

Beyond Female Stereotypes: *Bravely Fought the Queen*

Introduction:

Once Dattani observed, “Theatre has always been a mirror for man, a reflection of his world, of the eternal conflicts that plague him, through which he has experienced the gamut of human emotions” (“Contemporary Indian Theatre and its Relevance” 1). The stress on “reflection” definitionally precludes possibilities of resolution of conflicts, reversal of situation or complete rejection of the existing reality, neither of which happens in the play *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Yet, the play has enjoyed a phenomenal success both on stage and pages since its appearance in the arena of Indian English theatre, abroad and at home. The play is not the work of a visionary, but this is not an “imitation” of the reality; rather it is a “representation” of darker realities by centering the pool of light on a bleaker reality that very few creative writers have ever endured to acknowledge. What is envisioned is not a revolution, but a revelation of multiple truths by the performance/enactment of the history (to the audience and even to the appropriators of the horror themselves) keeping deliberately the consequence outside the ambit of the theatre -- both literally and metaphorically.

The patriarchy reinforces itself by privileging a habit of seeing, a way of looking at life using men's experience as standard to judge the experience of both the sexes and thereby ignoring woman's take. We meet a set of people programmed to see life with internalized patriarchal norms and values. The play attempts to exhibit the culture specific variation of the operation though on a deliberately maximized screen. Here Dattani presents a critique of what is passed as "Indian tradition" and exposes its inherent contradictions, and the different ways the discourse is used to perpetuate hetero-patriarchy which is nothing but a colonial legacy. "You can't talk about a middle-class housewife fantasizing about having sex with the cook or actually having a sex life – that isn't Indian either – that's confrontational even if it is Indian" (Mee, 319). The aesthetic product cannot provide any resolution, but it at least re-problemetizes the dominant social and political statement.

Hetero-patriarchy is an overarching system of male dominance through the institution of compulsory heterosexuality. Wilton (1996) observed: "This heteropolarity is necessary for patriarchy, for it must be possible to distinguish men from women in order to institute and reproduce a power differential that is (precisely) predicated upon that difference" (quoted in Yep, 31). The oppressive hetero-patriarchal power is visible in various ways- forcing unwilling woman into a marriage of humiliation, physically assaulting the pregnant wife leading to the birth of a spastic child, tricking the ignorant woman and the gay man into a marriage of convenience, defining women as sex object and marketable commodity and so on.

Bravely Fought the Queen is essentially a domestic play confined within the campus walls of the Trivedi household – the office of the brothers being an extension of the family drama allowing no outsiders except the Sridhar couple who acts as a catalyst. Dattani chooses this smaller arena of Indian family to show how power functions at the micro level, instead of turning the family situation outward. He means to turn the social system inward in order to see how individuals and homes are mediated and even constructed by the system of which they are but part and how they in turn are conditioned to perpetuate the so called Indian tradition. Here is a traditional, joint, Indian patrilineal family unevenly constituted, subjected to a process of constant reconstitution, manifested differentially in the collision of ancient cultural mores and present/emergent realities. Karlekar points out, “[I]nequality is embedded in oppressive structures of a family ideology committed to an age and gender hierarchy which is worked out within a household” (quoted in Ghosh, 58). Yet individuals keep changing roles within the power structure. The play is a powerful subversive re-reading of the popular television serials nursing the hearts of Indian viewers which are nothing but the variants of the “eternal” family saga, with a family at its centre presided by a Babuji (father) and Maji (mother), going through trials and tribulations, followed by the eventual triumph of, to use the blanket term, “Indian tradition.” The present family drama poses a potential threat to the manipulated patriarchal project of reinforcing the gender stereotype and gender hierarchy.

In the play, Dattani takes issue with the Indian custom of arranged marriage that privileges family prestige over personal choice, subordination of bride's family, validation of heterosexual relationship as only "normal" and continuance of women in a tortuous and violent marriage without any possibility of finding any support system outside the sanctity of matrimonial relation. The brother, strictly protecting his sisters from "men", marries one to a "leech" and the other to his former gay partner. Both sisters suffer for the suppression of their stigmatized family history by the same brother and the brother himself forwarding all kinds of compensations in form of humility, appeal and even huge sum of money.

The power-and-control-way involves a patterned process of coercive and controlling behaviour. With increasing institutionalization and globalization and the consequent shift in gender relationships and gendered identities, domestic violence has appeared as an emergent discourse. Ghosh argues that the focus on the "apparent manifestations of violence officiated the banal and every day form of violence against women in home" (Ghosh, 51). Dattani touches upon the issue in its varied facets such as violence against woman, same gender violence, multiplicity of masculinity, violence against women manifested through isolation, beating, sexual abuse, abuse by verbal means and gazing and potential threat, emotional torture, threat and intimidation, shifting blame, humiliating woman's natal family to draw money etc.

The over-arching patriarchal ideology which informs the family discourse gets reflected also in the commercial/market value system directing the business strategies taken up by the brothers who are the co-owners of an advertising agency. It mobilizes its

capital by exploiting the bride's family, uses women's product (nightwear) to make profit and targets male consumer cult de-legitimizing non-buyer female preference.

Dattani presents a slice of "sick society", out to oppress the minoritized entities like women, gays, subalterns, employees and even persons with dark complexion. No reform is envisioned, audience/reader is simply awed by the magnitude of pain and terror lying behind the facade of ordinary goings of an unacknowledgable commonality in a banal household. As Anindya Sen observes, "The rebellion finds its substance and meaning neither in the result nor in the course it takes, but in the 'cause' inspiring the rebellion, the ideology informing it and the 'power' against which the rebellion is directed" (*Sen*, 321). The play explores what lies under the facades which "characters and families put up to befool the world, revealing the "essential loneliness...the emotional price they pay for successful appearance in their need to belong" (Meena, 8), and cope with the social vigilance. A deep sense of unbearable reality almost makes protest structurally impossible, yet utopia becomes really inspirational and effective in this apparently defunct world.

The play tells, both through its words and performances, a story of repression in its microscopic multiplicity, and attempts at resistance and achievement of success similar to the growth of the bonsai into its bizarre maturity with all its roots and branches wired. The first act "Women" plunges us into the claustrophobic world of women trying in vain an unsuccessful escapade from the male pressure, the second "Men" gives us glimpses of the world of business excluding women from agency and continually controlling the preference of the women in macroscopic ways and in the third "Free For

All”, both worlds clash and collapse and get exposed. Memory carries back and forth in time frame. The repetitive performance of what is already ensued undercut the issue itself and reveals the façade and only the façade itself. The very slow building of resistance survives the shock that threatens the women’s world; and with the table turned, the world changes and the balance is shifted if not altogether tilts the upside down.

Thus the theatre becomes a lively representation of social dynamics, more importantly, of the “individuals who are exhausted“, dragged into darkness, perpetually bearing in silence the burden of oppression of the “hegemonic elite” (Chitra and Reddy, 30). “The clash between individual’s commitment to social order and one’s personal drive makes life intolerable. Dattani shows an exceptional vehemence in such situations” (Chitra and Reddy, 31). “This is itself a political and social statement of astonishing force” observed Walling (quoted in Chitra and Reddy, 31).

Repression:

Our experience of watching the play *Bravely Fought the queen* chiefly constitutes an overwhelming consciousness of the oppressive mechanism of hierarchy which is operational in every sphere of our life - -giving a sense of helpless suffocation. Yet we fall back upon the play during our reminiscence unlike with the horror films which we prefer to evade. Because contrary to the latter genre which achieves its effect by producing an unalterable sense of terrible pleasure, Dattani designs his dramatic materials to open up scope of critiquing the imaginaries which seemingly foreclosed the possibility of analysis as institutions. What we do along with the characters is the recognition of

truth -- the first step towards any possibility of refusal to be ruled by the power of knowledge and categorization.

The functioning of power is shown in the context of a family extending its ideological moorings to the world of business by its male members. This is an Indian patrilineal family -- a hetero-patriarchal, upward mobile, semi-feudal and semi-colonial unit trying to adjust its traditional ideologies with the emergent westernized social context. Naturally, it maintains the traditional family structure even though two brothers have two separate houses: the eldest male member Jiten is the fount head of power, the family shares legal rights over ancestral property and acts as a unit in production and consumption, women are restricted in domestic sphere and consanguine bonds are given preference over conjugal bonds. Consequently, the world is looked at, interpreted, invested and controlled by the bourgeois-hetero-patriarchal matrix of meaning which subjugates the others.

Violence Against Women:

In a hetero-patriarchal society, a social hierarchy -- based on gender securing male domination and female submission-- is maintained as a fundamental feature of social life. It works through the principles of heteropolarity which is a social construction founded upon presumed complementarities between women and men. In fact, as Kitzinger and Wilkinson point out, the compulsory heterosexist society maintains the rubric of gendered (the “natural fit” between penis and vagina) identity to secure its own interest of subjugation and invasion of women body and labour and encourages an otherization since “hetero’ means other, different [and] ‘heterosexuality’ means sexual involvement with

one who is other, one who is different – man with woman, woman with man. The otherness of the ‘other’ sex, the ‘difference’ of man from woman, is thereby immediately reinforced” (quoted in Yep, 31).

