

SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND PLAYS OF MAHESH DATTANI: A REVIEW

Shefali Diwan, Dr. Shabina Khan

Research scholar, RNTU Bhopal

Abstract

Indian literature whether drama, novel, poetry or short fiction, is depiction of Indian social setup. From its inception to the present, it has revealed different layers of Indian society. 'Big three' of Indian literature, women novelists, poets and short fiction authors all have presented the realistic pictures of various cultures and communities of India. This paper will discuss about Mahesh Dattani's views of Indian society and characters. The purpose of this research paper is to unravel Indian society and demonstrate different social issues in the plays of Mahesh Dattani. The researcher will use appropriate methods; both primary and secondary data will be utilized along with the analysis for the purpose.

Keywords: Social Issues, Gender, Indian Society.

INTRODUCTION

Dattani is a post-colonial writer or a dramatist who was born after eleven years of Indian independence. He is a famous and a great director, dramatist, actor and a writer of Indian English drama. There are other writers of Indian English dramatists like Asif Currimbhoy, Grish Kannard, Badal Sircar and Arun Joshi etc. but Dattani deals with social issues of Indian society and especially of his region. He is a star dramatist of Indian English literature. His famous plays are Thirty Days in September (2000), Where There is a Will (1988), Dance Like a Man (1989), Final Solutions (1993), n a Muggy Night in Mumbai (1998), Seven Circles Round The Fire (Radio play for BBC) (Seven Steps around the Fire) (1998) and many others which clearly depict Indian families in Indian socio-cultural setup.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are as under:

- To identify the social issues in the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani,
- To familiarize audience with Indian plays with special reference to dramatic art of Dattani

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“The only person who can, who could have prevented all this is my mother. Sometimes I wish she would just tell me to stop. She could have prevented a lot from happening” (Collected Plays II 18). Plays of Mahesh Dattani are full of sexual abuse, genocide and gender. Here in the above lines Mala remembers her old days and regrets her past. The dramatist points towards the psychological pain and alienation of a deserted child. It also points to void between mother and her daughter. Mala feels that her mother could have prevented her from sexual abuse but that couldn’t happen. Dattani gives a message to mothers and makes them aware about the degradation and damage that can take place and spoil the social and familial setting.

“I am not talking about a bad dream! I am talking about the time when uncle Vinay would molest me. When I was seven. Then eight. Nine. Ten. Every vacation when we went to visit him or when he came to stay with us. You were busy in either the pooja room or the kitchen. I would go to papa and cry. Before I could even tell him why I was crying he would tell me to go to you.” (Collected Plays II 25-26)

Mala like that of Pecola of *The bluest Eye* tries to share her agony with her parents but father was busy in his work and mother in her daily routine. Mala’s uncle, Vinay has molested her, her blood relative physically and sexually abused her and no one prevented her. According to the reports and surveys child, sexual abuse is increasing at a fast speed and in India, it is at its peak. This crime destroys the victim both mentally and physically and most of the time it leads to death or ruins the life of a victim forever. It is also said that in most of the cases, abusers are blood relatives and it happens with Mala. Dattani tries to tell us the story of Indian families and communities. Dattani’s plays express views about child sexual abuse, gender and domestic violence and Mala is a victim of all.

“I was six, Mala. I was six. And he was thirteen . . . and it wasn’t only summer holidays. For ten years! For ten years!! ... No pain no pleasure, only silence. Silence means Shanti. Shanti. But my tongue is cut off. No. No. It just fell off somewhere...., I cannot even speak about it. No, I can’t. I am dumb” (Collected Plays II 55). Though Mala has suffered a lot and she was very angry with her mother, yet she regretted when her mother revealed her own trauma and pain. She told Mala that the person, who had abused you, had also sexually assaulted me and pain is that he has done it with me for more than ten years. Dattani questions the family setup and points that women are not safe even in their own houses. Mala is a modern figure, she fights for her honour, challenges male domination but her mother remains traditional, and thus she suffers in silence. It is a slogan against sexual abuse and supremacy of males in Indian social setup.

“DEEPALI: If you were a woman, we would be in love.

KAMLESH: If you were a man, we would be in love.

