When the post-colonial India liberated from the imperial dictates, the drama began to flourish. In Bengal, in Maharastra playwrights began to experiment with a variety of themes and techniques, however the south was slow to change and there have been very few playwrights and stage performances. The scene is pathetic if we take into consideration drama written in English. It was Mahesh Dattani who first wrote in English.

Mahesh Dattani is a multi-talented, multi-faceted individual and he is paving his own path of success on stages worldwide. Mahesh Dattani is much more than one of our best known playwrights. He is a director, actor, dancer, teacher and writer, all rolled into one. Dattani has a theatre studio in Bangalore named Rangamane (also known as Mahesh's Studio), where he conducts workshops on acting, playwriting and directing. He has to his credit the distinction of being the only playwright to have been awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for writing plays in English (India's highest literary award).

Dattani's ability to create meaningful and moving drama has established him as the leading figure in English theatre today. Dattani is a complete man of the theatre familiar with all aspects of stagecraft. He has set up a theatre group in Bangalore, the city where he has grownup. Dattani feels that people have to come to
terms with the fact that English is an Indian language, just as it is American or Canadian or Australian. We should observe the fact that India has this colossal capacity to absorb from all sources. This is exactly how we have survived colonization.

Dittani's love of drama and dearth of English drama in India inspired him to write more plays. The charismatic quality of Dattani is the wide range of themes that he deals with in his writing. He explores the modern subjects like homosexuality, gender identity, human relationships and communalism. He gives expression to the longings and aspirations of the middle class Indians.

With Dattani's foray into the modern subjects changed the audience by homogenizing them with his theatre, and his theater with the taste of his audience. Bangalore is the place where his own familial context is concerned, because the family itself was displaced and resettled there. There he searched for his sense of identity in a place where the linguistic community was alien to his own. As English is the window language and vehicle of communication, then somehow made itself an integral part of his own identity. With natural ease, Dattani uses his chosen language. He finds it as the most comfortable language. Language is the major area of challenge, and so this achievement of Dattani is
significant. He uses English for the stage with a high measure of capability. As the urban middle class speaks English today, there is a rising assurance with the English language, shared by audiences and playwrights. Almost all the plays depict the life of urban society where Indian Drama in English never was before.

It is important to keep in mind that the playwright is actually a craftsman. He is a ‘wright’ and not ‘write’. His is not a conventional subject. He unmask the reality of the urban middle class society. He is not afraid of working within a relatively conventional dramatic structure to tell a story that was bold and powerful without ever being melodramatic. This unpretentious author of the theatre also comes up with a radio idea to be produced as part of a season marking fifty years of Indian independence in 1997.

The BBC Radio frequently commissions Dattani's plays, and he was one of the two Indians asked to contribute for the celebrations on Chaucer's six hundredth anniversary. In 1996, Dattani was commissioned to write his first radio play for the BBC; Do the Needful, an unconventional 'romantic comedy' He has successfully managed to garner a very supportive worldwide audience. It was first broadcast on 14 August 1997. Following the successful broadcast of Do the Needful, Mahesh Dattani was
invited to submit another idea, and so it was that Uma Rao, the scholastic sleuth, was introduced to the British listening audience in the play *Seven Steps Around the Fire*. The listener's response to this play is extremely positive. This play was first performed on stage at the Museum Theatre Chennai, by MTC production, on 6th August 1999. The theme of the play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* deserves to touch the society and to be touched by it. In this play he openly handles in Indian theatre the gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal. It is a play about how a society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the potential society creates. This play was first performed at the Tara Theatre, Mumbai, on 23 November 1998. The play *Final Solutions* is about transferred resentments. This play was first performed at Guru Nanak Bhavan, Bangalore, on 10 July 1993.

To direct a play is the process of making the written texts alive through performance. Dattani worked with the actors to recreate his text in a form, which suited their approach to performance: a sub textual approach characteristic of actors with a western training. Watching this was an object lesson in openness, responsiveness, and cross-cultural collaboration. Dattani loves traditional art forms especially Bharatanatyam, which is integral to
Dance like a Man. His stories such as Dance Like a Man and Morning Raga are from our culture of past and its influence on the present. Dattani is a Bharatanatyam dancer who trained under renowned gurus U. S. Krishna Rao and Chandrabhaga Devi for six years when he was in his 20s, he says it was during this period that he developed a taste for Carnatic music and also heard stories of how the classical dances and dancers occupied a place in society. But Dance Like a Man was not his gurus' story. And the character of Jairaj wasn't based on his own experience as a dancer. For Dattani's parents, the odd thing was not that their son wanted to dance, but that he wanted to learn an art from a region of India not his own. It was only a cultural perspective but not gender perspective. This play was first performed at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore, on 22 September 1989 as a part of the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival. Dattani, the theatre practitioner loves art and not himself in art. His plays fuse the physical and special awareness of the Indian theatre with the textual rigour of western models like Ibsen and Tennessee Williams.

