

## Women as Perilous Embrace A Case study of Dina Mehta's Play Getting Away with Murder

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### Abstract

The play *Getting Away With Murder* stages the various issues of contemporary Indian culture which includes the themes of associations like motherhood, obscure baffling affiliation of men and women, incest and infidelity. The study also centres on variety of brutality as physical, poignant, psychological, and the abuse of women at home and at work place. The play presents the themes of resistance, voicing against feticide, infanticide, rape, inequality, poverty illiteracy and gender discrimination. The play pursue three friends through their delicate personal miseries and anguish in their concealed hells. In humankind where the domination of women is naturalized, public spheres have become a podium to divulge the fundamental dogmas. The study middle on the existence of three cultured knowledgeable women-Sonali, Raziya and Mallika where the playwright tries to show the archetypal perception of women in the 20th century. Each character in the play is enthused by her own explicit apprehension. The research extracts the aspect of female infanticide and child abuse as Sonali does not want her daughter to born because she is preoccupied by her childhood happening where she has been battered and assaulted by her uncle. Mallika, the audacious among the three friends does not want to get married as she is monetarily protected and sheltered. In the case of Raziya, we can see a diverse perspective and angle of women where she is obsessed with her religion and blindly accepts Habib's marriage with his friend. She is not provoked to question the conventional doctrines which are totally contradictory to human ethos. This study enquire into the analysis of feminist issues such as gender discrimination, female infanticide, child marriage, life of a widow in a patriarchal society, male chauvinism and condition of bridegroom in-law's family. The objective of this paper is to explicate & explore the various social issues & details that surround the social milieu. The paper aims to express the grave & deeply rooted stark reality of the social structure.

**KEYWORDS** : resistance, retaliation, social structure, discrimination, domination, contemporary.

**Introduction** : Dina Mehta is an Indian writer belonging to the Parsi community. Among the Indian writers belonging to the community of Parsi's, Dina Mehta is prominent. Generally, the Parsi novelists who write in English are differentiated into two categories; expatriate writers and stay-at-home writers and Dina Mehta falls into the category of stay-at-home writers. Other Parsi novelists like Firdaus Kanga, Rohinton Mistry, Farrukh Dhondy and Bapsi Sidhwa are included in the list of expatriate novelists. The work of these novelists reflects the life of their community and the history of India. Their works also portray their ethnic identity and relationships like motherhood, intricate baffling relationship of men and women, incest and adultery. Dina Mehta's *Getting Away With Murder* deals with various issues like child abuses, rape, female feticide, and blind superstitious belief that are

the hindrance in the development of human development, but this play voices against foeticide, infanticide, rape, inequality, and gender discrimination. This play portrays the independent thinking modern women who work to rise up herself and world around with her conscience thoughts, and harmony. The play was first performed by Indus International, a sociocultural group for women at British Council Theatre in Mumbai in 1990. The play seeks to portray the lives of three friends Mallika, Sonali and Raziya who are connected perhaps by the strain of suffering that they undergo in the hands of male hypo critic and dominating human. The private world outside so corrupted that women have to face childhood sexual abuse, differential treatment on the male and the female child, infidelity partners with whom they have an utterly insecure relationship, sexual harassment at workplace and elsewhere, and a dishevelled life despite having been educated. In this play, the author addresses various issues like voicing against foeticide, infanticide, rape, and gender discrimination. The play portrays the lives of three women who are dealing with different types of assault like child abuses, infanticide and gender discrimination. Sonali, is a victim of childhood sexual abuse this had led her to psychosis and the later death of her villain uncle help her to expel herself out of that incident which keeps haunting her nightmares. Her psyche problem provoked her to commit the female foeticide during her previous pregnancy to avoid “violence and servitude” (63) for her unborn girl-child. Due to her childhood incident she even in the third month of her pregnancy did not inform her husband about this because she wants her friend Mallika (Malu) to ask Dr.Raziya to perform amniocentesis on her to find out the sex of the unborn child. Sonali confesses to Mallika that if a woman cannot give birth to a son it mean she has done some misdeeds in her past life.

Feminist literary criticism believes that all writing is marked by gender. It states that a society that organizes itself on the basis of gender distinctions, and uses language to re-enforce such distinctions, will display the same anomalies in language that are revealed in the practices of that society. But it is still a matter of debate whether textual signals of sexuality or gender exist. In this chapter, this question will be considered with regard to the male and female dramatists under study. Their portrayal of women characters and their use of the language will be studied, to see whether male and female writers see and write the world differently. In all cultures, the lives and experiences of men and women are distinct in many ways. It is quite possible that such differences are resonated to some degree in what they write about and how they write it. In the past, works which focused on women were often thought of as esoteric, while works which focused on men were considered to be aimed at a general readership. It was not thought unusual if a literary work did not contain women characters. Women's writing was treated as trivial, sentimental, sensational, and was not taken seriously. According to binary thinking, the male and the masculine are the norm and the superior, the female and the feminine are the aberration and the inferior.

