ABSTRACT

CHAPTER I

SECTION – A

Life and Works of Mahesh Dattani

This chapter deals with the various aspects of the life of Mahesh Dattani, the author of various important plays. It shows how before coming to lime-light, the author learnt the various aspects of theatre and materialised them into reality. The dramatist was born in Bangalore and got his education in the English medium school. As a result he chooses his medium of writing – English language. He is a different type of playwright in the sense that he never works on the issue that floats on the floor of society but he highlights the maladies and miseries in society. First of all he observes the problems very deeply and then he translates them into structure by writing a play. He completes his mission by directing them. His important plays are Tara, Final Solutions, Where There’s a Will, Do the Needful, On a Muggy Nights in Mumbai, Seven Steps Around the Fire, Thirty Days in September, etc. He is a versatile man who works not only as a dramatist but also as an actor, teacher, professional businessman and dancer. In every field of art he has learnt the technique minutely and used them in theatre to enrich its taste. The government has recognized his contribution by crowning him the Sahitya Akademi Award for his masterpiece Final Solutions and Other Play.

The plays of Mahesh Dattani emerged as ‘fresh arrival’ in the domain of India English drama in the last decade of the twentieth century. The plays
have a great ‘contemporary’ value. They are plays which embody many of the classic concerns of world drama. The most significant contribution of Dattani is perhaps his use of language. Dattani uses in his plays the kind of English as spoken by people in India. He is able to merge that past and the present as well as geographical locations. Human relationships and the family unit have indeed been at the heart of Dattani’s representation. His plays speak across linguistic and cultural barriers but they are essentially rooted in the Indian settings. But what makes Mahesh Dattani one of the India’s finest playwrights is, perhaps, his dramatic presentation of the ills and maladies, his lucid and simple language and above all, his realistic portrayal of the weaknesses and shortcomings of the society of the modern time.

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SECTION – B

This second section deals with ‘Indian Drama in English : A Bird’s Eye View’. Through this it is shown that ‘drama’ as a literary genre is not new for India but it is as old as the human civilization. In the beginning in India, most of the plays were written in Sanskrit language that was the language of the scholar of then society. With the growth of Hindi, many plays were written in this language. When the British East India Company occupied this country, English was made the official language and the language of learning. Many promising writers adopted this language. Many regional plays were translated in this language. Some important names are Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Circar, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan. It also shows that Indian English drama is still in its nursery stage and many promising playwrights are nourishing this plant to flourish. They are making bold innovations and positive responses in both theme and style.

With Decades of English education in India, both in schools and in universities, this country is the home to the largest English-knowing population in the world. Several writers of international repute have presented their vision and thoughts through the medium of English language. In this regard, the contribution of Indian drama in English is not as satisfactory as we generally see in the field of Indian poetry and fiction. The Indian English dramatists should strive hard to turn their professional and natural limitations into artistic assets in the manner of their ancient forebears. They should be grounded in contemporary problems while deriving inspiration and sustenance from their ancient culture. Most of the contemporary dramatists are doing this in the field.

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CHAPTER II

Social Maladies in *Final Solutions*

In this chapter the playwright, through the play *Final Solutions*, explored issues of identity, memory, suffering and loss. The play has been staged in India and aboard and has won worldwide acclaim. Dattani takes up a genuine problem which has plagued the country for a millennium or so. He, through this beautiful realistic presentation of two major groups of India, has tried his best to provide a workable solution to fill up the gap between the Hindus and the Muslims. His primary concern as a writer of drama is to expose the various maladies of society and, wherever necessary, to give some proper solutions through the medium of literature. He seems to be very certain in projecting his vision of secularism in which both the communities may live together with happiness. He highlights the fact that every community has right to protect its interest and expand its ideology; but no one is given right to give derogatory remarks on other’s religion and rituals.

