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LITERATURE: A COMPANION TO MAN

**(AN INSIGHT INTO THE MODERN INDIAN THEATRICAL WORLD
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MAHESH DATTANI'S DO THE
NEEDFUL AND TARA)**

Abstract

The present paper intends to have an insight into the Modern Indian Theatrical world with special reference to Mahesh Dattani's Do the Needful and Tara to demonstrate literature as a companion of man. The two selected plays of Dattani belong to the category of Social Realism. The plays depict the hidden realities of human world. Literature celebrates the society. Its task lies in the portrayal of the real into the reel life. The paper elaborates the importance of literature in one's life. Literature's hunt begins and ends with Man. Its collaboration with Man provides significant results. Every work of literature aims at the allocation of some problem. This challenge imparts knowledge about the societal incidents. When it comes to enlightenment, literature comes forward. Its companionship with men is centuries old. The paper intercommunicates the benefits of literature as a companion to man.

“All the world is a stage,

And all the men and women merely players;

They have their exits and their entrances;

And one man in his time plays many parts”. (Available on <http://www.williamshakespeare.info/>)

When it comes to literature, its companionship with man for centuries cannot be ignored. The literature emerged to entertain and enlighten the people. Its act of interweaving of history and

realities of society portray the socio-economic and political condition. It can be described as a colourful picture of the reconstruction of the facts and figures. The literary composition of the society in different eras depicts different themes and concerns. Literature, broadly, has been divided into poetry, fiction, drama, and criticism. The genres developed as per the interest of the writers and the changes that took place. The works of the writers always collect the information from his nearby surroundings and pen them down with the beautification of their words. In fact, no writer can detach himself from happenings taking place around him. Resultantly, literature presents the reflection of the society.

Drama as one of the genres of literature is the direct way to inspire and guide people. Dramas are performed in the theatres which convey the message through the expressions and dialogues of the characters. The purpose of the drama is to get the theme deep-rooted in the minds of the audience. People mostly believe what they see. So, the dramas required proper plot, story, and the capable actors so that a fruitful result can be achieved. Oscar Wilde considers Drama the most educating one. He comments:

I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being. (Online)

Oscar Wilde's statement has awakened the people. He has used the words wisely to define the superiority of the drama over the other genres of literature. No doubt, dramas are closely connected with the audience. The laughter and applaud prove the success of any drama. The immediate audience response makes drama stand aloof in pride and prejudice.

Wickham firmly believes:

Drama, in short, was not a subject; simply a collection of fragments, more or less interesting', but all 'peripheral' to already existing disciplines. (46)

Wickham is perfectly a professional. He stresses the impact of surroundings on the writers. Recognizing this fact, literature is said to be the companion of men in every era. The different eras throw light on various goings in the society through different modes. There is a direct link between the men and the problem. Combined, they form literature. Every society is supposed to face some problems. There can never been a Utopian society. The problems started appearing since the mankind came into being. Earlier, people were nomads, gradually transformed into the sensible civilization. But still we have not got rid of the problems. The problems change their form from time to time. They are the unending challenges.

The whole civilization can be classified in to three ages: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern. In the three stages, the writers kept trying to demonstrate the societal concerns. In the Ancient times, religious ceremonies were celebrated. The Medieval age introduced a number of changes. The age gave rise to liturgical dramas, mystery and morality plays. In the Renaissance, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Thomas Kyd, Ben Jonson etc. dominated the era with flying colours.

Drama significantly asserts the ideas that are in vogue. It is informative, entertaining, and transforming tool as well. It gets moulded easily as per the likes and dislikes of the people. The different eras had different themes. In the last of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century, the Modern era got started. It attacked the existing themes with a blow and shattered the dreamland and introduced the man to the brutal reality. The century is typically based on logic and reasoning. When in 16th century, Shakespeare focused his attention on Royal men. Christopher Marlow also came up with his die hard tragedies. The audience was left in awe and suspense. The writers were sailing in the boat of self-contentment. They cherished their imaginations. This era was an escape from the real life. But the scene was totally topsy-turvy in the 20th century. Social Realism was introduced by Henrik Ibsen in Norway. It dealt with the social issues of the society. The supernatural elements and the fantasies got a setback. G.B.Shaw, John Galsworthy, Pinero, Mahesh Dattani, Vijay Tendulkar, and many more followed the path of social realism. It also attracted the Modern man who adapted the changes and became more sensitive towards humanity. The literature as a companion has always informed and guided people about the struggles of the society on behalf of the characters presented in the works. The Modern era has witnessed bloodshed, insecurity, and alienation etc. The works present the same. Fanon 's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, Eugene Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*, Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder*, etc project the society's helplessness. The Modern era seems to have a license of spreading fears and disappointment.

