Chapter V

Conclusion

The conclusion of the thesis sums up the whole things in a nutshell. It shows how Mahesh Dattani who is a celebrated playwright in Indian English Literature has to his credit a number of great works which has gained popularity all over the world. His plays are mostly related to some serious problems of society. In this respect he is very close to George Bernard Shaw who tried his best to dive deep into the various layers of society so as to uproot the evils inflicting the whole humanity.

Mahesh Dattani is born in Bangalore and educated there in English medium school. He started to participate in theatre from school days and also got training of Bharatanatyam. He founded his own theatre group ‘Playpen’. He wants to express the Indian feelings and sentiments in English language to express his thought for a lot of Indians who live in India and abroad and also understand and speak this language. Besides writing plays he is thoroughly devoted to acting, directing and producing some significant plays both at home and abroad. He himself has perception that one can not survive on play-writing alone.

This Bangalore based English dramatist has started his career as a playwright by writing his play Where There’s a Will that is intrinsically rooted in social milieu. Till now he has already completed more than a dozen of plays related to various social maladies. His chief works are Dance Like a Man, Tara, Bravely Fought the Queen, Do the Needful, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Seven Steps Around the Fire, The Swami and Winston,
Tale of the Mother Feeding Her Child, Thirty Days in September, Clearing the Rubble, Two Solos and Dear Dairy.

Mahesh Dattani, thus continues the rich tradition and dramatic art in English language. He is a ‘reluctant playwright’ who always tries to give perfect shape to his play. For this he always directs the first edition of his play. His language is alien but the content and context are rooted in ancient tradition and modern conflict of Indian society. He is preoccupied with ‘fringe’ issues – the issues that remain latent and suppressed, or are pushed to the periphery. He portrays them on the centre stage – quite literary. He does all so to create at least an acknowledgment of their existence. As a result his plays are well-received by Indian audiences as well as the people of different countries. About this he says:

“Well, maybe the sheer fact that I’m projecting a milieu that is close to the audience – I think that may itself be an achievement. That’s what makes my theatre alive.”

Dattani is of the opinion that we live in such a society which is fraught with various ills and maladies and so we are bound to face these problems in this society. If anyone tries to ‘defy’ the orbit set by the tradition, is left with no option but burled into space and meets an unfortunate result. Society never give an alternative to live an independent life. This little space creates the feeling of struggle in the heart of an individual but it is very difficult to overcome the hurdles.

His plays are being staged, published and translated in various countries besides India. He is a versatile in the matter of the themes of his
plays. He is very different in the matter of art and craft, feeling and forms. All these dramatic qualities help him tremendously to broaden the horizon of theatre. His plays deal with sexuality and gender issues, religious tension, and the other ‘fringe issues’ of society and also explore a gamut of human relationships. His own favourite playwrights were Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. Dattani himself accepts that he is influenced by two playwright Madhu Rye and Vijay Tendulkar.

From the very beginning of his play Where There’s a Will he chronicled the social victim and the follies, foibles and prejudices of Indian society. He believes that a playwright should write about the evils present in society of his time and present it before the audience. He takes the ‘invisible issues’ of Indian society and places them on stage for public discussion. Through this way he encourages others to do so: ‘Our culture is so rich with tradition, and that’s a great advantage and a great disadvantage as well, because… we’re living in the present and there are so many challenges facing us – you just have to cross the road and you have an issue… I think it is very important for our country to spawn new playwright… Who reflect honestly and purely our lives, because… that is our contribution to the world.’\(^2\)

Dattani’s plays push forward his agenda, touching upon a host of taboo topics placing it at the forefront for the audience. On a Muggy Night in Mumbai lifts the veil of secrecy that shrouds the marginalized cultures, sexualities and lifestyles. He attempts, through this play, to touch the matter of homosexuality and heterosexuality. It is the first Indian play to show the gay themes of love, affiliation, trust and betrayal openly.
*Bravely Fought the Queen* is a play that is concerned with alternative sexuality. The play looks closely at the politics of the Indian joint family, it constantly points at the gender division and the dominance of the one over the other. In *Where There’s a Will* Dattani explores the dichotomy between the male/female roles within the archetype of the family headed by a man and what happens when a woman takes over. He explores the twin issues of gender and alternative sexuality in *Do the Needful*. The third gender - eunuch – is the theme of *Seven Steps Around the Fire* and it shows their position in society.

Mahesh Dattani is a sensitive playwright and gender issue is his pet concern. *Dance Like a Man* is concerned with social attitude towards dance and its thought. His best loved play *Tara* is the story of a girl Tara who could not twinkle on the horizon of male-domination. *Thirty Days in September* comments on the theme of child sexual abuse that begins from family. *Final Solutions* shows the battle between India’s two larger groups – Hindu and Muslim and suggests some solutions to ills of communal disharmony.

Besides writing play he has also written screenplay which are *Hum Tum aur Who, Ek Chingari Ki Khoj Mein, Ek Alag Mausam* and the screen adaptation of *Dance Like a Man* and *Mango Souffle*. *Morning Raga* is an original screenplay. Even in the film he raises the issues of dowry, discrimination against HIV afflicted persons, homosexuality, confluence of the past and the present, of old and new worlds, the archetypal and the contemporary and carnatic and western music.

