

## CHAPTER-VI

### CONCLUSION

Mahesh Dattani is one of the literary personalities, who experiments with drama and evolves a new type in theme and technique; one that will be essentially Indian, bringing forth real creative talent that will base itself on both tradition and technique. He does not modify himself according to canon rather he redefines the canons to increase the expressive range of his art and ideas. His dramatic works project the real life experience with vivacity of dialogue and performance. Commenting on his own art, he admitted that theatre is a reflection of what one observes if one goes beyond that it would be sermonize and cease to be theatre. He states:

The function of drama in my opinion is not merely to reflect, malfunctions of society, but to act like 'freak mirrors' in a carnival to project grotesque image of passes for normal in world. It is ugly but funny.( Roy, 3)

Dattani instead of dealing with the social problems in a traditional way with stereotype sentimentalism, represents unconventional, radical and rational dynamics of social issues, containing the seeds of the class of the 'self' of individual against the per-determined schemes of society. Dattani deals with social issues with immense human sympathy for social problem, he often tries to seek psycho-philosophical justification to make them more subtle and authentic. He dramatizes them not as a social critic but as a partaker of those experiences. His plays in this respect reflect the idea that "True drama is created by bringing life to theatre and theatre to life". (Priestley, 14)

It is said:

His plays fuse the physical and special awareness of Indian theatre with the textual vigour of western models like Ibsen and Tennessee William. It's a potent combination, which shocks and disturbs through its accuracy and its ability to approach a subject from multiple perspectives Post-colonial Indian and multi-cultural British both have an urgent need for a cultural expression of the contemporary; they require public space in the mingling of eastern and western influences can take place. Through this fusion of forms and influences, Mahesh creates such a space. This is in it-self a political and social statement of astonishing force. (CP-I, 229)

In Independent India majority of contemporary plays are not concerned with colonialism at all but with the intersecting structure of home, family and nation in the urban society of the present or with the configurations of genders. Much of the oppositional energy in the contemporary theatre is not directed-against the colonial experience but against the oppressive structures of nation, patriarchy, caste and tradition commenting the nature of post-colonial writing, Tahar Ben Jallouin, a writer from Morocco, says:

We have two cultures, it is as if we had had two mothers or two fathers, perhaps we don't have total control, like writers in the West, but we have two possible inner worth, I think we are double clever; firstly to use the narrative techniques the West and secondly, to exploit the narrative tradition, of the folklore, the stories from our respective countries, and we have come up a third type of literature which is unlike Western writing, which is essential, provincial, ego centric and onward looking, We have created literature which is open to other cultures and situations. (Qut. In Agrawal ,328)

Gender is the hobby horse of Mahesh Dattani. Almost all the plays of Dattani deal with gender issues. His plays *Where There Is a Will*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Dance Like a Man*, *Tara*, *Thirty Days in September*, *Do the Needful*, *Seven Steps Around the Fire* and *Uma and the Fairy Queen* arrest our attention towards the problems of women in Indian society which include gender discrimination, female infanticide and foeticide, domestic violence, child sexual abuse, imbalance of power relations between men and women, the inhuman treatment to hijras and women etc. In these plays, Dattani very realistically presents the condition of women in male dominated society.

The study of three plays in this chapter justifies the hypothesis that gender stereotypes play a very important role in perpetuating gender discrimination. Women and Eunuchs are subject to discrimination in the village or city, in India or elsewhere. The victims of gender construct are justified to raise their voice against the oppressive norms of patriarchy and old age pattern of discrimination. It is commonly observed that relegation of femininity is due to the elevation of masculinity (gendered roles). Men and women must be seen as human beings not as different gender identities. Thus, the oppressive structures, which perceives man and woman as binary opposites has to be dismantled. Men cannot be exonerated for the evil perpetuated against women, as men are also in certain cases even victims of gender discrimination.

Hence, not only women but men also have to be emancipated. The women's problem in India is but enigmatic or paradoxical as the older generation of women (mother-in-law) to some extent, because of their social conditioning – are perpetrators as they tend to perpetuate evil practice i.e. dowry, female infanticide, foeticide and abuse.

