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# Research Innovator

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Editor-In-Chief  
Prof. K.N. Shelke

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A detailed still-life composition featuring a quill pen as the central element. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is secured with a red wax seal and a red ribbon. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder casts a warm glow. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside sits on a wooden surface, alongside a red wax seal and a small wooden object. The overall scene evokes a sense of traditional scholarship and research.

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**Volume II Issue V: October – 2015**

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**Mahesh Dattani's Plays: Reflections on Global Issues****Dr. Bipinkumar R. Parmar***Associate Professor, Department of English, Shri M. N. Kampani Arts & Shri A. K. Shah Commerce College,  
Mangrol (Shardagram), Dist. Junagadh (Gujarat) India***Abstract**

Mahesh Dattani is one of the few potent dramatic voices in the realm of Indian English Drama. He depicts the issues which can be called "Post-Colonial" issues. His daring dramatic credo also depicts the taboo issues like homosexuality, child sexual abuse and the like. However, it has been the distinction of his dramatic art to articulate the voices of those whose voices are shrouded under false myths, legends, beliefs, tradition etc. It seems that his theatrical art has been swayed by the globalization. Post-colonialism is directly or indirectly associated with globalization. The process of globalization, aided by the computer and other technologies, was basically meant for expanding horizons of business and economic affairs and activities. In the process of this, it has also impressed and altered almost all walks of life. The impact of globalization on literature is far and wide.

The present paper intends to focus on the depiction of global problems and issues in the dramatic world of Mahesh Dattani, a major contemporary dramatic genius. It will also incorporate critical analysis of his theatrical art and craft. It will reflect on various thematic threads and devices as exploited in the plays of Mahesh Dattani.

**Key Words:** Reflections, Global Issues, Indian English Drama, Post-colonialism

Indian English Drama, after staggering for a long, has been growing considerably as a literary genre like Indian English Poetry and Fiction. Endowed with audio visual virtues, the drama is a very unique form of literature. The success of drama involves both writing and staging the play. Earlier, most Indian English plays failed to create powerful impact on the stage. It can be said that most of them were conscious literary activities. They were not written with an eye on stage-performance. More so, most of these plays were translated work. Actually, drama is a composite art which requires live involvement of both – performers and

viewers. M. K. Naik explains this in the following terms:

Drama is a composite art in which the written word of the playwright attains complete artistic realization only when it becomes the spoken word of the actor on the stage and through that medium reacts on the mind of that audience. A play, in order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, thus needs a real theatre and a live audience.<sup>1</sup>

Mahesh Dattani, the voice of India as called by McRae, is considered as a spokesperson of the marginalized sections of our society

such as women, children, eunuch, minority etc. His dramatic art manifest the cause of these marginalized sections of our society. He has expanded new horizons in Indian English Drama by visiting untraversed areas. Needless to say that Mahesh Dattani has improved considerably sad state of Indian English Drama through his innovative theatrical art and newer thematic devices. Apart from being a great dramatic voice of India, Mahesh Dattani is also a celebrated actor, director and dancer. He has established his own studio named Playpen, which provides an immense momentum to his dramatic career and other artists too. It has been observed:

Dattani's dramatic art is inspired by the mission to communicate profound meaning through his plays and, therefore, he exhibits keen awareness for the direction and stage performance of his own plays. He sensitive dramatic self is a fine synthesis of a dancer, director, actor, playwright, audience and commentator moving collectively towards a single direction.<sup>2</sup>

As a playwright, Dattani is a prolific writer. His dramatic corpus is wide and varied. In the different dramatic modes like stage plays, radio plays and screen plays, he has authored two dozen plays varying in themes and techniques. His plays are, by and large, rooted in urban surroundings. His theatre captures the scenes especially from contemporary urban Indian society. He depicts the problems of contemporary urban surrounding like patriarchal social system, gay and lesbian issues, problem of marriage and career, racial problem, gender

discrimination, clash between tradition and modernity, the plights of eunuchs and HIV positives etc. It is rightly attributed:

.... The setting for all of Dattani's plays then is necessarily embedded within the mechanism of the middle class Indian family, and this is the context from which he operates.<sup>3</sup>

