

## Mahesh Dattani and Mahesh Elkunchwar : A Comparative Study



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### Abstract

Mahesh Dattani and Mahesh Elkunchwar are two leading dramatist of modern times. Their plays have gained national and international attention. Their works have become part of Indian's post-colonial theatrical canon. Their plays reflect major social issues of contemporary Indian society. This research paper in a humble manner compares the works of Mahesh Dattani and Mahesh Elkunchwar in a brief manner.

While studying the plays of both playwrights it is strongly felt that the issues discussed in those plays are very much similar to the issues India is facing today. These two dramatist exhibit a lot of resemblance in many respects. However, there are differences as well. Dattani writes directly in English from the very beginning while Mahesh Elkunchwar came to the scenario of Indian drama in English through the translation of his works. Dattani write in English that is hybrid, home grown and regularly spoken by the urban people.

**Keywords :** Loneliness, Tradition, Homosexuality, Urbanization, Family, Gender.

### Introduction

Drama is a type of literature that is primarily written to be performed for an audience. Indian drama is one of the oldest in the world. By the mid A.D. 300 flourishing drama in Sanskrit Language had developed a technique. Sanskrit plays resembled epic poems. Each play was organized around one of nine Rasas (mood sentiment). Indian drama has had a rich and ancient tradition. The Natya Shastra being the oldest of the text in the theory of drama. The dramatic form in India has worked through different traditions – the epic, the folk, the mythical, the realistic etc.

### Analysis:

Mahesh Dattani is a Bangalore based dramatist. His plays usually deal with middle class life in urban India. The major issues he deals with are homosexuality, gender identity and construction, the

pressure of the past, the hollowness of the middle class life. In the plays of Dattani, the family is a battle field. Dattani uses all the resources of theatre at his command. He gives the audience a feeling of real world without the features of theatrical realism. He uses the language with great dexterity. He does so to individuate characters. Humor is an integral part of his play.

The dramatic works of Dattani depict different mental states, emotions, desires, aspirations, strengths and weakness, basic moral and social questions as well as individual's predicaments. They also present a many layered fascinating picture of the social, political, economic and cultural life of present times. Plays like – Where There Is 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 Bombay (1998), Seven Steps Around The Fire (1999), Thirty Days In September (2001) are glorious works that would bring credit to any literature.

In the play “On A Muggy Night In Bombay”, 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. Sharad speaks about the benefit of trying to pretend as if one is heterosexual. The characters are struggling with their identity. Bunny says that the man who loves his wife does not exist for him.

Gender identity is also one of the major themes in Dattani's play. His plays raise the question as to how men and women are constructed in terms of gender. Amrit Lal does not think dancing is for men in “Dance Like A Man”. Ratna thinks that her husband Jairaj is not much of a man. The play raises a question, what is manly and what is feminine.

Dattani's plays also shows the hollowness of middle class lives. His plays raise a question whether Indian family is a safe place to live in. The home is a battle field with uneasy alliances being forged by various parties.

Mahesh Elkunchwar has written and produced some of the most influential and progressive plays of post Independent India. He has done active works in Indian parallel cinema as an actor and screen writer. His works has gone a long way in shaping modern Marathi theatre. Elkunchwar plays, with their wide ranging themes, the passage of time and mortality, identity and sexuality, religious tension and gender issues, human bond and alienation- focus on human ties and personal and moral choices which are the classic concerns of all great works of literature. His plays symbolize the dramatic vision

and skill of a man who has played a seminal role in changing the face of urban theatre in India. Some of the plays of Mahesh Elkunchwar are – Sultan (1967), Garbo (1970), Party (1976) , Wada Chirebandi (Old Stone Mansion, 1985), Pratibimb (Reflection,1987), Atmakatha (Autobiography,1988), Yuganta (The End of an Age,Sonata, 2000) , Eka Natacha Mrityu (An Actor's Death, 2005), Raktapushp.

In the play “Sonata”, the action takes place in one drawing room in one night. Three girlfriends share their innermost thoughts. They often hurt each other – knowingly or unknowingly. All three are different in nature. One is a prudent mature Maharastrian. The other is a food loving Bengali. The third is a free spirit with quite an appetite for men. These woman are not at peace with themselves. The play “Desire In The Rocks”, is a story of incest and sterility of life. The play has two major characters, HemKant and Lalita - who are brother and sister and five un-named women from the village. The play portrays the oppressive norms of the society and the violation of moral or social boundaries and impulses of art and eroticism that challenges these norms. In “AtmaKatha (autobiography)” Raja is an eminent writer who is in the process of completing his autobiography. The authenticity of it is under question. His autobiography functions as an artificial mask.

His famous play Wada Chirebandi (Old Stone Mansion), portrays the slow decline in the fortunes of traditional Hindu family. The play was inspired by Anton Checkhov’s play “The Cherry Orchard”, that describes the socio economic transformation in the early twentieth century Russia.

### **Conclusion:**

Mahesh Dattani and Mahesh Elkunchwar are socially committed artists. They write about the real life of Indian societies. It is a society which poses to be Indian by heart and soul on the one hand and on the other hand it desires to be slave of western culture. All their plays are about different social concerns. Their plays exemplify the artistic blend of Indian and Western cultures and concerns.

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