

SEXUAL MARGINALISATION OF WOMEN IN MAHESH DATTANI'S THIRTY DAYS IN SEPTEMBER

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani is a Sahitya Akademi Award-winning playwright. He deals with the problems like marginalisation, gender discrimination, patriarchy, communalism. Thirty Days in September is a poignant story of Child Sexual Abuse. It revolves around the psychological trauma of Mala and the unknown and acute pain of Shanta. It also deals with the problems of incest. Women are suppressed not only by men but also by women. Women are seen just as sex objects by men. They always see women as bodies and not as beings with feelings. It deals with the mother-daughter relationship and their misunderstandings of each other.

Keywords: *Patriarchy, Child Sexual Abuse, Suppression of women, psychological trauma, sex objects*

According to Little Dubey, “*Thirty Days in September* has touched hearts and consciences everywhere. Sensitive and powerful without ever offending sensibilities, it manages to bring home the horror and the pain within the framework of a very identifiable mother – daughter relationship. It is a three act play set in the suburb of Delhi. It is a story of child sexual abuse. Mala was molested by her own maternal uncle when she was an adolescent girl. This led to a psychological trauma in her later years and she inflicts herself.” (Dubey)

According to Sigmund Freud, “What we describe as our ‘character’ is based on the memory-traces of our impressions; and, moreover, the impressions which have had the greatest effect on us- those of our earliest youth”. (Freud 539-540)

So a child needs proper care, love and affection when it is young as this leaves a permanent trace on the child throughout its life. Mala was not given proper care by her parents when she was seven. Her father left both Mala and her mother, Shanta. She was continuously molested from the age of seven until she becomes thirteen. She expresses her pain to her mother, but Shanta fails to recognise the agony she undergoes. She feeds her and eventually, Mala gets used to the molestation and starts enjoying it. Mala is made to believe that she is ugly, but her uncle liked her even though she is ugly. That too made a great impact on the character of Mala. Mala enjoyed being looked at by men.

“Mala: That is how you always pacified me and that is how I know that you believe me, deep down. Instead of listening to what I had to say, you stuffed me with food. I couldn’t 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. That if I ate till I was stuffed, the pain would go away...” (Dattani 104)

Shanta kept on praying and didn’t pay proper attention. She should have acted instead of praying.

Mala:... You were never there for me. You were too busy praying! (Dattani 104)

Male-dominated society has traditionally promoted an opposition between Sacred and Profane Love and accordingly classified women as ideal or disparaged. The effects of this ‘Double Image’ are well known. It is perfectly, if harshly expressed by what a man says, quoting ‘an old Italian saying’ in

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Truffaut's film *The Bride Wore Black* 'All women are whores except my mother who is a saint.' (Easthope 77-78)

Mala's uncle says Mala is a loose woman after molesting her. Her cousin tells Shanta that she should not let Mala go out as he is concerned about her. Ironically her uncle Vinay referred her to her cousin. They both try to project themselves to be good men and maintain a good reputation.

Mala: He told me that I was Uncle's reference! Those were his words! 'Your Uncle Vinay has given me your reference!' Uncle told him, Ma! I didn't do or say anything to him. He came to my room! Once he said Uncle's name, I just couldn't stop him!

Shanta: Your cousin told me in private that he was concerned about you, that I should not send you out of the house.

Mala: That was after! He told you that after he molested me! (Dattani 108)

Sex is considered to be an exposition of love. In a chauvinist society, women are considered as sex objects. They see women just as a body. It is apparent in the play. Mala in a party meets an unknown man. Even though he is committed to Radhika, he tries to flirt with Mala.

Man: ... We will be married in a few months. But- I would like to know you better.

Mala: Hold me closer.

Man: Yes... You have a nice body. (Dattani 101)

But the man does not wish to leave Radhika as she is the alternative form of his mother and so he does not want to miss her. At the same time, he does not even like to miss Mala. And he casually blames Radhika for being committed.

Man: I am sorry, I... Look, don't be angry with me. She was leading on me. I swear it was her fault. What could I do? Radhika! (Dattani 101)

Sex out of love is contrasted with molestation in the play. A sharp contrast between the characters of Deepak and the Uncle Vinay shows that sex out of love makes a woman feel alive. Mala is haunted by the thought of her uncle. Whoever she sees, she sees only her uncle Vinay and the molestation she underwent. When Mala and Deepak make love, it is contrasted with the way her Uncle Vinay molested her.

Deepak: You see? It wasn't that difficult.

Man: Touch me here.

(Mala withdraws her hand sharply, frightened.)

Man: You don't love your uncle?

Deepak: What's wrong?

Man: You don't love your uncle, hmm?

Deepak: Try it one more time.

Man: Quickly, before someone sees you. Touch.

Deepak: Please, for my sake.

Man: You said you loved me in front of mummy and daddy. Come on! Show it!

(Mala hesitantly holds Deepak's hand)

Deepak: Thank you.

Man: There! You feel that? It means I love you. Your uncle loves you.

(Mala begins to cry)

Deepak: (Stroking her hand gently). It's okay. It's ok. Cry if you want to.

Man: Shh! Don't cry. You want to come here during your holidays, no? Then don't cry. This is your seventh birthday, no? You are seven now. Ready for a real birthday present? Lie down. Come on, quickly.

Deepak: Look into my eyes.

Man: If they hear you they will say you are a bad girl. This is our secret (like an order but in a whisper). Don't cry! (Dattani 122-123)

While her uncle Vinay hurt her, Deepak makes her feel comfortable and alive by doing the same. After being with Deepak, Mala feels alive and realises the real love.

Mala: I can smile again. I can be a little girl, again. Not again, but for the first time. At thirty-plus, I am the little girl I never was. I want to see movies, taste ice cream. Really taste it, feel the high from the sugar. Tell the difference between flavours. I hear sounds I never cared to hear before- birds, temple bells... my senses are working again. I can touch this chair and feel the chair touch me. My whole body can feel! And for the first time I enjoyed sex. Truly enjoyed it for its tactile pleasure. Not as a craving for some kind of approval. I came alive and experienced what it means to be really loved. And for once I could look at Deepak in the eyes and say 'I love you' to him and believe it when he says the same to me. (Dattani 114)

Marriage in society is also considered to be a license to have sex and not as a result of love. Mala's father left Mala and Shanta for Shanta did not allow him to be with her. He did not realise the agony of Shanta. She was also suffering like Mala but her pain was unnoticed. Just because she was not ready to sleep with her husband he deserted the.

Mala: I know he didn't care about me. But he didn't leave because of me.... The only reason you shared my room was because you didn't want to sleep with him... You know what he said. He said to me, 'I married a frozen woman'. (Dattani 116)

The agony of women folk is not realised even by women. Throughout the play, Mala misunderstands Shanta that she did not pay proper attention and care towards Mala. But she fails to understand the pain of Shanta who herself was molested by the same person who molested Mala.

Finally, Mala realises that everything done to her was not really her mistake rather those who inflicted pain on her. Initially, she does not want to reveal her name out of shame as she likes being with men. But at the end of the play she realises that it is those men who have done all kinds of injustice to her should hide their identity. In a few years eventually, she forgets her past and starts a new life with Deepak.

The play portrays a gripping story of Mala and her agony. Women are always misunderstood and ill-treated. It happens not only in the working class people but almost all classes. So Dattani depicts the upper middle-class family in Delhi. But still there is hope. Real men are who respect women as they are. Deepak as portrayed in the play, is the hope, an ideal character who respects women for who they are and doesn't blame them for what they are not.

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