Breaking the Silence: *30 Days in September*

Introduction

> Nero fiddled while Rome burnt for he obviously preferred the strains of fiddle to the logic that lay behind a city burning, but history didn't spare him…Responsible writer, standing at a turning point of history, should take a stand in defense of the exploited. Otherwise history would never forgive him.
>
> (Mahasweta Devi, Foreword to *Agnigarbha, IX*).

The very last decades of the twentieth century opened up the flood gate of women's lib movement in India, and a socially committed writer like Mahesh Dattani felt upon himself the pressure of participating in the process by laying bare some of the issues wrapped in secrecy and silence for centuries regarding women's experience and "family's best-preserved skeletons from the 'khandaani closets'" (Virani, 46)." It well suited his brand of dramatic strategy of drawing the invisible issues from beneath the carpet. *Thirty Days in September* was a deliberate project commissioned by Anuja Gupta and Aswini Ilawadi of RAHI (Recovery and Healing from Incest) Delhi. As commissioners put it, the play "is part of RAHI's effort to turn incest or child sexual abuse from a private issue to public one and help women survivors come into recovery"

(Foreword, IX). But in order to be equipped enough to write a play on such a sensitive issue having such great consequence on the victims, required sufficient organized knowledge because as Pinki Virani observed, “Every child is vulnerable, dependent, innocent and needy, be it a boy or a girl. And so when it is sexually abused there is almost simultaneously the violation of its physical, emotional and mental state” (*Virani*, 64). Dattani got familiar with the whole process by his association with members of RAHI and even met survivors and all became participants of a journey -- the end product was the achievement of “the imaginative freedom allowed by a fictional form [which] would bring the subject alive” (Foreword, IX). Three major points were focused on – first, the play would articulate “how their (survivors’) lives and relationships are affected as a result of their abuse”; second, whatever be the case “recovery is possible when women begin to honour themselves and supportive spaces are provided for them to access”; and third the play should serve vital purpose of “breaking the silence and exposing the myth that surround incest, its perpetrators and its victims and survivors in our society”

The playwright had to undergo the full two years of travails and trials to grapple with the subject before giving it proper shape into a plot. He of course confesses, knowledge was “little and insignificant” (Note, XIX). He met survivors and hoped to meet even the perpetrators who might have come for counseling, but got soon disillusioned to discover that the “Abusers do not often seek help and would do anything in their power to deny their actions, probably even to themselves” (“ANote”, XIX). Acquiring some first hand knowledge, his next challenge was not to exhibit “insensitiveness” or not to appear “exploitative, looking for some dramatic material and

not really caring about their concerns and anxieties" ("ANote", XX). However, Dattani found the six survivors and their two partners extremely frank and both eager and able to "articulate about their own feelings and thoughts in a way that the men I know seldom are" ("A Note", XX). During the one week of documentation, he underwent a gamut of various feelings -- the "fear and isolation of victims, survivors and partners, the survivors' struggles with their non-offending parents, their inability to develop intimate and stable relationships, the renegotiating of their boundaries with their abusers, their sexual liaisons and other compulsive and self-destructive behaviours" as well as the "incredible resilience and spirit, and the courage and hope with which they have rebuilt their lives" ("Foreword", XIII).

The dramatist's first reaction was a "deep feeling of anger. Anger that I felt in my earlier years whenever I saw oppressive forces at play in communities, families, relationships. I just could not understand why they hadn't killed their abusers by now" ("A Note", XX). Naturally the dramatist had to wait for the "anger" to subside, or at least to bring it "under control" to weave a plot that will meet the necessity of both life and art: "It had to be something that would do justice to each person's journey and yet had to have a dramatic structure that would move beyond the realm of a slice of life" ("A Note", XXI). It was a process of careful balancing between the subjective and the objective- - "I need to be objective to look at the material and say now that's an interesting plot-line and work on a structure. But then I have to get subjective again to feel as these survivors felt and speak as they would" (Dattani, quoted in Bite, 6). He could not allow his "brand of humour" of his usual dramatic design to creep in since he could not see the "funny side of the situation" ("A Note", XXI). Working on stark reality, it is one of the most serious of

his plays dealing with emotions ranging from betrayal, anger, guilt, exploitation of needs to be loved to recovery of love and healing of deep wounds.

Syeeda Hameed in her opening address to the seminar "Recognizing Violence Against Children in the Private Sphere" said, "It can be a myth that home is the safest place for children" (quoted in Virani, 14). It remained so hard for us until very recently to accept that child sexual abuse exists in India, since it contains the potential of tearing up the façade of happy family of sacred India and exposing an "ugly India" (*Virani*, 53). The corner of the veil is lifted. The most striking feature about the crime is that the abusers are not dangerous or lunatic people; rather they are "respectable" men living in decent homes. Even after accepting the existence of the phenomenon in "Indian" society, the mainstream – chiefly constituted by upper and upper and lower middle-class – pushed itself into the shell of another myth: "…what happens among People Like Them, specially People Like That (Plat), does not touch, and therefore should not concern, People Like Us (Plus)" (Virani, 12). On the contrary, as Virani utters in the same breath, "…you need to know, especially if you are a concerned parent, that the People Like Them are not as much the People Like That as they are the People Like Us. The former do not have constant physical access to our children as the latter do" (Virani, 12). RAHI felt the precise need to shatter the fairy tale about the complex and silenced issue, since their precise area of working was the victims belonging to the specific group. Their motive coincided with that of the dramatist whose chosen arena is almost the same. The collusion worked together: "We felt he would be the right person to reach out to RAHI's target group of middle and upper-middle class women" ("Foreword", X). Hence on one level, Dattani wanted to "see the setting of *Thirty Days in September* as upper middle

class. I chose this setting because I did not want them to dismiss sexual abuse as something that does not happen to people like them" (quoted in Bite, 7). On the other level, he wanted to break the silence altogether because the hypocrisy entrenched with secrecy and secrecy with silence makes the abuse tell upon devastatingly on the victims -- "It's the silence and betrayal of the family that affects me the most. Like in this case the mother knew that her daughter was being sexually abused by her uncle, but still chose to keep quiet. It's this silence that makes the abused feel betrayed" (quoted in Bite, 12).

Every society has its own arbitrary criteria of defining the border between silence and speech into which experience is divided. Patriarchy maintains its centrality in both ways-first by its eloquence in condemning incestuous women and by implication, subjugating them to the privileged role of angel in the house, and, secondly, by its silence about men's role in creating such deviants.

If the promiscuity of the adult could be safely deposited on account of the "bad" women, the child sexual abuse remains by definition/implication beyond the boundary of speech and society chose to live content with it unspoken. M. S. Raj Sree observes, "Given this cultural reticence, there existed no established language in which to narrate the experience of sexual trauma, and that absence itself circumscribed the possibilities for conceptualizing and representing any but corporeal injuries" (Sree,151). Hence, the present play attempts to move beyond the set border. It presents the promiscuous sexual liaison of Mala Khatri as a revictimization of her painful experience of being sexually abused as child by her uncle who strategically exploited the need of an emotionally insecure child to be loved: "I love you even though you are so ugly… you are good only

for this..."(*Thirty Days…*, 52). Her religion-maniac mother Shanta hysterically tries to "forget" the excruciating abusive experience of her own and that of her daughter and advices Mala to do the same ("No pain no pleasure. Only silence. Silence means Shanti. Shanti" (*Thirty Days…*, 67). The abuse in childhood once for all Damages Mala's natural growth and deters her from getting along with any adult relation beyond the ominous cycle of thirty days (a repetition of her nightmarish childhood vacations). The mother, haunted by the "daemon" within her daughter, and the latter by a sense of being betrayed, fails to communicate with each other. However, both of them are tortured by the burden of contrary feelings towards the exploiter- a combination of love, anger, pity, dependence, and hate.

Once Judith Butler observed, "…there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body" (*Bodies that Matter*, 10). Mala's female body is constructed and politicized as a tool to please and a single means to get anything she deserves. She becomes oblivious of the difference between "the everyday body as it is lived, and the regime of disciplinary and regulatory practices that shape its form and behaviour" (Butler, quoted in Sree, 143). She develops into an emotionally crippled woman with her butchered psyche continually bleeding by her mother's terrible silence. Thus, we find how society turns the victims into either promiscuous or frozen – both categories detested by the same patriarchal society.

Dattani directs his dramatic enterprise towards the unwrapping of the issue of child sexual abuse from layers of further victimization, towards the reckoning of the fact that: "…I have nothing to hide. Because I know it wasn't my fault" (*Thirty Days…*, 3).

Finally the voice of Shanta breaks out from the silent zone to confess: “I remained silent not because I wanted to, but I didn’t know how to speak” (*Thirty Days…*, 67). Mala, now “entitled to life”, completes her journey from “It’s not anybody’s fault, except my own” (*Thirty Days…*, 3), to the assertion: “I do not hesitate to use my real name now… There’s nothing to hide. Not for me. After all, it is he who must hide.”(*Thirty Days…*, 2)

The object towards which the artistic endeavour of Dattani moves is making the story of individuals into that of “us”, to see and incorporate the element of universal probability in it: “All of us were children once and all of us loved, respected and trusted the adults around us who were in charge of our lives. That love could well have been, or it might have been, or it has been, reciprocated with abuse. That is the story of us” (“A Note”, XXII). The extent to which the project was carried forward could well have been measured by an observation by Lilet Dubey, who was also the director of its first production --, “After every performance, women have come back stage with their own traumatic stories writ large on their faces, grateful for the catharsis the play offers, but even more, I think, for expiation of their own guilt which they have arrived as a heavy burden for so long...For through it they believe, their silent screams have finally been heard” (quoted in Bite, 15).

