CHAPTER 5
SUMMING UP: A Multitude of Creativity

After analysing the major plays of Tendulkar, Karnad and Dattani, one can say that even though all the three belong to different states and times, their concerns are similar. The language or the style of writing may vary, but the message is the same, as clearly indicated by their choice of themes and characters. All the three are contemporary playwrights, bringing to light the contemporary issues of society.

Tendulkar’s plays deal with the earlier period of post-modernism. The themes of his plays are about various social and political issues such as man-woman relationship, the individual’s struggle against family/society, sex, violence etc. and are based on real life incidents. Violence, which has been brought out in a very raw form, has been a dominating factor in most of his plays like *Vultures* or *Sakharam Binder*, and violence of any kind leads to conflict at the outer level in his plays. In the same way, Dattani’s plays also have similar themes of family/society and politics, and he too derives them from real-life situations. In his plays every individual, irrespective of his/her gender, is a victim of family/society if s/he does not abide by its norms. They face conflict not only at the outer level but also at the inner level – that of their existence. Issues such as arranged marriage, homosexuality, gender-bias, etc. are prominent themes of his plays. His plays explore the hypocrisies of a modern society. Though the themes in Karnad’s plays are also related to social and political aspects their treatment is a little different from that of Tendulkar’s and Dattani’s. Unlike the other two whose plays are based on real-life situations, Karnad borrows the story from myths, legends, folk-tales and history and interprets them in the modern context. This is what makes his plays and characters different in their outlook. Tendulkar gives his observation to Gowri Ramnarayan as to why Karnad uses history and myth as subjects for his plays:

... his (Karnad’s) upbringing itself has been amongst the *Puranas* while I read *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* also at a late age.... playwrights of my generation had used history and myth in their writings. I feel that this depends on an individual’s upbringing and sensitivity. (4)

Karnad’s plays are an intermingling of the traditional and the modern and explore human desires and the good and the evil in human life as seen in *Naga-Mandala*,

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Hayavadana or The Fire and the Ram. These human desires may be beyond an individual’s reach, but his/her persistent struggle to achieve them at any cost leads to a conflict within the individual, and this becomes a central theme of his plays.

Caste-system has always been a part of Indian society and culture. Religion too, has dominated the culture and beliefs of the people; issues relating to philosophy have been also in the foreground. Karnad’s plays explore these issues as we see in plays like Tughlaq, Tale-Danda and The Fire and the Rain. Karnad shows that though caste-distinction is a political issue, society is equally responsible for it. The fact that he brings out is that the differences of caste can result in violence and bloodshed, while Tendulkar’s Kanyadaan points out the fact that even if caste-distinction is eliminated from society it does not change the individual’s thought-process or behaviour. The aspects of religion and philosophy are not found in either Tendulkar’s or Dattani’s plays, as they are more concerned with exploring the bleak realities of life.

Politics has also been a subject matter for these playwrights. Tendulkar’s political plays like Ghashiram Kotwal or Encounters in Umbugland depict the stark realities of politics in India, while Karnad’s Tughlaq is an irony on the contrasting personalities of the Sultan and its effects on the political sphere of the country. These plays are comments on the power politics that take place at the cost of innocents. Final Solutions, the only play (till date) of Dattani’s dealing with politics, is a sharp comment on the present-day Hindu-Muslim conflict.

Tendulkar’s characters belong to the middle class and the lower middle class. He likes to explore problems concerning people of this class, but in some of Dattani’s plays the characters belong to the upper class or the aristocratic class; their likes and dislikes are different from those of Tendulkar’s characters. Yet the issues concerning them are not different. The same is the case with the characters of Karnad. They are men and women of a different period, belong to the higher, learned class or are royals, yet they face similar kinds of problems as those faced by men and women in Tendulkar’s and Dattani’s plays.

