

Influence of societal norms in Mahesh Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen*

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Abstract

*Social norms are viewed as a guideline for appropriate behaviour among communities. Social norms can be codified into rules and laws or they can be informal understandings that guide how people of a society behave. The aim of the paper is to elucidate the influence of social norms in the play *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Norms are important because they help shape people's needs and preferences, which act as criteria for choosing between options. But the exceeded amount of people blindly following the unwritten norms creates a huge impact on the lives of women and men. The selected play has been subjected to in-depth topic analyses by the researcher through meticulous reading. The study aims to improve character analysis in the chosen work by adding the social norms theory perspective.*

Keywords: *Social norms theory, gender abuse, myths and beliefs.*

Introduction

The social sciences have devoted a lot of time to studying social norms, the unwritten laws that guide behaviour in groups and civilizations. Sociologists have concentrated on their social functions and how they motivate people to act (Durkheim 1895 [1982], 1950 [1957]; Parsons 1937; Parsons & Shils 1951; James Coleman 1990; Hechter & Opp 2001), anthropologists have discussed how social norms operate in various cultures (Geertz 1973), and economists have investigated how adherence to norms affects market behaviour (Akerlof 1976; Young 1998a). Legal academics have increasingly praised social norms as effective substitutes for legal requirements since they may internalise negative externalities and offer signalling mechanisms at little or no cost (Ellickson 1991; Posner 2000). The relationship between normative beliefs and behaviour is an important issue that is frequently blurred in the literature on norms. Some authors notice norms with observable, recurrent patterns of behaviour, while others concentrate solely on normative beliefs along with expectations. These narratives find it difficult to explain the complexity and heterogeneity of norm-driven behaviours, as they only focus on normative beliefs and expectations. Norms are important because they help shape people's needs and preferences, which act as criteria for choosing between options. These standards represent a set of shared values in a community. People may choose what they want, but that preference conforms to social standards. Norms affect behaviour because they become a part of an individual's motivations for action through a process of socialisation that begins in infancy. The propensity to comply to established norms is constant and developed; it is unaffected by the results of conformity.

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Long-term contacts with significant others, such as one's parents, help shape these enduring dispositions. Through repeated socialisation, people acquire and internalise the standards' underlying principles. The process of internalisation is defined as the development of a psychological need or motivation for individuals to adhere to a set of common norms. When norms are internalised, conforming to them will be seen as positive or suitable, and people will often experience guilt or shame if they engage in deviant behaviour. Since people are motivated to comply, if internalisation is successful, external sanctions will not be necessary to induce conformity, and normative beliefs and behaviours will be consistent as a result. In conclusion, there is conflicting evidence in the social psychology literature to support the idea that a person's actions are influenced by her normative ideas and attitudes. However, these studies do not make a careful distinction between different categories of normative beliefs. It is important to distinguish between "personal normative beliefs" (beliefs that a certain behaviour should be followed) and "normative expectations" (beliefs about what one believes others should do, which is a second-order belief) because it is often the case that only these second-order beliefs have an impact on behaviour. Consequently, cooperative outcomes can be elucidated without using the concept of social identity. In a situation where there are a generally stable environment and people have had sufficient time to form emotional connections (or may expect to have ongoing interactions with the same group), it appears that the social identity theory is more likely to apply. The concept of social identity is less persuasive in elucidating the observed levels of cooperation in controlled laboratory settings, when there is an absence of anticipated future contacts. Conversely, we emphasise that in experimental scenarios where individuals are segregated into distinct groups, social identity does indeed appear to be significant. (Under those conditions, research has shown that individuals tend to perceive the situation as a "us versus them" scenario, leading to increased loyalty and trust within their own group, while also harbouring a similar level of distrust towards the opposing group; (Kramer & Brewer, 1984; Bornstein & Ben-Yossef, 1994.) Nevertheless, a theory that explains how individuals conform to norms based on their social identity must confront the difficulty of making accurate predictions when individuals are simultaneously devoted to many identities, even in situations that are consistent and include recurrent interactions. Our diverse identities encompass many roles such as employees, parents, spouses, friends, club members, and party supporters, among others. There are laws that delineate the appropriate, acceptable, or respectable conduct for each individual. The ramifications of simultaneously adhering to many identities that may conflict with one other remain uncertain within the framework of the social identity paradigm.

