



Research Paper

Social Spectrum in the Plays of Mahesh Dattani

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Abstract:

Mahesh Dattani is a unique and popular dramatist of Indian English Drama. He has created a vibrant new theatrical form which is a marked development for hither to stagnant stage of Indian English drama. All his plays throws light on the less discussed and untouched themes such as homosexuality, gender discrimination, eunuch issues, communalism etc relating to middle and upper middle class of urban society but these plays due to their universal appeal, crosses the linguistic and geographical barriers and appreciated by all types of audiences.

I. Introduction

Mahesh Dattani is a versatile dramatist of Indian English drama. He is a theatre icon who has written, acted, directed and produced several plays in English, which have been very well received by the audience and appreciated by the critics. He is the first Indian playwright, to be awarded by the Sahitya Academy in 1998 for his play, "Final Solution" and his overall contribution to Indian English Drama. The plays of Mahesh Dattani emerged as fresh arrivals in the domain of Indian English Drama, in the last decade of twentieth century. His plays though deal with the contemporary issues of Indian urban middle class society yet these have an universal appeal and can be staged anywhere in the world. We can say that these plays speak across the linguistic and cultural barriers.

Where there is a Will, Dance like a Man, Tara, Bravely fought the Queen, Final Solutions, Do the Needful, Seven Steps around the Fire, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai and Thirty Days in September are the popular and well recognized literary works and well received theatrical presentations created by the dramatist. Dattani has created a vibrant new theatrical form which is a marked development on the hither to stagnant Indian English drama. His plays throw light on the hidden and dark corners of so called well cultured and civilized upper middle class Indian society often pron to vices of hypocrisy, hollowness and deceit. These plays successfully display some of the social issues of our society, which are otherwise considered mean, ugly, untouched and queer to be mentioned in literature. Such problems of our society find a central place in Dattani's plays. He has handled some comparatively less explored themes such as alternate sexuality, transgender, AIDS, homosexuality, child abuse and conjoined twins with great success. Dattani makes an abundant use of Indian mythology, rituals, traditions and contemporary problems, India is beset with but he elevate these themes to a higher level touching the human cords that emanate love, happiness, sexual fulfillment and problems of identity. In his plays Dattani moulds his subjects in such a way that it is both topical as well as appealing, breaking the linguistic and cultural barriers. Social spectrum present in Mahesh Dattani's plays is aptly discussed in this paper.

Tara is a play that deals with the theme of gender discrimination and social consciousness in modern society. It is not only the story of the hero of the play, but it is the story of every girl child born in our society whether urban or rural. It is a play that treats the children of the same womb in two different ways. It is about two children, a boy and a girl joined together at the hip. They can only be separated only surgically, the partiality and injustice starts here. It shows that a woman herself is the enemy of woman. The mother prefers the male child and thus strengthens the chain of injustice. It is bitter example of child abuse present in the Indian society. Every girl child born in an Indian Family does suffer some kind of exploitation and if there is a boy child in the family, the exploitation is very much visible as the privileges are consciously or unconsciously propounded to the son. Play sets in London, Chandan, a dramatist who is remembering his childhood days in the company of his sister Tara. Even after their unjust and manipulated partition, which is made against Law of Nature, they are emotionally united. They share the same agony which Chandan tries to describe by writing autobiographical drama. He apologize to Tara for doing all this 'Forgive me, Tara, forgive me for making it my tragedy.'

ISSUE OF EUNUCH

The most popular play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* dwells on the theme of an eunuch's identity constitution and their connotation. Uma Rao, the sociology scholar is the most powerful character of the play and mouthpiece of the playwright, who fights to establish the identity of an eunuch. The society accepts a hizra for gracing the ceremonies of marriage and births but would not allow them to portray such ceremonies. Again in the play, we observe how the police officer refuses to subject himself to any medical examination, to rule out the barrenness of his wife due to his impotency. This bias of squarely blaming the woman for her barren state is another societal phenomenon that Dattani exposes.

ISSUE OF HOMOSEXUALITY

It is noted that, Dattani writes on unconventional subjects which include the seemingly mean, ugly and unhappy things of life but his special focus is on the suffering that arises from problem centered on sexuality. His play *Bravely fought the Queen* charts through the emotional, financial and sexual intricacies of a modern day, Indian family. Two brother Jiten and Nitin have married two sisters, Dolly and Alka. Women remain at home much of the time where they look after the men's aging mother Baa. Baa was usually harassed by her cruel husband. Baa sees the picture of her husband in her elder son. So here we have two generations sharing the same experience at the hand of their chauvinistic husband and yet to come third generation who also experience the mean treatment of her father before her birth and is born as a disabled child. This play presents the concept of gay culture prevalent in big cities.

A Muggy Night in Mumbai is a tragic comedy which deals with homosexuality. This play is a celebration of freedom, but it also warns that the freedom is threatened the moment one step out of the privacy of home. The irony of the whole story is that the poor girl did not know that the man to whom she was going to get married was homosexual and ex-lover of her brother. The whole story throws light on the homosexuality and its non acceptance by the Indian society. It tries to make them what are not, with often disastrous results.

Thirty Days in September treats the sensitive issue of child abuse which has generally remained largely unanalyzed in literary and critical studies.

ISSUE OF COMMUNALISM

Final Solutions, the award winning play of Mahesh Dattani foreground the Hindu Muslim problems. It also tackles the theme of transferred sentiments in the context of family relations. This play mocks at the politicians who use people as their puppets. These puppeteers are the culprits. The playwright wishes to stop this game of hatred and communal tension through the character of Ramnik a liberal minded person who accepts that his father has done the black deed. The play advocates the theme of forgiveness which is always better than revenge. We should forgive the offenders and forget the past. This can be the final solution.

It is concluded from the above discourse that Dattani is a most dedicated and committed playwright of Indian English drama who has brought, the unique, less discussed, hidden and controversial issues, prevailed in the society, to the fore. His theater presents very crude, tension oriented harsh realities of our society on the stage. His plays scratches the mind and soul of the audience to make them realize the sheer realities of life. Certainly Indian English drama has found a new life in the works of Dattani who dares to walk on the untrodden path.

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