




"It is important to read *Final Solutions* as a play that has come to be part of academic curricula after its proven success on the stage. As any history of Indian writing in English will reveal, very few of the plays written from the 1890s to the 1970s (the period usually recorded in these histories) survived. Of the plays that survive, hardly any can claim to have had the kind of successful run that almost all Dattani's plays, including *Final Solutions*, have had.

Besides being one of our most prolific and successful contemporary playwrights writing in English, Dattani is the only playwright in English to win the Sahitya Akademi Award. The award was given for *Final Solutions and Other Plays*, Dattani's first published collection of plays, in 1998. His four earlier plays—*Where There's a Will* (1988), *Dance Like a Man* (1989), *Tara* (1990) and *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991)—had successful runs in Bangalore and other places, and established Dattani as a strong and original talent. His unusual themes, technical experimentation, and above all, brilliant use of a variety of spoken Indian English not heard on the English language stage before: all these reasons made Dattani, and Bangalore, the centre of action as far as Indian drama in English was concerned."

—From the introduction by Radha Ramaswamy

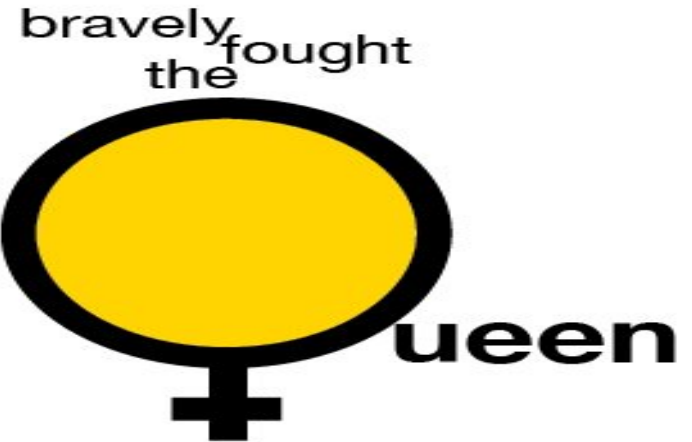
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bravely fought the Queen

Mahesh Dattani

a stage play in three acts



"At last we have a playwright who gives sixty million English-speaking Indians an identity" —Alyque Padamsee

