

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Mapping the Subaltern in the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani

Ms. Savita Boral<sup>1</sup>, Ph.D. Research Scholar, The North Cap University, Gurugram  
Dr. Divyabha Vashisth<sup>2</sup>, Head-Centre for languages learning, The North Cap University, Gurugram

## ABSTRACT

An understanding of the concept of Subaltern is crucial to the study of art and literature. The question of representation, resistance, domination, and subordination are an integral part of subaltern studies and ideological discourses. India is a multicultural nation, which in other ways results in discrimination, assimilations, and many other social and economic changes that paves the way for cultural identity and subalternity. The term "Subaltern" has been borrowed from Gramsci which means an unpleasant, unwanted, discarded, and inferior group of people in society. Subaltern is anyone who does not have any say in the general setup of a society and can be associated with any kind of economic, mental, or physical deformity. The study aims to analyze the traumatic experience, psychological conditions of subalterns in the plays of Mahesh Dattani, as he writes on the burning issues that beset the post-independence Indian Society. The plays selected for the purpose are 'Final Solutions', 'Bravely Fought the Queen', 'Seven steps Around the Fire'. 'Final Solutions' focuses on the problem not only on the problem of communal harmony but suppression of women and post-modern ideologies. Dattani's 'Bravely Fought the Queen' is the picture of womenfolk commencing well-off households belligerent male-controlled supremacy as it preponderates in our country. The third play in the queue is 'Seven Steps Around the Fire' that pacts per the leitmotif of eunuchs, their distinctiveness, their establishment, and their subtext.

**Keywords:** Subalterns, Marginalization, Oppression, Power, Patriarchy

## INTRODUCTION

Subaltern connotation of substandard fecund is a word espoused via Antonio Gramsci to denote folks assemblages in the social order who are substance to the supremacy of the dominant classes. The theory of the subaltern expanded its eminence and importance with Gayatri Spivak's essay 'Can

the Subalterns Speak' questioning and exposing their patronizing attitude. Spivak acclimatizes the deconstructive modus operandi of Derridean to argue out the unlike practices of subject constructions and 'Othering'. Most of the people in the past, present, and future were, are, and will be subjugated to subaltern experiences in multifaceted and multidimensional ways be it in terms of age, religion, gender, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, citizenship, and so on. In India, the term subaltern which initially designated tribals and Dalits was expanded in later decades to encompass women and other weaker sections in the society. Even in the field of writing the role of gender is persistent and both men and women as writers have explored the role of gender through their writings. Mahesh Dattani is one of the few leading Indian English dramatists who has registered the societal quarry and idiocies, faults, and bigotries of our country. He also criticized and exposed the Indian middle class in many of his plays. Some of his drama sexist lucid fortifications of humanity's castaways and would, be insurgents, people forced to live double lives to satisfy the prying eyes of society. Numerous matters like homosexuality, gender discernment, Leninism and juvenile voluptuous cruelty, etc find an honest and candid delineation in his plays. Subsequently ephemeral through segments of poetical, conjectural, and dogmatic drama, Mahesh Dattani's theatrical talent delivered a safe and sound berth for Indian English performances as an influential civic expression. Dattani pared out his path yonder the tenets to eradicate the peculiarity amongst folio and stage and to make playhouse an abode to express the opinion

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

of the abandoned, subaltern in the altering ciphers of decency.

