

## Psychic Manipulation in Mahesh Dattani's

### *Thirty Days in September*

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**Abstract:** Mahesh Dattani is hailed as the dramatist of universal stature, known for his inspiring writings about muted issues of the society. His fantasy towards theatre is fulfilled through his theatre playpen. He is the first playwright in Indian writing in English to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award. His plays expose social issues like child sexual abuse, difficulties in the existence of transgender and same sex love. They are unsettled issues that do not find any solution till date. The upper surface of the society shows that it has turned towards modernization and intellectual enhancement, but the crest still has its own tradition. However the way one thinks has not changed; especially the behaviour towards the female gender. Marching towards modernization stay at the brim and yet not deep rooted. This paper applies Lacanian concepts to study the agony of child sexual abuse and the consequences of dark psychology and manipulation in the play *Thirty Days in September*.

**Key words:** Manipulation, moral values, dark psyche, language, abuse.

Indian society is highly bound by tradition, culture, humanity and morality. Moral character is possibly molded with good behaviour and thought. It enhances self respect and also respect for other human beings with love and care. There are people who violate moral values, and become a great curse to their society. Through them mental and physical disturbances are created for their dear and near ones. Those people have a dark mind filled with dark thoughts. The dark psyche of such people possesses powerful forces that are used for manipulation. Dark psychology is defined as a psychological principle of influence used

for manipulation and at the end the manipulator is benefited and the victim is harmed and affected. Dark psychology thus is a weapon used for manipulation. The manipulator may be a trickster, scoundrel or an outright criminal or abuser. Thus all moral ideals of a good human being are pushed to the background.

Moral values are essential for every human being. It protects him and the people around him. Obscuring such good values push him and the world around him into darkness. Morality is the basic system through which a person can analyse the good and evil. The concepts of religion, culture and tradition are all built on the basement of truth, honour, love, respect and morality. Staying apart from good qualities will make one a bad influence to the society. The moral value has to be deeply rooted in individuals in order to avoid a dark psychology. The play *Thirty Days in September* exposes the manipulator Vinay who is devoid of all good qualities. A person with good qualities can never be a manipulator. Author Horn defines manipulation as a form of intentional influence, characterized as an attempt, by a person or party (the manipulator), to change the behaviour of another person or party (the target), typically with a view of achieving a goal in the manipulator's interests. Vinay is the maternal uncle of Mala. He sexually abuses Mala at the age of six. The tender psyche of the six year old girl longs for love and affection as it is an age of searching and development. The lovable childhood of Mala is destroyed by Vinay with fake affection. Mala's mental and physical agony doesn't affect him.

Obscuring moral values pave the way for the surge of immoral behaviours like incest. The surge of sexual emotions in dark psychology craves for immediate targets or satisfaction. The manipulator uses deceptive, devious and exploitative techniques against the target. Mala does not recognise that she is being manipulated. She is too small to understand the things that happen to her. Vinay leaves Mala in a situation of guilt that she is to be blamed for the abuse. According to Daniel Smith in his book *Banned Mind Control Techniques Unleashed*

the manipulator do not care about the feelings of the victim. The most indigestible thing about the manipulator is the incapability of feeling the needs of his victim. Vinay does not care when Mala gets harmed in the process, whether it is emotional or physical. The silence of the victim is an added advantage for the manipulator. Continuing to be under the manipulators hold is a pathetic agony for the victim. Silenced victimisation rots the moral quality of a society. This will bring down the humane value of the society. On July 2019 a rape protest meet was held in Bangalore and the newspapers reported that the rapes registered by the police had doubled in the year 2013 than in 2001. Social activists report that many cases remain unreported because of stigmatization and intimidation.

Likewise Mala maintains silent against this injustice done to her by her uncle. The maternal uncle hides his immoral attitude under the cover of helping the fatherless daughter. Mala being haunted physically and mentally for days together tries to communicate the matter with her mother Shanta. But Shanta does not listen to her daughter's conversation. She stuffs her mouth with food. Shanta avoids her daughter and stays in front of deities, and continues her prayer. The unprotected child becomes aggressive and violent and hates her mother. The manipulator Vinay uses tricky techniques to blame Mala for her physical and mental condition. His conversations are quite immoral and vulgar. He dominates Shanta and Mala with his manliness.

The irony is that the manipulator is represented as a moral protector of the family. He silences Mala by saying that "this is secret"(43). He also adds that if she opens about this to anyone they would blame her as a bad girl. The little girl is afraid to be blamed as a bad girl by the society. So she remains silent. The manipulator does not care about the difficulties faced by the victim because of manipulation. Vinay does not show any concern towards Mala. He makes Mala fall in his control and to be with him without any hesitation. Vinay makes Mala believe that she likes to feel Vinay's touch and that she also enjoyed his

company. This has a huge effect on the victim. Vinay openly states that “after four years you have become a whore! At thirteen you are a whore!” (44). So he is sure that the girl will become a sex addict very soon. The silence of her mother makes the daughter go mad with sex. In order to punish her mother and uncle, Mala victimises herself and become a sex addict.

Vinay’s actions haunt her and taunt her like a dark ghost. The cruel behaviour of Vinay transforms Mala in to a whore. The society views him as a sole supporter and a dutiful uncle, but nobody recognises the fox in disguise. He shows himself as an innocent guardian and well wisher of the family. Attractive discourses and pleasing promises prove to be the strong holds of his dark psychology that seeks fulfilment in forced sex.

