



CHILD ABUSE IN MAHESH DATTANI'S THIRTY DAYS IN SEPTEMBER

Jamirul Islam

Research Scholar,

Department of English,

Maulana Azad National Urdu University,

Gachibowli, Hyderabad, 500032, Telangana.

jamirulislam.alig@gmail.com

Abstract

Mahesh Dattani, a renowned playwright, is considered to be the most prominent literary figure in Indian English Literature. He basically deals his play with social issues. The play called Thirty Days in September also deals with the social issues like Child Abuse. Here in the play, the playwright showed how the close caregiver namely, Vinay took advantage of his sibling called Shanta who is the mother of the protagonist Mala. Later on, this cheap man also abused his own niece, called Mala who is the daughter of Shanta. The protagonist Mala accused her mother for her evil past. She meant to say that she could get rid of from her sufferings and the stingy man called, Vinay if her mother opened up her mouth. Silence out did the play for Mala's sufferings.

Key Words Child Abuse, Incestuous Relationship, Silence, Mental Trauma.

Introduction

The playwright, Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian English playwright who received Sahitya Academy award in the year 1998 for his distinguish work "*Final Solutions and Other Plays*". In the year 1984 he has formed a theatre group called 'Playpen' where he directed several plays, ranging from Old Classical Greek to Modern Contemporary works. Dr S.S Kanade calls him 'he is known as neither women writer nor gay writer; but as a human writer'. Alexander Viets comments on Mahesh Dattani in The International Herald Tribune as 'one of India's best and most serious contemporary playwrights writes in English'. The play *Thirty Days in September* is considered as the most solemn play of Mahesh Dattani. Many a times the discussion of Indian English Drama in the academic sphere stops at Mahesh Dattani . He is the path breaker of Convention. He is the playwright who gave the voice to the voiceless.

Themes in Dattani's Play

He basically attempts to depict socially challenge theme in almost all of his plays. He tries to unmask the harsh reality of our society. Moreover, he looks at several issues of our society through his writings. His plays are basically talking about the discrimination against people in the society on the ground of religion, caste, class, gender and sexuality. The play *Dance Like a Man* deals with the issues of gender identity. In *Bravely Fought the Queen* he talks about the exploitation of helpless woman victims of male. In the play *Do the Needful* the playwright deals with the issues of gay marginalisation. In *EkAlagMausam* he shows the problem of marginality of women on the grounds of defect and disease and in *Thirty Days in September* of course with child abuse.

What is Child Abuse?



Child abuse is basically physical, psychological and sexual exploitation of a child, especially by uncle, parent and other close caregiver. In general abuse refers to (usually voluntarily) acts of commission on the sides of parents and other close caregiver that cause actual harm to a child. On the very recent era the concept of Child Abuse has come into the limelight. Earlier it was considered to be a mere problem. They never think it as a heinous crime. It was side-lined by church and family and they insist not to address it in public domain. These defenceless children victimized by their grown up people and sometime they traumatized once they got adult. These victim children try to get rid of from the past reality but they could not because hallucination and depression overcome their memory.

Comments on Child Abuse

On the issues of child abuse Randi G Fine rightly says:

Black and white means wrong or right.

There must be grey- there can't be just one way;

From two extremes, I lost my dreams,

They hid away inside these walls of grey.

Herbert Wards says:

'Child abuse casts a shadow, the length of a lifetime'.

Edmund Burke comments on child abuse:

'The greater the power, the more dangerous the abuse'.

Beside these there is a popular quote "wounded children become wounded adults, and wounded adults can destroy themselves and possibly others".

Analysis of the Play

In this paper I will attempt to report how child abuse is presented in Mahesh Dattani's play '*Thirty Days in September*'. This play consists of three acts. It is the story of Mala and her mother Shanta. Initially the protagonist of the play *Thirty Days in September*, Mala has blamed her mother. She means to say that her mother, Shanta could save her life.