Yep observes, “As an institution, heterosexuality is rooted in gender hierarchy and is manifested through its central mechanism, marriage” (quoted in Yep, 29). Implicit in the marriage contract is men’s appropriation and exploitation of women’s bodies (e.g., sexual, reproductive) and labor (e.g., domestic, emotional) (Yep, 29) Communication 29). Like Cinderella or Parul (a character in Indian fairy tale), woman must be submissive to familial exploitation or like Snow White lie asleep/dormant and wait patiently for male rescuer and view marriage as the only desirable reward for “right conduct” till the prince charming -- wealthy and dashing rescuer -- should come as the super provider. Unfortunately however, even after conforming to the gendered subjugated position recommended by the fairy tales, so many marriages turn out to be the institution in which women are colonized, physically assaulted, used as a bet; even deceived into illegal marriage that conveniently delegitimises the woman as a wife. In other kind of marriages, Ghosh observes, “in most Indian marriages women enter as strangers into an already structured world, the creation of a permanent inequality in the relationship of the natal and conjugal homes, and over-arching domestic ideologies that legislate gender status and role” Ghosh, 58). Liberalization, privatization and globalization disempowered women as economic being. As a result, women continue in the abusive environment due to economic vulnerability, lack of support structure outside home and family. Most threatening is the fact, as Hossang puts it, “...most homosexuals get married due to social

pressure.... Most adjust to a double life. So do their wives.... There is no greater misery in such marriages than in most Indian marriages which are arranged” (Merchant, xvi).

Flavia Agnes argued, by “placing dowry violence on a pedestal” in their movement, Indian feminists got incorporated into conservative agency of counting gender violence more as exceptionalism than as the defining context of woman’s life (quoted in Ghosh, 51). In the present play, Dattani chooses to present how the violation of woman’s basic human rights continues to be the pervasive and endemic realities in their life. Two sisters get married to the two Trivedi brothers according to the norms of fairy tale and the sanctity of marriage. Since men sleep with bad girls but don’t marry them, Praful, the brother, maintains a strict supervision on his sisters’ conduct and tries every measure to correct Alka’s propensity to impropriety. One day when a neighbor boy left her at their door step, Praful felt it useless to expend inadequate speech on the sinner, and took the school girl to the kitchen, placed her face in front of the burning stove carefully so that her face does not get burnt (it may devalue the marriage product) but allowed to burn some of her hairs (“I can still smell my hair on fire”, *Bravely Fought...*, 257). The semiotic part of the threat over, he cautions: “Don’t you ever look at men” (*Bravely Fought...*, 257). In due time -- to use Colette Guillaumin’s words --, he gives away his property (both the “good” girl Dolly and the corrected “bad” girl” Alka) to Trivedis in marriage. The play enacts the unfolding of the fissures and fractures hidden beneath the venire.

In the Indian variety of meritocracy the husband and his family top the pyramid and the bride and the bride’s family occupies the lowest stratum, and the relational

importance gets complicated if the bride's family holds remarkably greater property and prestige. In the play, as the brother of the brides, Praful is placed in a victim's position in the typical Indian sensibility which subordinates the bride's family: he gets humiliated by the three members of her in-laws family for Alka's intoxicated protest against Baa's indecent remark about their family. Alka is thrown out of the house by Nitin and only gets admitted after repeated pleading on part of both Praful and Dolly to Nitin and Jiten respectively and offering sufficient pecuniary penalty. The same exploitation continues also in a subtler and perpetual manner.

Patriarchy also works by confining its victims in isolation. The brothers' twin houses in "nowhere" (Lalitha can't leave the place due to unavailability of any auto-rickshaw), deprive them of any neighbor, themselves being busy in the office leaving the two sisters cum sisters-in-law and Baa (mother-in-law) to keep and detest each other's company. The pressure of confinement becomes evident the way both sisters desperately want to go out (Alka's appeal to go for a drive with her husband alone and Dolly's urge to be out for a dinner) and at the rigor with which they are frustrated and advised to keep Baa Company and nurse her well. The concept goes well with what Guillaumin calls "sexage" -- appropriation of women's time (Baa continually demanding the attention of her daughters-in-law) and the care to be taken in the family of whoever can't take for themselves and the healthy male members (Referred in Tyson, 99).

The play explores the workings of hetero-patriarchal norms of domination at micro level of family ranging from regulating the daily living of the women members according to the need and will of men folk to gross instances of domestic violence. Jiten

does not care to ask Dolly's permission for inviting Lalitha to talk to her and even does not bother at least to inform her. The lack of identity of women -- non-referential to her husband -- becomes evident in Dolly's desperate attempt to locate Lalitha as "somebody's wife". Lalitha comes as the emissary of male world and remains intent upon discussing the masked ball --a male project. Dolly for sometimes wards off the pressure of male world and remains absorbed in her own and expresses her desire to communicate with Lalitha in other matters closer to her heart and concerns. Unlike her companion, even her sister Alka, Dolly remains completely ignorant about the business and official (outside home) world except for going to the office parties as a beautiful living decorative piece. It is the same sense of prestige for possessing a precious object which makes Jiten brag of Dolly's knowing tailoring among his office subordinates, but makes him careless about mentioning their only daughter Daksha (a spastic child) - a black spot in his career - though she is mentioned compellingly by her mother to brag of how many prizes she had won in her school where the prestige is integrated with the fact.

Patriarchy successfully prevents any grouping among its victims. Lalitha's observation that to have one's sister as next door neighbor is a "fantastic" idea is not readily appreciated by Dolly neither is she pleased by Alka's implying that she got a better deal than her. Dolly even blames her sister for making Praful ashamed of coming over to their house by her incoherent speeches which resulted in his utmost humiliation and for situating him in many compromising dealings. Patriarchy keeps its vigilance even through another woman. Baa keeps constant control over the lives of her two daughters-in-law even in her bed-ridden condition. With coming of the news that the party has already been cancelled without even informing the women getting ready at home to go

out and Praful's coming over to the office without visiting his sisters, the breach between the sisters becomes clearer. But fallen back upon one another, gradually a woman-only-group gets formed. Lalitha, the interlocutor, also feels involved. But the constricting presence of Baa keeps reminding of the vigilance as she persists to ring the bell fracturing the slowly evolving intimacy among the women. The loud bell even penetrates the wall of Dolly's house to reach Alka next door pronouncing the access of power extended from Jiten – the fount head and the perpetrator. She even exerts her domination by complaining of negligence to the power holders.

The victims are farther weakened and brought under control by deprivation of knowledge of the fact and misrepresentation of the situation. Praful's refusal to come over to the home of Trivedis on the excuse of it being "too far" while he is in the town doing business with the brothers is a blatant lie served by Jiten to Dolly. It creates a misunderstanding among the siblings and even a direct confrontation between Alka and Dolly pushing them farther from the source of their strength and resources. The brothers collude also to cook Praful a lie that both sisters are away in Ooty for an outing to overcome Alka's usual bad temper. It helps both to hide the fact of the latter's helping them out with enormous finance that might provide a strong ground to the sisters against all the domestic violence they are regularly subjected to and to remind the brother of his own vulnerable position owing to his sister's past misconduct.

The play also explores a rather less admitted and exposed (perhaps the cruelest) area of patriarchal domination -- the exploitation of women in their parental house, leaving them nowhere to turn to. Almost from the beginning, the play is pervaded by the

invisible presence of a character, Praful - the brother/representative-of-parent of the sisters. For some untold reason, Baa continuously remembers him in her blabbering. He comes to the Trivedi office for business but refuses to come over to the house to meet his sisters -- news conveyed by Jiten and remembered by the sisters in their different ways of love, anger, idealization, pain and passion. Praful appears in Dolly's account as the victim of the hierarchical structure of patriarchy (pyramid), compelled to bear the burden of Alka's misbehaviour towards the higher authority, Baa, and undergo the humiliating chain of pleading and getting insulted to acquire the permission for her sister to live in her "own" house because otherwise Alka would not have been accepted" anywhere else". He appeared to be pressured by society for performing the role of a responsible brother by getting his sisters married - the task farther toughened by the stigmatized history of their family as well as Alka's lifestyle which is rather unbecoming of a "woman". However, if the consequence of one drunken fit of Alka constructs him as a suffering hero, another fit reveals a ghastly face of the sufferer. The loving brother is shown to teach the lesson to his school-going sister of not looking at men to secure his family prestige which he prefers to secure by lying to his sisters' in-laws and thus plunging them into an eternal pit of humiliation and torture. How the patriarchal norms get encoded into morality becomes evident as Alka, with all her rebellious spirit, refuses to go to Kanhaia - the clandestine lover of her sister - and sobs pathetically: "Praful, your sister is good" (*Bravely Fought...*, 263).

