

AMOGHVARTA

ISSN : 2583-3189



Social Issues in the Representative Plays of Mahesh Dattani and Vijay Tendulkar : A Critical Exploration

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Author

Dr. Pinki Kumari
Assistant Professor (G.T.)
Department of English
B.R.B. College
Samastipur, L.N.M. University
Darbhanga, Bihar, INDIA

Abstract

Indian drama in English is gaining ground by leaps and bounds. The dramatists like Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sarkar, Mohan Rakesh and a host of other great writers have tried their best to upgrade the Indian dramas with the help of their great contributions by composing some immortal works full of beauty and truth. The works of Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani are very much rooted to the problems of society. In each and every work, these writers have tried their best to present the society as a whole with the help of their imaginative frame of mind and some poetic devices which matter most to the lovers of drama and literature. Almost all the plays of these two writers deal with some social issues of modern time. Like G. B. Shaw, both the playwrights want to root out the evils of the society so that the world can become paradise and the man can become Superman. In the works of Mahesh Dattani, we often see some untouched

issues of the society like the problems of third gender, gay themes and feminine sensibility. Similarly the works of Vijay Tendulkar dwell on the themes of women empowerment, gender identity, personal relationship, untouchability and the marginalized issues, so on and so forth.

Key Words

Women empowerment, Gender identity, Personal relationship, Historical perspectives, Gay literature.

Both Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani are dramatists par excellence. Both are champions of “art for the sake of life”. Vijay Tendulkar is a problem play writer. In almost all his plays, he raised some social questions with a keen eye for negative presentation of the different types in the society. He is fond of describing vultures, Predators and some behaviours you want to root out from the world by exploring the various problems of the society. He has an equal command of both feeling and form, matter and manner. About his poetic and dramatic techniques, Dr. Amar Nath Prasad rightly says:

“His images, symbols and metaphors are very suggestive. So far as the dramatic pageant and presentation is concerned, Tendulkar seems to be a master craftsman with an unsleeping grip on the various techniques of dramatic art. He has given the post independence Marathi drama a new idiom

and a new vision and thus put the Marathi drama on the national and international map.”

(Prasad, A N., Preface)

Vijay Tendulkar is a prolific playwright of Marathi language. He has to his credit a number of great works which are highly related to the problems of society. He has to his credit eight full length plays, 24 Radio plays and 18 children's plays. Most of his dramas have been translated into English and in some other languages of India. They are being taught in most of the universities in India. His play, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, *Silence! the Court is in Session* earned several laurels and accolades.

His famous play, “Silence the Court is in Session” is related to the problem of women. It is a very fine example of feminine sensibility which Tendulkar has presented in a very brilliant manner. This play displayed controversy in India but in the foreign countries it got popularity. About this book, Priya Adarkar who is the editor and translator of this drama, observes:

“ Their characters, dialogues gestures and even mannerisms that reflect their petty circumscribed existences fraught with frustrations and repressed desires that find expression in their malicious and spiteful attitudes towards their fellow beings”

(Adarkar, Priya. p VIII)

This drama also presents the agonies and feelings of a helpless woman who has been best expressed in the act of placement of irony in the Play. In this play, Miss Benare has been given the role of a prisoner but truly speaking, it is not Miss Benare who is the prisoner, rather she is free from the fear of society. She has her own will, but the other characters are really prisoners of the society as they are not free from pretensions, hypocrisy and other limitations and preoccupations of the society. We see that the culprits are very vocal and aggressive while the protagonist is silent at first but when the taunts and ironies cross the limit of tolerance, the rebellious woman in Benare explodes and does a great havoc making all the listeners dumbfounded. It is her last speech which may be called the heart of the play. It is like the famous speech of Candida in G.B.Shaw's play, “Candida”.

Vijay Tendulkar's other famous drama “Vultures” represents society in which there is a tussle and quarrel in the family between kiths and kins. The drama deals with the prevalence of money and wealth in personal relationships and tells the truth how under the influence of wealth and possession, the man becomes insensitive towards personal relationships. This is the central idea of this play “Vultures”; the title itself is very suggestive.

About the background of the play, a critic says:

“Gidhare (Vultures) was born out of a personal crisis in his life, that poured out of Tendulkar within the short span of our plays and he himself was shocked that he could give expression to so much violence. It was almost a cathartic process.”