The women characters in Tendulkar’s plays like Benare, Sarita, Rama, Jyoti or Laxmi are of prime concern to the playwright. They face exploitation and violence to a great extent, are not allowed to have any opinion in the family/society and have to suffer silently. But Tendulkar gives them an opportunity to speak out their agony. What they lack is the courage to walk out on their men and hence they remain as
mere voices. Some of Dattani's women characters are completely modern in their outlook and beliefs. They are independent, educated and also selfish as found in Ratna or Bharati. They are not the typical, self-sacrificing Indian women who suffer silently like Tendulkar's. They do not remain mere voices, but act to assert their identity and individuality as seen through Lata, both of Dance Like A Man and Do the Needful, or Kiran Jhaveri. Yet they are not free from exploitation, as seen in the case of Dolly, Alka or Kiran (On A Muggy Night in Mumbai). While Karnad’s women characters do not remain mere voices that are heard but they also act. They are not the modern upper class women of contemporary society; neither do they all face physical violence. Their problems are related to fulfilment of sexual desires. They are questioned on the basis of chastity and are not accepted in society if they have sexual relations out of wedlock as seen with Rani or Vishakha. But Karnad’s female protagonists, like Dattani’s, speak out their needs (for physical desires), which are not just carnal instincts but are of a spiritual quality for them. Karnad shows that woman, as an individual, has an equal right to voice her needs.

All the three playwrights agree with the fact that not only women suffer as inferiors, but men also suffer when they are labelled inferior by society. The men too, are victims of family/society as their lack of ‘being something’ makes them furious, sadistic and helpless. Hence, they lash out their angst towards other inferior beings as found in the case of Tendulkar’s Sakharam, the Pitaless, Arun and the men in Silence! The Court is in Session; Dattani’s Jitesh, Ed, Javed and Jairaj and Karnad’s Appanna, Kapila, Puru and Arvasu. They are exploited by society for selfish needs, and they, in turn, exploit the weaker section as a release from their own frustrations. All these male characters face the same problem – of establishing their individuality in society. Dattani has also depicted homosexuals and eunuchs as a part of society; homosexuals have equal feelings and are no different from heterosexuals. His plays such as On A Muggy Night in Mumbai and Do the Needful, like Tendulkar’s Mitrachi Ghoshta (his only play), which deals with the issue of homosexuality, show that society cannot shut its eyes to such facts of life. Similarly, Dattani, in his Radio play Seven Steps Around the Fire, brings out how Indian society has neglected the eunuchs who are a part of society since ages. But such characters are not found in Karnad’s plays.

A major difference in the language of these plays lies in the fact that while Dattani writes in English, Karnad and Tendulkar basically write in their mother tongue, i.e., Kannada and Marathi respectively, and then translate the plays into
English for readers who are not familiar with these regional languages. While Karnad himself translates his plays from Kannada into English, Tendulkar does not do so; the English translation of Karnad's may be similar in interpretation to the original work, but that of Tendulkar's may slightly differ, depending upon the interpretation of the translator. As generally seen, when the plays undergo translation they tend to differ a little from the original. Karnad, in *Indian Review of Books*, tells Dattani about the translation of his plays:

... my English translation is not a faithful translation... I rewrite a lot of it in English which is not there in Kannada.... I translate bits of English back into Kannada. Because the English itself suggests its own series of images and you know logic and the language bring their own associations. (5)

It might not be possible to translate a thought that has been put in the regional language literally into English or vice versa. So, either that thought has to be loosely translated or eliminated. Hence, while this may happen with the plays of Tendulkar and Karnad, it is not the same with Dattani's plays because he has made English itself his mother tongue, and so whatever English syntax he writes in, seems convincing to the native who speaks a similar kind of English.

The language used by each of the playwrights is in accordance with the atmosphere and the characters of the plays. Tendulkar employs a very raw and violent kind of language, while Dattani uses a language belonging to the so-called 'aristocratic' and 'elitist' class and Karnad uses a language that is spoken by chaste Brahmins and royals – a kind of language found in Sanskrit drama. But whatever the language, the meaning conveyed through it is the same – exposing the frustrations and unfulfilled desires of human beings.

