

Promise to Protect and Pledge to Heal: An Analysis of Dina Mehta's *Getting Away with Murder*.

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Abstract:

Dina Mehta offers on stage through a rare kind of a play "Getting Away with Murder", the predicament of a victim of child sexual abuse. She examines the deleterious impact of the abuse on victims which is sometimes life-long. The protagonist Sonali exhibits the typical symptoms of victimhood at the time of her pregnancy. She undergoes a gamut of emotions like guilt, fear, anxiety, nervousness, anger and depression. Noticing her hysterical outburst and infantile regression, her understanding husband Anil, her loving brother Gopal and her supportive friends take her through the process of healing that she emerges from being a victim to victor. Dina Mehta excels in unraveling slowly and steadily, the sensitive mind of the victim. She emphasizes the need to address this issue, to implement child-focused policies and to provide a safe environment for the children to grow up as healthy adults.

Keywords: Child sexual abuse, Long-term effect, Psychological scarring, Infantile regression, The healing process, Residual vulnerabilities, POCSO Act, Recidivism, Victim to Victor.

Childhood is a state of innocent bliss without any fear and inhibition. Childhood spans human life roughly from birth to the age of twelve, which includes toddlerhood, early and middle childhood and pre-adolescent period. Childhood is considered to be a period of weak intellect, immaturity and vulnerability. Children are full of fun and vitality, radiating ineffable joy. They are vibrant, pure, sin-free, guiltless and have unlimited energy. They have not fully developed physically and mentally at this stage. Hence they cannot decide on their own. They are helpless and dependent on adults, and they need adults' protection, care and control. In the right atmosphere, with the guidance of responsible adults, their transition from childhood to adulthood takes its natural course. But unexpected sexual abuse gives them a rude jolt. The cruel awakening into adulthood robs their innocence and turns their world topsy-turvy.

To our great dismay, day-after-day innumerable cases of child molestation are reported in a conservative country like India, making the adults admit miserable failure in protecting the children who are the future pillars of the society. These despicable incidents indicate the corroding values of Indian society, urging the adults to address this pressing issue immediately.

Initially, there is no separate law to punish offenders against children. Any crime against children is judged under the adult law. The rapid increase in crime against children is challenging. 'Child Maltreatment' is an umbrella term that includes all crimes like assaults, bullying, teasing, or abuse. Green defines child maltreatment as "physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect" (qtd. in Foster, 2011, p. 16). Child maltreatment is a violation of children's human rights. In 2003, Goa took the first step in formulating a law exclusively for child sexual abuse due to a rape case of Mathura.

Child sexual abuse has grown to be a serious and widespread social ill. The incidents of child sexual abuse, which once seemed sporadic, are now rampant. The taboo-ridden society has pushed the problems under the carpet and remained silent due to fear of social ostracism and stigma. The unreported cases have indirectly led to the increase of such heinous crimes against children. Unchecked, this exploitation of children has grown into gigantic proportion with myriad forms that it needs drastic measures and concerted efforts of judiciary, schools, family, media, social workers, NGO's, police force and policy-makers to curtail this social evil. Unless serious action is taken, it will gnaw at the very fabric of Indian society.

Media have given alarming and disturbing statistics about child sexual abuse which highlight the susceptibility of children living in society full of ills and infirmities. Literary artists also through their works, sensitize people to this issue and create awareness among the public. Writing is a dynamic, uplifting, informative, and maybe transformative art form. Literature is a positive force with a broader reach; it can give a clear direction to many social problems: Literature supports children in identifying potentially dangerous situations, recognizing when they are being victimized, getting comfort that they are not odd, and—most importantly—seeking help, even in the absence of parental or instructional direction. A powerful antidote to feeling like "I'm the only one" is to discover facing similar situations through literature. (McDaniel, 2001, p. 204)

Being a victim herself, Pinki Virani has brought out a path-breaking book called *Bitter Chocolate (2000)*, a docu-fiction that includes many case studies. She records the testimonies of police, doctors, social workers and victims themselves. Her insightful work contains what constitutes child sexual abuse, why and how it happens, real-life stories of victims, practical solutions to counter child sexual abuse and help-lines for the victims. In India, where people have a long history of lineage, culture, and legacy, Pinki Virani reveals the horrifying instances of child sexual abuse. These people are afraid to come out for fear of being ridiculed and judged.