Child Sexual Abuse

“[M]ore children are being buggered than battered” (Beatrix Cambell, quoted in Virani, 52).

This is a horrible truth from which we turned our faces away for so long leaving a significant portion of our society (the victims) to suffer humiliated, alone and silent. Freud was compelled to replace his observation about the root cause of hysteria among women being sexually abused in childhood with his theory of Electra complex due to extreme social pressure. In the same manner, Sandor Ferenczi (for his insight into CSA), John Caffey (for findings of internal injury of children due to sexual abuse) and others were shouted down. It is only with the publication of Henry Kempe's *The Battered Child Syndrome* in 1962, the phenomenon got accepted as an "in-family evil" (Virani, 44) -- though the victims continued to face denial and minimization of the abuse.

According to Driver and Droison, the definition of child sexual abuse includes "Any sexual behaviour directed at a person under sixteen years of age without that person's informed consent", and they further observed, "It must be defined by every circumstance in which it occurs: in families, in state-run and private institutions, on the street, in classrooms, in pornography, advertising and films" (quoted in Virani, 7). The specification of the age of sixteen is based on the world wide survey of the intelligence and emotional quotient, which show that the persons below sixteen are incapable of "informed consent". The concept of child sexual abuse include first, an adult exposing his or her genital to a child or persuading the child to do the same, secondly, touching the child genital or making the child touch the adult genitalia, thirdly, involving children in pornography including showing pornographic material, fourth, an adult having oral, vaginal and anal intercourse with a child, fifth, an adult making any verbal or other

sexual suggestion to a child, sixth, an adult making children to engage in sexual activity among themselves, seventh, inserting foreign object into a child's body for his or her own sexual gratification (Virani, 6).

As Doctor Shekhar Seshadri observed, the victims undergo the "survivor cycle" -- "The cycle continues, wheels within wheels, spokes of shame being added each time the child recalls the sexual abuse and the sense of powerlessness" (quoted in Virani, 65). The child is submerged into deep confusion about both the definitional and consequential implication of the happening, and a sense of helpless and wrong kind of silence along with betrayal accompanies her/his sharp physical pain if the abuser belongs to the closest circle. If the child is physically, mentally, emotionally and financially dependent on the adult, refusal becomes impossibility and acceptance becomes intolerable. Doctor Woods told Mr. Cambell "Don't assume for one minute that the children have told you everything. They always keep back the worst things" (quoted in Virani, 53). The survivor withdraws into the private dungeon and even if it gets vocal, s/he is either faced with humiliation or disbelief. Pinki Virani observes, "Ethics, thus, is what society can use as its framework of values and with which it can justify 'interference' in the private life of the perpetrator and his victims" (*Virani*, 43).

The impact of any one or more kind of abuse leads to disastrous effect on the victim and gets perpetuated through her/him to others. Various signs shown by a child include among others, temper tantrum and aggressive behaviour, depression, anxiety and withdrawal, sense of isolation, promiscuity etc.

Indian parents, after detecting the fact, concentrates on its physical aspects and social standing; the emotional feelings of the child being locked up, s/he grows up displaying the long-term "sleeper effects" (Virani, 64), such as, first, mental health problem, second, sexual traummatization including both sexual feeling and attitude shaping in developmentally inappropriate and interpersonally dysfunctional relation, third, problem in child raring, fourth, stigmatization, fifth, social dysfunction, sixth, the feelings of powerlessness leading to actual inefficiency, various phobia, developing into an abuser to settle power issue, seventh, sense of betrayal and distrust in any relation (Virani, 64-6). As Virani puts it touchingly, "There is no law that can protect an adult from the childhood abuser. The crime is never punished" (*Virani*, 75).

The deafening silence maintained by the society, especially the upper and upper middle-class, the fugitive abuser, and the slow legal system and barred gates of home push the secret survivors to corner. The two major problems which the survivors face are to make the society accept CSA as real and then make it accept the survivors themselves. Nobody to listen to their story, they are bound to live through long "years of silence. Silence wrap around life like a cocoon…" (Daniaca, quoted in Sree, 150). Society tells them to "forget [it] as a bad dream"; they become the "secret survivors", none to take their side or listen to them. This at least must be accepted now that the horrible thing is an irrefutable Indian phenomenon, and then the question arises, "Now do we still want to maintain this conspiracy of silence about what we are allowing to be done to our children?" (*Virani*, 30)

Network of Abusers

Our experience of reading/watching the play may be described as an entry into, to quote Walling, "life denying structures" (quoted in Kumar, "Child Abuse and Its Psychological repercussion in Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days in September*," 81), a journey through its dark dungeon and finally a rejection of it to accept the world of light and life-affirming principles. The issue of child sexual abuse in the play is set in a larger frame of patriarchal power play. Patriarchy ensures its centrality by detesting the frozen and promiscuous women – both unable to satisfy the need of it and when exposed to be its author, tries to absolve itself by a simple formula of "she made me do it".

Dattani uses the play to exhibit how gender issue cuts across the class. A man, by virtue of being a "man" alone, enjoys the patriarchal privileges of authority and determines meaning and defines phenomenon, controls and regulates action. The paper-wala in synthetic shirt and khanki sandals enters right into the kitchen of Mala's flat without bothering to ask for permission or acknowledge any courtesy to Shanta -- a consequence perhaps she wanted to avoid by getting prepared with her notebook and the money to be given even before opening the door. He takes the charge of inspecting the gas on his own, not out of cordiality, but the authority he enjoys in the absence of a "man" in the house --"There is no man in the house, that is why. If there is a man in the house, what is my problem whether her gas is leaking or her terrace is licking" (*Thirty Days.…*, 6). The very intonation of his speech and the posture of standing with his pelvis thrust forward towering over the mistress of the house make him the replacement of the "man" in the house who would control and protect the women folk. He refuses to grant

Shanta's accuracy of calculation of the payment of 630 and forwards the bill of 690, silences her mild protestation that she never forgets an entry, snatches rudely the book from her and finally threatens to take the money from her daughter demolishing her frail resistance.

The very construction of patriarchy is superbly captured by the dramatist with the simple gesture of Deepak's taking charge of the situation with the same posture of standing with his pelvis thrust and making it clear that he is not going to leave the house without serving his purpose of talking to her. Interestingly, the masculine gesture is able to acquire him the consent which he could not get with repeated request and pleading with Shanta. It proves an effective means to subdue the woman, even her fear, to the will of a "man".

The phenomenon of abuse and exploitation is not a one-way traffic, it gets built through a complicated network of the abused turned into abuser, the abused enjoying being abused ("use me"), the victim victimizing others sometimes with success, sometimes with getting further abused under the venire of victory on the abuser's part and so on.

The man in the party who is easily seduced by Mala's inviting glances to dance with her and enjoys sexual pleasure planning for more behind his fiancé's back, does not hesitate to use and throw Mala at the slightest threat of breaking up of his sanctified and sanctioned relationship with Radhika. The sight of Radhika shocks the man out of his clandestine planning and he just dumps Mala to follow her in order to ask her forgiveness: "She was leading me on. I swear it was her fault" (*Thirty Days…*, 21). Mala

suffers the extreme humiliation, fights her tears and covering her face leaves the party. But the same Mala gets irritated at her mother's letting Deepak, her real well-wisher in her house.'

The action of the man in the party is not a stray incident, but a recurrence of history. When a teenager, Mala gets assaulted by her cousin of course with her consent, being recommended by her uncle ("I was uncle Vinoy's reference" *Thirty Days…*, 28). After molesting her, the abusive exploiter returns to his role of protective patriarch and confides his concern about Mala to her mother -- "that he was concerned about you, that I should not send you out of the house" *Thirty Days…*, 30).

However, as the play progresses, revelations are made about Vinoy, the great architect of the banishment of two women from the world of common humanity - making one a "whore" and the other "frozen" and compeling them live a life of confinement in their an "unreal" world where only the reality of trauma and self-abnegation exist. The man comes as the uncle for Mala and "bhaia" (brother) for Shanta – the only shelter and provider after Mala's father left them without any communication.

Uncle Vinoy is referred to in the play in connection with Mala's exposition of him as an abuser who molested her when she was seven and continued up to when she became eight, nine, and ten and stopped only when she was thirteen. During each vacation of thirty days whenever they happened to live together, she was molested every day and by some mysterious strategy he bought Shanta's silence and disbelief so that she never asked her daughter what happened to her, or may be, she knew it and only fed her to forget the pain. It vitiated the childhood of the victim. The pain and humiliation of

those childhood days apart, It maimed her growth, damned her soul, took away her self-respect and capacity to live life forever. The longing to be approved and needed turned her into a seducer at thirteen. We see the girl of thirteen trying every measure to provoke her uncle -- of course this time against his will -- to have sex with her, a teenage girl seducing her cousin. And when she grows an adult, she becomes a slot. Once for all she is categorized as a "bad girl" -- a category which she fits in for the people who knows her and her mother too, a category she fits herself in by following the norms of the role-playing by conduct and thought. Thus she finds fulfillment by playing the role she is "made for".

