

**GUILT AND REPENTANCE LEADING TO INSANITY IN MAHESH DATTANI'S
BRAVELY FOUGHT THE QUEEN AND TARA**

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Abstract

Gender discrimination, concept of androgyny, queer sexuality etc are the predominant and most celebrated perspectives of Mahesh Dattani's plays. But a train of sins, acceptances, guilt and a desperate struggle to mend what is done and to repent the consequences of pride and prejudice is what has supported the main stream as an inseparable, distinctive part. Feeling guilty, infinitely guilty, of what one has done is the sign that that individual is not devoid of human milk. Feeling guilty and heading towards repentance selflessly is a rare human aspect. In Dattani's plays some are selflessly guilty while some are again conspiring to cover their previous conspiracies. If repentance is the ultimate destination of one, it is a showcase of love, though not genuine, to influence the victim of another. The result is the ultimate loss, loss of calculation of time, a naked insanity. This article will focus on the feeling of guilt and repentance, finding respite only in lunacy, of the characters of Dattani.

Keywords: Conscience, Patriarchy, Guilt, Atonement, Insanity

Introduction

‘Unexpected emotion will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways.’(Fraud) As June Tangney, US American professor of Psychology, George Mason University of Virginia said in her presentation that there is a slight difference between shame and guilt. Shame is more public, it is more about how people around are judging an individual for his or her deed, whereas guilt is more private which works within the individual, tormenting how he or she can commit such wrongs. People verdict themselves as bad human beings when they are ashamed and they verdict their particular acts as bad when they are guilty. (Shame and Guilt: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly) Raffaele Rodogno shares the same tone on this subject:

Shame and guilt are both emotions of negative self-evaluation. The characterisation is axed on the difference in their respective focus of evaluation. In shame, one evaluates negatively the self as whole (“I am a bad (greedy, inconsiderate, etc.) person”, “I did that horrible thing”) while in guilt the focus is one’s specific behaviour (“I *did* that horrible *thing*”)....Shame is generally associated with hiding, escaping, and striking back, while guilt with confessing, apologizing, and repairing. (432)

Hence the sinners of both the plays are more guilty than are ashamed because they are unable to accept in their sub-conscious state what they had done consciously and are struggling hard to confess, apologise and repair but as it is evident 'Sin advances in its consequence; repentance follows step by step, but always a moment too late.' (Marino 194) Research indicates that guilt (linked with empathy) is the more adaptive emotion as it can motivate people to behave in a moral, caring and social responsible manner. Shame (about the self) (linked with aggression) can easily go awry.(Tangney) Psychologists have thus defined an individual's feeling of guilt on his/her past deeds and it can easily find a resonance in the psychological unfolding of the major characters of Mahesh Dattani's plays *Tara* and *Bravely Fought the Queen*.

Dattani's plays are no less like the documents recording human psychological complexities, their manifold traits and a patterning manifestation of the conscious – sub-conscious conflicts. If we go after Roland Barthes, it is when the author dies and the readers interpret the text according to their interest, intelligence and intellect, the text incurs too many doors to enter. *Bravely Fought the Queen* is widely considered to be the first ever significant play on gender queer and Nitin being the 'first homosexual character...encountered in any modern Indian play' (Mee 157), whereas *Tara* is read as a play on gender discrimination, about the girl child and boy child dogmas. But what Dattani has contemplated that his plays are more than mere showcases of gender and its issues. The complex psychology of the urban mass – especially the upper-middle section whose unfulfilled and dissatisfied desires get buried under the glitter of power, pelf and position, is what had stuck Dattani the most and the artist within him has presented the complexities through traditional family drama:

Dattani's family dramas deal with issues that confront contemporary Indian society, but are seldom recognised as "Indian". For an insider, tradition ...is often an unconditional force to abide by. But tradition itself ceases to be lived presence when it refuses to be reinterpreted and accommodate changing perceptions and practices. Then it can only seek to function through repressive/coercive strategies....The family in Dattani is an index of tangled attitudes toward gender and sexuality that characterise a traditional society. The clash between traditional and modern values in his work usually leads to their complex interplay. (Sengupta 163-164)

