Chapter – VI

Conclusion

Indian English Literature has become an independent and outstanding credo writing in the Commonwealth Literature. Earlier, fiction and poetry had been highly fruit-bearing literary endeavors and drama was less profitable pursuit. Over the last few decades, Indian English drama has also started to blossom like fiction and poetry in the field of Indian English literature. Drama is the prominent form of literature. It is perhaps the most touching medium of representation of human life. It has the power to surface the conscience of the audience. The drama, being dynamic medium, depicts the dynamics of human experiences acquainting us with character’s veiled and intricate pattern of human consciousness. Dattani's contribution as a revolutionary playwright, as a drama teacher, as a stage director, as an actor, as a Bharatnatyam dancer and as a sociologist explaining various complexities of society is an asset to Indian writing as a whole. He successfully achieved the synthesis of a thinker, an artist, an actor, a director and the preacher.

When the British planted the seed of English, they had no idea that a virile, tropical beanstalk would explode in the India they left behind. The stalk would reach- if not the sky- far across the ground, and entrench itself firmly in this land of a thousand tongues. And it is through the efforts of dramatists like Dattani in India that English has not remained as an imported language, it has rather returned to the West as the expression and framework of Indian identity with the fragrance of Indian soil, soul and sensibility. With the coming of Sahitya Akademi Award, Dattani is now considered an officially recognized part of the Indian literary establishment.

Dattani's plays have a special charm to the audience in the sense that they enchant them into active identification with the character and action of the play. His plays are
symptomatic of an individual’s struggle for identity in the familial, religious, cultural and social domains. They give voice to the androgynous or gynoandrous side of a person-female within the male and the male within the female selves. His dramatic writings bring a dynamic change and innovation and though he does not revisit his roots via mythical frameworks as does Karnad yet his plays are 'Indian’ in their realistic setting of contemporary urban realities, where he gives voice to the muted and the invisible voices within the public arena of the stage. Being a master of theatrical art, his plays are characterized by innovation and experiments in stage craft, required for the powerful communication of ideas.

Dattani follows the familial focus and conflictual structure of Western realist drama, but he doesn’t imitate them. He does not adhere blindly to the rules and theatrical norms of the West, he rather imparts a uniqueness to his plays through crucial deviations. First, there is usually no 'protagonist' whose selfhood can render the struggle with home in individualistic terms and relate it to the idea of a singular destiny. Rather, the condition of victimization extends to all the inhabitants of home (in either a nuclear or an extended family) who are trapped by cultural constraints and economic circumstances into an impossible co-existence.

In the span of a century and a half, drama in India has risen from its imitative slumber of the West and has carved for itself a niche of recognition across globe. Contemporary Indian English drama in spite of its regional heritage has emerged as powerful medium to represent the socio-psychological crisis of human beings against the existing orthodoxical ideologies. Some leading dramatists like Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, and a host of other dramatists have dealt with various issues of contemporary Indian society, that have been lashing out human beings for ages. They have mirrored the problems that the society is trapped in.

Indian drama in the hands of Dattani has taken the initiative further and has proved to be a perfect blend of entertainment and enlightenment. He is a prominent contemporary
Indian English dramatist who used stage to make a representation of those aspects of social reality that are the cause of insecurity, uncertainty, depression, fragmentation, nervousness and nothingness in human life.

He is a versatile genius who encapsulates in himself creative genius dealing with human sensibility and human experience, as well as a celebrated actor, director, dancer, and film producer. His dramatic world projects something that is challenging and new which differentiates him from the other Indian playwrights and places him to a higher level of competence. Themes chosen for the plays are broadly the marginalization of voiceless people and issues of invisibility. His dramatic world focuses on the invisible issues of Indian society, which everyone comes across every day, yet maintains a silence, not cogitating in one’s mind or daring to defy. His dramatic world presents human sentiment and sensibility par excellence. The call of humanity is at the centre in all his plays. He brings theatre close to the social reality. He has depicted newer (queer, as some call them) themes like homosexuality, child sexual abuse, victims of dreaded disease like AIDS, the problems of eunuch in our society and a lot many other sensitive issues.