Shanta flees from the world around her to take refuge in her worship ("I have my God and that is enough for me. Krishna knows what all I have gone through" *Thirty Days…*, 41) and manages to refuse everything as non-existent either by imagining they did not happen or more effectively by forgetting. Reality proves too much for her to accept as real. She fails to be normal wife to her husband and an affectionate and even an averagely responsible mother to her daughter.

The most oppressive face of the structure of patriarchy comes out when we find these women are helplessly dependent on the very abuser in multiple ways. The family, comprised of a housewife deserted by her husband without any provision for alimony and a minor child, is pathetically dependent on the "man" who acts as the provider in absence of the conventional one. The financial dependence apart, he is the "man" for the family to face the world in whose absence the paper-wala acts as the surrogate. However, the most pathetic is the emotional dependence/confinement which he imposes on them by cutting

them of from all source of love and affection and demolishing successfully the belief that they are at all worthy of it. Shanta requests him to be the man-representative during the meeting with Deepak and his family as the head-of-the-family and unfalteringly he agrees to play the "dutiful uncle" because "I have always been there like a father for her" (*Thirty Days…*, 50). Mala is haunted by the fact of her uncle's leaving her disgusted with her bahaviour which only cements her belief that she is unlovable except as a sex object. Even after knowing full well that uncle Vinoy was an abuser, she gets hurt at his addressing Shanta directly ignoring Mala; unable to resist herself, almost under breath she calls him and moves towards his proximity engrossed in his affectionate chit chats with Shanta in spite of herself until suddenly checks with much pain and leaves the place. Dattani shows his real mastery in introducing the short act, and the gestures make up for so many things.

The child of seven comes with her parent to her maternal uncle's place to spend her vacation who turns to be a Hobsian figure out to satisfy his own need at the terrible cost of abusing a child. The girl is taken to a secret corner by her uncle to give her the birth day present for coming to the age of seven. She is ordered to pull up her frock and help his uncle to do whatever he likes in exchange for allowing her to come here to spend holidays. Farther more, she is asked to show her love to her uncle since she has expressed her affection in front of her parents and her refusal to do anything would be breach of trust and everybody would call her a "bad girl". Moreover, the kid is almost converted to the belief that she is ugly and extremely unlovable: "Nobody will tell you how ugly you are" (*Thirty Days…*, 52). The belief gets farther petrified by the fact of her father's leaving the family for another. The uncle however promises to love her if she obeys his

order. As a panacea for the physical pain, the ”man” encourages her to remember her school activities, tell what she has learned in her school and go on singing the nursery rhymes. To add a little salt, the abuser also represents it as “our secret” (*Thirty Days…*, 51). After the deed is done, he orders silence and makes her convinced that she also enjoyed since she is only “made for it” (Thirty Days…, 3 being so ugly. A child with a rather uncaring father who sends his crying child to her mother for consolation and a mother who before asking her child the reason for weeping feeds enormously to stuff her mouth, she becomes pathetically dependent on her abuser who promises to love in exchange of sex.

The pedophilic never leaves the adult Mala psychologically even after being thrown away by her moralizing uncle who loses all sexual interest in her after she becomes thirteen. Mala sees him in every man, and having no other alternative to capture attention, the extremely lonely girl tries to provoke him with her sexual charms, and whenever anyone tries to come nearer her more than physically, she rejects him. As if to match with the holidays, she always prefers the affairs which last for thirty days. The uncle revitalizes Mala’s childhood by his absent presence and assumes the mode to warranty his mastery. In every relation Mala wants to replicate the freeze moment of childhood. Even in the fold of love and security offered by her fiancé Deepak , Mala is haunted by the man and finds herself unable to strip her off: either she repeals the relation or sees the same man in him and offers what she has to give in exchange for approval.

The exclusive standards of morality by which the abusers measure themselves, not only find ways to keep themselves out of legal regime by silencing the victims in

numerous ways; in fact, they don't consider their act as crime at all. The indifference and complacence with which the abuser Vinoy caries his authority as the head/man of the family, do not show any lack of confidence in or doubt about his position. In the dinner he plays the most jovial, frank and dutiful guardian of the helpless women sponsoring the dinner as expected. He cracks jokes, appreciates Deepak, silences Shanta's objection of Mala's taking one more peg of wine and affectionately pats Mala being a big girl by now. He keeps unperturbed at the subtle hint of a threat "I have been a big girl for fifteen years, uncle" (*Thirty Days…*, 56). He criticizes councilors for creating trouble "where there is no problem" and for blaming parents as "exploit the fact that most people carry some kind of resentment against their parents" (*Thirty Days…*, 57) to earn their living. Very cunningly during his tirade against them, he introduces the fact of Mala's father's leaving his family as the presumed reason behind Mala's "depression" and suppresses Mala's protest with sufficient authority. However, faced with a tough opponent like Deepak who won't let it pass so easily, he resumes the real authority: first he demonstrates the care and protection he has always given unabashed ("I have only given her love and attention, right from the start" *Thirty Days…*, 58); then being even more pin-pointed in area of Mala's abused childhood, he brings in the strategy of pressurizing the weakest region and almost command Shanta to protest against his insult ("They are insulting your own brother and you keep quiet" *Thirty Days…*, 58); and finally, he acts the liberal well-wisher and both forgives and appreciates Deepak's concern about Mala and declares his faith in him as having potential of a "good husband for our Mala" (*Thirty Days…*, 59).

Defacement

Terrified being faced with a horror which s/he can neither define nor deny nor deter, the victim of child sexual abuse "becomes a survivor through the process of developing defensive strategies which endeavour to protect her, his, inner core" (Virani, 198). Its whole being works to the only purpose of survival and s/he becomes accustomed to the coldly comforting zone – the survivor's cycle from which s/he denies to move on. Helen Sheldon (quoted in Virani, 201) categorizes the symptoms of these blockers into three areas: first, depression, anxiety, sleeping disorder, eating difficulty, self-harm, and alcohol or drug dependency. Second, feeling of isolation, distrust, fear of men, difficulty in relation with own children, alienation, and repeated victimization in adult relations. Thirdly, avoidance of sex, promiscuity and prostitution (*Virani*, 202). Rani Raote, a Mumbai based psychiatrist summed up the problems when she observed, "The honest attempt should be to walk towards self-hood… they will cry and block themselves in levels though unflattering to them but they find it comfortable. These levels are familiar to them and that's why comfortable" (Quoted in Virani, 200).

Dr. Shekhar Seshadri attempted to catalogue the various "survivor cycles" the victims undergo. They may be enlisted in following manner: first, s/he is plunged into utter "confusion" about her/his own identity ("I don't like it, but I cannot stop it"), to whom to turn for safety since I cannot save myself, What actually happened may be wrong and so on. Secondly, it leads to self-estrangement ("I am bad, at least not normal. Why can't I be like others?" Nobody cares about me, I actually don't count neither I want to be"). Thirdly, the negative feelings lead to saddest part – the wrong set of survival. S/he tries to hide, protect the "real" me from being exposed. Fourthly, now the child gets trapped ("I am responsible for what happened to me because I did not stop it. I did not

tell anybody. I must keep the secret to survive. It is my fault"). Fifthly, all these lead to a negative image of the self ("I deserve it all. If they knew they will be disgusted with me. I am a bad person. Everyone is better than me") (*Virani*, 64-7).

The child struggles alone to repress the crisis silently, but the stress takes shape in various deformities. The emotions being locked up, the survivors start to display long-term "sleeper effect[s]" like: I) mental health problem (anxiety, fear, depression, masked depression, suicide, alcohol, cigarette or drug addiction, self-annihilation etc); II) sexual traummatization (both sexual feeling and attitude shape themselves in "developmentally inappropriate and interpersonally dysfunctional relation", such as, Prostitution, aversion to sex, confusion of sex with love and sexual identity with care giving and care getting, inappropriate sexualization, aggressive sexual behaviour, difficulty in arousal and orgasm, promiscuity, revictimization and so on); III) Problem in child raring (the cycle repeats itself in handling own children in a sexual or non-sexual way such as over-protectiveness or fertility control); IV) Stigmatization (negative self-images); V) Social dysfunction (delinquency, criminal behaviour, violence against self or other); VI. The feelings of powerlessness (the child's will, desire and sense of efficacy is contravened and it grows into anxious, inefficient and escapist. Other impacts include nightmares, phobia, becoming abuser to settle the power issue, eating and sleeping disorder, disassociation, employment problem, vulnerability to subsequent victimization); VII) sense of betrayal (generally harmed by close ones if not parent --, abused children lose faith in them and search some one to depend upon making themselves more vulnerable, create discomforting intimate relationship, cause and suffer marital disharmony, choose wrong partners, show poor and even abusive parenting skill (Virani, 65-6).