**SUBALTERN VOICE IN DATTANI'S FINAL SOLUTION**

In some classical plays, the female character is depicted as a conventional woman who accepts the male's care without question. In Kalidas' *Abhigyanam*, Shakuntala silently acknowledges the curse of sage Durvasa as well as her husband Dushyanta's passive indifference. Similarly, modern Lidian playwrights such as Rabindranath Tagore, Vijay Tendulkar, GirishKamad, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Mahasweta Devi, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Poile Sengupta depict women in interesting ways, such as the beleaguered woman, woman battling societal and ethnic injustice, a Dalit woman, proclaiming her eccentricity, a woman who has been sexually abused, and so on. Women dramatists, in particular, have contributed to the inclusion of a female perspective in Indian drama. Male playwrights, influenced by western and Indian feminism, have only recently begun to write plays with a feminist consciousness. Mahesh Dattani, an Indian English playwright-director based in Bangalore, falls into this range. His plays explore the patriarchy's feminist experience of manipulating the notions of both sexes in the social order. As a result, Mahesh Dattani's depiction of women in his plays differs from that of other Indian male playwrights such as Girish Kamad or Vijay Tendulkar, in that Dattani writes from the perspective of a woman.

The play *Final solutions* that was selected for SahityaAkademi Award is an effort to reconcile the mass and canvas within the periphery of the stage. The dramatic structure is organized with the help of flashbacks, corporate mass in the form of a chorus, and the quick shift of scenes in the form of interior and exterior. Being a dramatist, Dattani is enthralled with the speckled entreaty and densities of womenfolk as stagy charismas. The phantasmagorias of womanhood in primeval manuscripts divulge exactly how custom in

masculine civilizations relegated women to the nonessential and abridged them to an ostracized locus. These imageries of the woman demonstrate how civilization and its levieslimited women to the corners in her home as a consort and a mother. This has been highlighted in a segment from the *Manu Smrithi*, where the liberty of a woman has been strapped away to distantstupor:

*Pitaa Rakshati Kaumaree, Bhartaa Rakshati Yauvane; Putroo Rakshati Vardhakyee; Na Stri Swaatantryam Arhati: (Shastri1983,IX, 3) which resources the father guards the women throughout babyhood, the husband in her adolescence, and the son throughout her adulthood; a woman does not warrant independence.*

Likewise, phantasmagorias of mythological typescripts like *Savitri* and *Anasuya* anticipated as archetypes of our traditional womankind, swayed several male-written works. These man-printed transcripts, whether prehistoric or else contemporary, probable women as reluctant, placid, besides distinguished as an individual, unalloyed and generous as a wife, forfeiting and empathetic as a mother. Such prognosis of a woman convincingly is incredible on the condition that she is mortal and not divinity. A woman is an individual, a human being with as many blemishes and flaws as any other human being. Mahesh Dattani's dramas replicate an appreciation of the overhead fact. Falling into the genre of playwright, Mahesh Dattani is enthralled through the wide-ranging entreaty the intricacies of womanhood as theatrical disposition. This possibly will be the aim why Dattani's women cannot be abridged to pigeonholed groupings. If in case anyone endeavors to classify his women characters they can be beheld, only with hesitancy, as the customary, the inaudibly defiant and the newfangled woman, as these categories tend to be fluid and merge. On the other hand, *In Final Solutions*, the woman who façade the travail and oppression beneath patriarchy is Hardika/ Daksha, the woman who is the victim of dominance along with the prisoner of the past proficiencies and

RESEARCH ARTICLE

memories as it influences her contemporaneous too. The existence of petite Daksha vicissitudes at an age of 15, when she got conjugal to Hari, for instance, the chief alteration she undertakes is her name, with which her individuality is concomitant. Her name is reformed to Hardika just to cup tie the name of her husband Hari along with her life. All her hopes and dreams, aspirations came to an end, her edification is clogged and she at this instant is a typical housewife of a Gujarati kinfolk.

*Hardika says "All my dreams have been shattered...I can never be a singer like Noor Jahan. Hari's family is against my singing film songs. His parents heard me humming a love song to Hari last night. And this morning they told him to tell me...I'm just a young girl who doesn't matter to anyone outside her home."*

Hardika is later clogged to meet her Muslim pal Zarine and is trampled on the account that she did not take his consent to go and eat with the Muslim family. **"I did not touch their food! Ah! Don'th itme(Angrily). Don't do that! I swear I didn't eat anything! Alright. I won't go there again. Please leave me alone."** Hardika is a dupe of oppression and dominance in the hands of a male hood family. She did not have the liberty to live her life on her terms where she is even repudiated to listen to the melodies of Noor Jahan. Though India got freedom and got independence from British rule, Hardika is still a convict in the hands of her near ones. Dattani through the character of Hardika has shown how women in Indian under Patriarchal dominance get excluded from their dreams and comes under the subaltern group who cannot think for themselves and remain voiceless.