Dattani uses the strategy of 'deconstruct and transform' approach. Dattani feminism is not elimination of distinction between the sexes; not even simply the achievement of equal opportunity, it is related to individual's right to find out the kind of person he/she is and strives to become that.

All the observations finally arrive at the consideration that sex in this country as a status category with power politics, which is designed to maintain an old age system, where one group of persons are controlled by another.

According to the historical view in which a diabolical patriarchy systematically holds women in a state of submission and dependency may be term as a conspiracy theory or interior colonization, where women are viewed as inferior intelligence, an instinctual and sensual gratification or an emotional nature both childlike and primitive and so on. In a country, where women are worshipped as Kali, Durga and Saraswati but this other face of tormenting is dreadful. Isn't our societal worship of women merely a stratagem to lull them into sub-mission, an extra ordinary piece of sexual politics, a game which the master group plays in elevating its subject to pedestal level.

'Masculine' and 'feminine' are not the complex natural distinctions we had assumed them to be elaborate behavioural construct for each sex with in society, obviously, cultural, and subject to cross-cultural variations. Sex is biological, gender psychological and so cultural therefore, by eliminating discrimination; we would all be the same, in a perfect world with no difference in between. This what Dattani's plays do when his characters travel into their marginalized journey of lives struggling to dismantle the tag of 'otherness' stucked to them. As dattani put it in-an Interview to Angelic Multani:

It is one thing focusing on these areas in the human condition that leaves the individual with a sense of displacement or being the other: But it's what the character does under those circumstances that make him/her interesting. Ultimately all good writing is about character revelation and journeys. The provocation that are connected with a person's marginalized identity are what spur the character into action. (Multani, 166-167).

Thus, he has turned the table in favour of women. If a woman makes a man master, she can make him aware of his weaknesses and shortcomings also. Women choosing not adhere to traditional gender roles are thrust into the 'other' suspect category, which has further alienated them from possible solidarity with their sisters. Dattani has tried to show that women should be able to live their own sexuality, taking initiative about what they wish.

One another aspect of Dattani's plays is that we have also hetro-sexual bias in term of gender-based violence, where we think men are the one perpetuating violence against women. This is also true, but we are not thinking about the men, who are also violent to other men.

Women and men of younger generations in Dattani's plays are all increasingly moving away from traditional gender roles. Ultimately, change will come with new generation of men/women who are able to see their place in democratic setup, where the rights of all women, transgender and Eunuchs (Hizras), regardless of ethnicity, class and caste will be seen as critical political change and a just society. Basic tenet of Dattani's feminism is to deconstruct power and to propose alternative paradigms for power sharing and the exploration of how women and men strategically redefine power, around the world in present times, challenging the power structures, systems, dismantling injustice, exploitation and inequality in all their forms. The structures of

colonialism and capitalism are beneficial to the structure of Patriarchy so that they should be dismantled. Dattani's characters struggle against the structure of patriarchy and other institutions that politically, socially and economically sustain sexist structures. After examining the plays, the conclusion is that 'nothing is right or wrong it is just the perspectives'.

The plays of Dattani somewhat, prove that the traditionalist consider homosexual relationship as something aberrant, disgusting and even blasphemous, the gays think otherwise. They would feel pride and happy to assert their true identities and sanctity on some favorable situations. On the whole, the both plays discussed above, tackle a theme that is bound to catch the conventional Indian audiences by surprise and may raise their eyebrows. Though Mahesh Dattani is not the first to visit this unexplored piece of land, his approach is certainly different and his honest effort to portray the complexity of relationships with utmost sensitivity without any vulgarity and cheap thrills in the form of entertainment make the plays acceptable even when dealt with taboo issue such as homosexuality. According to Mahesh Dattani, much of 'mainstream' society, lives in a state of 'forced Harmony', and a stereotype like homosexuals, simply for lack of choice, out of a sense of helplessness, or out of a lack of alternatives and therefore they suffered and marginalized.