"A more or less secret sympathy with heterosexual male misogyny carries with it the narcissistically gratifying reward of confirming our membership in (and not simply our erotic appetite for) privileged male society (Bersani, 42). Glimpses -- though very

distant -- were found by the unconscious dropping of words of some closely guarded secret. It remains unexplained whom Alka mentioned as “staring at each other at the table” (*Bravely Fought...*, 256), an act, which infuriated her to insult her in-laws, why Dolly warns Alka referring to Praful and Nitin as very close college friends and where lies the truth behind Alka’s mocking reference to Praful as “saint like my husband” (*Bravely Fought...*, 257). The fact of Sridhar’s seeing an auto-rickshaw outside the office and the driver being inside the campus yet not coming up while lights were on since Nitin was at the office, remains unexplained. Sridhar’s wife gets equally puzzled when she discovers the driver of an auto, parked outside the Trivedi house on the outskirts of the city, scaling the wall of the servant quarter at night. The uneasiness increases with Alka’s strange comment that Nitin would take Baa’s permission to have children and “by God, you won’t give it to him” (*Bravely Fought...*, 284). However, the terrible truth stares naked at our face when by the end of the play Nitin soliloquizes with only sleeping Alka to bear witness, and confesses to be a confirmed gay man - a former partner of her brother Praful. The spectator/reader shudders at the terrible conspiracy by which the saintly brother tricked his sister into a marriage with his sex partner by alluring him with increasing possibility of their intimacy and assuring him that Alka knows everything and what she bothers is the security of marriage. Yet while Alka continues her existence in her unredeemable hell only finding relief in alcohol and parties adding up to her own undesirability, Nitin finds a way out. Taking advantage of Alka’s heavy sleep -- a metaphor for her attempt at oblivion --, night after night, Nitin met Praful while at their house, still continues to meet the autorikshaw driver with “powerful arms” at the office,

and will go on from now onward at the out-house: “Don’t wake up. Stay drunk. You mustn’t watch” (*Bravely Fought...*, 315).

Even after all that, Jiten so easily commands his brother to throw his wife out of the house that will save them the humiliation of taking money from Praful because it will recover Nitin’s place in Baa’s eyes and she will give her house to him. Neither does he hesitate to deprive Daksha, his own daughter, for whom Baa has secured it and plans to sell the property at one and half crore: “She is a drunkard. An alcoholic. Your wife is a boozier and you still keep her? What kind of a man are you?” (*Bravely Fought...*, 290)

The mother of Dolly and Alka wanted to pursue the art of music in a society where art resides in a precarious zone of threatening social hierarchy. The women who attempt to pursue it are easily categorized as prostitutes because that would otherwise destabilize the pattern of subjugating women’s identity and domesticating her labour. The woman was entrapped by subterfuge of false marriage. Not that she would have escaped the predicament, but her inclination towards art makes her easier prey and more vulnerable to society’s judgement -- already saturated with patriarchal ideologies. Long after her marriage with the person she loved, she comes to know that he already has a family consisting of a wife and four children. Enjoying the privileged position of being the only shelter of a woman of injured repute – though himself being the doer -- he returns to his respectable position of patriarch of a socially certified household. The marriage getting void, the woman’s position as a wife gets delegitimized and she is categorized as the “mistress” as Baa prefers to call her. She is compelled to live a life of shame, lying to the neighbor that she is a widow, her daughters are married under same

deception (though themselves ignorant) and her “sin” visits her daughter in form of a hellish life of humiliation and even physical torture.

The history also works the other way turning the oppressed into an oppressor, the victim into an agent. The past revisits the present through the delirious recounting of long-silenced history of oppression by the ancient woman. In Baa’s nightmarish reverie, we have a glimpse of the day when a fair and beautiful woman of musical talent from a decent family gets married to a dark, dominating man of little refinement against her will. She had a lovely voice and used to sing bhajans before marriage, but afterwards she was prohibited to sing before others except her husband, her lord. Simone de Beauvoir observed that women invest their meaning in their husband and son through marriage because they try to escape their freedom to realize their full potential in the world since it is frightening, it does not guarantee success or wellbeing (Referred in Tyson, 97). But in a middle class milieu in India in 1950s (presumably), there was hardly any option for a woman to live outside family, her natal family being unwilling to take the social stigma of fostering an unmarried woman. A tyrant, her husband was an autocratic father and a torturing husband. She fought her battle with the power of the huge dowry in form of money and house -- though now in possession of her husband - and her two sons, especially her favourite beautiful Nitin. She voiced her protest against torturing their children and living a low life in spite of getting hit time and again even in front of her boys. However, the social code which makes the woman ashamed of violence inflicted upon her makes her plea pathetically: “Not on the face! What will the neighbor say?” (*Bravely Fought...*, 278)

The informing oppressive ideology works in a more dangerous way than inflicting abuse (except extreme cruelty) -- by the way of co-opting women themselves in that project, both by creating their consent and making them the tool to carry out its programme. It is not simply the story of oppressing men and victimized women, but since family constitutes the site of struggle for resource and power, women members are inserted in hierarchy based on marriage, maternal status, age, ranking among daughters-in-law and so on. The perpetrators of violence easily find women's complicity and active participation in inflicting abuse on other female members. The differential access to power and resource leads to re-division of household works, antagonism among relations, re-entrenchment of patriarchy etc as the more privileged women become or act as surrogate or violent agent of male hegemony and control. The possibility of women collectivity remains unrealized and even in the non-nuclear Trivedi family women members feel isolated. With an unfortunate twist, the person whom the rebellious Baa dislikes most is Alka, the rebel. In lieu of her husband and in absence of Jiten, it is she who becomes the most appropriating authority of patriarchy. She uses the bell to ring all day to keep awake/vigilant and goes on regulating the times of her daughters-in-law, complains of negligence to his sons, even uses her illness as she threatens Alka "If you don't, I will vomit and you will have to clean it" (*Bravely Fought...*, 283).

An analysis of Indian male psyche reveals that it is the obsession with mother image combined with mother's erotic transference of affection and expectation on to the favourite son that make men often fail to communicate with wives. Baa fails to resist Jiten to become like his father -- both in complexion and in character. But Nitin with his fair complexion, in her subconscious, becomes a perpetuation of her paternal heritage

(“The younger one is beautiful, like my father! He has my blood”, *Bravely Fought...*, 288) and she reserves Nitin for herself. He becomes her greatest instrument of resistance not as a protector but as a reservoir of qualities she is fond of: “I had to live up to her expectations” (*Bravely Fought...*, 289). Consequently, she could not tolerate a woman in the life of her son/man-of-choice especially when she is so much like herself.

With another twist, Baa uses Jiten as the chief instrument of perpetuating the same ideology and means of implementation of rule which tormented her so terribly and which she fought so hard against. Instead of sympathizing with the cause of the mother of her daughters-in-law deceived painfully by the man she trusted and loved, she throws the blame on her and blatantly categorizes her as a “whore”. Baa turns out to be the loudest mouth piece of delegitimacy of the women with such history to enter a respectable family. In her repeated verdict “throw them out, Jitu”, she even instigates her son to hit his pregnant wife. However, a consciousness of her blood (the baby in the womb) being injured, makes her insist to hit on the face instead of the tummy -- a warning goes in vain since the inhuman rage got released to hit Dolly bitterly leading to the birth of the premature baby with the cord around her neck. The spectator is simply shocked to see the woman who was so proud of coming from a “decent family” where men do not hit women, provoking her son to perpetuate their father’s tradition -- “what ‘man’ made of a ‘woman’”.

SNDT (a Mumbai based Research Centre for Women’s Studies) Mumbai defines domestic violence as referring to “all acts perpetrated in the private domain of the home to secure women’s subordination; and which is rationalized and sanctioned by the

prevailing gender ideology” (quoted in Ghosh,53). The play exhibits in the pan behavioural patterns the workings of patriarchy inflicting violence on women positioning their security, dignity and integrity in a perpetually precarious position.

Troubled Childhood:

The play centers the pool of light on the issue of gender violence, but it offers a side-glance at the spectacle of oppression at another level -- the abuse of children maturing them into the agents of abuse as adult. The theme is not dealt with directly, only hints are dropped. But the suggestions sufficiently point towards the forces working behind the perpetuation of a sick society of which they are the victims.

Feminists often argue that maternal instinct is not a peculiar in-born quality in women; rather it is a natural urge for all members of the species. Patriarchy programme the women in a manner that women learn to believe that their womanhood is unfulfilled without motherhood, because, otherwise the investment of women to the husband and the son would be lost (Tyson, 96). A closer reading of the play may bring out the truth of the contention at least in the case of Baa. With all her love and concern for her children Jiten and Nitin, the suffering woman locates in her children something more than filial affection.