(Tendulkar, Vijay. *Five Plays*. introduction. P XIII)

Ghashiram Kotwal by Tendulkar is a very fine play which is also based on some prominent issues of the society. It is a critical and historical play which contains not a single theme but a number of themes. At first the main theme seems to be related to the rise and fall of Ghashiram Kotwal who is very ambitious for capturing power and glory even at the risk of honour and modesty. The other prominent theme of the book is class discrimination in which there is a very big gap between the poor and rich, the rough and the sublime, the marginalised and the possessed. Apart from this, the play also presents the decadence of modern society, sexual immorality and hypocrisy of the brahmins of Pune. One of the themes is also related to the balance and cruelty of the administration particularly of the police who have become corrupt in their character. About this book Dr. Prasad says:

“The main theme of a book is generally related to the title of the book or the main protagonist.

In this book the main protagonist is Ghashiram Kotwal who is a poor Brahmin from Kannauj. He comes to the city of Pune with his daughter Lalita Gauri. He wants to achieve the highest position in the City. He is very ambitious like that of Macbeth. He falls prey to the dirty politics and immoral administration of Nana Phadanavis. By dint of flattery and even selling the virginity and honor of his daughter, he succeeds in getting the goal of his life through the sequence of events. Tendulkar shows that politics is so dirty that the man discards his worth and all the moral and spiritual values of life for the sake of getting power. In the realm of politics of power, honor and character matter negligible.”

(Prasad, Amar Nath, P 60 -61)

The beginning of this play is ironic. Here irony has been beautifully implied in the use of dance and music. The brahmins sing and dance and they are happy outwardly. Like the root of a tree, they are strong, but they are rotten to the core. They are hypocrite and hollow. In the first song of the play, the Director uses the term ‘Pious Brahmin’ which is very ironical. In the latter course of the play we see that the brahmins of Pune are not pious and religious but crafty and corrupted.

The play *Ghashiram Kotwal* has such incidences and events which may be controversial. It has a grave satire on the brahmins of the contemporary period. The satire here is so acidic and sardonic that it may find the anger of a number of people; but in spite of several controversies the play wherever it was staged was enjoyed by the audience of different languages and cultures because of its musicality and contemporary contest. It is so dramatic, musical and masterly composed that even without the knowledge of Maratha history, a man can enjoy the beauty of the book and also of the play whole heartedly. This play is a historical play with some reservations. It is a literary and musical presentation of history. “Here the history is not confined to only one place or time but it crosses all chains and constraints of time and becomes universal because of its literary power and artistic beauty. It is a very fine combination of feelings and form, so it is more than history, more than time and place. It cannot be read on the basis of history but it should be read and enjoyed on the basis of literature and modern contest where Nana and Ghashiram are common people. (Prasad, 71)

Similarly his other plays like *Kanyadan*, *Kamala*, *Mukabala*, are critically important for understanding some social issues of modern time. *Kanyadan* is a dalit drama showing the issue of inter caste marriage and its consequences.

“Kanyadaan” examines the institution of marriage and some other social problems associated with marriage and untouchability. Jyoti’s marriage to Suryakant, shows how a man deeply rooted in traditional values, brings to light the conflicts and pressures faced by women in such unions. In the frenzy of love the woman is unable to see any differences but latter on realises her mistakes which she had committed in the lunacy of love.

The play portrays the class differences and the resulting tensions between the educated lower class and the upper class. If we analyse the play minutely we also see that how the lower caste wants to take revenge of the upper caste people. In this respect this drama also reminds of the famous novel, *Untouchable* by mulk Raj Anand. Arun, Jyoti’s husband, seeks revenge against the upper caste for the historical exploitation of his community.

Tendulkar portrays the violence and disillusionment experienced by the youth, particularly those from marginalized communities. The play reflects the aggressive reactions of the younger generation against societal injustice.

Through its narrative, “Kanyadaan” advocates for social reform and liberation from orthodox society. Tendulkar’s works often challenge the status quo and call for a more equitable and just society.

“Kanyadaan” is a poignant commentary on the societal issues of various forms that matter most today in this age of changing circumstances. Tendulkar’s art of storytelling is very compelling. The characters make the play a classic of Indian theatre. They resonate with audiences even today.

Mahesh Dattani believes in portraying the unexplored, unnoticed and untouched issues of society. He is a versatile theater person, a writer, a director, actor, dancer and teacher all welded into one. He has been awarded the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award for his famous book *Final Solutions and Other Plays*. In this play Dattani provokes our thinking, compels us to think afresh about the problems. Apart from that, Dattani emergence as a humanist who cares for the marginalized section of Indian society. He has presented very beautifully the problems of women, hizaras, dancers, physically challenged people, homosexuals very artistically and beautifully. Pranav Joshipura observes:

“ The success of Mahesh Dattani as a dramatist rests upon his themes and unique way of treating them. He is an experimenter who loves to consistently experiment with the stage space. Moreover, the subjects of most of the plays are hitherto unexplored. The audience gets startled to know about the undercover reality of the society. The reader thus awakened becomes sensible to the happenings around her/him.”