This play follows three friends through their personal sufferings in their private hells. Sonali, happily married to a businessman Anil Bhatnagar, is in her third month of pregnancy. But strangely, she decides not to tell her husband about that good news until she has met Dr.Razia and found out its sex. She requests her friend Mallika or Mala to persuade the doctor to do amniocentesis and tell her its sex. Though the rallying cry freedom for every woman is heard in every nook and corner, women themselves stoically accept their marginalisation and Sonali belongs to this

type of women. In a world where the oppression of women is naturalised, public spheres have become a platform to reveal the underlying ideology. Sonali is aware that it is a testy that it banned for sex determination and is allowed only to detect abnormalities in the foetus, but she knows if Malu persuades Dr.Raziya, could show some medical pretext and do the test:

Mala: ....Okay Sonali suppose Raziya; does the test under whatever.

Sonali: If it's a girl I'll abort it.

Mala: My God you too....I thought only ignorant women had this prejudice.... But to someone like you can it matter if the first is a boy or a girl?

Sonali: To me it's simply a family planning measure.... Anil would cheerfully welcome a row of daughters...but his mother would be mortified, if I presented Anil with a girl as his first born.

Mala: Would it also mortify you?

Sonali: Well my mother always said that a woman's failure to bear a son is just retribution for her misdeeds in her past life. (Mehta, 62)

Mallika in "*Getting Away with Murder*" is similarly a woman characterized by determination. She successfully manages her food exports company and also wards off the advances of her male partner. She is able to rescue Thelma, her secretary, from the ploys of her partner. She gives support to Sonali and helps her overcome the trauma of child abuse. Jaya, ManjulaPadmanabhan's Harvest, is the only person to survive the power play between the First World and Third World countries. While her husband and brother-in-law give up the fight soon, and her mother-in-law succumbs to the material charms offered, Jaya alone maintains her identity and establishes her right to be thought of as a human being.

Dina Mehta also used the theatre for portraying her resistance against violence like child abuses, rape, female feticide, blind superstitious beliefs, gender discrimination and inequality, which is often the order of the day in the androcentric world. In *Getting away with murder* Dina Mehta's female characters Sonali, Mallika and Dr.Raziya voice out the concept of male gaze where women are represented as a victim to this male dominated society and as a sex object. These chosen characters protect against the patriarchal treatment which shows that they are empowered women. They decided not to be lifeless in the hands of men and didn't want their life to be controlled by others. Dina mehta's plays are a challenge to false patriarchal theory that women is meant to be a subject of violence and suppression, which they are really not. Women empowerment means helping them to take their own decisions by breaking all personal limitations of the society and family by which the women get emancipated from the shackles of patriarchal society and now it's the turn of the common people to contribute positively for the cause.

Thus, in the end of the play, Mehta strikes a note of optimism, men need not be indifferent observers, they can simply help a woman in getting over her trauma . Sonali is empowered at the end, because she has been purged out of her psychosis, her self-realisation lends her gravity. She had written a letter to Anil, proclaims that she would spend her entire life in taking care of her ailing sister-in-law and she also wants her mother-in-law to come back to her from her ‘forced pilgrimage’. Malu also put an end to the whole conspiracy of Mr.Pingley to blackmail Thelma and thereby having an affair leading to rape and with her strong determination she successfully manages to help Sonali to overcome the trauma of child abuse. Raziya too, is able to confess, “The enemy is within, don’t you see!” (Mehta, 78), meaning thereby, that women in India will have to break the shackles that tradition binds them in, to confront their real selves. Hence, Sonali too, confidently claims, “Nothing can change overnight, I guess, but we can be goddesses if we want it enough” (Mehta, 92). Therefore, in order to be empowered and protected against male-oppression, women must use their “body” as a weapon to fight against that very sexual exploitation and “the culturally constructed body then”,

**Conclusion:** It is Dina Mehta’s commitment to the cause of female empowerment that has made her protest against the patriarchal treatment meted out to women. Her chosen characters like Sonali, Mallika and Dr.Raziya are the empowered women who resist being type casted into the stereotypical image of woman. They choose not to be submissive to the demands of the society and take control of their life into their own hands. They realize that they have to confront not only their strengths but also their weaknesses. It signifies their empowerment. Swami Vivekananda once said “arise away and stop not until the goal is reached”. The creative minds are doing their best, through their works, for the emancipation of women from the shackles of patriarchal society and now it’s the turn of the common people to contribute positively for the cause.

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