

Facing the Hidden Face of India in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara and Thirty Days in September*

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India is a country known for its cultural divergence and traditional practices. India is a nation where familial ties and relationships are given great importance. But the very traditional country has a darker side too. India stands in second place among the most dangerous country for women; India has registered cases of caste based violence standing in par with some of the most violent countries of the world. These are some of the sensitive issues that are handled by the Indian writers with quick and sure hands. But what was left unsaid are the abuse and violence undergone by children – be it emotional, sexual, physical or psychological. It is taken for granted that children do not undergo such feelings or they exaggerate or to protect the name and the modesty of the family. According to a recent survey by Save the Children India

94.8% of rape cases saw children being raped by someone they knew, not strangers. These acquaintances include neighbors (3,149 cases) who were the biggest abusers (35.8%). 10% of cases saw children being raped by their own direct family members and relatives. (Web, anonymous)

The conclusion of the report being that a child is being abused every 4 minutes. The darker side of the nation has to light when parents started to report the cases of abuse.

Mahesh Dattani is a writer who deftly handled the issue of child abuse long before the public awareness about it was started. He was one of the earlier writers to write on child abuse, more specifically the psychological and sexual abuse of girl children in the Indian familial set up. He is a man of multi-dimensional personality. He is an Indian director, actor, playwright and a writer. He has a number of plays to his credit such as *Where there's a Will*, *Dance Like a Man*, *Tara*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Final Solution*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Thirty Days in September*, *Seven Steps Around The Fire*, *The Murder That Never Was* etc. He is the first playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for *Final Solution*. *Dance like a Man* has won the award for the Best Picture in English awarded by the National Panorama in 1998. Dattani's plays deal with the themes of social issues not the very obvious ones, but

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the deep-seated prejudices and problems that the society is usually conditioned to turn away from. His plays deal with gender identity, gender discrimination, and communal tension.

Dattani in his *Tara* explores the life of conjoint twins, Tara and Chandan born with three legs. The Patriarchal society plays a cruel card in their lives ruining Tara forever. His argument being that the society puts down a girl child in favor of a boy for milieu, more so in case of a crippled girl child.

A scan showed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl. The chances were slightly better that the leg would survive on the girl... they would risk giving both legs to the boy... Chandan had two legs for two days. It didn't take them very long to realize what a great mistake they have made. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead fish which could have- might have-been Tara (TA378)

The abuse of a child need not be sexual. Psychologists say that even the smallest act of emotionally putting down a child or making them feel unwanted or in adept is considered as an abuse. Tara in this case had to live a crippled life till her death because of the decisions taken by her family to provide a better life to a boy child over their girl. She faces emotional and physiological trauma her entire life and finally breaks when she learns the reason for her misery.

Thirty Days in September explores the life of a woman who had undergone sexual abuse as a child. Dattani's initially shows the psychological state of a girl who has trouble holding onto a relationship for more than a month. She never trusts any man she dates and has a secret pleasure in breaking up the relationship. When finally confronted she opens up about her past. She was raped by her uncle in her own house. She developed a personality that secretly loves hurting men

Shhh! don't cry you want to come here in 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. If they hear you they will say you are a bad girl. This is our secret... Relax and look into my eyes. I am not going to harm you. Help me and I will love you more than your mummy or daddy. (TDS, 43).

Dattani shows the emotional trauma of the child in the last scene. He sets in the fact that most of the child abuse or rape cases registered. The abuser is someone the child is familiar with either a very close family friend or a relation. The child is usually blackmailed using some little mistake she did earlier or bribed with some trivial thing she likes. In most of the cases the child is afraid of speaking things or doesn't speak about it because the child is not aware of being abused or presumes what is happening to her is right because an elder whom her parents know or respects does things to her. Only a very few are able to understand that what happens to her is wrong. In some unfortunate cases where the child is able to understand that it is wrong and informs the parents, they fail to take action and let it slide. Mala, the protagonist of *Thirty Days in September* suffers the same fate and blames her mother for her plight.

Where were you when he locked the door to your bedroom while I was napping in there? Where were you during those fifteen minutes when he was destroying my soul? Fifteen minutes every day of my summer holidays, add them up. Fifteen minutes multiplied by thirty or thirty-one... That's how long or how little it took for you to send me to hell for the rest of my life (TDS, 52-53).

Mala was raped when she was seven years old by her maternal uncle and later on by her cousin. Her mother, who was a victim of child abuse herself, identifies what's happening to her daughter but does nothing to confront her brother or prevent her daughter from being abused like she was. Her inaction is the most cutting part of Dattani's play. As in most cases, she is afraid of the society taking the wrong side on her daughter and losing her relationship with her brother. As a result of her silence she loses her daughter in the most horrible way imaginable. She develops an aversion to affection and takes pleasure in having short term relationships with men and ending it as she wishes.

The Indian society has been created in way that if the women voice out their problems, the blame is pointed to them first, before questioning the men. In cases where it is the men of the family are the aggressors, the women are often silenced in order to preserve the family name. This in turn has negative effects on the women who open up to speak about the abuses they faced.

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