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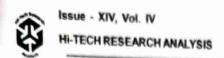


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# CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TWO SISTERS IN MAHESH DATTANI'S PLAY BRAVELY FOUGHT THE QUEEN

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#### Research Paper - English



#### Introduction:

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ail:

Bravely Fought the Queen 1 was written in the year 1991. It was first performed at Sophia Bhabha Hall, Mumbai on 2 August, 1991. Thereafter the play was performed at Battersea Arts Centre, London in 1996 by Michael Walling's Border Crossings Group.

The play presents a semi-rich urban family. In a way it, is a traditional pl-ay holding up a mirror before life. We find here the events of a few hours of an evening in this family. The setting is Bangalore. The family is Gujarati. Jiten Trivedi and Nitin Trivedi, the co-owners of an advertising agency, are brothers who have married Dolly and Alka, two sisters. The women usually remain at home. Here, they look after their aged mother-in-law, Baa. Baa often drifts into her unhappy nostalgic memories. She connects past and present.

Lalitha and Sridhar are middle-class couple. Sridhar is working in the office of Jiten and Nitin as an advertising expert.

The play is divided into three acts. Act I is named as "The Women", Act II as "The Men" and Act III as "Free for All!" Each title represents its theme. Action in the first two acts occurs simultaneously at two different places distant from each other. That is although the two acts are successive in time as far as stage performance is concerned



they are supposed to be happening at the same time. The third act is an enactment of events occurring thereafter.

In Act I men's participation is limited to occasional references about them.

Dolly is getting ready to go out. At that moment, the doorbell rings. Dolly "gets up and opens the door to Lalitha, who is carrying a large bag and shopping bag." (233) It is clear that Lalitha and Dolly have not met each other previously.

Dolly doesn't know much about Sridhar either. He handles ReVaTee account in the firm. He is a hard working person. Lalitha knows everything about Sridhar's office because he has been affable husband to her.

Dolly is not interested in Lalita. Her immediate concern is to get ready as she believes that her husband, Jiten, will be reaching home soon to pick her up to go out. This is the reason why she doesn't like Lalitha's visit. She tries to call Jiten in his office to reconfirm their program. But Jiten's phone is engaged.

However, Lalitha can't leave Dolly's house immediately as herhome is very far, at the "other end of the world." There is also danger of getting looted and being raped if a woman travels alone by an auto rickshaw. Sridhar, moreover, has just dropped Lalitha to Dolly's place and gone to his office which also is very far. He might take some time in reaching office. Lalitha on that account says, "I'm sorry but I can't leave." (235).

Dolly is in this case impatient:

I am going out. Out. And I need to relax before I dress up. You understand? (237)

The suggestion is that Lalitha should leave. Dolly's irritation hurts Lalitha. It is difficult for Lalitha to leave just then. She can move out only when her husband comes to pick her up. Therefore, Lalitha cleverly draws Dolly into discussion by making pleasing remarks about her house. Dolly likes this and voluntarily gives details of her house.

The conversation makes Dolly a little friendly towards Lalitha. She then talks about the people liviling in the house. First she refers to Daksha, her daughter.

She is in school She goes to-let me see (closes her eyes, thinking desperately)-Ooty. Yes. She goes to a School in Ooty. (239).

The fact is that she has been from hei. birth a spastic child, a child with weak



bones and cerebral palsy. Probably she is in some institution looking after such children.

Baa, Dolly's and Alka's mother-in-law does not die, but has been almost paralytic since then She cannot even get up from her bed on her own. She rings the bell to call Dolly now and again. She was the daughter of a rich family. It is evident from her delirious utterances in the play that her married life had been painful. Her husband used to beat and abuse her a lot. She is not happy with her past and her present seems to be worst looking to her paralytic condition. She is not happy with her sons either. She knows them very well, knows that they are not dependable in anything.

Lalitha soon finds out that Alka is different from her sister. She is talkative and confident. She is easy going and a hard drinker. She appears to be smarter than Dolly. She doesn't care for anybody's opinion about her. However unlike Dolly, she receives Lalitha positively.