DEEPALI: If you were heterosexual, we would be married” (65 *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*).

In this play, Dattani has dealt with a matter of uniqueness and difference. He is a brave Indian dramatist, who likes Arundhati Roy, deals with those subjects, which are prohibited. Homosexual and transgender issues are taboos but still Dattani has been able to express his opinion about this and thus make people aware about this problem. Ed and Kamlesh are lovers and Kiran is shocked at this revelation. This is the problem that broke her heart and it almost took her life. Dattani tells about families, marriages that break down in the middle, lives that suffer and reality, which is masked. This play tells about homosexual and heterosexual relations of different people and thus shows the complexity of human life especially of homosexuals. Kamlesh was engaged with

Sham but the person of love for Kamlesh was Prakash but Prakash feels the fear that he may be banished or excommunicated from the social circle. Dattani not only puts forward the problems of homosexuals, but heterosexuals, lesbians, gays and all transgender community.

“As Ed put it – I get everything, I get to be accepted
can have a wife, I can have children

Who will adore me simply because I am a hetero – I beg Your
pardon – a real man” (On a Muggy Night in Mumbai 101).

Dattani wants to integrate this sect with the rest of the society. He is against any kind of indifferent social displacement. He wants that people must accept transgender, homosexuals, heterosexuals, lesbians and gays as members of the society. Constitution of India has given full protection to all the nationals so there is no way to segregate one sect excommunicate a particular sect from mainstream of society. Through this play Dattani speaks in favour of transgender. “It’s not shame, is it? With us? ... It’s fear... Of the corners we will be pushed into where we don’t want to be” (On a Muggy Night in Mumbai 89). Living this life is not easy because in Indian society a lesbian, gay or homosexual faces a lot of problems and most dangerous being the issue of social alienation or displacement. Same is discussed in the above lines by the characters of this play. “The play ends with Kamlesh rediscovering love with Sharad and a humiliated Ed trying to commit suicide. The social pressures are so overwhelming that he just cannot think of living normally. To him living according to the norms of the heterosexual society is a prospect worse than suicide (G. Sankar and Shankar Kumar 40). Dattani has taken the subject matter, which is delicate but he has handled it properly. He has talked about subject of marginalization.

“Is life a forward journey or do we travel round in a circle, retuning to our starting point? Can we shake off our prejudices or are they in our psyche like our genes? Will we ever be free or ever locked in combat...Arabs against Jews, whites and blacks, Hindus against Muslims? Are there any final solutions?” (Dattani 161). Dattani is an Indian playwright who deals with socio-political issues. In this play, he has expressed his opinion about Hindu-Muslim battle. He said that people are still having animosity against each other. Like a realist, he paints the picture of 1947 and shows how people have killed each other. However, much has changed but the attitude and behavior of people has receded back to Hindu-Muslim clash. Daksha (Hardika) feels utter hate for Muslims, though she has tried to help Muslim family. Ramnik gives shelter to Muslim boys in time of crisis thus dramatist wants harmony between the people of India. If this drama is applied to the present, still the situation is same and Hindu-Muslim clash is still on. Through the character of Daksha our dramatist shows that women still have subordinate position in Indian families. Daksha was kept in dark about the help of Zarine and Ramnik helped Muslims. Dattani has tried to shed light on relation between two communities. He has also shown that people are becoming wise and they are helping each other but still political intervention spoils everything.

CONCLUSION

Dattani is a dramatist of great stature. He is not only an actor, but director and a playwright as well. He is a social realist. He talks about the issues of the marginalized community. He believes in harmony, freedom of expression and talks about gender, social displacement and complexity of familial and social relations. He depicts Indian social system to show how institution of family and society work here in India.

REFERENCES

- [1] Dattani: Mahesh, col. Collected Plays II. New Delhi: Penguin, 2005. Print.
- [2] On a Muggy Night in Mumbai. Collected Plays. New Delhi: Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 2000.
- [3] Sankar G and Shankar Kumar. Representing the themes of Marginalization and Homosexuality in Mahesh Dattani's On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, The Indian Review of World Literature in English Vol. 13 No .I January 2017. PP, 39-43