

**THE EXISTENCE OF OPPRESSION AND SUBJUGATION IN MAHESH DATTANI'S
*BRAVELY FOUGHT THE QUEEN***

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani is a great dramatist and a theater artist from India. He has written numerous plays which have depicted the darker side of Indian culture. The play taken for consideration here is *Bravely Fought the Queen*. It is his fourth play that deals with a sarcastic gaze at the marginalization of the second sex. It is a kind of domestic tragedy which portrays the sufferings and agonies of women at the hands of men. All the women characters in Trivedi family in the play undergo extreme sufferings because of tyrannical patriarchal society. The iron-fisted domination of the masculine gender has been pictured in its true sense. The action of the play takes place in Bangalore. Dolly, Alka, Lalitha, and Baa are the women characters who have been dominated by their husbands. This paper proposes to focus on the existence of oppression and subjugation and the ancient patriarchal notions that are still running and ruining women.

Keywords: *suppression, ill-treatment of women, male arrogance, falsehood, unfaithfulness, incest, and lechery.*

Gender bias, sexuality, identity crisis and family politics are the core concerns of the play. The action takes place in Mumbai and revolves around the Trivedi's joint family where Baa is the mother and laying ill on the bed. She is the senior and runs the family with an iron-fisted hand. She has two sons Jiten and Nitin who are running an advertising agency as partners. Both of them get married to two sisters Dolly and Alka respectively.

Meanwhile, the play has another couple Sridhar and Lalitha. Sridhar is an employee in Trivedi's advertising company. There are many characters that are named but they are not physically seen. Daksha the daughter of Dolly, Praful, the brother of Dolly and Alka, Kanhaiya-auto-rickshaw driver and a beggar woman respectively are referred to but seen virtually only. Another interesting feature of the play is that Dolly and Alka's mother and their father-in-law, Trivedi are all deceased but their characters appear as reminiscence. The play is symbolically divided into 'The Women' (Act I), 'The Men' (Act II) and finally 'Free for All' (Act III).

The play depicts women's oppression with their unfulfilled aspiration to rebel. It reveals that the male-dominated system in our society creates violence and a severe sense of loneliness in women's lives. The play shows that the men dominated society legitimizes women's physique in a gaudy, glamorous way. The play opens with the entry of Lalitha, wife of Sridhar. She is invited to a party by her boss Jiten and Nitin. So Sridhar leaves her in Trivedi's home. Dolly, wife of Jiten, hears Thumri music and she is very innocent and the woman who wants to satisfy all her husband's wish. Baa is an old woman who continuously rings the bell to record her presence and she doesn't like her daughters-in-law because their brother Praful had cheated her and married his sisters to her sons. Though she hates them, Dolly and Alka are expected to fulfill all the wishes of Baa. They too docilely accept their passive roles and chaotic schedule to aid an aged woman. Commenting on the female characters, Das says:

Lalitha, Dolly and Alka represent three types of women who seek to find their identity in a male-dominated world: Alka with alcohol, Dolly with her fantasizing about Kanhaiya and Lalitha with her obsession with bonsais, a metaphor Dattani uses for exploration of self and identity in trying to come to terms with reality that engulfs them (69).

To Lalitha, Dolly and Alka speak normally as an outsider and after some time they start to discuss and share the cruelty happened in their life. Dolly is an example of a typical woman who masks her face happy though she is beaten and tortured by her husband. In the beginning, Dolly restricts to explain the plight of her life but later she reveals. Praful, brother of Dolly and Alka, is a tyrant character who tortures his sisters even for silly things. Once Alka had returned home from school, her neighbor's son dropped her right at the doorstep. Alka tells:

Later Dolly becomes a victim at the hands of Jiten. Baa happens to know that Dolly's father is not dead and he is living with his second wife. Because of tolerance and patience, Dolly bares all the beatings from Jiten even in her pregnancy. While beating, Baa had asked Jiten to not beat her on the head but all other places could be the target. Dolly had been beaten by Jiten on her stomach during the eighth month of her pregnancy. Because of his kick on her stomach, she happens to deliver a premature baby. Daksha, a premature baby, is a physically poor child. Alka is an unsatisfied woman because of her husband Nitin's homosexuality with her brother Praful. Even as a brother, Praful had asked Alka to marry Nitin who is his sex partner. Later she worries

for Nitin's inept ways of satisfying her. So Alka had been tormenting by her disharmonious family life with Nitin. So she addicts to alcohol. Alka feels:

"I have been cursed because I don't have children. That's what you [Baa] want to say!" (BFQ 284).

Baa, a cruel old woman, also a sufferer at the hands of Mr.Trivedi. Baa wishes to sing but he refuses and stops her from singing. And also he beats her for no reason. She has been dominating by her husband until his death. Even after his death, his cruel mentality exists in her and it is exposed upon her daughter—in—laws. But often in her nightmare she deliriums the torture of Mr.Trivedi:

Did you hit me? Go on. Hit me again. The children should see what a demon you are. Aah! Jitu! Nitin! Are you watching? See your father! No! No! Not on the face! What will the neighbors say? Not on the face. I beg you! Hit me but not on...aaaah! (BFQ 278)

Each woman characters metaphorically are connected to the usual and most desirable. Dolly wants to hear Thumri whereas Alka addicts to alcohol and Lalitha and Dhalsha to bonsai trees. In the second act, the male characters who are all very dominant and rule creator on women. They work for an advertisement campaign for a ladies' innerwear company. According to Jiten, this ad campaign is nothing but a vicious presentation of female sexuality displayed to satisfy males. He cheaply explains how the female and her sexuality is simply a commodity to a man with money. He tells,

"Man would want their women dressed up like that. And they have the buying power. Yes! So there's no point in asking a group of screwed-up women what they think of it" (BFQ 276).

These men though born out of woman womb, they never see a woman as a sacred being. Their view is women are sexual a sexual commodity. Even in the play, Jiten commits adultery. In the third act, Free to all, Dattani shows the compassion has risen in the minds of the characters. Dolly creates a bombastic space on Jansi Rani Laxmi Bai in her mind. She wants to be very bold in the dominating situation. At last, she curses Jiten for his nuisance act turns sin in the form of Dhaksha. He feels guilty for his actions in past. Nitin also embraces Alka with words. Nitin says,

How can you still love your brother after what he did to you...? That's right. Don't answer. Just sleep. (Laughs) You always were a heavy sleeper. Thank God. Those times when I used to spend the night at your place, I used to sleep on his cot. And he would sleep on a mattress on the floor beside. (BFQ 314)

In the play, Alka is presented as a complete boozier and also a complete oddity in Trivedi family. The life Alka has gained a kind of braveness and strong enough to face critical pathos. By comparing these women to Lalitha, she seems more compatible than the other two because of her life with the absence of physical violence.

Bravely Fought the Queen deliberates the arrested emerge of women in a man's world. Alka, Dolly, Baa, and Lalitha all have an aspiration, an inner urge, symbolically connecting to brave Queen, to breed and embellish like a fruit-bearing, fully grown-up tree but not as bonsai. The male counterparts try to cut and make women as bonsai. It is at the hand of women who wish to be neither a fruit-bearing tree nor a bonsai. Women should unveil the so-called patriarchal concept and recreate a room of their own as Virginia Woolf says in 'A Room of One's Own'. Though many women writers write for their gender, Dattani pictures it in a different way. He used to end all his play in a good way. In this play, so he ends with all characters understand their own weakness and goodness.

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