Moreover, being Virani's cathartic divulgence, *Bitter Chocolate* establishes a forum for debate. The fourth chapter of Arundhati Roy's book *The God of Small Things*, which addresses the child sexual abuse and examines how the defenceless are subjected to abuse, neglect, and anguish. *A Doll for the Child Prostitute* by Kamla Das is a significant piece on this subject. A twelve-year-old girl named Rukmani is raped by her stepfather and pushed into prostitution at the age of playing with dolls in this compelling and sad narrative.

Novelists narrate the impact of child sexual abuse vividly through their novels. However, dramatists find it difficult to enact such delicate and sensitive issue on stage. Though child sexual abuse incidents are not shown on stage, the aftermath of the horrifying experience in adult life is presented by dramatists like Mahesh Dattani and Dina Mehta. "The playwrights vividly dramatize the raw emotion and the stark, undiluted reality with remarkable insight and bring to the fore the psyche of the protagonists" (Malik, 2007, p.112). Mahesh Dattani's play *Thirty Days in September* (1990) deals with the shocking story of the sexual exploitation of a mother and her daughter by the same person. The mother remains silent due to family circumstances. She fails to voice her opposition and protect her daughter. The inner conflict embedded in the subconscious mind of the child sexual victim leads to psychosomatic behavior, promiscuity and sadistic attitude towards men. Her mother's guarded secret makes her lead a sexually perverted life. Her sexual molestation makes her molest other men and dump them in thirty days. Feelings of distress and negativity make her lead a sadomasochistic life. The protagonist comes out of her trauma with the support of her husband and a counselor. Dina Mehta's play *Getting Away with Murder* (1990) highlights the consequences of child sexual abuse in adult life through the protagonist Sonali, a child victim. This paper maps the abuse, her retaliation, trauma, survival and recovery.

Child sexual abuse is perpetrated by those in close proximity to the childlike intra-family members, father, uncles and brother or extended family members, legal guardians, members in occupational relationship with the child such as school teachers, doctors, nurses, caregivers, friends of the family, neighbors and people who the child encounters in day-to-day environment. Invariably, evil lurks not far away from home. In most of the cases, the child and the offender live together. In sporadic cases, the abuser is a total stranger who molests the child for sexual gratification or family vendetta. In Dina Mehta's *Getting Away with Murder*, uncle Narotam, who is in a position of power, trust and responsibility, abuses Sonali.

Child sexual abuse is not an accident, not necessarily a single episode. Mostly, it is of a long duration, creating a frightening and unsettling effect on the victims. The effect of the obnoxious act of the trusted individual follows the victims throughout their lives, causing inexorable damage to the development as normal healthy human beings. Sexual abuse of children can have short-, medium-, or long-term impacts. The emotional expression will differ based on the developmental stage at which the abuse takes place and the intensity of the abuse. Mostly child sexual abuse has immediate effects like decreased school performance, poor social adjustments, cognitive distortions, confusion, sense of betrayal, helplessness and behavioral disorder. Proper intervention at the appropriate time and good support network can decrease the adverse outcome of the abuse.

Moreover, children have the potential for resilience. During adolescence, in addition to the usual problems of the teenage, the damage caused by child sexual abuse may negatively impact them, leading to immeasurable problems like depression, anger, dissociation, interpersonal problems, maladaptive coping skill, substance abuse, promiscuity, violent behavior and impotent rage. Even at this stage, a strong support network can ameliorate stress and enhance their coping skills. The effect of the suppression of the horrendous experience is long-lasting with the severe repercussion that may rear its ugly head later in adult life showing mental health disorder, identity disturbance, self-destructive behavior, shame, guilt, insomnia, infantile regression, some problems in their sexual life, mood swing, irrational rage and fear psychosis.

