

Post-Modern Feminist Ideology in Mahesh Dattani's *Where There's a Will and Final Solutions*

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Abstract

A true art is not meant for teaching and preaching. Its primary function is to give delight; its purpose is chiefly aesthetic. Only a writer, who maintains a perfect blending of both feeling and form, can push upward the art at its zenith. Mahesh Dattani exposes the illusion of perfect and complete control over the family for a longer period. Here the question arises in our mind why a man aspires too much for authority and power. Does it signify any value of life? Apparently it doesn't attach any meaning to human existence. Nor does, it helps in improving quality of human life. Dattani is convinced that it is an attempt to make one-self secure and survive. So, man's drive for the domination arises out of his own apprehension of insecurity. The dramatist mainly reflects on the issues of gender discrimination and evil of patriarch along with host of other issues like father-son, husband-wife relationship, evil of capitalism in the post colonial purview.

Key words: Post-modernism; Feminist ideology; Women protagonist; Psychology

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INTRODUCTION

The word "drama" originates from the Greek word "dra" which means "do", the "doing" or "action". Adrama has

a plot, characters, dialogue and situation. According to Basil, Drama "is a composite art, in which the author, the actor, and the stage manager all combine to produce the total effect". History of Indian drama is mysterious and vast. It has an ethnic dramatic tradition. Drama originated from classical myths, culture and religious events. Ancient dramas were enacted in holy places like temples. Earlier Indian drama has three main branches: Folk Drama, Sanskrit drama, and Dance darma. Both the great epics: *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are the best example for the ancient Indian drama tradition. During the which period there were two types of plays. They are *nataka* the plays of historical or mythological themes and the *prakarna*, the plays with created stories and less elevated characters. Like other literary forms in Indian writing in English, drama too was apted by many great personalities like Tagore and Sri Aurobindo.

But in India, drama in English has never reached the high status as prose, fiction or poetry. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar attributes the failure to the fact that English is not a natural medium for conversation in India even among the sophisticated. It is curious however, that more attempts have not been made to use such promising Indian elements as dance and popular folk-theatre conventions.

DISCUSSION

Tagore made adaptations of his own Bengali plays into English poetic prose. They manage to convey the ideas of the original but lose most of their power by loss of the original Bengali poetry especially in the songs. Sri Aurobindo wrote plays directly in English and boldly set out to imitate the blank verse drama of the Elizabethans. Blank verse is notoriously difficult to use well. His plays with the exception of *Perseus the Deliverer* have little dramatic quality. The revival of poetic drama in England in the nineteen-thirties and forties like T. S. Eliot, Auden and Isherwood, and Christopher Fry attracted new Indian

writers to the genre. Eliot, himself praised G. V. Desani's play, *Hali* (1950) but as poetry rather than drama. Equally unactable was Bharati Sarabhai's *The Well of the People* (1943) which also employed a poetic medium. Sarabhai attempts to give symbolic and mythic expression to Indian national aspirations.

Among the 21st century playwrights Mahesh Dattani has a remarkable place. Actor, director, playwright, dancer and screenplay writer Mahesh Dattani was born in Bangalore on August 7, 1958. Educated at Baldwin's highschool and St. Joseph's college of Art and Science, Dattani is a graduate in History, economics and political science with post-graduation in Marketing and Advertising Management.

He has worked as a copywriter in an advertising firm and subsequently with his father in business. His theatre group, Playpen, was formed in 1984, and he has directed several plays for them, ranging from classical Greek to contemporary works. In 1986, he wrote his first full-length play, *Where There's A Will*, and from 1995 he has been working full-time in theatre. In 1998, he set up his own theatre studio dedicated to training and showcasing new talents in acting, directing and stage writing—the first in the country to focus on new works specifically. In 1998, Dattani won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award for his book of plays thus, becoming the first English language playwright to win the award.

Hailed as one of the “most serious contemporary playwrights by Alyque Padamsee, Mahesh Dattani is a director, actor, dancer, teacher and writer—all rolled into one. Dattani is also an accomplished screenplay writer and film director whose efforts in *Mango soufflé* and *Morning Raga* have been highly appreciated. He sent his second movie *Morning Raga* to the Oscars in 2005 even though it wasn't India's official entry.

Mahesh Dattani is India's *avante garde* playwright. He is also an accomplished dancer, having trained in western ballet under Moly Andre at Alliance Francaise de Bangalore during 1984-87. He also trained in Bharatnatyam during 1986-90 and made his solodance debut in 1989 at Bangalore. Subsequently, Dattani has performed in temples and festivals as well as informal spaces. His *Dance Like a Man* has won popularity and it was directed by Lillette Dubey. The film version of play was directed by Pamela Rooks, and it won the best feature film award in English at the national film festival.

Dattani teaches theatre courses at the summer sessions programme of Portland University, Oregon (USA) and conducts workshops regularly at his studios and elsewhere. He also writes radio plays for BBC radio 4. Although throughout his academic career neither was Dattani a student of literature nor did he show any signs of literary creativity. His dedication and passion for the theatre has won him scholarships and awards, besides to write plays on social issues for them.

Mahesh Dattani gender issues, spokesman for all the marginalised people. “All of us,” he says, “want to be part of society, of the mainstream but we must acknowledge that its a forced harmony.” He is interested in gender issues. In his play *Tara* the idea of “forced harmony” is a recurring theme: those who survive are those who won't “defy the gravity of others”. It's all about conforming. You can't survive unless you fit into a social stereotype like homosexuals for instance. So, it's all about keeping the rebel in oneself alive and at the same time move in that forced harmony. That's where the struggle lies.

