

Portrayal Of Sexuality In Mahesh Dattani's *Breif Candle*

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Abstract

The current paper endeavors to investigate the functions of the various subtleties of sexuality and its performative potential outcomes as investigated in Mahesh Dattani's a lot later parody *Brief Candle* (2009). The paper attempts to show how the ideas of sexuality and its representation is by and large associated with our sexed bodies and how we expect different sexual ways of behaving and characteristics from different gender in a phallogocentric culture like our own remembering the generally held natural distinction between the male and the female. In this association, the paper here likewise tries to lay out Nandini Bhattacharya's well known term "subaltern sexuality" as a nonexclusive term to assign female sexuality overall as an evidently sub-par sexual classification (Bhattacharya 1996). So, with references to the discourses on sexuality as evolved by different gender critics such as Simon de Beauvoir, Kate Millett and Michel Foucault, the paper will scrutinize the varying gender roles with respect to male and female characters present in *Brief Candle*. However, unique references are made to the noticeable subtleties of sexuality and its prospects of performativity in a gendered society as exhibited by the distorted groups of Vikas and Shanti who are separately desolated by cancer and HIV in the play.

Keywords: Sexuality, Subaltern Sexuality, Phallogocentric Society, Body, Desire, Male Gaze

Introduction

The notion of sexuality, which once was directly related with one's biological representation, has now become one of the most discussed topics of the era. It has given birth to the contested area of social and gender research. The increase in research and debates over the topics of gender difference such as masculinity, femininity, homosexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality the term sexuality is no more just anatomical representation of one's genital organs. Instead of being normative the gender has taken the performative approach. Gender is not based on what sex you are born with but what role you are comfortable in, how you feel from inside and what behavioral traits you have. When we perform gender, that is the attitude we carry, the way we behave, the way we feel comfortable, what our impulses makes us do either consciously or unconsciously, that gives us the particular role of gender we want to practice. Being in another body and performing it differently makes it quite uncomfortable for the bearer. In this paper we will explore different performance of sexuality in different layers, in Mahesh Dattani's play *Brief Candle* (2009). Variegated traits of sexuality will be explored in this play by pivoting upon the vanquishing role of female gender in a phallogocentric world.

In the play *Brief Light* (2009), an endeavor is made to lament that meager line that recognizes a parody from a misfortune. Here additionally Dattani manages one of the "undetectable issues" that he is renowned for (Mee 1997). In the comic plot of the play-inside the-play in a *Brief Candle*, we see that few patients of cancer survivals are practicing an exhibition intended to be performed for gathering pledges for their cure. In one of scene that is going to be performed, the characters, in spite of knowing the certainty of their bound fates, make an honest effort to appreciate life through pretending. Yet, the female characters like Deepika and Shanti here additionally succumb to male longing. Each man in the play pursues or try to lure female characters for sex, and now and again they pass Viagra so nonchalantly that it goes to be very pestering for females. The play for the presentation is composed by Vikas, who is dead when it is practiced. Still he stays a person in the play, tormenting recollections of every single other person. It appears to be that Vikas swindles his sweetheart Deepika and picks the bohemian existence of roaming love-making while voyaging various corners of the world. As an outcome he gets AIDS and then cancer. Amarinder pursues Shanti for sex all through the play. In any case, his longing for her fades once Shanti's deformed body, because one of her breast was removed due to cancer, is uncovered. In this way the play undergoes few layers of complexities of sexuality in execution.

There is a significant lacuna in the discourse on Dattani's plays when it comes to discussing the concerns of female sexuality and how it is objectified by men in our hegemonic masculinity, phallogocentric culture, whether it be in the west or the east. The majority of current assessments of this societal threat as it is described in Dattani's *Brief Candle* are merely conjectures and hints. It is clear that there has not yet been any attempt to study the play in detail in this manner. Because of this, the current article aims to analyse Dattani's *Brief Candle* from a feminist perspective, paying particular attention to the discourses on sexuality that Simon de Beauvoir, Kate Millett and Michel Foucault have studied.