Language is another great tool for manipulators. They use this tool in a highly effective manner to make victims obey to their dictates. Honeyed words and superlative promises lure the victim into their trap. It proves to be a permanent trap that sucks life out of the victim. This happens in the case of Shanta and Mala. Vinay attracts them with magical words. When Mala starts crying, he stops her from crying saying that:

MAN. Touch me here.

Mala withdraws her hand sharply, frightened.

MAN. You don’t love your uncle?

[.....]

MAN. You don’t love your uncle, hmmm?

[...]

MAN. Quickly before someone sees you. Touch.

[...]

MAN. You said you loved me in front of mummy and daddy.

Come on! Show it! (42).

He stops Mala from crying, but the little soul stores its agony in her mind. Vinay asks her to sing a school rhyme to deviate her concentration from him. Vinay seduces her through sugary words. He makes her stay inferior by adding that she is ugly looking and that he love her in spite of her ugliness. Such bewitching words disturb Mala, and unknowingly she gives up to be spoiled. As motherhood fails to save her, her victimisation is so deep.

Apart from this when Vinay arranges a marriage for Mala with her boyfriend Deepak, he says that “I was saying that I definitely will do my best to see that this marriage goes through. In spite of her loose ways . . . If only you had controlled her from the beginning. She has always been wayward. You know that” (45). The words of Vinay bewitched Shanta, and make her to remain silent. Shanta finds that the marriage of Mala with Deepak is the only way for Mala to escape from her maternal uncle. Shanta is terrified and afraid of the society. Vinay, had taken over Shanta’s life by providing support to feed the family. Her mind is successfully brought under the control of Vinay. He does not allow her to think positively. Her mind is closed with suppression and feelings of guilt. She only thinks about the society and the criticism she may infer from the people. Being separated from her husband she believes that living without a male support is very difficult. So she suppresses her feeling and stays dumb.

The idea of mind control is a fascinating issue in dark psychology. Every individual is afraid of putting their bad aspect to lime light. All claims themselves as good, lovable and caring. They love to address themselves as people with good character. Such exploiters use various tactics and concerning intelligence to suppress victims through their weaknesses. They bewitch them and make them submit in an intelligent manner. In the play *Thirty Days in September* Vinay seduces Shanta and Mala using hard and sore words. He keeps telling them that the society will blame them for being sexually abused. Thus he silences them into mute beings who are helpless. Both the women do not have the courage enough stand before the

society and prove that they are innocent. They find it hard to split the appearances of Vinay as a sole supporter and the reality about him as a manipulator.

The concept of appearance and reality is related to the opposition between the perception of something and its objective reality. Plato related appearance with opinion and reality with truth. Thus Vinay seems to appear as a care taker and a manipulator at the same time in *Thirty Days in September*. Good on the outside and a bad wolf on the real part. The victims, Mala and Shanta do not talk about their conditions to anyone in the society. Their condition is that as Helena Cixious says “that women are trapped in a masculine world of representation, forced to be the reproductive medium or essence in which men find their ESSENTIAL being, but are themselves debarred from actually possessing essence” (97). Every women has an instinct to overcome suppression. They have a desire to demolish the two-fold domination but they lack the courage fearing false representations.

In fact, women are willing to come out of the clutches of abuse. The society appears to be the most caring and loving towards feminine gender. They talk about their weakness, they hail them as creators of new life, and they worship them as Goddess. On the other hand they are abused, harassed, killed, molested, treated as inferior being and controlled by iron hands. This reality is very hard to accept, but they all seem to appear. Truth will make one free from all bondages. The mind of a person gets relaxed. The guilt is punished. But it is very hard to open the gates of reality. Reality is a torch that diminishes the darkness and gives the person a bright beginning. Love, care and affection stay when reality dwells in one’s heart. Dattani holds the torch of reality to showcase the social evil of incest through his play *Thirty Days in September*. Through the character Deepak, the boyfriend of Mala the reality is revealed. He acts as a catalyst to stimulate an experiment to bring out the truth. Both the women are controlled by the manipulator Vinay. The fear of revealing the reality and facing the world with the real face haunted the women more and made them mentally sick. Deepak

played a very hard role to release her from the traumatised sector. Thus the reality is revealed through the confession of Shanta and Mala. Mala is taken to a counsellor. She takes four years to come back to normal position of reality. She put an end to the appearances and admits that her maternal uncle is dead. When reality overcomes appearance, both the women speak out the truth. They released themselves from the bondages. According to Lacan real is easiest to define but is hardest to talk about, and to talk reality is impossible. But this impossibility is solved using an external supporter. Thus Deepak act as a mirror to expose the reality.

According to Lacan the mirror is the medium that makes people to feel that they are unique and perfect. The child does not recognise its weakness through the mirror. Through the external medium mirror the child views its fragmented body as a whole. In reality a person is not able to view the whole body at a glance, it is seen as parts or fragment, but through the mirror, the whole is visible. Thus Mala views herself through her uncle and mother. She punishes herself and becomes a whore. She gets a mirror in Deepak, through which she view her original self. Her thoughts revolve around the cunning words of the manipulator. When she grows up, the hatred towards her mother too grows her mind.

Signs are systematically and unconsciously constituted in every person. Mala pours out her agony through her immoral behaviour. She does not speak, but she acts. Mala's mother is not able to decode her symbolic conversation. Before she speaks all her inability and terrified life are spoken. It does not take the shape of a language. When she gets a stimulator the language comes out. Lacan says "Language and structure exists prior to the moment at which each individual at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it" (64). Thus Mala comes out of the clutches of her manipulator. Self realization is very important and the courage to fight against the dark psychology of a manipulator is also needed.

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