In *Where There's a Will*, the ghost of an autocratic old man who has willed his property to his mistress overhears the unpleasant truth about what his nearest and dearest really think of him. *Dance Like a Man* harks back to a time when dancing was considered a harlot's pursuit and reveals the duplicity of society's moral standards. In *Tara*, a mother is forced to choose her son's welfare over her daughter's and this wreaks havoc in the lives of the whole family. *Bravely Fought the Queen* is a bleak play depicting the stunted lives of the members of a joint family and the troubled relationship that dishonesty breeds.

Final solutions, a play about Hindu-Muslim conflict were slated for theodicean Herald theatre festival in Bangalore in December 1992. A week before it was scheduled to be staged, the Babri Masjid was demolished. The festival organisers fearing calamitous repercussions rejected the play. It was finally staged the following year in Bombay (now Mumbai) and Bangalore. *Night queen* was written for the 1996 annual literary supplement of the Telegraph in Calcutta (now Kolkata). *Do The Needful* was arrived on BBC 4 and staged in Bangalore. Prejudice, guilt, dishonesty, compromise—are Dattani's major themes.

Where there's a will discuss the negative effects of parents love for their children. It is nicely summed up in the statement of one of main character, “will the scars our parents lay on us remain forever?” There are three characters in the play, who are the victims of negative influence of love in their own way. Hasmukh Mehta has to live his entire life under the strict observance of his father, great task-masters eye. He expects his son Ajit to do the same. Mehta's wife, Sonal, realizes very late that she also was under the shadow of her elder sister, Minal. She is much pained to say, Even my husband's funeral, she sat beside me and told me when the cry. She becomes vocal to save herself before it is too late and asks her sister, “go jump into a bottomless pit”.

Final Solutions is Dattani's only political play. It discusses what happens when distrust and hatred guide members of different communities living in society. It describes how innocent people become victims of communal frenzy and postulates that “if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed”. Familial relationship has also been dealt with in this play. Hardika's hatred of her in-laws as they persecuted her and

Smita's love for Babban, a hopeless passion, are some of the problems discussed in the play.

The other woman who represents a new woman is Preeti, Hasmukh's daughter-in-law. She has been described as pretty, charming, graceful and sly as a snake. She knows that her father-in-law is suffering from blood pressure, high cholesterol and an enlarged heart. She takes the advantage of the situation she substitutes her vitamin pills in the bottle of her father-in-law's blood pressure tablets to hasten his death. Though her act is discovered by Kiran, yet her husband and family members remain unknown to her trick. Later she feels frustrated at not having inherited Hasmukh's money so she abuses her husband and subsequently bursts into tears. When Ajit tries to console her by giving tranquilizers and come to his father's tablets, she cleverly sends her husband away from the room before he can ingest the tablets and throws away together with the bottle out of the window. This shows her shrewdness and plotting. She shows the picture of the women who can do anything to fulfill her desires. Now-a-days portrayal of women like Preeti is very common in daily soaps of various TV channels.

This project aims at showcasing the patriarchal Indian family system as presented in Mahesh Dattani's first play *Where There's a Will* and it also aims at analysing the dramatist's attempt of creating a powerful bonding of sisterhood as a counter action for the already existing dominant patriarchal world. This project is divided into four chapters. Chapter I deals with the origin and growth of Indian drama and Indian English drama. Chapter II highlights the patriarchal code as issues in play of *Where There's a Will*. Chapter III showcases sisterhood as a solution. Chapter IV that serves as conclusion concludes the major arguments of the project.

Mahesh Dattani's play *Where There's a Will* is a combination of patriarchal codes and sisterhood bonding. Dattani exposes the illusion of perfect and complete control over the family for a longer period. Here the question arises in our mind why a man aspires too much for authority and power. Does it signify any value of life? Apparently it doesn't attach any meaning to human existence. Nor does it help in improving the quality of human life. Dattani is convinced that it is an attempt to make one self secure and survive. So, man's drive for domination arises out of his own apprehension of insecurity. The dramatist mainly reflects on the issues of

gender discrimination and evil of patriarchy along with host of other issues like father-son, husband-wife relationship, evil of capitalism in the post colonial purview.

CONCLUSION

The words that throw Hasmukh uses ample lights on the fact that Hasmukh's notion of faithful wife is as good as faithful dog that acts as per provided training without using her own discretion. Sonal's ignorance and innocence makes her, devoted and descent wife, but her husband. His autocratic attitude makes him a rude creature. At the end, Sonal and Kiran join hands to eradicate the evil of sexual colonialism of Hasmukh. They are endowed with the ability to assess and subsequently shaking off the unjust shackle of patriarchy. In this play as fact, all trouble comes out of Hasmukh's false notions of joy and happiness of life. He considers domination as the only and final system which can bring joy and happiness in the family. Ironically, he fails to understand that domination kills joy of human heart and soul. Domination flourishes killing others' self and identity. It is, in fact, biggest hurdle in building up the premise of happiness. This brings out a philosophical twist and a happy end to the play explores the deteriorated inter-personal relationship among members of the same family. The play shows cases a particular race of human being who runs after money.

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