

DIMENSIONS OF EVIL IN THE MAJOR PLAYS OF GIRISH KARNAD AND MAHESH DATTANI

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Abstract:

Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad are versatile literary figures. They have deep interest in myths, legends, contemporary events and essential problems. Girish Karnad has demonstrated that viable plays could be written and staged successfully by combining experimental models from European plays with the rich tradition of ancient Indian Drama in Sanskrit and folk drama in 'Prakrits'. Mahesh Dattani has, on the other hand, exhibited that he is a worthy successor to the former in many ways. Like the former, myth and history are also the basic concerns of Mahesh Dattani but he specializes in exploding the myths of harmony in joint family and also grapples with the vexed questions of the identity of the individual, irrespective of caste, creed and profession. Dattani has a vested interest in handling the forbidden topics or sensitive issues such as the fate of transgender and homosexuals, bias against female child and dancing profession and practice of looking for soft targets and scapegoats. The proposed topic is a modest but serious attempt at evaluation of major plays of playwrights, where two of them are similar and dissimilar in their intensions and dramatic technique but show equal fascination to expose various dimensions of evil of modern Indian society.

Keywords: *Evil, Myths, Legends, Transgender, forbidden topics, Prakrits.*

The word 'evil' is widely considered to be derived from 'Germanic' or 'Proto-Germanic' (Evil). In the book *Evil in Modern Thought* (2002), the author writes, "Evil is a way of marking the fact that it shatters our trust in the world" (Neiman). Peter Dews, a philosopher, writes in his study, *The Idea of Evil* (2007), "It hints at dark forces, at the obscure, unfathomable depths of human motivation." (01). He adds further, "It suggests a vision of supernatural powers, which human beings may ally themselves with, but it threatens the modern, enlighten conception of the world as moving towards a just and peaceable future one which can be shaped by human will and intention" (Dews 01). The 'WordNet Search' at Princeton University web pages has defined evil as, "morally objectionable behavior" and "morally bad or wrong" (Evil 3.1). But this definition makes it difficult to understand and define the concept of evil further because an act which is morally wrong for one person may not be wrong for another and as such the term denotes multiple meanings. Thus killing can be an act of heroism, if the act is committed to ensure safety of family or nation but at the same time if assassinations are carried out as a result of personal benefit or just for the sake of jealousy, this would be considered as an act of evil. A similar definition has been offered by 'The Free Dictionary' where it has the same sense as the one we encounter in the definition at Princeton University's web pages. According to "The Free Dictionary" anything which is called an evil is "morally bad or wrong; wicked" (Evil). The question that arises here is whose morality are we talking about? Lars Svendsen tried to explain this in his book, 'A philosophy of Evil' where he discussed four kinds of evil. Svendsen writes, "Every wish is tied to some concept of the good, even if the good is only for the agent himself and in general, can be considered evil. The satisfaction of desire is good as in the example of rape and murder satisfying a desire and thus having subjectively, a good side- though, obviously rape and murder are certainly evil in and of themselves" (Svendsen 109). Evil always appears attractive to victimize innocent beings. In *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare writes, "....But 'tis strange and oftentimes, to win us to our

