

## **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN THE SELECT PLAYS OF GIRISH KARNAD AND MAHESH DATTANI; A STUDY**

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Indian English Drama marks the beginning of distinctive tradition in the realm of world drama. The playwrights find myths, legends, history folkore etc. very useful and attractive for the thematic investment in their plays. In fact contemporary playwrights reinvestigate this treasure of knowledge with present socio-culture and political scenario. However, it should be pin pointed here that contemporary drama mainly depends on translation. The plays, written in vernacular languages are translated into English. So the translation works boosted up the Indian dramatic scene. In this context the contributions of some great playwright's like Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar are highly wonderful and therefore occasions here special elucidation.

Another doyen dramatist in the arena of contemporary drama is Mohan Rakesh who is best known for his play Halfway House which is a translated work of his Hindi plays Adhe Adhure. The play depicts discord and dichotomy of family life. It also explains how parental discord affects on the lives of the children. One Day in Ashadha (1958) and The Great Swans of the Waves (1902) are also his full length play dealing with the historical past. Nonetheless, the theme of man-woman relationship is also well explored in these plays. Since drama is the most powerful and potent means explore human experience, Mohan Rakesh has used it for exploring man-woman relationship in a very realistic way. As far as Mohan Rakesh's dramatic output is concerned, it is not very large one but his contribution to the field of Indian Drama is myriad.

Girish Karnad is one of the outstanding playwrights in the modern India. He has considerably enriched and enlightened the tradition of Indian English drama. During his childhood days in country side of Karnataka he encountered with some Natak Mandalies which are indelible impression on his dramatic works. Karnad has composed eight plays. All these plays are originally appeared in Kannad and later on have been translated into English. He began his dramatic career with the publication of his maiden play Yayati in 1961. He is retelling the myth

of the Mahabharata very skillfully in this play. He works out the motivation that facilitates Yayati's final choice. It is very unique and original play. Of the eight plays five plays Tughlaq, Havyavandana, Naga-Madala, Tale-Danda and the Fire and the Rain are reincarnated into English. Karnad plays were staged successfully and got international recognition.

He is capable of comprehending requisite of stage production of the play. Karnad's plays reflect such social situations and cultural practices taking place in our country. Liberation of women from the variety of bondages and rigid patriarchal control are the essential feminine concerns of Karnad plays. Multiple perspectives have been expressed through women characters in the plays Yayati, Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala and The Fire and the Rain. In this paper, the attempt has been laid to bring down patriarchy and patriarchal ideas and give women choice to do whatever they want equally with men. Karnad's plays portray the harsh and realistic situation faced by women in India. Being a conscious and sensitive dramatist, Girish Karnad envisages profound changes in traditional, socio, psycho-cultural status of a woman and tries to establish the identity of a woman in his plays.

Mahesh Dattani as an Indian an Indian English Dramatist is not an easy task. A multifaceted personality Dattani has written dramas, radio plays, screen plays and acted in and directed many plays over the years. His plays are primarily written to be staged. Dattani has the courage and dare of conviction to say what is what. Dattani not only faces reality but depicts it with all sincerity and devotion. Dattani's plays such as Seven Steps Around the Fire, Mango Souffle, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Do the Needful are based on gay and lesbian relationship. Life in these plays is presented from bisexual and same-sex love point of view.

Problems of Indian middle class family such as marriage negotiations, inheritance, poverty caused by natural calamities like earthquakes and droughts are treated as themes in plays like Where There's a Will, Do the Needful, Clearing the Rubble, and The Tale of a

Mother Feeding her child. In *Thirty Days in September*, a family play based on incestuous relationship, Dattani shows how women feel humiliated and get exploited by male members of the family. Here, a helpless mother, Shanta turns to Deepak to save her daughter, Mala, for both the mother and the daughter were physically exploited by the same man who happens to be her brother and Mala's uncle. The agonizing request "Please save her. I did not save her. I did not know how to save her. How could I save her when I could not save myself".

Dattani depicts communal distrust and disharmony in his well-known play, *Final Solutions*. The title is highly suggestive, for it makes us think whether the evil of communal violence can be rooted out, lock, stock and barrel. There are hints and guesses in the play which whisper results, Provided we pay heed to it. To write a play on a burning topic like this, requires courage of conviction, which Dattani has in plenty. Bobby's reply to Aruna, "if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed", provides a clue to Hindu-Muslim reconciliation and "further Bobby adds, "And if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate". This reminds us the great Shakespearean dictum, "forget and forgive". If the Hindus and Muslims forget the past and forgive each other for the wrongs done in the past, then the road to understanding and cooperation will be free of thorns. After all, the past is irrevocable. Why waste the present, for the happenings in the past and destroy our future? This seems to be the message of the play.

Dattani not only deals with the themes like communal; violence, crime, homo-eroticism, lesbianism, disease and the breaking down of joint family system, but with finer things of life like dance and music. In *Dancing like a Man* and *Morning Raga*, he dives deep into the heart of the dancers, artists and singers who pine for recognition. Dance and Music transcend the baser instinct of human beings and bring joy to their minds. It is an irony of life that some people like Amrital in *Dance like a Man* and Abhinay's father in *Morning Raga* are opposed to dance and music respectively. But their children remain unfazed and cultivate dance and music against all odds. Dattani suggests through the characters that 'dance' and 'music' can be taken as respectable

Professions in our society. Old prejudice against dancers and musicians should go. The reviews of Lata's dance speaks volumes for the sublime aspect of dance. It reads like this: Her rendition of the *ashtapad* from *Geeta Govindam* was tenderly intense and intensely tender. The audience was y transported to *Gokulam* and witnessed