Besides voicing the unvoiced marginalized class in Indian society, his plays are also correlated with the contemporary issues in the Indian society. *Final Solution* is purely based on the issue of communalism in the context of Indian pluralistic society. His play *Tara* portraits the miserable plight of the female child in the contemporary Indian society, problems of their career, marriage and opportunities offered to them, socio-political exploitation, gender discrimination, and ruthless discriminatory norms of patriarchal society. Dattani is one of such literary persons, whose experiment with drama evolves a new type both in theme and technique; one that will be essentially Indian, bringing forth real creative talent that will base itself on both tradition and technique. He did not modify himself according to canon, rather he redefines the canons to increase the expressive range of his art and ideas.
Dattani's dramatic writings venture to project the real life experiences with exceptional vivacity of dialogue and performance. Commenting on his own theatrical art, Dattani admitted that theatre is a reflection of what one observes. To go beyond that would be to sermonize and cease to be theatre. This obsessive and absorbing technique used by Mahesh Dattani in all his plays is really apt. The theatre of Dattani is certainly identifiable, typified by claustrophobia and escape. Right from the beginning of his career, Dattani was trying to get out of tight places. He has been experimenting with permeable fourth walls, translucent scenery, and the theatre's obsessive need to establish and to transgress borders. Themes of sexuality, madness and memory interweave in his oeuvre, questioning, over and over, about how to project the inner psychological process through the outer technical skills.

*Tara* is a medium for Dattani to reveal the patriarchal underpinnings of the society. Its gender discrimination has led to a dysfunctional family. It provides a glimpse of the modern society carrying the badge of education and advancement of thought but underneath the façade of modernity lurks beneath the veneer of age old male chauvinism and gender discrimination. *Tara* exposes the hollowness of the advanced and the educated society which maintains the shams of equality on one hand but when it comes to reality, they too are the perpetrators like Patel and his wife. The world may portray equality of women with men but we are all not ignorant of the sad predicament and their painful journey to come out of the confinements and breaking the fetters. Dattani questions the role of the society which treats the children of the same womb in two different ways on the basis of gender.

Even in the contemporary era, female foeticide has become so common that people kill the foetus in the uterus after detecting the gender of the child. All the propagandas of equality between male and female, equal opportunities to women in all the fields are belied. Dattani succeeds in portraying a heart wrenching account of the plight of a girl who loses her life in the struggle for survival not because of her fault or the ordained destiny but because of the discrimination that is embedded in the patriarchal codes of conduct. Dattani ridicules the
societal standards in undertones that move the audience with pathos at the death of Tara. Education has been a failure in the erasure of the real life practical education that has been given to them through socialization rather patriarchal socialization. His play also focuses on the misconception that education makes the society broader in thought and feeling.

The sensitive issue of sexual abuse of children is also dealt quite rapaciously in *Thirty Days in September*. It unwontedly hauls our mind to its hostile effect on the overall growth and development of the female child. Several complications like depression, poor self-esteem, anxiety, physical injury, post-traumatic disorder, and propensity may generate to augment the sense of inculcated oppression in adulthood. Relentlessly molested by her maternal uncle, Mala gathers a storehouse of heartrending memories. She has a tattered past filled with abusive abrasions. There is an audacious endeavor throughout the play to disclose the silence which environs Mala through her blemished psyche.

Through sincere men like Deepak, Dattani endeavors to unfetter women from perpetration of sexual exploitation. He celebrates Deepak’s character that has the courage to expose sexual repression and can offer support in emotional crisis. The dexterous handling of the play by the dramatist has highlighted an extremely cruel issue which often remains unspoken like the way Henrik Ibsen did in his time. Dattani questions the child sexual abuse with special reference to incest. This wrecks the lives of the sufferers. They propagate not only the physical agony but also the mental deformation, and challenge the social traditions which classify women as a silent recipient of pain by presenting the quarrel between mother and daughter. The play has a fine balance of form and content and every expression is potent enough to convey a meaning beyond the verbal suggestion.

Dattani’s play *Final Solutions* has a powerful reverberation as it deals with an issue of extreme concern to our society, *i.e.* the problem of communalism. The play portrays dissimilar shades of the communalist approaches established among Hindus and Muslims in its attempt to underline the stereotypes and clichés which manipulate the collective sensibility
of one community against another. What distinguishes this work from other plays written on the subject is that it is neither sentimental in its appeal nor simplified in its approach. It advances the objective frankness of a social scientist while presenting an assortment of sundry attitudes towards religious identity that often thrusts the country into inhuman discord. Yet the issue is not moralized, as the demons of communal hatred are located not externally but deep within us.

Dattani is worried to see the fatal consequences of communal riots and social disharmony. In the play he shows how Satanic manipulations make tiny snowflake, snowball in a genocidal juggernaut. He also draws our attention to the role of the politician, police and public. Peaceful co-existence of the common people suddenly seems to be suffering from mass amnesia, where they cease to recognize each other and bitterness begins on religious consideration. Religion then becomes a distancing factor among them. It advances the objective candour of a social scientist while presenting a mosaic of diverse attitudes towards religious identity that often plunges the country into inhuman strife. It casts a negative impact on the dominated; the natural outcome is resisted and man/woman becomes mechanical to be acted on the pressure of a switch, otherwise not. Under the constant surveillance, individuality is lost and personality becomes a sign of subversion. The play, with a sensitive mode, projects how sometimes the absconding signature of authority becomes an isolating caricature of normality.

