



Humanism in the Plays of Mahesh Dattani

Ayaz Ahmed Chowdhary

Assistant Professor Gdc Mendhar

ABSTRACT

It is proper to say that the composition of drama is more difficult task than other forms of literature. The playwright has to coordinate various elements like dialogue, music, plot, metaphoric construction. The psyches of the characters and audience, paraphernalia and stage craft along with the unity of time.

KEYWORDS:-Realism, Sexual Abuse, Gender Truth, Beauty, Art.

INTRODUCTION

Mahesh Dattani is a man of multi-dimensional personality. He is considered one of the best Indian Playwrights writing in English. He is an Indian director, actor, playwright and a writer. He has a number of plays to his credit as *Where there's a Will*, *Dance Like a Man*, *Tara*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Final Solution*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Thirty Days in September*, *Seven Steps Around The Fire*, *The Murder That Never Was* etc. He is the first playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for *Final Solution*. *Tara* (2000) and *Thirty days in September* (2007) are awarded as the best productions of the year directed by Arvind Gaur. The directors like Arvind Gaur, Alyque Padamsee and Lillete Dubey directed Dattani's plays. As a director, he directed the movies like *Mango Souffle*, *Morning Raga*, *Dance Like a Man* and *Ek Alag Mausam*. *Dance Like a Man* has won the award for the Best Picture in English awarded by the National Panorama in 1998. Dattani's plays deal with the themes of social issues not the very obvious ones, but the deep-seated prejudices and problems that the society is usually conditioned to turn away from. His plays deal with gender identity, gender discrimination, and communal tensions. The play *Tara* deals with gender discrimination, *Thirty Days in September* tackles the issue of child abuse head on, and *Final Solution* is about the lingering echoes of the partition. It was Alyque Padamsee who first spotted and encouraged Mahesh Dattani's talent and gave him the confidence to venture into a career in theatre. Dattani formed his own theatre group, Playpen, in 1984. He is the only English playwright to be awarded the Sahitya Academy Award. He got this award in 1998. He writes plays for BBC Radio and he was one of the 21 playwrights chosen by BBC to write plays to commemorate Chaucer's 600th anniversary in 2000. His Sahitya Akademi award citation reads as follows:

*Dattani.....probes tangled attitudes in
contemporary India towards communal differences,
consumerism and gender...
a brilliant contribution to Indian English drama*

CONCEPT OF HUMANISM IN PLAYS OF MAHESH DATTANI

Indian English is a self-governing and stupendous platform for writing in the Commonwealth Literature. Earlier, fiction and poetry had been highly fruit-bearing literary accomplishments and drama was less profitable chase. Over the last few decades, Indian English Drama blossomed like fiction and poetry in the field of Indian English literature. The theatrical art, called the "fifth Veda", is regarded as something holy and religious activity since its beginning. It speaks beyond the region, race, rank, position, class, caste and gender, etc. It decodes the message and defines meaning of life. Drama is the high up form of literature. Its success depends more on the performance than on its written counterpart. It articulates message for the viewers largely through its stage performance, marked by its distinctiveness like pluralism and dynamism. It breaks the web of illusion and ignorance developing understanding and perception of the people. Indian English drama beyond the limitations of imitation, amateur, translations, and proper patronage has emerged as an effective one to make a sign of the dilemmas of human existence expressed in terms of gender inequalities, caste ridden practices, social discrimination and all pervasive moral depravity deriving strength from its structural compactness and ability to bridge up direct