Mahesh Dattani

***Bravely Fought The Queen* of Mahesh Dattani : Theme, Context and Analysis**

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Mahesh Dattani

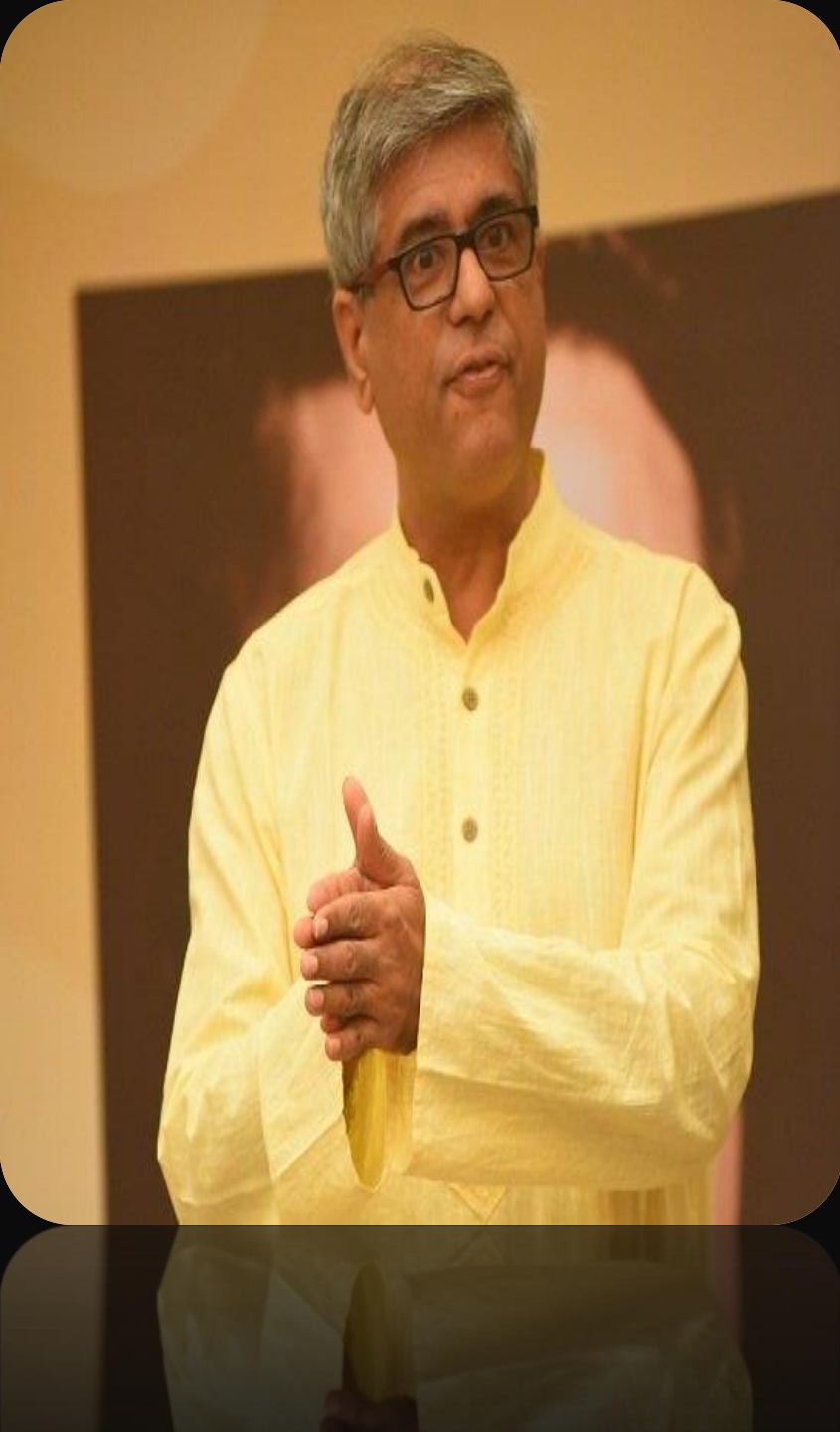
Mahesh Dattani (born 7 August 1958) is a Bangalore-based Indian director, actor, playwright and writer. He wrote such plays as *Final Solutions*, *Dance Like a Man*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Tara*, *Thirty Days in September*, *The Big Fat City* and ‘The murder that never was’, starring Dheiraj Kapoor.

He is the first playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi award. His plays have been directed by eminent directors like **Arvind Gaur**, **Alyque Padamsee** and **Lillete Dubey**.

Mahesh Dattani (born 7 August 1958)



Mahesh Dattani was born in Bangalore to Gujarati parents. He went to Baldwin Boys High School and then went on to join **St. Joseph's College, Bangalore.** Mahesh Dattani began his career as a copywriter in an advertising firm. In 1986, he wrote his first full-length play, *Where There's a Will*, and since 1995, he has been working as a full-time theatre professional. He has also worked with his father in the family business. Dattani is also a film director. **His debut film is *Mango Souffle*, adapted from one of his plays. He also wrote and directed the movie *Morning Raaga*.**



Plays of Mahesh Dattani

Where There's a Will, 1988

Dance Like a Man, 1989

Tara, (1990)

Bravely Fought the Queen, 1991

Final Solutions, 1993

On a Muggy Night in Mumbai,
1998

Seven Circles Round The

Fire (Radio play for BBC), 1998

The Murder That Never Was, 2000

30 Days in September, 2001

Brief Candle, 2009

Where Did I Leave My

Purdah, 2012

The Big Fat City, 2012

Acts and Characters of the Play

Act I: The Women

Baa, a widow woman and the mother of Jitin and Nitin

Dolly, wife of Jiten

Alka, wife of Nitin

Daksha, daughter of Dolly and Jiten

Lalita, wife of Sridhar,

Act II: The Men

Jitin, Baa's elder son;

Nitin, Baa's younger son;

Sridhar, an employee in Jiten and Nitin's office ad

Praful, brother of Dolly and Alka.

Act III: Free to All

which is the combination of the activities of the men and women characters.

Introduction and Plot outline

□ **Maresh Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen* was first performed at the Sophia Bhabha Hall, Mumbai on 2nd Aug. 1991.** The play has a multi-layered thematic technique. It deals with the three generations and reflects the inhuman treatment meted out to women of these three generations. **The playwright has divided the play in three acts with titles for each. The play won the Sahtiya Academic Award on 1998** which shows its uniqueness and greatness.