The male characters in Dattani's *Brief Candle*, such as Mahesh, Vikas, Amol, and Amarinder, seem to view Deepika and Shanti as little more than objects of pleasure. The performance demonstrates how patriarchy in our predominately male culture sexually abuse women. According to Lacan, "sexuality [is] structured around the primary symbol of cultural authority [...] named phallus" (Bristow 2007: 8). In the first scene of *Brief Candle*, the main female character Deepika is seen managing the daily operations of Hotel Staylonger. This is when the play's humorous subplot begins. Deepika tries her hardest to prolong the lives and take care of the cancer patients in her hospital, and its humorous subplot as a play-within-a-play heightens the gravity of the cancer patients' ephemeral existence.

In the play we can see the different representation of women, sometimes they are showcased as goddesses while soon after they are referred as demons. The character Vikas in Dattani's *Brief Candle* led a wandering life of extravagance, dominating any female who were in his way, later he eventually makes a deal with reality when he is forced to accept Deepika's care because she has cancer. Finally Vikas realizes that it is Deepika only who can fill the gap of his life which he has been lacking while roaming around the world for his so called social mission. Deepika lately forgives Vikas and become indifference to him, keeping aside her pain during the last phase of their life, they accepted each other and reunited as body and soul. As a result, during the end of the play, Deepika is exalted to the status of a goddess. But the other female character Shanti after her breast surgery, where she had to get rid of one of her breast because of cancer, was not considered as whole woman by both her husband and other character named Amarinder. Vikas being a lascivious womanizer breaks the trust of her partner Deepika, goes by theory that sex "has become more important than our soul, more important almost than our life" (Foucault 1978: 156). On his adventure of world along with his lecherous character in spite of his medical emergency get affected with AIDS. Other than that, the male characters in the play also show the same trait of sexual desire and sexually aggressiveness throughout the play by going after other women. The passing of the medicine Viagra also highlights sexism and adultery in the play. It clearly shows how the male characters try to sexually harass the woman in the play which also signifies the objectification of females in modern society of India. Amarinder way of projecting his desire of sex with Shanti by provoking her through several gestures of his is also problematic and quite amusing that how easily the comfort of woman in society are taken for granted.

In her analysis of Mahesh Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991), Payal Nagpal has already demonstrated how sexuality and capitalism are inextricably linked in today's society and how men oppress women in an androcentrically capitalistic culture (2011: 76- 98). Similar to this, it appears that the role of female characters in *Brief Candle* like Deepika and Shanti is to fulfill the carnal urges of their male equivalents. Simon de Beauvoir, a French feminist critic, made the following insightful observations about the process of commoditizing women as simply objects of sex and pleasure:

And she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called 'the sex', by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex - absolute sex, no less ([1949] Translated by Parshley 1956: 15-16).

Even though Deepika and Shanti respond against the predatory sexual identity of the male riders, the discourse they employ to convey their outrage at their sexual abuse reveals the fact that they have acknowledged the socio-cultural politics of sexual identity, which always assign women to second-class status in society, subordinate to men. Deepika's emotional reaction toward Vikas only serves as evidence of how deeply socialised women like her are, readily accepting the findings of traditional biology, which continues to hold that women are biologically predisposed to be the targets of their male partners' sexual aggression and violence :

DEEPIKA. Do you think I could, somehow, get rid of you?

VIKAS. If only you had said goodbye. Don't you regret that?

DEEPIKA. Oh, come on! Regret? You just show up one day- sick. Deepika, nursemaid, take care of me now. Hug me now, and love me. Why? [...] Because you are a man and I am a woman? It's my job to nurture you? [...] Where were all the whores, truck drivers, beggars you spent so much time with? [...] Why me? [...] You are the one who lived a colourful life. A free-thinking, free-moving writer who warmed the cockles of people's hearts! Everyone says, „Oh, he changed my life. He showed me how to live. Why do good people like Vikas have to go?“ I am the bad person. Oh, dead people are all saints! Living people are bad, bad, bad. Where were you when I needed you? (*Brief Candle* 39)

Foucault looks at the turbulent urges of sexuality on the verge of death. He discovers that sexuality, in general, is "nothing more than a method by which power has been organised in western civilization" while doing so (Bristow 2007: 9). The "mechanisms of patriarchy" were also attempted to be summarised by Charles E. Bressler (Barry 2010: 117). He explained how, in Kate Millett's view, sexual politics are maintained in our culture:

Consciously or unconsciously, women and men conform to the societal constructs established by society. Boys, for example, should be aggressive, self-assertive, and domineering, but girls should be passive, meek, and humble. Such cultural expectations are transmitted through media, including television, movies, songs, and literature. Conforming to these prescribed sex roles dictated by society is what Millett calls sexual politics or the operations of power relations in society (Bressler 2007: 173).