communication between the sensitive soul of the artist and the audience. The Indian dramatists are reflecting upon the issues that inundated human race for a long. The 20th century witnessed radical and rapid changes and alteration in a number of fields of human interests and investments. There has occurred a basic and speedy shift of values and notions. It demanded urgent need to address the shifting values and notions in our society. Stirred by this situation, the dramatists of our time grabbed the opportunity of addressing the pains and misery, suffering and subjugation of the unreached and unprivileged sections of our society. Drama is perhaps the most touching medium of representation of human life. It has power to surface the conscience of the audience. What is very essential is the active participation of the audience. The dramatic experience is like touching a bare electric wire. The drama, being dynamic medium, depicts the dynamics of human experiences acquainting us with character's veiled and intricate pattern of human consciousness. The need to address human misery and consistent mechanism of humiliation compels the dramatists to deviate from the traditional path and reshape the conventional canons and concepts of stage art and craft capable of creating spaces for registering remonstrance against the mortification of humanity as a whole. Some leading dramatists like Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar and a host of other dramatists have dealt with various issues that have been lashing out human beings for ages. They have mirrored the problems and issues of contemporary Indian society. However, none of them has ever made them as essential part of their dramatic art. Mahesh Dattani has been making conscientious efforts to showcase the issues and problems of contemporary Indian society making them the integral part of his dramatic credo. He is not merely a creative genius dealing with human sensibility and human experience, but he is a celebrated actor, director, and film producer. His dramatic world projects challenging and new aspects which differentiates him from the other Indian playwrights and places him to a higher level of competence. He has his own style to say whatever he wants to say. His drama depicts human sentiment and sensibility par excellence. Humanity is at the centre of all his plays. The close look at his plays shows that Dattani synthesizes social realism with his theatrical art like G.B. Shaw and Ibsen. He is committed to present suffering and sobbing of the marginalized people especially residing in our urban area with a sense of uprootedness, anxiety, insecurity, and unrest. Dattani's plays are marked by high degree of stage ability and humanistic approach towards the subjugated colonized sections of our society. He explores into the new realms of themes and issues which are unexplored or overlooked by other dramatists. He explored untouched (queer, as some call them) themes like homosexuality, child sexual abuse, victims of dreaded disease like AIDS, the problems of eunuch in our society and a number of other issues. Apart from these radical issues, his dramatic world presents the issues like communal tension, plight of the women in our society, problem of career and marriage, socio-political exploitation, politics of patriarchy, gender politics, a shift in value system, and people grieving under the stroke of destiny, etc. Moreover, there are some plays where he seriously muses on the themes of dance and music and depicts the problems pertaining to them in our conventional and conservative society. Dance like a Man and Morning Raga are the fine examples of this. Dattani takes a lead to represent commoner's voice which did not find due expression on account of conventional theatrical canons and devices. He has been constantly striving to explore the position of the marginalized sections of our society for relocating their positions and defining their identities in our society. In this way, he shares in a process 'a way of decolonizing of theatre'. He within the framework of theatrical structure and strategies, surfaces the evils of discriminations based on gender and religion, socio-political exploitations, social myths and conventions hampering the response to the call of humanity, the predicament of human destiny, the marginalization of the people due to lack of understanding of AIDS, false notion regarding art, music, dance etc. By doing so, he has expanded the new dramatic horizons in the field of Indian English Drama. Dattani is a leading serious dramatist in contemporary era. He is always careful to maintain serious tone in his plays. He differentiates his dramatic art with unconventional approach, deviating from the water-tight dramaturgy, taking psycho-philosophical probe into the human mind and heart, presenting more or less cultivated areas of human life. He strives to decode human experience on the stage with a variety of ways and that even in an effective way. In the hands of Dattani, theatre ceases to be mere artistic expression and becomes a means to realize life. His theatrical creed highlights the dynamics of social and interpersonal relationship with vehement focus on human experience. He has proved that theatre is a potent vehicle to present the gamut of human experiences along with social dynamics. Dattani, a powerful craftsman and devout humanist, delves deep into the depiction of the suffering and subjugation of those who, still today, dare not voice their pains and problems. Moved by social ailments and maladies, he tries to justify them within the array of his theatre. Women, children, eunuchs, minority, transsexual, and ailing people constantly maintain his attention. He carries on his theatrical business in such a way that it enlightens audience's minds with better understanding and enables them to appreciate the suffering of an individual resulting from the rigid codes and scheming nature of the society. To free theatre from the grip of rigid dramaturgy, he adopts stage mechanism dexterously poisoning the actors and the audience at the same wave length. Drama is performed on stage aiming at going inside and across the human mind and sensibility. Since life is changing at jet speed; the drama has to change its dramaturgy for keeping pace with the changing scenario of life. Being quite aware of this, Dattani is constantly making experiments and innovations in his theatrical performance. His art and craft are coming up with newer and newer modifications and alterations every time. His theatre vehemently asks us not to discriminate among the people on the basis of caste, gender, country etc under the evil influence of social myths and conventions. His theatre stirs the wind of rationalism and humanism in the minds of the audience. On the basis of study carried out in the previous chapters, it becomes crystal clear that Dattani's power of observations is very keen and minute. the dramatist's familiarity with contemporary urban Indian society is deep and profound. however, the general about opinion Dattani is that he has restricted his theatre to upper middle class especially dwelling in the urban parts of the country but it is not true. At the most, it is the partial truth as he presents human predicament of rural India in some of his plays. It is true that he mainly portrays the people coming from upper middle class. His theatrical art effectively represents