Thus the 'most successful' (Mee156) dramatist of India has portrayed every unnoticed detail of his urban environment in an era of exploring the poverty and backwardness of the rural Indian society. Dattani in his interview with Erin Mee said 'I think the old cliché about writing what you know best holds good for any work or for any art (grammar or literature). I think one has to be true to one's own environment.'(156-157)

In both the plays it is the women who are on extremity of guilt though not shame. A heavy traumatic conscience has subdued their formal selves who were the performers of will and whim. The guilt underpins the sinners either because they are unable to outcry their remorse to seek redemption or it is their ego which is not letting them to commit that they

have performed something inhuman. They are struggling their ego, their guilty conscience and their other selves, which are being rather the real impediments in their way of seeking redemption. In the end each of them meets tragic consequences - dispersed like poetic justice pioneering their guilt a way.

In *Bravely Fought the Queen* the character of Baa is suffering from extreme guilt so much so that she has become half lunatic, getting hallucinations of her stored memories. Throughout the course of the play she has appeared as an old, restless, ailing, insane hag. She keeps on calling people to serve her, accompany her. She is suffering from a traumatic experience of being alone, being not surrounded by people who can make her feel the most important person in the house which she used to be once – the totalitarian owner of the Trivedi family. Here comes the story of the average Indian family – both rural and urban – where the mother-in-law harbours a baseless disliking for the daughter-in-laws considering them to be her competitor in the competition to win the son as well as the supreme position in the house. Dolly and Alka got married to Jatin and Nitin, the two obedient sons of Baa. But the marriages were never smooth with all their dark secrets and also with Baa's manipulation. Baa is both the victim and the oppressor of the violence in the family and it is the trauma of both the experiences what has made her losing the calculation of time. She lives in flashes, hallucinations and memories:

Baa: Do you like your father?

Nitin: He is dead, Baa.

Baa: How can you say such things? (as if to a child) Nitin? Do you like your father?

Nitin: (voice changes to a child's) Yes, Baa. I like him.

...

Baa: ...Nitin? You don't like your father, no? He is not nice.

...

There he is! He is coming! Go away! Have us alone! (Screaming to Nitin) Tell me you hate him! He hits me! Nitin tell me you hate him! Say it! (*Bravely Fought the Queen* 302)

What the playwright has effectuated his focus on is the clever strategy of men during his time. It is to marry women with a rich ancestral belonging and then securing the rights over financial affairs, the regular domestic violence finds way to the married life. Baa is the victim of such a strategy. She comes of a rich family, evident from her own demands:

Baa: ...It is my money. ...mine! Every paisa is mine! Mine from my father. ... this is ,My house! My house! (*Bravely Fought the Queen* 278)

In her time she was badly abused by her husband - a black strong man whom she abhorred. In spite of herself being the source of the luxury, power and pelf to the family, she uses to be beaten brutally by him:

Baa: You hit me? I only speak the truth and you hit me? Go on. Hit me again. The children should see what a demon you are. Aah! Jitu! Nitin! Are you watching? See

your father! ...no! no! not on the face! What will the neighbours say? (*Bravely Fought the Queen*278)

Hence, after the death of her husband she took over the position of the sole dictator of the family which she never got but probably wanted always. Winning over the sons, she wanted to rule over the daughter-in laws, too, which was more a psychological outcome, a kind of revenge, an eerie satisfaction in torturing the brides as much as she had faced in her time. In Miruna George's words:

She is too overpowered and overwhelmed by her past to come out clean and definite; all along she presents herself as a victim, an affiliate to her husband's prejudice. There is no room for an autonomy of self-expression. While she rejects her husband's authority, there is a desire to overpower through her son's authorities. (151)

Excusing on the unsaid truth about the parents of Dolly and Alka, Baa instigated Jiten, who in her own words 'is just like his father. Just like him' (*Bravely Fought the Queen*284) to cast a fatal punishment on the daughter as a repay of her parents' truth, Jiten in his usual impulsive, hostile nature beat Dolly brutally when she was expecting Daksha, their abnormal child. She is like an outcome of the sin committed by Jiten, conspired by Baa. But Baa's reactions while hallucinating the event of Jiten's hitting Dolly, throws the light on her real intentions - intentions of a mother-in-law:

