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Abhay Nath Thakur
Guest Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
B.S.R.S. College, Pachadhi
Darbhanga Bihar, India

Theme of revelation of past in selected plays of Mahesh Dattani

Abhay Nath Thakur

Abstract

Mahesh Dattani is a Bangalore based Indian English playwright. His plays usually deal with middle class life in urban India. The major issues Dattani deals with are homosexuality, gender identity and communalism, revelation of past, the hollowness of middle class life and the family as a battlefield. The present paper humbly attempts to describe briefly the theme of revelation of past in the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani. Once the past is revealed the real motive comes before the audience and the complex web of relationship is visible to the audience.

Keywords: homosexuality, communalism, revelation

Introduction

A Play is meant to be performed. Indian drama has had a rich and ancient tradition. Natyasastra is the oldest of the texts on the theory of drama. The dramatic form in India has worked through different traditions- the epic, the folk, the mythical, the realistic etc. The history of Indian English Drama demonstrates the presence of individual talents.

Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian English Dramatist to be awarded the Sahitya Academy Award. He is a Bangalore based playwright and director. The plays of Mahesh Dattani gained national and international cultural attention. His plays have become part of India's Postcolonial concern. His plays reflect major social issues of contemporary Indian society.

Mahesh Dattani's plays do have wide ranging themes – revelation of the past, identity and sexuality, religious tensions and gender issues, human bonding and alienation. His plays focus on human relationships and personal and moral choices which are the classic concerns of all great works of literature. He is a socially committed artist. He writes about the real life situation of Indian society. All his plays are about the different social concerns. His plays exemplify the artistic blend of Indian and Western cultures and concerns.

The dramatic works of Dattani depict different mental states, emotions and ideas, desires and aspirations, strengths and weaknesses, basic moral and social questions as well as individual predicaments. They also present a many layered fascinating picture of the social, political, economic and cultural life of the present times. Plays like *Where There's a will* (1988), *Dance Like A Man* (1989), *Tara* (1990), *Bravely Fought The Queen* (1991), *Final Solutions* (1993), *Do The Needful* (1997), *On A Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998), *Seven Steps Around The Fire* (1999) and *Thirty Days in September* (2001) are glorious works that would bring credit to any literature.

Review of literature

Contemporary themes in select plays of Mahesh Dattani

Vibhut Singh Impressions www.impressions.org.in

In the true sense, Mahesh Dattani, the most unorthodox and contemporary playwright of Indian English drama has used the medium of stage to present the invisible issues to the audience as theatre is the mirror of real life. Alyque Padamshee calls him, one of the most serious contemporary playwright.

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The plays of Dattani invariably question few of the norms and conventions prevailing in contemporary Indian Society regarding gender bias and other social relationships like

Corresponding Author:
Abhay Nath Thakur
Guest Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
B.S.R.S. College, Pachadhi
Darbhanga Bihar, India

homosexuality, lesbianism, prejudiced gender identity etc. Dattani tackles issues that afflict societies of our country nay around the world. Dealing with issues like male female ascendance divide, patriarchal tradition, unusual sexual orientation, Communalism, marginalization Dattani virtually holds back nothing. As a powerful playwright he employed his literary potentials to generate mass consciousness towards these issues and social upliftment of the marginalized section of our society.

Collected Plays Mahesh Dattani Penguin

His plays bring Indian drama into the present day in their themes –sexuality, religious tensions and gender issues – while still focussing on human relationships and personal and moral choices which are the classic concern of Indian drama.

Revelation of Past-a major theme in Mahesh Dattani's plays

Characters in the plays of Mahesh Dattani hide their motivation. They hide their past actions in their relationship with people. Tara is the story of girl who wants to twinkle and shine. Bharti in the play shows excessive love for Tara. She is over protective about the future of Tara. She expresses her desire to donate her kidney to Tara when there is another donar. All these decisions are motivated by the inhuman act of having decided to deprive Tara of one leg. The chances of survival of the leg was much better with Tara than with Chandan. It is the knowledge of having committed a wrong that leads to her mental breakdown. Her relationship with her husband deteriorates. Bharti bribes Roopa to be friendly with Tara. Roopa is offensive and comic. The dramatist deliberately creates an opportunity for the audience to laugh at Roopa. She speaks English which is comical. She is portrayed as a kind who will grow up to constitute the ever interfering ever watching ogling society. The audience comes to understand that Chandan's father was more interested in the career of Chandan than Tara. Gender bias of the character becomes visible when the audience understands that Mr. Patel agreed to the decision of his father – in –law because he lacked the courage to oppose him. There is a complex web of relationship in the family. Revelation of the past tells it all to the audience.

Final Solutions is the story of a Gujrati family that consist of four people – grandmother (Daksha/Hardika), father (Ramnik), Mother (Aruna) and daughter (Smita). They encounter two muslim boys –Javed and Bobby. They arrive at the house seeking refuge from a bloodthirsty mob during a Hindu festival. In the play there are various revelations. The audience comes to know about the heinous behavior of Ramnik,s father and Grandfather. Ramnik says to Javed that he had a saree shop. He had a mill also. He wanted to give Javed a job in the saree shop. When the past is revealed the audience understands the real reason why Ramnik was doing this. The play raises the theme of revelation of the past in a way never done before in Indian English theatre. The play challenges the stereotype view of communal persons in society. English speaking people can also be communal in their own dangerous way. There are no good Hindus or bad Hindus. There are no good Muslims or bad Muslims. Characters are caught in the trap of conditioning and past experiences.

Mahesh Dattani's "On a Muggy Night in Mumbai" is a play about the fears and insecurity faced by six individuals in

Mumbai. They are unable to adjust to the outside world. However, there own world is ripped apart by jealousy, separation and feeling of loneliness. These characters continuously feel the need to always hide their homosexual leanings. However, when the past relation is revealed the audience see the characters in a new perspective.

In the play Kamlesh is a homosexual. He is comfortable with his gayness. However, he is in turmoil. His sister is going to marry his former lover who pretends to be straight (heterosexual). Sharad and Deepali are comfortable with their sexuality. They have different ways of being gay. The past relationship between Kamlesh and Prakash and the romances between Ed and kamlesh's sister Kiran are beautifully presented. The audience then comes to know that Ed and Prakash are the same person.

Sharad speaks about the benefits trying to pretend as if one is heterosexual. It helps to get accepted. It helps to fit in with the society represented by the marriage party going downstairs. He says that male power buys respect in society. The characters are struggling with their identity. Bunny says that the man who loves his wife does not exist for him. The only people who know him are the persons in the room where the action is taking place. He says that he has tried to survive in both worlds. everyone believes that he was a model middle class Indian man. He was selected for the role because he looked exactly what the common peoples perception was about an ideal male.

Conclusion

To sum up, revelation of past is a major theme in the plays of Mahesh Dattani. Past is linked to present. It shapes the future. Mahesh Dattani presents it in such a way that the audience finds themselves on the stage for the first time in Indian English Drama.

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