

Brave Queens: A Socio-Gender Perspective in Feminality of Mahesh Dattani's 'Bravely Fought the Queen' and Lloyd Jones' 'Here at the End of the World We Learn to Dance'.

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Abstract

In a cave, on the coast of New Zealand Louise and Schmidt hide along with two other locals escaping forced recruitment. In a posh sub-urban bengaluru bungalow Dolly and Alka expose the hypocrisy of the patriarchal society, reveals subaltern position of women. Llod Jones in his famous novel 'Here at the End of the World we Learn to Dance' and Mahesh Dattani in his world famous Play 'Bravely Fought the Queen' systematically unfolds the age old war fought between love, sex, feminality and patriarchy, gender ideology and social systems.

Key Words: Love, Marriage, Tango, Feminality, Gender Ideology, Marginalized, Patriarchy.

Mahesh Dattani's play 'Bravely Fought the Queen' seeks to explore the battles being fought between the members of the same family. There are four female characters in the play Alka, Dolly, Baa and Daksha. All of them are victims and undergo both mental and physical, torture at the hands of the male members of the family. Dolly, the wife of the elder son of the Trivedi family, Jiten, and sister of Praful faces inhuman treatment and physical torture. Jiten is a drunkard and a violent man just like his father. He is very violent with his wife Dolly as he believes that she is a bastard child. He hits her badly even when she is pregnant and as a result she suffers premature delivery. Their daughter Daksha suffers both physical and mental deformity at the hands of the male brutality and patriarchy even before her birth.

Dattani is a writer who fights for true art and depicts the feminine side of the gender ideology which always has to come to terms with the society dominated by men. By blurring the line between fantasy and reality Dattani reveals the deceptions, hypocrisies and unscrupulous nature of men and hence the social attitude towards women. John McRae calls Mahesh Dattani the voice of India now as he portrays feminine characters and depicts problems of women and their marginalized role in their own family and society.

Dattani staged his characters to teach people how they should live their life. He talks about gender inequality, social restrictions and sexual stereotyping they face in and out of the married life. Alka, Dolly's younger sister is ill treated by her husband Nitin and her brother Praful. To teach her lesson, Praful once drags her to the kitchen and tries to threaten her with burning stove and even burns her hair. He always neglects her and does whatever he thinks fit. The third woman in the Trivedi family, Baa, the mother in law of dolly and Alka also faces ill treatment at the hands of her husband. Senior Mr. Trivedi beats her and she could do nothing except suffer serious frustration. Now widowed and aged she takes out her frustration on Dolly and Alka by torturing them and turning their respective husbands against them. The feminality with which all these female characters treat each other results into more pain and punishment in their own life.

When Dattani unveils the issue of homosexuality, he does so in a very bold manner and adds the wife's reaction, which is strikingly unequivocal, that distinguishes her totally compromised position in the male dominated society. Alka, whose husband Nitin is a homosexual and, thus, not at all interested in her, couldn't but aggravate her anguish and agony when she finds out who his male partner is. He is none other than Praful, her own brother who tortures her for her behavior and family prestige. Dattani makes us personify a married woman who is a victim of a extra-marital gay relationship between her husband and her brother. Dattani thus shows us how the patriarchal system victimizes, oppresses and exploits women. All three generations of the women in the Trivedi Family suffer this patriarchal brutality and hypocrisy. Dattani reveals another layer of meaning and male hypocrisy when he reveals the reasons behind Jiten's sexual libido with prostitutes, Nitin's homosexual relationship with Praful, Shridhar visiting prostitutes and Mr. Trivedi's treatment to Baa. Jiten holds himself guilty for Daksha's deformity and retardness. This is why he hates Dolly more and finds refuge with prostitutes. He satisfies his frustration by torturing them. Nitin is Baa's favorite. He suffers a kind of Oedipus complex. Thus, he cannot love Alka or any other woman and prefers Praful. Praful makes Alka marry his gay partner just to make sure his relation goes on without any problem. Shridhar, the employee in the advertisement firm own by Trivedi brother, loves and respects his wife Lalita indulges in a sexual relation with a prostitute and still call himself a better man than the Trivedi brothers.

