“Mahesh Dattani as an Explorer of Virgin Land: A Study in Queer Issue of Homosexuality with special reference to Mahesh Dattani’s Selected Plays”

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Certain queer issues like homosexuality, lesbian relationships or same sex relationships those have traditionally been kept aside are the prime concerns of Mahesh Dattani’s plays. Dattani is the daring playwright who tackled taboo arena of homosexuality courageously. He mirrors the gloomy problems and latent issues of contemporary Indian society in his thought-provoking plays like *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991), *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998), *Do the Needful* (1997), *Seven Steps Around the Fire* (1998), *Dance Like a Man* (1989) *Mango Soufflé* (2002), etc. Queer issues such as homosexuality and plight of *hijras* are being dealt with candidly by him.

Mahesh Dattani is undoubtedly a versatile dramatist of our times. It will be apt to mark him as “an explorer of virgin land” that has traditionally been kept unspoken or unleashed by the dramatists. Dattani, within the framework of dramatic structure, tries to investigate the identities of those who occupy no space in social order. In the traditional society of India, the identity of homosexuals, lesbians and *hijras* (eunuchs) has not yet been organized. Hence, his plays are like charters of demands for homosexuals whose activities are deemed a social taboo in Indian society. Since the late 1980s, there have been several stories in news media on same-sex relationship/marriages that focus our attention towards the rising socio-cultural mishaps and related gender discrimination in case with the marginalized homosexuals, lesbians, *hijras* who struggle for identity and space in Indian society.
Mahesh Dattani has been making conscientious efforts to showcase the issues and problems of contemporary Indian society making them the integral part of his dramatic philosophy. 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. He delves deep on the depiction of the suffering and subjugation of those who, still today, dare not to voice their pains and problems. His plays record the injustice meted out to the women, children, transsexual, minorities, homosexual and other people belonging to marginalized sections of our society.

Dattani is committed to present suffering and sobbing of the marginalized people especially residing in our urban area with a sense of uprootedness, anxiety, insecurity, and unrest. He discovers new territories of themes and issues which are, generally, unnoticed or overlooked by other dramatists. 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 lot many other issues. By doing so, he has expanded the new dramatic horizons in the field of Indian English Drama. That is why Dattani is regarded as the daring dramatist of the modern India. He traverses the “virgin land” where others dare not to go. According to Dattani, "Same-sex sexuality is an unspoken part of our life. So far the imagery has not been detailed in literature or cinema. So a big deal is made out of films exploring it..."

It is necessary to mention here that the Indian Penal Code 377 deprives the people from the freedom of choosing life partner. It forbids people to choose partners from their same sex. Of course, following the opposition to this by some thinkers and writers, the government has made some amendments in this section and sanctions permission for choosing life partner irrespective of sex/gender. Still some questions remain unanswered. The question is What about the established norms and notions of society? Does it accept the same sex marriage? Dattani dramatizes all these questions and shows his protest against the marginalization of the people in the name of culture, customs, community,
gender etc. The manifestation of gay issue challenges the established social patterns.

The plays chosen for the present research project *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Bravely Fought the Queen* and *Do the Needful* have central motifs of aforesaid queer issue of homosexuality. He doesn’t pass any judgment over the issue. He just discusses it as it happens in our society realistically. He shows how established norms of society suppress and repress individual urge and passion causing mental agony to the person concerned. He has an awareness and ability to look into the invisible or taboo issue wrapped in web of hypocrisy and tradition.

Our society has exclusively promoted heterosexual relationship as the prime mode of sexual expression, as it is only means of survival human race on the earth. So gay relationship has been greatly discouraged and looked upon as an act of contempt and disgust since time immemorial. Dattani’s plays come forth as a challenge to our conservative Indian society. It strikes at the root of concept of continuity of civilization through the promotion of idea of centrality of heterosexual relationship in society, where the gays are subjected to exclusion and contempt. His plays present struggle and repulsions of the gays against the backdrop of the culture which outlaws gay relationship. The gay are torn between social tradition and individual’s choice of sexual pleasure. Longing for social approval and freedom from social ban lurk in the hearts of the gays. Hence, one can feel that there is an urgent need to work on politically on the bruised socio-economic status of homosexuals.

In Dattani’s *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Kamlesh is suffering greatly due to gay relationship with Prakash who breaks away from him and develops relationship with Kamlesh’s sister. In *Do the Needful*, Alpesh has failed to fulfill familial expectations on account of his homosexual nature. His first marriage is broken and forced to remarry a girl named Lata who is in love with someone else. However, they find out midway for fulfilling their parental and social expectations. So is the state in *Bravely Fought the Queen* where the plight
of gays and women is depicted bluntly. Dattani raises some serious questions as to whether homosexuality is an unnatural deviation. Are people homosexuals by choice? In other words, can one choose one’s gender and sexuality? And can homosexuals convert to heterosexuality?

It is noteworthy here that Dattani has dexterously dramatized the issue of homosexuality in all the three dramatic modes- Stage Plays, Radio Plays, and Screen Plays. He disdains the idea that gay love offends our sensibility and perverts people ethically. He is presenting reality as it exists in our society. He neither approves nor disapproves the marriage between the M people of the same-sex. He just un_masks the truth shrouded under established tradition of heterosexual relationship. His treatment to gay theme is quite convincing and realistic.

To sum up, with his artistic insight and lively theatrical vision, Mahesh Dattani bravely explores queer issue of homosexuality and overtly speaks of the traumatic realities associated with the homosexuals in the context of Indian society. It is also noteworthy to grasp that his vision is preoccupied with the totality of human experiences instead of following a track of fragmentation. His sensibility is rooted in socio psychological spectrum of human predicament and, therefore, he has adopted the identical themes for different types of dramatic presentation. It can lead to a revolution in the scope and commitment of theatrical activities in India. He has done yeoman service to Indian English Drama through his wonderful dramatic creations with innovative theatrical approach and original thematic device. His plays are characterized by queer issues of homosexuality, same-sex relationships, the traumatic gay predicament and so on in the context of contemporary Indian society.

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