Smita, the only earthly personality in the most acknowledged work of Dattani's *Final Solutions*, is a representation of the novel woman, an empowered girl who cessations unrestricted commencing the bonds of rigid customs, contrasting her mother who is immobile and destined by hoary stubborn customs. She perceives a great deal

erroneous by the corporeal chic of her birth-giver, who is a steadfast follower of Hinduism and has been accustomed to have faith in and perform her religious conviction is grander as compared to any other religion.

VICTIMS OF MALE TYRANNY IN  
DATTANI'S PLAY BRAVELY FOUGHT THE  
QUEEN

Bravely Fought the Queen is the depiction of housewives from well-to-do families' belligerent in contradiction of patriarchal ascendancy as it triumphs in India. This play also questions the male and female roles in the general public. Dolly, the protagonist of the story, transferred herself to be courageous to ambush from her fierce and disloyal husband and her oppressive mother-in-law, who, even in her crippled situation grips on to the gearshifts of inland authority. This composition too throws light on the emotive, monetary, and sensual niceties of a contemporary Indian household. Depicting the ever-changing Indian principles, this drama renders the rattle a mid old-style and present-day ethos. In this play, Dattani boldly and unhesitatingly handles the issues of homosexuality. It is about women suffering due to the husbands into homosexual relationships.

This play is a character drama and the characters are adjoined by the conceptual glooms. Jiten look like his predecessor in looks and in nature as Profile similar to his father Hasmukh. They extant the dim facade of patriarchy- prejudice, abhorrence, and dominance. Jiten signifies the conventional mannish who extravagances women as sex entities besides gets prostitutes to his work place. However unfolding Jiten Baa says, **"Jitu is just like his father, Just like him."** Baa's better half was a harsh fellow who distraught her. The manner of nastiness executed on her by her husband is conveyed to the readers and spectators from time to time in the play when she senses nervous even after so many eons of his demise. Jiten, the elder son resembles his father while the younger spawn Nitin is an extra passive and compassionate character. Baa develops an

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

inclination towards Nitin as he resembles her a lot. It was because of the spitefulness and mistreatment of Jiten to her expecting spouse Dolly that she delivers incapacitated girl. Jiten's character is somewhat similar to Osborne's character *Jimmy in Look Back in Anger*, a ruthless and vicious individual who inflicts pain on his companion. He can be called an atrocious and alike Jimmy; he does not dither in harming the other people present around him.

Women in Mahesh Dattani's plays are marginalized, subaltern but they fight back. The play *Bravely Fought the Queen* illustrates the predicament of current cultivated Indian Womanhood. In this composition, eventually the women characters are instances of manipulation predominant in educated metropolitan kinfolks. It also conveys a message that women cannot be repressed for a longer period of time. If they are not heard for long, they will fight back. Alka very confidently inquiries her partner and probes for a clarification for his unfaithfulness. Other than this she also states the duplicity of her own brother for not illuminating the reality of homosexual affairs among her husband and her brother. Alka is all set and fortified to combat back and to query the standards fixed by men for women at home and in society. Moreover, this play also represents the notion of gay ethos ubiquitous in urban cities. Thus Mahesh Dattani benevolences to us the depressing veracities of the metropolitan families and the struggles and quandaries they face.