□ The play deals with three couples, each existing in a hierarchical relation with others. **The play centres on the Trivedi family with its two brothers Jiten and Nitin and their wives Dolly and Alka. Dolly and Alka are sisters. All the relations are maintained strictly under some rules and regulations. Praful is the only brother for the two sisters. The third family that is connected with the characters of the Trivedi house, is that of Lalitha and Sridhar - a couple whose identity is still in formation.** In this hierarchal relationship Sridhar is the employee of the Trivedi brother's, and Lalitha in that sense, is socially subservient to the two sisters.

Act-Wise Summary of the Play

Act-I

Every act is named as per the gender of the characters present therein. The act one is named as **“The Women”**. It speaks volume of women. It presents the emptiness and trauma in the lives of women of the Trivedi house hold and others. **In a sense, the play deals with the theme of hypocrisy.** The close look at the house will reveal that living room is face and kitchen and Baa’s bedroom etc. are the back or inwards reality. The spectators are curious to peep inside the kitchen and inner rooms where real incidents take place. The playing of **thumri of Naina Devi** pervades right from the beginning to the end of the play. It has also got very symbolic significance. **Naina Devi was a great queen, but she loved to sing thumri which was practiced by the whore.** She had strong urge for singing love songs and resistant will. She followed her urge and passion without caring for the social criticism. **With the support of her husband, she sang in the face of patriarchal dominating society.** She was mistaken as for a twaif. Eventually, she is recognised as the queen of thumri. **Dolly also wants to be dressed in whore at the ball like Naina Devi, a paradigm of heroism.**

Act-I

Both husband and wife feel reluctant to talk about Daksha till the end of play:

ALKA: She must like you very much. She hardly ever mentions her daughter to anyone.

DOLLY: Stop it!

ALKA: She doesn't tell anyone.....

DOLLY: Stop it, I said! (BFQ ACT I 34).

Dolly by listening her daughter's name always remembers how she was tortured during pregnancy when a letter arrived insinuating that Dolly, Alka and Praful's father was not legally married to their mother and that he lived elsewhere with his family and four children. This is also one of the reasons for their husband's torture on them.

Title of the Play

The title of the play is used in an ironic way showing domestic struggle of the women of the Trivedi family. There is a popular poem in Hindi about **Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi**, a valorous queen. **She fought against the Britishers. Through this inset story, the dramatist focuses women's craving for love and freedom and the struggle they underwent in the play:**

Lalitha: The poem was let me see.

Alka: (interested) 'Jhansi Ki Rani'

Lalitha: Yes, but how did it go? (Remembers and recites) We'd heard her praises sung so often.

So bravely fought the Rani of Jhansi.

So bravely fought the manly queen.....

Alka : Khoob ladi mardani who to..... (CP: 295-96)

So, Lalitha suggests Dolly to dress up herself as the Rani of Jhansi, a brave queen. But Alka is more inclined at this suggestion and wants to join dressing herself as a brave queen.

Title of the Play

ALKA : 'Khoob ladi mardani wah to...'

Lightning

DOLLY : Bravely fought the manly queen?
..... Why manly?—

ALKA : Because she was brave...

Brave enough to qualify as a man.

(Dattani 296)

Interestingly the Rani of Jhansi is an icon of Indian nationalism. She was one of the first freedom fighters who had resisted the British colonial forces. In an essentially patriarchal society, even a national icon like Rani of Jhansi must be judged along 'male' parameters-- 'bravery' and 'manly valour' for example. **In the Indian patriarchal social setup bravery is a quality which has been traditionally associated with the male. Hence because she displays bravery, Rani of Jhansi is dubbed as 'manly'.**

Act-I

□ **Baa, who has the stroke, is in her late sixties. She is bed-ridden.** She wears white sari. Her husband was very violent person. She had been ill-treated by him. The memory of violent husband is still alive. **Two things are harassing to Alka and Dolly - the bell and Baa's loud mouth.**

□ The play seeks to present women's exploitation by the male. **Alka is ill-treated by her husband and by her own brother, Praful. She pours out her rage and resentment in the following terms:**

...I can't forget what they did to me! Our brother is a cheat! He lied about our father to them. And he lied to me! He lied to me (CP: 256)