(Joshipura, Pranav, 2009. Preface)

Mahesh Dattani's famous play, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* deals with the problems of the homo sexual society. Generally Indian literature has ignored the theme of homosexuality. Very few writers have shown courage to suggest male homo sexuality. About lesbian relationships, they are less covert. But the credit goes to Mahesh Dattani who has very beautifully presented their problems. He also shows how often the homosexual have intimacy themselves and live in secrecy. Sometimes they commit suicide as their wishes cannot be satisfied openly or because they cannot bear other peoples attitude of hate towards them. The pain of their deviance sexually has been completely presented by Mahesh Dattani.

The following conversation shows their feelings :

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

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

Deepali : If we were hetrosexual, we would be married.” (P, 65)

The action of the play moves from pass to present and from present to past. The timing also presents action happening at the same time in two different places. This probably no other dramatist has ever done. Unity of time and place and action are fully observed throughout the play. Kamlesh's flat is the place of action. The duration is a few hours of an evening. The action is simply the dialogues on the problem of homosexuality.

His other play, *Seven Steps around the Fire* holds a mirror before society. It is the love affair between a man and a Hijra leading to marriage. Here Dattani is the champion of the human rights of a minority that is the Hijra and once again distinguished himself as a humanist.

About the origin of the Hijra Mahesh Dattani observes:

“ God Rama was going to cross the river. In the forest, all the people of the city wanted to follow him. He told them to return. Men and women returned. But some of his male followers did not know what to do; they could not disobey him. They sacrificed their masculinity to become neither men nor women and followed him to the forest. Rama was pleased with their devotion and blessed them” (p. 10)

The play is full of a variety of music. The most important of them is the songs sung by the host of hijras, their typical sound of claps, their songs are in a hoarse voice. There is no Raga pattern in it. This helps the dramatist in creating the hijra effect in the play. A foreign reader may get attracted to this music on account of its peculiarities.

Music is very important in a radio play as there is no visual effect. Sound manipulation has to offset the want of spectacle. The play had sounds of fans, rustle of papers, foot steps, opening sound of gates, clinking of metal plates on the floor, gargling, coughing, striking, blowing a smoke, snipping a finger, clicking of hills, traffic

noise, crying of little children throwing of coins, dialling phones, flinging door of a car, starting the car, dog barking, honking of car horns, chattering of guest sound of a couple. The setting of the drama is in Bangalore. The dialogues are short and meaningful, the action of the play runs smoothly, scenes are rather short and the action moves rapidly from one into another; this helps in sustaining the interest of the listeners. Thus this radio play has almost all the best features.

Mahesh Dattani's "Bravely Fought the Queen" is a powerful and thought-provoking play that addresses critical social issues through its compelling characters and narrative. It challenges traditional gender norms and offers a commentary on the struggles and resilience of women in a patriarchal society.

Dolly is the wife of Jiten Trivedi. She is a central character who represents the plight of women trapped in an oppressive marital and familial environment.

Dolly is portrayed as a submissive and obedient wife who has internalized the patriarchal norms. However, beneath her apparent compliance lies a deep reservoir of suppressed emotions and unfulfilled desires.

She struggles with her husband's abusive behavior and the lack of affection in her marriage. Her longing for a better life and her disillusionment with her current situation are critical to her character. The first act begins with Dolly sitting in her drawing room:

"Dolly is seated on a sofa wearing a dressing gown lost in the thumri perhaps humming along with it. She is aimlessly filing her nails. She has a mud mask on and her hair is in clips." (P. 233)

Mahesh Dattani's play "Final Solutions" is a powerful exploration of communal tensions and the impact of religious violence on individuals and families.

Dattani uses symbolism and realism to convey the emotional and psychological impact of communal violence. The play's setting and the characters' dialogues reflect the real-life experiences of individuals affected by such conflicts.

"Final Solutions" serves as a social commentary on the destructive nature of communal hatred and the need for understanding and reconciliation. It challenges the audience to reflect on their own biases and the broader societal issues that perpetuate communal violence.

Mahesh Dattani's "Final Solutions" is a compelling drama that tackles the complex issue of communal violence with empathy and insight. Through its well-developed characters and poignant narrative, the play encourages audiences to confront their prejudices and work towards a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Tara is a classic drama by Mahesh Dattani. It is related to the problem of women and feminism. While the play "Bravely Fought the Queen" highlights how women are exploited in male dominated Indian society, "Tara" on the other hand, highlights unnecessary suffering of the physically challenged. It also studies the general issues in India where a male child is given preference over a female child. Here we find a symbolic view of the general human situation in a dark universe alien and apathetic to human suffering.