The language in Tendulkar's plays is neither philosophical nor metaphorical, but one that is spoken by individuals in real life. The characters speak the language according to the culture and atmosphere that they are put into. In *Vultures*, most of the members speak very crude language; they call each other names and abuse everyone. In *Sakharam Binder*, Sakharam lives in a lower-class atmosphere, and so his language and beliefs are coloured by it. In *Kanyadaan*, Arun speaks in sarcasms and also uses words, which are not approved by Seva who belongs to an upper-middle class society. Similarly, Nath and Jadav use words that reflect their society – the upper-middle class, and hence their language is quite different from the other
male characters. Most of the women characters do not use foul language (except for Champa or Manik) and speak about their desires in the most simple and casual language – one that is neither embellished with metaphors nor is crude.

Karnad’s characters are drawn from myths, folk-tales, legends and history; the language that they speak is also in keeping with their culture and atmosphere. Theirs is a language of the higher class, full of profound meanings layered within them, which is not used in daily conversation, as in plays like Tale-Danda and The Fire and the Rain, where chaste Sanskrit is used. Dattani, in Indian Review of Books, appreciates Karnad’s use of such Sanskrit words:

... I saw the play... and I was a little concerned. Now, a word like ‘rakshasa’... I mean ‘demon’ is somehow not the same thing and I’m glad that you stuck to the ‘rakshasa’, that you didn’t sort of compromise.... It didn’t matter because the context was so clear that the onus was on the audience to understand what ‘rakshasa’ meant. (4)

Tughlaq speaks a language that is marked by poetry and philosophy, which indicates his dreams; he is a learned man whose language shows his royalty. Basavanna’s language shows that he is a kind and saintly being, and Arvasu’s language shows his innocence. The language of the women characters in Karnad’s plays is also of a higher level because they too belong to the upper class and the learned class. Chitralekha and Vishakha belong to the royal and the learned class of society respectively, and their language reflects their class. Even the inanimate characters like the dolls, the Story and the flames use language, which creates a fairytale atmosphere, a world of magic. And yet, the language of Karnad’s characters does not remain aloof from contemporary society. Whatever they speak, the meaning conveyed is equally relevant to the present times.

Dattani’s characters use a language, which is spoken by contemporary, upper-class society. It has no embellishments or philosophies, but it is the language in which the aristocratic or the ‘modern’ class converse everyday as in Dance Like A Man or On A Muggy Night in Mumbai. His is a language similar to Tendulkar’s, in the sense that it is related to real life. But unlike Tendulkar’s, Dattani’s language is not crude. All his characters are educated and belong to high-class society, so the language also carries ironical undertones as found in Bravely Fought the Queen. The language of his plays brings out the hypocrisy and selfishness of the characters and it sounds
familiar to the contemporary, English speaking generation, as it sounds like a native speaking English with some words and accent of the vernacular language. The atmosphere that he uses in his plays also colour the language.

A distinguishing feature that marks all the three playwrights as creative geniuses is the various theatre techniques used by them in their plays. These techniques lend a new dimension to their plays, especially at the level of performance. Tendulkar’s plays do not have many techniques, as they are more concerned with real life situations. His Ghashiram Kotwal remains unique amongst his plays for the use of the device of the human wall, derived from a folk form to which Tendulkar has lent a special role by using it in a modern context. This wall acts as a chorus, is a representative of society, sings and dances, narrates incidents and also conceals scenes that are not supposed to be in the present. A similar folk form is found in Karnad’s plays, but his devices are quite unique as in they are something belonging to a world of fairytales and magic. His devices remind one of the traditional folk drama forms where there is total ‘willing suspension of disbelief’. He uses inanimate objects as characters and makes them representative of society and its thoughts. The flames, the dolls, the Story etc. all speak like normal human beings and are representatives of society. Tendulkar’s use of the imagery of birds to symbolise the docile women and their evil tormentors is yet another device in his plays. Benare and Rama are ‘sparrows’, while professor Damle is a ‘crow’ and the Pitaies are ‘vultures’.