harm, the instruments of darkness tell us truths, win us with honest trifles, to betrays in deepest consequence"(Shakespeare 1002). However, Wikipedia defined 'evil' as any action which disturbs, "the most basic moral or ethical standards prescribed by a society, philosophy, or religion" (Evil). Hence this definition makes it clear that if something is evil, it is decided by the morality of society and not by individual's morality because evil people are those whose primary instinct is self-gratification, and thus they are not able to empathize with others. They are unable to feel the pain or sufferings of others. The only thing they are concerned about is their wish and desire's fulfillment. In other words, although many actions are considered evil in a particular group or society, the fact remains that there are many actions which are unacceptable universally and therefore are considered 'evil' univocally. This applies to murderers & rapists etc. Lars Svendsen, in his book called *Philosophy of Evil* wrote, "Evil should never be justified, should never be explained away", Svendsen writes, "It should be fought" (Svendsen). This is the reason why we find stories about Gods fighting with Demons. Satan declared war against God for his lust for power. Ram fought a war against Ravana. There are numerous such stories in both Christian and non-Christian texts. The existence of evil can be traced back to the mythical past. In Indian myths, evil is shown to have existed before the Creation of Universe. There was the presence of 'asuras' (Demons) who are the symbols of evil. There is a description of six negative characteristics of human mind in, a Hindu theology. According to Hindu theology, "...the six passions of the mind, which are: *Kama* (lust), *Krodha* (anger), *lobh* (pride), *matsarya* (jealousy); the negative characteristics of which prevent man from attaining *moksha* or salvation" (Wikipedia). Similarly, we find a description about five great sins- *Panch Maha Paap* which share similarity with seven deadly sins found in Christianity i.e: - wrath, sloth, lust, greed, pride, envy and gluttony. Actually we find the description of four great sins or *MahApatakas* in the *Manu Smriti*. According to the "Manu Smriti 9.235 the slayer of a Brahmana (A twice-born man) who drinks (the spirituous liquor called) Sura, he who steals (the gold of a Brahman) and he who violates a Guru's bed, must each and all be considered as men who committed mortal sins (mahapataka)" (Panch-Mahapaap) But one more sin got added in *Usana Smriti* which says, "The destroyer of a Brahmanas, one who drinks spirituous liqueurs, a thief and the violator of preceptor's bed, and the one who is associated with them, are the great sinners." (Panch-Mahapaap) here we get aware of five existing great sins. There are many references associated with in Hindu scriptures. The speaker in *Agama Shastra* explains the five great sins as, "The five great sins are- *Brahmahatya* (Brahminicide), *Nishiddha Surapana* (drinking prohibited, alcoholic drinks), *Chaurya* (theft), *Vimatrigamana* (cohabiting with Guru's wife, mother, elder sister and other such motherly relatives/figures) and associating with those people who have committed one or the other above mentioned sins." (Panch-Mahapaap) The five kinds of sin are also mentioned in *Chandogya Upanishad*, "Steno hiranyasya Suram pivamschacha gurustalpam Avasan brahmaha Chaite patanti chatv Arah panchamashch Acharamstaih II" (Panch-Mahapaap) which means "one who steals gold, who drinks sura, who cohabits with guru's wife and one who slays a Brahmin- these four and fifth who associates with these four- all of these five becomes fallen." (Panch-Mahapaap) Therefore we know that involvement of human being in sins give rise to evil. In Indian myths we find presence of evil and its existence is as old as anything in this universe.

Girish Karnad has convincingly dealt with the problem of evil in his various plays. Evil, we are told, has various dimensions, viz: - Social evil, moral evil, metaphysical evil, political evil etc. Karnad has tried to show the dimensions of evil using myths as a vehicle. Similarly, Mahesh Dattani is another contemporary playwright who has similarly explored various forms of evil using legends and conventions. In classical Greek, "mythos signified any story or plot whether true or invited" (Abrahms). Again, a distinction is also made between legends and myth in terms of the state dramatists use them, "If the protagonist is a human being rather than a supernatural being, the traditional story is usually called not a myth but a legend" (Abrahms). *Paradise Lost* written by Milton can be considered as one of the best examples of great myth of struggle between good and evil. Girish Karnad (born 19 May 1938) is a