If Mala's wound bleeds profusely, Shanta's blood freezes as a consequence of deep scar inflicted by a long and damaging sexual abuse which she experienced in her childhood by a very close family member. The resistance of Shanta consists of several escape routes like repression, denial, detachment and dissociation. Most frequently, she returns to self-abasement -- always ready to assert "it is always my fault" (Thirty Days…, 11) – which becomes almost a leitmotif in the play reiterated by both mother and daughter. Her escape mechanism includes evasion of subject by taking refuge to physical discomfort and more strongly taking shelter in "praying" – always seeking the security in the fold of her "puja" (worship). Another favourable device she deploys is replacing fantasy with truth and vice versa. Thus the real person in her keeps inaccessible – her face covered with so many layers of deluding masks. The survivor cycle even sometimes denies access to memory of the very sexual abuse. Consequently, the most effective mechanism she brings into action is the loss of memory: she forgets every thing, everything that might disturb the make-belief world of "shanty" (peace).

"Adult women with a history of childhood sexual abuse show greater evidence of sexual disturbance or dysfunction, homosexual experiences in adolescence or adulthood, depression, and are more likely than non-abused women to be re-victimized" (Virani, 60). While Mala becomes promiscuous, Shanta is defaced the other way. Bite comments, "She lost all her sensitivity and sensation for love and sex. Sex was neither a thing of joy, nor pain for her" (Bite, 10). She could not bear the touch of a man, even her husband, without being a lesbian. She became sexually defunct, living a life of isolated

existence beyond sensory experience -- a life devoid of sensuous feelings. Most pathetically, she even fails as mother and proves ineffective in protecting her own child from meeting the same fate as hers. Mothers, who are sexually abused in their own childhood, often show Munchausen syndrome or experience "blanking out" from time to time, creating a space between herself and the child so that they cannot hurt it as she was by her adults (*Virani*, 56). She is unable to communicate her warmth and concern to her for whom she lives ("it is always my fault" (Thirty Days…, 11) and is incapacitated to help in her utter crisis, share her deepest sorrow, even understand her real self – only increasing distance.

We see Mala in a party talking to her colleague on her cell phone about an advertisement campaign on sanitary napkin. Here is a professional, sensitive, creative and intelligent worker. She is quick to detect the traditional gender construct in the picture of the mother skipping with her daughter, which goes against the ethos of the ad aiming at campaigning freedom and physical ease. She suggests rather changing it in a mother playing cricket with her husband and daughter, throwing the ball in the air while running within the house with the caption "free" and "A hit always" (*Thirty Days.…*, 17). Her sincerity is evident in her attitude to the work and her capability is quickly recognized as the man in business suit identifies her as the architect of the "bronze beauty campaign" and goes farther to ad that certain advertisement planned by her deserves IAAFA award: "You are a genius" (*Thirty Days.…*, 18).

But the same Mala appears with another face. She dresses provocatively, looks at the almost unknown man seductively, helplessly giving the impression of her

infatuation with the man and gets irritated at recognition of her work: “Shall we talk about something else apart from work?” (*Thirty Days…*, 18). The man cautiously introduces Mala to his fiancée Radhika and finds excuse to respond to Mala’s alluring proposal to dance together. He of course flirts with her by praising her and Mala leads him on and shows her satisfaction at being flirted with and more so when she knows that he is in the town for a month. She directly offers to be physically near: “Hold me closer” (*Thirty Days…*, 20). She agrees to his proposal to drink together but only wants it now while her partner wants to drop his fiancé first and then have his rendezvous. With obvious eagerness, Mala comes closer to invite a kiss. She goes on inviting his sexual proximity until she is thrown out by the user to satisfy his greater need of winning his fiancé’s confidence.

As Raj Sree noted, “the acts of violence render the victims helpless and they lose their sense of control, connection and meaning which is essential for a healthy life. These acts of violence leave the victims in a state of helplessness and thereby undermine their sense of personal efficacy, their relational capacity, and their ability to psychologically integrate the upheavals of life in meaningful ways” (Sree, 145). Being humiliated to the core, Mala stands for a while with her head down, like a school girl caught in the act and leaves the place fighting her tears amidst staring glances.

We see Mala from Shanta’s eyes – a girl of thirteen provoking her uncle, asking to kiss her, touch her, say things to her and “do things” (*Thirty Days…*, 30) to her. She receives pleasure also by her sexual partnership with her cousin. To repeat Shanta, she

was “an average child”, but one “had my brother and your cousins dancing around you” (*Thirty Days.…*, 30). She attracted many more.

All the incidents are quite in tune with Mala’s own confession “I don’t know why. I just don’t understand … why I do it… What I am doing is terribly wrong! But it means a lot to me. I like it. That is why I am a bad person” (*Thirty Days*…, 15). Thus Patriarchy successfully categorizes a woman as a “bad girl”, makes her conform to it, compels her belief that she is “made for it, which ultimately washes the abusers of their guilt (being led on) and use her for the purpose she is made for.

Mala flinches even from the relation with Deepak who is ready to show her the respect, love and trust and stubbornly refuses to continue the relation for which Deepak is so keen, parroting the same statement, “It won’t work between us (*Thirty Days.…*, 34). While sitting in a restaurant together, she suddenly says to Deepak that the man sitting near is staring at her breasts, which infuriates him. To Mala’s utter dismay Deepak goes to the man and threatens him for the obscene behaviour which makes the man horrified (“she is mistaken or she is lying” *Thirty Days.…*, 34). Mala tries to stop Deepak, and the moment he raises his fists, Mala confesses “I made it up” *Thirty Days.…*, 34). She admits frankly that it is she who wanted it this way and declares that only this could satisfy her and this is the precise thing she wants from Deepak. She even offers her body to Deepak in return to the security and approval she claims from him.

What we witness is a defaced face of a seven year old child in need of love and security from her adult and receiving instead terrifying sexual abuse, sense of guilt and horrible sin, callousness and willing indifference. Calendar moved rapidly from seven to

twenty seven faster than maturity. She went on repeatedly experiencing the nightmare whenever exposed to the object associated or reminded of that traumatic experience.

Solitary Cell

Unlike some other plays by Dattani, in the present one, we encounter characters – Mala and her mother Shanta – suffering from the confinement in their respective solitary cells without any visible warden. The two women live in the flat with no male member to impose patriarchal authority or inflict violence or to protect and provide either.

The family does belong rather to an upper middle class with no financial anxiety or other familiar crisis such as disease, calamity, and social stigma or like. Yet when we meet Shanta for the first time absorbed in her puja room offering flowers, ringing bells and singing song to deity ("Mere to Girdhar Gopal, Dusro na koi", *Thirty Days*…, 4), a sense of detached discharge of routine duties prevails instead of calm and peace. The doorbell rings without exciting any curiosity at the possibility of someone's coming from the outside world. As the stage direction goes, she takes up the notebook before opening the door automatically without showing any feelings. The first glimpse of emotion is seen in the form of bewilderment as her pre-programmed action gets jolted by finding at the door step some one other than the paper-walla, some one whom she did neither expect nor recognize. She even does not readily recall Deepak until he repeated his previous conversation with her on telephone, his request to meet her and her consent in the matter. The immediate reaction at the recognition is that of rather uncivil and pathetic refusal to meet him. She asks him to come when Mala is at home, and when Deepak insists to talk to her in absence of Mala, Shanta gets scared about her daughter's

presumed anger: “If she finds out you are here and I talked to you…” (*Thirty Days…, 5)*. We come to know from the conversation that Deepak called her on the other day to meet her and requested not to let Mala know, the precise thing Shanta did. Mala got angry and warned her against any such meeting which frightened her so much that when Deepak rather impatiently observes, “She can’t kill you!” (*Thirty Days*…, 5), at her abnormal fear, she answers: “You don’t know her” (*Thirty Days*…, 5).

However, her resistance gets dissolved only after Deepak takes the charge of the space in a macho fashion like the paper-walla. She is pleased to know Deepak is colonel Vatia’s son and is genuinely happy to know Deepak and his parents are eager to accept Mala. From her unguarded remarks we come to know that the mother and daughter live like strangers. Mala keeps easy when absorbed with work or she goes out. But in the evenings when she is at home, she keeps restless and irritated throwing her anger on her mother. However, Mala also keeps on lying about her programmes to her mother maintaining a secret life: “Sometimes she repeats the same lies, as if she does not care if I know she is lying” (*Thirty Days.*.., 13). . However, Shanta quickly recovers her self-composure and explains: “She is a very nice girl at heart. Sometimes she gets angry with me -- but … it is always my fault” (*Thirty Days.*.., 11). Shanta also has the strange habit to keep note of everything even the fluctuation of her daughter’s mood. She offers a calendar marked with a cross on last Monday, the precise day she refused Deepak, along with some other. She gets hysterically frightened as Mala calls home and comes to know that Deepak is there and threatens not to return: “Don’t say that! Come home! Mala please come home!” (*Thirty Days.*.., 15).

