



FEMININE PERSPECTIVE IN MAHESH DATTANI'S *THIRTY DAYS IN SEPTEMBER*

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ABSTRACT

*In the present research paper, I have pointed out several key aspects of **Thirty Days in September** which deals with feminine psychology, nature of exhibitionist personality and sexual stimulation with the help of a few characters. Author wants to prove that patriarchal society uses their power even in their own homes. It is the first generation's guilt that leads to the sufferings of the second generation. That is why the second generation is unable to protest.*

Keywords: *Feminine psychology, exhibitionist, stimulation and patriarchal society.*

INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse of children and even adolescents is a human rights violation first and foremost. However, it is also an act that leaves a person scarred for life once s/he grows up and begins to understand the implications of what had happened to him/her quite early in life. The use of innocent children and adolescents for sexual stimulation or worse than that, sexual gratification is understood as sexual abuse. Literature on the subject of child sex abuse reveals that it could begin with small rewards or gifts, followed by a demand for sexual stimulation/gratification by way of returning the favors. It could begin with adult's indecent behavior like exposing themselves and seeking exposure of the child/adolescent in return, or it could be inviting them to watch pornography on internet and adult films. It could also take the form of intimidation of a proposed victim, using threats, blackmail or simple physical attack.

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The play, *Thirty Days in September* makes a critique of the issue of child sexual abuse and brings to light the great damage it causes to the psyche of the helpless children. Children are taught to respect their elders and begin to depend on them for safety and security. They do not understand the nature of abuse but are scarred for life. When adult abuse their trust, those in whom they found security make them search and traumatize in the aftermath of a situation like this.

Mala (a word, which literally means a garland) is not able to understand what her uncle had done to her and done it repeatedly over a period of time. Addiction is an extreme form of recurrent habitual behavior. Habit formation shapes out of what appears to a subject to be a unique response to a stimulus repeatedly over time. She gets addicted to the abuse and it appears as if her mind is conditioned to accepting abuse probably as a ritual of getting ready for life.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, “An adult who engages in sexual activity with a child is performing a criminal and immoral act which never can be considered normal or socially acceptable behavior.” Thus, we can define the child sexual abuse in the context of sin which is not punishable act according to the society. Generally this act happens in number of joint families but still society either ignores it or hushes it up. In reality, it is criminal act in the eyes of the law and a sin in the context of religion. It is an immoral act even on moral grounds. In fact, there is no provision for penalty in family structure. Even if there were some provision existing in some cases it is not imposed because the victim is too frightened and feels ashamed to report it.

The present play, *Thirty Days in September* deals with the child sexual abuse and brings to light the consequences which are emerge from the young victims. It talks about how the individual’s psyche is ruined with the passage of time. Mala- the protagonist of the play is molested by her uncle before she reaches adolescence. Her mother- Shanta does not take any notice or chooses to remain silent in the face of her daughter’s molestation. The act is recurrent (30 days) and Mala becomes used to it. She does not only known and familiar people but also strangers in a first meeting in order to seek sexual gratification. Mahesh Dattani seems to use the protagonist Mala to demonstrate how young girls get converted themselves into sex workers.

The play begins with Mala, talking to her counselor, and the interaction between them offers a portrait of her as a very confused person. Adolescence is even otherwise too difficult for a person to handle. Psychologists say, for it marks a transition from childhood to adulthood. It is a state of great mental confusion in a person because s/he knows that s/he is no more a

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child but at the same time not fully an adult, and that is why s/he does not know what s/he should choose to do, and what effects it will have on the family, his/her siblings, peer group or society.

In a tape-recorded voice, she reveals her condition to her counselor which is very suggestive. She is unhappy with her present condition and reveals her real name, Mala Khatri. She speaks about her molestation by her uncle. Generally, the victims of child sexual abuse develop negative opinion about them and thus seek to be which is why s/he becomes a loner, not able to mix with others. She blames herself, her uncle and her mother for all the wrong done to her. They think that, someone may take an advantage of their situation. In the same manner, Mala thinks that she is responsible for her own condition and some time she feels that her mother's silence. We are able to reach this conclusion because Mala herself reveals her condition at the beginning of the play, "and my name is...I don't think I want to say my name... I am sorry...I know it is my fault really... It must be. I must have asked for it...It's not anybody's fault except my own. Sometimes, I wish that my mother..." This is merely an act of blaming oneself for what has happened.