No! Jitu, hit her on the face, but not on the [...] Stop it Jitu! On the face, only on the face! Enough! Stop! (*Bravely Fought the Queen* 311)

Lying on bed, hallucinating her past trauma of being beaten by her husband, she wailed in pain and pleaded the brute not to hit the face where the truth behind her hatred for the other women in the house is hidden. The unknown seed of resentfulness on the society and its discrimination, its partiality and injustice lies here. In her subconscious mind she wanted other women, too, to go through the same hell of a married life what she went through for no reason. Thus she and women like her, both the victims and the oppressors satiate their psychological hunger. But things went wrong and Jiten losing his temper beat his pregnant wife kicked her unborn child to obey his mother. The result of this game of passing ancestral violence was the child Daksha, a girl born with abnormality. Baa got sank into utter guilt of committing the sin and spoiling the third generation. With whatever identity has she established herself in the house, she is a woman above all and has a woman self to empathise the pain. Even if she is not able to feel her woman self, her grandparent self within overburdens the guilt every moment. In her unconscious mind she herself considers being the sole guilty and behaves loony. In her lunatic state the glimpses of the past has snatched her present and her mobility. She is now no more that a useless old furniture to her family. Though fraught with utter guilt, she is a stark example of violence casting by women against women in the average Indian families:

Bravely Fought the Queen is a play about sinners and their secret guilts, it is about violence against women, about exploitation of the weaker, about the mean, squalid

corporate world. The play seems to be approving Freud's theory about repression....Shadows of past are felt throughout the present and since past can't be undone there seems to be no end to it. The play doesn't even end formally. (Tyagi 194)

This torment of conscience is what is pushing her every day to seek repentance that can lessen her burden of the sin of making life immobile. Daksha being born as a girl child is already destined to face discrimination, inequality, injustice and dominance of the patriarchs in her life and Baa's sin has only added oddities to her already odd path of life, making it ultimately impossible to survive a world ruled by men, fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. Patriarchy does not spare a full grown working and complete woman whereas Daksha lacks even the so called normality. Hence Baa on a pay for her evildoing, wants to secure Daksha's life, wants to make others taking care of her by leaving the house to her:

Caught in the split identity of an unhappy sick mother-in-law, guilty, yet trying to make amends to rectify or absolve her sin, Baa...believes that her self will be indicated in her existence and validated by her final act of bequeathing her ancestral home to Daksha. By this affirmative work, she tries to bring meaning to her life. (151) She then wanted Praful to be the trustee as she does not trust anybody else. She believed that it was only Praful who love Daksha genuinely which even her own father had never shown any considerable care for the poor child:

Baa: Nobody loves Daksha in this house.

Nitin: that's not true. Jitu loves his daughter.

Baa: I don't love Jitu. (305)

Then she explained in her hallucination what she had eyed in her sanity:

Baa: Daksha is four now.

Nitin: She is fourteen now.

Baa: Look! Look at Praful playing with her. My little Daksha! How happy she is with Praful. Look this is the first time I have seen her smiling! She is smiling at Praful! She is trying to get up to go to him! Oh! Praful loves my Daksha. Praful will look after her when I'm gone.(*Bravely Fought the Queen*305)

All the while Nitin could not help being surprised at Baa's selecting Praful, whom she had hated the most and had advised him not to befriend him from their childhood, as the trustee of her sole property. This is how her soul searched for repentance altering the soul itself. Paying no heed to her endeared son Nitin's urge, she thus declared with all her former authority, this time for something good, that 'It is Daksha's house.'(*Bravely Fought the Queen*304) Miruna George explained the psychology of Baa thus:

She is ridden with guilt for causing the premature birth of her granddaughter Daksha. The fear of being cheated by Praful made her instigate Jiten to beat Dolly. The victim has become the perpetrator of patriarchal oppression. The desire to remain close to her sons results from her own sense of dislocation. She feels rootless in the presence of

the young wives her sons have brought home. The insecurity felt by her in the early years of the marriage propels her to keep her sons close and loyal to her. She longs for an identity that eludes her till the end.(151)

