Abstract

STAGING THE SUBALTERN: THE POLITICS OF POSTCOLONIAL SUBALTERNEITY IN THE PLAYS OF UTPAL DUTT, GIRISH KARNAD AND MAHESH DATTANI

Various formerly colonized countries, after achieving political independence, continue to suffer from processes of subalternization that are in many ways a legacy of colonialism. Such postcolonial subalternization produces myriad processes of subjugation that are born from the intersection of a number of different determinants like class, caste, gender, religion, sexuality etc. Theatre, across the world, has repeatedly sought to foreground such subalternization on stage through plays that not only critique subalternizing processes but also explore numerous facets of subaltern consciousness. The aim of this thesis has been to analyse how the same tradition is also continued within the domain of Indian theatre by the different plays of Utpal Dutt, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani. Utpal Dutt’s plays generally focus on different historical episodes and foreground subaltern agency in various national and international historical episodes. Such historicized subaltermans also create on stage allegorical enactments through which the contemporary concerns are addressed and at the same time they also serve to foreground inspirational ideals towards which others may progress. While the predominant concern of Dutt is class, Karnad remains more concerned about caste and gender. He not only explores these through occasional forays into history, but unlike Dutt moves to an entirely different world of legends and folktales which serve to unleash carnivalesque critiques as well as alternate horizons. Dattani however moves away from both of their paradigms and instead uses his realistic plays, set in urban middle-class India, to explore a number of unchartered territories to expose those menacing subalternizing forces that lurk beneath sophisticated veneers. While he does follow established tradition in dealing with issues of communal subalternization or the subalternization of women, he also breaks new ground with his treatments of homosexuality, sexual abuse of children etc. In the process all three playwrights, in their own ways, serve to emphasise the prevalent subalternizing process as well as the manifestations of subaltern consciousness associated with them. They not only offer an illuminating critique of the nation and its discontents but also strive to create a resistant consciousness which may successfully challenge the prevalent hierarchies.