

# “Changing Trends in Postmodernism: A Case Study of Mahesh Dattani’s *Thirty Days in September*”

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**Abstract:** *Indian theatre has a rich heritage in most of the regional languages. In Ancient era, it was performed in lyrical form in India. They are based on mythology. As the audience changes the choice of their interest is also changes. As a cultural activity Drama is significant performance in Indian society. Drama portrays the changes in social, political or cultural fields. We can reconstruct our history and understand the society to which we belong by studying drama. India has a rich tradition in drama. Vedic Aryans performed the drama in a very simple way. Different acts were enacted in front of the people from Ramayana, Mahabharata etc. It portrays the situations which in relation to the good people and bad people intimately. Due to the ruling of British in India around 150 years and even they ruled many countries worldwide- English received the status of International language. There are many writers of India whose writing is translated into English as it has the status of International language. Even many Indian English writes have written directly into English language. Indian dramatist Kapur, Kamlesh (2010 History Of Ancient India (portraits of a Nation), 1/e. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. p. 483. ISBN 9788120752122) rightly defined Indian theatre as, “Indian theatre is one of the most ancient forms of Asian theatre and it features a detailed textual, sculptural, and dramatic effects.<sup>[1]</sup>” In modern era, there are many popular dramatist as Makrand Sathe, Mahesh Yalkunchwar, Mahesh Dattani, Girish Karnad who have notable work in English literature. Present paper aims to focus on Mahesh Dattani’s play *Thirty Days in September*- as the work of postmodernism.*

**Key Words:** *Indian Theatre, Indian Drama, Postmodernism, Mahesh Dattani, play, *Thirty Days in September* etc.*

**Introduction:** India has a tradition of drama since ancient time and contributed to the world literature significantly. The Indian English drama has been changed its characteristics according to demand of the time and its different dimensions. The variety of drama given by the Indian dramatists are identical on the world level as it has the uniqueness Indian which depict the Indian society and the changes as per the trends of time.

**Origin of the Term Drama:** Indian Drama has a great tradition. It starts with Sanskrit Plays. The word ‘Drama’ is originated from the word ‘dra’ which means ‘do’. Action and dialogues are predominant in drama. The oldest texts and theology claims the origin of the divine drama in the sacred Vedas itself. Originally, it is preserved in *Natyashastra*. Bharata’s *Natyashastra* proved to be the most significant work for drama as well as dance. Bharata ascribed a new vision to drama as the Fifth Veda. There are many talented and renowned dramatist of the ancient era. They are Ashvaghosa, Bhasa, Sudraka, Kalidasa, Harsha, Bhavbhuti etc. Drama is a composite art with artistic realization. It represents the society in visible and audible narrative. It is very efficient and powerful genre with drastic incentive in social and moral issues of the times. Actually, for a dramatist, it is a tool of conveying the raising social concerns. In relation to this, M. K. Naik rightly states in his article *The Achievement of Indian Drama in English* in *Perspectives on Indian Drama in English*:

“Drama is a composite art in which the written word of the playwright attains complete artistic realization only when it becomes the spoken word of the actor on the stage and through that medium reacts on the mind of that audience. A play, in order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, thus needs a real theatre and a live audience.<sup>[2]</sup>” (Naik: 1977: 180-181)

**History of Indian Drama:** Indian English Drama had a long history. There are various themes and contents on which the works belong. They are philosophical, political, social, moral, religious, and historical. Indian English Drama depicts the unconventional themes and the realities of life. *The Persecuted* by Krishna Mohan Banerjee added the zest to the Indian English Drama. The real journey of Indian English Drama was started when Michael Madhusudan Dutt wrote *Is This Called Civilization?* Then, there are the writers from pre-independence and post-independence period. They are R. Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Harindranath Chattopadhyay, T. P. Kailasam, Bharati Sarabhai, Asif Currimbhoy, Gurucharan Das etc.

**The contemporary Indian English Drama:** Further, the contemporary Indian English Drama presents a memorable turn in the perspectives. It is experimental, innovative and reinvestigating the folk - love and religion with the context of the contemporary socio-political issues. The stalwarts are Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar etc. Moreover, the contemporary Indian dramatists dare to defy the new vistas of the society. And in the sense one has to consider the name of Mahesh Dattani, one of the eminent playwrights, who has given a fresh dish to the readers of late 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Mahesh Dattani as the contemporary Indian English Dramatist:** Mahesh Dattani plays pave a new way into contemporary issues. He started his own theatre group ‘Playpen’ in 1984 for tyro artists. His plays are performed there. The plays of Mahesh Dattani are remarkable as well as appealing. His plays are combination of both provocative as well as classical concerns of world drama. Dattani is the first playwright writing directly in English who won India’s prestigious Sahitya Akademy Award for his *Final Solutions and*

*Other Plays* in 1998. He is India's avant-garde playwright. He is a dramatist, actor, director, dancer, teacher and screenplay writer.

**Mahesh Dattani's Focused Theme in his Plays:** Mahesh Dattani's plays draw the attention of the sensible readers to the present day issues. It depicts the unconventional themes related to social issues i.e. communal disharmony, hijra community, gay relationships, patriarchal society, homosexuality, gender discrimination, etc. In other ways, to mark the certain change in the society.