For Baa, the children were her tool of resistance against gender violence, which in turn, was itself gendered since her strength was hidden in the fact that both children were male -- “I have given you two sons!” (*Bravely Fought...*, 288) The pride was again programmed by another dominant ideology of class consciousness. Jiten being dark in

complexion like his father, was never favourite with his mother (“I don’t love Jitu”, *Bravely Fought...*, 305). A very subtle sense of identification with his father and distancing from his mother (femininity) -- obsessed with her fair complexion --, led Jiten farther to the process of homo-sociality and he adapted the characteristics of his tyrant father who avenged his untamed wife by imprinting himself on his child -- “Jitu is so much like his father”. The child got hardened through time enough to declare callously “I don’t bother” to Nitin’s observation that he is Baa’s favourite, but the hard days could not be lost in audience’s imagination. His stand with the old house which symbolizes the past gives a clue. While Nitin is unwilling to sell it because of “too many memories” (*Bravely Fought...*, 277) perhaps he could cherish and could return to, Jiten is aggressively eager on the contrary because of the same reason -- “too many memories” (*Bravely Fought...*, 278) from which he wants to take flight. Only a glimpse of the terrible time could be found in his pathetic appeal following a physical threat to Dolly to stop mentioning Daksha’s predicament and retelling his own share of guilt. Her miming the in coordinate gesture of a spastic child breaks him down painfully. The violence turns into cowardice, he helplessly wants to transfer the responsibility of his violent beating of his pregnant wife on to the instigation of Baa (“Baa provoked me”, *Bravely Fought...*, 310) which goes far beyond the mere means of escape. Dolly is of course right in saying that he can’t get away so easily because it was his hands that were hurting her, but the tear in his eyes and the gruesome deed of running over and over an old beggar woman may be an attempt to snap the bonding with the unloving maternity that contributed something to his make up.

The troubled and maimed childhood stunted the natural growth of Nitin in another way and he was also shaped according to the will of the powerful controlling hands. Even when a boy of ten years, as Baa recounts, Nitin was afraid of darkness and his father “as black as night” (*Bravely Fought...*, 272). A delirious re-living of past reveals the traumatizing process by which a child is compelled to reject a part of his own identity. Through a regular programming, the mother taught her son to hate his father. His fair complexion made him favourite with her both for being unlike her husband and being like herself and her “blood” with which she could identify alone. Now begins the emotional, intellectual and personal distancing: “Nitin? Do you like your father? ... Go away! You are not my son! You are bad, like him!” “ (*Bravely Fought...*, 302) She made him carry the burden of her expectations, live her life through him making him the reservoir of all her desires: “And you wanted to make sure Nitin would be different” (*Bravely Fought...*, 284), says Alka. Living a shadowed life, he matures into a parasitic being, pathetically dependent for the decisions in his life on his former lover Praful or his brother Jiten.

Minoritizing Homosexuality:

As a patriarchal institution, heterosexuality privileges, elevates, and maintains the dominant social and material status of men at the expense of women and sexual others, and the anxiety of proving manhood conceals or banishes unsanctioned sexuality that might de-stereotype the gender performance. It invests penetration with social meaning since wrenching penetration out of a heterosexual matrix of meanings deprives it of its symbolic power. Following the logic, to be penetrated is to relinquish power. Naturally,

hetero-patriarchy levels homosexuality as womanish. Though Dattani chooses to be rather less attentive to the issue in the present play, closeted homosexuality -- specially making scapegoat the unsuspected woman -- is shown to be a potential site for repression.

A feel of something untold creeps into the play by Nitin's excited and fascinating account of the encounter with the driver of the autorikshaw as he was describing to Sridhar an event of their car hitting the auto owing to Jiten's rash drunken drive. As Jiten hit the vehicle, the man rushed to them and opened the car and as Jiten started to accelerate, he clung to him even when it was on first gear only allowing Jiten break free when the truck from the opposite side was almost on top of him. The narration makes Nitin almost entranced with the charm of the "violent looking man and horror of the nightmare at the possibility of the accident and like the spectator Sridhar gets puzzled by the mesmerized confession of the narrator: "I still remember the strong black arms" (*Bravely Fought...*, 281). The recollection gets an uncanny dimension as it alludes to Dolly's enchanted recounting of "two powerful black arms around me" (*Bravely Fought...*, 262). The veil is uplifted when at the end, Nitin confesses himself to be the former lover of Praful. It was Praful who tricked him into the marriage by playing the game of making Nitin ashamed of what he is ("He made me cry each time!" *Bravely Fought...*, 314) He continued to offer Nitin an opportunity to meet him whenever they (Nitin and Alka) went to their place and the whole house including Alka was fast asleep. The deception went farther as Praful provided him with a completely false version of the story as he claimed that Alka knew everything, but she did not care since what she alone

bothered about is the “security of marriage”. Thus, as an agent of patriarchy the man gets privileged at the expense of both the woman and the minoritized sexuality.

“In his desires, the gay man runs the risk of identifying with culturally dominant images of misogynistic maleness” (Bersani, 42). Both Praful and Nitin the gay partners show a strong antipathy and callous selfishness towards women. The mutual exclusion of the two oppressed groups from each other’s sympathy is also evident in Alka’s codification of “competent husband”. However, Nitin chooses to satisfy his sexual need as a closeted homosexual (as he confesses to be going for meeting the driver in his outhouse) under the fold of heterosexual marriage, the kind of intimacy which “receive social benefits, juridical/administrative recognition, symbolic esteem, social legitimacy, and a normalized, morally valued status” (Seidman, 211). And since the heterosexual imperative centers around reproduction, the non-reproductivity of the marriage is easily blamed on the sterile woman.

Another dimension of latent homophobia and the fear of being perceived as womanish come out with Jiten’s brand of masculinity as the fear becomes the central organizing principle of the cultural policing of manhood. MICHAEL Kimmel observed, for men like Jiten “Fear and shame are sites of psychic violence” and “[t]he fear of humiliation and emasculation keep “real” men afraid, ashamed to be afraid, and silent about their own fears” (quoted in Yep, 19). The self-inflicted violence against one’s own self gets the form of outward manifestation through the oppression of the mirror image -- the Otherized part -- of one’s own identity.

The gendered and classist market:

“[I]n practice, the public and private not only interpenetrate, but are produced together in varied and often systematic ways connected by condensation and displacement ...” (Sangari, quoted in Ghosh, 57).

The hetero-patriarchal norms that are functional in the world outside home, now get complicated farther by the factor of resources. As in home, Jiten is always sure of Nitin’s consent since in a patrilineal family of India, the authority rests with the eldest male member and his decision is generally not open to dissent and also because Nitin lacks the so-called dominating masculinity of his elder brother. The Trivedis put up the false façade of success and stability in the market while in actuality their advertising agency is running through a bad time. In order to pull it out of huge debt in the market, they need a supply of a large sum of money which they could not arrange except from Michani at the impossible rate of thirty-six percent interest since banks and financial organization refuse to lend them any further credit.

Jiten brings a very innovative and effective plan into action -- not by his efficient management but by dint of the hetero-patriarchal privileges. He finds some one, to quote Nitin, the “joker” (*Bravely Fought...*, 267), who will lend them money without demanding a partnership, without interest, without asking for any favour, without any specific time limit for returning the sum and even without the knowledge of the world -- almost in fashion of blackmailing. He is none other than Praful, their brother-in-law - “the sentimental fool” (*Bravely Fought...*, 267): “When it comes to his sisters, he can’t think straight” (*Bravely Fought...*, 267).. Initially Nitin freezes to hear the suggestion

almost shuddering from the implications and consequences like giving Alka an upper hand over him, giving Praful a chance to exhibit the fact that he is a “better human being” (*Bravely Fought...*, 267) who in return of their treating him like a “sheet” helps them out. The constructed nature of all the social ethics and morality gets exposed when the “normal” moral codes get inverted by the very fact that Praful belongs to the lower stratum of the social pyramid being the bride’s party: “I can take his money and still treat him like crap...He is so inferior that he has to prove himself by loaning us ten lakhs!” (*Bravely Fought...*, 267) By another inverted code, Jiten increases the money up to twelve lacks, reminds him of Alka’s frailty of character with a lie that the sisters have gone to Ooty to prevent him coming home, tactfully refers to his stigmatized family background (“She shouldn’t keep bringing up your background ... But you know how old people are”, *Bravely Fought...*, 268) and very diplomatically makes it clear to him that by lending money he is actually compensating for the blemish caused by his family and purchasing the happiness of his own sisters at a very meager amount.

The power derived from the gender hierarchy is reinforced by class hierarchy. Jiten’s attitude and treatment of Sridhar lacks the minimum respect or concern for the subordinate. For no reason except for his baseless sense of dissatisfaction, he unhesitatingly scatters Sridhar’s papers on the floor and it is only with the chance arrival of Sridhar in time that the bonsai is saved. The boss would make authoritative demand that his subordinate should be accountable for the losses his company is running through (“That’s what Sridhar’s there for. To see that we don’t lose it” (*Bravely Fought...*, 265), but would not follow Nitin’s advice, “Then I think we should leave it all to him instead of interfering with the campaign” *Bravely Fought...*, 265. The urge to assert absolute and

tyrannical authority makes Jiten continue to interfere and hold the rein so that Sridhar cannot enjoy the full “masti” (joy – by implication - liberty).