Dattani's play *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* to arouse four points: a belief in the basic underlying similarity of homosexual and heterosexual people; a rejection of the concept of homosexuality as a central organizing principle of the personality; an assertion that homosexuality is as natural, normal and healthy as heterosexuality; and Denial of the notion that lesbianism or male homosexuality poses any threat to the nuclear family and society as we know it. Everyone has the

right to live life as they see fit and make their own choices. There should be no discrimination based on sexual preferences

Dattani slips the rug out from under or from within the 'thing', resting its identity claim as contingent upon volition, on the one hand and material circumstances, on the other. His aim is to retain the project of identifying in order to challenge directly the social-symbolic institution of heterosexuality. These plays of Dattani remind us those of the lesbian and gay theatre movements emerge out of a history of a political struggle. Enabled by the post-Stonewall liberation politics of identity that galvanized lesbians and gay men to come out and demonstrate to the world that "we are everywhere", lesbians and gay men established community-based theatres where lesbian and gay playwrights, actors, technicians, and others involved in the production of performance could both develop and refine their work without fear of reproach. Moreover, lesbians and gay men interested in theatre that spoke explicitly about lesbian and gay issues now had a theatre within the public sphere where sub-cultural codes, vernaculars, and customs could be articulated and shared, negotiated and contested. Though the theatre of Dattani is not only for homosexuals but of, by and for heterosexuals too for presenting them that they have same emotional lives and conflicts as they have and so there is no difference between them at all. The audiences enter into the space of performance, because we know that magic and transformation sometimes happen here and our curiosity gets the better of us. Dattani makes audience remember that performance puts into motion any number of emotions that circulate within the space of performance and that, occasionally, this dynamic transference of energy invigorates our lives, persuades us to return again and again to the theatre. And it is the result of the efforts of people like Dattani that the Government is now

becoming aware towards these social issues and the change in the sec.377 of the law in 2009 is the proof of this which legalizes the relationships of the homosexuals.

No matter how different Dattani's people are from the standard definition of normal but they never appear strange or distanced from reality. This is a play about creating spaces within restricted areas of self-expression. To that extent, *On a Muggy Night* needs to be looked at as a radical step forward for Indian theatre. As Dattani says in an interview: "It's not that I have done something new, but I've done something unpredictable, and I have shattered a lot of images." (Mee, 157)

As Mahesh Dattani, through his plays focuses on many contemporary social issues, he has recurrently used subjects that touch upon the zones of experience that the 'normal' middle class society would rather sweep under the carpet and happily imagine did not exist. The preoccupation with 'fringe' issues forms an important element in Dattani's work-issues that remain latent, suppressed and rather 'invisible', or are pushed to the periphery, come to occupy centre stage-to create at least an acknowledgement of their existence. This is exactly how Dattani would penetrate below the surface, subvert the complacent beliefs that everyday reality is constructed with, and makes visible the invisible issues that haunt so many of his plays. It also points towards the postcolonial design and concept that a responsible for dichotomy evident in its continuous erosion of moral and spiritual values and discipline

The positive and hopeful point is that such his plays have done exceedingly well in urban India, which implies an audience that is rapidly coming to terms with its own multiple, many hued self. The message is loud and clear: gay is beautiful and if you're drawn to same-sex love, come out for your own sake and to avoid hurting others. Judith Butler too has stressed upon the necessity of conceiving lives that are lived beyond (hetero-normative) symbolic order (or social law), she argues that such

‘unorthodox’ lives should not just be seen as the shadowy outer margins that represent the foreclosure of hetero-normative kin and cultural boundaries, but as lives lived within the norm. Male-to-male sexuality in India can be understood in these terms, as a sexual possibility intrinsically bound up with hetero-normative contexts, rather than as necessarily separated out as an individual and social sense of self, identity or sexuality.

Mahesh Dattani ridicules the existing social customs like arranged marriages, which are in favour of the custodians of heteronormative society rather than the individuals. Dattani seems to suggest that arranged marriages are not for the happiness of the bride and the groom but to maintain the social status and dignity of the parents. Alpesh in *Do the Needful* and Subbu in *Seven Steps Around the Fire* are coerced to marry against their wills by their parents. These plays warn the heteronormative patriarchal society that if the individuals are forced into arranged marriages having no choice to them to decide with whom to marry, the individuals can hoodwink their parents as Lata and Alpesh do or they can commit suicide as Subbu does. Dattani’s plays dealing with the theme of homosexuality appeal the heterosexual patriarchal society to treat homosexual as human beings giving them enough social, political, and economic space.

