

Lifting the veil: A study on Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days in September*

Pilcy Peter

Research Scholar

St joseph's college

Trichy

Abstract

Mahesh Dattani, a renowned playwright is also a director, dancer, actor and teacher. Being conscious of the positive role that a creative writer specially a playwright can play in social reformation, Dattani chose tabooed themes such as homosexuality, child sexual abuse and gender discrimination - not merely for shocking the public but with a specific purpose of arousing awareness about these invisible problems mainly the repressed desires, innermost emotions, loneliness, feelings of different groups, etc..

This paper strives to emphasize the trauma of a girl child's life as she is a prey to incest in the play *Thirty Days in September* written by Mahesh Dattani. It describes the silent sufferings of a girl and her mother. This paper creates awareness on this situation and the courage to break the barriers of faceless life. Mala is the protagonist of the play. The scattered life of Mala transforms into life of freedom. Similarly her mother Shanta cross over her silence in order to acclaim to the world that women too are human beings who has to be respected and honored.

Key words: Incest, silence, protest, power, women

Dattani has presented a sensational issue, child sexual abuse in the play 'Thirty Days in September' where the different factors have to be lifted to the audience. The central character of the play Mala is sexually assaulted by her own uncle before gaining puberty. As she approached the phase of youth, she realized that the sphere is unsympathetic and relationships are insincere. Thus she begins to be unsafe and sexually addicted. The play '*Thirty Days in September*' unfold with Mala talking to the counselor, where she discloses her confused mind. Haunting presence of her uncle prevent her from following her love interests beyond the baleful thirty day period, scab her spirit every now and then and above all silence her voice.

Mala does not want to face the society and she endures the humiliation by herself. Her anguish becomes too severe when she thinks of her mother's silence towards her life scenario.

Pedophilia or Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is the physical or mental transgression of a child with sexual purpose, usually by an older person who is in some place of trust /or power. They do it for their sexual gratification. Child sexual abuse happens in three ways habitually: incestuous abuse (i.e. by family members of victims), sexual abuse by unfamiliar people, and child prostitution. Families often choose to solve this issue due to disgrace. In Indian culture, maternal uncle is an important person in the family. He is expected to be the best conservator, privileged person to give 'Kanyadan' for the marriage ceremony. But here the custodian changed into the ruiner of Mala. If a teener is seduced by her own maternal uncle, whom should the girl trust? It casts light on the state on nearly all Indian women, specially the girl children who have to face disgrace and pass a trauma at all the aspect of their life.

Revolving around Mala and Shanta, the play unveils the betrayal of our own people. Mala, sexually maltreated by her maternal uncle, at the age of six has to suffer continuous sexual molestation which leads her to go to any man whom she comes in contact with. She delays to love Deepak because of the haunting presence of her uncle. But still with his help, she becomes triumphant to fight against her ill treatment by refusing her maternal uncle's gift of house.

Mala blames Shanta for her irresponsibility towards the suffering of her daughter. Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born* emphasized the stupidity of such situation. She says that though motherhood is for women it is dominated by men. This noble motherhood thrust on women conditions her entire life.

The pathetic situation is best expressed in Mala's lamentation:

You know, I couldn't say anything to you. You never gave me a chance to. If only you had looked into my eyes and seen the hurt or asked me 'Beta' what's wrong? Then maybe I would have told you....but ma, I did look to you for help, while you were praying your eyes avoiding mine, and I knew deep down I must have known that you will never ask me that question you already knew the answer.

Consequently women are fostered as pliable, providers, and acceptors from the infancy itself to survive in the male dominated society. The play involves its climax when we come to know that the mother also is a prey of incest even to the same person. Now we recognize the cause of silence from Mala's mother.

Shanta recollects her past when she sees Mala's pain. She lost everything when she was six year old. Her tongue was cut off with pain by not able to tell anyone. She did not shout for help which she also couldn't do for her child. Therefore Shanta's silence made misunderstanding between mother and daughter and began to distrust.