**The Postmodern period of Literature:** Now, it is postmodern period that means transition from modern to postmodern. It is a reaction against modernism. One can find the revolution at every place that is in theology, architecture, music, art, literature and films. There are various modifications, progresses and trends found everywhere. Actually, the term postmodernism is sometimes called a controversial term. It is quite debatable task. It has received wide usage and most deliberation. But as far as literature is concerned, it has its own certain features. The literature inclines to be non-traditional. It has formed its new style and rejects the traditional boundaries. So, the impact of new trends found in postmodern literature in English.

**Mahesh Dattani's play *Thirty Days in September* as the part Postmodernism:** The present research paper aims at studying the portrayal of family in Mahesh Dattani's play *Thirty Days in September*. The play *Thirty Days in September* is a representation of postmodern drama. It is a family play built on the theme of Child Sexual Abuse. It takes the audience to the heart of darkness. It was first performed on 31 May, 2001 at Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai.

**Setting of Mahesh Dattani's play *Thirty Days in September*:** It is a stage play in three acts. The play was commissioned by RAHI, a support group for women survivors of incest. The whole story takes place in the suburb of Delhi. Mala is the daughter of Shanta. She is a modern young girl. Her father left both long ago. She feels her mother is responsible for all. A young man, Deepak, loves her and proposes her but Mala turns it down.

**The Plot and the Theme of Mahesh Dattani's play *Thirty Days in September*:** The play focuses on Mala's psychology, mother-daughter relationship and child's sexual abuse. Dattani's focus is on the problem of child sexual abuse. The everlasting impact of child sexual abuse is revealed by telling the tragic tale of Mala. Lillete Dubey expresses her views in the note on the play:

“*Thirty Days in September* has touched hearts and consciences everywhere. Sensitive and powerful without ever offending sensibilities, it manages to bring home the horror and the pain within the framework of a very identifiable mother-daughter relationship.<sup>[3]</sup>” (Dattani 2005: 4)

Moreover, the stage is divided into four acting parts and the action moves without any set changes. The play starts with Mala who talks to an imaginary counselor opposite to her. She is not talking to the audience but there is a tape recorder, her conversation is recorded and she is unaware about recording. Mala Khatri, a

young modern working girl, is the protagonist of the play. She becomes the victim of sexual molestation in her childhood. She tolerates the agony but feels its impact in adolescent age. She is haunted by the idea of her molestation.

No doubt, Mala tells her mother, Shanta about her molestation but her mother remains silent. Actually, Mala is molested by her own maternal uncle, Vinay, for lust. She expresses her agony by putting the word on her mother. She says:

“MALA. I am not talking about a bad dream! I am talking about the time when uncle Vinay would molest me. When I was seven. Then eight. Nine. Ten. Every vacation when we went to visit him or when he came to stay with us. You were busy in either the pooja room or the kitchen. I would go to papa and cry. Before I could even tell him why I was crying he would tell me to go to you. You always fed me and-and you never said it but I knew what you were saying to me without words. That I should eat well and go to sleep and the pain will go away. And, and – Oh God! It did go away. But it comes back. It didn't go away for ever!<sup>[4]</sup>” (Dattani 2005: 25,26)

Mala, as a child, had no knowledge about sex as well as might not enjoy it but when she grows up young, feels the horror of it. The impact of child sexual abuse made her licentious. She was carrying the burden of incest. Later on, we find the fault lies with Mala. She starts to attract other sex and invites them for making sex. She is ashamed of herself and naturally diverts her anger towards her mother. She feels that her mother doesn't care for her and is responsible for her miserable plight. Consequently, one can find that Mala is a mentally disturbed girl. She is not ready to marry Deepak. On the contrary, Deepak is ready to marry Mala in such circumstances but she avoids marrying him. She is not interested in marriage but wants to enjoy sensual gratification. Furthermore, her mother, Shanta is anxious about her daughter's marriage. She feels that Mala should get settled as early as possible. Mala tries to protest it but finds herself guilty, quarrels with her mother.

Moreover, Shanta always keeps silence and sings the prayer to Lord Krishana. Ultimately, she reveals the truth about her silence that she herself was the victim of child's sexual abuse by the same person. She was only six then and till ten her brother exploited her both physically and psychologically. At last, Mala realizes how her mother is also became the victim of child sexual abuse by her own brother. She feels guilty and realizes the same pain and agony of her mother. At last, Mala feels relaxed and slowly rests her head in Shanta's lap who turns back to her God and continues with her prayers.

**Conclusion:** In this way, Mahesh Dattani has discussed the serious issue by portraying the two characters that is mother Shanta and her daughter Mala. At last, both unite in love because both sail in the same boat. Both suffered in their life through grief and penance. He focuses on how child abuse disturbs the lives of the girls. Dattani represents a doll in the play as a symbol of silence. Truly, it is a family play. Dattani discovers the darker side of the family life with deep intuition. Undoubtedly, Dattani is representing the reality of modern urban milieu. The play throws light on the changing scenario having great impact of globalization.

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