Mehta portrays the effect of the horrible experience of child sexual abuse as long-lasting in Sonali's life. Sonali hails from a middle-class background. Hers is a small, ideal family with her parents and one brother. Unfortunately, the untimely demise of her father and their financial instability make her mother seek the protection of her brother Narotam. The home, which should be a cocoon of warmth, security and safety, becomes a predator's den. The benefactor becomes a predator. Sonali's maternal uncle in the garb of a benefactor steps into their life and makes it unutterably miserable for Sonali. Child sexual abuse victims mostly lose their trust in mankind. In general, the victims and subsequently the survivors come to doubt the natural order that is meant to adore and safeguard children, keeping them secure inside their families and communities. They believe that the world is unfair (Rowan, 2006, p.37).

Narotam uses Sonali as an object for his sexual gratification. Sonali's mother knows her brother is enamored of Sonali. Due to the financial crisis in the family, she ignores Sonali's complaints. Narotam's nocturnal visits and Sonali's nightmarish experience continue from the tender age of eight to twelve, unabated. Her uncle, in his inebriated state, takes advantage of her vulnerability and innocence.

The unaddressed bitter problem of her childhood, which has been simmering for long with a gamut of emotions like bewilderment, rage and sorrow finally bursts forth when Sonali gets married and becomes pregnant. Sonali becomes restless and highly impulsive. Deciding to do a sex determination test which is legally banned in India, she seeks her friend Mallika's help to persuade Dr. Raziya to do it. Mallika reveals that such a test is performed to find out genetic abnormalities. As there are no such genetic disorders in her family history, there is no need to undergo the test. Sonali then confesses that she cannot bear the suspense for nine months to find out the gender of the child. If it is a female child, she wants to abort it. Mallika is surprised at Sonali's attitude, as Sonali is economically sound and has no financial constraints, she believed that that prejudice was exclusive to uneducated ladies! Or impoverished women destined for a life of work who, when they bear daughters, incur more debt and poverty because girls require dowries in order to be sold. "But to someone like you, how can it matter if the first child is a boy or a girl?" (Mehta, 1.1. p.62). Sonali makes it appear that her anxiety is an outcome of society favoring a son. She justifies that is just a family planning step. Is it necessary to produce a line of daughters? Though Sonali admits that Anil loves a girl child, she doesn't want to give birth to a girl as a first-born because all the three brothers of Anil have boys as their first-born. If she gives Anil a girl child, her mother-in-law would be appalled. She further states that woman's failure to bear a son is just a kind of payback for her previous life's wrongdoings. Mallika couldn't accept such irrational arguments. Sonali still insists, "I believe it's my right to choose the sex of my child" (Mehta, 1.1.p. 63). The different reasons Sonali has given so far appear lame and too vague. A niggling doubt creeps into Mallika's mind that there is something more than what meets the eye. Mallika argues that any sex determination test doesn't guarantee a son. It paves a way to kill girl children. As a proof, Mallika talks about a report given by a Mumbai nursing home that out of sixty-nine sex determination cases, sixty-eight are the fetuses of girls and they are aborted. It is like mothers awarding death sentence to female children. When Sonali has no further counter-arguments, she explodes in anger and talks like a feminist, that it is her body, her choice and a symbol of her empowerment. This unprovoked burst of anger confirms Mallika's suspicion. When Mallika tries to probe into the hidden truth, Sonali furiously shouts to shut up tapping the table forcefully. "To be born a girl is to be subject to violence and servitude!" (Mehta, 1.1.p. 63). When Mallika tries to reason out that Sonali's decision will not reverse the society's attitude that forces the female into servitude, Sonali yells hysterically that she remembers anger from the past and anger screaming silently inside her body, mind and soul. She expresses the suppressed feeling by breaking the crockery. She also yells at the waiter. Individuals are shaped by their life experiences. Child sexual abuse has altered Sonali's attitude towards life and people. Unresolved trauma makes her unable to trust anybody, or incorrectly respond to the waiter. When a person is under stress, her capacity to think is severely impaired. That person exhibits intolerance and anger as a problem-solving strategy. Mallika tries to pacify Sonali. But Sonali suffers from a strange hallucination. She recalls her contorted face and trembling thighs from the horrors of passivity. "as they drag me out of her with forceps—a slimy, piteous mess—" (Mehta, 1.1.p. 64). The psychological suffering surfaces as physical pain, headaches and hallucination. Sonali tries to explain to Mallika, a strange experience she had and the resultant headache: "My eyes disappeared first, then my face... and with an awful wild jumping of colors and voices, the picture struggled up... and I saw my mother in pain. However, the scariest thing is still hiding from me in the shadows – I see it beginning to take shape—a gesture here, a half-remembered word there—but it never really does and "I'm baffled and left with a splitting headache" (Mehta, 1.1.pp. 64-65). The sexual abuse she had in childhood adversely affects her adulthood. Sonali now battles with a strange fear that haunts her. She always feels that there is someone watching her from inside the flat when she leaves. She notices, "a withered hand at the parting of my curtains" (Mehta, 1.1.p.58).

