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Victimization of Women in the Hands of Men and their Patriarchy in Mahesh Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen*

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Abstract:

Basically Indian society is male centered according to sociologists and the family is dominated by male. Since he is the head of the family, the freedom is hardly given to the other members of the family. Mahesh Dattani, acclaimed as one of the best playwrights in the modern India, portrays women suffering under the oppression of patriarchy in his writings. In the present paper an attempt has been made to discuss victimization of women in the hands men and their patriarchy in his play, *Bravely Fought the Queen*. It portrays women suffering under the yoke of patriarchy and rather disturbing picture of the relations between men and women in a wealthy isolated suburb of Bangluru. In the play, Dattani has dealt with the status of women in the present Indian society and thereby depicting the victimization of women as they had been in the past. Here, all the women suffer because of male tyranny. In the play, women are always the victims in the hands of men or in our male chauvinistic society. All of whom have been saplings at the hands of male figures who have sought to curtail their full growth and led to the growth of grotesque artificial plants but unable to serve the real purpose of natural trees-to provide shade, fruits etc. Thus, like the bonsais, the women in the play are incapable of realizing their full potential. All have suffered through the intervention of patriarchal force.

Keywords: Patriarchy, culture, male, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Mahesh Dattani, Jiten, Nitin, Lalitha, Daksha, Praful, husband, bonsai.

Victimization is an act that exploits or victimizes someone or treats them unfairly. Women became the utmost victim under all the circumstances. She became the dancing doll in the hands under the male-oriented society. As Reddy remarks, "Patriarchy is something that cannot be separate from the structure of Indian society" (Reddy 67). In Indian culture, importance is given to the male. Basically Indian society is male centered according to sociologists and the family is dominated by male. Since he is the head of the family, the freedom is hardly given to the other members of the family. Marriages in India are usually arranged by parents and the wife becomes a member of the husband's family, in most cases moves in with them. Since most marriages are arranged with the assistance of third parties, the families

generally do not know each other well. It had become almost impossible for the liberation of the mind of the women.

Mahesh Dattani, acclaimed as one of the best playwrights in the modern India, portrays women suffering under the oppression of patriarchy in his writings. Director, actor, screenplay writer, film maker, teacher, Mahesh Dattani is a man of multiple aspects, creativities and identities. His themes reflect and comment on the ordinary and every day conflicts of so many urban people. Dattani was born on 2nd August 1958, in a Gujarati family, settled in Bangluru, Karnataka. His plays are the mirror of contemporary Indian society. They discussed the undercurrent of social life. Like Bernard Shaw and William Shakespeare he exposes the evil prevalent in the society. He uses the world of comic theatre as a powerful tool for bringing about the necessary social change. In the present paper an attempt has been made to discuss victimization of women in the hands men and their patriarchy in his play, *Bravely Fought the Queen*. It portrays women suffering under the yoke of patriarchy and rather disturbing picture of the relations between men and women in a wealthy isolated suburb of Bangluru. Mahesh Dattani's plays are different due to the rational and objective stand taken by him in revealing the layers of hypocrisy and prejudice.

Bravely Fought the Queen was first performed at the Sophia Bahbha Hall, Mumbai on 2nd August 1991. It is Dattani's fourth play. The play has a multi-layered thematic technique. In the play, Dattani has dealt with the status of women in the present Indian society and thereby depicting the victimization of women as they had been in the past. As L. A. Devi observes: "It is a domestic tragedy dealing with the odds and suffering on patriarchal imposition and domination over women" (Devi 189). Here, all the women suffer because of male tyranny. There are four female characters who are physically present in the play such as Baa, the mother of the two brothers Jiten and Nitin, the two sisters of Praful-Dolly and Alka who are the wives of Jiten and Nitin respectively and Lalitha, wife of Sridhar. They are victimized in the hands of men and their patriarchy. They are exploited in the play. Dattani presents patriarchy in its varied manifestations.

When the play opens, we find baa as the ailing mother of Jiten Trivedi and Nitin Trivedi with white hair and in a white sari and the unnamed mother of Praful and the two sisters Dolly and Alka represent the first generation. Baa represents many Indian mothers-in-law who set up their sons against their wives. Her post is tragic and she has been the victim of injustice and tortures of her husband. As L. A. Devi observes: "Baa's husband was a dominating and violent man who had not only prevented her from singing but also used to beat her up time and again. His nature towards Baa and their sons was so rude and brutal that she becomes affected even after the death of her husband whenever she recalls him of making her unable to live in the present" (Devi 190). The husband of Baa was a drunkard and he frequently used to beat up Baa. Baa met him before her marriage and came to know about his dominating nature. "You want me

to sing only for you? I will sing for every one! Why are you so angry” (288). She had to face humiliation physically in front of their own sons. “You hit me? I only speak the truth and you hit me? Go on, hit me again... see your father!” (Act II 57). Now, Baa becomes old and her husband is dead but his remembrance is still affecting her seriously. She sees the picture of her husband in her elder son, Jiten and thus automatically develops an inclination towards her younger son, Nitin who resembles her a lot. Her overpowering attitude makes her a patriarch to her daughter’s-in-law. Thus, it is the injustice, violence and ill-behaviour of her husband towards her that she desires love, support from her sons. Her nature is deviated from normalcy because of her husband’s lack of concern for her. All the relations are maintained strictly under the dictates of patriarchy.