The advocates of sanctified womanhood have a large sensuous photograph of a model hung on their office wall. The treatment of his models as sex objects rather than employees is obvious in the way Jiten looks at Shirley: “She is modeling undies. Who the hell will notice her face?” (*Bravely Fought...*, 265).

Though the plan of launching the Re Va Tee colour-coordinated nightwear and underwear got approved by the client, the concept of the advertisement did not work out with the directors and they outright rejected it on the ground that, to quote Sridhar, “we ...haven’t understood women“(*Bravely Fought...*, 273). As he summarizes, the advertisement aims at justifying why the product -- with all its colour coordination, exclusive design, and exclusive market and like qualities -- would be purchased by women at such high price, and locates the answer in sex. So far as the agency owners are concerned, they think that the commercial precisely aims at that. The poster presents a woman in Re Va Tee wear invitingly lying on the bed with the signature “Light his fire with Re Va Tee” (274). And the story runs like -- the woman watching her husband or lover coming from the window rushes to change into Revati wears and lies on the bed as he opens the door with the same signature. A market survey among twelve women across the upper middle-class, upper-class and stinking rich revealed that all of the interviewees found it “offensive” in their various ways: one thought it fails to enter a woman’s world”, another found “[t]here was nothing personal or realistic about it”, some found it “tasteless and degrading”, another observed “despite its Westernized treatment, it upholds the

silliest of all Indian notions that woman exists to please man” (*Bravely Fought...*, 279) and other like. For professional reason Sridhar tried hard to get their client convinced about the effectiveness of the concept forwarded by his employers: he argued that the formal response may not be candid, consumer’s response often have layers of complexities, the test group might not be representative enough and most importantly the ad aims to appeal to the latent libido unregulated by the “superficially and culturally informed self”.

The professional approach of Sridhar is sharply countered by Jiten’s masculine corporate norms. He altogether dumps the idea of conducting the speculation campaign among women and sets men as the proper target group – the buyers: “Men would want their women dressed up like that. And they have the buying power” (*Bravely Fought...*, 276). He even mocks the pretensions of the “screwed up” (276) women who feign to feel offended at being treated like “sex object”. Stubbornly he refuses to hear Sridhar’s research of the market survey and his persistence with the suggestion of considering the consumer’s need and revise the presentation in a week ends in his being threatened to get fired. It is only to keep his job (“Wait! We are saving to buy a flat”, *Bravely Fought...*, 280) that he ultimately agrees to push the client following Jiten’s view point in spite of himself being rather unconvinced (“So long as you sound convincing”, *Bravely Fought...*, 285). Sridhar warns against the suicidal proposal that the client should take it unchanged or shove it. During the following altercation, Jiten reveals a more-than-professional reason to take up the office at the particular place and the business itself. In response to Sridhar’s observation that the brothers do not have the expertise in handling the particular field and they need someone really professionally trained, Jiten forwards

the following argument for taking up the particular business venture: “No checking into seedy hotels in City Market. Just drive down Lavelle Road and pick one up. Bring her here and pack her off in half an hour” (*Bravely Fought...*, 286). Having the sole power to sack him and trouble his financial life, he even orders bewildered Sridhar to pick a professional sex worker for him in the office and compels Sridhar to undergo the humiliation of working a pimp for his boss.

Thus we have a business discourse in which the men -- both as seller and consumer -- are independent subject of free will and can act upon, change and give meaning to the world while women and male subordinates are contingent, dependent, controlled by situation and have meaning only in relation to men/boss. However, by the norms of corporate masculinity, the working class/employees are effeminized and their labour is appropriated to secure the interest of the superior.

Subaltern:

Only a corner of the veil is lifted from a sprawling dark area of Indian socio cultural arena in the play which is that of exploitation of the subaltern. The topic is given a passing attention and does not provide much space for analysis, yet through its narrow chink, the light falls on the hidden area covered under “normality”

Like other oppressing ideologies, whiteness encourages historically systematic promotion of a subject who is superior, privileged and raceless. It entails an effortless superiority, a moral rectitude, a defeat of the emotional and the neurotic by the power of conscious self. The fair lady incorporated in an unwilling marriage, never accepts a

“dark” man as her husband. She develops a physical hatred for a man coming from a lower stratum of society whose habits and habitation could never match her upbringing and expectation. The wife keeps the husband reminding of his lower status: “Oh, the whole house smells of you! I have married such a villager! Aah... The men in our family are decent” (*Bravely Fought...*, 288). *Bravely Fought...*). She even can’t love, and can hardly tolerate the son who resembled his father in appearance and is so prominent in her loud proclamation of her love for her fair son carrying her lineage, “blood”. The unloved child adopts the identifiable inheritance, and the loved one is used to reproduce the ideology of otherizing: “You don’t like your father” (*Bravely Fought...*, 302). An analysis by S. Anandhi, J. Jayaranjan and Rajan Krishnan in their paper “Work, Caste and Competing Masculinities: Notes from a Tamil Village” shows that, the low caste people who in previous days felt emasculated by the upper class, after getting social respect and reservation, often show hyper masculinity syndrome dealing both with women of their own community and oftener the upper class women (referred to in Ghosh, 62). Interestingly, the only means Baa’s husband adopted to fight his battle resisting his inferiority is physical violence. He became a habitual wife-beater, without controlling himself even before his children. With Baa’s urge if Nitin learned to fear, rather to hate, the demon – his father --, Jiten adopted its qualities to express his masculinity.

Another figure that remains an invisible but disturbing presence -- not by action but by existence -- is that of an old beggar woman who comes to the compound of the Trivedi house everyday at night and leaves the place early in the morning.

Dolly suspects the sympathetic watchman to have opened the door for her. The presence somehow ruptures the elitist show of the Trivedi household and she is ordered to be expelled by the memsahib. Dolly with all her frustration could never sympathize with another woman belonging to a different class. She orders to make it sure that the woman does not go to Alka's house. A bleak reality stares at our face as we identifiably watch three women sitting comfortably in the well furnished leaving room enjoying the rain and the other woman -- though old and bed-ridden --, by virtue of belonging to an upper class, reminisces about smell of mud during rain, another old woman was lying under the sky outside with a tarpaulin to save her fragile body from getting wet. The deliberate attempt to remove the disturbance by the women is enacted on a level of terror and horror by the sahib who, in an attempt perhaps to snap his bonding with Baa, runs her over repeatedly until she turns into a spot on the ground. Only the Sridhar couple shudders at the repelling act, while other characters remain callously unconcerned, absorbed in their own worlds.

Defense cum Defiance:

No ideology is closed to challenge or without contradiction or incoherence. Naturally in the present play too, resistance builds up destabilizing the linear flow of power and rubric of monolithic network of oppression. However, here resistance comes more as defense and defiance that are contingent upon the oppression inflicted, rather than as a positive force.

Utopia has remained inspirational and instrumental for women in fighting the suffocating oppression they are subjected to -- endemic to their daily existence. In

Dattani, when a need to belong makes direct resistance rather difficult, the characters develop a private world beyond the surveillance of “reality”. The present play also contains such operation of resistance. We first meet Dolly lost in the Thumri by Naina Devi playing on the stereo. She is lost in the music as it creates for her a world of fantasy. Her preference for a self-absorbed existence is evident in Alka’s complaint that it is Dolly’s unsociable nature (“you...speak when only spoken to. You refuse to mix, you refuse to be interesting”, *Bravely Fought...*, 247) that makes them further aloof from society. Dolly chooses to live in a make-believe world where she does not want to remember her banal frustrated survival. It offers a world of wish fulfillment.

Tremor is felt even in the silent and apparently immobile world of Dolly. As Alka narrates the love saga to Lalitha with Dolly’s consent and participation, colour returns to Dolly’s world of fantasy woven by the musical fabric of Naina Devi. The story goes like this: when Dolly is left alone at nights with her daughter in a special education school, her mother-in-law at last asleep relieving her of the whole day long servitude, male folks at club, and the watchman fast asleep in his quarter only to be awakened by the Sabs’ honking, she goes for her rendezvous with the nineteen-year old “beautiful Kanhaia” (*Bravely Fought...*, 261) -- a replacement for the permanent old cook holidaying in his village. Coming out of her shell of passivity, she provokes, proposes and pursues her object of desire and gets lost in the world of the “two powerful black arms around me and the beautiful sound of the heart beat of a warm gentle soul” (*Bravely Fought...*, 262). Thus she performs a magnificent appropriation of her almost solitary confinement in her loneliness – literally and metaphorically.

Under hetero-patriarchy, the language of eroticism is man's language. In everyday discourses of sexuality, female sexual agency and female sexual pleasure are largely absent. Women do not have an adequate language to assert, articulate, and share their pleasures. Yet, as Luce Irigaray argues, women's sexual experience is "far more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined" (Irigaray, 28-3). In this scenario, the wife's fantasy of sexual liaison is a potential appropriation of the husband's disapproving behaviour (his regular visiting of prostitutes) as well as her own sexual starvation, since in typical hetero-patriarchal monolythicized Indian tradition, sex is practiced with wife only for vegetable procreation. This is sex for procreation, and the sex for pleasure is kept withdrawn from her; males enjoy it with prostitutes. The re-inscribed fantasy of Dolly's sexual adventure uncovers the repressed sexual life of many urban housewives.

