***Bravely Fought the Queen*: Characterisation**

The play *BRAVELY FOUGHT THE QUEEN*uncovers how the patriarchal system oppresses and discriminates educated women on the basis of gender. The play is the story of the sufferings of a three generation women of Trivedy family in the hands of male members of the family. Dolly and Alka are married to Jiten and Nitin respectively. Praful is the brother of Dolly and Alka. Baa is the senile mother-in-law. This domestic tragedy centers round the life of the above mentioned characters revealing their psyche through their action and speech.

Dolly and Alka lead their life taking care of the needs of their husband and senile mother-in-law. Their world engulfed with these demanding duties leaves them with no time to live a life for themselves. The intermittent bell ringing of Baa which calls for an immediate attention shows how women also become oppressors in patriarchal society. Jiten Trivedy’s wedlock with Dolly is purely for the sake of societal norm of marriage. He satisfies his sexual libido by calling whores to his office. He beats up Dolly without remorse for no fault of her and that results in giving birth to Daksha prematurely, deformed and mentally retarded. Alka is victimized not only by her husband Nitin but also by her brother Praful. With the ulterior motive of extending his gay relation with Nitin, Praful gives Alka in marriage to Nitin. He violently attacks and threatens to burn Alka’s face for crossing the boundaries drawn by the patriarchal society. Alka’s impulsive questioning of the chastity of Baa in retaliation to Baa’s blaming as whore, made Nitin drive Alka out of home. Alka remains childless because of Nitin’s homosexual nature and Baa’s control over her son. Both the sisters bear the brunt of Baa mainly because of their mother’s second marriage with a already married man. Praful hides the truth that he is the half brother of Dolly and Alka. So Baa scolds their mother as whore and also takes them to be whores. She induces her son Jiten to beat Dolly during her advanced stages of her pregnancy that results in Daksha become a victim of her father’s brutality. Both the women Dolly and Alka masquerade themselves from the suffocating reality. Dolly tries to forget her unromantic reality by immersing herself in the musical world. She finds ideal love in the sweet voice Naina Devi in her thumri song. Her fantasy as having sexual relation with Kanhayia; the cook is her attempt to give vent to her suppressed desires. Alka seeks refuge in liquor to numb her feelings.

Baa, herself, is exploited by her drunkard husband. Baa’s suffering under her violent husband ended her in inability to live in the present. Even after his death, his memory haunts her.

Lalitha is the wife of Sridhar, an employee in Jiten and Nitin Trivedy’s advertising firm. Even though she does not suffer as much as Alka and Dolly, She suffers from loneliness and repression of her creativity and imagination. It is reflected in her grooming of Bonsai tree. Dattani draws parallel between the stunting of the plant’s natural growth and the arrested growth of the women. This bonsai tree symbolizes the women’s plight in a patriarchal society.

The world of male characters is shown in the Act entitled, ‘Man’. Jiten’s male chauvinistic attitude is exposed when he argues for the advertisement to be created for the Re-Va-Tee brand of Lingerie. Jiten discloses his narrow mind that woman’s identity is subordinated to male desires.

In most of Dattani’s play, female protagonists play a prominent role. The careful reading of the play throws light on Dattani’s truthful concern for the pathetic women characters in his play. His story and characters underscores the struggle of women against the oppression of patriarchal Indian society. These plays, having family as its background, showcases the emotional, financial and sexual conflicts of a modern, educated urban Indians. It encompasses the feminist ideology when the subjugated women in the story give vent to their emotions and retaliate. Dattani’s women, attempt to forcefully cross the margins drawn by patriarchal society, but at the end, succumb to the domination of patriarchy and waste away.

***Bravely Fought the Queen*: Dramatic Craftsmanship**

Mahesh Dattani makes daring efforts to depict quite unconventional and radical themes in his plays. The complexities of human relationship and predicament of the modern man find due expression in his dramatic works. His dramatic techniques and stagecraft are superb. There are rapid shifts in terms of time and space. He has made use of different images, symbols, devices, techniques etc. to communicate his ideas in a very effective and concrete manner. In the plays of Dattani multi-level stage plays a vital role. It helps in connecting the past with present and also contains certain symbols which indicate inner workings of the minds of the characters.

The script of *Bravely Fought the Queen*is in three acts, titled ‘Women’, ‘Men’, and ‘Free For All’. The claustrophobic ‘female’ world of Act I is pitted against the ‘male’ world of business of Act II and the characters stand exposed in Act III where the two worlds clash  and collapse, with the home as the site of the battle. The fissure between the conventional and current cultures having thrown up a new social landscape, the play races towards a brave culmination laying bare the gruesome truths that lie behind the pretence of conservative Indian morality. Questions of gender, sexuality and identity are raised and the unspoken is voiced, the unseen made visible.