*Thirty Days in September* focuses on the issue of child sexual abuse. It is family play based on incestuous relationship in which Dattani shows how women feel humiliated and get exploited by male members of the family. Both women characters the mothers Shanta and the daughter Mala were physically exploited by the same men in their childhood who happens to be Shanta’s brother and Mala’s uncle Dattani categorically points out that the negligence in familial relationship is responsible for the growing discontent in children. It expects the parents to be watchful to protect

their children from child sexual abuse. It has been observed that in most of the cases the abuser is a close relative of the abused. As a result, the matter is hushed up and the abuser goes unpunished. This deliberate silence on child sexual abuse encourages the abuser to commit such kind of acts. Had Vinay been exposed and punished in time for sexually abusing Shanta, Mala might not have been the victim of his sexual lust. To protect girl children from child sexual abuse, Dattani demands severe punishment for the abuser irrespective of his relationship with the abused and expects parents to be attentive like Deepak in giving the proper counselling the abused to recover from the psychosomatic trauma of child sexual abuse.

The play *Final Solutions* encourages both communities to open a dialogue in order to rectify the current situation of communalism. It is not limited to questions that face India but a dilemma that the entire world is currently encountering. It is a confrontation between Arabs and Jews, whites and blacks, Hindus and Muslim, traditional and modern, and above all, between the innocent general people and crafty politicians. Dattani brilliantly handles the difficult contour of the play with a subtle dramatic mechanism of using the family to mirror the community as also using the community to reveal the hidden ugliness within the family unit. Are there any final solutions to the problem of communal riots, disputes and acts of hatred? Can we come out of this vicious circle? Alyque Padamsee asks:

Is life a forward journey or do we travel around in a circle, returning to our starting point? Can we shake off our prejudices or are they in our psyche like our genes? Will we ever be free or ever-locked in combat... Are there any final solutions? (CP-I, 161)

But, Like all other plays, Dattani offers no resolution and the end is inconclusive; it leaves the viewers delving deep in search for an answer to the

problem posed and find a 'final solution' itself. If the anger can be expunged from our range of emotions, only then we can live peacefully. But this is not possible at all. A Hindu has always inherited a preconceived notion of what a Muslim is like. The open-ended finale leaves us musing as to what solution there can be to the mutual hatred and intolerance that prevails between the Hindu and Muslim in India. Blame game is in full swing. As it is to be expected, political parties blame each other, residents blame the government and the police. Violence comes as an out pouring of anger and frustration. First of all, who is a citizen, who is an "outsider"? Everyone that lives in this land, no matter how far the generations that have lived here go back, came from somewhere. The earlier generations shaped the character of this city as it sees it. A city is a living, changing, amorphous creature that cannot be frozen in time and that image taken to be its true representation. "Whose city is it, anyway?" Well, it is the city of every single person living here, whether those who landed here yesterday at the airport, bus station or train station and are setting up homes as we speak, or those whose families have been living here for generations.

There is no reason to believe that the newcomers do not have an equal interest in having a rounded, complete, fulfilling life in the city they have chosen to make their home. Newcomers also definitely look for signs of welcome. If given half a chance, many of them would do just that, just right in, they too would like to live a life of grace and charm, I improved. They too want the crime rate down. They too want fewer accidents, better schools, better transportation, fewer power cuts and water shortages, packs for their children, safe roads, and justice and liberty for all.

Instead of looking outward for the sources of our problems, we would do well to look inward, at our own feeling toward this city we have called home for generations. What are our strengths and capabilities? What are our weaknesses? Let

us assess those and act accordingly. Let us not blame our weaknesses on “outsiders.” Let us not act in haste and look for scapegoats. Let us be a city worthy of our heritage, if we so care about it. While we spend our energies fighting the demons of humanity – discrimination, injustice, intolerance, human rights abuses – we forget that the demons are not just out ‘there’ they may inhabit within. Likewise, our advocacy platform is shrouded in abstract terms so fickle that it can be a weapon of attack in one instance and equally come under attack in another.