When we analytically consider those passages of the drama "Brief Candle" where Amarinder and Shanti occur to unveil the internal dynamics of various sexuality characteristics while sharing a few of their most susceptible situations in life, we can best comprehend the different intricacies of sexuality operating the different manner in the psyches of men and women. The following describes how Amarinder envisions his sexual objectification to be as a man:

AMARINDER. What made me a man? Climbing a mountain, playing a game of hockey, knowing I could satisfy a woman in bed. All that was under attack with a group of needles probing at my prostate, [...] Like being sodomized with metal. [...] I lay there thinking of the results of that biopsy. If I did have cancer, they will remove my prostate. A gland the size of a walnut that defines my maleness [...] (*Brief Candle* 23)

In contrast, Shanti seems to demonstrate how women are culturally pressured at home to conform to the standards of beauty established by the dominating male gaze of a hypermasculine culture. In the concluding soliloquy, when she is revealing her thoughts, she describes what she imagines her female beauty and sexual orientation to be like as a woman:

SHANTI. On my wedding night, my husband put on some music and danced. He wanted me to dance with him. I wasn't prepared for that. My mother had told me that I should on no account show any enthusiasm but follow his instructions. But I should also know when to gently protest, and when to finally give in ... She never told me he would want to dance with me on my wedding night. Maybe it didn't cross her mind; otherwise she would have put me through dancing lessons at the age of seven. She put me through Carnatic music. I sang well and I had sung for him when he had come to see me [...] (*Brief Candle* 31)

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One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine ([1949] translated by Parshley 1956: 273).

The plot in which Amarinder's eagerness for Shanti abruptly wanes as he witnesses one of her cancerous breasts being omitted during treatment and Shanti's hideously deformed chest, in certain ways, illustrates how our hegemonic minds treat women as little more than objects of body image. By erasing the elegance and/or efficiency of the brain, the hegemonic masculinity overlooks the fact that real beauty genuinely is not related to our external appearance:

SHANTI. Maybe I deliberately let that towel fall. To see your reaction.

AMARINDER. No, you didn't. SHANTI. I didn't. But I am glad it happened. At least I know.

AMARINDER. No. You don't know. SHANTI. [...] But... I see the same man I did when I reached out. A man eaten by fear. (*Brief Candle* 33)

The paradox of our patriarchal system, in which the external attractiveness and attractiveness of a woman's body are key factors in determining her gender identity in accordance with the prevalent male gaze, has been addressed by Simone de Beauvoir:

And she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called „the sex“, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less ([1949] translated by Parshley 1956: 273).

CONCLUSION

In summary, the masculine figures in the drama *Brief Candle* largely oppress and manipulate the female characters in inappropriate ways. We can refer to the sexual violence of the female represents in the play under conversation as "subaltern sexuality," as though female sexuality is inadequate to those of men, in light of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's focus on the double inhibition of the diasporic women of the poor countries of the Third World (Bhattacharya 1996). However, women in a male-dominated culture are subjected to such intense sociocultural and psychological indoctrination through various media that many of the women consciously

believe their fictitious secondary sexual and/or gender category as something real or natural. Similarly, it is true of the female characters in this scene in the drama *Brief Candle*. Male chastity is not an issue, as Vikas demonstrates by devouring the purportedly "subaltern sexuality" of every single unfortunate woman he comes across while on his trip around the migratory world. But if a woman loses her chastity, it seriously compromises her character's sacredness or integrity. If she loses either of her breasts, as we saw in the instance of Shanti in *Brief Candle*, even her beauty or femininity is highly doubtful and questioned. Throughout the entirety of the play, Amarinder pursues Shanti because he sees in her the same sexual potential that Vikas saw in those wandering women. However, after the surprise discovery of Shanti's chest revealing one of her cancer-affected breasts that had been destroyed by chemotherapy and the consequent surgeries, Amarinder's enthusiasm for intimate intercourse with Shanti abruptly vanishes. Amarinder now sees Shanti as a half-woman and no more finds her to be as attractive sexually as an unexpectedly discovered new country might be to a coloniser.

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