Through the fusion of Post-colonial India and multi-cultural Britani, Dattani creates such a space of political and social statement of astounding force. To Mahesh Dattani a play is never really finished. Plays really happen in the theatre only, as
ephemeral events. The apparently permanent printed text is just one approximation to what might occur when the piece is performed. The constantly shifting nature of Dittany's stage space became the starting point for a kaleidoscopic approach to the text.

As Dattani frequently takes the complicated dynamics of the modern urban family as his subject under the weight of cultural constructions of gender, and repressed desire, his characters struggle for freedom and happiness. His plays are played on multi-level where interior and exterior become one, and geographical locations are collapsed-in short, his settings are as fragmented as the families who inhabit them.

In the play *Tara* the issues of class and community, and the clash between traditional and modern lifestyles and values are woven into. *Tara* is about the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins following the discovery that their separation was manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favour the boy over the girl. Dattani sees *Tara* as a play about the gendered self. The play *Where There's a Will* has several interesting aspects. Dattani describes it as the exorcism of the patriarchal code. The play *Thirty Days in September* looks at incest and child abuse. Dattani has never fallen short of serious issues that need to be addressed. It is difficult to situate Dattani as a part of a
continuum in a given 'tradition' of Indian playwriting, with in the framework of Indian dramaturgy. Dattani succeeded in raising concerns, which are familiar to most audiences in Delhi, Bangalore, or Bombay, not through literature or television, but through life and experience.

The plays of Dattani present a stimulating and provoking platform for dissenting views, cultural tensions and relationships. So many issues, which are common urban problems mirror in a very incisive manner in his plays. No issue is sacrosanct or taboo – Dattani confronts all of them with a warmth, spontaneity and clarity tinged with a comic overview. The tone, ambience everything is Indian, characters and ideas - every thing is Indian – even the English is delightfully so. Presenting these plays will provide an exiting and rewarding challenge.

The perfect cueing into burning issues of social relevance, once we have stashed away in dusty closet niches for generations, sets Mahesh Dattani apart from other contemporary Indian playwrights. Ever since he first penned Where There's a Will in 1986, Dattani has treated each subject with a deep-seated identification rooted in everyday angst. Such charged emotions spare no one- neither the players and the director, nor the audience. Deep within platitude-ridden Indian society, his
characters seethe and reveal, probe and discern, scathing their families and neighbours, leaving each reader or watcher with a storm within as the aftermath. An essential storm for our evolution as socially sensitive individuals.

Performance is the predominant aspect of theatre, whereas writing is the other aspect. Dattani’s plays did not amount to anything substantial like a tradition of play writing, nor did their staging lead to their emergence of a tradition of Indian theatre in English. Indian theatre in English began to emerge with a distinctive and vigorous identity, because people generally use English to read the text but not for performance. Only after the homogenization of the English language, Indian theatre in English begins to emerge with a distinctive and vigorous identity. Mahesh Dattani is in the vanguard of those who have made this happen and has an innate sense of dialogue that is vital, stimulating, lucid and effective. He has dispelled the perception about English theatre being ‘gratuitous fizz’.

Dattani has been working with films since 1992; having written screenplays for films like *Ek Alag Mausam* for which he was the creative consultant. As a stage director turned filmmaker he has to translate his vision and power in handling dramatic action, overtone, personal moments and emotional insight into cinematic
technique. *Mango Soufflé* (2002), the celluloid version of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* revises its narrative style as the film is a visual component. Dattani discovered an entirely new language-being, he says, at that stage of life where he would like to explore cinema, the way he did with theatre and dance.

The survey of the literature available on earlier Indian drama in English, suggests that Indian Drama in English was generally perceived as being mediocre in output and quality. It lacked encouragement from theatre groups, audience and sponsors, with the result that the playwrights tended to write "literary" plays that were not stage worthy. Most of the plays failed to use convincing spoken English, because they had no real life models to work from. Dattani brings out the follies and the prejudices of Indian society as reflected within the microcosm of the family unit, the most tangible and dynamic realities of Indian society. Dattani's contribution in constructing the characters of his theatre is a way of decolonizing the theatre without resorting to 'a politically driven search for as indigenous aesthetic and dramaturgy'.

Dattani uses the dramatic tools of the colonial era. They are like the proscenium stage and other paraphernalia along with English, the "hybrid" language itself. Dattani subverts the borrowed structures with his subconscious use of accents, clothes,
music, cultural moorings and believes specific to the context of his plays.