In *Tara* the guilty conscience has marked Bharati to be a delinquent. In *Tara*, too, the guilty is finding means to repent to get rid of the torment of the conscience. From the very outset of the play she has manifested herself as a very strange and abnormal character. Her love and affection towards her daughter have something more than a general genuine motherly affection. She is an overprotective parent with some unexpressed psychology. It is only at the end Patel revealed the truth behind her abnormality which was less a precedent of motherliness and more an attempted atonement, a redress of her sin committed to her own daughter:

This revelation stuns Tara, who now realises that the protestations of Bharti's love for her had a different motivation than a bonding between women.(Prasad 140)

The major theme of the play, however, is gender discrimination which was so valiant at times that one can risk lives even. Tara paid an unrecoverable price for the offence of being born with a different set of genitals. Whereas it is the prospect of ability, Tara is more able than her twin brother, Handan. The twin was born with three legs – one for each and one to be more on the girl's part if it was to survive. Bharti, along with her father who was a rich politician with high authority, persuaded the doctor who again wanted to erect his own hospital with the help of a powerful person, influenced the operation and the third leg was given to the boy in an 'unethical' (*Tara* 378) way. But it was destined to be wasted at the hands of greed and injustice:

Chandan had two legs for two days. It didn't take them very long to realise what a grave mistake they had made. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead flesh which could have - - might have – been Tara. (*Tara*378)

The gloom of that guilt that the leg would have survived in Tara, gradually overwhelmed Bharti and she chose Tara over Chandan thereafter. The truth was unrevealed to the children and we saw the parents fighting over who will reveal it to them first, for Bharti wanted a self-satisfaction in telling the truth herself to Tara while Patel was unmoved in his decision not to give her the self-complacency at any cost:

Bharti: I will tell her.

Patel stops

I will tell them everything.

Patel goes to her and slaps her.

Patel: You would not dare tell them. Not you. Please, don't, not yet!

...

If at all they must know, it will be from me. Not from you. (*Tara*345)

Patel, very much a part of patriarchy, here is trying to put on an appearance of a helpless father who had no part to play in that 'unethical operation'. But he himself had admitted once

that situations had a chance to be altered 'may be if I had protested more strongly! (378) and now he is taking the advantage of the sin committed by Bharti and her father, a sin of which he was also a part and probably he ,too, wanted the same destiny but never was led into the situation to accept it. He is pretending to be the guiltless and thereby accelerating Bharti's more:

You will have to obey me. It's my turn now. (*Tara*344)

As a way-out of finding complacency, Bharti wants to donate Tara her kidney though Patel has arranged a commercial donor. She wants Tara to carry a part of her which she once denied being driven by her greed. Now she madly wants to donate Tara her kidney to repent her sin and to veil her former injustice, the crime too: 'I want to give her a part of me! (*Tara*344) Probably she wants to prove her greatness, her sacrificing self just to make Tara feel how good she is and that Tara and her mother are more compatible than anybody else in Tara's life. But Patel, too, is determined not to let her pave the path to atonement: 'I do not want you to have the satisfaction of doing it. (*Tara*344) Whether she truly loves her or not that will always be a debatable question, but her endeavours were always desperate to show Tara that she loves her the most in the world, even more than how much her father do:

Bharti: Tara! My beautiful baby! You are my most beautiful baby! I love you very much....I want you to remember that....Everything will be alright. Now, that I am giving you a part of me. Everything will be alright....I will make up for all the things God hasn't given you. (*Tara*315)

A mixture of guilt and fear of being discovered by the person whom she has casted the crime on, is what can be stated as the reason behind such a lie. The irony is explained only in the end that it was not God who had deprived Tara but her own mother who in general are considered to be the earthly selves of God himself. Her sense of guilt and an acute desperateness to mend it have robbed her reasoning and have made her over concerned and over protective about Tara, so much so that she even threatened Roopa to befriend Tara:

Bharti: And you will be her friend?

Roopa: Yes. Yes. Certainly. Such a nice girl.