The dramatic setting coalesces with the themes. The trademark Dattani stage often uses the various levels to create theatrical resonance in a special way. For instance, the level where Baa is placed remains a constant in all the three acts, and the time shifts that occur in terms of her memory carries the audience back and forth in time even as the present seems to parody the past. The men play their part in the office in Act II, even as repeat performances of what has already ensued in Act I continues at the other levels. Such repetitive devices serve to undercut the issue itself and reveal the façade as just that – a façade. The prosperous business family, the Trivedis, is finally stripped of its veneer and everyone stands exposed to unpalatable realities of abuse, alcoholism, adultery and homosexuality as fallout of the war on the home front.

Symbolism plays an important role in this play in bringing home what the playwright wants to convey. The bonsai Lalitha brings as a gift for Dolly becomes a central symbol in the play. It represents a cruel miniaturization of a free spirit. The symbol begs for a comparison with the situation of women in the Indian scenario – also under grown and stunted in terms of the development of their independent identities. No wonder that both Dolly and Alka appreciate the bonsai. Yet another bonsai seen on Sridhar’s desk is described as “odd” and “grotesque”, surely pointing to its basic unnaturalness. What has been accepted (and even found attractive) by the women seems odd in the sphere of the men who have never been restricted or manipulated. Almost all the characters in the play are made to comment on the bonsai in a deliberate attempt at drawing parallels.There are a host of other symbols and imageries. The young cook projected as Dolly’s lover, the face mask, Baa’s bell and wheelchairetc. are the imageries used for expressing some thoughts and ideas in the play. Dattani gives us images which could only be created in theatre.

Dattani employs a range of theatrical techniques successfully. The multi-layered reality in the play - suggested by the split stage - moves constantly into an internalized reality, as it was. Dattani writes with a dexterously veiled acidity, employing a language that uses both simplicity and serration, pressing the word to its limits, flanked by equally pungent, loaded silences. Dattani’s theatrical craftsmanship has been compared to Ibsen’s. *Bravely Fought the Queen*dramatizes the emptiness and sham in the lives of its cloistered women and self-indulgent, unscrupulous men, blurring the lines between fantasy and reality, standing on the brinks of terrible secrets, deception and hypocrisies.

***Bravely Fought the Queen*: Symbolism**

Symbol is a powerful means of communication in literary work. Mahesh Dattani excels in art and craft of symbolic exuberances and imagery. The play *Bravely Fought the Queen*is moulded by craft of imagery or symbolism. The play repletes with rich symbols, imagery, rhythm, sound etc.

The title itself is symbolic. The Queen in the title of the play refers to the legendary warrior queen Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi. Alka, the much trodden-upon younger daughter-in-law in the Trivedi family, dreamily identifies with the Rani of Jhansi and longs to put on the costume of the Queen at the masquerade ball being planned. She attempts to rebel against the claustrophobic atmosphere in her home where she is virtually a prisoner. She has been tricked into marriage with a closet homosexual (her sister’s brother-in-law) by her brother (who has been his partner). She has already been thrown out of the house once due to the machinations of her mother-in-law and is in peril of a repetition now. At the end, she bravely fights back.

The bonsai Lalitha brings as a gift for Dolly becomes a central symbol in the play. The bonsai represents a cruel miniaturization of a free spirit. As Lalitha explains innocently and gleefully to Dolly, it involves minimizing the amount of earth that the plant has to grow in, pruning its stem and branches and regularly snipping its roots so that its growth becomes stunted. The dwarfed plant is an artificial creation of human will. It may appear beautiful to some but it is a deformed plant. The symbol begs for a comparison with the situation of women in the Indian scenario – also under grown and stunted in terms of the development of their independent identities. Lalitha points out that the plant gets habituated to its changed ethos and accepts it and moulds itself to it. This is the sad situation of women socially conditioned by their men folk over the ages. The bonsai is meant for Dolly, thus associating its symbolism with her. It is also appreciated by Alka, thus pointing to her situation too. Yet another bonsai seen on Sridhar’s desk is described as “odd” and “grotesque”, surely pointing to its basic unnaturalness. What has been accepted (and even found attractive) by the women seems odd in the sphere of the men who have never been restricted or manipulated. Almost all the characters in the play are made to comment on the bonsai in a deliberate attempt at drawing parallels. Daksha, the spastic child of Dolly and Jiten, is an obvious parallel to the stunted and dwarfish bonsai, a deformed child born in pain due to violence inflicted upon her mother.

