



Concept of Drama and Mahesh Dattani- A Study

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ABSTRACT

As a playwright, actor, director, and social thinker, Mahesh Dattani is well-known in the world of Indian English drama. His plays address societal concerns like as gender inequality, patriarchy, communalism, etc. in an accurate and sympathetic manner. He is recognised as the dramatist of the masses, including the wealthy, the oppressed, the underdogs, the disregarded, the urban elite, and the underprivileged. This inferior status of women in Indian society has been conveyed by him in an ideal way. In *Tara* and *Final Solutions*, Dattani depicts a patriarchal society in which the male members act as "autocratic" rulers and make all the crucial decisions for the family. He has depicted *Tara* in *Tara* as the victim of gender discrimination, which is a major and prevalent problem in India. In Indian society, the desire for males and disdain for daughters still exist.

KEYWORDS: - Gender Discrimination, Subordinate, Feminism, patriarchal society.

ENGLISH DRAMA IN INDIA FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Theatre is life. There is no art, no craft, no learning, no yoga, no action, which cannot be seen in it. Bharatmuni in *Natyashastra* The dramatic tradition of India has been very rich. Since millennia, Indian dramatic art has been looked upon as a veritable source of information, instruction and entertainment. Rules of stagecraft and all aspects of drama – stage-setting, music, plot-construction, character selection, costumes, make-up, dialogue, acting and a host of other aspects related with theatre – have been discussed in Bharatmuni's *Natyashastra*, which also has the distinction of being hailed as the "Fifth Veda". Bharatmuni is generally believed to be the first scholar to theorise drama; much before Aristotle did in the West. The writing of a play and its performance became two inter-twined and yet separate entities in the *Natyashastra*. India has the longest and richest tradition in drama. The origin of Indian drama can be traced back to the Vedic period. As a manifestation of our national sensibility Indian drama came into existence as a means of exploring and communicating the truth of things and was popularly hailed as the 'Fifth Veda'. Indian dramatists such as Kalidasa, Bhasa, Bhavbhuti and many others have given Sanskrit drama the kind of depth and intensity, which has been rarely matched in world theatre. It is believed that the Greek dramatic tradition was developed much later in the western hemisphere; and had tremendous influence on English theatre, after England was formed as a nation and English was developed as a separate language. English theatre evolved and developed after the great Renaissance of the 14th century. Sanskrit drama flowered and witnessed success as playwrights had kings and members of royal courts as their patrons till almost the 12th century A.D. But after the 12th century, it fell into days of decline as the epic centres of Sanskrit literature were conquered by invaders. It was only after the British set up their regime in India that the stagnant Indian drama received new strength and witnessed a revival. Krishna Kriplani rightly points out that the modern Indian drama "owed its first flowering to foreign grafting" But this development was viewed with suspicion by the native Indians and it was considered as an attempt to further establish and continue the rule by the British over India. Indian traditional drama therefore, with its rich tradition and heritage of over two thousand years, cast an even more reproachful eye at drama in English in India. In the words of Kaustav Chakraborty, "In a typical reactionary postcolonial situation, to write in English – the language of the colonial ruler – in independent India has often been considered to be politically incorrect." English – the language of the British rulers, who colonized India for nearly a century and a half, was generally regarded as the language of the oppressors. To write in this language therefore, was largely looked upon as the result of a slavish mind-set, which could not break free from the British hegemony and which still probably yearned to establish a type of superiority by its rampant usage. However, no one can really deny the fact that English is one of India's recognized languages, and is actually an invaluable link between diverse linguistic groups. Modern Indian English theatre has, on the one hand, with the application of various modern theories and innovative tools, extended its focus from rural to urban India, while, on the other, these plays, as a part of the 'Theatre of Roots' movement, are significant in their binding of the traditional forms of Indian theatre with the modern as well as in introducing the masses to Indian drama in English. Contemporary Indian drama, deviating from the classical and European models, is experimental and innovative in terms of thematic and technical qualities. The forms of presentation, styles and techniques have undergone a lot of changes and each dramatist worth his name has added a distinctive touch to it so that it appealed to the masses as well enlightened them. Kaustav Chakraborty writes, "It is not the offspring of any specific tradition and it has laid the foundation of a distinctive tradition in the history of world drama by reinvestigating history, legend, myth, religion and folklore in the context of contemporary socio-political issues" Among the major dramatists who have given a distinctive shape to this enormous mass of creative material are Rabindranath Tagore, Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnard, Nissim Ezekiel, Dina Mehta, Manjula Padmanabhan, Badal Sircar and Mahesh Dattani. It is interesting to look into how English theatre established its roots in India. Marking its beginning in the eastern parts of India first, English theatre originated in India as a form of much needed entertainment for the British soldiers and