The cruel crime of child sexual abuse has not vanished from her memory completely. The effects of child sexual abuse are deep-rooted. Some memories remain "frozen in time" in the form of images, body sensation like smells, touch, taste, and even pain and strong emotions" (Bloom, 1999, p. 6). Sonali frequently worries that she will relapse into her early years. Her desperate attempts to face the terrible, hidden truth that is upsetting her are evidenced by her childlike regression into a childlike voice when she stares in the mirror and her frantic switching between the present and the past. "Someone must help... help me.... Don't want to sit near him, Mother. Don't like to be touched.... Your fingers are not kind, they hurt ... Stop it, stop! ...leave me alone" (Mehta, 1.3.p. 66). Joseph Le Doux has called this "emotional memory" (qtd. in. Bloom, 1999, p. 6) and has demonstrated that while some of the answers can be overridden, this type of memory can be hard or impossible to remove.

Sonali's mother-in-law eavesdrops when Sonali is in the bathroom; she complains to her son Anil about Sonali's strange behavior that she talks like an eight-year-old girl. She doesn't know that Sonali has revealed her trauma through her infantile regression. Narotam's filthy action has affected Sonali's psyche that she continues to relive that trauma. Trauma is defined as "the realization of one's worst fears, the experiences that every human being would never want to have" (Klempner, 2000, p.77) and is the reaction of an individual to a traumatic incident or series of events. The trauma of child sexual abuse is deeply imprinted in Sonali's mind that it reoccurs as a flashback, body

memories and nightmares. A flashback is an abrupt, unwelcome recurrence of a section of one of those painful, unprocessed memories (Bloom, 1999, p. 6). Whenever Sonali is upset or frightened, a flashback occurs flooding her mind with emotions associated with the trauma. Every time she takes a bath she can hear him outside, breathing and waiting to stare at her without her clothes on. "get away or I'll tell Anil you're hounding me..." (Mehta, 1. 3. p. 66).

When Mallika meets Dr. Raziya, she reveals her concern for Sonali's condition. Mallika has observed Sonali's abnormal reactions as if someone is watching her at the restaurant. Given that Sonali has painted her uncle in a frightening shade of crimson, Mallika senses something is off. Does Sonali think well of her Uncle Narotam? You know, he appears repeatedly in the strange watercolors she creates, always rendered in "menacing reds" (Mehta, 2.1.p. 74). Generally speaking, art can be very important to healing. It acts as a "bridge across the black hole of trauma" (Bloom, 1999, p. 7). But to Sonali, red symbolizes danger from her uncle, reminding her of his diabolic act. Unconsciously, Sonali relates red to her loathsome uncle.

