

**Domestic Violence and Challenging Tradition of Women in the Family:
A Critical Study of the Selected Plays of Vijay Tendulkar, Girish
Karnad, and Mahesh Dattani**

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Abstract:

A serious social problem, domestic violence in families refers to the misuse of authority and control in familial relationships. It can take many different forms, such as financial, emotional, sexual, or physical abuse. Recognising the causes, effects, and required interventions of domestic violence is essential to comprehending and combating it. A thorough understanding of the problem from a variety of situations and viewpoints is offered by the examination of domestic abuse in the plays of Mahesh Dattani, Girish Karnad, and Vijay Tendulkar. Their writings are a potent critique of social mores and a plea for reform, highlighting the necessity of increased awareness and action to stop domestic abuse in all of its manifestations. Dattani discusses current events and the covert nature of domestic abuse in contemporary metropolitan environments, frequently emphasising the psychological effects and the search for one's identity. Karnad illustrates the profound cultural roots of domestic abuse by placing it within the framework of myth and folklore. Tendulkar frequently emphasises the powerlessness of the person while concentrating more on the social structures and the systematic aspect of abuse.

Keywords: Portrayal of patriarchal systems, domestic violence, women's psychological and emotional abuse, and social difficulties.

1. Introduction:

The practice of violence against women has long been condoned and even encouraged. Roman law granted a man life and death control over his wife over 2,000 years ago. English common law permitted a man to use a rod or whip little broader than his thumb to discipline his wife and children in the seventeenth century. It was a common 'rule of thumb' in America and England until the late nineteenth century. Many feminists contend that a deeply ingrained patriarchal society that celebrates and promotes male dominance is to blame for violence against women. It is said that men are more likely to resort to violence in a patriarchal culture in order to maintain their position of power. This theme has been extensively explored in Indian drama by well-known playwrights such as Mahesh Dattani, Girish Karnad, and Vijay Tendulkar. Their writings offer a nuanced critique of cultural standards and power dynamics within the family structure by delving into the psychological and emotional aspects of domestic violence in addition to highlighting the physical abuse. Domestic violence is portrayed by all three playwrights as emotional, psychological, and social abuse in addition to physical torture. They draw attention to the patriarchal systems that support this kind of abuse. The plays frequently highlight women's tenacity and hardships navigating hostile settings.

2. Vijay Tendulkar: Representation of Domestic Elements

The harsh realities of home life and the underlying power conflicts are frequently depicted in Tendulkar's plays. Tendulkar examines how women are oppressed by society and their families in "Silence! The Court is in Session." The play's fictitious trial exposes the pervasive misogyny and the abuse women face in the name of societal correctness. Kamala is another noteworthy piece that depicts the emotional abuse and commodification of women in the family. According to Beauvoir (1949):

“..... equality and liberation would be achieved only by destroying the male's superiority and refusing to succumb to a traditional role...women were “imprisoned” by the roles of mother, wife, and sweetheart.”¹ (p.797)

Nothing is deterministic or certain in the realm of absurdity, therefore anything can happen and yet affect us. We discover this in Tendulkar's "Silence!" "The Court is currently in session." The mock trial of the US president for his role in the spread of nuclear weapons is staged by a group of amateur players. However, they accuse an unmarried lady of infanticide and hold a sham trial against her, isolating her from them. Unprepared, Benare finds himself in a ridiculous predicament. She starts to feel cut off from people after being accused of infanticide. But because she can't find the

connection between her need and its satisfaction, she commits herself twice. These suicidal attempts could be interpreted as her desire to enjoy liberation from evil faith, even though her body was saved. She has made the decision to be born how she wants. She has suffering as a result, but she does not depart in bad faith since she is running away from responsibility, freedom, and anguish. Without holding anything, she shares her outlook on life with Samant, telling him:

“Forget about the sage Tukaram. I say it- I, Leela Benare, a living woman, I say it from my own experience. Life is not meant for anyone else. It's your own life. It must be. It's a very important thing. Every moment, every bit of it is precious”²(p.8)

She feels agonised by this kind of decision since she is aware that it deviates from institutions and societal norms that are regarded as sacred and pure by tradition and religion. As the court heaps blame on Benare's character one after another, her suffering grows. The accuser and the judge merge upon the facts, and she receives a harsh verdict.

“no memento of your sin should remain for future generations. Therefore the court hereby sentences that you shall live. But the child in your womb shall be destroyed”³ (p.76).