The make-up mask Dolly wears is used metaphorically. She is unable to laugh in fear of cracking the mask which, in effect, will spoil her appearance so carefully done up. The emphasis -- both in stage direction and dialogue -- to the minutiae of make-up indicates an urgent need to hide the real face/self. Dolly pretends to know Lalitha's name, recognize Sridhar at office and to have been told about the ball by her husband only to cover up the extent of being neglected and ignored by Jiten. As Alka points it out, she even manages to forget or not to believe that the outing which they looked forward to for so long was cancelled. However, later we come to know that she already heard Jiten canceling the outing, yet decided to pretend not to know, undergo the tedious process of facial, filing, elaborate make-up and dressing and waiting for it in a desperate attempt to ignore the life of extreme humiliation.

The psychic presence of some one like Naina Devi, whose cultural pursuit situated her in the precarious zone of improper womanhood and who was designated as Tawaif by the patriarchal code of morality, brings in a stream of possibility of resistance. As Dolly recounts, she was a queen, but her marriage into royalty and obvious glory of living a life of a *rajmata* (the royal mother) could not wrench from her the impossible longing to sing -- an act in which she was inspired after listening to a tawaif in her youth. She was possessed and her husband came forward to support her, rebelling against the oppressive mechanism. Hence, she sang thumri -- the love song --, and as a consequence, was often identified with a tawaif, but it did not matter to her “because she could sing”. Now she is known as the queen of thumri. The double standard maintained in the world of culture to keep up patriarchal surveillance encodes the cultural pursuit of a woman as prostitution. Another queen is also remembered -- the “manly queen” who out stepped the socio cultural boundary restricting women and fought against colonial oppression which is another patriarchal machinery. However, the impossibility either to refuse or situate her position, compelled the dominant ideology to categorize her as a “manly queen” -- as brave as a man. Since valor is strictly a masculine quality, she is incorporated into man’s world. The elimination of the central metaphor -- though in a rather casual manner --, by the three women, releases immense potential.

If Dolly resorts to withdrawal, Alka chooses yet another way of flight -- to get oblivious of her stifling surrounding and to take shelter in alcohol. It gives her strength enough to protest Baa’s indecent and humiliating remarks about her parental family (“Do they have different fathers?” *Bravely Fought...*, 256), put up with the disappointment of being neglected, fight her sister’s accusation of misbehaviour and both to forget and

Alka speaks out the tortuous treatment she received from her glorified brother. It gives Alka the courage to defy oppression and react naturally to a situation unguarded by unnatural self-surveillance and suppression which made her rather submissive during her sober condition. It is the same yearning to flee that makes her plead with Nitin for a long drive and to shut her ears up by her hands. Unable to bear the sharp sound of the bell of vigilance, she rushes out of the front door.

In our first meeting, Alka, to echo Dolly, seems to “strike a better deal”. Even though like her sister, she gets to know that the outing has been cancelled only when she herself calls the office to hurry off her husband after getting fully dressed for the purpose, Nitin at least bothers to answer her phone immediately and find an excuse of being sure of his brother’s informing Dolly early. Unlike the aloof, down, morose and self-absorbed Dolly, Alka is rather jovial, active and sociable. She quickly recognizes Lalitha, converses rather candidly, offers her a drink, strikes a conversation about her personal life and a bit about Lalitha’s own, and gets intimate enough to share hard drink (though mistakenly) and maintains a conspiratorial silence about the outing being cancelled to Dolly until she herself finds it out. Dolly accuses Alka even of “bragging” of Nitin’s keeping her better company and better informed than Jiten does to his wife. . She also boasts of living an excited life in the world of “so-and-so” and bottle. Under the veneer of jovial party-goers mask, we meet a woman, needing the help of alcohol to overcome her nervousness and deep sense of insecurity as well as the memory of being cheated by her closest ones without having the power even to articulate the guilt in words.

If fantasy offers liberty and solace leading the oppressed out of the oppressors' reach, the blasting of some of it that situated patriarchal functioning in a comfort zone, gives relief. The pretence of welfare of women folks stands naked as Alka's comment explodes the shell of hypocrisy sheltering their brother, warning women against men like Jiten who ends up by marrying his sister to a leech, the kind of men he cautioned his sisters against ("The saint gives his sister to the sinner and disappears!" *Bravely Fought...*, 300) He has yet another sister whom he brings to the right track by his violent correctional methods and gives to the "sinner's brother" who is his "best friend".

The ball:

The proposed mask yields tremendous potential to destabilize the normative category by opening up a possibility of transgression. The ball becomes a fit metaphor for the thematic design of a play where the main characters live a subterranean life under the veneer of "something you are not" (*Bravely Fought...*, 297). Several costumes are suggested for the invitees.

Women decide that Dolly should come to a *muzra* outfit in the ball. Though one is expected to wear the costume of apparently what s/he is not, the very proposal denotes the transgressive fantasy that blasts off the myth of sanctified womanhood. By choosing to perform "tawaif", Dolly chooses to repeat her husband's promiscuous adventure, to conform to his conception of woman and to expose the double standard for wife and mistress. The impurity of her transgressive desire discloses the impurity of dominant forms of identity. Alka's pleading to wear the outfit of *Jhansi ki rani* made of "joddi"

(golden thread) and silk with a cut board sword is a pathetic urge to imitate at the micro level the valorous act of rebelling against colonization.

Grouping:

The most important deterrence about women's consciousness of collectivity is that, unlike other oppressed groups, women don't have any shared tradition, and consequently, their stories are "written out of history" (Tyson, 97). They live dispersed among men in firmer bonding with men than other women. The lack of history of common cause, fight over resources and other subjugating strategies keep them apart. In isolation, many women live submissive and silent existence. Dattani envisions a possibility of women integrity in the play by providing a space for themselves almost in a manner of woman-only group. If the first act exhibits the woman's world as oppressed, maimed and isolated by the various apparatus of hetero-patriarchy, the third act detonates the possibility of resistance. The mutual distrust and accusation between the sisters is now replaced by the restoration of sympathy. Dolly wakes Alka up from her alcoholic stupor to see the rain and teases her with a fantastic idea of loving to dance in the rain in tune with filmy numbers all wet. Both joke at the game they played before Lalitha about Kanhaia making her guess even wilder which creates momentary breach, but companionship of common pleasures is quickly restored. Alka's plea to play the Jhansi ki Rani and miming the swishing of the sword in the air may appear light, but the laughter following the show melts the ice and lightens the gloom that was pervading the atmosphere from the beginning.

The Appropriation:

Rain pours first as puddle and then heavily, thunder bolts and the cosmic turmoil washes off false make-ups and breaks off the glass ceiling. Alka, suddenly seized with a sense of freedom, tries to concretize Dolly's fancy about her and rushes into the rain to dance a liberating dance. She falls off, yet she tries again and the others enjoy and laugh until suddenly the light of the car is seen.

However, the dam was broken and the flow could not be stopped at least for some time. Bravely tries the queen to fight. The brothers get upper hand for a moment – Jiten commands Alka to change clothes, Nitin asks her to wash her face and leave Dolly's house to have a discussion and at latter's scared plea to remain for a while, forces her to the point of Alka's falling on the coffee table. But now she answers back and draws Nitin's bewildered agreement on the fact that sometime we do things when “you don't know what you are doing” (*Bravely Fought...*, 300), ironically proving him “understanding” and reacting against Jiten's staring at her in this indecent state. She at last gathers sufficient courage to voice the long long-hidden wound with a threatening possibility. The hetero-patriarchy that tricked Alka into a marriage with a confirmed gay man is appropriated in the threatening significance of her statement: “... I haven't been an ideal housewife. And you haven't been a ...well, a competent husband” (*Bravely Fought...*, 300). The encoded immorality of which she was alleged so long as “shameless”, “whore” etc is repaid destabilizing the unalterable rubric of unopposed patriarchy: “Dolly, I feel sorry for you. Having a lech for a husband. A saint for a brother” (*Bravely Fought...*, 300).

The small rupture multiplies. Nitin breaks the oath of secrecy and reveals the truth of their plan to borrow money from Praful and stopping him to come to their house in an uncommon urgency not to take his money. He even goes farther to stop forcibly his brother from declaring Alka's predicament of being thrown out with a decision hitherto absent in him: "Not now". Shaken by the sudden change, Jiten expresses his shock: "You raised your voice at me?" (*Bravely Fought...*, 301)

Now the most oppressed, submissive, silent and withdrawn Dolly gets vocal, breaking the silence. She sharply reacts against Jiten's impolite behaviour towards Lalitha and challenges his authority to decide his wife's fate as Jiten tries to establish his greatness in not throwing her out: "You won't. You can't" (*Bravely Fought...*, 308). She demands explanation for stopping Praful from coming to their house as well as for threatening to throw Alka out of it. Driven by old habit, she of course once pleads with him for not letting Nitin to do that, but finally takes the decisive move to change the rhetoric. She makes it clear that Jiten can't drive her out. He of course retorts in his manner not to care a hang for it. Dolly accepts that even after all this her husband can pretend that he "does" not throw her out while she cannot feign that she can leave and he wins.