The interpolated tale of Kanhaiya, the alluring cook, also functions as the potent symbol which denotes disappointment, emptiness and trauma in the women of the Trivedi household. The young cook projected as Dolly’s lover, is merely a figment of her imagination. Apart from this, the face mask, Baa’s bell and wheelchairetc. are the imageries used for expressing some thoughts and idea in the play. The failure of ReVa Tee advertisement symbolizes that the men have failed to understand and recognize the feminine self and equity as human being.

In Act I and in Act III Dolly has Naina Devi’s thumri playing. The symbolism of Naina Devi’s bold decision to sing love songs usually the preserve of tawaifs is central to the play. Dolly tells Lalitha that she married into royalty but still chose to sing like a tawaif. She would surely have been marginalized by society but the wonderful thing is that her husband supported her. Together, they faced all the social ostracism and reproofs that came their way until finally she came to be celebrated as the queen of thumri.

The title of the third and final act, “Free for All” is very symbolic and suggestive. There is a free flow of emotions and passion, anger and hatred, blaming and counter blaming. The women express, assert, and move freely in this act. Dattani presents a kind of familial court in which contention and counter contention takes place till the truth is revealed. The Trivedi brothers are dismissed as scheming and gay, violent and unfaithful. The dramatist disproves the idea of varied spaces for man and woman showing them human beings equal in all respects.

Thus symbolism plays a crucial role in *Bravely Fought the Queen* to bring home the entire gamut of meaning and implications to the audience.

***Bravely Fought the Queen*: Theme**

*Bravely Fought the Queen*, while exposing the hypocrisy of society, dwells upon the subaltern position of women and those men who fall outside the sexual norm. ‘Family’ is the most important theatrical space in Mahesh Dattani’s plays including *Bravely Fought the Queen.* The dramatist depicts the battles being fought among the members of same family at home.

The play seeks to presents women’s exploitation by the male. Alka is ill treated by her husband and by her own brother, Praful. Once annoyed, Praful dragged her into the kitchen and pushed her face in front of burning stove and burnt her hair. Her husband, Nitin also treated her badly, even driving her out of house once. Baa, now aged and invalid, was brutally beaten up by her husband. Her anger and frustration is mis-directed towards her daughters-in-law. Jiten is like his father, violent and drunkard. He is very violent with his wife Dolly as his father was with his wife, Baa. He hit badly even when Dolly was pregnant, and their daughter Daksha was born invalid due to that. Baa and Dolly are the worst victims of the conventional and cruel attitude of their husbands.

The play also depicts the issue of homosexuality in a very bold manner, as well as suffering of the wife due to her husband turning out to be a gay. Alka’s anguish and agony is aggravated when she comes to know that Nitin, her husband, has homosexual relationship with her brother. She has become the victim of her own brother and husband’s gay relationship. On account of dry marital life, Alka has become a boozer.

Dattani’s also shows that love for the children often comes from the past guilt. It is the pressure of past mistake or crime that leads them to construct more and more love for kids so as to compensate their past loss. ‘Baa’, Praful, and Jiten did injustice to Daksha. Their excessive love for Daksha results from their past guilt.

The play portrays sexual, moral, and financial depreciation in the lives of the Trivedi brothers residing in a posh suburb of Bangalore. The play also shows how addiction of prostitution of the husband empties joy and happiness of marital relationship. Jiten and Shridhar are the pleasure seekers in prostitutions. They bring the outside women even at their office for this filthy purpose. As a result of this, their wives are unhappy and bored in their marital lives. The play presents the shifting Indian values and dramatizes conflict between traditional and contemporary cultures.

The play also highlights other evils like money-lending, prostitution, domestic violence, consumerism etc. Though, the women of the play differ in their mood and musing, they are unhappy and disappointed at their ‘claustrophobic’ spaces. It is because of this depression and disappointment they are drifted towards different things for eliminating dark-shadow of their frustration. Alka is addicted to wine, Dolly develops romantic notion for Kanhaiya, Lalitha’s excessively involved in growing bonsai, which acts as a powerful symbol of the condition of women in the play.

Eventually, all men are unmasked and their real faces are brought before the audience. There is revolutionary change in the character of Dolly. The otherwise quite submissive, meek and shy Dolly emerges as an assertive and potent character and breaks through silence at the end and burst out her anger against the ill-treatment and injustice done to her. Alka also makes shocking and rather disgusting revelation of hidden motives of her brother Praful who got her married with Nitin for continuing his gay relationship.

The play depicts the emotional, financial and sexual complexities of Indian urban family. The women of the play are exploited in a multiple ways. But they are not passive sufferers. When it goes beyond endurance; they fight back. Alka is the fine example of this. She is the queen who bravely fought against the patriarchal system just as Queen Lakshmibai fought valorously against the colonizers of the country i.e. British.