This decision gives her a lot of possibilities. She can choose any one of them to escape suffering. She may comply with the ruling by destroying the baby or she may commit suicide or she may try to live for giving birth to the baby by whatever mean. She resolves her existential dilemma—“to be or not to be”—by defying the ruling:

"No! No! No! I won't let you do it-I won't let it happen- I won't let it happen!"⁴ (p.76)

3. Girish Karnad: Representation of Domestic Elements

The Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis hosted the world premiere of Girish Karnad's "Nāga-mandala," which is based on an English translation of the play's original Kannada text. Two Karnataka oral folktales served as the inspiration for the performance. These folktales were passed down orally from generation to generation, with the older women of the family telling them to the children and other women. Additionally, these stories function as a parallel means of communication between women in the community. The main theme of Karnad's play is a woman's desire for love, which is satisfied by a snake that takes the form of her husband rather than by him. The play begins with a brief prologue that depicts the inner sanctum of a destroyed temple where the presiding deity's idol was damaged, making it impossible to identify the deity. There was a man sitting there, most likely a dramatist, who was

trying to keep his eyes awake and avoid falling asleep. A mendicant has cursed him, saying that he must wake up at least one night this month or else he will die. He informs the crowd that:

"I may be dead within the next few hours. I asked the mendicant what I had done to deserve this fate."

Moreover, he said,

"You have written plays. You have staged them. You have caused so many good people, who came trusting you, to fall asleep twisted in miserable chairs that all that abused mass of sleep has turned against you and become the Curse of Death."⁵ (pp. 22-23)

A major problem that is intricately woven into the plot of Girish Karnad's drama "Naga-Mandala" is domestic abuse. The play explores the plight of Rani, a young bride caught in a violent marriage to her husband Appanna. Appanna violently abuses Rani, both physically and emotionally. He denies her autonomy, confines her to the house, and provides her with minimal emotional support. His infidelity and lack of concern for her well-being exacerbate her loneliness and pain. Rani views Naga, a mythical serpent who takes on the form of Appanna, as a way to get away from her abusive childhood. Naga deceiving Rani by taking on her husband's form raises challenging questions regarding permission and autonomy, despite the fact that Naga and Rani appear to have a more affectionate and caring relationship. The play highlights the broader patriarchal culture that condones and accepts domestic violence. Rani's case serves as an example of the institutionalised discrimination that many women encounter, even if it is not unusual. The social norms that uphold women's oppression and lack of voice are criticised through Rani's persona. The main focus of the story is Rani's journey from a submissive and oppressed wife to a woman who gains some control over her life. The use of legendary and folklore elements, like the transformations and the miraculous hair, emphasises her yearning for self-assertion and empowerment. The play's conclusion, in which Rani's virginity is proven through torture, left the topic of how domestic abuse is addressed unanswered. Although Rani seems to be gaining authority and respect, the underlying issues of abuse and patriarchy remain unaddressed, suggesting that societal change is still a long way off.

4. Mahesh Dattani: Representation of Domestic Elements

Dattani's plays are renowned for their audacious examination of taboo topics, such as domestic abuse. In "Bravely Fought the Queen," Dattani depicts a family that is afflicted by emotional and physical abuse. The difficulties faced by the

characters demonstrate how domestic abuse affects every family member, including the kids. Dattani belongs to the group of authors who place women at the centre of their fictional universe. Emphasis on Patriarchal Discriminatory Social Order Feminist authors have successfully brought our attention to the numerous problems associated with the miserable situation of women and attempted to expose the flaws in the discriminatory patriarchal social order. One author who has drawn our attention to the unfairness and discrimination against women in our society is Dattani. He portrays the feminine side, which must constantly reconcile with a world dominated by men. Subconsciously, all women are aware that they must overcome the obstacles that men have created in their lives, even when they speak of women's emancipation and feminine liberty.

Three couples who live in hierarchical relationships with others are the subject of the play "Bravely Fought the Queen." The Trivedi family, including their two brothers, Jiten and Nitin, as well as their wives, Dolly and Alka, are the focus of the play. Alka is the sister of Dolly. Every relationship is rigorously upheld by a set of guidelines. The two sisters have only one brother, Praful. Lalitha and Sridhar, a couple whose identities are still being formed, make up the third family associated with the Trivedi house characters. Lalitha is socially submissive to the two sisters in this hierarchical relationship as Sridhar works for the Trivedi brothers.

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“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!”⁶(p.34).

When a letter claiming that Dolly, Alka, and Praful's father was not legally married to their mother and that he lived somewhere else with his family and four children arrived, Dolly constantly remembers how she was tortured during her pregnancy by hearing her daughter's name.