Mahesh Dattani also reveals how these already suffering and marginalized female characters treat each other and make their living worse. Baa hates both Alka and Dolly because they are bastard children. Alka reveal Dolly's secrets to Lalitha and endanger her position. Dolly fancies a sexual relation with imaginary cook Kanahaiya to give vent to her suppressed emotional and sexual desires. Alka finds refuge in liquor and gossiping, Lalitha lives a life with cheater husband. Baa hates Jiten and blindly loves Nitin for whatever Senior Mr. Trivedi did to her and lastly, Daksha is forced to live physically and mentally crippled life from her birth.

Dattani focuses on his opinions regarding this gender ideology through social-gender perspective of these characters and plot. The brave queen in the title stands for the legendary Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi and Dolly in the play who fights against all the odds. But what does she prize the most? She, as long as possible, tries to co-operate with the situations in the family but

ultimately decides to stand against this stereotyping. When Dolly chooses to put on the costume of the legendary queen for the ball, she decides to stand tall and face the odds.

Eventually, through their suffering, struggles and mistakes masked Dolly, petrified and rebellious Alka, fooled Lalitha, troubled Daksha and oppressed Baa unmask the male hypocrisy. Dattani uses these characters to depict the emotional, sexual, social, familial and habitual complexities and the hidden dark side of Indian urban family life.

The other select piece of art, with plot ranging from rural New Zealand during the final days of the World War I to urban Buenos Aires of the present day and covering the span of three generations across two continents and three countries is a novel by Lloyd Jones named 'Here at the End of the World we Learn to Dance' (2002). The deep suspicions of an isolated and war torn community and forced recruitments to fight in the Great War forces Louis Cunningham and Paul Schmidt to hide in a cave. Desperate for solace and to pass the tormenting time Schmidt teaches Louis and other two local boys 'tango'. The iconic and sensual dance form instantly becomes their mutual obsession. It triggers a love affair that span generations and continents.

LLOYD Jones' novel is interesting as it interweaves two love stories, one from the past and other present, one full of platonic love and the other all about carnal desires and obsession. But, in both the stories it is the woman that invests the most, loses the most, suffers the most and asks us 'why'? the most.

Jones uses the sensual language of the music and dance. His narration, just like the forward and backward steps in the sensual dance form 'tango' keeps taking forward and backward stances with the help of flashback. Through the ritualized action and metaphors in unspoken but well expressed and heard language of music and dance Jones teaches what women prize the most. The historical and almost legendary lovers Louis and Paul occupy the pedestal position as they are projected as eternal, platonic and mythical lovers. But nowhere in their manner and the treatment they get in the plot do they emerge as legends. This is the result of the end of their love story. The second and present couple Paul's granddaughter Rasa and the narrator Lionel explore and reveal the old love story when they try to outlive and fulfill it.

The study of the development of New Zealand novel reveals that most of the novels written around 1930s show the influence of socio-political events such as depression. The WWII also interrupted the works of New Zealand writers which shows the impact of war damage and experiences of violence. In the decades of 40s and 50s the novelists concentrated on the plight of isolated individuals in a hostile society. By the end of the 60s and 70s the environment for New Zealand literature was much favorable. The novels written post 90s shows reflection of globalization and multiculturalism. This decade is flourished by the contributions by the prominent writers like Lloyd Jones, Maurice Gee, Elizabeth Knox, Patricia Grace, Craig Mariner and Anne Salmond.

Lloyd Jones born on 23rd March 1955 is equally famous award winning fiction writer. Born in Lower Hutt, New Zealand, Jones is known for the portrayal of middle class families in his fictions. He deals with hot subjects and settings around his birth place and issues related with

them. He defines and redefines realism, forms for fictions and subjects in his works. His narrative techniques are always challenging.

There are four main characters in the novel, which are Paul Schmidt and Louis Cunningham, Rosa Schmidt and Lionel. Apart from these two artistic couples there are some other characters like Ivan who is Rosa's husband, James and Cathleen who are Louis' parents, Jackson and Audrey who are Boyd's parents and Peter and Jean who are Lionel's parents. There are some other minor characters like Billy Pohl, Henry Graham and Tom Williams etc.

