The Plays of Mahesh Dattani: A Study of Human Relationships

Abstract

This study purports to examine in depth and detail the wide spectrum of human relationships depicted by Dattani, a theme that has not been examined consistently and comprehensively by the critics so far. In order to arrive at a balanced appreciation of his mind and art, an analysis of relationships within and outside the family, including those between husband and wife, between different generations, siblings, transgendered and the miscellaneous ones have been examined using mainly socio-psychological approach.

An overwhelming number of marriages in his plays, particularly the arranged ones, are characterized by simmering discontents, frustrations, anxieties, tensions and conflicts between husband and wife, caused largely by their emotional, temperamental and attitudinal incompatibilities, further traceable to sources like unhealthy socialization, economic status and sexual orientations. Relationships between or among siblings, not a common theme in modern drama, further evinces his insights into human behaviour when he probingly dramatizes the shifting emotions and complex motives in bonds between brother and brother, brother and sister, and sister and sister.

The treatment of conflict between the older and the younger generation, representing traditional values, aspirations and authoritarianism on the one hand and modern sense of individual freedom and inclinations on the other, testifies to Dattani’s dramatic credo of enlightening and provoking the mind of the audience by exposing rampant hypocrisies in relationships.

Dattani has been bold enough to lend his pen to a relationship that has been regarded as unnatural, perverted and, therefore, stigmatized in society leading to the suppression by the gays of their own authentic human desires. His handling of this relationship, often not touched upon, expresses his genuine interest in laying bare the hypocrisies of social life that only accepts and gives approval to heterosexual relationships.
Through a series of miscellaneous relationships like those between peers, friends, boss and subordinates, communities and even strangers, Dattani enlarges the range of his subject, revealing a vast variety of human ties which one forges and lives through in one’s life.

His incisive and extensive treatment of the human relationships shows not only his insightful grasp of changing social realities but also of human nature, which deepens and enhances the appeal of his theatre, underlining the humanistic values of acceptance of diversity and difference, equality and freedom for a happy and meaningful social and individual life.