prominent figure of Post-Independence Indian Drama in English. He is fascinated by the universality in characteristics found in the problems, situations, characters he is surrounded by. In this connection P. Dhanavel says, "...Karnad as a dramatist has deep insight into the contemporary social and political problem, which is eternally relevant to mankind." (58). Girish Karnad's important plays which expose the dimensions of evil are *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq* (1964), *Hayavadana* (1971), *Naga-Mandala* (1988), *Tale-Dand* (1990) and *The Fire and the Rain* (1995). To this Dhanvel says- "What Karnad projects through his plays, especially *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and the Rain* is human aspirations lead to inhuman desperations. *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Padmini*, *Rani*, *Basavanna*, *Bijjala*, *Jagadeva*, *Arvasu*, *Nitililai*, *Yavkri* and *Vishakha* are characters as well as situations depicting the road from beautiful imagination to harsh reality" (35). Mahesh Dattani, a Sahitya Akadmi 'winning' playwright and stage director has also tried to show and provide detailed analysis of evil practices going on in society. The plays in which Dattani tried to show the dimension of evil are, *Where There's a Will* (1988), *Dance like a Man* (1989), *Tara* (1990), *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991), *Final Solutions* (1993) and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998). The author of *The Encyclopedia of Religion* has divided evil into two kinds, he comments, "...moral evil could be conceived of as the product of a free act involving human responsibility alone....each of us finds evil already present in the world; no one initiates evil but everyone has the feeling of belonging to a history of evil more ancient than any individual evil act" (Eliade). Further he tells us about 'Physical evil', that it is the outcome of social, situations and actions as human being to reach their goals, exercise violence and make others suffer. But apart from moral evil and physical evil, as stated by Eliade, there are various other dimensions of evil like, social evil, political evil, metaphysical evil etc. The experiences of humans are conditioned by the various factors leading to evil. Bhagabat Nayak in this connection in his book titled 'Girish Karnad's Play: Archetypal and Aesthetical Presentation' has said, "Reworking with the myths he reveals the human mind when it was unable to distinguish between the fact and fiction, virtues and vices and asuric and human nature of individuals; band warns the future of mankind to remain cautious and careful in human relationship, personal whims and temperament, earning and application of knowledge and wisdom and obsession and ambition" (Naik 07). He further adds, "Like myths, folklores are the constant creative source for Karnad. Reworking with the folklores he discovers the dream world in his constant touch with reality" (Naik 07).

Yayati is known to be the first play of Girish Karnad but unfortunately, it was translated into English much later and strangely enough, it does not find a place in Collected Plays of Girish Karnad in English translation by O.U.P. (C.P). Karnad considered the play juvenilia but later on, it was translated by Priya Adarkar in 2003 in a very convincing way. From the 'preface' to the play we learn that he wanted to resume his career as a poet but soon realized that his future lay in the domain of drama (Mukherjee 11).

As regards *Yayati* is first play, it is derived from the *Adi Parva* of *Mahabharata* whereas a king named *Yayati* is cursed with senility because of moral transgression. The condition of his deliverance lie in a very strange way that somebody should take the curse on himself, become old and allow the father to be young again. The significance of the myth lies in the fact that Karnad himself was faced with the difficult situation when he decided to leave for England to pursue his dramatic ambition. Karnad spoke in an interview, "But amazed how closely the myth reflected my anxieties and Uncertainties and my resentment at all who seemed to demand that I sacrifice my future but it served as an outlet for my doubts and provided me with a set of values" (Mukherjee). Apart from the personal angle, the play also has a universal bearing because it brings out the folly of superimposed wisdom in the name of autocratic behavior. In this play, two ladies suffer and they are *Chitrlekha* and *Sharmistha* for no real fault of theirs. Though an easy play, it is a milestone because it exposes the mindset of old and conventional wisdom by people who stick to it in the name of tradition and duty. Certainly Karnad's play gives a new twist to the original myth where the father blesses the son for compliance but in Karnad's play *Yayati* is presented as whimsical pleasure seeking king who is sentenced with curse for moral transgression. The king is finally rendered as a vulnerable character

and the writer's sympathy goes to the women such as Sarmistha, Devyani and Chitralekha who are trapped into old concepts of gender and caste biases.