human sensibility and experiences irrespective of class, gender, religion, race etc. Critically, Dattani writes about all those who have been compelled to drag unhonoured and shabby lives on the periphery level of society. They survive on fringe averting the agony of social myth and apathy. He captures the ugly and clumsy scenes from the rut of the urban social milieu. Dattani's theatrical credo is characterized by the realistic tone and humanistic approach. That is to say that Dattani, swayed by Galsworthy, Bernard Shaw and Ibsen, synergies the dramatic credo and stark reality of life. He tries hard to diminish disparity between the page and stage enabling theatre as the instrumentation in articulating the voices of the subaltern. He neither follows the established notions of theatre nor does he propound newer principles of theatre. He innovatively employs theatre to make it closer to life itself. To him, theatrical presentation is manifestation of the 'human self'. Therefore, he dramatizes the stark reality of life without much romanticizing the idea. He dramatizes truth of human life as revealed through human experiences. He means to say that theatrical art can be enhanced and enriched by affiliating it to the truth of real human experience. Therefore, his drama is called 'life' itself. He observes human life very closely and interprets it through his theatrical performance. He has an inborn love and passion for drama. He has rightly been acclaimed as a dramatist of substance. Creation of truth and beauty are the twin aims of literature. The art or literature attempts to create harmony in the society by presenting truth and beauty. Dattani's dramatic art unveils the truth and beauty hunched under the falsehood, hypocrisy snobbery and ugliness. Of course, his dramatic art presents the truth of real life experiences by using corresponding techniques and strategies vis-à-vis experiments and innovations. A close study of his plays reveals that his plays are the protest against the imposition of restraints and constraints as well as forces of social myths and conventions that offer dehumanizing treatment to others. He is an absolute humanist who takes his pen against all the maladies and malpractices of the society. He disapproves all kinds of power controlling system except love and respect. His theatrical creed strongly suggests that he is a thinker and devoted humanist. His plays dramatise the battle being fought on the family landscape. Bravely Fought the Queen and Tara are the most tragic and terrible family tales. So far the 'poetic justice' is concerned; Dattani admits 'natural law of justice' in his dramatic universe. He neither punishes nor rewards any of his character. It doesn't mean that there is no moral order.

REFERENCES

1. Rickett, Arthur Compton. A History of English Literature, New Delhi: Universal Book stall, 1990. p. 89.
2. Boulton, Marjorie. The Anatomy of Drama, New Delhi: Kalyani Publisher, 1985. p.3.
3. Worsfold, William Basil. Judgment in Literature, quoted by B. Prasad in A Background to the Study of English Literature, New Delhi : MacMillan, p. 73.
4. Ghosh, Manomohan. (edited and translated) Natyashashtra Ascribe to Bharat-Muni (A Treatise on Ancient Indian Dramaturgy and Histrionics), Volume I & II, Varanasi, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office Reprint, 2007.
5. Keith, A. B. The Sanskrit Drama, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, 1992. p.12.
6. Deshpande, G. T. In the article entitled "Sanskrit Drama" in Indian Drama published by The Director, The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India Delhi-8. p. 15.
7. Naik, M. K. quoted in article entitled "Perspectives and Challenges in Indian English Drama" by R. N. Rai, in Perspectives and Challenges in Indian English Drama edited by Neeru Tandon, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors(P) LTD, New-Delhi, 2006 p. 112.
8. Iyengar, K.R.S. Indian Writing in English, New Delhi: Sterling, 1985. p. 226.
9. Amur, G. S. Kailasam's. Quest for Greatness in Critical Essay on Indian Writing in English, Madras: Macmillan, 1977. p. 186.
10. Naik, M. K. A History of Indian English Literature, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1995. p. 256
11. Iyengar, K. R. S. Indian Writing in English, New Delhi: Sterling, 1985p. 243. 12. Das, Bijay Kumar. Postmodern English Literature. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2003. p.126.
13. Mokashi, Puneekar Shanker. "Drama in India" Encyclopedia of Post Colonial Literatures in English. ed, Eugene Benson and L.W.Connolly. 2Vols. London and New York: Routledge, 1994. p. 386.
14. Rao, John Mac. A note on the play in Collected Plays of Mahesh Dattani, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000. p. 119
15. Dattani, Mahesh. "Invisible Issues:" An Interview with Mahesh Dattani by Erin B. Mee, appeared in Mahesh Dattani's Plays Critical Perspectives, edited by Angelie Multani, Pen craft International, New Delhi, 2007. p. 156.