Dolly, wife of Jiten, is portrayed as an isolated woman. Jiten marries her not because of any attraction or love for her but only for the sake of the societal norm of marriage. He is neither loyal to her nor he tries to understand her. He never treats her the way she deserves. There is restriction in every aspect of her life. Here, her husband is the symbol of patriarchal domination. Her mother-in-law induces Jiten to beat her up in the advanced stage of pregnancy of seven months. As a result, Daksha is born prematurely at seven month, she is mentally retarded. Jiten used to beat her up for every matter. Thus Daksha too, is victimized. Her brother Praful has also exploited and deceived her and her sister. The real plight of Dolly is revealed by Alka in the play, “Having leach for a husband” (300). Here, Daksha stands as the symbol of Jiten’s violence and torture on Dolly. Thus Dolly suffers because of the norms of the patriarchal society of Indian. The patriarchal system with its subtle manifestation in the Trivedi household tries to render Dolly and Alka passive. In this connection Angelie Multani comments, “Dattani’s keen and astute insight into the position of women in a middle class domestic household as “marginal” is worthy of appreciation. Dattani presents the ways in which exploitation is now couched in terms of culture and refinement” (Multani 78). Alka and Dolly have their moments of resistance that make them survive in the oppressive atmosphere of the Trivedi house. In the hands of patriarchy she suffers torture, violence and ill-treatment. Her husband’s lack of concern for her results her to have some psychic problem. Thus, she creates her own world to be happy in which she beautifies herself and takes interest in listening Naina Devi’s ‘thumari’. She and Alka, her sister, create an imaginary character, Kanhaiya as her lover. Her husband shows her superiority over her. As Devi comments, “She suffers not for her own fault but for Praful. She suffers because she is a woman” (Devi 193). Her husband is a cheater and disloyal to his wife. He victimizes her because he wants to show his superiority over her. Dolly had decided to remain within patriarchy all along. Her disabled child Daksha is the symbol of her unfulfilled selfhood. The question of her identity and maternity remains unanswered till the moment of the encounter she has with Jiten.

Alka is the younger sister of Dolly and wife of Nitin. She is a spirited young woman in her early thirties and also suffers from the same predicament. She is the victim of

patriarchal society. First, she suffers at the hands of her brother, Praful and then her husband and mother-in-law's hands. Praful is very cruel to her. He burnt her hair for returning from school with the neighbour's son on his scooter instead of walking with Dolly. She says, "He lit the stove and pushed my face in front of it! I thought he was going to burn my face! He burnt my hair I can still smell my hair on fire" (257). Her husband, Nitin has homosexual relations with her brother Praful even before his marriage to her. In this way, her life is devoid of any love. Her brother tricks her and uses her as an instrument to maintain his affair with Nitin and she has to suffer her whole life because of it. She dilutes herself in wine to get rid of her loneliness. Once at the dinner time, Baa insulted Alka's family before Praful, Alka remarks, "Your sons are so different from one another. They are both petty like you, but otherwise.... Do they have different fathers" (256). Due to this remark, she has been thrown out of the house by her husband. She drinks heavily. She is blamed for being childless that she is not perfect as a woman. She laments "You (Baa) know why I can't have children. You won't let me, That's why" (284). There is no happiness in the married life of Alka. She suffers severely. She is childless; she lacks decency and qualities of an ideal life. Further, she is an alcoholic. But it is her brother, husband and brother-in-law who urge her to be such a woman. Alka deserves all over sympathy. She is victimized upto the extent that she is turned into a totally different facet from herself. The presence of women like Dolly and Alka is taken for granted. They are expected with their constant presence at home, to understand the requirements of the ones who are really in charge.

