

**CRISIS OF VALUE-SYSTEMS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY:  
AN ANALYSIS OF  
MAHESH DATTANI'S *THIRTY DAYS IN SEPTEMBER***

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Mahesh Dattani, a well-known name in the field of literature and theatre, is an Indian playwright who deals with some of the contemporary problems through his writing. He is a man of high intellect and deep understanding whose writings touch all the sects of society and depict the predicaments of people in truthful and realistic manners who reside in it. Unlike others, Dattani's works have nothing to do with fancy and imagination, as Premchand writes "Literature properly so-called is not only realistic, true to life, but is also an expression of our experiences and of the life that surrounds us." (The Nature and Purpose of Literature 82), but presents problems with proper solutions. Dattani portrays harsh and bitter realities of the contemporary world as he writes for the downtrodden, exploited and oppressed people of society. His plays leave a powerful impact on readers and they are enough qualitative to give a new direction to the society as D.J.R. Bruckner declares Dattani a "Powerful and disturbing writer" (The New York Times). His works cover a wide range of burning issues like forced sexual relations, homosexuality, change in individual's psychology, gender discrimination, incest, sex addiction, drastic transforms in the characters and child sexual abuse. The techniques used in his plays come with effective conversation between characters and bring impressions of postmodern society. Mainly, his plays are for enactment, not only for reading, that is why they got good commercial success wherever they have been performed in home as well as in abroad.

Mahesh Dattani explores a wide range of themes related to current milieu what we observe around us, and the most genuine characteristics of his plays are the truthful and artistic presentation of characters and incidents as he writes:

I write for my milieu, for my time and place-middle-class and urban Indian. My dramatic tensions arise from people who aspire to freedom from society... We have to understand the marginalized, including the

gays. Each of us has a sense of isolation within given contexts. That's what makes us individual. (The Hindu: Mar 9, 2003, Sunday)

His plays are blessing for those people who are thrown out of society. Dattani has raised these serious issues on the request of RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest), which provides help to female victims of incest both mentally and physically as well. Dattani was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award for his contribution to Indian drama for his play *Final Solutions*. Born in Bangalore on August 07, 1958 he founded theatre group *Playpen* in 1984. Apart from a renowned playwright he is a stage director, an actor, and in summer he also runs a course of drama writing and theatrical nuances in USA. He has written many plays like *Dance Like a Man* (1989), *Tara* (1990), *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991), *Final Solutions* (1993), *Do the Needful* (1997), *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998), *Seven Steps Around the Fire* (BBC radio play 1998), *Thirty Days in September* (2001) and *Brief Candle* (2009), which are interwoven with different themes, and almost all have been performed on stage. Mahesh Dattani's plays are artistic mixture of different cultures and mental states, feelings, emotions, desires, thoughts of Indian as well as Western World that is why Mario Relich calls Dattani "A playwright of world stature."

The present play *Thirty Days in September* is an epitome of the contemporary debased system. Written in 2001, the play emphasizes on some serious issues like child sex abuse and its effect on individual's psychology and reveals the secrets of incest in a family, and declares that such things are enough to bring distortion in society as Lillete writes:

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. (BC82)

The play explores more about mother-daughter relationship but it ultimately fails when plot develops further because of some misunderstandings come between the two. Mala, the protagonist of the play goes through a shocking experience which changes everything in her life even relations with her mother.

Child sexual abuse is a burning concern in the society. Society is also responsible for all these breath taking wrongdoings, and an individual bears severe pain given by it. Dattani raises such issues in his plays, for he wants to convey that in the wake of materialism human beings are cutting the roots of social norms and they are crossing the limitations of everything, and the results are visible everywhere without any gap. Dattani, through this play, unveils the mindset of the present generation both male and female as well, and reaches to a point where everything is clearly visible. After reading this play it seems, as Dattani conveys directly, that the present epoch has changed into wasteland as T.S. Eliot writes: "And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, And the dry stone no sound of water" (The Wasteland), where nothing appears growing and ascending but a barren land without morality and ethics totally unbalanced and distorted. Dattani questions the male dominated society that why it is silent on such serious issues like child abuse, sex, forced relationship etc. Shanta bears everything including physical pain for a long time due to fear and pressure of society because she considers that if the incidents are disclosed, the storm will come in her life. People will taunt her or they will try to molest her like Vinay, and will outcaste her. The playwright delineates that we people of this world have lost everything and there is nothing to pine for, and we are pining for momentary pleasures as W. B. Yeats inscribes in the poem "The Second Coming".

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

There is betrayal of human relations, and love is filled with sexual desires. If Shanta had wanted then most probably she would have stopped Vinay for his wrongdoings, and having forceful sexual relationship with her (Shanta) as well as with her daughter as Mala says “The only person who can, who could have prevented all this is my mother”(BC98) but somewhere it was there in her mind that no one will listen to her in society and she will be targeted for everything that is why she bore everything silently.