His plays reflect on the problems and issues faced by the middle class family. Therefore, his plays are short tales/stories of various families. Technically speaking, he has incorporated them in the fabric/ texture of his plays. Family is the most important dramatic space in the Dattani's plays. It seems that Dattani considers family is the main unit of the society. His theatrical art makes distinctive efforts for addressing the issues that besets entire humanity across the world. What lends greater height and depth to his dramatic credo is his attempt to manifest the predicament of the human destiny gripped by evil clutch of myths and legends as well as socio cultural practices. It is observed:

He prepared the stage for a specific realism on the lines of Ibsen and Shaw. For him, man is an integral part of society and consciously or unconsciously the creeping influence of societal set up, determine the fabric of relationship around him.<sup>4</sup>

Mahesh Dattani always comes up with a play having newer issues. He, generally, deals with the post- colonial problems. The problems of the identity crisis, child labour, gender discrimination, racial prejudices and conflict, clash between two generations, the plights of HIV positive etc. are post-colonial

issues. Within theatrical framework and dramatic narrative, Dattani seems to be missioned at sensitizing the peoples about these besetting issues. His play *Dance Like a Man*, a stage play of two act, depicts conflict between the tradition and modernity. It also depicts the problem of marriage and career. Lata, daughter of Jairaj Parekh and Ratna, is promising dancer. Her parents are also *Bharatnatyam* dancers. She finds herself in love with Vishwas, only son of a sweet seller. The play serves as bitter criticism of patriarchal familial social set up. It has aptly been observed”

The theme of clash between tradition and modernity has already been assessed by number of authors, but Dattani has provided a variety and vividness to this theme. *Dance Like a Man* has been hailed as wonderful and engrossing play. The play displays its deep concern for family harmony and approach for a social reformation, which makes it unique piece of art.<sup>5</sup>

His another play *Tara* is a very touching tale of Siamese twins namely Tara and Chandan conjoining from chest and were having three legs. The apparent theme of the play is favouring the boy child and frowning upon the girl child. The play provides the study of dynamics of human relationship and evil working of socio-cultural practices. Tara and Chandan were separated after three months of their birth. The medical report stated that the third leg would be more comfortable with the girl-child. There appeared more chances of survival of third leg with Tara. However, discarding medical report, the third leg was given to Chandan. Her mother and her maternal grand-father, a very

politically powerful person, got doctor change the medical report by bribing him some acres of land. This injustice is caused to her by three-patriarchal social system, political power and capitalism. Theatrical art of Dattani depicts this injustice in a very successful way. It has been analyzed:

Tara centres on the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins following the discovery that their physical separation was manipulated by their mother and grand- father to favour the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara). Tara, a feisty girl, who isn't given the opportunities to her brother (although she may be smarter) eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan, and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister's death by living without a personal history.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the development in the fields of science, technology and industry coupled with the process of globalization, there is no significant improvement in the position of women in our society. The existence and identity of women is always in danger be it America, India or any other country.

Mahesh Dattani has been conferred with Sahitya Akademi Award for his significant work *Final Solutions and Other Plays*. What makes him internationally appreciated author is his ability to negotiate global issues effectively within the range of his theatrical art. *Final Solutions* is his best known stage play. Within the texture of this play, he depicts the communal tension between the Hindus and the Muslims. The play is set against the backdrop of freedom



and partition of the country into India and Pakistan on the basis of religions. There broke out communal riots across the country following the partition of the country. The joy of freedom and the grief of communal riots have been dexterously juxtaposed in the play. The dramatist has invested the newer techniques and stage craft in the play to negotiate the theme of communal discord. He has also made effective use of old device of chorus. He has shown two choruses-the Hindus and the Muslim each one of them constituted with five members of one community. The communal feelings and inner thoughts of both the communities have been laid bare by the choruses of the respective communities. The racial hatred and discrimination is global phenomenon. The dramatist attempts to seek the final solution of this devilish issue through this play. He also throws light on the fact that such riots are always engineered by some people having private interest. Such people have nothing to do with the religions and the feelings of the people. The theatrical art of Dattani pleads for cause of entire humanity. Through this play, he maintains that human pride and greed are the root causes of communal conflict in Indian society. Being a dedicated dramatist and devout humanist, he thinks only in terms of the welfare and betterment of entire humanity.