Act-I: The Entry of *Kanhaiya*

□ The play also highlights romantic story of Dolly and **Kanhaiya, a teenager**. Alka, in the presence of Lalitha, narrates the love-scene between Dolly and Kanhaiya in association with Naina Devi's thumri. **It is quite shocking and humorous that Dolly is also interested in listening to the narration of her romance with Kanhaiya. She feels joy and embarrassment at the same time.**

□ Actually, interpolated tale of Kanhaiya, **alluring cook who might be or might not be present also functions as the potent symbol which denotes disappointment, emptiness and trauma in the women of the Trivedi house hold.** Alka and Lalitha have drunk excessively. Alka keeps on speaking under the influence of intoxication. How women behave when they are alone and guarded. **Act one ends in tension-abling calling of Baa for Dolly and Dolly's joyous calling for Kanhaiya.**

Act: II- The Men

- **Act–II (The Men) presents men’s business and world outside. The Trivedi brothers are having financial agency and Shridhar is working with them.** There is a discussion on market survey for ReVa Tee advertisement made by Shridhar. The model is alright, but they have failed to understand women’s desire.
- **Reva Tee advertisement is pregnant with meaning. It is very suggestive and symbolic.** The failure of ReVa Tee advertisement symbolises that the men have failed to understand and recognise the feminine self and equity as human being.
- Dissatisfied with the result of the ReVa Tee survey, Shridhar wants to make another presentation, but Jiten opposes the idea, calling it a great campaign. **He says that they are of the women’s opinions. They have little weight in the marketing world as they don’t have buying power.**

Act-II

Jiten: Screw the survey! You know who you should have tested it out on? Men!

Shridhar: Men!

Jiten: Yes! Men would want to buy it for their women! That's our market. Men would want their women dressed up like that. And they have the buying power. Yes! So there's no point in asking a group of screwed-up women what they think of it. They'll pretend to feel offended and say, 'oh, we are always being treated like sex objects'. (CP: 276)

Thus, Jiten doesn't respect views and opinions of women considering them as secondary human being or merely subordinate to their male counter parts.

Act-II

□ The play is a portrait of sexual, moral, and financial depreciation in the lives of the Trivedi brothers residing in a posh suburb of Bangalore. The play also shows how addiction of prostitution to the husband empties joy and happiness of conjugal relationship between husband and wife. Jiten and Shridhar are the pleasure seekers in prostitution.

□ They bring the outside women even at their office for gratifying the carnal desires. The comfortable couch is kept for this filthy purpose. As a result of this, their wives feel boredom and unhappiness in their marital lives. The play presents the shifting Indian values and dramatises conflict between traditional and contemporary cultures.

Act-III: Free to All

□ **The third act brings all men and women face to face. They are confronted and exposed to reality.** In the third act, Jiten and Nitin come home to find Alka all wet and muddy as she has just danced in the rain and injured herself. **Both are shocked to see her in an indecent look. Jiten stares at Alka and tells Nitin to ask her what she was doing outside in the rain:**

ALKA: I don't know what I am doing outside. Aren't there times when you don't know what you are doing?(to Nitin).What's the harm in that? Huh? Tell me.

NITIN: None. There's no harm in that.

ALKA: You agree with me? Don't you? You do see what I mean? Dolly, did you hear that? You are always saying that I imply I've got a better deal. He is understanding.(BFQ ACT III 83).

Act-III: Free to All

□ Jiten and Nitin's father was a cruel and a dark man who harassed their mother. **This kind of cruelty perpetrated on Baa by her husband is brought to light every now and then in the play Bravely Fought the Queen when she feels jittery even after so many years of his death: “I have married such a villager! Aah! You slapped me? Never, never slap me. Nobody has hit me. The men in our family are decent” (BFQ 83). Baa sees the picture of her husband in her elder son, Jiten and thus automatically develops an inclination towards her younger son, Nitin who resembles her a lot.** He is more subdued and sympathetic character. The mother-son intimacy comes out in the following lines:

BAA: Nitin! You don't like your father, no? he's not nice.....Tell me you hate him! He hit me! Nitin tell me you hate him! say it!

NITIN: Yes! I hate him! (BFQ ACTIII 86).

Act-III: Free to All

Even Baa the mother of Jiten and Nitin is tortured by her husband in front of their own sons:

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

JITEN: Forget it(BFQ ACTII 57).

The play also exposes the male chauvinism and woman as the colonized subordinate section of male dominant Indian society.

Baa and Dolly are the worst victims of the conventional and cruel attitude of their husbands. They are meted with injustice and ill treatment at the hands of their male counter parts.

