

## Child Sexual Abuse: An Invisible Issue in the play Thirty Days in September

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Mahesh Dattani picks up the issues that simmer in the society, but are rejected because of embarrassment or prejudices. Specially issues concerning to gender discrimination, transgender identity, gay and lesbian syndrome, child sexual abuse, religious intolerance and inequalities have been put into limelight in Mahesh Dattani's drama. It shows the social consciousness in the plays of Mahesh Dattani. He tries to show dark side of society which is much uneasiness among the audience.

In the paper attempt is made to critically analyze Mahesh Dattani's play Thirty Days in September, the play was first performed at the Prithvi Theater, Mumbai; on 31 May 2001. The play deals with the subject that simmers below the surface of our consciousness and that is, girl child sexual abuse. The play was commissioned by 'RAHI', a support group for women survivors of incest. (Dattani, Collected Plays, Volume Two 5) RAHI: is an organization in India which works for woman survivors of incest and 'Child Sexual Abuse' since 1996. Before go through the play we should understand the term 'Child Sexual Abuse'.

The Term: Child Sexual Abuse:-

Child sexual abuse is sexual exploitation

of child by adult. Child sexual abuse is generally secretive and socially unspeakable issue. It becomes public issue in the last few decades. However, it is present throughout history. This issue becomes objectionable in recent time. The first published work of child sexual abuse appeared in France in 1857: 'Medical-Legal Studies of Sexual Assault by Auguste Ambroise Tardieu.

In the play Thirty Days in September Deepak sees through the panic psyche of Mala and takes her to a counselor where she hesitatingly reveals some truth. But ultimately it is because of Deepak's love and affection that Mala unburdens herself. The memory of her uncle's misdeeds haunts her when uncle Vinay comes to her place.

Mala is the protagonist in the play who was molested by her maternal uncle at the age of seven. Mala growing up in an impression that she doesn't trusted any man. She always thinks that she would be used and hurt. She is never completely open and vulnerable to a man. Consequently, she never reaches that level of intimacy in a man woman relationship. She wants sex only for physical satisfaction but it was just lust which ruins her life. In the meanwhile she meets a gentleman Deepak who fall in love with her just because of her honesty and truthfulness. Deepak respects her and consider her as lady of the age.

Mala begins to think of herself as loose characterless. This misrecognition of her own identity creates sense of guilt in her mind and frames her identity. As a result mala became physically vulnerable and desires the company of men for sexual gratification. She plays a game of love with every man in her life but she is unable to connect positively with men. She did it deliberately. She meets men and setup relations with them but ends within a period of thirty days. The number 'thirty days' is somewhere in her subconscious mind. It is used when she was molested by her uncle. She

Mala is the result of buried hatred, pain and the sense of betrayal and silence against the crime.

Mahesh Dattani as dramatist wants to project fragmented consciousness of Mala on stage too. Therefore, Mahesh Dattani makes use of four acting areas, flash back, monologues, recorded voice, incomplete sentences which represent the fragmented consciousness of Mala. The Doll's symbol and Lord Krishna's portrait are very effective. Doll's symbol presents the childhood abuse of Mala which also symbolizes that she is not permitted to express reality by society. With the image of Gopal (Krishna) audience remember the demon Kansa, who kills seven children of his own sister. This modern Kansa represents by Mala's uncle Vinay. Mala's demon uncle made incurable wounds on her mind, body and soul. Those wound are psychological, physical and spiritual wounds. This dramatic art of Mahesh Dattani projects fragmented existence of Mala in the play.

Deepak really wish that Mala should tell him the truth. He realizes Mala doesn't trust him. He minutely observes the behavior of Mala and he founds that she is not in mood of say anything and doesn't cry too. She always seeks for someone's company. This way Mala unknowingly disclose her molestation but she doesn't disclose the name of offender to Deepak. Deepak slowly realizes that both Mala and Shanta hides some secrete. Deepak understands a close relative of Mala molested her in childhood. He suspects to Mala's maternal uncle Vinay. Deepak, Mala, Shanta and Uncle Vinay go to restaurant to discuss about the marriage of Deepak and Mala. Deepak deliberately take the issue of Mala's childhood and ask to Shanta and Vinay is any unpleasant evident happened to Mala. Uncle Vinay suddenly try to change the topic. Then all of them returns back to Mala's home. Here, uncle Vinay plays his last card to keep the mouth shut of Shanta and Mala. Vinay announce that he is going to gift his flat to Shanta. But unexpectedly

Mala get angry to Vinay and Shanta and accuses to her mother that she remain silent just for the sack of money. Mala very seriously accuses to her mother and uncle. Mala brings the real silence in the play. She says to her mother that her mother knew the fact but she never helps Mala. Uncle Vinay try to deny accuses and said that it is just the wild imagination of Mala.

This particular moment brings the play to its climax. Now it time to self-discloser of Shanta; she disclose that she too had been a victim of child abuse at the hands of the same man(Vinay). She says that this is the cause to keep her quiet, although she knew everything. Shanta reacts painfully to Mala's accuse of being remained silent. With her dialogue Shanta brings the ugly truth of hypocrisy, she says:

SHANTA: I remained silent not because I wanted to, but I didn't know how to speak. I-I cannot speak. I cannot say anything. My tongue was cut off. . . (To Deepak) Please save her. I did not save her. I did not know how to save her. How could I save her when I could not save myself? . . . (To Mala) You say I did not help you? I could not help you. Same as you could not help me. Did you ever see the pain in my eyes? . . . (Pointing to the Man) he spoke. Only he said, only he saw and he did. (55)

The man (uncle Vinay) tries to stop Shanta from revealing the fact; but now no one can stop Shanta, she broke the silence and tells what had happened to her:

SHANTA: I was six, Mala. I was six. And he was thirteen . . . and it wasn't only summer holidays. For ten years! (Pointing to the picture of God.) I looked to Him. I didn't feel anything. I didn't feel pain, I didn't feel pleasure. I lost myself in Him. He helped me. He helped me. By taking away all feeling. No pain no pleasure, only silence. Silence means Shanti. Shanti. But my tongue is cut off. (55)

Thus, Mala knows that Shanta is herself a victim of exploitation but she is afraid to tell her pain to anyone. Mala realize the real cause of her mother's silence. Shanta knows all what