Mala comes home and we witness the two tortured confined souls confront and inflict more pain on each other. Mala is restless like those days when she in querulous mood, Shanta requests her to have some food and is faced with sharp refusal of her company, but is immediately called back. Mala enquires about the meeting with Deepak and Shanta, as usual, avoids the question looking at the picture of Krishna and then by forwarding the excuse of forgetting. But Mala won't allow her to evade either with her head ache or forgetting: "You forget what you don't want to deal with (*Thirty Days…*, 22). She gets irritated with the painting of lord Krishna which has always been a hiding place for Shanta to hide from responsibility of addressing all unpleasant issues: "One of these days I will throw that picture out of this house" (*Thirty Days…*, 23). At last, unable to avoid, Shanta gains enough strength to utter the words – "He told me he wanted to marry you" (*Thirty Days…*, 23). Now it was Mala's turn to avoid the subject, but insisted on by her mother, she blatantly refuses to marry him. Shanta pleads her daughter to accept the proposal from such a nice boy and a family already familiar and even shows hitherto absent strength in her persistence: "I have always listened to you for everything, but this… You must say yes" (*Thirty Days…*, 23). Mala returns to her private confinement refusing to give any reason for her decision.

The volcano erupts as Shanta tries to comfort Mala offering to know and console: ("You can tell me what is troubling you. I am always there for you", *Thirty Days…*, 23). Mala sharply reacts at the empty solicitude and accuses her mother of never being available during her crisis. In her desperate attempt to flee, now Shanta ridiculously proposes to make "alu paratha" (potato stuffed chapatti) for breakfast which Mala likes so much. But the flow couldn't be stopped and a history of unredeemed pain reveals. As

Mala recounts, when she was a child, day after day, Shanta deployed the same strategy: whenever Mala came to her hurt, crying with pain, she used to staff her mouth with the food and silence her. It did not lessen the pain but only blocked the way of expression. Gradually Mala learned to like them, enjoy the variety of food item as the panacea for all her pains. Now Mala wonders whether Shanta already knew what was happening to her daughter, but refused to acknowledge: "You knew. Otherwise you wouldn't have been so prepared" (*Thirty Days…*, 24)

This time again, as Mala refers to her mother's inattention to her pain, Shanta asks her daughter's forgiveness for not asking her where it hurts, kissing her and lulling her to sleep with a "lori" (lullaby) instead of giving her sweet and going to puja room when she fell down from the stairs and broke her legs. Mala gets genuinely shocked to see her mother still failing to remember the ghastly memory of her child's abuse – either deliberately or helplessly – and replacing the leg-breaking event for far more tortuous wound. Mala openly refuses the veracity of Shanta's projected forgetfulness, but her wide-eyed innocence appears disarming. Desperately Mala tries to make her remember at least the experience she herself confided to her mother five or six years ago, alludes to the specific place and context and even Shanta's own citations. Shanta stubbornly refuses to recall and instead, takes the blame on herself of both forgetting and saying some foolish thing which Mala took seriously. But Mala could not let it go so easily today: "I said something serious and you took it lightly" (*Thirty Days…*, 26). She repeats her horrible experience of being molested by her uncle Vinoy during a month's time in every vacation she used to go to visit him or he come to live with her.

Shanta now takes recourse to the psychic mechanism of replacing fantasy with truth and vice versa. She plainly repeats what she did five years ago and says that it was all Mala's figment of imagination; nothing of that sort happened to her. For sometimes, Mala thought that it happened to her alone, she is made for that and perhaps she imagined things. But she could not avoid the reality: "I just have to learn to live with the pain" (*Thirty Days.…*, 29). Shanta suggests forgetting everything as a "bad dream", to banish all bitterness into the region of oblivion. But Mala refuses to unacknowledged both the hellish pain and its cause and gets suddenly furious at the portrait which has always been a safe escape zone for her mother and for which she never bothered to probe deeper into her daughter's crisis: "I just have to learn to live with the pain" (*Thirty Days.…*, 29). IN a violent gesture she takes off the portrait and in Shanta's utter dismay throws it out of door and it breaks into pieces. Shanta's inertia gets jolted as she rushes out and gathers the portrait and broken pieces of glass and Mala gradually returns to her composed shell.

But once pushed forcibly out of her confinement, Shanta takes the initiative and breaks Mala's tired silence: "I remember, but what I remember is not what you remember" (*Thirty Days.…*, 29). She remembers not the child Mala but the adolescent one ("Not when you were seven but when you were thirteen" *Thirty Days.…*, 29), when pushing herself on to her uncle pleading and forcing him to kiss, touch, make sexual advances, "do things" (*Thirty Days.…*, 30). Mala shudders at the narration and cries to stop her mother. But she continues her story about Mala's affair with her cousin leading and enjoying: "I went to the kitchen to vomit. Then I prayed……To our God, so He could send his Sudarshan chakra to defend you, to defend us from the demon inside you, not outside you" (*Thirty Days.…*, 30) It is only another Looking out of the window of her

cell. Shantta could see only the face of truth facing her. She does not understand Mala's pain in making advances neither does she believe when Mala reveals that it is uncle Vinoy who bed her cousin who approached Mala with the words "You are your uncle's reference" (*Thirty Days…*, 30). Unable to fathom the depth, Shanta advises "And please don't talk about trying to forget the pain… Try to forget the pleasure" *Thirty Days…*, 31). She categorizes her daughter as a "bad girl" a favourite epithet of Mala for herself. Mala only weakly protests "The pleasure is part of the pain ma" (*Thirty Days…*, 31).

With the progression of the plot, we encounter layers of secrecy and walls keeping the mother and the daughter apart. Uncle Vinoy is coming to stay with them for two days and Mala, though hesitant, gives her consent. The casually alluded help which they got from Vinoy lights up another mist of history. Mala is disillusioned about her father being the provider for their daily living even after his departure. Unwillingly Shanta confesses that it was uncle Vinoy who was the very person while she went on giving Mala the impression that it was her father who cared to send money, extra for diwali and school-day celebration to show his concern in order to secure her with the feeling of being cared for by her father.

However, the revelation of the truth turns out to be another version of distorted reality. Shanta's attempt to show Mala her father's affection has also an element of indirectly impressing on her that he didn't care for her – at least Mala thought so. As Mala breaks the boundary of uncritical acceptance of fact and exclaims: "He didn't leave because of me. He left because of you" (*Thirty Days…*, 41). Night after night Shanta used to sleep with Mala to avoid his touch and prayed to Krishna to save her from the daemon.

Mala's father left with the words "'I married a frozen woman'" (*Thirty Days.…*, 41). Mala, in her turn, confined in her cell, sees the specific version of truth and categorizes Shanta as "failure as a wife and a mother" (*Thirty Days.…*, 41). They accuse each other and themselves only to spare the real abuser. Whenever Deepak has any hunch about her uncle or Mala herself slips any hint, Mala quickly alleges her mother ("It's not my uncle. It's my mother … She doesn't want to see me happy" *Thirty Days.…*, 48). And in a desperate attempt to avoid her brother's enquiry whether it is something about him, Shanta denies and quickly explains, "It's my fault. I should be more strict with Mala" (*Thirty Days.…*, 49). Thus the mother keeps lamenting "I wish she could listen to me" while the daughter complains "I wish she wouldn't be so lost in her religion. I wish she had been there for me!" (*Thirty Days.…*, 49).

Mala goes on accusing her mother for creating the hell for her where alone of the entire world she belongs, and the threat to be thrown out from this hell finally demolishes the walls of their respective solitary cells and they come out to see one another.

Partnership

As Dr. Rani Raote found out from her activities in the field of child sexual abuse, "women, who have survived a dysfunctional relation, tend to react negatively when they enter into a functional one. They often try and spoil the thing for themselves by some psychobabbel" (quoted in Virani, 198). Naturally much tension concentrates in the arena of partnership. The sexual traummatization leaves Shanta frigid and she fails to communicate with her partner/husband with any warmth, and victimized by a fear-

psychosis, always tries to save herself from the touch of the daemon. Her husband fails to delve deeper than the surface and trying for some times, leaves the "frozen woman" and their daughter.

The play is of course the tale of darkness, but not unredeemable; silver lining of love, dependence and trust appear around the dark cloud of oppression and the consequent deformity. We meet Deepak as he comes to see Shanta in Mala's absence to discuss about her. He fixes an appointment with her on telephone and is rather refused an entry in her house impolitely. He pleads, tries to clarify his cause, takes the opportunity of Shanta's moving from the door to enter right into the room, prevents her from calling Mala and finally, with no other way, he takes up the macho authority of gesture in imitation of the paper-Walla to have her talk.

The pains Deepak takes and the urgency and sincerity he shows are not the craze of the infatuated adolescent. Deepak shows real concern and respect for his partner and tries to address her crisis. They met in a party a month ago and danced, and arranged to spend the holli (an Indian colour festival) together. After this, they started to see each other everyday making Deepak quite convinced of his own serious involvement and Mala's attachment: "I thought she loved me" (*Thirty Days…*, 10). Every thing was going well until last Monday Deepak told her that she is "most sensitive, intelligent and dynamic woman" when strangely Mala stared at him and suddenly declared "It is over" (*Thirty Days…*, 10(. Curiously never did she give him any chance of feeling otherwise, did not accuse him of any act that might hurt or disrespect her, but only she avoided to take Deepak to her mother and did not tell anything about him to Shanta. Deepak is hurt

at the fact of her silence about him to her mother and rather bewildered at the strange conduct of Mala of giving her mother the impression that Deepak does not want to marry her as he is only interested in a casual affair: "That is the way it is with men'" (*Thirty Days…*, 11).