Act-III: Free to All

❑ **In Dattani's play, battle is fought in the house. In this play, the house of Trivedi brothers seems to be the arena. The play also depicts the issue of homosexuality in a very bold manner.** The play also throws light on the suffering of the wife due to her husband turning out to be a guy.

❑ **Alka's anguish and agony is aggravated when she comes to know that Nitin, her husband, has homosexual relationship with her own brother, Praful. She has become the victim of her own brother's gay relationship.** Her brother was having homosexual relationship with Nitin. Hence, **he gets her sister married with his partner to continue his relationship in a smoother and longer way.**

Act-III: Free to All

□ Nitin realises how unfair he has been to Alka and he feels that in order to hide his homosexuality he has been neglecting Alka for a long time. Nitin slowly goes close to Alka, who is asleep on the sofa and speaks to her: “He tricked you too, didn’t he? How can you still love your brother after what he did to you.....? That right. Don’t answer just asleep (laughs) You were always a heavy sleeper. Thank god” (BFQ 99-100). In rest of his monologue, Nitin reveals his homosexual relations with Alka’s brother Praful and how he has responded to his sexual overtures but makes him ashamed of himself later. At last he accepts Alka as she is, with her drunkenness and promiscuity.

Act-III: Free to All

❖ Even after Jiten's repeated instruction to disown Alka, Nitin does not pay heed to his instructions. Dolly also comes forward to rescue Alka and avoids her ousting. **She reminds Jiten that he is responsible of Daksha's present condition.** Due to guilty conscious they all love her, especially Jiten and Baa.

❖ **Dolly tells Lalitha that Daksha - fourteen years old, "a very bright girl" (BFQ 294) goes to a 'special-education' school and she is learning dance in that school. Then she acts out Daksha's uncoordinated dance which is actually her physiotherapy exercise. Jiten being guilty conscious cries out that "you know I didn't. it was Baa! Blame her not me! She is my daughter! (Crying.) Get her back! Get her from wherever she is. I want her home" (BFQ 312).**

Act-III: Free to All

❑ It was Jiten who had ruined Daksha's life with his hands and feet: "I will not let you get away so easily! They were your hands hitting me! Your feet kicking me! It's in your blood! It's in your blood to do bad" (*BFQ 312*). The words of Dolly shatter the conscience of Jiten and he rushes out of the house, **in lost temper he runs the car over a beggar woman.**

❑ Dolly hugs Alka as a gesture of acknowledgment and reveals to Lalitha that young cook does not exist as her lover. **The cook is a fantasy, just as their lives are.** They all live a life full of shams. Their internal relationships are tense and mere rumour.

❑ **All the men and women in this play are frustrated and unsatisfied with their life.** Hypocrisy and selfishness have evaded happiness and contentment in an affluent, educated urban family. **The wives have nothing soothing in their life, they concoct stories to have excitement and psychological gratification.** Real self of everybody in Trivedi family is in disguise.

Themes of the Play

The Plight of Modern Educated Women:

The play *Bravely Fought the Queen* clearly depicts the plight of modern educated women. In this play all the women characters are the examples of exploitation that is still prevalent in urban families of our country. **It also shows the reality that women cannot be kept suppressing for a long time. If they are not heard for a long time, they will fight back.** They suffer not because they are sinners but because of the men whom they believed and submitted themselves and their life in their hands. **Their fantasies in *Bravely Fought the Queen* arms themselves at the end of the play to fight back.**

Indian urban middle-class

❖ The plays of Mahesh Dattani are centred around the emotional, sexual and financial problems in the Indian urban middle-class or upper –middle-class families within the family structure.

❖ **Dattani challenges the universal questions of traditional and stereotyped gender scales.** It is here that the relevance of the title of his play *Bravely Fought the Queen* lies. Alluding to the story of Rani of Jhansi in the title Dattani shows how the two women Dolly and Alka fight like men against emotional adversities to create an identity for themselves though their position, in the Trivedi household, is a stereotyped subjugated one.

Three Generations of Women

In this play we have three generations of women - they are Baa, Dolly, Alka and Daksha. The play also reveals the fact that the suppression cannot last long as women will fight back to question the autocracy of men. Alka very boldly questions the authority of her husband and asks for an explanation for his disloyalty. She also exposes the betrayal of her brother for not revealing the existence of homosexual relations between her husband and brother. All the women characters in this play suffer and such women are still prevalent in educated urban families and also the examples that women will fight back if they are not heard or are suppressed for a very long time.

