa claims that he struck her as a result of Baa's provocation. Baa was under the impression that Daksha was not of their blood. She referred to Dolly as a whore, and Jiten took his mother's remarks at their value.

It is the goal of the play to portray not just women's exploitation by males, but also their terrible treatment at the hands of their own female counterparts. Alka is abused by her husband and brother, as well as by Alka's mother-in-law, Baa, and her in-laws. In order to keep the truth of their mother's second marriage from their father's children, Praful had arranged for his sisters to be married off to the Trivedi brothers. Their mother was completely unaware that her husband had previously been married and had children with his first wife until she gave birth to Praful, Dolly, and Alka, and she had no way of knowing. She had ended her relationship with him after discovering this information. After receiving an anonymous letter, their illegitimacy was exposed to Baa, who didn't react kindly to the information. She makes fun of her daughters-in-law for something that was not their fault at all. She is quite critical of their whole family. "Your mother is a keep...a mistress! My sons have married the daughters of whore!" (BFQ 311). In response to the news, Baa kicks Praful out of her home and incites her two sons to turn against their respective spouses and daughters. Despite the fact that she herself has been a victim of domestic abuse, Baa manipulates her sons into taking their spouses. She is so cold-blooded that she does not even spare the pregnant Dolly from her cruelty. She merely urges her son not to strike Dolly in the tummy so that the baby is not harmed by the incident. She expresses herself as follows: "Jitu, hit her on the face but not on the....stop it Jitu! On the face, only on the face! Enough! Stop!" (BFQ 311). Alka is enraged by the fact that her brother's error has forever altered the course of her and her sister's lives. None of them were aware that

Praful had been withholding information about their father from them and Dolly was not aware of this as well. She expresses her fury and contempt against her brother in the following outburst to Dolly, “I can’t forget what they did to me! Our brother Is a cheat! He lied about our father to them. And he lied to me! He lied to me” (BFQ 257).

Bravely Fought the Queen explores the presence of male chauvinism and the subordinate position of women in Indian society, which is controlled by men, throughout the story. Jiten and Nitin Trivedi are siblings who possess and manage an advertising enterprise. They are now working on a television advertisement for the ReVaTee brand, which specialises in women's nightwear. Although a survey conducted for their commercial has shown that it is derogatory towards women, Jiten is adamantly refusing to make any changes. He holds the belief that the perspectives of women, particularly in relation to products designed for women, are insignificant.

The failure of the ReVaTee advertising campaign symbolises men's incapacity to fully understand women and their expectations. Women's rights activists argue that men have consistently neglected to recognise the feminine identity and her equal status as a human being throughout history. This depiction of Jiten presents him as a quintessential patriarchal individual who lacks regard for the thoughts and viewpoints of women, perceiving them as subordinate beings or just subordinates to their male counterparts.

The drama depicts the depreciation of the Trivedi brothers, who reside in a wealthy neighbourhood of Bangalore, in terms of sexual, moral, and financial deterioration in their life. These wealthy metropolitan males are more interested in having an extramarital sexual connection than they are in maintaining a healthy and happy marriage with their spouses. They are used to obtaining anything they want by sprinkling money on it, and they employ the same strategy to gain sex as well. When in the presence of prostitutes, Jiten and Sridhar are at their most content. In order to satisfy their carnal desires, they bring these ladies to their place of business. In fact, they have a sofa in their workplace just for this reason. Jiten takes one step further and requests that his boss Sridhar arrange for him to be picked up by a prostitute. He tells Sridhar this in a very direct manner., “It’s the biggest advantage of having an office on Grant Road...Just drive down Lavelle Road and pick one up to bring her here and pack her off in half an hour. You save a lot of time” (BFQ 286).

Jiten fulfils his sexual desires by engaging with prostitutes, whereas Nitin, who is homosexual, maintains a discreet relationship with a same-sex partner, keeping it concealed from the public. Their women serve solely as instruments for upholding the societal facade, with no other purpose. Consequently, their spouses experience boredom, dissatisfaction, and lack of fulfilment in their marital relationship due to this carelessness. Both men and women are experiencing suffocation due to the dominance of patriarchy and gender bias, as depicted by Mahesh Dattani through the characters in his plays. To foster a robust and resilient nation, it is imperative to prioritise the establishment of strong and stable families, since they serve as the fundamental building blocks upon which a country is constructed.

Furthermore, the family is our first and most important society. If the initial community itself is founded on erroneous norms and prejudice, the country, and the greater society will not be able to survive for much longer in this state. It is unable to thrive or advance.

Women are not just discriminated against throughout their marital lives or during their upbringing. Occasionally, this discrimination begins even before the onset of the event. The female is repressed, oppressed, and given a harsh deal in society from the moment she is born, and sometimes even before that. The author covers almost every facet of women's issues, from female infanticide to sexual assault and domestic violence. Mahesh Dattani is a prolific writer. He brings up a wide range of concerns, including unequal property distribution, denial of equal education and rights, and subjection in the name of culture. Every facet of metropolitan women and her issues is dealt with perceptively and comprehensively by Dattani; Dattani's women suffer as a result of the conventional stereotypes into which they are trapped and to which they are obliged to comply, as elderly Baa, Dolly, and Alka in *Bravely Fought the Queen* demonstrate. After having fought the Queen, other female characters emerge as emphatically emancipated individuals.

Conclusion:

Bravely Fought the Queen stands as a compelling testament to Mahesh Dattani's talent for dissecting complex social issues through the lens of theater. Through nuanced characterizations and thought-provoking narratives, Dattani challenges audiences to confront their own complicity in perpetuating gender stereotypes and to envision a more inclusive and equitable society. As a work of art and activism, "Bravely Fought the Queen" inspires reflection and dialogue, highlighting the potential of theater as a catalyst for social transformation..

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