However, Deepak does not lose hope or confidence in her. His hope or confidence is not built upon any fantastic idealism or exotic attraction; on the contrary, he offers sufficient hints at his guess on Mala's whereabouts (possibly another relation) which he, instead of interpreting as feminine infidelity or promiscuity, detects as a psychological problem which calls for proper counseling. His honest and effective concern for Mala gets more prominent when set in sharp contrast to the man's conduct in the party who is provoked by Mala perhaps in the same manner ("She smiled at me and wanted to dance with me" *Thirty Days…*, 14), takes advantage of the opportunity to enjoy the physical proximity of the alluring woman out of his fiancé's sight as is evident from the stage direction which shows 'the man exploring her back more with his hand when it is away from Radhika's line of vision' (Thirty Days, 20). As a partner the man acts dishonestly with his own fiancé and uses Mala to enjoy and also to ensure his position as a victim of her seduction. Men sleep with bad girl but don't marry them. That is why, he does not hesitate to propose to spend night with Mala without the knowledge of Radhika since he is already aware of Mala's reputation as an easily available woman ("you have been with him for sometime I think" *Thirty Days…*, 19) and dumps without a second glance to appease his would-be wife whom he betrayed few minutes ago leaving Mala bear the humiliating stare of all the people of the party.

Deepak does not only detect Mala's promiscuity as a crisis making her suffer too, something more than casual physical hunger, he shows a rare piece of understanding, patience and cooperation both in maintaining the relation with negative effort of Mala and giving constant company to her during the trials and tribulations Mala undergoes during her convalescence. He keeps offering his help and tries to understand even after repeated and rude refusal and searches after the "the real person in you" (*Thirty Days.…*, 33).

It is only at Shanta's insistence (persuaded by Deepak) that Mala meets Deepak after breaking up the relation with no explanation and behaves in a detached formal manner in response to Deepak's affectionate approach. Disregarding all her mother's warning against telling anything about her fallen childhood, she honestly confesses everything about her present psychic deformity. However, contrary to Shanta's anxiety, Deepak appreciates this rare piece of honesty in his beloved – "You are talented, beautiful, intelligent, and honest. You have a rare gift of honesty" (*Thirty Days.…*, 33). Yet Mala remains unperturbed and here the story turns a sharp corner from the romantic tales of fallen women seeking someone who will appreciate her inner goodness and overwhelmed at being appreciated, surrenders to the man, the angel. Mala sharply retorts that "It doesn't mean a thing to me" (*Thirty Days.…*, 33) to her and she takes an innovative way to show what she wants. She accuses a man looking at her in an obscene manner, and when Deepak gets ready to take action against the man, she confesses that she has "made it up" (*Thirty Days.…*, 34). She makes it quite clear what she desires is to be used as a sex object. At this revelation, Deepak is almost at the brink of despair and for moments he can't see any hope -- a view so strongly upheld by his fiancé: "I told you

so. I know it won't work between us" (*Thirty Days.…*, 35). But Deepak can't let it go and he succeeds at least to convince Mala to see a councilor.

Deepak does not hurry, neither does he expect any miracle; rather he waits patiently month after month always assuring Mala of his presence by her side whether consciously invited or not. In the play when Mala rushes for help to his flat living through both a real and a psychological time together (as discussed in the section "Awakening"), Deepak appears to be a most dependable and loving partner almost glorified by the striking contrast to the "man" who haunts Mala's life like a Greek fury whenever she tries to land ashore. Literally and metaphorically, he extends his hands, pursues Mala to hold it, and offers it repeatedly overcoming all Mala's refusal and hesitation. Apparently Mala comes to call it off and like thousand times earlier, he comforts her. He offers his shoulder for her to cry and sincerely assures, "I am not going to harm you" (*Thirty Days*…, 51). Responding from her life of long past – of course unaware Deepak takes it to be her present reaction --, she pitiably offers her body most provocatively in return to his promise not to leave her – "I won't tell any body. Please don't leave me" (*Thirty Days.…*, 50). With great care and honour, Deepak covers her body instead of using or chiding her: "Mala, you cannot abuse your body like this! I won't let you do it to yourself!" (*Thirty Days.…*, 53).

Perhaps encouraged by the councilor, Deepak takes up active measure in digging out the long-hidden crime poisoning Mala's life. At uncle Vinoy's disgust with the councilor's job of creating misunderstanding among close relatives and in Mala's case creating grievance against her deserter father and mother, Deepak charges him of

excluding his own name from the list of possible wrong-doers. Mala and Shanta get scared and try to stop him, But Deepak's business is to bring the truth and he continues and even alludes to Mala being abused as a child: "What kind of attention did you give to Mala?" (*Thirty Days…*, 58). He persists even after Mala offers to leave the place and straightly says that he will take Mala's exit and Shanta's silence to be the ascent to his conjecture. However, he tackles the situation rather tactfully by assuring Shanta of everything being all right and striking an apparently cordial note with the uncle as before and avoids creating any scene in a public by apologizing after Shanta's denial of his allegation. However, Deepak gets sufficiently convinced of his hunch as he says to Shanta in private: "I wish you had remained silent" (*Thirty Days.…*, 60).

Though supportive through her sexual adventures, Deepak is also affected by them and struggles with his own needs to be met. He sometimes gets frustrated struggling against Mala's reluctance to take him in confidence and her indifference about the relation. Deepak goes to Mala's councilor to know how to help her and we see him a fatigued man at the brink of losing faith in himself and any future of the relation. He admits his failure to win Mala's confidence – "She doesn't trust me, and I find that very tiring" (*Thirty Days.…*, 54). Deepak does not hide his tiredness though he does not for a moment doubts Mala's honesty. He shows also real insight as he feels a strong hunch about her uncle instead of Mala's repeated refusal to tell anything about him. He is really hurt at the indifference he confronts regularly in Mala: "If I tell her it's off she would simply look at me. She may not say a word but her eyes would tell me what she is thinking 'See. I told you it won't work. You are wasting your time with me. Go away and leave me alone'" (*Thirty Days.…*, 54 He even almost feels that "I don't even exist for her"

(*Thirty Days…*, 54). However, he is right enough to detect a deep craving in Mala for company; the desperation may lead her to offer sex in exchange. HE decides to give one more shot. The situation turns in his favour and the revelation becomes inevitable. Now Deepak offers finally to take her along with him in "our" home. Shockingly, even Mala refuses to accompany him since she cannot love "anyone … else" (*Thirty Days…*, 66). However, by the end of the play, Shanta's rude self-violence jolts Mala out of her own post-traumatic stress and we meet Mala confessing to her councilor her sincere and exuberant longing to "be" with her fiancé.

Tutun Mukherjee argued, "Placing the forms within the discourse of 'gender as genre' reveals the way [the] sex-gender system operates in the art and practice of drama and theatre and controls their cultural reproduction" (Mukherjee, 4). Dattani prefers to present a sensitive, metro sexual, modern man who believes in partnership than patronage or possession; and refuses the position of a conventional moralizing and condemning patriarch or a great, charitable man. Deepak recognizes the problem, hits hard, gets bruised in the process and finally unmasks the daemon.

Awakening

Quite in his own manner, as Raj Sree rightly observed, "Dattani places the play in a structure of optimism where wrongs could be corrected, faith resurrected" (Sree, 152). Hence, by the end of the play, the ray of love, trust, companionship and peace disperse the mist of nightmarish days and darkness of the haunted nights of both Mala

and Shanta – the victims of terrible child sexual abuse. In the play written in collaboration with RAHI, Dattani gathered sufficient professional help in mapping out the journey of the survivors through the recovery process and, with the aid of his imagination, presents an appropriation of the genre of fairy tale where the woman and the man join hands to fight the daemon. Mala undergoes almost all the four major steps of exit cycle as enlisted by Dr Shekhar Seshadri: I) Empowerment: The victim gets aware that "It is not my fault", "guilt and shame are his", rather, "I am remarkable for enduring what happened and its consequence". II) Survival skill: s/he got to choose between several survivals skills regarding which ones are to keep and which to reject and be "myself to myself. III) Clarity: s/he must recognize that "I was victim of sexual abuse", "I have personal right to enforce boundary between persons", "I am not what I thought myself to be due to it", "I am more than a victim of abuse or survivor" and hence, "I must trust my own perception". IV) Self-awareness: s/he must realize that "I should value and use my thought and feelings" and "I like and appreciate myself", All these lead to love and respect for oneself and give the feeling of deserving of love and respect by others (Virani, 192-9).

The play breaks the linear narrative and opens with the culmination of a journey taken up four years ago. The destination is reached by declining to own the destiny designed by the diabolic forces in the long-hidden past which hitherto deterred the workings of all the life-affirming forces in Mala's life. This is an anagnorisis – of course not in the tragic sense --; not a rejection or refusal to recognize the past event, but a re-interpretation of it. The reversal of situation occurs as the sense of guilt is replaced by the self-respect, and the perpetrator of the feeling is reckoned as the abuser and criminal.