His second play *Tughlaq* moves away from existential burden and here he adopts a new genre namely a historical play in his mother tongue. His fascination for the much-maligned and misunderstood king Mohammad-bin-Tughlaq arose from the fact that he was often regarded as a mad King, a bigot and eccentric by turns. Everyone agrees that he failed as a ruler of Delhi and his contradictory traits of personality have been criticized by most of the historians. However, Karnad wanted to present him as a misfit because a liberal king with scholarly habits and interests was unacceptable and his dreams and vision were not shared by his subjects (Hindus and Muslims alike). Karnad chose this play because he found that after the death of Pandit Nehru, Post-Independence India faced a similar situation when there was much Nehru bashing for his failures. As Karnad wrote, "The play reflected the slow disillusionment, my generation felt with the new politics of independent India; the gradual erosion of the ethical norms that guided the movement for independence and coming to term with cynicism and real politics" (C.P 36). The play's main interest lies in the portraits of the paradoxical personality of Tughlaq who, in spite of main positive qualities of body and mind fails to satisfy his subjects because the common man has no sympathy for such a figure and the evil doers such as Rogues, Murderers and fraudulent people take advantage of his lenient and indifferent attitude. He has beautiful dreams of performing justice, equity progress and peace but his actions do not match and consequently, Ulemmas and Sayyids feel disturbed. He is warned by the Imam and his step-mother and advisors like Barni and Shaikh Shihab-ud-din. All appreciate his good work of building schools and hospitals but they expect him to be orthodox in his approach. He is cheated by various people and instead of adopting a correct political strategy; he uses the method of coercion or resorts to novel idea of copper coins, found to be non-productive. Certainly Karnad wants to restore the true status of Tughlaq and his dialogue with God or Barn shows that he does not lack good intentions and pious wishes but Barn rightly comforts him with ringing words, "...History is not made in stagecraft, its lasting results are produced in the ranks of learned man. That is where you belong, your majesty, in the company of learned man. Not in the market of corpse" (C.P 66). Thus in *Tughlaq* he takes up the issue of corruption and the disenchantment of the common people with Tughlaq, a situation which was witnessed in Post-Nehruvism era.

In the third play *Hayavadana* Karnad makes another attempt to deal with very important issues by turning to myth, folk motives and devices of the ancient Sanskrit drama where the narrator, mask, miming and chorus are often used. As everyone knows, the original story is derived from the Sanskrit text *Kathasarithsagar* but Karnad has also turned to the German writer Thomas Mann's version of the same in his tale *The Transposed Head*. But Karnad gives a twist to the story of transposed heads by showing that problem of human identity is a matter of complex relationships and binary opposites of body and mind must be viewed differently. The author presents a story of two main characters. Devadatta and Kapila very close friends with one with a mind and the other with well-built body. Very soon complication arises when Devadatta also falls in love with her. Even Padmini seem to be drawn towards him. Then the sub plot of transposed head is utilized where Padmini gives Devdatta (his friend's body) and Kapila gets Devadatta's. Thus, there is comic confusion but it is cleared by Padmini alone who realizes the problem and feels that she alone has the capacity of solving the dilemma. Obviously, Karnad uses the myth in his own way and uses new characters and situations in order to show that head and heart must unite for proper and completion. Certainly, it is a problem play. In this play mind body confrontation and the appeal to Lord Ganesh for a final solution are devices which have been very successfully used but again in his play the privacy of women and their search for rewarding experience even at the cost of marital fidelity have been beautifully explained.

In his next play *Naga-Mandala*, he takes up oral tales and weaves two stories into a composite plot. Some people even regard this play as the companion piece to the previous play dealing search for

