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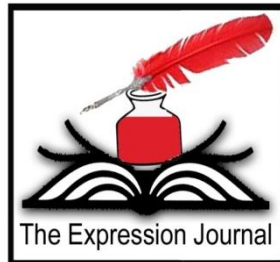
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SOCIAL ISSUES IN SELECT PLAYS OF MAHESH DATTANI

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani is a contemporary writer who writes specifically in English. Dattani's plays question some of the norms and conventions of society. In the process, interesting questions arise regarding gender and other issues like homosexuality, lesbianism, child sexual abuse. Dattani tackles issues that afflict societies the world over. Dealing with issues like male-female ascendance divide, the patriarchal tradition, consumerism, communalism, Dattani holds back nothing. All his plays portray the Indian society as it is. Present paper is an attempt to analyze and explore the burning social issues in Mahesh Dattani's plays. This concept of social issues has been raised in this paper thorough the characters created by Mahesh Dattani.

Key-Words

Dattani, Gender Issues, Homo-Sexuality, Lesbianism, Child Sexual Abuse.

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Mahesh Dattani is a contemporary writer who writes specifically in English. Dattani's plays question some of the norms and conventions of society. In the process, interesting questions arise regarding gender and other issues like homo-sexuality, lesbianism, child sexual abuse. Dattani tackles issues that afflict societies the world over. Dealing with issues like male-female ascendance divide, the patriarchal tradition, consumerism, communalism, Dattani holds back nothing. Alygue Padamsee calls him one of the "most serious contemporary playwrights."

It is the most popular play, dwells on the theme of eunuchs, their identity, their constitution and their connotation. Uma Rao, the sociology scholar, emerges as the most powerful character of the play, the mouth piece of the playwright, who fights to establish the identity of an eunuch. Mammal, during her research on the class and gender – related violence and crime, meets justice in the nemesis of the play. An eunuch, a beautiful one, invited for marriage, and the final tragic death-all seem to be a misconstruct. This is all about marriage of a beautiful hizra Kamla to a son of a wealthy government minister named Subbu.

This shocking revelation culminated into the murder of Kamla. The society accepts a hizra for gracing the ceremonies of marriage and births but would not allow them to portrayed of such ceremonies. The author has ironically portrayed this aspect which would not have been given any head, for any matter related to them is of no importance to anyone. The heart rendering story about a hizra that she is murdered simply because she had fallen in love with Subbu a young man having a status of importance in society, fills us with horror and sense of injustice. Again in the play we observe how the Police officer refuses to subject himself to any medical examination to rule out the barrenness of his wife due to his impotency. This bias of squarely blaming the woman for her barren state is another societal phenomenon that Dattani exposes.

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Tara is a riveting play that questions the role of a society that treats the children of the same womb in two different ways. Dattani's 'Tara' is a poignant play about a boy and a girl who are joined together at the hip and have to be separated surgically, which will mean the death of either of the two. The fact that the injustice perpetuated by the victim's own mother whose preference is to the male child, makes the play more powerful suggesting that it is woman who continues the chain of injustice. Tara is not just the story of the protagonist of the play 'Tara,' but it is the story of every girl child born in Indian family whether urban or rural. The situation is aggravated if the girl is physically challenged or there is any other physical or mental deformity in her. It is a bitter example of child abuse present in the Indian societies. Every girl child born in an Indian family does suffer some kind of exploitation and if there is a boy child in the family, the exploitation is very much visible as the privileges are consciously or unconsciously propounded to the son. The scene opens in London with Chandan, now a playwright, reminiscing about his childhood days spent with his sister Tara. Tara and Chandan are two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities and that Dan, in trying to write the story of his own childhood, has to write Tara's story.

The play revolves around the Siamese twins, Chandan and Tara Patel, an operation to separate the twins at birth, leaves Tara crippled for life. Chandan, the privileged brother wants to turn his anguish into drama on his sister's childhood. Throughout the play we can feel that she bears some kind of grudge against the society. She seems to have some kind of aversion with the outside world and her world consists of only her parents and her brother whom she was ever close to. The play explores besides exposing the typical Indian mind set which has from time immemorial preferred a boy child to a girl child. It looks at the triumphs and the failures of an Indian family. comprising of father (Patel). Mother (Bharati) and two children (Chandan and Tara) coping with the trauma of disability. Tara, a feisty girl, who isn't given enough opportunities as were given to her brother eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister's death. His sense of trauma and anguish is so intense that at the end of the play, we see Chandan apologizing to Tara in the most moving of all the lines "Forgive me, Tara. forgive me, for making it my tragedy."