The play opens with Mala's final session with her councilor on the date twenty-ninth February in the year 2004. She begins a self-appraisal with giving her name, Mala Khatri unhesitatingly and declares confidently to the unheard counselor's question "Why not? I do not hesitate to use my real name now." (*Thirty Days…*, 2). As the playwright points out, she has an easy air about herself, "Why not? I do not hesitate to use my real name now." (*Thirty Days…*, 2). The growing assurance and the calmness of her position as a person who has overcome her hesitation are evident in the confidence to recognize, "It wasn't my fault". At last she is able to identify the guilty and unburdens herself, and unhesitatingly comes out in the open light leaving the life of the reptile -- burdened with the venom of self-abasement: "After all, it is he who must hide", "He should look the other way when someone spots him anywhere on this planet", "I have nothing to hide" (*Thirty Days…*, 2-3). As Anuja Gupta and Aswini Ilawadi observed, "Mala's compulsive sexual liaison are needed to be understood as the process of rivictimization whereby the victims consciously expose themselves to sexual situations which has the elements of exploitation. It is only when Mala is able to give meaning to her bahaviour that she begins recovery" ("Foreword", XVI). With a growing sense of jubilation she asserts, "And I can make that happen. I have the power to do that now" (*Thirty Days…*, 2). She codifies the victimizer as abuser and brings him under the socio ethical surveillance by which until now she was alleged guilty. Coming under the preview of criticism, the uncritical ubiquitous presence of the controller, interpreter and monitor is defunct: "He is dead" (*Thirty Days…*, 3).

The time frame moves backward and forward and the final triumph is followed by the very counseling session that takes place on thirtieth of September 2001. The

contrast is too obvious. The easy confident manner of present Mala is at a polar opposite to the nervous, self-conscious, unsure and ashamed woman come to confess her sin without any hope of redemption. She refuses to give her name and tries to hide all components of her identity losing herself in the anonymity of sinners: “I don’t think I want to say my name… I hope that is ok with you” (*Thirty Days.…*, 3). Shaken with doubts (“I am not sure of many things”, *Thirty Days.…*, 3), she was confirmed of only one thing -- her guilt: “It’s not anybody’s fault, except my own. Somehow, I just seem to be made for it. May be I was born that way, may be … This is what I am meant for” (*Thirty Days.…*, 3). Unwilling to keep any record of her history, she is anxious to stop the tape recorder: “I can only tell you more if you turn this thing off” (*Thirty Days.…*, 3)

The process of recovery continues by charting out the territories Mala explored in spite of herself. She confesses her habit of building up casual relation and shoving them up in certain time: “I don’t know why. I just don’t understand… why I do it” (*Thirty Days.…*, 15). She provokes and pursues a man into a relation, continues it for a month’s time – preferably for thirty days -- and finds it unsatisfactory. She tries to interpret and define her act as a “game’ first, then she corrects it and withdraws her overt control of the situation and levels it as “something which pleases”, then accepts her helplessness at being pleased (“it means so much”), and finally locates the cause in her evil nature: “This is because I am a bad girl” (*Thirty Days.…*, 12). She is unsure about why she does so: she blames it on her adoption of too much Western values and lacking in traditional ones. Interestingly, her sense of guilt, so clear from her categorization of herself as bad, brings out the latent sense of terrible sin. Yet she can’t either explain it or stop it. The only point where she returns time and again is her mother -- she expects her mother to stop her,

perhaps subconsciously gives sufficient clues about her goings on, and getting frustrated on the quarter, she dominates her and blames her again for letting her do it: “the only person who could stop me, who could prevent many thing to happen is my mother” (*Thirty Days…*, 15). It is curious that she likes the affair should be packed up within a certain time period (thirty days), enjoys the physical part if the partner is older -- preferably much older than Deepak who is few years older than herself -- and enjoys to be used by the right kind of person: “I enjoy when they use me” (*Thirty Days…*, 12). She has a list of people. Though she mentions Deepak as her fiancé, yet can’t get on with him and must move on like an automaton (as her mother) as if her action is beyond control surpassing her wish, and she can’t help doing it.

Dattani plays a charming trick of presenting the base point of beginning the journey, its gradual progression and the triumphant arrival at the peak simultaneously to acquire splendid effect. In the first scene Mala is seen as completely cured of her nightmare which is immediately followed by the presentation of the first meeting with the counselor showing sharp contrast between the two persona almost in every point – e.g. Mala hesitant to give her name in the first session now confidently registers her name careless about the tape so different from the one so touchy about it. After leading us through the drama of her hellish existence, self-inflicted wounds and taking the first step to cure, the playwright again takes us back to the first scene interspersed with other scenes during her convalescence keeping them side by side. The thing becomes all the more real as the sessions are conjured up as playing the recorded version of Mala’s speech.

Returning to the first scene, we recall the whole journey as Dattani repeats the selected portion of the first session taking the cue from "nothing to hide" (*Thirty Days…*, 37). He makes some part reverberate and overlap each other, such as, "name is", "first time", "my fault" etc to catch the basic tenets of the structure of her understanding and interpretation of the world around and herself, and which get transformed to occasion her liberation from her confinement. She holds herself guilty of seducing people and enjoying sex for a certain length of time and rejecting the previous one for another. Her father left Mala and her mother for another woman and although he kept on sending money for their subsistence, never cared to contact. She thinks that only had she been more lovable, he would not have left them. Mala goes on multiplying her faults as she confesses herself so bad as to seduce her uncle at the age of thirteen and then her cousin and other people available. Her uncle left her being disgusted with her behaviour. She is of course sure that her uncle was not a "bad person or anything" (*Thirty Days…*, 38), and shows reluctance to discuss much about him because she is concerned with her own evil nature for which she seeks the help.

Towards the end of her journey, Mala is thrilled at seeing a "whole new face" (*Thirty Days…*, 37) after getting severely bruised and living with bandages all over the face, "as if you didn't have a face at all" (*Thirty Days…*, 37). Suddenly she finds all "bandages come off" with no sores left on it, with no sores left on it. This is a journey to discover her own self. She re-lives her childhood -- perhaps lives it for the first time--, "I can be a little girl, again. Not again, but for the first time" (*Thirty Days…*, 38). The euphoria contains the expression of boundless joy: she comes alive, enjoys ice creams, hankers after chocolate, deciphers between fairy tales, and listens to the sounds of bird

and the temple bells which did not exist for her at all for all these years. The whole world is presented with a fist for her senses -- perfumed, musical and colourful: “My senses are working again” (*Thirty Days…*, 38). This is not a relapse into childhood but a rejuvenation of a time which she never lived. . The so-called “bad girl”, the femme fatal, blurts out: “And for the first time I enjoyed sex. Truly enjoyed it for its tactile pleasure. Not as a craving for some kind of approval… for once I could look at Deepak in the eyes and say ‘I love you’ to him and believe it when he says the same to me” (*Thirty Days…*, 38). She feels the magic moments of love and really realizes “what it means to be really loved” (Thirty Days…, 38). Finally we meet a person “entitled to life” (*Thirty Days…*, 39).

The process of convalescence spans over years and takes several sittings. A most disturbing and challenging phase in the journey occurs when uncle Vinoy comes to live with them for two days. Mala’s previous love/hate, pain/pleasure return under the veneer of composed exterior. She almost craves for his attention and takes the move to interact uninvited and gets hurt being ignored. The day passes. But at night she get scared of her feelings of both attraction and repulsion and loses control over herself and runs like a scared child to Deepak’s flat in order to avoid going to her home (“Anywhere but home!”, *Thirty Days…*, 47). Interestingly, the first urgent appeal “Can I stay with you” (Thirty Days…, 45) is immediately followed by “let’s call it off” (*Thirty Days…*, 46). Deepak could guess the great emotional turmoil she was going through, though unaware of the exact reason, and patiently repeats his sincere attempt: “Help me connect with you” (*Thirty Days…*, 46). He appeals to give both of them a “chance”, the “only chance” Shanta could think of for saving Mala in her homestead at the same time.

We witness a rare piece of mastery in stage craft as Dattani plays two scenes simultaneously, as directed by him, 'light will not be raised' (*Thirty Days…*, 44), placing Deepak's loving and caring partnership against the patriarchal construct of the first scene, the two faces of the same man is simultaneously visible through Vinoy's interaction with his sister in present and his conduct to child Mala in past – protector and provider and cruel abuser. During the first half of Deepak's conversation with Mala when the latter consciously seeks Deepak's company to get out of her trauma, we find uncle Vinoy playing the dutiful brother to Shanta. He assures her of performing his duty as an uncle even "after everything" because Mala is after all like his own daughter, tries to lessen Shanta's stress by reminiscing their childhood days when Shanta used to get lost in her own world, takes care of small matters like hanging the picture on the wall and so on. On the other side of the scene, Deepak is trying to make Mala belief in herself and him. Almost in a trance, Mala visualizes a "man" following her whom she herself attracted and provoked ("I am doing something that attracts them to me", *Thirty Days…*, 47), and openly admits that she wants him come near her. Deepak tries hard to break this illusion and extends his hand instead. After urging her several times she holds his hand, but with an assurance of loving her on his part, Mala relapses into the memory of some traumatic remote past and every gesture of present Deepak brings some correspondent though contrasting experience with the "man". Getting out of her present identity, she relives the life of the small girl of seven gifted with the "real birth day present" by her uncle. Against the backdrop of the adult Mala being offered the genuine love and confidence in her lovability, the small girl is given the false assurance of love and an effective sense of being repulsive otherwise. The cry of relief of adult Mala is hushed up by the memory of

the threat to the crying child that if anybody hears it or knows they will say she is a "bad girl" (*Thirty Days…*, 51). The fact of being "ugly" deepens and the dependence on the only person who loves her in spite of the fact increases and the child learns to offer anything in exchange of approval, of being loved. The adult Mala shudders at being left alone and screams "I won't tell anyone. But don't leave me alone!" (*Thirty Days…*, 53). She immediately gets ready to offer sex to prevent desertion and lies down and pulls her dress up to her head revealing and pathetically offering her body in the same manner the "man" used to hold the frock of the seven-year old child up her head and order her to remember her school, sing the song "thirty days in September," not to tell anybody and not to cry. His hunger satisfied, he clothes the child along with the warning not to tell anyone as well as convinces her that she actually enjoyed it – interpreting the pain as pleasure by a fine linguistic strategy: "You like it! You enjoy it. After four years, you have become a whore!" (*Thirty Days…*, 52). The adult child proves luckier having some one clothing her body with care and respect not because she is unattractive, but honouring her for being beautiful, honest and extremely talented.