Dattani carefully structures the play to fit in with the needs of the plot. He handles the spacing out of the performance rather admirably. The stage space was defined and redefined, aided by the lighting design and the actors charted out diverse terrains, lining up the boundaries even as the analogous narrative continued center stage.

His dramas are played on multi-level sets where interior and exterior become one, and geographical locations are collapsed- in short, his settings are as fragmented as the families who inhabit them. The stage settings are contrived to amalgamate the multiple layers of the societal, the familial and the historical contours of such a location. The segmented realities in the play suggests by the split stage levels move constantly into an internalized reality, as it were. Dattani writes with a dexterously veiled acidity, employing a language that uses both simplicity and serration, pressing the word to its limits, flanked by equally pungent, loaded silences.

Dattani preoccupies with ‘fringe’ issues. He brings forth the ‘invisible’ issues of Indian society, which remain latent and
suppressed. He talks about lives in a forced harmony. Due to the lack of choice and due to the lack of alternatives they conform to stereotypes like ‘homosexuals’. He tries to unmask the realities

The plays of Dattani present a stimulating and provoking platform for dissenting views, cultural tensions and relationships. They mirror the society’s common urban problems. No issues are sacrosanct or taboo – Dattani confronts all of them with a warmth, spontaneity and clarity tinged with a comic overview. It is a rewarding challenge to present these plays. Dattani is a craftsman and a theatre person before being a writer. With this background, Dattani became successful and could communicate to his audience his ideas in a right manner. Dattanni succeeds in raising concerns, which are familiar to most audiences in Delhi, Bangalore, or Bombay, not through literature or television, but through life and experience.

He unmasks the realities of the urban middle class society. By peeling off the colourful masks of the men and women and by bringing into light the dark secrets of the hypocritical relationships of the family and how every one wears a fancy dress to disguise their real self. Dattani proves himself unique. He tries to bring out the ugly old truths covered under the “Water proof Tarpaulin.” The earlier, idealized, Indian view of family, domestic comfort,
supportive relationships or nurturing intimacy is jeopardized in Dattani's plays. 'At last we have a playwright who gives sixty million English-speaking Indians an identity. The plays of Dattani widely varied in thematic and stylistic content, are a tribute to the dramatic vision and skill of a man who has transformed the face of urban theatre in India.

In the three plays of Dattani, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Do the Needful* and in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, the characters are Homosocial and Homosexual. He brings forth how these behavioural patterns are influencing the lives of women in the family. Confusion and dishonesty about sexual orientation surfaces in these plays. Male homosocial desires - men's relation with other men is the main theme of these plays. These plays are about how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates. The themes of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* deserve to touch the whole of society and to be touched by it. The entire continuum of this play is the travails of gay men and women, some of them strongly anti-heterosexual and their genuine real life problems. This play is in a sense is a plea for empathy and sensitivity to India's queer culture. In this play the two marginalized sections of society are juxtaposed in a complex way-gays and women. But Dattani talks
much on "men loving men", "between men "and "men promoting the interests of men".

In these three plays Dattani gently touches sex, gender and sexuality. The usage of these three terms and analytical relations are almost irremediably slippery. The charting of space between something called "sex" and some thing called "gender" has been one of the most influential and successful undertakings of feminist thought. The term "Sex" has had the meaning of a certain group of irreducible, biological differentiations between members of the species. It is a 'chromosomal sex' on which the social construction of gender is based on more fully and rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviours of male and female persons in a cultural system.

The characters in these plays choose ingenious solutions to find the way against the hegemony of the common oppressor of the society. They exemplify how Dattani enmeshes the dominant issues of sex, gender and sexuality in the epistemology of the closet. This is a lesson in openness, responsiveness and cross-cultural collaboration.

His characters are self-absorbed in their own world. Dattani is inspired by Vijay Tendulkar, who has added a new dimension to
the contemporary Marathi theatre with the machinations of power. These two playwrights deal with the unit of the family and its disintegrating relationships caused by the inflated ego of power and how it dominates one's own self and others.

Dattani's *Where There's a Will, Dance like a Man, Bravely Fought the Queen* and Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in session, Kamla, Ghashiram Kotwal* share the theme of power. In these plays power is defined horizontally in terms of individuals against individuals from patriarchal domination, humiliation, of revenge in assertion, to eventual victimization, played out against a background of political and moral decadence and degeneracy with sexuality impinging on strategies of power.

The anguish and pain of family life, destructive, stultifying relationships and patterns of behaviour are embedded in the fabric of life are due to the influence of power. The power of domination over others leads humiliation to revenge in assertion to eventual victimization. In exercising one's power over the family leads them to be the victims of their own machination.