Mallika requests Raziya to perform the sex determination test to help Sonali calm down for a while in her disturbed situation. Only then Raziya revealed that Sonali was pregnant last year and had a miscarriage. Mallika was not even aware of Sonali's previous pregnancy. Raziya confessed that Sonali came to her for the same test last year. Raziya refused to do the sex determination test. She suggested another test. "...I did an earlier test in her 10th week of gestation – a chorion villus biopsy. It is more complicated, the instrument is introduced from below – and its danger is that the fetus may stop growing" (Mehta, 2.1.p. 74). Despite the danger involved, Sonali insisted on undergoing the test. The test results confirmed that it was a female baby. After four weeks, a frantic call from Gopal, Sonali's brother made Dr. Raziya rush to Sonali's house only to know that she was profusely bleeding due to her abortion. When Raziya enquired about the cause of abortion, Sonali reluctantly said that there was nothing to express and it was all rush, pain and blood. "I flushed It or She away" (Mehta, 2.3.p.75). Dr. Raziya made a shocking revelation to Mallika that it was a self-induced abortion. This type of destructive behavior is a typical symptom of long term traumatic condition of child sexual abuse. Though Mallika is aghast at the destructive bent of Sonali's mind, she understands Sonali's strange behavior. Raziya also tries to analyze Sonali's preference for a boy child. Sonali feels that having a son helps a woman partially overcome her present agony. But Mallika feels that something is still radically wrong with Sonali. When she wants to know the real cause of the problem, she decides to have interaction with her family members. She approaches Gopal, who is also her lover, to resolve the mystery behind Sonali's sufferings. Gopal initially doesn't reveal the reason for her suffering but requests them not to judge her harshly, "Somewhere along the line my sister's taken terrible wallops" (Mehta, 2.4.p. 83). He blames his mother as one of the reasons for Sonali's psychological scarring since his mother's domain was restricted to kitchen and she could not view anything beyond a certain limit. His talk confirms that Sonali's mother has not understood or solved her problem.

Not knowing the real truth, Mallika is anxious about Sonali's condition, so is Anil. Anil does not want anything to go wrong with her pregnancy like the previous time. He is worried about her restlessness during the night. However, she gives lame excuses like the food she had the previous night at the party has made her stomach upset and visit the bathroom frequently. After Anil goes out, she stands in front of the mirror, regresses into her childhood and relives her moment of agony. Anil suddenly returns to take something that he has left behind in the room and she realizes that she has cried. Thinking that it is hormonal change during pregnancy, he tries to console her. But she shouts hysterically, blaming her mother-in-law and Raziya for her mental imbalance. Anil tries to calm Sonali's frayed nerves. She shouts, "I don't trust Raziya anymore. I don't even need the test. With my whole body, I know it's a girl. [...] I can get rid of it myself..." (Mehta, 2.5.p. 85). He coaxingly reassures her, "Lovely. I have always wanted a daughter" (Mehta, 2.5.p. 85). When Sonali's hysterical raving and ranting continue, he slaps her to bring her back to her senses. In her hysterical state, Sonali recollects the words of her mother that men oppress women just like a scorpion stings people with venom in its tail and the submissive women allow men to pursue their job of oppressing. Hence, she feels that she should submit to his beating. Anil tries to pacify her and reassure her of his love. She immediately remembers her mother has loved only Gopal and 'him' and not her. When Anil tries to find out who is 'he', she points out the canvas on which she has painted the picture of her uncle Narotam, the 'red monster'. Anil is surprised to see the portrait in which uncle Narotam is seated in a squashed wheelbarrow. She scornfully mentions that it is a different portrait, from the one that her mother has in her house. Her mother honored uncle Narotam, placed new flowers in front of the picture, asked them to pray for him, and recalled his generosity with appreciation. The memory of the past surfaces and Sonali unknowingly reveals how her drunken uncle skidded setting his foot on the toy cart Gopal sent flying across the floor. Unable to hide the inward glee, Gopal and Sonali burst out laughing, inviting the wrath of their mother. The situation worsened when "[Narotam] hurt his back and didn't get up for a week" (Mehta, 2.5.p. 87). All these years, in some kind of "emotional numbing" (Bloom, 1999, p. 9), Sonali dissociated herself from those horrible feelings and behaved normally. But as Pennybaker says, "... Unexpressed emotions may be very damaging to one's mental and physical health" (qtd.in Bloom, 1999, p. 9). Sonali is now experiencing a stimulus-reaction emotional roller coaster. She begins to have hallucinations and shouts out for Gopal. She feels that her head hurts and hurts. Unable to bear the strain, she falls into a faint. "Fainting is an extreme form of simply stopping consciousness. Psychogenic fainting is the brain's way of saying, 'I cannot handle this'" (Bloom, 1999, p. 8). It is nearly impossible for traumatized individuals to recover on their own. They should tell their story in overt or covert ways. Even if Sonali's call comes in a disguised way, it is an indirect call for help. Anil, with compassionate regard and understanding, without blaming or criticizing Sonali, calls Gopal for help. Anil discusses Sonali's condition with Gopal. He says that she is going through a personal torment that many people are not aware of including Gopal. He believes that it is time for them to speak whatever it is that causes her to act destructively, abuse herself, feel guilty and angry, and be unsure of whom to trust. He believes that he is entitled to know. Mallika also requests Gopal to reveal the truth about Sonali. Anil feels that some bitter memories are troubling her and affecting her health condition. She suffers from memory related struggles. She experiences terrifying migraines. Remembering is the process of getting back both memory and feeling. It is a vital part of the healing process.