Yet, now Dolly snaps the tie with silence and decides to re-"tell" the history -- "her" story of victory: "once I did. When I became a mother" (*Bravely Fought...*, 309). This is a powerful subversion of the hetero-patriarchal eulogization of motherhood which glorified Baa for giving two sons to carry on the family name. Breaking the lineal time frame to make the past and present stand together, the playwright enlivens the memory of

fifteen years back (Past Baa and present Dolly and Jiten). On that evil day, Praful came to meet his sisters and Baa received the letter from her relations at Ahmedabad informing about the family history of her daughters-in-law. Baa's version of their mother being a mistress of their supposedly dead father who lives with his wife and four children smudges the story of another deception committed by a man who built up a relation with a woman -- ignorant of his former marriage. This was of course a defense mechanism for the oppressed against the ideological machinery which stigmatizes the victim instead of the victimizer, to tell that their father was dead, but the sisters did not know that Praful had suppressed the truth even to the family they are getting married into. Like their mother, the ignorance brings about their fall and they are punished for the sin of their father, which by the diplomacy of the dominant class, acquires the status of their mother's fallenness. Baa called the sisters whores and commanded her sons to throw them out of the house. Interestingly she did not prevent Jiten from hitting his wife, but made it precise to hit in the face since otherwise it might affect the blood of Trivedi family Dolly was carrying during her pregnancy. But the daemon was let loose and he slapped and kicked the pregnant wife. The injury was explained in the hospital as due to fall from the staircase and the offense remained outside the ambit of legal penalty, but the horror got its shape through the birth of a two month premature spastic baby Daksha with the cord around her neck.

Julia Kristeva holds that by having an access to the semiotic dimension of language, we can go beyond the patriarchal language (Referred in Tyson, 103). Denying the pleading and threat from her husband, the long latent volcanic eruption of fuming emotion of Dolly leads the language to the more dangerous and neutral pre-cognitive

gestures. She moves her hands and neck incoordinately with dilated eyes and meaningless smile in the fashion of physiotherapy Daksha is undergoing in her special school. Jiten of course tries to unburden himself of the guilt by accusing Baa, but Dolly won't let him go so easily. Mimicry brings in the recognition of the fount head of sense of guilt outside oneself. Alka's liberating dance in the rain and Dolly's mimicry of the physiotherapy -- as she dances "disjointedly, wildly, with ever-increasing frenzy" -- unleashes tremendous destabilizing power.

The explosion proves too much for Jiten to stand. He cries and pleads for silence, appeals for Lalitha's exit and even threatens to hit Dolly. He tries to absolve himself by repeating his plea as not-guilty since it was Baa who instigated and provoked him, since he was drunk and was angry with Praful, but Dolly makes it clear "They were your hands hitting me! Your feet kicking me!" (*Bravely Fought...*, 312) Overwhelmed with guilt, he appeals to bring Daksha home ("I want her home", *Bravely Fought...*, 312). Unable to write off the guilt, he rushes out of the door. Next moment he is reported to be running the car violently over a beggar woman lying outside and driving recklessly in the dark symbolically annihilating the bond with Baa.

Patriarchy supposedly casts men as rational, strong, protective and decisive as opposed to women who are irrational, emotional, weak, submissive and nurturing. Jiten's aggressive behaviour which blocked the fear and pain so long, now violently gushes forth through the irrational gestures akin to womanly hysteria in the same manner as his pathetic escape exposes him to be a weakling literally rushing away from the confronting

truth. Victim of his own rage and repression, Jiten, finally enters in to the public regime of legal crime.

A more complicated resistance/appropriation comes into being in the region of Baa. For some strange reason her constant enquiry whether Praful is coming to her daughters-in-law turns into a positive order to Nitin to call him. She does not change her approach to Alka of course and Nitin tries to encash her feeling of hatred towards his father to ensure the possession of the old house and even asks whether she will give him the house if he drives his wife out of the house. A history of perverted resistance is revealed as the timeframe merges in her incoherent speeches. The child Nitin is compelled to change his answer from a spontaneous “yes” to a rather laboured “no” to Baa’s query whether he likes his father prompted by the fear of losing his mother’s affection. With an overwhelming emotional pressure, Baa also makes him assert his hatred for his father followed by applause: “You are my prince!” (*Bravely Fought...*, 302). The child’s urge to secure mother’s affection now changes into something more -- an urge to possess the property and even more to free himself from Praful whose money he must accept otherwise: “Do what you like with your property but don’t let him run my life!” (*Bravely Fought...*, 305). The final jerk of the play comes in the form of the disclosure of Baa’s decision to make Praful the trustee of her house which she will leave for Daksha. The very feminine reason she forwards defeats all the patrilineal norms of social ethics: “Praful loves my Daksha! Praful will look after her” (*Bravely Fought...*, 305). It was the same house which Baa claimed to be “my house” against her husband, the house which she wanted to leave for Daksha - a security for her, compelling all the

members of the family to look after her (“This is Daksha’s house”, *Bravely Fought...*, 305) - thus assuring an unexpected agency.

A covert appropriation also takes place at yet another level. Dattani carefully chooses the name Kanhaia for Dolly’s imaginary lover, the “temporary cook”. Kanhaia is an affectionate adoption of Krishna, the universal lover, whom DD Cosambi portrayed as a dalit leader – a black or deep blue man coming from a backward community. The fascinating image of the “powerful black arms” becomes almost a leitmotif in the play signifying liberation of suppressed sexual and emotional life. It belongs to the fantasy lover of Dolly, the mesmerizing auto-rickshaw driver and most interestingly to Nitin’s father coming from, as Baa claims, the lower stratum of society. Dolly’s fantasy counters her apparent frigidity and Nitin’s fascination resists both heterosexism and his mother’s oppressive demand to hate blackness. However, Indranee Ghosh observed, without the idea of the specific myth, “this involved symbolism can hardly be realized in performative circumstances” (Ghosh, “Dattani and the Drama of the ‘Babalog’”, 58). She also complains that Dattani shows a strong propensity towards portraying upper or upper-middle class men having homosexual relation with people coming from the lower class and the “subtext of such depiction is that this is a sick relation, shameful act, involving only the servant class who are bound by their economic condition” (Ghosh, “Dattani and the Drama of the ‘Babalog’”, 59). However, it must be admitted, though unaware of D. D. Kosambi’s representation, the audience -- well acquainted with the myth of Krishna, compellingly conscious of an overt hatred for the dark complexion advocated by Baa and an equally vocal fascination of Dolly and Nitin, and at the same time, knowing full well that both the imaginary and real lovers belong to the repressed class -- can easily

appreciate the subversive possibility. Moreover, by introducing a clandestine affair for both heterosexual and homosexual relations, the playwright refutes the second allegation. It also should be remembered that the sexual imaginary here acts as a tool of de-stereotyping a lifestyle, a destabilization of normative structure of knowledge and understanding. Hence, by introducing layers of non-normative significations, Dattani enriches the process.

Stunted Resistance

Foucault observes: “We are never trapped by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy” (quoted in Champagne, xxiii) What distinguishes the present play *Bravely Fought the Queen* from others by Dattani is perhaps a sense of inexorability of circumstances, complete irrefutability of certain forces and impossibility of absolute freedom from the oppressive mechanisms. Here he deals with a bleaker reality than is redeemable, but by refusing to accept the version offered by the oppressor to the world (represented by Sridhar couple) the characters at least enter the regime of truth. Hence the possibility, though limited, does not get closed altogether.

The Other Way:

Dattani introduces Lalitha and Sridhar almost in the choric stature -- participating in the drama to bring about action, but themselves remaining unchanged like catalysts. They represent the mediocrity by which the pitfall of the characters' habitat is judged. The play envisions a possibility of a lifestyle which yields moderate space and respect for the members of a family without having any need for violent defiance or defense.

We meet Lalitha in the very first scene (even before Alka) as she enters into the self-absorbed world of Dolly entranced in the thumri of Naina Devi and filing her nails absent-mindedly. Ripple is felt in the still water as she comes like a fresh breeze with her easy attitude and outlook of life, sense of humour and confidence in mutual reciprocity with her husband with whom she shares both the domestic and official concern. The Sridhar couple is not an outright non-traditional one. Sridhar prohibits Lalitha's moving in the area of Artinagar at night due to its lack of safety and Lalitha, though reluctant, does not refute his truth or nor does she object to Sridhar's preference to have her drink in his own presence. This sharing of opinion in small matters extends to joined interests. During her description of the masked ball to launch the Re Va Tee brand, proposed by her husband, she unconsciously switches from "he" to "we" and "our". Unlike Dolly, the mistress, whose husband is going to launch the brand and who herself is supposed to advise the design of the costume yet ignorant of even what Re Va Tee is, let apart the plan of the party, Lalitha is well-informed about the whole thing and comes to meet Dolly after a good piece of homework.