Dattani’s *Brief Candle* tells us how people suffering from incurable diseases have to dance between love and death. The play is farcical in tone and presents some extremely funny situations revolving around a hotel room near the airport. The characters in the play await their departures and hence they end up in comic situations as they entangle themselves in surreptitious dalliances and complicated love affairs. Dattani has used the metaphor of arrival and departure for life and death which allows the characters to reflect on their own struggle for survival.
The play, *Where There is a Will*, is built on the conflict of human aspirations in familial relationships. Dattani, like Ibsen and Shaw, exposes the evils of the patriarchal norms of society and presents his narrative around the intrigues and manoeuvrings of a dysfunctional Indian family. Dattani's major concern in the play has been to show the ‘subversion of patriarchy’. The central character of the play, Hasmukh Mehta represents the darkest face of patriarchy-intolerance, hatred and dominance. These passions are all fuelled by inner insecurities and complexes of guilt and fear. The other characters of the play-Ajit, Sonal, Preeti and Kiran get liberation from the stranglehold of Husmukh Mehta who is gradually dwarfed and diminished to the point of insignificance.

*Dance Like a Man* falls in the same category with *Where There’s a Will*—the presence of authoritarian father. Jairaj is eager to take dance as his profession but his father is vehemently critical of Jairaj's standpoint because the socio-political structure of our society does not allow a man to take dance as his profession and consider dance to be for a different kind of women. Jairaj desperately tries to break away with such traditional social custom by delving deep into the world of rhythm and dance and further marries a dancer named Lata who also belongs to a dancing family. After a series of clash of view points, the play culminates with an artistic revelation through the dramatic dance of powerful sensibilities.

The play *Dance Like a Man* poses serious questions on the reader’s mind. It makes one think and rethink about how our actions are shaped according to the society and how one accepts them without questioning. This conditioning is done right from the childhood and it is nobody’s fault. The rules were made according to the norms of the then society and it is impossible to stay put on them even now especially when the society is constantly evolving. Personally, I feel that the rules should be amended according to the situations and time period. The characters are shaped in such a manner that one cannot term them as a proper white or a proper black character. It displays shades of gray.
Making a thing invisible resides in denying the thing any existence. To avoid talking about something or to cover a thing is to make it invisible. In fact, there has always been a politics in society behind this invisibilization of something, especially if the thing is tabooed or one deviating from norms. In the politics concerned with sexuality, the process of invisibilization renders any sexual deviance invisible by merely denying its existence with a projection of the discourse of heterosexual and normal behaviour or heteronormativity. This sexual politics of invisibilization is also textual. For instance, a writer whose writing covertly hints at homosexuality and later establishes social order and harmony at the expense of homosexuality is the product of a politics which has its deep root in the history of a heteronormative and patriarchal society. In the context of the Indian society the studies of what is sexual “norm” and what is “deviance” are interlinked with the formation of the identity called “Indian”. This identity is held to be traditional, conservative and historically sound.

The identity of the Indian society, as is traditionally defined by Hinduism, is that of peace, harmony, tolerance and inclusion. Indianness resides in the idea of 'Unity in diversity', as it is presumed to give shelter to multifarious deviances of sexuality even in spite of a monolithic heteronormativity. But this picture of Indianness can be seen as a politically convenient—as also reductive—construction which suits the needs of a particular political ideology at a particular juncture in history. As such, the heteronormative Indian society has, in fact, consciously kept issues which can subvert the very essence of “Indianness” tactfully hidden in the closet to construct harmonious social picture. The contemporary India keeps issues of deviant sexualities like those of the gays, lesbians and hijras deftly invisibilized in its cupboard, denying them any existence. In general, all social and religious injunctions against alternate sexualities as being unproductive are economic in origin, since alternate sexualities have nothing to do with reproduction and propagation of the human species. Moreover, the babies born out of a normal heterosexual union would join war as “men” in times of scarcity to protect their tribes or nations.
Homosexuality, or alternate sexuality in general, does not lead to creation, rather it is taken as a form of recreation which is deemed futile by the societal norms. Therefore any such sexual deviance that challenges the status quo of patriarchy is trampled under the foot of the dominant forces in society. Any such emerging phenomenon is to be crushed or silenced or made invisible under the veneer of the fruitfulness and harmony of heterosexual normativity. Writers have been compulsorily part of this politics of invisibilization by positing a “straight” and harmonious world, and writers writing of a “coming out” by gays and lesbians have been mostly confined themselves in the closet for fear of a “witch-hunt” or stigmatization, fear of literary shaming and isolation in literary heterosexual circles. Therefore the only way the patriarchal society can curb any such exercise of self-autonomy is to render all such deviant desires invisible.