Presence of social norms in *Bravely fought the Queen*

The life of two brothers and their family is the main subject of *Bravely Fought the Queen's* main plot. The men and women of the family are the focus of the plot at first, and it is only in the third act—the last act—that the broken pieces from the first two acts are put together. Jiten and Nitin, two brothers, were wed to Dolly and Alka, two sisters, respectively. The mother-in-law spends some time in each of the two houses where the family resides in a twin set-up. Baa, the boys run an advertising agency while the mother-in-law is disabled and is cared for at home by the daughters-in-law. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that the lives of the women who were portrayed as modern, content, and liberated women have many inherent problems, much like a labyrinth's nest, and that their never-ending attempts to elude reality through various means only serve to magnify the problems. Dattani's play is a lovely depiction of contemporary India, and he skilfully designed it to show the different issues that contemporary women encounter in their daily lives. The plays of Dattani are realistic and true to life. He has depicted the challenges that face contemporary women and the physical and psychological load they must bear throughout their lives in his play. There are numerous other issues that women confront, and numerous writers have noted them in various ways.

As mentioned above, Baa compromises her own sex in order to maintain male organisational structure in the Indian family system, and she plays a part in her daughter-in-law's misery as a result. Dattani serves as a perfect example of this since, while being "bed-ridden," she remains the family's repository for all the patriarchal norms. She commands Jiten to brutally beat Dolly while she is in an advanced stage of pregnancy and prohibits Nitin from being a parent. Alka is accused of having a flawed womanhood at this point because her infertility leads her to bemoan, "You know why I can't have children. You won't permit me. That's the reason why!"³ Additionally, by ordering Jiten to beat Dolly, she lets out her resentment about prior instances when she, too, was the victim of domestic abuse. Nevertheless, her incitement turns out to be harmful and destructive because she is directly to blame for Dolly giving birth to a premature spastic kid named Daksha, who serves as a silent reminder of Jiten's domestic abuse. If the heterosexual marriage's detrimental scope forces Dolly and Alka to limit their self-expression, donning the mask of upper-class hypocrisy simply erases Nitin's homosexuality by making it invisible, to maintain the status quo evident in the range of familial requirements urging them to comply with the confines of their marital home. The play's stereotyped characters, like Baa and Jiten, who exist to support these appropriated identities, are thus the conclusion of patriarchy and are defined by the appropriation of identities at numerous levels. Dolly's chat with Sridhar makes it clear that she lacks firm social contracts that would allow her to advance in society. As soon as Alka, her sister, notifies her that she can't go outside due to some of the pressing business engagements, her subordinate position becomes clear. Alka, like Dolly, begs her husband Nitin in a pitiful and desperate manner: "Nitin, let us go somewhere. Just the two us... just for a drive. Anywhere. There are so many things I want to discuss but we are never... I'm all dressed and ready and all you have to do is pick me up. Forget Dolly. Forget your brothers! (Dattani, 241)".

The utilisation of Social Norms Theory serves as a fundamental framework for the examination and interpretation of the characters and topics present within the literary work titled "Bravely Fought the Queen." This theoretical framework explores the influence of established norms and expectations on individuals and society, highlighting its potential to impose limitations and exert oppressive forces. The central focus of the play is the character Jyoti, who identifies as transgender and actively questions the prevailing societal constructs of binary gender norms. Dattani adeptly depicts the trajectory of Jyoti's experience as they navigate and challenge prevailing society norms pertaining to gender identity. The drama illuminates the repressive nature of traditional gender norms by showcasing the challenges encountered by those, such as Jyoti, who challenge these prescribed roles. Jyoti's narrative additionally delves into the inner conflict that arises from deviating from societal norms. The theatrical production explores the emotional challenges faced by Jyoti as they navigate issues of societal exclusion, familial relationships, and personal self-esteem. Dattani's depiction highlights the significant influence of cultural conventions on an individual's sense of self-worth and psychological welfare. Moreover, the literary work titled "Bravely Fought the Queen" fearlessly depicts the stark truth of the discrimination and prejudice faced by transgender individuals within societal contexts. The dramatic personae within the theatrical production are faced with the challenge of addressing and grappling with the prevailing societal stigmatisation, thereby exposing the adverse consequences inflicted upon marginalised communities as a result of these established standards.

Alka appears to be brash and self-assured, yet she senses the household's weariness. Immediately after a Lalitha introduces herself, "I do a bit of writing. Freelance I write an occasional woman's column for the Times. Sometimes I review cultural events. I am into meditation." (Dattani, 243)". Lalitha discusses the bonsai process in her conversations, "Anyway, then you plant the sapling in a shallow tray – you've got to make sure the roots don't have enough space to spread.... you can shape their branches into whatever shape you want – by pinching or wiring the shoots." (Dattani, 246)". Alka is not just angry with

her husband's indifference; she is also angry with her brother Praful. She nearly cries, "I can't forget what they did to me! Our brother is a cheat. He lied about our father to them." (Dattani, 256)". Alka uses her talkativeness, drinking, and desire for extramarital relationships as coping techniques for her loneliness and as a way to confirm her individuality independently of Praful, Jitin, and Baa. It enables him to cope with the acrid reality. According to reports, Coleman: "For many people – both men and women – it is the severity of stress in their life situations that appears to lead to excessive drinking in an attempt to screen out unbearable reality. (Coleman: 426)".