Silence! The Court is in Session has the technique of a play-within-a-play, the ‘mock-trial’, which represents Benare’s past. It is an illusion, which becomes reality and leaves Benare shattered at the end. Similarly, Karnad employs the device of a play-within-a-play in The Fire and the Rain or a story-within-a-story in Naga-Mandala. Symbols such as the door-latch or phone calls are used effectively to develop the themes in Tendulkar’s plays. Again, phone calls become the symbols of communication in Dattani’s play Bravely Fought the Queen. The other side of the conversations in Act I are picked up in Act II and thus they complete the meaning.

Unlike Karnad and Tendulkar, Dattani, primarily, writes for the stage. His plays are performance oriented but the devices are not as unique as those of Karnad’s. Dattani has employed the use of lights to highlight an event or a character and his/her inner workings of the mind in most of his plays. In Bravely Fought the Queen, Baa’s area is lit up when her babbling is heard, and the lights in the kitchen and the back door represent the hidden desires of the women. When in On A Muggy Night in
Mumbai characters reveal their thoughts on a special platform, the spotlight remains on them to highlight the effect. In **Dance Like A Man**, when the old and the young characters change roles, the spotlight is on them to emphasise this change. Though Tendulkar makes use of lights in his plays, they are mainly to show the passage of time as seen in **Kamala**; they may also then depict the inner working of the characters’ minds.

The merging of the sub-plot with the main plot is another of Kamad’s devices. The sub-plot may not be directly linked to the main story as in **Naga-Mandala** or **Hayavadana**, yet it becomes an integral part of the main story and helps to develop the play. Karnad also uses Prologues and Epilogues that are treated as separate Acts. The Prologue and the Epilogue act as the narrative background or the climax of the play as found in **Naga-Mandala** or **The Fire and the Rain**. Another device, which is quite notable in Karnad’s plays, is shape-shifting or metamorphosis. Exchange of bodies and heads or disguise is one form of this metamorphosis as is found in most of his plays. All these devices are representative of the illusions that human beings mistake for reality. A somewhat similar device is seen in Dattani’s **Dance Like A Man** where the old Jairaj takes on the role of Amritlal Parekh, his father, and the young Lata and Vishwas take on the role of the young Ratna and Jairaj. Here is an exchange of roles, but the transformation is only at the physical level in order to make use of fewer number of actors.

The use of masks has always been an integral part of Indian theatre, especially of the traditional and the folk. Karnad uses masks in various ways such as Hayavadana wears a mask to show his horse head, the exchange of heads in **Hayavadana** is depicted through masks representing Kapila and Devdatta and in **The Fire and the Rain** Arvasu wears a mask to act as Vrtra. The Mob/Chorus in Dattani’s **Final Solutions** takes on the masks of Hindus and Muslims by turns and acts according to the need of the time. The mask, which is usually found in traditional theatre, is used in a modern context in the plays of Karnad and Dattani.

Another device is the use of flashbacks to depict past events. Though this device is not found in Tendulkar or Karnad’s plays, it is prominently there in most of Dattani’s plays and is used in various ways. The past is interlinked with the present; in **Tara** there are three levels – the present depicting the older Chandan, the past lives of Tara and Chandan and the medical reports of Dr. Thakkar, which again is a contradiction to the assumed reality. In **Final Solutions** the past is known through
Daksha’s reading of her diary. This past haunts her even in the present, and the reason behind her hatred for the Muslims is known more clearly. *On A Muggy Night in Mumbai* uses a different kind of device to show the past. There is a special raised platform in the centre on which characters speak out their thoughts. These thoughts are also incidents narrating the past and linking it to the present like jigsaw pieces.

The old Jairaj, in *Dance Like a Man* becomes Amrtilal Parekh, his father, by wrapping a shawl around him. Their past is not narrated by a third actor but is acted out by them in this manner. These flashback techniques not only give a hint of the past, but also heighten the suspense in the play.