Labeling any oppositional discourse as homogenous overlooks the fact that it may have within it diversity and the lack of any unitary religious framework. The leaders of many Islamic regimes get co-opted into the western view fundamentalist category and therefore, posing a threat. Thus it becomes imperative to have knowledge of another culture so that the understanding of our own culture and political thoughts gains in a deeper awareness of human relationship. Though we are faced with a very uncertain future, we must try to re-examine the concept of secularism and try to view the politics of difference with the clarity and broad-mindedness that the issue of fundamentalism demands. There is a liberal communitarian model, which might be an answer to the debate. It is important to address the question of the way we should conceive of human reasoning once we accept that there is no universally comprehensive and privileged stance or point of view. We have to conceptualize on the Nietzschean idea of liberation of thinking for multiplicity through the demolition of platonic hierarchies by keeping in view the constant ‘dream’ of harmonization, which underpins all shifts and the adventures of the dialectic.

The present economic and political tensions call for a new agenda for social reconstruction within which socialism does not need to be replaced but must put

forward a programme to salvage a world from inequality, exploitation, hunger and the abuse of power. Such a move might lead the world away from disorientation and a delusional course. A dialogue between left-wing politics and the anti-essentialist theoretical basis would help to throw light on the nature of the social and political struggle, characteristics of the major crisis in contemporary world politics and capitalism. Past politics need to be reviewed in order to revitalize the institutions of democracy around the world.

While the politics of exclusion is rife in our lives, and it may indeed compel one to claim an affiliation, Dattani chooses neither to remain on the fringes nor to be fully absorbed. Rather, he wants to chart out his own destiny, creates still undergoing an experience that is deeply personal. To do this, he has to defy stereotypes. Defiance, though painful, remains for him an empowering option mainly because when defying, he not only goes against the dominant, but also challenges himself to reason, and to accept the consequences of thought and action. Nevertheless, one must defy on principle and not just for the sake of being exceptional. Social justice advocacy, therefore, should give expression and recognition to personal marks of resistance in challenging deep-seated prejudices that permeate human reason and action. Otherwise, it loses significance and passion. Certainly, the challenge in advocacy rests with the personal. Core values we espouse can no longer concern just ‘those people’ out there but must concern ‘us’ right there. Nor can they be externalized or dealt with in a technical, mechanical or surgical fashion. Dattani has to search his soul not only to make peace with his conscience but also to accept the consequences of his conviction. The dramatic canvas of Dattani is not a static and mechanical survey of human experience corresponding with the clash of the motives at the level of the

familial relationship or at the level of individual's own aspiration in context of social order.

It is not difficult to conclude that the Ghost of Partition stalks South Asia, haunting the minds and souls of many of its people. It bequeathed a negative, aggressive and violent mode of thinking, behaving and realizing a political objective. It is possible that in the end both sides may be fatigued by the high cost of such an undertaking, or one of them gives up such a path realizing that it cannot win the competition. A clear and strong message from the Security Council of the United Nations and major states outside it to India and Pakistan to abandon the path of conflict may also help. Perhaps a process of forgiveness for the crimes committed during Partition initiated by intellectuals from both sides can miraculously lead to reconciliation and mutual acceptance. Whatever it is, Dattani's intention is clearly to bridge the gap between people, and set straight some of the events of history, which have been distorted by time so that they are no more partitions of hearts or of countries. Indian ethics can be also followed that teaches to respect all modes of religious creeds with an uncompromising spirit of tolerance.

In conclusion, it can be observed that it is the need of the time for society to look beyond the stereotypical identities framed based on sex, gender and religion to value the worth of individual identities to mark an end the forms of discrimination that has been portrayed in the plays of Mahesh Dattani. In the march towards an equitable society, it is irrelevant to attach importance to sex, gender and religion. Thus, the plays of Dattani are rooted in democratic ethos and humanity as they develop an altogether unique way of response towards the marginalised sections of society