In sharp contrast to Dolly's absence from any participatory role in decision-making either in conducting social life or even family life, Lalitha is an equal sharer of the anxiety and toils of her husband, and the family planning of having no children right now since "We are saving for a flat of our own" (*Bravely Fought...*, 243). Apart from sharing common areas of concerns and knowledge, Lalitha has carved a niche for herself: she is an occasional freelancer, woman columnist, does meditation, writes poetry for herself and grows Bonsai and does things to keep herself engaged in resourceful activities. In sharp contrast to the Mrs. Trivedis' incapacity to take a single decision

without their husband's consent or wish, Lalitha seems to influence her husband's decisions like whether to go for a holiday or to get cash instead so that she might not leave her bonsai to her neighbors.

Sridhar's professional ethics of preferring the consumers' point of view over gendered market policy of Jiten breathes a healthy air in the stifling atmosphere. The possibility of multiple masculinities replaces the violence-based or hegemonic masculinity with peaceful masculinity based on egalitarian principles. Sridhar's concern about Lalitha's opinion on finding him with a prostitute as well as the anxious care with which he first saves the bonsai from falling down and later wraps the broken pieces in a paper renders the play a sense of normality. His protest against his boss's order to act as a pimp by having enjoyed sex prior to him to leave Jiten his "left over" may be the part of the fantasy schema of resistance adopted by the characters in the play. In the third act, Sridhar's sharp reaction at Jiten's nasty innuendoes towards Lalitha, the scuffle and Lalitha's shriek and appeal typify the protective patriarchy, but the small touches as his indulgence to his wife's request to stop to nourish her bonsai or to get answer from Dolly envision a streak of light against the dark dungeon. The ideal/destination - if any - was far away, but at least they got prepared to start their journey: "Come on! We have a long walk ahead of us!" (*Bravely Fought...*, 314).

Bonsai:

The bonsai in the play acts as a fine metaphor to exemplify the performative nature of so many of our natural or normal structures of behaviour and ideas. As Lalitha explains the making of the bonsai, "...it comes with a bit of practice. In the beginning, you will have a

lot of dead shoots on your hands. But then you learn and it ...comes.” (*Bravely Fought...*246). As she further narrates, bonsai could be grown by stunting the “natural” growth, wiring its branches, keeping it in a shallow tray so that the roots cannot find enough space, trimming continuously and shaping it by pinching or tying them.” The elaborate description of the bonsai also draws our attention to the acts of interference even in the area generally held as an act of nurturing like watering, applying fertilizer and pesticides, trimming and the paraphernalia of gardening. The treatment of the women in the play reflects the bulldozing of patriarchy to stunt the growth of personality, desire, opinion, and potential of women. However, by a reverse logic, the dwarfing may also hint at the possibility of resisting the so-called “natural” expansion of patriarchy itself by a bit of practice and patience.

The Stunted rebellion:

Unlike other Dattani plays, the present one does not visualize the possibility of any qualitative transmutation of the baser element, no substantial change following a dramatic conflict. When the third act accumulates its potential to create ruptures in the rubric, a group gets formed among women overcoming mutual distrust and accusation; the laughter breathes fresh air in the cell. However, terror creeps in; Dolly helplessly calls for Alka to caution her about the coming of the brothers, and getting terrified asks Lalitha to stop the music on the stereo that might stop her. Alka enters the room: wet, mudded and limping, perhaps exhibiting the impossibility of freedom.

With all the social, economic, moral/ethical, cultural, and institutional power in the oppressors’ hand (even in secret collusion with other male members of opposite

camp), the rebellion proves too fragile. Alka is extremely humiliated by nasty innuendoes of Jiten and his order to his subordinate to fix a drink for his boss's wife and the verdict of expulsion on Alka. Alka realizes that she will break down without the help of alcohol, shivering from both cold and absolute insecurity. Lalitha says, "It's the heat going out" (*Bravely Fought...*, 304). Jiten even overpowers Sridhar on physical level protesting the discourtesy shown to his wife.

Title:

The play *Bravely Fought the Queen* may be taken to be the dramatization of the act of eliminating the central metaphor, as suggested in the title, of the poem: "So bravely fought the Rani of Jhansi/So bravely fought the manly queen..." (*Bravely Fought...*, 296). the poem is a translation of a Hindi poem which runs like – "Khub lari mardani woh to jhasi wali rani thhi/ barsa dhal kripan katori uski hi saheli thi." Significantly, the allusion to the Rani of Jhansi and Naina Devi -- women figures, who out stepped the culturally fixed feminine role and identified as deviants like "manly queen" and "tawaif" -- operates at a meta-theatrical level. Lalitha remembers her school book reference to the translation of the Hindi, in connection to Dolly's describing Naina Devi as the queen of thumri, the song sung by the Tawaifs. As the three women recite in a jocular mode, myriads of meanings unfold before the audience. Dolly herself is fighting her battle to keep up her sanity in face of the deep sadness about her daughter Daksha (the spastic child who is a victim of her father's rage) as well as the terrible unfulfilments of her natural desire absent in the marriage of convenience by fantasy of dressing her daughter in a dance costume and the clandestine meeting with the temporary cook Kanhaia. Alka

fights her secret sorrow of an unconsummated and sterile marriage with her brother's former lover by her unwomanly aggressive behaviour and alcohol. Following the gay vocabulary, Nitin may also be designated as the "manly queen" fighting to assert and cover up his natural sexual bend.

However, Indranee Ghosh objects that in the play, "the title itself suffers from the division of language" (Ghosh, "Dattani and the Drama of the 'Babalog'", 57) while commenting on Dattani's lack of correspondence between the form and the content and the utterance and the intention and failure to produce meaning. Her objection is based on the fragile nature of the appropriation of the very myths of Lakshmi Bai and Naina Devi. She observes that the cut board sword of Alka is "a metaphor for herself, bold and dangerous looking from outside but soft and vulnerable from inside" (59). "a metaphor for herself, bold and dangerous looking from outside but soft and vulnerable from inside" (Ghosh, "Dattani and the Drama of the 'Babalog'", 59). The myth of the brave queen inspires Alka not to fight oppression but go to the fancy ball with her "tin plate armour" as Naina Devi inspires Dolly not to defy the world and follow her heart but construct a fiction of "Kanhaia". In a same vein, Anindya Sen portrays Dolly's struggle as "puny, abject, ineffectual and even pathetic" (Sen, 322). He further complains, it "never rises to the level of the battle of principle, it never moves towards an ideology of emancipation, never embraces any 'cause' apart from the very personal and therefore never becomes in any sense universal or exemplary as does Ibsen's [rebellion]" (Sen, 324). Action merges into the locus of Baa whose constant ringing represents an echoing pattern of behaviour and perpetuation of the stereotypes. "The play in its rapidly shifting values, structures the self who is the locale where the traditional and the contemporary clash but do not fuse to

give birth to a new environment. In this situation only the bonsai can thrive and that too by a great cost to itself” (Chitra and Reddy, 39).

Sen himself, however, locates the answer in the very structure of the play which makes the protest ideologically impossible and which we sometimes miss in the presence of the awful spectacle in front of our eyes: “Dolly and Alka especially have symbolized the modern woman’s struggle for emancipation against oppression and slowly and steadily have grown in stature to the point where the latent irony and cynicism of the playwright’s stand in the play becomes obliterated” (Sen, 320). Dattani intends to bring out the very futility and impossibility of the struggle of the women in face of the sheer brutality of Jiten and callous selfishness of Nitin. The viciousness is too undiluted for any rational protest. Hence the protest comes perhaps in a macabre manner. The tyranny of Jiten, Praful and Baa get symbolized by the sterility of one marriage and the birth of a spastic child from another.

Hence, the only person who escapes the social constructionism and remains beyond the reach of structured violence -- though taking birth from it -- is Daksha. Even in her fourteen, the spastic child communicates with gesture, body language, sound, rhythm and other semiotics of language to express her feeling and bodily drive. Refusing to enter the symbolic of the speech of patriarchal language, she still continues her existence in a precognitive preverbal world. Her very existence destabilizes the normative “family” and notional “Indian tradition” which are accorded dignity and honour by obliterating all the variants of a richly pluralistic culture. Willingly or unwillingly, the perpetrators own the guilt: “Your mother loved her more than was natural! Praful loved

her. More than was natural. You love her. You love her more than Baa or Praful! Because you feel the most guilt!” (*Bravely Fought...*, 312) Baa defies the code of patriarchy which she internalized so completely both in detecting the motive and consequence of her action of leaving her house to Daksha. Perhaps the only person, whom Praful loves in the world unselfishly, is Daksha -- as testified by Baa and Dolly. And it is Jiten’s inability to tolerate the manifestation of his demonic violence that makes him cry like a child and prompts him into an action which finally brings him under the impasse of legal crime.