The paper examines how literature is a companion to man with special reference to the theatre and Modern Indian playwright Mahesh Dattani. The present paper intends an insight into the Modern Indian theatrical world. Mahesh Dattani's *Do the needful* and *Tara* have been selected to show the task of literature. The choice of the two Modern works has been deliberately made. Both the works are the problem plays dealing with the complex issues that seem difficult to be solved. The writer's aim lies in exposing the social ills prevailing in the society. Though the writers' medium of expression varies in both the plays, yet the target remains the same. Mahesh Dattani belongs to the Indian Writings in English. He also enjoys the tag of a 'problem play' writer. He lays his attention on the social changes that are the demands and need of time. The Modern Indian writers' style of writing is very simple and they elaborate the problems effectively. Mahasweta Devi in an 'Introduction' to her five plays expressed:

Once I became a professional writer, I felt increasingly that a writer should document his own time and history. The socio-economic history of human development has fascinated me. But some of the greatest political happenings of my times like the Tebhaga revolt of the Bengal peasants or the Partition and its aftermath had passed me by before I had become a writer. So I chose to resurrect older periods in history in their immediate physicality, as if they were nothing less than contemporary. The Naxalite movement between the late sixties and early seventies, with its urban phase climaxing in 1970-71, was the first major event after I had become a writer that I felt an urge and an obligation to document. (viii)

Drama, an impressive genre of literature, most of the times depicts the societal norms. Mahesh Dattani acts as a medium of spreading awareness in the masses about the changing scenario. Drama is the most liked genre of literature. Its enactment moves the audience and forces them to introspect and do the needful. It can also be taken as a strong tool to amend a man. Being a companion, it sells out emotions along with informative technique to reform.

Mahesh Dattani, a Bangalore playwright, is bold enough to raise the issues of homosexuality in his works. His plays mostly deal with the marginalized class of the society. He got Sahitya Akademi awards for his *Final Solutions* and other plays in 1998. He tries to use theatre to have his say before the people. Most of his plays deal with the social ills. The characters are presented in such a way so as to be linked with the audience easily. The paper puts forth one of his best Radio-play *Do the Needful*. BBC Radio 4 broadcast the play on 14th August 1997. The duration of the play is of an hour's. It mocks at the married life of gay Alpesh and his wife Lata. They enter into a contract marriage and vow to let others do what he/she wants to. Alpesh wanted to get rid of societal pressures of getting married. Lata, who was in love with a Muslim boy, Salim, did so to misguide her parents. The theme is quite a controversial one. Dattani has perfectly woven the story. The play blames the society that forces the people to hide their own selves. Our constitution doesn't discriminate anyone on the basis of sex. But the society has its own rules and regulations. The homosexuals' don't get equal respect and opportunities in the society. They have to face the dearth of consequences once they are exposed. The attitude of the society sometimes gives rise to hatred and animosity towards the other sex or religion. The works of Mahesh Dattani blame the society for all the mishappenings. The characters of the play act as the mere victims.

“Article 15 of the Indian Constitution says that the state shall not discriminate against on grounds of religion, race, sex, place of birth or any of them” (www.legalservicesindia.com)

In the play, the dramatist throws light on the behaviour of the so-called respected class of the society. How they convince and force the victims to live in remorse. Alpesh was a gay. He was in love with Trilok. But his mother wanted him to marry a poor girl so that she should not demand more from Alpesh and them.

Kusumben Patel. I know. I know there must be some good reason for you to say no to marriage.

Alpesh. What happened with my last marriage?

Kusumben Patel. Yes? What do you want to say?

Alpesh. You don't want it to happen again, do you?

The arguments prove Alpesh's fear and refusal for marriage. But in vain he was convinced.

He felt weak before the society and agreed to marry.

Kusumben Patel. We will find some poor Patel girl—who will be grateful to enter our household...Who will not expect too much from you.

Alpesh. Yes, baa. (Thought.) Oh, Trilok, Trilok, Trilok! (Dattani, 126)

Lata faces the same pressures in her house. She loves Salim, a Muslim boy. Difference in religion does not let them marry.

Lata (thought). Salim. I know you are allowed four wives- what's the point in thinking of all that now? I will have to be content keeping you as a lover. How are we going to work this out? (126)

In the end of the play, both Alpesh and Lata are on their separate paths but together before the society. The end shows the victory of the society over the desires of the living beings. The conventional ideologies have resulted in giving birth to two more corrupt people in the form of Alpesh and Lata. The end reads:

Lata. Where do we meet?

Alpesh. You've got my cell phone number, haven't you? Give me a call when you're...through.

Lata. What do we tell baa?

Alpesh. You'll do shopping, right? Just let me know all the shops you've been to and tell her I took you there. Here, use my credit card at Benzer's. I will go there tomorrow and sign the vouchers. Don't go to the temple, the pujari knows my dad. He is sure to tell him that I wasn't with you.

Lata. I won't have time anyway. I have enough to do.

(Thought) Salim!

Alpesh (Thought). Trilok!