Lalitha is an extrovert personality. She likes company of intelligent people. Moreover Sridhar and she are planning to purchase a flat on loan be they have enough money for the down payment. They don't have any child yet. She is an occasional drinker. Lalitha thinks that she now has a chance to talk about her favourite subject, i.e. bonsaio.

After listening to the entire process of making a bonsai, Alka's reaction is true to her character: "Sounds very tedious." (246).

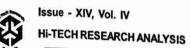
The playwright has presented Dolly and Alka with contrasting qualities Dolly is dull and boring, but compassionate and amicable, while Alka is energetic, talkative, independent in her decisions. Dolly appears to be a dull character.

In normal circumstances she would not lose her cheer. Evidently she is more caring and affectionate than Alka. She takes better care of Baa than Alka. While talking to Jiten on telephone, she says:

Dolly is lonely. Her loneliness and depression make her introvert. She is not interested in meeting people in social Parties. What Lalitha fails to see is that Dolly has lost the taste for life, the zest for living.

Alka is rather self-centered unlike Dolly. This is the reason why she does not like to take care of Baa. She gets angry when Baa rings the bell repeatedly to call herhe cries out in frustration:





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There is total lack of sympathy for sufferer in her words. Yet the old lady has to pass her time depending entirely on the daughters-in-law. By turns she stays with one son after the other. Alka says: She knows she moves to my house tomorrow. (253)

The relations between Dolly and Alka are rather strained. The primary reason for this is their brother Praful. Praful is an absent-presence in the play. Alka hates him.

Alka's present behaviour is the outcome of some actions of Praful! He had told the Ti vedis that his father had died. This was a lie. His father was living separately which the Trivedis found out later. This created terrible problems in their family. Moreover, at Praful's instance she had married Nitin. Alka thinks that he knew that Nitin was incompetent and that knowingly Praful concealed the fact from her.

Alka though effusive of everything else, is as secretive as Dolly as far as her tragedy is concerned. Both the sisters heroically suffer in silence and aloneness.

The irony of the last sentence becomes clear after the play is over. Daksha's stagger on weak bones in her infirm efforts to walk is likened to dancing. Dolly's daughter is invalid and her husband is a debauch. All alone she has to look after an invalid child. That is her unspeakable and little spoken agony. Alka's ironical words naturally irritate Dolly. She naturally refuses to talk of Daksha. Then Alka wants her to talk of Kanhaiya who is another mystery of the play. To this Dolly agrees. Alka gives detailed account about Kanhaiya while Dolly provides the missing links.

There is a suggestion near the end of the play that Kanhaiya is just a fantasy of two sisters. But it hardly matters whether he is a fact or a fiction. Fantasy helps when fact is unattainable.

It hardly matters whether Kanhaiya is a fact or fantasy. His probability and necessity are patent.

The sisters have similarities in their suffering. But then therare vital differences in their tales of tears. Dolly has a supporter in Alka who helps, sympathises and understands her problems. But Alka has to suffer silently and all alone. She cannot tell her tragedy to anyone. Praful and Nitin know it and therefore they are not very cruel to her. On the other hand, Alka does not have to take care of anyone. She lives alone and will also die alone. She has thus the luxury of dying at her will. But Daksha and Baa are dependent on





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Dolly. Their personal miseries compound Dolly's suffering.

The title Bravely Fought the Queen is applicable to both. Both fight bravely though their enemies are different and the fields of battle they fight in are not the same. Such tragic tales are never sung by the bards. They sink in oblivion after they cease. Women in India are more or less such sufferers.

Dattani carefully observes classical unities of time and place and action though occasionally he brings in the past in the form of a stream of memory. That is how he turns past and present into a simultaneity just to show how past and present together constitute one single action in unity.

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- Dattani, Mahesh: Collected Plays, New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2000, pp.233-315.
- 2) All subsequent references are from the same book.



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