Realizing the seriousness of the situation, at last Gopal opens up. The sordid story of Sonali's molestation by her uncle comes out to the open. Though their uncle appears pious and holy, he defiles the sanctity of the house by sexually exploiting his niece. One can visualize that the so called devout pig would visit her in bed wearing all religious symbols on his forehead.

The screams she suppressed must still be tearing her up within. He scared her into silence and submission. Though Sonali's brother Gopal witnessed his uncle's shameful act night after night, he failed to prevent it. Shamefacedly, now he admits his failure to support Sonali. "And I did nothing to help her, nothing" (Mehta, 2.5.p. 88). He could have yelled or made a loud noise with his toy (drum) to draw the attention of others. Instead, he cowered under the bed cover.

GOPAL: (hoarsely): "To grow her nails and scratch out his eyes. Stick a finger in her throat and make herself sick. I could have yelled for mother or played an alarm on my tin drum...." (Mehta, 2.5.p. 88). But one could understand that Gopal was too young to realize the full implication of the act. Now that he recalls it as an adult, he blames himself for reacting the way he did.

Her mother's acquiescence indirectly abets the uncle's crime of passion. This grave injustice done to her by her mother disturbs Sonali's psyche. The mother's worst fear—that the abuser has power over both her and her mother—is confirmed by her inability to stop the tragedy. Knowing that her mother would not help, Sonali seeks her brother's support to check his reprehensive behavior. She plans her retaliation to

escape from the monstrous clutches of her uncle. When a child is exposed to repeated episodes of danger, they trigger off a built-in-response, a kind of a protective device. "The basic internal protective mechanism is called, the fight or flight reaction" (Bloom, 1999, p. 2). Sonali chooses to fight. She remembers the broken toy cart of Gopal and decides to use it to hurt her uncle. She intends only to harm him and cause some pain. Sonali and Gopal mime the silent conspiracy they hatched against their uncle. She meticulously stage-manages an accident by placing the toy cart upside down on top of the staircase. As expected, the drunken uncle stumbles over the cart, falls down the stairs and breaks his skull. Sonali confesses, "... I felt I was watching a well-rehearsed act. Gopal and I burst out laughing – Mother never forgave us" (Mehta, 2.5.pp. 86-87). To make matters worse, he died. Sonali's attempt at resistance results in the unexpected death of her uncle. When her mother lays a guilt trip on Sonali, she takes it to her heart and suffers untold pangs. Though Sonali vehemently denies, it creates a guilt complex at her tender age. She has camouflaged childhood memories but they simmer and surface as infantile regression when she becomes pregnant.