Dattani being a modern and progressive writer is well aware of modernistic attitude and traditional values, and that is why he comes up with two different ideologies of two generations. Shanta, in this play, has been portrayed a typical Indian lady who has nothing to do with materialism and avarice, and believes only in household works and traditional ways of living whereas on the other side Mala is much conscious about fashionable world, and stylizes as a high-tech girl having all the qualities of Western World as she is much open about sex. She is addicted to sex, and does not hesitate to make sexual relationships with many men even much older to her. She is enough blunt to speak things in home as well as in public and is much aware of her rights as she says “let people know. There is nothing to hide. Not for me. After all, it is he who must hide. He should change his name, not me.” (BF 88) Shanta’s escaping nature proves her a weak character as she is habitual of evading things as whenever any problem falls in the house she always goes to worship room saying “Mere to Giridhar Gopal, doosrona koi, mere to Giridhar Gopal, doosrona koi...” (BC89) Her heart is a wide ocean of secrets, and no one can understand it. Only God can guide her. Mala is a reasonable girl who does not have trust in fate and destiny but rather goes to find reasons which are the causes of her pathetic condition. Unlike Shanta, she does not accept anything easily without testing it, for it is rooted in her mind that there is nothing left in this world to believe. She is much frank in every sphere of life including sex and many other things. And, apart from this she likes to work independently facing what comes in her way. Mala has tendency to reveal things and is more inclined to give them proper solutions. She does not veil them like her mother. Mala has capacity to solve issues at her own but on the other side her mother goes to others to seek help or discuss things. Shanta has many troubled and horrible memories but has repressed them in silence. Mala is well aware of her condition. She feels pity for her but still wants to settle down in life. This attitude shows that she wants to win the race of life.

The title of the play ‘Thirty Days in September’ symbolizes Mala’s inability to keep herself in long term relationship with anyone. She says “I suppose it’s these Western values. I wish I were more traditional, then I wouldn’t behave like this...” (BC 98). She cannot keep her relationship with any one more than one month that is why many entries can be counted in the calendar.

The emotional gap is obvious between mother and daughter. Mala the protagonist of the play goes through the results of what she was compelled to do in her childhood. She may be blamed to become addicted to sex as Shanta taunts her many times, but doing so her mother forgets that it was she who made her like this. Mala has forgotten happiness of life and lives a rotten life in a closed room where there is nothing but darkness and feelings of regretful life. At this stage of life she is on a platform where she finds everyone staring and mocking at her. The character of Mala conveys a message that a child has many colorful dreams for his/her future but when such dreadful things happen, the life becomes hell. Mala moves to her mother many times

to get help and discuss issues but Shanta makes her silent giving her favourite dishes or stops the matter in between deliberately. Mala says “That is how you always pacified me... Instead of listening to what I had to say, you stuffed me with food.” (BC 104) Mala can count the names of people with whom she has slept with but she says that her mother should have warned her to stop all this. Dattani brings this gap deliberately so that both can understand each other in the end. A stage occurs in the middle of the drama where both mother and daughter are not aware of each other’s conditions but the storm comes at the end when Shanta reveals her traumatic experiences to readers. This is the point where climax takes place and everything is unraveled by the playwright. She has motherly attitude towards Mala and accepts her faults saying “It is always my fault...I—I forget things. I am the one to blame. But she is a very nice girl at heart. If she settles down, she will be all right”. (BC95)

Dattani brings Deepak as a ray of hope in the family as he wants to reestablish everything through new perspectives. He cannot see things degrading and every time speaks “Please. Can I talk to you, Auntie? For Mala’s sake.” (BC 93) Deepak is a modern boy with lots of potentials and capabilities who comes with a turning point in play. Shanta wants her daughter to settle down in life with Deepak. But, she denies, for in every male she sees Vinay but Deepak proves himself worthy for her and the relationship stays last long. It is the point where play takes the positive turn.

About the end of the drama Dattani responds to Asmita Theater group:

I would respond... Mala’s resolution lies in the moment of realization for Mala that she had misplaced all her anger on herself and her mother when she understands that and rightfully places her anger against her perpetrator, the drama comes to an end.

In the end of drama Dattani rectifies the misunderstanding between the two that has been there in the past, and establishes a harmonious relationship. Mala also accepts her fault of blaming her mother all the time. She says to her mother- “We were both struggling to survive but—I never acknowledged your struggle...I promise you I will listen. I am waiting for a sign from you...to say that you have forgiven me.” (BC139) Through the character of Deepak, Dattani delivers a message that present is important in life, not the past, for it cannot be retrieved but a lot can be learnt from it.

The play opens the door for new thinking as Ramesh Chander observes “Thirty Days in September’ is worth watching. Mahesh Dattani builds his play around child abuse and tries to lift the veil on the hush-hush subject...Lifting the veil...” (The Hindu) If Dattani wanted then he would have given a tragic end to the play but the presence of Deepak indicates that still there are good people in society. In this way Dattani gives the exact description of the contemporary society and proves himself as a social reformer through this play, and thus he leaves the leaves of hope at the end.

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