Not only the patriarchal power, the power of profession, the power of money, but also the power of love and the power of sex influence the minds to impose it upon another causes eventual
victimizations. Humans will do any thing in their power to get it. Such persecutors will become powerless at the end. Sometimes having been in powerless position, they feel better by taking assuming power over others. The power of one mind to influence and impose itself upon another personal campaigns for control and domination over oneself, over others and over one's world, Mahesh Dattani forces us to examine our own individual and collective consciousness.

Dattani challenges the construction of 'India' and 'Indian' as they have traditionally been defined in modern theatre. He brings out how women suffer by the dictates of an oppressive society. This oppression in most cases is embodied in autocratic father figures and also husbands. Dattani's aim at changing society and offer some scope for reflections on life through his plays will give the audience some kind of insight into their own lives. The characters that inhabit Dattani's world are fallible and often vulnerable. They suffer as a consequence of being bound by the dictates of an oppressive society.

In the plays of Dattani, women emerge as stronger, more decisive characters than men. It is a rich dramatic theme and gives Dattani much to work with. Another frequent feature is domestic tension and strife. Marital relationships in Dattani's plays tend to
be arenas for endless, repetitive bickering. The partners know each other's vulnerabilities and are constantly blaming and accusing the other.

Dattani is inspired by Tendulkar's play *Silence! The Court is in Session* with the concept of 'Na Stri Swatan-tramarhathi'. With the backdrop of Karnad's *Naga- Mandala* the thesis explains how the plight of women is peculiar in the drama of life, with male chauvinism in the plays of *Where There's a Will, Bravely Fought the Queen, Dance Like a Man* and *Tara* in the plays of Dattani.

Mahesh Dattani explores the fringe issues that are generally swept aside by the 'main stream' concerns of a society that would prefer to believe that they do not exist at all. In the radio play, *Seven Steps Around the Fire* commissioned by BBC is a "whodunit" in which he uses a scholarly-sleuth to cleave away the veneer over the 'hijra' community. In contrast to this community, the chapter "Neutral maturity" deals with the dwarfed maturity in the stage play *Bravely Fought the Queen* where the highly civilized characters, men and women in urban society are stunted by the external pressures of power and patriarchy and Dattani employs Bonsai as a symbol to suggest the dwarfishness.
Dattani delicately touches the feelings of *hijras*. The characters in these plays are symbols of the ambiguous spaces they occupy in terms of their suspect sexuality. Dattani makes us to realize that we cannot bring any changes in the society as the system and the tradition is ancient.

Dattani brings out the shams of the Indian urban society in his plays. He explores the hijra community and brings out how the neuter gender is neutralized in the civilized but with stunted and dwarfed maturity.

Mahesh Dittani's plays are famous for the technical craftsmanship. Dattani ensures that the enactment on stage will be effective by giving us detailed stage directions. He uses space very skillfully, some times as confining and some times as widening. Dattani's drama technique is unique of its kind. He moves from one part of the stage to another from one level of the stage to another, and he lights up different areas of the stage at different times. As he does this, his characters move in time. Age becomes youth, 1990s become 1947 and, past, present and future come together. The complex structure of these plays matches their complex and disturbing thematic quality. Dattani, very often places one character at a higher level so that the play is seen from his or her view point.
All these plays of Dattani show a rich variety of theatre forms. Our ancient traditional forms offer the urban playwright a lot of technical freedom in the form of music, mime and exotic imagery. All the modernization and westernization of the urban life is depicted on the stage. Dattani’s stagecraft in the contemporary Indian Drama has highlighted his drama technique. The drama depends on the participation of author, actors, and audience to accept the operation of theatre and the conventions associated with it. The page is only a raw material for the stage from which the performance is created. Dattani, the writer, actor and director could weave his plays colourfully with all his talent tries to communicate his ideas through this dynamic medium.

Dattani’s keen ear for the spoken word ensures that his script seldom strikes a false note. He places his ear close to the hearts of his characters, and senses their innermost feelings. He often walks the tight rope but never slips. That Mahesh Dattani is a successful playwright is no more a contested issue. His art and craftsmanship is revealed in a manner that is unique to him. ‘Verisimilitude’ is the expression that comes to mind when one reflects on the plays of this compact Collected Plays of Mahesh Dattani. Indian theatre in English begins to emerge with a
distinctive and enthusiastic identity and needs to be given unconditional support.

Above and beyond his own successes he is hard at work creating ways for new South Asian talent to blossom. After many years of playing a major role in South Asian theatre, his work has finally made it to a Canadian stage.

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