**TRANS SUBALTERN IN DATTANI'S SEVEN STEPS AROUND THE FIRE**

Seven Steps Around the Fire is a radio play, that deals with the leitmotif of eunuchs, their distinctiveness, their construction, and their inference. It is the agonizing story of a "Hijra" Kamala, who is deeply in love with the son of a well-heeled politician named Subbu. When the reality of hers that is she being a hijra is discovered to people, she is hard heartedly slayed. Ironical but true our Indian society consents a hijra for adorning the occasions like marriages and especially

childbirth but will not permit them to participate in such ceremonials. The author has paradoxically depicted this characteristic, for some matter connected to them is of least meaningful to anyone. Her massacre does not stimulate sympathy and a feeling of compassion but she is looked down upon. The mystery behind the death is there in the police-politician-rime nexus, which is a postcolonial development. Marriage is a sacred institution, accepted throughout the globe. Mr. Sharma, the nasty politician does not understand the importance of the same. A eunuch, an attractive solitary, is asked for conjugal and the ultimate disastrous decease – all appear to be a misapprehension. A sense of horror and injustice prevails for it is not by choice but sheer misfortune that she is deprived of essential felinity.

Uma Rao, who is the daughter-in-law of a deputy commissioner and the wife of SP is also a sociology scholar and is writing a thesis on the origin and contemporary status of the "hijra Community". She emerges as a potent personality in the drama. She is the spokesperson of the subalterns here. She battles back to establish the personality of Kamala, the transgender, through her exploration on class and gender-related fierceness and delinquency. It is she who uncovers the truth behind the murder of Kamala. Through Uma possesses much dignity and intelligence, she feels lonely in her connubial. Perhaps this sagacity of seclusion sorts her sympathize with Anarkali, the hijra she supports. The faintness of the law lords, which rest on the proof first, is also noteworthy. This play by Dattani expresses about the plight of subaltern and thus accomplishes the postcolonial conditions of writings. Thus Seven steps Around the Fire couriers the individuality crisis of the hijras and their-felt longings for actuality behaved as a social being and a unlike the public like the government and law oriented politician rarely feel a pang of morality in getting a hijra burnt to bereavement.

**CONCLUSION**

To conclude, Mahesh Dattani has raised such issues in his plays which are consciously or

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

unconsciously accepted and followed even by educated persons. Such issues have never been given importance through a large part population suffers because of them. Dattani has done an uphill task by pulling them out from the rug and display them on theatre. The plays taken up are specific of the most protuberant spectacles commencing with subalterns and also discuss the psychosomatic characteristics and certain precise social arrays of subalterns. All the characters discussed are eventually searching for their individuality, looking for haven and acceptance in family and society. Thus Dattani plays voice the sufferings of downtrodden and subaltern strata of the society who are forced to suffer everything mutely.

**REFERENCES**

- [1]Dattani Mahesh, 2000, collected plays, New Delhi: Penguin Books India
- [2]Althusser, Louis “Ideology And Ideological State Apparatuses.” Trans. Ben Brewster. Critical Theory since 1965. Ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle. Tallahassee: UP of Florida and Florida State UP, 239-50
- [3]Foucault, Michel, 1977, Discipline And Punish: the Birth of the prison. New York: Pantheon Books
- [4]Iyengar K.R.S, 1977, Indian Writing in English, Bombay Asai
- [5]Naik, M.K, 1982A History of Indian English Literature, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi
- [6]LoombaAnia, 1998 Colonialism/ Post colonialism London & New York Routledge
- [7]Spivak Chakravorty Gayatri, Can the Subaltern Speak, 2017, Macat Library, 1<sup>st</sup> edition
- [8]Doniger Wendy 20000, The Laws of Manu Penguin Classis
- [9]Barry, Peter, Beginning Theory, New Delhi,2013, Print
- [10]Nayar, Pramod k. ‘ Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory, Noida, Pearson, 2010, print
- [11]JagoseAnnamarie, ‘Queer Theory: An Introduction ‘Online
- [12]Banerjee, Dbjani, trans. Bishnupada Chakravarty, The Penguin Companion to Mahabharata, New Delhi, 2007