The problems and constraints of homosexual is another global issue. In his plays like *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Do the needful*, *Mango soufflé* and *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Dattani, with uncompromising spirit and daring theatrical experiments, depicts the theme of homosexuality in a very convincing manner. Homosexuality is to be

considered as a taboo issue in Indian society. Homosexuality is considered as something unwanted and unnatural whereas heterosexuality is a desirable and lawful. All the, aforesaid, plays present perpetual pains and sufferings of homosexuals. Daring theatrical credo of Dattani takes lead to depict them in his plays. It has been rightly observed:

To break the taboos, to expose the misery of sexually marginalized sections and to reflect man's consistent struggle with his inner self, confronting with socio-ethical restrictions constitute a specific strain in his dramatic art.<sup>7</sup>

The gravest of the grave global issue that Mahesh Dattani deals with is the problem and suffering of HIV positives in our societies. The HIV/AIDS problem prevails around the world. The entire world has been combating with this virus for more than three decades. The most painful and unbearable thing for the AIDS affected is the stigma. The stigma can be seen in the forms of discriminations, exclusion, revulsion, evasion, etc.

In his screen play *Ek Alag Mausam*, Dattani presents the emotional and existential crisis in the lives of HIV positives, Aparna and George. It is considered as the love story of AIDS infected people. However, it is far beyond it. Along with the misfortune and misery of HIV positives, theatrical art of Dattani endeavours to respond the call of humanity discarding socio-medical myths and belief. It seems that the play is a protest against the forces that prevent a man from making an innate response to call of humanity. Dattani seems to assert that social

stigma and apathy cannot subdue the urge and love for life. Aparna and George, marginalized as being HIV positive, are the two heroic persons of this play. Despite knowing AIDS as preface to death, they feel for human warmth and relationship. They are quiet aware of the fact that such relationships among the HIV positives is legally prohibited. The play shows that human sensibility takes it on course beyond the socio-legal prohibited spaces. Avoiding shadows of doom and death, they feel for each other's love and company. There seems triumph of love for life over death. Joy of love overpowers tears and troubles caused by social apathy and stigma. Within the theatrical range of his art, Dattani dexterously creates awareness against AIDS epidemic showing the pains and suffering of HIV positives. The way Dattani handles the entire issue gives rare touch of universality.

It seems that Dattani wants to say that virus infection is a physical problem. It cannot be deemed as moral aberration. It is quiet insanity to deprive such people from their needs and urges. The medical science has failed to find out the suitable remedies of this disease. It does not mean that society has right to leave them die in shame and isolation. The play ignites light of love that disperses the darken shadows of despair and doom. The aim of the play is to make us understand and appreciate the issue in true way. Generally, people suspects HIV positives being involved in unlicensed sex. Even Aparna also thinks that George's being HIV positive is the result of his past illicit relationship. The dramatist breaks her illusion by unveiling truth that he has been

infected while giving blood to Joseph, son of Dr. Machado. It is really painful to watch the rejection of George even by his own parents. His parents are worried more about social stigma than the pain and suffering of their son, George. There appears a speech by Dr. Machado at the end of the play. It can be deemed as epilogue of the play.

On World AIDS Day. Let us remember the lives of those who died of the virus and respect the dignity of those who are living with HIV. Today's enemy is not other human being from another country or people of another religion or race. The real enemy today is a tiny invisible creature-a virus. The AIDS virus knows no barriers of caste, creed, religion, age, gender, and race. It is not prejudice fear or ignorance that will win the battle against AIDS. But understanding, precaution and above all love.<sup>8</sup>

With his theatrical vision and artistic perception, Dattani succeeds in negotiating the various global issues so successfully beyond the cultural context and geographical territories. With his innovative art and thematic novelty, he has heralded a new era in the field of English Drama. Within the canvas of his theatrical art, he reflects upon some serious issues of contemporary society. His theatrical canvas is coloured with socio psychological realism. It can be said that he has adjusted and augmented his theatre on the lines of Ibsen and Shaw highlighting particular realism. His dramatic approach is quite unconventional and radical.

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