integration. There are two stories in which the first story is about lamp's flame when people gather in a village temple and tell stories dealing with community life. (Mukherjee). The second story is about a woman who is visited by king Cobra in the form of the married women's husband during night. The folktale method is here utilized very beautifully. The main story is about Rani whose husband is fond of another woman and is not willing to spend time with her. An old woman suggests a magical device and with a root prepares a potent love drug. Rani follows the device but out of fear doesn't give it to her husband and throws it away. The content of mixture falls on an ant-hill which is the abode of king cobra. On tasting it, the cobra falls in love with Rani and visits her during night in the form of her husband (Apanna). Initially, she is disturbed by the strange behaviour and her husband's quite rude to her during day but at night it turns into an amorous lover and she ultimately gets pregnant and she reveals the truth to her Naga lover. Her husband is naturally disturbed and he is quite shocked and accuses her of infidelity. She demands a trial of her chastity and she thrust her hand into the ant hill and pulls out the cobra and hangs him around her neck as a kind of garland. The whole village now accepts her as a goddess and her husband is also convinced. In this play again, Karnad looks to the fate of Rani and also her search for completeness because she has finally to leave the cobra kills himself by entangling himself in curve. Rani understands everything and honors his sacrifice by asking her son to perform due funeral rights. Once again this play deals with the issue of completeness and gives a new angle to the man-women relationship particularly the gender relation in view of the gap between the innocence and experience. Thus, this is a play where the issue of marriage has been problematized and it is a symbolical attempt to deal with intriguing nature of man-woman relationship. Perhaps it is a new attempt of Karnad to deal with the fate of Indian women confined to a conventional, stereotyped situation of neglect and desertion in a joint family. In short, Girish Karnad in these plays tried to use interrogate the existing notions and interrogations against the background of social and political system and social evils of gender, caste and mal treatment of women in his various plays. Another point that emerges from the study of play that Rani's story is archetypal of every woman's craving for domestic happiness and completion by becoming the mother of a child. This is clearly taken from a very significant remark of Rani when she tells the truth about her motherhood to her shocked husband, "I was a stupid ignorant girl when you brought me here. But now I am a woman, a wife and now I am going to be a mother. I am not a parrot. Not a cat or sparrow. Why don't you take it on trust that I have a mind and explain charade to me" (C.P 32). Thus, within the framework of the folktale cum myth. The dramatist manages to expose the stereotype notions of patriarchal system about woman's purity.

In *Tale-Danda* Girish Karnad once again moves back to the world of realistic situation from contemporary history. This time he seems to be perturbed about the political scenario in the wake of caste violence regarding reservation and the social tension in the country in the decade of 70's onwards. Apart from it, the controversy between the majority religion and minority religion also pained him a lot and, for a change, he moved to a period of 12th century in Karnataka when there was a similar upsurge against Vaishnavites by Lingayats. The dramatist now moves to a movement called Virasiva movement of religious protest and reform led by a Kannad poet-saint Basavanna in Kalyan (Karnataka). Here he refers to the conflict in terms of an inter-caste marriage between a Brahman girl and an untouchable boy under the patronage of king Bijjala. In this play, he refers to twin issues of caste tensions and religious conflicts between Buddhism and Jainism. The dramatist wanted to suggest that Hinduism has always encountered many challenges and has suffered from divisions among people because of cultural and social factors. But he widens the issue in an open-ended manner and suggests that Hinduism has withstood various kinds of revival attempts through violence. For example, the king Bijjal has to remember that he was originally, a barbar but became a king because of his ancestors who fought and gained the status of a warrior cast (Kshatriya). The king is however accepted gracefully only by the follower Basavanna, Known as Sharanas. The contrary view is endorsed by a Hindu Pandit Damoder Bhatt who supports the Hindu Dharma in the name of conformity and discipline. He feels that there is nothing to be ashamed of one's

caste because it is just like one's home, 'meant for oneself and one's family.' In other words, he believes in the superiority of the Hindu religion because it can accommodate difference through the tight grip over human conduct in terms of rituals. *Tale-Danda* is thus a drama of discussion and debate in the manner of a play by Ibsen or by Shaw and his followers. In the preface, Karnad hinted that he wrote this play against the background of Mandir and Mandal movements in Post-Independence India. Here Basavanna becomes the spokesman of the author when he remarks, "Violence is wrong, whatever be the provocation. To resort to it, because someone else has started it first is even worse" (C.P 36). Thus here, social evil is exposed under the garb of realism and there are various sufferers in the play because the followers of Basavanna try to exploit the caste sentiments resulting into retaliation but there are also other characters who seem to be moving with the time. The play loses something in translation of its original flavor. Finally, in the most ambitious play,