The same politics is also traced in society’s treatment of the transgenders. Society at large is confused regarding the role and identity of the transgenders. As a result it resorts to stigmatizing the hijras and forms an ideology conferring on them a socially inferior status, somehow establishing their dangerous nature and invisibilizing their struggles and sufferings. *On A Muggy Night in Mumbai* deals with homosexuality in all its colours. Humans are, by nature, emotionally androgynous beings, with the characteristics of one gender overshadowing the other. By this I mean that most women have male responses that are not society and culture induced, while men have a tendency to constantly suppress their feminine sides. Now that it is fashionable for men to be "sensitive", the lines between gender specifics are becoming more blurred.

*On A Muggy Night in Mumbai* is a serious encounter with the politics of sexuality. The protagonists are, for the large part, pretty sure of their sexual preferences yet have to keep their sexuality and sexual orientation in hiding out of the fear of stigmatization. We have Bunny, the well-known public figure who does not want to come out of the closet, Ranjit, the flaming queen pouncing around the stage, Deepali and Kamlesh who are quite
comfortable with their sexuality, and then there is Ed/Prakash who is trying to be bi-sexual
despite himself. There are many levels at which this play works. The sibling consanguinity
between Kiran and Kamlesh is made grotesque by Ed/Prakash's incestuous relationship
with both.

Do The Needful, Dattani's earlier radio play for BBC, too has homosexuality as its
theme. Both On A Muggy Night in Mumbai and Do The Needful are first of their kind in Indian
literature dealing explicitly with the theme of homosexuality. In this, the situation is a
traditionally arranged marriage where the woman, Lata, is in love with someone else while
Alpesh, the proposed groom, is a closet homosexual. The script is an interesting tussle between
these two emotional situations and the resolution is reflective of our current social mores.

We have a tendency to constantly look for "classics" in our literature. There are very
few literary works that emerge as full-blown classics. Theatre, by its very nature, is transient.
But while that does not mean that plays do not last through generations of play-doers and
play-goers, it also does not mean that plays that do not, perhaps, stand the test of time are
irrelevant or "bad theatre". Drama has to confront its own times. It has simultaneously always
been a mirror to society, its trends and thought-processes, while also forcing society to look
at situations and think about issues that it may not want to deal with.

Dattani excels in mirroring his society. By which I mean the restricted English-
speaking, reading, thinking society to which you and I also belong. There are enough Dollys
and Alkas (Bravely Fought The Queen) within our ambiets, who are a product of the family
situation thrown up by people like their husbands and Baa, just as there are enough Smitas
and Javeds (Final Solutions) who are victims of communal passions.

Dattani tackles issues that afflict societies the world over. Dealing with issues like the
male-female ascendance divide (Tara), the patriarchal tradition (Where There's A Will/ Dance
Like A Man), consumerism and communalism, Dattani holds back nothing. He uses the world
of comic theatre to encase the bitterness of the truths he is dealing with. But there is a tendency
in his work for his resolutions to be too abrupt. Perhaps the fact that he has to be conscious of
the running length of the play forces him to quickly end the script. But he needs to balance the
"setting of the scene" with the "end of the play" in a more even manner. Homosexuality? Most
Indians would be uncomfortable discussing it, but Mahesh Dattani is not.

A man with a mission, is he? Just doing the needful, that's all. Dattani talks about two
generations who seem to be sharing the same experiences at the hand of their callous
husbands and yet to come third generation, Daksha who also experiences the maltreatment of
her father even before her birth and is born as a disable child. Dattani’s use of the bonsai is an
interesting trope in the play. On one hand it reflects on the nurturing aspects of Lalitha. On
the other hand, it also unveils the attitude of a power ridden society towards women. The
women in the play are creations like Lalitha’s bonsais, whose shoots or their desires are
constantly trimmed and cut so that they spread only to a particular level. They are not
allowed to attain the required height. Their roots are not given ample space to spread. This is
also the case with the women in this play. They too are trimmed in different ways to fulfil
men’s desire. Usually people say that the rule of men over women is accepted everywhere
voluntarily and that even women make no complaints about it. But women today have started
recording their protests. In England, America, France, Italy, Switzerland and Russia,
thousands of women have protested against their social co

