Appendix

An Interview with Mahesh Dattani by the Researcher

The Researcher had, via email, the following interview with Mahesh Dattani on 17th January, 2011.

Researcher: What encouraged you towards play writing business?

Dattani: The business of play writing happened quite by accident. It was only when I started receiving enquiries from professional companies in Mumbai and abroad that I took it up as a possible business.

Researcher: Your plays voice concerns for the downtrodden and the subalterns like hijras, HIV positives, gays, etc. Have you stayed among them for a period of time? Have you ever been admitted by them for voicing their feelings?

Dattani: It is very difficult to win trust from any closed society. I did succeed in some instances and at others I failed.

Researcher: To what extent do you think drama an appropriate vehicle to articulate and spread social concerns and their solutions?

Dattani: I think it can help to a great extent in focusing attention on social conflicts. Remedies and reforms are really best left to society to work out.

Researcher: Do you believe that dance is associated with the theatrical art?

Dattani: Yes, absolutely. Dance, drama and music are integrated in our traditional performing arts. The word Natya is used for both drama and dance.

Researcher: How did you feel when you wrote your first play Where There’s a Will?
Dattani: Very good. I had a sense of accomplishment.

Researcher: Most of your plays have family as a locale. Will you please explain a little why do you keep it at centre?

Dattani: It is a reflection of the Indian way of life. The family and family values are hugely important in Indian culture.

Researcher: You are one of the few Indians who have been commissioned to write plays for BBC Radio. Tell me something about your experience as a radio play writer.

Dattani: It is a difficult medium to write for. I believe, of the three mediums I have worked in (stage, screen and radio) the medium of radio drama has been the most challenging.

Researcher: Have you ever tried to outnumber the cinema-goers for your stage plays? My Point is: have you attempted in such a way that the audience would prefer to watch your drama being staged rather than watching their film versions?

Dattani: Yes. More people have seen my play Dance Like a Man than its movie version.

Researcher: Thirty Days in September is one of your most serious dramas. What prompted you to write this play?

Dattani: I was commissioned by an NGO called Rahi based in Delhi to write a play on the theme of CSA (Childhood sexual abuse).

Researcher: Plot is the soul of tragedy, said Aristotle. How much importance do you attach to it in your plays?

Dattani: Very much. Plot is essential to revealing character.

Researcher: Final Solutions bagged you the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award. How do you feel about it?
Dattani: Very proud.

Researcher: Have you noticed any visible change upon any strata of our society after they have watched your stage-plays dealing with such themes as mentioned in the previous question?

Dattani: Yes. There is more debate and invisible issues such as CSA do get talked about after the play is performed.

Researcher: Do you see yourself as an activist? Whether “Yes” or “No”. Please, detail your answer.

Dattani: Yes and No. I am an activist like many socially responsible citizens. That doesn’t necessarily mean it spills into my writing.

Researcher: Do you think that you administer poetic justice to your characters properly in your plays?

Dattani: Am not sure I attempt it.

Researcher: Do you find any difficulty in capturing internal conflict and emotional crisis of the character in prosaic form?

Dattani: No. Otherwise I wouldn’t be a dramatist.

Researcher: Bonsai plant, idol of Lord Krishna, wooden soldier, mango fruit, etc. are some of the rich symbols and images in your plays. How much they help to your poetic exuberances and craftsmanship?

Dattani: Images are very important in theatre as it is a visual medium as well as an auditory medium.

Researcher: Don’t you think that you have developed a tendency of using Gujarati settings in your dramatic works?

Dattani: Yes. I didn’t develop this tendency; it is there from my very first play.
Researcher: Considering majority of your plays being rooted in urban milieu, you are labeled as the writer of modern Indian urban society. How do you react to it?

Dattani: I am urban and Indian, so the definition is correct.

Researcher: Being a Gujarati fellow, I am proud of a Gujarat born writer Mahesh Dattani. Presently, Gujarat is undergoing a tremendous change. This transition emphasizes more on economic status of the state in the country. Much transition is still in wait for the concerns like education and social hierarchy. What can be done for that? I would wish that you could pen some of these concerns at clash in Gujarat. Have you any plans for that?

Dattani: No plans as such but then the kind of changes I write about will definitely reflect the transitions in Gujarat as well! I am as much a Gujarati as I am an urban Indian, and proud of it all.

Researcher: What is your ongoing activity now?

Dattani: I am currently busy with my recent productions of Paolo Coelho’s The Alchemist and also renovating my new flat!