In *The Fire and the Rain* Karnad moves to another dimension of evil which is allegorical in its treatment and metaphysical in its ultimate dimension. This play was again based on a myth. The dramatist is now moving once again to *Mahabharata* for his source. Thankfully, then translated version in English shows much sophistication and expressiveness. Different critics and intellectuals called the play his 'best play, difficult to surpass in future (Mukherjee). In his typical style a myth from one parva of *Mahabharata* is taken up but it is transformed into a multidimensional suggestive play dealing with the fundamental political evil, the misuse of powers by human beings resulting in severe punishment by gods. The rituals of *yagnas* and penance are used beautifully in this play which deals with the fate of yavakari who misuses his *tapasya* and brings upon him a series of misfortunes and political revenges and they all result in the sufferings of various people such as Yavakari, Rabayya, Paravasu and Aravasu's penance restores everything. The beauty of the play lies in presenting a story of sin and atonement through the device of allegory. The English title of the play is quite suggestive where the words *Fire* and *Rain* become dominant symbols or metaphors which enlarge the dramatic action of the play. The word *Fire* refers to passions of lust, revenge and betrayal whereas the word *Rain* suggests the redemptive value of grace, faith and humanity. As already stated, this play makes use of the devices of Yagnas, the appearance of the supernatural element in the form of the tormented spirit. The prologue and epilogue of the play resemble the classical plays of ancient Greece and ancient India. There are, as usual lots of innovations in terms of creation of new characters of Nittlai, a hunting girl and Vishakha. The redemption is carried out by Aravashu. The conflict between Indira and his two brothers Viswaroopu and Vairitra also suggests that even the gods are not free from the power struggle and jealousy. In this highly complex play, the dramatist achieves a miracle by blending myths and rituals drawing our attention that in the fight for power and glory ordinary creatures become unwilling victims and sufferers. In short Girish Karnad uses the framework of Drama for bringing in a continuous parallel between past and present through the use of myth or history in order to highlight the vulnerability of human beings. He is at once entertaining and provocative and very skillfully draws the plight of ordinary mortals and suppressed people in general but the marginalized women in particular.

Mahesh Dattani is generally regarded as a worthy successor of Girish Karnad. This is because of two important reasons. Firstly, they belong to the same state of Karnataka and have lively interest in their mother tongue. Apart from that they are conscious dramatists and believe that theatre is a very powerful medium of social transformation and discussion of many taboos and close subjects. Professor M.K. Naik has very beautifully pointed out the similarities and dissimilarities between Karnad's and Mahesh Dattani's plays, "In a sense Dattani's Drama compliments Karnad's in the mythology and history are Karnad's favorite subjects while Dattani is involved with social and political issues in India today" (Naik M.K and Narain, Shyamala) Mahesh Dattani himself has defended his plays in well-chosen words, "...I am certain that my plays are a true reflection of my time place and socio economic background... In a country that has numerous challenges to face politically, socially, artistically and culturally" (C.P.) This view has been

repeated by many of his admirers. He deals with sexuality and gender issues, religious issues and the workings of personal and moral choices as he explores gamut of human relationship. In the context of the present topic the problem of evil Dattani's play assume importance because they deal with many faces of evil such as social and moral prejudices, violence, lust, child abuses, incest and even cruelty towards transgenders and gay people. He had succeeded to a great extent in arousing the conscious of his contryme4n not only through his play and films but also from other media from such as music and dance and theatre workshops.

From a chronological analysis of her plays, it becomes palpable since the beginning of his first play *Where there is a Will* to his latest plays and radio plays, he has taken up issues which originate from close mindset of Indian people in general and upper middle class families in particular. Not only this, he has also taken up the chronic issue of Hindu Muslim conflict from a very fresh angle. In his first play *Where there is a Will* he takes up the issue of driving out patriarchal code through setting of the gujrati family where various Kinds of presentations and prejudices are exposed petal by petal in form of a black covey. The writer raises a very important issue to a particular character who cries out in agony, "Will the scars of our parents lay on us or remain forever"(C.P.508) In a very simple plot we learn the tragedy of a self-made industrial who behaves like an auto crat and exercises control over his wife (Sonal) but he has little grip over his son Ajit. Initially it appears that Hasmukh Mehta is a very successful patriarch who has full control over his family and he has even blind scheme of revenge to disinherit the rebels on the strength of will, a legal document but the end of the play suggests his efforts are nullified and in his family everyone is a victim including his son, wife and few other minor characters. Though Hasmukh avoids death it is symbolically suggested that after his death his empire will fall to pieces.