Men As Victims of Their Own Rage

□ **As Simone de Beauvoir perceives and comments; “The position that women occupy in the society is comparable in many respects to that of racial minorities in spite of the fact that women constitute numerically at least half of the human race” (21).** One can't say that women are born as sinners and they are suffering just because of men whom they trust a lot.

□ **They not only surrender themselves but also their life which is fully ruled by one man army.** As Dattani says in an interview to Lakshmi Subramanyam: **“I am not sure I have portrayed the women as victims in *Bravely Fought The Queen*. I see men as victims of their own rage and repression. This has serious consequences on the lives of women”.**

Alka, the Queen

❖ By exploiting layer upon layer of performance, of unreality, Mahesh allowed his actress a route to emotion in its rawest form; the pain, the anguish in the blood-knot of the family which is his constant theme. (Walling, Michael, p. 229)

Dramatist highlights the collision between conventional mindset and modern culture resulting into newer landscape. The play depicts the emotional, financial and sexual complexities of Indian urban family. The women of the play are exploited in a multiple ways. It should be noted that they are not passive sufferers. **They do suffer, but when it goes beyond endurance; they fight back to free themselves from the burden of subalternity.** They take weapon in their hands to show that they are not only subordinate to their male counterparts. **Alka is the fine example of this. She is the queen who bravely fought against the system of colonisation i.e. patriarchal system just as Queen Lakshmi Bai fought valorously against the colonisers of the county, i.e. the Britishers.**

Symbolism

Bonsai

The bonsai Lalitha brings as a gift for Dolly becomes a central symbol in the play. The bonsai represents a cruel miniaturization of a free spirit. As Lalitha explains innocently and gleefully to Dolly, it involves minimizing the amount of earth that the plant has to grow in, pruning its stem and branches and regularly snipping its roots so that its growth becomes stunted. The dwarfed plant is an artificial creation of human will. It may appear beautiful to some but it is a deformed plant. The symbol begs for a comparison with the situation of women in the Indian scenario – also under grown and stunted in terms of the development of their independent identities. Lalitha points out that the plant gets habituated to its changed ethos and accepts it and moulds itself to it. This is the sad situation of women socially conditioned by their men folk over the ages. The bonsai is meant for Dolly, thus associating its symbolism with her. It is also appreciated by Alka, thus pointing to her situation too.

Bonsai



Kanhiya

□ The interpolated tale of Kanhaiya, the alluring cook, also functions as the potent symbol which denotes disappointment, emptiness and trauma in the women of the Trivedi household. The young cook projected as Dolly's lover, is merely a figment of her imagination. Apart from this, the face mask, Baa's bell and wheelchair etc. are the imageries used for expressing some thoughts and idea in the play.

□ The failure of ReVa Tee advertisement symbolizes that the men have failed to understand and recognize the feminine self and equity as human being.



Naina Devi's Thumri

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

Naina Devi



Symbolism of the Final Act

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

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

Setting and Stagecraft of Dattani



While explaining the set of the Border Crossings production of *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Michael Walling, in his note on the play *Bravely Fought the Queen*, points out that their set:

Centered on a slightly abstract inner space, furnished with three white blocks, which represented the Trivedi household and the office. The only naturalistic element in this area was the bar: a glowing blasphemous shrine to alcohol, with the all-seeing eye of the television above it. Around this central area was another world: red and dusty full of torn newspapers, discarded whisky bottles and cigarette packets, the beggar woman's tarapaulin, a wheelchair. This was an India at once alluring and terrifying, both for the bourgeois characters of the play and for its western audience. (Dattani 229-30)

Conclusion

Dattani clarifies that gender in his plays –

has to do with my own comfort with both the feminine and the masculine self in me...the masculine self is very content; it doesn't need to express itself. But the feminine self seems to seek expression...And since I have the male self, which is equipped to fight as well, it is a proportionate battle (Chaudhuri 47-8.)

His plays then represent a clash of the male and the female orders but they emanate from a single personality of the playwright. But for Dattani, since 'expression' is an important issue, he is able to translate the feelings into effective theatrical expression and communication. It is in this expression and in its decision to stay away from offering judgments that Dattani offers an authentic representation of the contemporary nation.



Thank You!