In a dialogue with Anitha Santhanam, Mahesh Dattani observes that the quietness and the disloyalty of the family affect a person so much. Here mother was forced to keep silence which made the daughter to be abused. Thus both of them are part of the same destiny. Shanta becomes dead to pain and joy but Mala always feels craving for sexual quenching. Shanta's silence, which she takes as Shanti, ruins two lives—hers and her daughter's. Her silence reveals two things—the first, degrading Indian morality, and the second, the stereotypes for women which present them as objects of male gaze. Vinay never feel ashamed when he is called 'Bhaia' by Shanta; instead he confidently maintains to be a father figure when Mala's marriage is concerned. He, who shatters Mala in her teens, does not dither in using the expression "She is like my daughter." Mala is made to consider herself as a bad and characterless person.

Dattani breaks the 'Rakhi' relationship between a brother and a sister. A pure and pious bond is broken through Vinay, the father like figure. The dramatist communicates the conflict of Mala's conscious and unconscious mind. Mala boldly says her name and the name of the abuser because she is confirmed that it is he who hides himself not her. She, being a victim of sexual utilization before reaching her puberty and in early youth, and of betrayal at the hands of her mother becomes indecisive about her action. She talks to herself that today is the thirtieth of September. She doesn't want to say her name since it is my fault. She would have asked for it.

Girl child always need a shelter from the cradle to grave. They feel refugees in their own house and consider it to be the 'unsafe nest'. These children are always trapped by the abusers. They do not even know what happens to them because they are provided with their favorite things which they can't get from their parents. Dattani wants the women to lift their

voice from the teenage itself and fight for their rights. Unless the victims break their silence, the abuse will continue fearlessly. The writer conduct such plays in front of the society with the hope that they will be aware to raise their voice for the sufferers along with the writer. Hence the urge of having sexual education in the schools and to tell even the remedies to surpass the problem.

However, the quality of silence and secrecy that suffuse the family isolates each woman in her suffering and they end up taking out their pain, anger and fear on each other. And, if you have a young child, girl or boy, teach them the sense of touch. Make them feel safe and loved enough to be able to confide in you. And most importantly, always listen to and believe in your child, even if you don't like what you're hearing. If you have been a victim, don't criticize yourself, don't let anyone else blame you, and don't let that determine the course of the rest of your life. Get help, get on with your life... don't let the monsters win! And remember, it wasn't your fault! Years of silence. Silence wrapped the life of Shanta and Mala like a cocoon. In India women are reluctant to speak out about their abuse as it would invite social humiliation, ridicule and disbelief.

Considering this burning problem, Mahesh Dattani brings plausible concerns and structures, a world of positiveness that the wrong can be improved and resurrection of brutalized faith is possible. Children who are often have low self-esteem and may find it difficult to trust. *Thirty days in September* is a record of lifting the veil from a troubled daughter and an unfortunate mother, as it is one that splendidly addresses the issue of child sex abuse. The silence is to be interpreted; the silence isn't a lack of noise; rather it is full of threatening noises. The new horizon has been explored to represent the voice of women crushed under the wheels of exploitation of elitists. Dattani unfolds the layers of the butchered psyche of Mala who suffers at two levels - her struggle with her own inner self and secondly her discontent with her mother who maintains oppressive silence to escape horrors of the reality. The suffering of Mala and Shantha rationalize the 'silence' against sexual colonialism is a common destiny of all women in all generations. The breaking up of that silence is not only a post- colonial creed but a psychological device to show the sufferer out the hell of 'guilt' and 'self-accusation'. At the end Mala and Shantha comes to a common point where silence of them speak out their own conflicts.

Reference

Dattani, Mahesh. Collected Plays. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005. Print.

Dattani, Mahesh. An Introduction. New Delhi: Foundation books, 2005. Print.

Myles, Anita. Contemporary Indian English drama an overview: New Dhi: Sarop book, 2010. Print.

Sha, Shakar Guari. Current Indian perspectives In Indian English Literature: New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2006. Print.

Pandya, Rakesh. Contemporary Indian English Writers. Jaipur: Vista publishers, 2010. Print.

[www.the](http://www.the-criterion.com) – criterion.com the criterion. An International journal in English. Vol. ii. Issue iii.2011.