Thematically the most outspoken play, Ek Alag Mausam depicts the atrocities, pain
and sufferings of the lives of HIV patients, the inhuman treatment meted to them. The play is
an attempt to respond to the call of humanity. It is not a question of love of two people but it
is a question of love with life. Dattani leaves a beautiful optimistic message to all those
marginalized patients who are on the fringes- the urge to live come what may. The play may
be deemed as a tool to evolve social protest against the social myths and misbelieve about the
dreaded disease that pushes the victim to dark recesses of silent suffering.
Mahesh Dattani’s forte is his command over theatrical art and occupies a holy status among its sister arts. Dattani, through his adept skill and command over drama, endeavors to bring out a social reformation in the society via his representation of the dilemmas and contradictions flowing incessantly in the psyche of the homosapiens in the society. The complex issues he takes up are the manifestations of the frustration, despair and the negative energies piled up in the minds of individual as well as the collective consciousness of the social agents called human beings.

Through his theatrical art, Dattani succeeds in persuading the readers to examine their individual and collective consciousness raising several pertinent questions. Does the person as we are before the world is the same as our inner self? Have we emancipated ourselves from ignorance and embraced nobility or are we just maintaining a facade? Or do we blindly follow the pre-determined laws rather prejudices of family and society at large? Dattani investigates the socio-cultural prejudices making his plays thought provoking and introspective because he deals with the strata of society facing identity crisis, feeling isolated and marginalized. He takes up fearlessly for the welfare of human beings whatever has been pushed under the rug or neglected. The themes of his plays are not confined to a society or a country but they are universal in appeal because his themes draw attention of the audience instantly as whatever he writes he is concerned for humanity at large. Since his themes are universal they cross all social and linguistic barriers eliciting emotional and intellectual response from the audience.

Society has always been in a state of constant and radical shifts of values and norms and it is with these radical departures and formations of new structures, new marginalizations take place. These marginalizations are the parents of new grievances which need to be voiced in the society. Stirred by these unspoken and muted grievances, playwrights like Dattani took to writing as a potent weapon for urban catharsis and addressing of human miseries, sufferings and conflicts. Dattani’s plays are the best exemplars of his genius in portraiture of
human sensibilities and experiences. Synthesizing psycho-social realism with his theatrical art like G.B. Shaw and Ibsen, Dattani voices his humanitarian dreams and his ideals for an egalitarian society, with dramatic medium as his tool. The subtlety with which his he depicts the dynamics of human experiences acquainting us with character’s veiled and intricate pattern of human consciousness remains unique.

Dattani has created a rich tradition of theatre with sublime goals. It is not only entertainment but nobler goals of humanity that make him stand apart among his contemporaries. Longinus’s dictum holds true for Dattani and his works: Sublimity is the ring of greatness in the soul. It is this greatness of his soul that reflected in Dattani’s play. He has bequeathed a rich theatrical tradition, a sublime oeuvre of dramas to the posterity. With the distinct and diverse dramatic modes of full length stage plays, radio plays and screen plays, Dattani has explored the possibilities to integrate human sensibility with virgin issues.

Dattani's distinction lies in his distinctive theatrical perceptions with the spaces for the shift of dramatic scene defining in terms of time and space which have inaugurated a new era of Indian English Theatre. His plays make a beyoning of the canons of blind and prejudiced emulations and translation as well as classical and western traditions. In this way, Dattani makes daring efforts to depict quite unconventional and radical themes in his plays. The complexities of human relationship and predicament of the modern men find due expression in his dramatic works. His dramatic techniques and stagecraft are superb. There are rapid shifts in terms of time and space. He has made use of different images, symbols, devices, techniques etc. to communicate his ideas in a very effective and concrete manner. Dattani’s theatrical genius is characterized by diversity, dynamism, and innovative urge. He is an unconventional voice in the theatrical firmament of India. He seeks to present volcanic dimensions of rage and resentment as well as distrust and discontent shrouded inside the psychological domain of human consciousness. Dattani’s theatrical creed asserts that human nature has its own autonomous space. Any act of encroachment to this space, either through
conventional ideology or by any other means, will result into agitation and uprising causing chaos and destruction.

Crossing the cultural and linguistic barriers, Dattani has created a rich repertoire of natural and authentic theatre with higher and nobler humanitarian aims. His theatre is emblematic of spirit and sensibility of Indian soil having 'the richness of the classical tradition' from which he 'developed a greater spatial-temporal awareness.' (MMP 25). His canvas of theatre is colored with the sufferings and tribulations of the common human beings. Assimilation of theatrical art with real life experience is the quintessence of his theatrical creed which breaks the web of illusion and ignorance.