PREFACE

Indian Drama in English made a crude beginning with the plays of Krishna Mohan Benerji. It attained its first refinement in the hands of Michael Madhusudan Dutt and it has been in existence for over a hundred years. It has made modest strides since then and has experimented in themes and techniques in variety of ways. English theatre in India is not strong enough to support Indian Drama in English. For the Indian dramatist the problem of adapting English language is not difficult if the characters are drawn from that cross section of society where English for the ordinary conversation is used. With the influence of western civilization in India a new renaissance dawns in Indian drama. English education gave an impetus and a momentum to the critical study of not only western drama, but also classical Indian Drama. Thus western impact awakened the dormant, critical impulse in the drying roots of Indian native tradition with the sap of a new life.

The output on Indian Drama has been much less than that of poetry and fiction in quantity and quality. Similarly the output of the critical material in Indian Drama is much less than that of
other genres. Of the very few playwrights of English, Mahesh Dattani stands apart. With the advent of Mahesh Dattani, the young playwright in English, the curtains have risen for the contemporary Indian Drama in English Theatre. He is the foremost Indian English playwright today.

As English is the window language and vehicle of communication, he made English an integral part of his own identity. He finds English the most comfortable language. His unselfconsciously use of the English language is one of the chief distinguishing features. As the urban middle class speaks English today, there is an increasing confidence with the English Language, shared by audience and playwright. Almost all his plays depict the life of urban society where Indian Drama in English never was before. Thus Indian Drama in English began to emerge with a distinctive and vigorous identity.

The large-scale acceptance of Indian Drama in English among the English speaking urban middle class, signaled a change not only in the plays but also in the entire socio-cultural context. Changing attitude to English, to theatre and changing definitions of urban identities have contributed to the development of Indian Drama in English as a new genre of Indian theatre.
Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian playwright writing in English, to have been awarded the Sahitya Akademi award. His plays bring Indian drama into the present day in their themes – sexuality, religious tension and gender issues – while focusing on human relations and personal and moral choices which are the classic concern of world drama. He always takes the complicated dynamics of the modern urban society. The plays of Dattani should be studied as a cultural expression of some contemporary urban Indian realities rather than as a dramatic literature to be enjoyed for aesthetic pleasure as the earlier studies of the Indian Drama in English had done. He presents a stimulating and provoking platform for dissenting views, cultural tensions and relationships. They mirror in a very incisive manner a lot of issues, which are common urban problems. He has created a theatre of a kind with the synergy of Rasa. Daring and innovative, Dattani has made Indian Drama in English a major genre of social critique today.

The present study aims at exploring the ‘visible’ and the ‘invisible’ themes in Dattani’s Collected Plays. For exploring Dattani’s central themes-the family, alternate sexuality, other gender, morality and identity– while examining the dramatic innovations in his work.
For a detailed study of Dattani the thesis is divided into seven chapters:

The first chapter is an Introduction to the contemporary Indian Drama in English. This chapter deals with the origin of Indian Drama in English, from Rabindranath Tagore to Mahesh Dattani.

The second chapter is on “The Closet Epistemology — Sex, Gender and Sexuality in the plays of Dattani”. This idea is found in the plays, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Do the Needful and Bravely Fought the Queen. The idealized Indian view of family harmony, understanding or supportive relationships are jeopardized to a large extent in these plays. He tries to make invisible things visible and he openly handles the fringe issues in his plays. His is a plea for empathy and sensitivity to Indian ‘queer culture’.

The third chapter “The Concept of Tyranny in Mahesh Dattani’s Plays” deals with the unit of family and its disintegrating relationships in the aspect of “power”. The power of domination over others and over one’s own self in 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 are discussed. In these plays power is defined horizontally in terms of individuals against
individuals from, patriarchal domination, humiliation, to 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 fourth chapter is “Gender Issues in the Plays of Mahesh Dattani.” Dattani challenges the construction of ‘India’ and ‘Indian’ as they have traditionally been defined. He brings out how women suffer by the dictates of oppression in most cases embodied in autocratic father figures and also by husbands. Dattani’s aim at changing society and offer some scope for reflections in the hope that his plays will give the audience some kind of insight into their own lives. The chapter explains how the plight of women is peculiar in the drama of life, with male chauvinism as represented in the plays Where There’s a Will, Bravely Fought the Queen, Dance Like a Man and Tara.

The fifth chapter “Unmasking the Realities of Dwarfed Maturity and Neutral Maturity”, deals with fringe issues that are generally swept aside by ‘main stream’ concerns of society that would prefer to believe that they do not exist at all. The radio play Seven Steps Around the Fire, commissioned by BBC is a “whodunit” in which he uses a scholarly-sleuth to rip off the veer over the ‘hijra’ community. In contrast to this community of neutral
maturity the chapter deals with the dwarfed maturity in the stage play *Bravely Fought the Queen*, where the highly civilized men and women in urban society are stunted by the ego, power and patriarchy and how Dattani symbolizes with the stunted growth of Bonsai.

The sixth chapter "Dramatic Technique" deals with the technique and craftsmanship of Mahesh Dattani's plays. Dattani ensures that the enactment on stage will be effective by giving detailed stage directions. He uses space very skillfully sometimes as confining and sometimes as widening. 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. Age becomes youth and past, present and future come together. The complex structure of these plays matches their complex and disturbing thematic quality in all his stage plays.

The seventh chapter, the concluding chapter, deals with Dattani's *Collected Plays*, and his quality of 'verisimilitude'. Dattani carved a niche for himself in Indian English Drama. His undaunted dedication to the truth has exposed the unpalatable side of Indian culture. Thus the study of his plays enables us to perceive the invisible realities of Indian society.
This thesis focuses on the dramatic innovations of Mahesh Dattani, the daring and innovative dramatist. It has been shown how he is the most significant contemporary English playwright who made Indian Drama in English the major genre of social critique.

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This study is inspired by Mahesh Dattani, India's best known playwright writing in English and the first to win the Sahitya Akademi award. He has encouraged me in an occasion of meeting him as a research scholar. I specially thank Mahesh Dattani for all his inspiration.

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