Dattani gives the Indian ideology of the dharma (religion) that God is ultimate reality and no religion should be taken as superior while other inferior. He exposes the concept of universal brotherhood that ‘We are all equal’. It appears to him that both Hindus and Muslims must learn to think dispassionately and absorb the spirit of humanism. The Muslims must get rid of their communalism and aggressiveness. The Hindus must rid themselves of their customary beliefs, conservatism, and caste-psyche. Both must overcome irrational hate and should learn to love each other as human beings. They must aim at a free culture that makes all people happy. True morality is that which enables us to be happy without injuring others. *Final*
Solutions is a great drama because his humanism emerges from it like fragrance coming out of a flower. The beauty of his plays lies in this fact that he seldom expresses his vision of life in a direct way; rather he weaves the thoughts into the fabric of art and dramaturgy.
CHAPTER III

Social Maladies in Tara

This chapter deals with the social maladies in Tara. Gender discrimination is one of the prominent themes in Indian Writing in English and the theme of Tara moves round this issue. It shows how women have been the subject of persecutions and sufferings right from the birth to death. Dattani has raised the various issues in his plays but so far as Tara is concerned he exposes the hypocritic nature of Indian society in particular and the world civilization in general which puts the women in the forefront but never removes the bias against them. Through Tara, the playwright shows that she is an intelligent and smart girl but even her parents do not give her proper opportunity for flourishing her worth and ability. The second god, a doctor, under the influence of money, commits a heinous crime by operating a Siamese twin. Thus the play presents the marvel of medical. It also shows the hypocrisy of the so-called modern doctors who sell their souls for the gain of money. In a very light vein, the dramatist also suggests that man and woman are the part of a single coin and they do not find comfortable in separation but pine to be united. The message of the playwright is to develop our humanistic sense of love and affection for the down-trodden and deserted, the disabled and the diseased.

The dramatist also seems to appeal to the general man to have a very mutual relation between man and woman in society. The beauty of the play lies not simply in the presentation of social fact about feminine sensibilities but it also lies in its metaphoric and dramatic presentation of those facts of
society. It is the play which expresses the totality of Dattani’s vision of life. Dattani has quite lived up to his primary ideals of dramatic art suffused with the elements of poetic sensibility and aesthetic charms.

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CHAPTER IV

Social Maladies in Where There’s a Will

The fourth chapter deals with the social maladies in Dattani’s first play Where There’s a Will. Its critical analysis shows how Mahesh Dattani, a great observer of man and manner of the society, has very brilliantly portrayed a very realistic presentation of society. What matters most in his plays is his natural and realistic description of our day to day life. He has exposed the problem of gender discrimination in a male-dominated society and also the importance of will in a traditional family. Everybody has a will of his own. He suggests that it should not be crushed and mutilated by the elders or by the conservatives. In order to run the society smoothly, it is necessary on the part of the elders to pave the way for the new comers so that these new comers may flourish and bloom with new vigour and vitality without any impediment.

Dattani’s success lies in the fact that Sonal who is a very dull and subdued character, at the end shows the sign of being dynamic. It shows the end of will and patriarchy that runs from ages in our society. In the matter he is very close to G.B. Shaw and Henrik Ibsen in presenting the realistic picture of society. But his unique feature lies in the fact that no character seems to be his mouthpiece and he gives full space to his characters to bloom. The facts and figures, the playwright has depicted, are moulded in the form of rich art rendered through metaphoric expressions and some other dramatic and poetic devices. The other feature of the play lies in the fact that he presents the serious issues of patriarchy in a very comic way. This play is the simplest in structure and is nearest to the traditional drama.
CHAPTER V

Conclusion

The conclusion of the thesis sums up the whole thing in a nutshell. It shows how Mahesh Dattani, unlike other popular Indian artists, is neither educated abroad nor he lived abroad. He was born, brought up and educated in India. He is the true observer of society and has keen sense of perception. As a result he generally finds facts and figures related to traditional problems of India and transcreates them into his plays. He is an original playwright in this sense that he never touches the maladies of surface level but what he calls his issues of plays as ‘fringe issues’. He, very realistically, presents the problem of gender discrimination, communal violence, exorcism of patriarchy, child sexual abuse, eunuch’s problem, the problem of homo-sexuality and lesbianism etc. Although he raises the real problem of society but his presentation is very much artistic and his success lies in the fact that he got the prestigious award of Sahitya Akademi for his collection of plays for the first time.

His portrayal of the various ills and maladies of society is very vivid, realistic and comprehensive. It also shows the playwright’s great concern for the suffering people particularly of the persecuted women who have to bear the brunt of patriarchy in society. 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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