Most of Dattani’s plays have the technique of creating suspense through dialogues and then revealing it through the narration of the past events. The use of a ghost and Mob/Chorus as a character, something similar to Karnad’s device of lending the inanimate objects a human quality, is also found in Dattani’s plays. In *Where There’s A Will*, Mehta becomes a ghost and lingers on even after death to observe his family being happy together inspite of his trying to control his wealth and family members. The Mob/Chorus in *Final Solutions* acts as a narrator and as a character throwing light on the situation around. All these various devices in the plays of all the three playwrights become metaphors of something or the other, perhaps of the hidden desires or the events of the past. But it is the use of these devices that make these plays unique in their own way.

The plays of Tendulkar, Karnad and Dattani have been performed and appreciated not only in India but also in other countries and have received rave reviews all over the world. Though in the initial years Tendulkar’s plays like *Silence! The Court is in Session* or *Vultures* were banned or discarded due to their bold social and political themes and the depiction of sex and violence on stage, at present they are appreciated widely. His plays have been performed in India and abroad (even by foreign actors). Elyse Sommer writes about a recent performance of *Sakharam Binder*:

> Violent cruelty is always shocking. Yet, with sex, cuss words and violence common on both stage and screen and censorship giving way to self-imposed restraint or “just say No,” Vijay Tendulkar’s *Sakharam Binder* is hardly likely to be as shocking as it was when it premiered in Bombay thirty years ago and was closed down by the censors.
Ghashiram Kotwal was banned for its depiction of Nana Phadnavis as a scheming and lecherous politician and for showing so much violence on stage. But in the present times the same play has been considered amongst the best-written plays of the country. Jabbar Patel’s production of the same play is amongst the best productions of Tendulkar’s plays.

In comparison to Tendulkar’s plays those of Karnad have not faced much censure and have been considered as masterpieces in Indian literature. All his plays have been performed in India and abroad to packed theatres, and have received reviews appreciating not only the themes but also the techniques and structure. Guthrie Theatre, U.S, has commissioned his Naga-Mandala and Arjun Sajnani’s Agni-Varsha has been performed widely. Arjun Sajnani has also filmed Agni-Varsha, which was shown at the launch of the Commonwealth Film Festival in Manchester. Karnad’s recent play Bali: The Sacrifice has also achieved appreciation and has been performed in India and abroad (by foreign actors too). In a review on Karnad, the audience response to the performances of his plays has been described in these words:

… when the state government decided to hold a week long festival of his plays, not even theatre lovers could have guessed what a runaway success it would be. The modest Ravindra Kalakshetra could not hold all those who wanted to witness his plays, and some even had to be turned away. Inside the auditorium, enthusiasts thought nothing of sitting on the ground in the aisles and standing at the far end, when seats were exhausted. There were loud claps and whistles, much like a popular film. (Girish Karnad – Poetry in Dramatic Motion)

Similarly, Dattani’s plays have also received grand reviews in and outside India, inspite of the fact that (in India) there might be eyebrows raised at certain issues such as homosexuality and eunuchs. Dattani himself directs his own plays, and apart from that many other directors have directed his plays. He has also filmed his play On A Muggy Night in Mumbai as Mango Souffle, which has won appreciation from critics and audience as well. His play Dance Like a Man has been filmed by Pamela Rooks under the same name. The performances of his plays have been in focus of the critics and the audience, especially more so because these plays are in English. Antares, in a review of Dance Like a Man observes:
Obviously, the universality of its theme and the quality of Dattani’s script (in English) has made it something of a cultural flagship for contemporary Indian theatre.... Mahesh Dattani has whipped up a piquant curry of emotions, held in check with incisive psychological insight and seasoned with effortless wit.

Tendulkar, Karnad and Dattani have been ranked amongst the best playwrights of India and as writers whose works bring about an awareness of the contemporary times. Tendulkar’s plays are a beginning towards a changing society, Karnad’s carry forward the development and Dattani’s are an assertion of it. Their plays appeal not only at the performance level but also at the level of literature. Their plays have been translated into various languages to make them reach all the corners of the country and the English translations have reached even outside the country. Such continuous writings and translations from these three playwrights is proof enough of their enjoying an outstanding position in the history of Indian English literature.
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