It is very remarkable fact that Dattani discusses various ills of the society and presents them through his unique dramatic technique. One has to
just think on topic and Dattani has a play on it. He does not believe to write a play but he materializes the first edition of the his play on the stage. This adds wonders to his written text. It is because he thinks that a play is complete only when it has been performed in front of the audience.

The second chapter of this thesis discusses the liberal attitude to communalism. In this play we can discern the repulsive, frenzied, perfidious power of the perpetrators of communal forces. The playwright questions the means of violence against any community on the name of religion. Dattani sets two plot and the different of period is 40 years. At the last of the play he shows the real reason of communal fanaticism. He also wants to show that it is very bad to think that one community suffers in the hand of other and so an organized violence should be started. In communal riot the real gainer is the group leaders and politicians who excite the common people to do so.

Dattani suggests many solutions in this play and he also tells the need of the reform in police administration is required. He says that innocent people suffer in any communal frenzy and so it should be examined and people should live peacefully. He wrote the play in the light of Ram Janmabhumi – Babri – Masjid conflict. He creates very interesting situation when two Muslim boys take shelter in the house of a Hindu family and all discuss over their grievances. He himself accepts that the title came from *The Third Reich and the Holocaust!* This play is also remarkable because he got the Sahitya Akademi Award for this and created a space in the Indian literary scenario for this special new genre of writing – Indian Drama in English.

The third chapter deals with the problem of gender discrimination that still prevails in our society in the modern age. It shows that we live in the
age of the globalization but still reluctant to give the real share to the half population of society. Male and female are the two sides of the same society but the privilege in siphoned by male and female leads the life of second grade citizen. It was hoped that time would be better for her. But the second gods on the earth, doctors, are making their existence more miserable and a Tara could not see the light of earth due to female foeticide. Most of these acts are done under the patronage of parents and other family members.

*Tara* is Dattani’s best loved-play. He depicts that the girl may be more enterprising than the boy but what is the great deal in it, she nevertheless fails in the race of favour. This discriminatory attitude is quite prevalent in India and whether it is an educated or uneducated family inclination towards a male-child is blithering and consequently the rising graph of female infanticide is mind-boggling. It shows that we are living in a man’s world and it is very difficult for the woman to fight out her way. Such incidents do much to hamper the mission of female – upliftment in a male – dominating society. The playwright gets positive success in his mission to shiver the mind of audience against this bias.

The fourth chapter of this thesis deals with what Dattani himself calls it ‘the exorcism of the patriarchal code’. In this play the playwright also shows that women in all forms – wife, mistress, daughter-in-law, sister – are fully dependent on man. But Dattani also depicts that she can utilize the opportunities if she gets that. Hasmukh controls his family through his money and does not give any space to improve his interpersonal relationships. After death he watches his own actions and realizes that his desire bears no fruit and he falls victim of his own machinations while Kiran uses power to improve her relationships.
Where There’s a Will is a young man’s play which ends with an optimistic note as Dattani depicts the baby’s kicking in Preeti’s womb being symbolic of the start of a fresh new life for all the living members of the family and the banishment of Hasmukh’s ghost being indicative of the exorcism of the past. The evils of patriarchy take centre-stage in the play. Dattani covertly asserts that where there is a will there is a way. So the dramatist in his play Where There’s a Will uses ‘Will’ as a fantastic pun. Dattani himself evaluates this play in following terms:

“It is called Where There’s a Will and it’s about this patriarch who controls his family – his wife, son and daughter-in-law. He dies at the end of the first scene, and his ghost becomes the narrator. What he has done is that he has left a very convoluted ‘Will’ and his family had to act according to his wishes to inherit. The ghost is later exorcised by the women”.

Thus Dattani, like Shakespeare, writes for the theatre and believes that the written texts are fully realized only through the process of performance. His plays can be said to have been inspired by Ibsen, the father of Realism, whose plays deal with a number of social problems like The Pillars of Society, which deals with women rights, The Doll’s House, which deals with an incompatible marriage and The Enemy of the People deals with political and municipal corruption. Dattani’s plays also deals with gender discrimination, child sexual abuse, homosexuality, communalism, the place of eunuch in society, HIV-afflicted people etc. He focuses on many contemporary issues and his personality can not be easily sidelined because of his contemporaneity. The greatness of Dattani lies in the fact that he is

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one who believes that theatre is an art with a function. He shows us a
glimpse into various issues that have been existing and unconsciously
accepted by us. He pulls them out from under the rug and displays them
threadbare though it is an uphill task and requires grit and forbearance.
Dattani has great responsibility in doing so but he is aware that his mission
is completed by his characters. As he says: “I also know that I have a lot to
say and am probably not saying it well enough. But my characters have a lot
to say too, and they seem to be doing rather well at having their say.”

Thus the portrayal of the various ills and maladies of society by
Mahesh Dattani is very vivid, realistic and comprehensive. It shows
Dattani’s great concern for the suffering people particularly of the
persecuted women who have to bear the brunt of patriarchy in the society.
But what matter most in his writings is his dramatic presentation of the
thoughts. Like a successful dramatist he has woven the material of his social
thoughts and visions into the fabric of art and literature.

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References


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