Lalitha, the wife of Shridhar visits the Trivedi house in connection with her husband's job. She does not suffer in the hands of Shridhar but in the hands of society. She is an employee in Jiten and Nitin's office and very fond of making bonsai and taking care of them. She is the outsider and different from the three Trivedi women. She represents a kind of normality which the three Trivedi women do not possess. She is in a place a bit safer and better than that of Trivedi women. She has a room in the outside world where men run their life. She has her part to decide whether they (she and her husband) should have children or not. Once Lalitha and Shridhar won raffle at one of those made-for-each-other contests. The prize for it was two free tickets for Goa or cash. She rejected the idea to go to Goa and had some fun because of her bonsais. She tells Dolly, "Shridhar wanted Goa and I wanted cash. I just couldn't imagine leaving my bonsais with the neighbour, worry whether she had remembered to water them" (252). Shridhar says to Lalitha, "It's a typical of women to do exactly opposite of what their husbands want, just to prove they are independent" (252). Her obsession with bonsai presents her imaginative world where she can design everything according to her own will. She too longs for something the society does not give. Her passion for growing bonsais symbolically reflects her own mindset. Symbolically, bonsai represents these Indian women of India whom the patriarchal society has never given the chance to grow freely. She is not suffered in the hands of Shridhar but there is the society, which doesn't even allow her to return home by herself from Dolly's House. Daksha, the third generation of the Trivedi family is the victim of patriarchy. Her mother Dolly was kicked by her husband in her pregnancy. The result of it is the premature birth of

Daksha with a deformed body. Her father even doesn't mention her name before anyone. She is under physiotherapy. In the play, she is never in the stage. Even Dolly doesn't want to mention her daughter to anyone. She too is victim. In this connection Ghosh comments, "Women are conditioned to arrest their emotional and mental growth" (Ghosh 1).

At the end of the play, the young couple Lalitha and Sridhar finally escapes from the Trivedi's house of pain. Their dialogue as they left so moving: it's because it gives a sense of the huge task which lies ahead. (Lalitha enters. She looks at Sridhar. They embrace.)

Sridhar (breaks away). Come on! We have a long walk ahead of us!

Lalitha. Has it stooped raining?

Sridhar (picks up her things). Yes. But the roads are flooded. (80)

Though themes of domestic violence and wife abuse are more often represented in the media, Dattani provides each woman a space for self expression. He projects the image of housewives, the sisters, Dolly and Alka Trivedi who have married Jiten and Nitin Trivedi respectively in a stereotypical manner. Dattani lays down the codes for a socially acceptable relationship in a marital set-up. The association between the presence of old Baa and the institution of patriarchy she signifies is not lost on us. The fact that she herself was a victim of oppressive patriarchy is revealed by her sudden outbursts in moments of recall experienced by her. Her trauma at remembering the physical abuse at the hands of her husband stays fresh in her memory.

Dattani's use of the bonsai is an interesting trope in the play. On the one hand it reflects on the nurturing aspects of Lalitha. On the other it also unveils the attitude of a power-ridden society towards women. The women in the play are creations like Lalitha's bonsais. They are not allowed to attain the required height. Their roots are not given ample space to spread. Alka, Dolly and Lalitha are all bonsais each of a different kind, with one difference. Violence is the norm with which the actions of the women are controlled. As a brother in a patriarchal society, Praful has the complete right to resort to violence if he feels his sister is going astray. The pathos of women is evident in Alka's words,

I told him to drop me before our street came. He didn't understand and dropped me right at our doorstep Praful saw. He didn't say a word to me. He just dragged me into the kitchen. He lit the stove and pushed my face in front of it! I thought he was going to burn my face! He burnt my hair. I can still smell my hair on fire. Nitin was right behind us. Watching! Just.....Praful said, 'Don't you ever look at any man. Ever.' (253).

The sexual policing of women is not uncommon in then urban society. Women are given liberties according to the whims of their patriarchs. The Trivedi household considers Alka an immoral drunkard. As Alka dances in the rain, she is regarded as a drunkard and an immoral and uncivilized woman.

Jiten: Ask her what she was doing outside in the rain.

Alka: I don't know! I don't know what I was doing outside. Aren't there times when you don't know what you are doing? (To Nitin) what's the harm in that? Huh? (Nitin doesn't respond) Tell me what's the harm?

Nitin: None. There's no harm in that. (265).

Though trapped in a social matrix, the women seek alternative ways of expression.

In a nutshell, Indian women are still under domination and oppression. The torture or the way our women suffer may be different but the age-old system of dominance over women by men will never end. We think that this play which consciously uses the metaphor of the bonsai to connect its women characters with it at every level and expose their role in relation to it. We see the different shades of gender bias and patriarchy affecting women characters in Dattani's plays. In the play, women are always the victims in the hands of men or in our male chauvinistic society. All of whom have been saplings at the hands of male figures who have sought to curtail their full growth and led to the growth of grotesque artificial plants but unable to serve the real purpose of natural trees-to provide shade, fruits etc. Thus, like the bonsais, the women in the play are incapable of realizing their full potential. All have suffered through the intervention of patriarchal force.

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