Once upon a time, both men and women were used as slaves by their owners. After a long time, men were freed from slavery, but this is not the case for women. Women were not "forced slaves" from the beginning; rather, they were "willing slaves." The idea that women must submit to and obey males was ingrained in women's upbringing from the very beginning. A woman's education and character development are compelled to have only one goal, which is to attract men, because all moralities teach three things: that women are completely dependent on men, that women have a natural attraction to the other sex, and that any pleasure, privilege, or ambition that comes to women can only come through her husband. Dolly's sole passion is to forget her woes and the emptiness of her existence by listening to Naina Devi's evocative thumris. Until the end of the play, both the husband and the wife are hesitant to bring up Daksha:

"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! (Dattani, 34)."

Baa, Dolly's brother has lied about their parents, the mother-in-law keeps filling in the spaces from the higher level. Dolly admits to her husband that she was unaware of what Praful had told him regarding their father and that she had mistakenly believed her spouse to be well-informed prior to their union. But it was already too late. Assuming that the two sisters and Praful were born outside of marriage and that their mother was that man's lover, Dolly and Alka's father was then living with his wife and four kids. When Baa learns the truth, she is furious and utters the following:

"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. (Dattani, 96)."

Dolly supports her mother: "My mother didn't know about his wife till later. She was deceived too! (Dattani, 96)." Women and girls frequently have to limit their responsibilities to those of mothers, wives, and carers. Gender norms place girls in caretaking roles, which causes gender inequity in the division of household roles. As a result of the limited outside options, this also leads to a lack of education. Girls and women are even more likely than men and boys to have their movement severely restricted in conflict situations, causing them to spend more time at home. Even when working in the same setting, girls and boys may be given completely different tasks, exposing them to various risks and dangers. For instance, on a family farm, boys are frequently given more responsibility for running machinery, using dangerous tools, and applying chemicals.

Conclusion

The plight of educated women got worsen and both Dolly and Alka faces this trouble at home. The unwritten social norms instruct the people to follow them blindly and in result the everyone becomes prey for it. All of the men eventually remove their masks, exposing their true faces to the audience. Dolly has undergone a radical shift in personality. Dolly, who is often quiet, meek, and subservient, develops into a strong, aggressive character. At the conclusion, she bursts into silence to express her rage at the unfairness and mistreatment she endured. Additionally, Alka makes unexpected and downright repulsive revelations about the covert goals of her brother Praful, who married her to Nitin in order for him to maintain his homosexual connection. Norms have the potential to flourish, but they can also disappear. The abrupt and unexpected alteration of established patterns of behaviour is a poorly understood phenomenon. For instance, it is now considered inappropriate to smoke in public without first getting permission, and only a few years ago, no one would have hesitated about using language that was gendered. Inefficient norms (such those that discriminate against women and minorities) should dissipate more quickly and frequently than more effective norms, according to logic. Bicchieri (2016) notes that while inefficiency is a necessary condition for the death of a standard, it is not sufficient. This is evident from research on crime and corruption, which shows that even when corruption pushes a society to the point of collapse, the resulting societal costs are insufficient to warrant systemic change.

The dramatic works of Mahesh Dattani provide a captivating perspective from which to analyse the Social Norms Theory. The artist's creations effectively portray the inherent conflict between personal aspirations and societal norms, thereby providing insight into the difficulties individuals have when they attempt to either resist or adapt to prevailing conventions. Dattani's theatrical works employ a range of characters and tales that push spectators to engage in introspection regarding the influence of cultural standards on human conduct and interpersonal connections. This renders him a noteworthy figure in the realm of contemporary Indian theatre. Additional investigation of his literary works from this particular standpoint has the potential to provide more profound understandings on the changing dynamics of society and individuals. In conclusion, the play "Bravely Fought the Queen" by Mahesh Dattani presents a powerful illustration of the Social Norms Theory. The theatrical production offers a thought-provoking analysis of the repercussions that arise from questioning established social conventions, specifically within the realm of gender identification. The play prompts contemplation on the influence of established conventions on individuals and underscores the significance of fostering a society that is more open and tolerant, as evidenced by its characters and narrative.

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