Deepak also takes the initiative to make Mala face the truth which is perhaps the most effective means to fight her self-inflicted torture. He directly accuses her uncle of having a considerable share in Mala's malady and gives sufficient clue at the event of abuse. But Mala startles at the potential of the hint and tries to evade along with her mother and really gets horrified when it becomes rather clear though her uncle continues careless. Unable to check Deepak, two women take recourse to the blatant lie and at Mala's insistence Shanta breaks her silence and gives clean chit to the abuser.

The immediate revelation is stopped, but it creates sufficient anxiety at least in Mala and Shanta as not to keep their lips tightly closed and stay composed any longer. It is shown in the hurry Mala shows to arrange a cab for Deepak to return in the rain. However, the victim over-acts the role and the constructed nature gets exposed. Uncle Vinoy prepares a dramatic suspense to present his master stroke. While kept waiting, Mala slips the comment unaware: "What do you think he wants now?" (*Thirty Days.…*, 62). Deepak loses no time to point out the implication of the word "now" as opposed to "then". Mala gets angry and sharply declares her decision not to visit her councilor farther. But the counseling started to have its effect imperceptibly and changed Mala from a silent submissive victim to a protester though not yet completely liberated from the entrapment. Uncle Vinoy offers the title deed of the flat as a present to Shanta in order to perform his "responsibility", better to "showing my deep and sincere affection to you, my sister" (*Thirty Days.…*, 62-3) and to acknowledge the "fond memories" (*Thirty days*…, 62) of the childhood days spent with his sister in their ancestral home. Shanta is moved, puzzled Mala mildly reacts and offers to pay the rent to which uncle Vinoy states the obvious fact of her soon leaving the house after getting married to Deepak. It acts as a detonator and the combustion could not be stopped any longer. Mala sees her deep-seated fear of being left alone getting realized. Almost hysterically she refuses to be thrown out: "You are throwing me out!" (*Thirty Days.…*, 63). When Vinoy, in a most uncle-like affection, tries to console her by reminding her of becoming a "woman", Mala finds her grip on the person losing away whose love she assured by offering her body -- "no good to you" (*Thirty Days.…*, 64). He tries to lighten the fact by making it a fit of her "wild imagination", but Deepak comes forward and encourages Mala to speak out. However,

her expectation of being protected by her mother gets frustrated again and she accuses her of letting this happen to serve her own interest: “He didn’t just buy a flat. He bought you!” (*Thirty Days…*, 64). The lava of burning memory comes out from the caldron of her secret despair and she recounts unabashed the “Fifteen minutes multiplied by thirty or thirty one” (*Thirty Days…*, 64) minutes of her childhood when the uncle used to close the door of their bedroom or find some secret places to damn her soul to banish it to “the hell for the rest of my life!” (*Thirty Days…*, 65). She accuses Shanta for creating the hell for her by her silence – not by her ignorance or indifference – because she knew full well what her child is undergoing.

The eruption over, the deep-delved frozen silence of Shanta was yet to be broken. Deepak now asks Mala to go with him to their “own home”, but the unexpected blow comes in form of Mala’s refusal -- “It can never be over. It won’t work between us” (*Thirty Days…*, 65). She now pleads with Deepak to leave her for his own sake to the “hell” she belongs to, because she is still haunted by the “man” and his memory never allows her to think of anybody else: “I can never be free of him. I am not so sure I want to be free of him. Even if I were, I am not sure whether I have the ability to love anyone… else” (*Thirty Days…*, 66) Aghast by the revelation, the uncle screams “I don’t want you. Think of your future” (*Thirty Days…*, 66), for the first time revealing his true face. Pathetically Shanta pleads to Deepak to take her with him “from this hell. There is no love for her in this house” (*Thirty Days…*, 66). With no option left to save Mala even this time, she breaks her silence. The words come out defying the warning for the first time which kept her mum in all manner for so many years; they come out disjointedly through broken half-formed syntaxes mixing “didn’t” and “couldn’t” replacing agency

with the instrumentation, subject with object -- all varying modes of speeches centering round the constant, unfathomable pain. She speaks directly to Mala as she admits that she did not save her because she could not, she could not help Mala as she could not save herself, and in her turn, Mala also could not help her mother. Shanta's mute existence gets eloquent: "No, Nobody saw anything. Nobody said anything. Not my brothers, not my parents. Only … he spoke. Only he said, only he saw and he did" (*Thirty Days.…*, 67). Shanta was robbed of her power to act or speak, she was got decamped even of the power of feeling – "I didn't feel pain, I didn't feel pleasure, I lost myself in Him" (*Thirty Days.…*, 67). A terrible history of maiming the humanity of Shanta finds ventilation in the tortured expression: "I was six, Maala, I was six. And he was thirteen… and it wasn't only summer holidays. For ten years!" (*Thirty Days.…*, 67).

"I remained silent not because I wanted to, but I didn't know how to speak" (*Thirty Days.…*, 67), at last Shanta manages to articulate. She could not tell any one, could not shout, and could not even expect a word of comfort except from her Krishna who alone helped her by divesting her of any feeling. The dumb suffering she underwent is piercingly dramatized by making the "man" makes unintelligible sounds like "Uh, eh, oo, oo, aa, aa, aa…" (*Thirty Days.…*, 68). As if unable to bear the unbearable pain, Shanta takes recourse to a grosser physical pain and jabs the sharp piece of glass in her mouth.

Mala screams out of her trauma witnessing the scene of suffering perhaps greater than her own. She rushes to her mother, presses the towel to her bleeding mouth, appeals to keep silent, holds her tight and warns their common enemy in clear terms "Don't you dare touch my mother!" (*Thirty Days.…*, 69).

At the end of the play, we return to the first scene. Mala's session is over, she remembers her uncle but now with a radically different emotion. She only wishes him to be here not to seek protection but to tell him "…I have nothing to hide. Because I know it wasn't my fault" (*Thirty Days…*, 69). This is a sharp contrast to her desperate promise not to tell anybody so that this man does not leave her. Even after recognizing her abuser, she could not free herself from him and was spending life like a possessed. At last she is able to write off his influence, snap the bondage of the memory: "He is dead. Today, twenty-ninth February is my freedom day" (*Thirty Days…*, 68). Mala feels her bonding with Deepak with whole of her existence; she claims back her sense and soul that were the bonded labor to the dead "man" for so long. Mala proposes to celebrate her freedom with her fiancé waiting in a restaurant for the champagne dinner.

Interestingly, Mala for the first time faces the doll, because now she can face it from an objective distance, freed from its earlier status as an extension of her present identity. She detects what happened to her to be a real evil and almost visualizes it through a physical projection of a psychic process. The doll is an objectification of the grown body which is a psychological extension of the static childhood. Here we have a reenactment of the previous scene of exploitation and a recital of the nursery rime "thirty days has September. April, June and November. / February has twenty eight. All the rest have thirty one!" (*Thirty Days…*, 71). Dattani chooses the date twenty-ninth February to be the day of liberty. As Walling observed, "the trauma associated with past need continually to be revisited and reinvented to allow us to reinvent and so empower ourselves in the present" (Quoted in Kumar, "Child Sexual Abuse…" , 80).

However, most striking is the final union of mother and daughter, Shanta cannot talk physically and she is absorbed in her puja, but a beatific sense of peace and calm surrounds her. Mala moves forward. She is ready to listen to her mother and craves for a sign from her that she had forgiven her and finds the comfort that she already has. Shanta does not speak, but Mala understands. Mala learns to live with the glimpses of her nightmare along with life.

And thus, with the diminished stature of the "man", the home turns from the claustrophobic cell into a private place of peace and freedom where human relationship can thrive.

Conclusion:

Thus with rare intensity, Dattani handles "a story that is perhaps just beginning to be told" ("Foreword", XVII), "undoing the layers of secrecy and denial with which incest is so tightly wrapped" ("Foreword", XVIII). The play superbly survives the test – as put down by Anuja Gupta and Aswini Ilawadi: -- "We had a challenge to touch the issue without being offensive, disturb the viewers without being insensitive and offer some resolution without being simplistic ("Foreword", XIV). The final message which RAHI aims at getting across through this project comes clear, while the playwright succeeds in making an aesthetic product a social statement: "she is not alone, she is not to blame and the road to recovery may be long but it starts with a single step" ("Foreword", XVII).