This demonstrates his distaste for her since he views her as merely a puppet that must be obeyed rather than being demanded or ordered. The upper-level information that Dolly's brother has lied about their parents is constantly being filled in by Baa, the mother-in-law. Dolly admits to her husband that she was unaware of what Praful had told him about their father and that she had assumed he was well-informed before they were married. However, the harm had already been done. It was implied that the two sisters and Praful were born out of wedlock and that their mother was that man's lover at the time Dolly and Alka's father lived with his wife and four kids. When Baa learns the truth, she becomes furious and utters:

“BAA: Your mother is a keep...a mistress! My sons have married the daughters of a whore! DOLLY: Your mother never understood that. She blamed it on us! BAA: Throw them out of the house. (p. 96). Dolly takes up for her mother: “My mother didn’t know about his wife till later. She was deceived too...”⁷.(p. 96).

Jiten plays with all of the girls that are models for his company since he is a womaniser. Dolly stays silent and never questions him about it. Dolly informs Jiten that he always gets his way and that she only ever prevailed in a fight with him once, and that was when she became pregnant. Before they argue further, Jiten wants Lalitha to leave the house. Dolly is adamant, though. However, it seems that Nitin asks her to remain at home, and he leaves by himself. He informs Sridhar:

“It is the biggest advantage of having an office on Grant Road. It was pointed out to me by the bugger who sold this place to me. No checking into seedy hotels in City Market. Just drive down Lavelle Road and pick one up. Bring her here and pack her off in half an hour. You save a lot of time..... it is a regular thing for Nitin and me. Driving out and picking a couple up.”⁸(p.67)

Both the brothers are obviously no respecters of women; they neglect their wives and have been beating them up and driving them out of the house.

5. Comparative Analysis:

Despite having distinct styles and methods, Tendulkar, Karnad, and Dattani all depict domestic abuse in similar ways. They criticise the patriarchal systems that support and encourage domestic abuse. They highlight the psychological and emotional pain victims endure in addition to physical violence. Their writings frequently focus on women's experiences, emphasising their hardship and tenacity. Through their plays, they urge structural reform to address domestic abuse and push

for a reassessment of social norms. It is important to encourage women to think about their goals, values, and aspirations. This can entail exploring one's own beliefs and motivations through journaling, meditation, or therapy. These feminists declare their opposition to all forms of sex discrimination in the epigraph of one of their publications. Women's oppression may be caused by patriarchal culture and family structures rather than by particular male malice. The problem stems from the belief that a woman's identity should develop from and merge with her roles as a mother and wife.

6. Significance in 21st Century:

In the twenty-first century, domestic violence is still a serious problem that affects people, families, and societies all over the world. Domestic violence persists in many cultures and socioeconomic classes despite legal improvements. Victims frequently sustain chronic psychological trauma in addition to serious physical injuries. Children who witness domestic abuse may have negative consequences, which could prolong the cycle of violence. Healthcare services are heavily burdened with treating injuries and mental health conditions brought on by domestic violence. Victims sometimes struggle to keep a job, which causes volatility in the economy and lowers productivity. Laws protecting victims have been passed in many nations, but enforcement and support networks frequently fall short. Comprehensive strategies, such as education, support services, and strong legal frameworks, are necessary for effective policies. Trust, understanding, belief, self-reliance, and bondlessness are all lost as a result of domestic violence. Women's identity crises, divorce rates, extramarital affairs, and elderly parents' anguish and annoyance are all on the rise.

7. Conclusion:

The examination of domestic violence in the plays of Mahesh Dattani, Girish Karnad, and Vijay Tendulkar offers a critical perspective that allows us to analyse the intricacies of social expectations and familial connections. Their writings are potent critiques of the need for increased understanding, compassion, and action in order to stop domestic abuse and assist its victims. These playwrights continue to spark conversations about this urgent social issue and promote a more just and equitable society through their moving narratives. The necessity of combating domestic abuse has been brought to light by an increase in awareness campaigns and advocacy initiatives in the twenty-first century. Technology and social media have been crucial in raising awareness of domestic abuse cases by providing forums for victims to tell their stories. The frequency and intensity of domestic violence can be influenced by variables like race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. In the twenty-first century,

comprehending and combating domestic violence necessitates a multifaceted strategy that takes into account social, legal, cultural, and economic factors. To build a society free from fear and violence, efforts must be persistent and well-coordinated.

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