Bharti: She must make more friends....If you promise to be her best friend – what I mean is if you like to be her friend – I will be most grateful to you and I will show it...in whatever way you want me to...first promise me that you will be her friend. (*Tara* 340-341)

Here, too, she is not acting like a mother but like a criminal leaving no stone unturned to suppress her crime. A real mother of Tara would have never asked a girl like Roopa to befriend. She appears throughout the play as someone who is always helplessly on hurry to reach somewhere, always anxious peculiarly to affect on Tara with her excessive affection so that when she will get to know the injustice of her mother, these love and affection will be casting a screen on the ugly truth and will be able to override her deed. In her very brief conversation with Chandan about Tara's future she almost broke in with her real motif behind

this unnatural love. The irony occurs again when her game of passing the blame on others took place. If earlier it was the Almighty whom she blamed just to wear the mask of innocence, here she played the most common card of blaming the father with the charge of discriminating his love:

Bharti: Your father has a lot of plans for you.

Chandan: I have a lot of plans for me.

Bharti: And Tara?

Chandan: I'll always be there if she needs my help. But I don't think she will.

Bharti: She will. She doesn't know it but she will.

Chandan: Do you have plans for her?

Bharti: Yes. I plan for her happiness. I mean to give her all the love and affection which I can give. It's what she...deserves. Love can make up for a lot. (*Tara* 349)

Every time she speaks of Tara, there is a dried pain in her throat, a pain which she gave years ago to Tara and now is giving years after to herself – both deliberately. What she has consigned her life to is to make up things, to make up the misdeeds.

And then the final fate of the penitent, repentant mother with an overburdened conscience and a fatal worry that her daughter is soon going to die, appeared. After paying her last debt of repentance by donating Tara her kidney, she also got paid for her *karma*:

Roopa: They say she had a nervous breakdown. I think she has finally got completely loony. Stark naked mad. (*Tara* 358)

We the readers, though, have noticed her '*wand torah*' (*Tara* 358) self many a time. Her role ends as a lunatic woman pretending holding an infant in her arms, mumbling:

Tara! My beautiful little girl. Look at her smile, Tara. Smile again for me! Oh! See how her eyes twinkle. You are most beautiful baby. (*Tara* 378)

She finally got what she deserved and thus finally got emancipation from her tormented soul, though her efforts to make up the bond between her and her daughter did not work as Tara after knowing the cruelty performed by her mother and there by realising the realness of all her excessive love and affection, exclaimed sarcastically: 'And she called me her star.' (*Tara* 379)

Whereas Bharti's conscience drained the guilt, it drained to Chandan, who himself was a victim for being a part of the community of patriarchs. He, therefore, started tormenting his own soul for being born as a boy and felt unfathomably ashamed for causing the agony, the tragic end of his sister who, according to him, was more deserving at any field than him. He begged an apology for a non-attempted sin throughout the rest of his life. He repented the injustice of her parents, the commissaries of patriarchy:

But somewhere, sometime, I look up at the shooting star...and wish. I wish that a long-forgotten person would forgive me. Wherever she is. (*Tara* 380)

If Lady Macbeth boosted her husband and induced in him the black courage of committing the biggest sin of mankind - murdering a life, and showed herself to be the

dauntless with no milk of kindness running in her veins, it is also she whom the conscience tormented and turned insomniac, anxious, restless and insane respectively in *Macbeth*. She roamed insanely rubbing her hands to get rid of the spots of crime from her guilty hands though she herself had never stabbed the dagger. Bharti and Baa, too, though were very robust in their deeds and decisions, their femininity; their motherly instincts excruciated them inexplicably which brought the ultimate consequence – a loss of calculation of time and sense. While generalising Baa's conduct as a mother-in-law in the family Payel Nagpal has brilliantly defined her as:

Baa is not merely a woman; she is the patriarch in the guise of a woman. She has become a repository of all the male values in the family. (89)

Contrarily while focusing Baa as a woman living in the society dominated by patriarchy, she penned a different aspect:

In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, one can see the figure of the father as a dehumanised one. To seek social mobility and to assume the role of the patriarch, he marries a woman in the upper rungs of society. Having up surged financial control, he relegates her into a non-entity in the house. This happened in Baa's case and is repeated itself in the case of Alka and Dolly,...the pathetic condition of Baa in the family has only replicated itself in her daughter-in-law in a different form,...It is indeed one of the contradictions in the patriarchal setup that having been associated with the father figure, Jiten beats up Dolly at the behest of Baa. (91)

If the two characters are to bring together for a comparison, it will be judged thus that Baa's sin, though was intentional but was more a result of wrong execution while Bharti's on the other hand was both intentional and executed as per her plan and strategy and influence. She regretted and pined only when the surgery went wrong and her plan was not successful. Hence, the misfortune made her regret her deed and her deed itself probably never:

It is this horrific knowledge that leads to her mental breakdown as also to the breakdown between her and her husband, Patel. (Prasad 141)

As a scheme to repent and amend things 'Bharti has to construct her maternal love for Tara not just as an act of expiation but also to assert her moral superiority over her husband, to carve out her space within the family. Thus maternal love becomes an instrument, not a natural state of being, or even an end in itself. It is a weapon against Patel, and the expression of a desire to compensate Tara...Every relationship is a site for conflict, a conflict for control and power...hidden behind a façade of decorum.(Prasad 142)

Conclusion

If we take the concept of feeling guilty and attaining repentance to a general analysis, the feeling can be considered to be noble as it shows the individual's good moral aspect which plausibly was hidden under his/her material desires. We can even take into consideration the fact that:

...in the cases of failure to conform with a moral rule, although the obedience criterion of assent is unsatisfied, the criteria of remorse, feelings of guilt and repentance may all be satisfied-and the satisfaction of these criteria is sufficient to dispose us to say that we are concerned with a case of assent to a moral rule. (Horsburgh 346)

But this justification cannot be applied and accepted while judging Baa and Bharati. They and their deeds are too fatal to be forgiven and hence, they meet what they had sown, more lethal than death even. Tyagi in her article has reviewed these dwindling states of Dattani's characters thus:

In most of Dattani's plays the past is a constant presence in the character's consciousness; mostly past is relived in the memory or narrated in the dialogue of characters. Old people are there in every play. They are never stereotypically revered, morally perfect beings nor down-right victimised beings. They are normal human beings with very real shortcomings and vices and virtues. In fact they are the carriers of the past with which they interact or cleanse the minds of the progeny. (195)

Both the women humiliated the benignity of feminine self which bears all love, care and forgiveness. They humiliated humanity in spite of themselves being the most beautiful and important part of the human race itself. What is more shameful is that in both the cases it is women who dehumanised women which was rather a bleak aspect of patriarchy in the contemporary society of 18th-19th century – women accelerating the patriarchy against women. While Baa's attempt was a little less cruel in her intention, though the execution was inhumane and brutal, Bharti's was desperate and unforgivable. If Baa pined, mourned and repented, Bharti, too, did the same, but Baa's was more natural a backlash and Bharti's was more mechanical, a kind of show off to prepare the path to influence Tara's reaction after her knowing the truth. An explanation from Buddhism that 'at least feeling guilty about the actions one has committed, while seeing and talking the objective stance that these actions are not really real and have not been produced – they have arisen through casual powers of psychophysical elements.' (Cho 52) can loosely after scrutinizing her victimised self and knowing her real motto through her hallucinations, be sanctioned to Baa, but for Bharati all judgment leads to crime and punishment – no other explanation. She should have been, without any strategy, 'infinitely guilty' (Marino 104), and should have no other feeling except guilt.

Both of them struggled to interface natural flow of life, both committed sin, both got afflictive torment of souls, both repented, both atoned in their respective ways and both paid for their *karmas* being destined with a life of loneliness – devoid of peace and reasoning:

The worst a society can do to harm an individual is to permanently impair the reasoning, power, the sixth sense. (George 151)

They harmed humanity and human lives, and in return, the anguish and guilty prospect of humanity harmed them permanently. Thus through these stories, which are the 'metaphor for

life' (Multani 171) 'the playwright is able to bring out the contradictory and multifarious nuances of the relationship between the refined "social" live...' (Nagpal77)

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