So, whatever Mala feels at the present time is just due to her helplessness and equally due to her mother's persistent silence to this sinful act despite of the fact that she is aware of it. It is not easy for a girl to behave in a normal manner while someone is out to ruin her body and soul in early youth. Generally, we try to forgive and forget something that irritates us. God has provided both the qualities in us in an equal measure. He provides us the ability to remember things and events but at the same time he provides us the ability to forget painful and unpleasant experiences of life even if be for longer periods. However, we do not have complete erasure. Those feelings return to haunt our lives and trouble us frequently. It is due to these abilities that we are able to maintain/sustain our interest in life. If we keep looking constantly at the past experiences, we would not be able to make good sense of the present and our today gets transformed into yesterdays. If we keep thinking about the past experiences, we would certainly ruin our present as well as future. Mala constantly thought about her bitter experience of molestation by the hands of her uncle before her adulthood. She is not able to free herself from the trauma of past experience and develops a deep sense for victimhood.

Mala grows up into her adulthood, not as a normal person, but one obsessed with sex for the sexual pleasure. She becomes what is known in slang as a hooker. When Deepak proposes her for marriage, she reveals to him her passion for sex with several people arguing that even if she had to accept to marry him. She would need others and that would be fair to him. One day Mala and Deepak meet at a coffee shop and they talk about their respective interests in life. At that time Deepak asks what she likes the most. Then Mala points out to the man seating at the table next to them and complains that, he was looking at her body differently.

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On hearing this, Deepak suddenly gets up and starts beating the man. In the meantime, Mala tries to cool down Deepak and takes him back to their table. She confesses that she had told him a fake story and the man was indeed innocent. Mala only wants him to pay attention to her. It is her way of showing how it is important for her that men admire her beauty and lust after her. She says, “if he had looked at me, I would have felt- I would truly alive.” (Act-I, p.112)

Mala appears to wish her beauty and persona to be admired by people. Generally, we are not what we seem to be and we never appear what we are actually. We try to hide our inner likes and dislikes in due deference to society. We simply act and react to others and try to please them by having normally. In the same manner, whatever Mala has done was just because of her need to conform to the social norms. However, she comes out as an ‘exhibitionist’, or a person who tries to attract attention to him/her through exaggerated or inappropriate behavior. This attitude develops in her just due to feeling of loneliness of heart. When a person is not recognized by his/her people, s/he wants to project himself/herself as if s/he had everything that would earn popular recognition. One more thing is that, generally exhibitionist sort of people tend to project themselves as important and feel the necessity to maintain good relation with others. At the end of the play, Mala reveals to her that she was molested by her uncle before adulthood. At that time Deepak wants to help her and invites her home so that she would be more relaxed. Mala turns down his invitation on the ground that she would not be able to free herself from the haunting images of her uncle’s act. She says,

You don’t understand! YOU JUST DON’T UNDERSTAND!! I cannot love you because How can I even being to explain to you? I see this man [her uncle, Vinay] everywhere. I can never be free at him. I am not so sure I want to be free of him. Even if I was, I am not sure whether I have the ability to love anyone...else (Act-III, p.134)

It is clear from this that she has developed an obsession, a negative reaction, to her uncle’s deplorable act of abuse and is out to avenge it by indicating other men. We can put this as a ‘compulsive vengeful reaction’ turning her abuse into her ‘abuse’ of other man like him. She behaves indifferently to men who understand her pain and help her to overcome. She turns down Deepak’s offer of help. Her uncle damaged seems to have her natural growth. This psychological pressure left her unable to receive and reciprocate love from any other man. Mala holds her mother responsible for her molestation. She recalls how when she once tried to tell her mother five years ago about it, she did not pay any attention to it and asked her to simply forget it as bad dreams. She remembers retorting to her,



I am not talking about a bad dream. I am talking about the time when uncle Vinay would molest me when I was seven. Then Eight. Nine. Ten. Every vacation when we went to visit him or when he came to stay with us. You were busy either in pooja room or the kitchen. I would go to papa and cry. Before I could tell him why I was crying he would tell me to go to you. You always feed me and you never said it but I knew what you were saying to me without words. That I should eat well and go to sleep and the pain will go away. And, and- oh God! It did go away. But it comes back. It didn't go away forever! (Act-I, p.106)

Shanta, Mala's mother, had seen something totally different from Mala's story. According to Mala, her uncle has molested her while her mother tried to prove that Mala herself was responsible for all these. It appears as if Shanta would ignore it or wants to hold Mala responsible for it in self-defense.