MALA. The only person who can, who could have prevented all this is my mother. Sometimes I wish she would just tell me to stop. She could have prevented a lot from happening... Here are all the names of people whom I have been with. And the outline... Well I just wanted a line that would put them all together. But if you ask me, whose face I think it is- it must be my mother's. (18)

In the first act of the play, Mala accused her mother for her sufferings. She said that since childhood she is suffering or we can say exploited by her uncle Vinay (who is called 'MAN')



in the play). Her mother Shanta never approached to her daughter Mala. She always kept silent and the man Vinay took advantage of this silence. We have seen that the character Mala is abused since childhood by her own uncle Vinay. She also claimed to her mother that when she (Mala) tried to share something, her mother offered some food. Sometime Mala shocked to see her mother's behaviour. In the conversation Mala said to her mother;

MALA. That is how you always pacified me and that is how I know that you believe me, deep down. Oh yes, you would remember that I always like aluparathas because that's what I got whenever I came to you, hurt and crying. Instead of listening to what I had to say, you stuffed me with food. I could not speak because I was being fed all the time, and you know what? I began to like them. I thought that was the cure for my pain. (24)

She said that it is not only happened once rather several times. Whenever she went to her mummy, she was ready with something to feed her. In this play the motherly character, Shanta is always busy with Lord Krishna, she is always murmuring the name of the Lord Krishna. When Mala tried to unmask the reality, her mother told her to forget it as bad dreams. In addition, Mala told her mother that the uncle Vinay molested her in every vacation when they went to visit him or when he came to stay with them. And the most shocking thing is her parents were always busy with their works. They did not pay heed to their daughter. In the last part of the first act Shanta cleared the queries of Mala that why did she not utter a single word, why did she try to forget and why did she pray always for Mala. We have noticed throughout the first act of the play that Mala always blamed her mother. She said that her mother deliberately attempt to forget the past. In response of all these accusation Shanta replied her daughter that she has forgotten the past because what she remember is not what Mala remember. So, she has decided to forget everything. In this conversation Shanta blamed her daughter that she intentionally did all the bad things for her pleasure.

SHANTA. Not just the pain. I remember, much as I was trying to forget, what I saw. Not when you were seven but when you were thirteen (Gently). Please don't misunderstand me, Mala. I remember, seeing you with my brother during the summer holidays. You were pushing yourself on him in the bedroom.

MALA. No! That's not true!

SHANTA. I remember, Mala. You want me to remember? You were telling him to kiss you. (27)

In the second act of this play we came to know the fact that Mala's father did not support his family. The family is run by the money of Mala's uncle Vinay. Shanta concealed this fact. But when Mala pressurized her mother not to avoid her questions and asked her to reveal the truth; her mother respond her on the following way:

MALA. I hate it when you avoid answering questions! What way has he helped us?

SHANTA. I don't know...



MALA. Tell me!

SHANTA. (Looking away, more nervous than before). Mala, I am sorry I should have told you but... The money that we kept receiving after your father left us was from your uncle.

MALA. And father? Didn't he send us anything at all?

SHANTI.Nothing. (35)

After knowing the fact Mala got shocked and she blames her mother in several ways. Her mother defended herself by saying that whatever she did, she did for her daughter sake only. She did not want to hurt Mala. But unfortunately this pretension turns their relationship into sour. Mala blames her mother that her father left his family for his wife, Shanta only. Once Mala's father told her daughter that 'I married a frozen woman.'

In the third act of the play *Thirty Days in September*, the protagonist, Mala has become worried about her life. She comes across intimates with Deepak whom she loves. But she does not want to continue this relation because of her past incidents. She is haunted by her past memories. In the conversation Deepak tried seek out the prime reason of her depression. Her agitation towards her mother enhanced when she comes to know that Deepak entered Mala's home though she told her mother not to allow him. Here we also notice that Mala's uncle Vinay too, came to stay at their house for few days. Deepak consulted a psychiatrist for Mala. When the conversation amongst all the family members reached at the culmination the harsh truth is disclosed by Mala. Deepak came to know the real face of the Man, Vinay and comments on him by saying 'sick bastard'. At the last Mala keeps on blaming her mother that the man Vinay makes her life hell and her mother seals up her mouth.