officers who had to stay put in India for long years. The British colonizers built the earliest auditoriums in India; buildings meant for theatrical performances – a first of its kind innovation in the Indian subcontinent. The Play House in Calcutta was built in 1753 while The Bombay Theatre, built on the model of London's Drury Lane, was constructed in 1776. The British who had settled in India began to put up plays, English plays of course, by Shakespeare, Congreve, Sheridan and Goldsmith. Ananda Lal while offering a history of English theatre in India says, "Soon, it became common for companies and individuals from England, travelling to or from Australia and New Zealand, to present shows during halts in Calcutta or Mumbai for the expatriate community" The first play to be written in English by an Indian, was *The Persecuted*, or *Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta* (1831), written by the Rev. Krishna Mohan Banerjee (1813-85). As the title suggests, the play presented a debate on the ongoing social conflict between orthodox Hindu customs and new ideas that were being imported from the west. Though it was on record the 'first' English play to be written by an Indian, yet, understandably neither did the play make an impact, since English was not the language preferred by the native theatre goers, nor could it be well received because of its subject-matter, since it talked about uncomfortable issues.

MAHESH DATTANI IN THE REALM OF INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

Dattani has been greatly inspired by the prominent Gujarati playwright Madhu Rye; especially his very popular Gujarati play - *Kumarni Agashi* (trans. - *On the Terrace of Kumar*). A keen observer of men and manners, Dattani was captivated by the way Madhu Rye exposed the hypocrisies of the middle classes in India, particularly in the Gujarati homes (as Rye is a regional playwright). This was the beginning of Dattani's theatrical journey; he gradually began to develop an interest in playwriting. Playwrights such as Vijay Tendulkar, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams too have had a profound influence on his decision to pick up the pen and become a playwright. In an interview with Sachidananda Mohanty, he asserted: Well, I was particularly impressed by the plays of Vijay Tendulkar. Actually, that was one of the reasons why I decided to write myself, because when I saw plays in Hindi or Gujarati and I managed to acquire a translation, they just didn't have the same impact... Later on, it was Tennessee Williams. I relate to Tennessee Williams because he writes about vulnerable women in a very violent society. I think I tend to do that as well, although I don't see my women as vulnerable, in the sense that they do fight their own battles Dattani's plays have heralded a new era in the history of Indian English drama. He has the experience of acting in quite a few plays and so he has the knowledge of the intricate theatrical details which the audience have always found engaging. A sense of theatre is one of the most important ingredients that a playwright can put to good use to convey his message through his plays. With Dattani moreover, his plays convey more through the unsaid (the non-obvious) details, rather than conveying a message directly. Hence, his constant association with theatre in various capacities – actor, director, dancer, playwright – has given him a rare insight into the workings of theatrical spaces, and Dattani has been quick to grab the initiative to plunge even deeper into the portrayal of the psyche of the characters. Though there are other contemporary dramatists such as Manjula Padmanabhan and Poile Sengupta, who have been hugely successful and well received by critics, yet, Dattani's plays seem to have struck a chord among the audience and the critics alike. His plays are a commercial success and have won critical acclaim whenever and wherever they are staged.

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