In *Dance like a Man*, the family unite is used once again but this time the dramatist dealt deeper into the issue of mal adjustment because of the typical mindset. The word 'home' is now used symbolically to refer to the fate of three generations of occupants dictating their own terms to the next generation. Amrit lal is now the patriarch who carries the burden of his own period and he tries to impose his values to the members of next generation presented by Jairaj and Ratna. But ironically the members of second generation are also unable to shed their ambition and biases. This is what Lata learns to her dismay. This play has lot of interesting exposures and revelations and it is clearly brought out that in spite of professional success, the dancers are unable to transcend their egos and prejudices. The bias against male dancers is very beautifully brought out. While the young women and men are praised for defying their parents; they are unable to overcome the gender bias and personal ambition completely. That is why its ironic title *Dance like a Man* refers to a kind of compromise between the ideal and the real. In the whole battle Lata is a winner of the battle and choose a husband who has no idea of dancing but he is free from any obsession and easily turns into an art lover. The last words of the play are quite suggestive and telling, "We lacked the grace, we lacked the brilliance, we lacked the magic to dance like god"(C.P.166). These words clearly suggests that it is quite a tough job to get over one's obsessions and prejudices. At the same time the playwright clearly suggest that artists are also human beings and suffer from evils like jealousy, vaulting ambition and a sense of narcissism. The question of gender bias also is suggested through aversion towards dancers where they are segregated as people outside the mainstream of society.

In yet another play, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, acclaimed by critics and theatre goers, the dramatists exposes the emptiness and pretensions in the lives of two sheltered, fantasizing women and cruel unscrupulous men without being aware of their duplicity so called secrecy and cruelty. The issue of insensitiveness to women has been dealt with, by the dramatist in an earlier play *Tara* where there was a similar bias against female child and the question of gender bias is discussed in that play in more serious manner. The discussion of the present play is essential because Dattani was previously criticized as a male chauvinism or even as a women hater. His strong denial came in resounder "My women protagonist fight, scheme and get a piece of action albeit at a great personal cost"(Karnad). Here in *Bravely Fought the*

Queen we find more evidence of the hollowness of respectable ladies and their placid lives. In this play, at first these women do not fight but suffer silently. Here three women have shown to be suffering for lack of sympathy. One of them Baa is bed ridden and aged and when the bell rings nobody comes to help even when her three children are living with them. In this play with three acts with interesting title *Women, Men and free for all*. The female word is initially presented as a world of doom and unrelieved darkness dominated by males (businessman). It is only in the last act that all characters stand exposed and the clash came out in the home and kitchen through the device of contrast between two cultures, both conventional and rigid. One of them is endorsed by wealth while the other is trapped by conventional notions of morality. As already stated the play deals with women and victims of different generations namely Baa, Dolly, Alka, Diksha and Lalita. Dattani uses various techniques to tear apart the illusion of harmony and coherence in the old joint family system and certainly the title is an ironic reversal of the famed queen of the Jhansi for liberation. As already stated both *Tara* and *Bravely Fought the Queen*, deal with social evils of hypocrisy, rigidity and suppression of freedom of expression and choice. The writer has shown in all previous plays that women are at least not ready to take things being down.

In some of his plays like *On the Muggy Night in Bombay*, he takes up the issue of homosexuals or gay people just by suggesting that these people also have a right to exist but he also suggest that given a chance they would like to be happily married. A number of questions crop up and the use of irony suggest that the marginalized people and cultures and lifestyles have to be given a fresh thought. He has taken up the issues again in such plays *Do the Needful* and *Seven Steps around the Fire* but for the present attention would be focused on the most important of this plays namely *Final Solutions*.