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. 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.

Mala: No.

Shanta: To touch you.

Mala: I didn't.

Shanta: To pinch your breasts.

Mala: Stop it!

Shanta: You were forcing to say things to you.

Mala: Stop it, I said!

Shanta: To do things to you.

Mala: I did not! I did not.

Shanta: That is why I forget. I went to kitchen to vomit. Then I prayed. I prayed for you Mala (pointing to the portrait). That is what I was praying to our god, so He could send his Sudarshan Chakra to defend you, to defend us from the demon inside you, not outside you. But you would not let me, you don't let me." (Act-I, p.107)

This long conversation provides us with the evidence that Mala is right in blaming her mother for avoiding to talk to her about this and forget it. Shanta's indifferent attitude towards this leads one to suspect that she is dependent on her uncle, who is her cousin. Shanta judges Mala's deed as an immoral act/s sin and keep aloof. Shanta takes refuge in prayers so that

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God sets things right for her and her family. She feels that only Krishna could come to rescue her by using His Sudarshan Chakra. In fact Shanta feels as if Mala is a possessed soul and the devil in her head makes her imagine all sorts of wrongs done to her, about what she considers to be sinful acts. Mala finds this behavior strange and accuses her mother of indifferent towards her, or worst still an attempt to believe in her own falsehoods as true.

She complains bitterly and in a long dialogue defends herself. “By staying silent doesn’t mean I can forget! This is my hell... It is your creation, Maa! You created it for me with your silence! You didn’t forget anything. You only remain silent!” When looked at closely, this piece of interaction provides us with a new perspective on how she holds her mother responsible for her ‘living hell.’

According to Mala, whatever happened during her childhood days was just because of her mother’s silence on what was wrong with her own and Mala’s life. Shanta knows that her daughter Mala was undergoing physical abuse but preferred to remain deaf, dumb and blind to it. That is explained in psychology as an act of ‘Self defence.’ Differences develop between Shanta and Mala, which widen with the passage of time so much so that there is complete breakdown of communication between them. Mala boldly argues against saying,

...where were you when he locked the door to my bedroom while I was napping in there? Where were you during those fifteen minutes when he was destroying my soul? Fifteen minutes multiplied by thirty or thirty one or whatever. That’s how long or how little it took for you (to) send me to hell, for the rest of my life! Surely you must have known, Maa.

This offers a clear logical and powerful statement of fact that Mala makes about her unfortunate predicament. Mala is apparently justified in putting her mother in the dock for it. Therefore, Shanta’s accusations of demons possessing her daughter do not hold. Shanta paints Mala as a nymphomaniac who likes to be abused for the sheer sexual pleasure and that she had become addicted to enjoying sex acts.

At the very final stage of the play, we come to know the harsh reality that Shanta and Mala both were molested by the same person Vinay. When silence does not convey anything, then there is need to give expression to our feelings of hurt as a part of the human nature. If silence increases the level of pain in heart, the verbal expression of the hurt cause provides a psychological release. Shanta herself reveals that Vinay had molested her and that is how she has become ‘a frozen woman’ for her husband.

The result was she took refuge in Lord Krishna and became a devotee of His. When her mother reveals her condition, Mala sympathizes automatically with her and the relationship

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between the two returns to normal once again. Mala was not aware of her mother's silence and she thinks that her mother is responsible for all these when Shanta confides in her about her own experience, harmony is restored between them. We find here how 'confession' works magic in our lives. If we cannot be honest with ourselves, then we can never be honest with others. The act of 'confession' is a renewal of faith. For only the 'suffering' ones know and can empathize with other 'suffering ones.'

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