The action of the novel opens with Paul Schmidt visiting Louis Cunningham's grave every Saturday for eleven years now, after her death. Till his last of days it is his habit to visit 'Cementerio' at La Chacarita with his ten year old granddaughter, Rosa and pay homage to Louis with blue irises at her grave. After Schmidt's death he is buried at La Chacarita, alongside his devoted shop assistant, a plain and quiet English woman, Louis. When Schmidt's widow tries to recall meetings with Louis, the occasions were so brief because Louis used to keep to herself and avoid friendship with others. She had only one constant visitor her, late husband. She peeks into the couple's private post, their moments of togetherness. The moments beneath the lime tree in the garden and their usual dance in the main living area. All these days, apart from her secret dance with Paul, Louis lives years after years of lonely exile, but in the constant company of famous 'Tango' artists Carlos Gardel, Anibal Troilo and Roberto Goyeneche. While all these days and nights, Paul stays home tending to his other life, playing husband and father, Louis huddle next to her 1938 RCA Victor Radio.

D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930), in his Pseudo-philosophy, has developed the concept of 'Blood Consciousness' which is a theory about the polarity between mental consciousness and blood consciousness. Likewise, in the novel *Here at the End of the world we learn to Dance* Rosa exerts her nature and likings exactly like her grandfather. She shows her inherent qualities that makes her exactly like him. Following paragraph explains her Blood consciousness and inherent will to express herself through some medium.

Lionel is nineteen and Rosa is thirty six when they first meet. Lionel who works in La Chacra, Rosa's restaurant, as a dishwasher finds her exceptional because she is foreign, smokes and speaks accented English. He also feels attracted towards her love for Troilo, Gardel, Goyeneche and Tango music. Rosa who is thirty six, married and owner of the restaurant selects Lionel as her dancing partner to dance with her in her private moments. She knows about Lionel's fascination about tango. Lionel who is nineteen and improvident student himself, accepts to dance with her because he knows his fascination for her and that she would not ask twice. The following conversation between Rosa and Lionel reveals the pull of 'tango' and the role it plays in their relationship.

Rosa's and Lionel's conscious and even subconscious attraction towards each other affects their interest in 'tango' and their interest in 'tango' modifies the interpersonal relationship between them. This is the time when Rosa becomes a kind of both physical and artistic attraction for Lionel and, at the same time, he becomes 'pasta' for her. How the interpersonal relationship between them develops and how their mutual attraction for tango brings them together, breaking the formalities in employer and employee relationship.

Billy, Henry, Paul and Louis everyone shows their interest in 'tango' and dance but when it is a mean to feel Louis and her womanly touch for Billy and Henry, it is a means, for

Paul, to express himself and to make Louis express herself. When Louis dances with Henry, Paul fits the song around Henry's uncertainty and slows it down, and when she dances with Billy Paul makes it a race to finish it faster and sooner. But when he himself dances with her he uses the songs and music to take their dance to unexplored heights and depths. The dance and solace in each other's company becomes the only aspects of their lives they live for and on. It can be observed that they start to think about each-other only in the steps of 'tango' and feeling of belonging to somewhere or someone it provides. One observes, in this novel that tango fills up the vacuum created by the hostile world around the cave dwellers, the only spontaneous thing they do is tango, the only activity they willingly perform, apart from sleeping and shellfish gathering, is dancing tango with each other and for each other. It becomes the cosmos for them, the very foundation of their existence in that forbidden cave. It brings them together, keeps them together and even creates issues that break this melody of togetherness.

Louis and Paul feels attracted towards each other. This attraction has physical side too. When they kiss for the first time, Billy's world turns upside down as he too is attracted towards Louis. Paul who knows Billy's feelings and is an outsider, decides to leave everything, Louis, tango, cave and his aspirations, both artistic and personal, with tango and Louis behind. One night he just leaves them with just a note on sand for Louis which reads "Bye, Louise, I shan't forget you," and a squiggle of a kiss to her.