Radha pining for the divine lover, who has failed to arrive. Lata's tearful expression / and heaving bosom conveyed all that was humanly possible. / (CP II ISO)

The love of music and passion for dance are depicted through the characters of protagonists of both the plays. Dattani shows clearly that fulfillment in life comes through the success in music and dance. No doubt, these two plays have added a new dimension to Dattani's plays)

Mahesh Dattani always lays emphasis on theatre' and the performance of the actor—not on printed words. As Michael Walling puts it: Mahesh, a play is never really finished. Plays only really happen in the theatre, as ephemeral events. The apparently permanent printed text is just one approximation to what I might occur when the piece is performed. (CP 229)

Having said about Dattani's themes, let me turn to his techniques Drama as we all know is a performing art. Words in a play assume significance through articulation by the characters. It is performance on the stage by the actors that influences the audience. Written words don't really matter in a play, as they do in other genres. That is why, the stage direction, movement and setting of the play matter most in our understanding of the texts.

Mahesh Dattani lays emphasis on the articulatory words. All his plays are experimented on the stage and some of his plays were staged first and printed afterwards. Movement, stillness, silence, sound, and movement. The setting of the play depends on the arrangement of these four which give it a distinct identity. The movement of the characters and events are governed by stillness, silence and sound. The language in Dattani's plays transcends gender distinctions. Both men and women use words freely to describe their sex-preferences. The characters are not inhibited. The conflict of the mind cuts across individuals as well as societies. In some of his plays the conflict takes place between characters, and communities and above all, within the same individual. Plays like *Dance like a Man*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*.

The techniques in Dattani's Plays are in commensurate with his daring portrayal of sex relations and sexual preferences in his plays. If in the past gender, race and class were the determining factors for character analysis, in the nineteen eighties and after sexuality is taken as the most important factor that governs the socio-cultural lives of the people in the metropolis. John McRae's introduction to "on a Muggy Night in Mumbai" underlines this in the following lines:

"Mahesh Dattani is always adventurous in his ways of using the theatrical space at his disposal: multiple levels breaking bounds of the proscenium, wondrously inventive

use of lighting to give height, breadth, and depth.... The outside world is always pressing in the heat, the sounds, the people pestering Bunny, the kids who find the photo. Very few dramatists are able to give this sense of a whole society touching the participants in on stage drama it recalls Ibsen at his social best" (CP 45).

He raises the issues from sexuality to criminality and then moves on to topical subjects like communal violence, and dreaded disease like Aids and allows the characters to express their views freely. The same technique he adopts with reference to subjects like, music, dance and human relationship. The readers and the audience respond to the dialogues uttered by the characters. His plays evoke a good deal of empathy. His theatrical language modifies his dramatic texts and is reflected in the performance of the characters. Like many of the modern plays, in Dattani's works, the similarity between the language of his plays and that of ordinary people in our society is explicit. Dattani's plays are on contemporary life situations of middle and lower middle class families.

Dattani examines the problems; find them difficult but does not run away from them. His characters are lively irrespective of being 'good' and 'evil'. Dattani's characters are 'warm' and human with both virtues and vices. They speak to us in our own situation and evoke a sense of empathy in us. There in lies Dattani's originality.

Mahesh Dattani's contribution to Indian English Drama, in-order to place him among well known theatre personalities like Vijay Tendulkar (Marathi), Badal Sircar (Bengali), Manoranjan Das (Oriya) Who write in regional languages and are known as Bhasha Playwrights (i.e. playwrights in their respective languages) even when their plays are available in English translation. Girish Karnad is an exception. Mahesh Dattani is the only major Indian English playwright writing in English in the closing decades of the twentieth century and now, in the twenty-first century. Mahesh Dattani as an Indian an Indian English Dramatist is not an easy task. A multifaceted personality Dattani has written dramas, radio plays, screen plays and acted in and directed many plays over the years. His plays are primarily written to be staged.

Dattani has the courage of conviction to say what is what. Dattani not only faces reality but depicts it with all sincerity and devotion. Karnad's characters, though have historical and mythical sources, and bear correspondence with the contemporary socio-political conditions: they earn their autonomous individuality because of his approach towards them. He looks at them anew, searches elemental human passions among them, and uses the picturesque

settings as platforms to interrogate and challenge the existing moral frame of society. His protagonists threaten the stereotyped concepts of morality and force the readers and spectators to introspect and review them; Karnad's treatment of the myth in *Yayati* initiates an affirmed conviction of the playwright, in the words of Aparna Dharwadkar: *Yayati* established at the outset of Karnad's career, that myth is not merely a narrative to be bent to present purposes, but a structure of meanings worth exploring in itself because it offers opportunities for philosophical reflection without the constraints of realism or the necessity of contemporary setting (17)

The merit of Karnad's treatment of the myth is that it loses its traditional sacredness and didactic purpose for preaching ideal value system. The play confirms to Aristotle's three classical unities. It refers to past events which are the results of the racial tensions of the beings. The myth of *Yayati* is linked back to the wars between the gods and the rakshasas. The rakshasha King accepting the Brahmin sage Shukracharya as their guru for the Sanjeevani Vidya (art of reviving dead of life) is also a part and parcel of the same racial tensions. Acha entered the ashram of sage Shuracharya and had a love affair with Devayani. This was a conspiracy against the rakshasha's the betrayal of Kacha leaves Devayani broken hearted. He takes an oath that she will never love a man again. She finds an escape in the company of a rakshasha princess Sharmishtha under whose patronage her father Shukracharya lives.

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