MALA. He bought your silence. So that you can never tell anyone what he did to your daughter!

MAN. You have gone mad.

DEEPAK. Let her speak. (52-53)

At the very last of the play her mother, Shanta suggested her not to recall the grey memory. She asked her daughter to vanish her memory. She told her to forget the past and makes the life new.

MALA. By staying silent does not mean I can forget. This is my hell. This hell is where I belong! It is your creation, Ma! You created it for me. With your silence!! You didn't forget anything, you only remained silent! (54)

Eventually we come to know the main reason of Mala's mother being silent. She has chosen to forget her own memories. So, she becomes a devotee of Lord Krishna. She always engaged



with either puja room or in the kitchen. She did not utter a single word against her brother, Vinay because she, herself abused by her own devil brother, Vinay. Since childhood Mala's mother, Shanta tried to forget everything. At that crucial moment she felt neither pain nor pleasure, only silence. She said 'silence means shanti. Shanti. (55)

Nowadays child abuse or the exploitation of children is considered to be the most heinous burning issue. It is rightly addressed by the playwright Mahesh Dattani in his most familiar play *Thirty Days in September*(2001).This particular play deals with the incestuous relationship which not only shakes the humanity but also annihilate the equilibrium of one's mind. In this play both the victim protagonists are female in figure and they are being exploited brutally by some close caregiver. By out surface we may not believe our own eyes that their own relative could abused them but it brought about. Dattani's play *Thirty Days in September* is a domestic play which basically deals with the theme of the abuse of child, incestuous relationship and so on. In this play Mala, the protagonist is abused by her own maternal uncle, Vinay. Her mother, Shanta does not raise her voice against this grim tragedy. Finally, we get to know that she was also molested by the same person during her childhood. As far the exploitation of children is concerned RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest) foundation is working on it. This foundation is dedicated to providing individual and group services for survivors aimed at their psychological, emotional, sexual and spiritual recovery. Researcher estimates that in our country about one out of six boys and one out of four girls is sexually abused. About three out of ten of those who sexually molested children are family members of the child. These include father, uncle and cousin. Abusers are men in most cases, whether the victim is boys or girls.

In "Mahesh Dattani's'*Thirty Days in September*: A study in the treatment of incest", Santosh Kumar sonkar says that the children are not treated by elders as they ought to be treated. The eminent playwright, Mahesh Dattani has raised his voice against the plight of children, especially in the case of incest which ruins the lives of the victims. The victim does not only suffer the physical anguish but also the mental distortion, and has challenged the social customs which define women as a receiver of pain by representing the clash between mother and daughter.

Conclusion

The play *Thirty Days in September* is a big lesson for the entire humanity. The Indian English playwright, Mahesh Dattani draws the curtain which was closed from centuries. He also said that the root of all causes in the play is keeping silence. Always keeping Silence destroys the life of the people. Here in the play both the female character is suffered a lot for being always silent. The playwright, Mahesh Dattani gave a hints to the people to raise their voice if they feel something is hazy going on. In terms of child abuse, keeping silence never solve the cause of the problem. Here in the play the same thing is repeated by the motherly character, Shanta who always kept silent. Her silence welcomes the devil to abuse the child and makes her life into deep pandemonium. If we cross off this play and think then we will get to know that the abuser abused the child for many purpose. Sometimes the abuser earned



a huge amount of money by sending their children into the prostitution. They compelled their children to take part in the pornography. It is nothing but a sexual commercial exploitation. This exploitation traumatized them and many a time suffered by some incurable disease. This particular play *Thirty Days in September* reveals and criticizes social issues like the practice of incestuous relationship, the social taboos which define women as pain bearers, and the effect of child sexual abuse on an individual's psyche. The playwright, Mahesh Dattani also tried to mean that the children should not over bother about the society. Being silent they should not destroy their bright prospect for the societal reputation. If the life itself turns into hell then what is the use and utility of social reputation?

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