Dramas reveal the expressions and emotions best. The performance of the actors adds another feather in the cap. The situation is easily understood when seen. The play has perfectly portrayed the societal restraints. Its not at all wrong to call literature a true companion to men. The information is conveyed to the readers as a friend imparts to his companions. Mahesh Dattani himself feels that the actors make the situation living. He states in his *Preface*:

I also know that I have a lot to say and am probably not saying it well enough, but my characters have a lot to say too, and they seem to be doing rather well at having their say. (Dattani, xi)

Another play of Mahesh Dattani i.e. *Tara* is another example of literature being a good companion to men. It was first performed as *Twinkle Tara* on 23 October 1990. The story of Tara is a devastating one. The two conjoined Twins, one brother and a sister suffered from the pain of gender discrimination. They were born with three legs one each and the third one could only survive with the girl Tara. But their grandfather and mother decided to give the third leg to the boy Chandan. The leg did not survive. After some time, Tara died, leaving her brother in dismay and agony. The play is a satire on the society. It educates people not to discriminate on the basis of caste, creed, sex, race, etc. The play ironically portrays the difference between the tradition and modern values. Tara's mother Bharti always felt the pain of gender discrimination. It was her decision to give the third leg to Chandan. This guilt scared her throughout her life. She started caring for Tara after the incident. She was trying to provide herself another chance to prove her motherly love towards Tara. She treated Tara with ample of care and protection. This made her husband Patel irritated. He angrily asked Bharti:

Patel. Yes! Look at the way you treat Tara. As if she is made of glass. You coddle her, you pet her, and you spoil her. She's grown up feeling she doesn't need anyone but you! (Dattani, 352)

Bharti. Just leave me alone with my daughter. (Dattani, 353)

Mahesh Dattani plays with words. He has always added a good amount of emotions in his works. This bringing together of emotions and plotting display the best of image of society in Modern India. The society itself is caught amidst hypocrisy and social stature. A common Modern man does not know his landing. The traditions are fore grounded in the minds of the modern man as fears. The characters play the stereotyped roles. The fragile sex was supposed to work at home the whole day, whereas the strong ones followed 9 to 5 routine. The different genders lived in their boundaries. The walls were made and determined by the society. Bharti and Chandan considered themselves to be responsible for Tara's plight but were escapists. They did shed tears, but tried to escape the situation. Chandan fled to London. Bharti kept her busy in household chores. Chandan failed to get rid of the guilt. He changed his name from Chandan to Dan. He blamed masculinity for the death of his sister. He attacks the prevailing unnecessary intrusion of the social norms into the lives of innocent victims. He held society responsible for the actual mishappening in his life. Sans guilt, he could have lived better. He seems helpless in the end. He feels:

Dan. someday, after I die, a stranger will find this recording and play it. The voice is all that will remain. No writing. No masterpiece. Only a voice—that once belonged to an object. An object like other objects in a cosmos, where orbits are determined by those

around. Moving in a forced harmony. Those who survive are those who do not defy the gravity of others. And those who desire even a moment of freedom find themselves hurled into space, doomed to crash with some unknown force. (Pause). I no longer desire that freedom. I move, just move. Without meaning. I forget Tara. I forget that I had a sister—with whom I had shared a body. In one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out...and separated.....forgive me, Tara. Forgive me for making it my tragedy. (Dattani, 379-380)

Both the plays of Dattani that have been discussed above in brief are the constructions of the Modern society. The modern writers concern the society more rather than anything else. Most of the modern writers choose man as subject to alert the people of rising alienation towards each other. Nobody cares for other's pain. It's a Modern trend. The Modern writers feel pity on these people and web a story to give them a lesson before it gets too late. Mahesh Dattani emphasizes the termination of the conventional ideology of favouring a boy over a girl.

“The Stage but echoes back the public Voice.

The Drama's Laws the Drama's Patrons give.

For we that live to please, must please to live.”(Shepherd, 19)

Dramas voice is similar to the voice of public. The dramas focus the need of the audience. They produce what is appreciated and prevail. The needs and demands of the audience vary from era to era. The developments and the changes that are natural change the mood of the audience. It wants to see the world with its own eyes without a blink. The modern writers worldwide frame their work in the light of consciousness.

“There is no friend as loyal as a book” (Online)

Earnest Hemingway has rightly called the books as the best friends. Literature provides the best ever companionship to the men. In fact, it guides men with total loyalty and logic. The drama that we see and read is a story of someone around us. Literature, no doubt, has proved its loyalty as a friend to man. But the modern inventions have given a set back to the black ink.

In the world of gadgets and I-Phones, literature has to face a great challenge in calling people towards it. The technology mostly wins the race, the poor literature lags behind, even after providing enormous knowledge, lags behind. Mohan Periasamy, President of the Youth Exmore says that youngsters have lost touch with the reading habit due to the different entertainment avenues that have opened up. (Online)

As the experiences prove the importance of literature in the lives, one should never ignore the best ever companion. It will definitely serve its companion forever with its philosophical talks without stressing him out.

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