Now Anil and Mallika understand why Sonali was irritable, jumpy, on-edge, impulsive, anxious and aggressive. Her actions were harmful and socially unacceptable. It is a person's way of dealing with extreme guilt and anxiety. In order to combat the long-term impacts of chronic stress, Anil, Gopal, and Mallika understand that they need to provide a safe atmosphere as well as a healthy and sustainable human interaction. Healing involves – breaking the silence, understanding that it wasn't the victim's fault, grieving, getting angry, trusting oneself and moving on ("Care and Commitment", 2017). "For healing to occur, people often need to put the experience into a narrative, give it words, and share it with themselves and others. Words allow us to put things into a time sequence: past, present and future" (Bloom, 1999, p.7). Sonali's disclosure is a first step to dispel the shame of being a victim. Anger is a powerful and liberating force. Sonali directing her rage at the molester is pivotal to healing. By grieving over her loss, she has acknowledged her pain so that she could let go of the horrible past and move into the present. Though she cannot erase her unpleasant past, she has proved that she is strong enough to survive the dreadful ordeal. Once her feelings and perspectives stabilize, with resolute intention, she can move on. In addition to her attempts, her husband, brother, Mallika and Dr.Raziya make her understand that the abuse is not her fault and she does not have to feel guilty. Moreover, they help her realize her self-worth as a person. Though Dina Mehta doesn't show the process of Sonali's healing directly, she presents the beneficial results that make deep and lasting changes in Sonali's life. Sonali musters her strength to invite her mother-in-law to return from Banaras and live with them. She admits that attitudinal changes may occur slowly if one strives hard, one could make it happen. It takes time and nothing can be changed overnight.

The play ends on an optimistic note where Sonali is pregnant without the usual anxiety. Yet she confesses to Mallika that she has her moments of panic. It shows the "residual vulnerability" (Landgraf, 2017) that still lingers in her mind. Chakraborty says that even the abuser's death and a significant amount of time and distance are not sufficient to heal a wounded mind (7). She understands that she must face both her weaknesses and her talents. Sonali finally decides to take charge of her life.

The drama is divided into two acts, the first of which has four scenes and the second of which has six. The second act is lengthy as it deals with Sonali's secret trauma, her healing and recovery. The play has four places of action – a restaurant, Sonali's home, Raziya's house and Mallika's office. The play is cyclically structured with beginning and ending in the same restaurant, mapping the journey of Sonali's healing. Mehta employs mimetic gestures of Gopal and Sonali to enact the nightmarish experience of her childhood. "In the absence of verbal articulation, the psychologists greatly emphasize the significance of the non-verbal forms of expression such as drawing, painting or collage through which the victim gives vent to the pent up feelings of entrapment, guilt, shame" (Malik, 2007, p. 115). Dina Mehta effectively uses the portrait of Narotam as a red monster drawn by Sonali, showing her hatred to indicate the contrast in her mother's attitude of veneration. Through tonal variations of Sonali, Mehta points out that Sonali is shuttling between her bitter past and the seemingly normal present. Dina Mehta illustrates the seriousness of child sexual abuse by presenting the brutal reality of the issue through the use of dramatic devices.

To combat the grievous issue of child sexual abuse, various sectors like health, welfare, education, justice and police are to be involved. Efficient strategies are to be taken up by the family, community and the nation. An ordinance was passed to amend the POCSO Act of 2012, to award even death punishment for pedophiles who abuse children below twelve, and this law has been approved and passed by the President in 2018. Some people argue that capital punishment is not a sure deterrent. They advocate psychological counseling and psychological treatment for the molester so that recidivism will not occur. Parents should take precautionary measures to safeguard the children, invite their confidence, listen to their grievances, monitor their movements and teach them about good touch and bad touch. This play is a call for concerted efforts of the entire society to reduce the prevalence of child sexual abuse, to promise to protect the children and in the event of untoward incidents to take the pledge to help them in healing ("Safe Environment", 2017).

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