It was first performed in 1993. This play foregrounds the Hindu-Muslim problems. It also tackles the theme of transferred resentments in the context of family relations. The characters in the play motivate us to think that angry out-bursts lead to chain reactions. The play opens with Daksha reading from her diary. An oil lamp converted to an electric one suggests that the period is the late 1940. Daksha is the grandmother of Gandhis. Daksha closes her diary and then Hardika appears on the stage. She feels the things have not changed that much. In the living room of the Gandhis, Aruna, Ramnik Gandhi's wife, enters while Aruna's daughter Sunita and her husband are retiring for the night. Ramnik doesn't like Hardika's telling his daughter that "those people are all demons." Aruna is a God fearing woman who thinks that everything will be smooth and peaceful one day. Ramnik saves the two boys-Bobby and Javed. Ramnik thinks that Javed has done an unforgivable act. Ramnik, a liberal minded person, offers a job to Javed only to give him a chance. Ramnik transfers his anger at his own father's black deed (burning the ship) to his mother. In the name of communal hatred, this shameful act is done by Ramnik's father. The play is a fine example of transferred resentments. Smita, who is unable to express her love for Babban, criticizes her mother bitterly. The play mocks at the politicians who use

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people as their puppets. These puppeteers are the culprits. The playwright at the end of the play, wishes to stop this game of hatred and communal tension through the character of Ramnik. Ramnik accepts that his father has done the black deed. We should forgive the offenders and forget the past. This can be the final solution.

Charters through the emotional, financial and sexual intricacies of a modern day Indian family. 'Bravely fought the Queen' was written by Dattani in the year 1991 and it was performed at the Sophia Bhabha Hall, Mumbai on August 2, 1991. The narration is centred around an Indian family in which two brothers Jiten and Nitin, the co-owners of an advertising agency, have married two sisters, Dolly and Alka. The women remain at home much of the time, where they look after the men's ageing mother Baa. Jiten and Nitin's father was a cruel and a dark man who usually harassed their mother. The kind of cruelty perpetrated on Baa by her husband is brought to light every now and then in the play. Baa sees the picture of her husband in her elder son, Jiten and thus automatically develops an inclination towards her younger son, Nitin who resembles her a lot. So here we have two generations sharing the same experiences at the hand of their chauvinistic husbands and yet to come third generation, Daksha who also experiences the mal-treatment of her father even before her birth and is born as a disabled child. In the same way Dolly and Alka in 'Bravely Fought the Queen' arm themselves at the end of the play to fight back.

Alka very boldly questions the authority of her husband and asks for an explanation for his disloyalty. She also exposes the betrayal of her brother for not revealing the existence of homosexual relations between her husband and her brother. There was Kanhaiya, who represents the world of sexuality whether heterosexuality or homosexuality. He might be the alluring cook who might or might not be Krishna of Dolly and Alka, or the dark auto driver who embodies Nitin's sexual guilt. Nitin at the end of the play exposes his homosexual relations to Alka who is fast asleep after getting drunk. Thus we see that women have not been presented as sinners but they suffer because of the men who are part of their lives. This play presents the concept of gay culture prevalent in big cities. 'On a Muggy Night in Mumbai' is a tragicomedy which deals with homosexuals. In the play, Sharad and Deepali, though comfortable with each other, have different ways of being gay. More stress is laid on the characters of Kamlesh and Prakash who is also Ed and romances with Kamlesh's sister Kiran. Initially Kamlesh and Prakash were ardent lovers when Prakash suddenly turns coats and changes into Ed, weaning the garb of a handsome guy, head over heels in love with Kiran, who unfortunately happens to be Kamlesh's sister. Kamlesh playing the role of humble lover resides to the changed situation without complaining. Nevertheless, his sexual needs are fulfilled by Sharad, his friend. He shocks us a bit by stooping down to mating with a guard for which he is ashamed of himself. Prakash who had now changed to Ed suddenly emerges into the room and the scene to meet Kamlesh's sister and bumping into Kamlesh is revived of his earlier crush on Kamlesh. Nonetheless Prakash/Ed is ashamed of being a homosexual and tries to leave the place with Kiran as soon as possible to escape the cynical eyes of the others who knew about his relationship with Kamlesh. Karan is shown to having all compassion for the gay people and wishes they could marry for happiness of her brother who she knew was homosexual. The irony of the whole story is that the poor girl did not know that the man to whom she was going to get married was homosexual and ex-lover of her brother. The revelation in the end comes as a shock to her. The whole story throws light on the growing homosexuality and its non-acceptance by the Indian Society.

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