As everyone knows the dramatist got special award for treating a chronic problem which has plagued us since partition. This play was first performed in Bangalore and subsequently first translated in Hindi and staged in Mumbai and elsewhere and finally published along with few other plays named *Final Solutions and other Plays*. Its success lay partly in its brilliant stage management and acting and direction by the celebrated Alyque Padmsee, a well-known dramatic celebrity. He rightly voiced that the theme of the play has perennial contemporaneity. He called it a play of transferred resentments, the old Indian habit for looking scape goats. In this play the issue of communal hatred is treated in the context of family relations. The most important character of the play Ramnik transfers his resentment to his father for his black deed to his own mother Hardika but Hardika's own daughter Smita has a grudge against Zarina because she doesn't support her in a fight against her own in-laws. In the play there is only one woman Aruna who seems to be balanced even though she is at times shaken by her daughter's behavior. The play is replete various minor habits, food habits, kitchen hats which shows our inbuilt prejudices and mental blockage. A technique of a memory is used in the play where a woman Daksha reads from a diary and her thoughts on communal disharmony pour in. The other technique is that of the chorus that somebody provokes and ignites and sparks a passion of fire and reaction starts in the form of street fights and uncontrolled violence. The period where the play starts is 1940 and Daksha is presented as a voice from old times, she is said to a grandmother of the main character Ramnik Gandhi. The dramatist once again tries to show that the evil is always there present or working in our mindset and even a same person has two identities. The voice of Daksha also undergoes transformation as she reads from her diary, first of all, as a girl of fifteen and subsequently as a nature lady who has undergone strong sense of disillusionment. She reveals, "All my dreams have been shattered....I can never be a singer. Haris family is against my singing films songs...." (C.P. 166). Again through the same monologue she uses the incidence along with the trauma of partition in a very paradoxical language, "Like last year, in August the most terrible thing happened to our country, we gained independence, you should have seen...."(C.P 166). In this monologue, the glory of independence and trauma of partition have been beautifully juxtaposed. Daksha's frustration is also expressed in confessional words, "A stone hit our gramophone table Krishna chose to destroy table which I love most. My entire collection of records broke. Those beautiful voices cracked"(C.P.167). The

present period is beautifully presented through the device of chorus where chorus becomes a mob comprising five men and 10 masks on stick. These are all symbolic. The use of black color is equally suggestive and in every chorus allegations are countered with questions, “why did they? Why did they today? The allegations are similar and speak our chariots and filled our gods. This is our land. It is in their blood to destroy. The stone that hit our god was not accident. The Muslims have complain against similar problem and they have a similar ego and bias. They haunt us now! They are afraid of us! They beat us now! We are few but we are strong! They want to throw us out”(C.P. 179). In such an atmosphere of fear and insecurity two muslim boys Bobby and Zaved managed to sneak in the household of Ramnik but for this gesture he is a declared a traitor and mad man. The discussion between Ramnik and Seeta is equally revealing because it shows all political parties use outlaws and Bandits for their own benefit. The cry of Zaved and Bobby is summed up in chorus, “Should we be swallowed? Till they cannot recognize us? Should we melt into enormity so that they cannot find us? Lose ourselves in selfish masks? Should we? Can we?”(C.P.196) The play answers the questions that the burden of guilt is borne by every character. Ramnik has own men and the present generation as well. Zaved accuses of Ramnik of hypocrisy because of his indifference and hypocrisy but finally all agreed that inspite of darkness there is still hope and it depends on a positive gesture. That last word used by Hardika and Ramnik refers to such possibility, “Do you think these boys would ever come back? Ramnik if call them, they will come. But then again, if it is too late they may not”(C.P). But there is a hope, life is a continuous journey.

In short, in the plays of Mahesh Dattani we have lively discussion of various social issues and fundamental problem of lack of trust. The writers make a very fervent feel for having a fresh outfit and attitude of sympathy towards complicated problems of modern Indian society. He takes up various social problems and evils of gender bias, communal tension and our inbuilt prejudices against Dance, gay people and arable loneliness of sensitive individuals (both men & women) through the medium of Drama. Thus, both Karnad and Dattani seem to be vying with each other by resorting to different dramatic devices but their intentions are the same.

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