Just like in the case of Paul and Louise, the aspect that brings Rosa and Lionel together is tango. The relationship between Rosa and Lionel is result of the combination of her love for 'tango' and his attraction for her. Rosa who is adamant in her attitude tries to create for herself, sub-consciously though; the love and adventure life lived by her grandfather Paul with Louise in the cave. Just like him, Rosa creates in Lionel interest for 'tango' and just like Paul and Louise every decision they take and every action they perform seems to be affected by this mutual interest. The following conversation between Rosa and Lionel explains the importance of 'tango' in everything they do and expect each other to do.

Through his letter Paul reveals the impact of Louise's persona on his life. Louise replies telling him about how they escaped the cave life. She chooses not to tell him about her marriage with Billy and request him to trace out on paper the dance steps he had taught her as she wish to practice them. She also requests him to write to her care of the local post office as she wishes to keep this renewed contact from Billy.

Chrissie Wheeler, Lionel's childhood friend and farm neighbor, visits him. She has a crush on him for his University studies, life in city and being different from all the other farm boys whereas for Lionel she is an adolescent who is still on the cusp. When she comes to know about Lionel's passion about tango her infatuation increases. Mrs. Jean Howden refers to Rosa as just a visitor who simply wants Lionel to forget about her and start taking interest in Chrissie. She makes use of tango to provide platform to this newly established old acquaintance, with new dimensions and probabilities now. Here we find how tango distinguishes the boundaries between friendship and platonic love. Jean, Lionel's mother asks Lionel to stay a bit longer and help his father who will be facing and recovering from the delayed hip replacement operation which is penciled in the coming docking and shearing season. Lionel could not let her see what a huge thing she is asking him to give up or to see how desperate and impatient he is to return to the nights at La Chacra.

It is Lionel's infatuation for tango and Rosa, each resting on the other aspect that makes him enquire deeper into Louise's life. When he visits her old apartment he expects to come across the things related with her and her private dance with Paul. He expects to find Louise there waiting for Paul to show up while drawing up her own list. On the deficit side the want of a happy domestic life with Schmidt, Children and grandchildren. And the continuation of her own story that progeny carry within them. On the other side of the score sheet, her romance, tango. Lionel tries to find out the similarities between Rosa and Louise to have a better perspective of his relationship with Rosa. He finds out the echoes of the study in deception of the same dance form Rosa teach him and nothing else to hold no to.

After Ivan's, rosa's husband's arrival everything that contributes into Lionel's story change. Rosa is no longer alone, dependant on someone like Lionel in her life and in the search of the adventures on the path trod by Paul and Louise. With Ivan back in her life Lionel remains just a faithful shop assistant for Rosa. Lionel and Rosa who share a sexual relationship and intimacy developed through their intimate tango practices, knows about its validity and future. This extra-marital, casual, intimate sexual relationship between Lionel and Rosa banks on their daily contact and intimacy they share in 'tango' dance. And Lionel also knows that once he chooses to go back to the farm, there would be no leaving it again and all he has is a little bit of time, to be with himself, with Rosa and with tango.

Then comes the news of Peter's death. He suffers from a heart attack while dragging his dead legs to risqué the sheep from the fence line. It seems to be the end of his artistic aspirations for Lionel. His family and friends welcome him back without any fuss. It is Chrissie Wheeler that accompanies him into his old new life devotedly. Jean, the person who could easily entitle the blame for Peter's death at Lionel, wraps her arm around him and welcomes him home. Harry Wheeler, Peter's oldest friend and neighbor also welcomes him without a single word about mishap. All these people lift the guilt in Lionel's mind and replace it with the feeling of forgiveness. Chrissie Wheeler's presence in Lionel's life provides him with another prospective towards this seemingly drab life. He starts to apply himself to this new life.

In this way, both the select works Here at the End of the World We Learn to Dance and Bravely Fought the Queen depict man-women relationship, family relationships, marital relationships, extramarital relationships, friendship and platonic love all having tango and artistic aspirations of the people involved at its background. All that happens and every relationship that is developed, modified and broken has the pull over the concerned characters.

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