



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

**GENDER ISSUES IN MAHESH DATTANI'S *THIRTY DAYS IN SEPTEMBER***

Prashant Yadav

*(Research Scholar, Department of English & MEL, University of Allahabad, Prayagraj- 211002.)*Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2023.10311>**ABSTRACT**

Mahesh Dattani shows that patriarchy controls the society and family. In this play we find gender discrimination which creates barriers for development of women in our society. The dramatist shows child abuse in this play and depicts that it affects whole life of children. The playwright wants to bring social reform by this play which is very important for a good society. The dramatist reflects that Mala faces too much sexual abuse in her life and she was very puzzled by this incident.

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**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 favours. It could begin with adult's indecent behaviour 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. 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 behaviour. 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. Beena Agarwal says: "The play *Thirty Days in September* is focused on the issue of childhood sexual abuse. Mala, the protagonist, is the victim of this abuse but she maintains silence against injustice."(Agarwal 91)

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 appear from the young victims. Bipin kumar Parmar depicts: "Dynamic and innovative theatrical art of Dattani captures the stark reality of life. He is famous for presenting taboo issues like homosexuality, child's sexual abuse, maltreatment to the eunuch, prostitution, etc. In the present play, Dattani reflects on the problem of sexual molestation of the child and for reaching impact thereof."(Parmar115)

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 counsellor, 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. In a tape-recorded voice, she reveals her condition to her counsellor 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. 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. 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. Mala explains to Deepak: "Mala am sure you will understand."(Dattani 30)

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 behaviour. 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. 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. 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-defence.

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. 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! 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. 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.

#### CONCLUSION

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. 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's suffering ones.

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