Tara is the story of a house which is trapped in complications. After the birth of their twins, they are not normal twins they are conjoined or Siamese twins. The medical treatment of the children is costly. However, money is not a problem for them. They are emotionally tense and troubled. That is the primary cause of all they are suffering. The play also talks about the problems of medical science in the lives of the physically challenged people. It shows the marvels of medical science and also how doctors may use its power for human welfare or abuse it for monetary gain.

The entire play is in Dan's nostalgic memories. Patel who is Dan's father is the general manager in the biggest pharmaceutical company in India. He is a Gujarati whereas Bharati, Patel's wife is the daughter of a powerful MLA who might have become the CM of Karnataka had he not died. So this is an intercaste marriage. In order to marry Bharati, they didn't approve of the match. Chandan, their son and Tara, their

daughter, are surgically separated twins. Naturally they have their psycho physiological problems. They have their own peculiar struggle for existence in which the sister dies and the brother continued to pull on his people being in all loneliness away from home and native land. The reference to it is suggested.

The most important question of this play is why was the third leg given to Chandan when it looks like an organic part of Tara.

The obvious answer is that the Hindu parents love their male children more than the female ones; that the Patel give Chandan what actually belongs to Tara cannot be disputed, but the appearance may not be a reality and what is obvious may be erroneous. Throughout the play, we see that parents love both the children with equal intensity. In fact Bharti appears to be partial to Tara later it is discovered that even Patel is more tender towards Tara. It is he who objected to the proposal of giving the third leg to Chandan.

Pranav Joshipura says:

“Hindu society in many parts of India has been rapidly changing. It is being westernised, modernised, globalised. Women are coming out fast from their homes to earn independently their bread like man. The economic conditions of India have not yet won all together. Altered Steel Man appears to be a better place than women. It is even more so in rural areas to struggle for the easy steps of the family. Women are just subordinate helpers in looking after home” (*Joshipura, P. 166*)

The central theme of the play revolves around gender discrimination. The characters of Tara and Chandan are Siamese twins, but society and their family show a clear preference for Chandan, the male child. This preference reflects the broader societal tendency to value male children over female children.

The play reveals the bias of the parents, particularly Bharati, who makes a crucial decision favoring Chandan over Tara during the surgical separation. This decision, driven by societal pressure and personal biases, leads to the physical and emotional suffering of Tara, illustrating the harmful impact of parental bias based on gender.

The characters in “Tara” are multi-dimensional and richly developed. Dattani portrays the complexities of each character’s motivations, fears, and desires, making them relatable and human. The twins, Tara and Chandan, along with their parents, Bharati and Patel, are depicted with intricate psychological depth.

“Tara” is not just a family drama; it is a potent social commentary on the issues of gender inequality, parental bias, and the limitations imposed by societal norms. Dattani uses the personal struggles of the characters to reflect broader societal issues, making the play both intimate and universal.

Conclusion

Thus, Vijay Tendulkar was a pioneering figure in Indian theatre, especially in Marathi drama. His works brought to the forefront several pressing social issues and challenged societal norms. Similarly, Mahesh Dattani has made significant contributions to contemporary Indian theatre in English, addressing themes of gender, sexuality, and societal norms.

Both Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani have made indelible marks on Indian theatre, each in their unique way. Tendulkar’s raw, confrontational style and focus on societal hypocrisy brought a new level of realism to Marathi theatre, challenging audiences to confront uncomfortable truths. Dattani, on the other hand, uses a more nuanced, symbolic approach to address contemporary social issues, giving voice to marginalized communities and bringing Indian narratives to a global stage.

Their contributions, while different in style and medium, have both expanded the horizons of Indian theatre, making it richer and more diverse. By examining the strengths and weaknesses of their works, we can appreciate the depth and complexity they have brought to the dramatic arts.

References

1. Adarkar, Priya (1974) Vijay Tendulkar's Silence the Court is in Session, *Five Plays*, Oxford University press, p. VIII.
2. Dattani, Mahesh (2000) *Collected Plays*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi.
3. Joshipura, Pranav (2009) *A Critical Study of Mahesh Dattani's Plays*, Sarup Book Publishers, New Delhi, Preface.
4. Prasad, A.N. (2023) *Vijay Tendulkar's Ghashiram Kotwal : A Critical Study*, Jigyasa Publication, Ghaziabad.
5. Vijay (1974) *Five Plays*, Introduction, Oxford University Press, p. XIII.

---==00==---