INTERVIEW WITH MAHESH DATTANI
Q. Do you want to comment on my research topic (Gender and Violence in your plays)?

A. Basically I think I used by the communities, sexuality minorities, of Gender minority, women being the gender minority. I think there are all sorts of metaphors for ‘oneself’ the neglected self, of the self that submitted to violence for too long and now is sort of fighting back because, in Tara it is a separation of the male self and the female self and the ensuring struggle where ultimately the female self withers away and wastes away and dies. So I do see these as a kind of metaphor for the individual and yes my plays are interpreted as a conflict against society. When Final Solutions is done it is seen as violence against minority community. In On a Muggy Night in Mumbai it is a sexual minority which is at the receiving end. But having said that, all my characters fight back, whether ‘Javeed’ in Final Solutions, where he is rebelling and the counter point of that is Baben who is actually ashamed of his background. He changes his name and decided to go back to his name. So pride and at the same time, sort of getting over the edge of anger is where I see the resolve in all cases.

Q. We saw lot of dilemma in your plays, your characters go on denying their position (Bunny Singh-a character in On a Muggy Night in Mumbai denying his status being a gay to public) and you blame both Hindus and Muslims in Final Solutions, there is no clear cut answer. What is your opinion?

A. One has to be very careful about bringing in the propaganda as well. That, you know a good play gives you both points of view, so whatever your gazes it is an acid gazes you can’t discriminate, I think I come down
equally hard on a gay life styles in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* as I do with Heterosexual life style because there is this moment where they say “that they can’t do us harm any more than the harm we do our self” and again this need to ‘confirm’ is stronger and in a lot of character by this Baben in boby in *Final Solutions* he changes his name or whether Bunny Singh in *Muggy Night in Mumbai* there is this sense of wanting to confirm and this Roopa in *Tara* she wants to be friend to every one and sort of this willing to just go with the flow of the things.

**Q.** All your plays are entirely different from Contemporary Playwrights-what inspired you to write plays like this?

**A.** I am trying to be truthful to my time and place and I feel that the invisibility of today’s issues as a playwright, I think I can afford to bring that out into the open. So there are several issues which concern us but remains invisible. Sexuality is a biggest issue. It concern every individual and at the same time our culture doesn’t allows that. And in a lot of instances minority and majority issues tend to get swept under the carpet. It is so like as I was a salesmen as I am researching on *Final Solutions* at that time some people felt that Muslims were majority, that there is a common notion that this greater rate of procreation among Muslims than this Hindus, where as it comes a shock to them that they only at 12% of the population. So like lot of issues get swept under, like sexuality- oh! it is a western life style it can’t be Indian. Where as sexuality is innate, it is human nature. So I guess that probably why I focuse on these issues.

**Q.** Tell me something about your Stage Technicalities.

**A.** I like to work with this levels and spaces, some where the boundaries are blurred, past and present sort of merge. So I guess in the theatre what is exciting is how you move Time and Space. Which you know is different to
how it is done in Cinema or Television. I think to get people to come to theatre you can give them what the theatre can give which no other medium can give. So I always been sort of pre-occupied with making those components very interesting and dynamic.

**Q.** What is your opinion about Present day position of Indian Drama in English?

**A.** Well it is still has a long way to go, it is not quite reached there. I feel that it is at a fledgling stage and I think there is so much of tradition, rich tradition in the Arts that we have, that will always seem like a new born baby compared to that. I think the danger is in being imitative and riding on the traditions of the west, there is great danger in that. It has to be avoided and we have to create the kind of Indian English Theatre which will become the tradition tomorrow. We are deprived of a tradition today because it's got such a shaky tradition and cantonment theatre. It's not the best of tradition to have, but if we are true to our time and place it will create a tradition for tomorrow.

**Q.** All your plays end with a question, no clear cut answer. What is your opinion?

**A.** That's true of life as well, because if they are clear cut answers then people would have resolved these conflicts a long time age. I don't think it is the business of a playwright to give clear cut answers, because there is a assumption that you know better than your audience. I think your objectives is to focus on life and represents or mirror in a way that it reveals the complexities, that day to day existence somehow overlooks or ignores.
Q. To what extent do your plays (themes) enlighten the masses?

A. Making Invisible issues visible itself is I think powerful enough. People are talking about sexualities much more freely because of works are being done. When I wrote Final Solutions, Dance Like a Man lot of the crisis, the complexities of the crisis, they need to be clarity on that because it is very easy for in especially in terms of Communalism, that it can be stoked by Politicians, and you can get a completely wrong sense of history and I think it’s important to provide that physiological distance from all that muck and to provide clarity and then human compassion will then prevail. It’s sort of trying to **move from human ignorance and blindness towards compassion** (This Interview was conducted on 24 June 2004, at Kalanjali Theatre group, Bangalore).