

Mahesh Dattani's *Clearing the Rubble* a Sarcastic Approach towards the 21st Century

Dr. Ishan Gairola

Gairola Sadan, Charvelley Road
Mussoorie, Uttarakhand.
Pin 248179.

Abstract

Indian drama, in the hands of Dattani, has been rendered into a perfect synchronization of entertainment and enlightenment. The themes chosen for the plays are broadly the marginalization of voiceless people and issues of invisibility. Dattani is well aware that imperfection is the law of nature; conflict and co-operation is a continuous process, but in an evolving, society, like India, which has been witnessing more inconsistencies and disharmony, at the level of both the individual and society, an artist by the very nature of his/her calling, requires to rise to the occasion to present these in a manner, most suitable to impinge upon the conscience of all, towards greater harmony and social balance, against any forced harmony. His world of drama focuses on the invisible issues of Indian society which everyone comes across every day, yet maintains a silence, not cogitating in one's mind or not daring to defy the why of it. Dattani's, *Clearing the Rubble*, is one such play.

Keywords: *Natural Calamity, Marginalization, Communal Sentiments, Social Reality*

Introduction

Mahesh Dattani stands out as the most prolific and distinctive theatre personality of the contemporary era of Indian English Drama for producing and staging plays with innate freshness and candor. He is one of the few dramatists, and perhaps the most distinguished one, who has given major space to marginalized voices. His plays are populated with characters belonging to various marginalized groups like eunuchs, gays, lesbians, women and minority etc. He is the master of bringing onto the stage, the everyday complex issues, with a wide range of themes and presenting them most realistically, without being judgmental. His plays are charged with a universal appeal, symbolizing many of the classical concerns of the world drama with a quality of stage ability around the globe.

His plays symbolize, purely performance oriented scripts, that prompt emotional as well as intellectual response from his audience/readers. The most remarkable trait of Dattani's dramatic world is that he has most innovatively invented an effervescent new

theatrical form of drama that has accelerated the growth of the hitherto stagnant tradition of Indian-English drama. He freely mingles the European models with the apt use of Indian mythology, rituals and myths alongside with the modern Indian dramatic techniques.

Communal sentiments are such that they work like a contagious disease and we display, our split personality. *Clearing the Rubble* is a spectacular display of such actions. The play first broadcast on 17th January, 2002, implicated the discriminatory treatment given to the minorities, even in times of natural calamities. Kutch, in Gujarat was devastated, when a heavy earthquake hit the region in 2001. Relief and rescue operations were carried out to save people affected by the earthquake like clearing the rubble, supplying food, water and medicine etc. People across the world extended charitable help and sympathy towards the quake hit areas in Kutch. However, the relief and rescue operations undertaken were not free from communal bias and prejudice as Muslim victims of the calamity were discriminated while receiving relief and help. They were deprived of proper care and help from the administration as well as relief workers. Thus, the Muslim victims of the earthquake were doubly marginalized; one as earthquake hit masses who lost their homes, employment and relatives and second as the minority Muslim community.

Dattani depicts this marginalization through the characters of Salim, Fatima, Salim's mother and Jeffrey, an English journalist in his radio play, 'Clearing the Rubble'. He tries to depict the reality of relief and rescue operations and the plight of the Muslims, during the earthquake in the Kutch region of Gujarat through the prayer of Fatima to Allah:

FATIMA: (thought) Allah be merciful! It is time for my prayer. Forgive me, but I cannot face meca. I cannot move. My Allah, please forgive me! Please show compassion. Both my daughters are with you now, I am coming too. Take me away from this unjust world now. I will hold the bodies of my daughters till I follow them your world. I have no more strength to call out to those people who help others but not us. I cry out for you now. Only in your world is there justice. I want to be in your world. (CP II 65)

The quake hit Kutch on 26th January, 2001, on the Republic Day of India. Jeffrey, an English journalist, visits the town to witness the ravages of the colossal earthquake, two days later. Jeffrey writes a letter to Nora describing the horrors of the earthquake in Kutch. The entire region of Kutch was reduced to a heap of rubble by the quake; no building in miles and miles of land could be seen erect. The survivors of the quake were crowding the relief camps for obtaining food and shelter. Jeffrey comes to a village in Kutch where the hospital has collapsed killing and injuring lots of people as a consequence of the massive quake. His heart is filled with deep sorrow and sympathy at the plight of the quake victims. Jeffrey meets

Salim, a poor boy, at night who is lamenting and imploring the people *'Don't go! Help me! Help, please! (CP II 69)*

Jeffrey learns from Salim that his sisters and his mother were lying under the rubble and the help he got from the rescue workers was not up to the mark and inadequate. He complains that the rescue workers were discriminating him on ground of his being a Muslim and hence not paying due attention to rescue his mother, Fatima, and his sisters, Saira and Mumtaz. Salim desires Jeffrey's help in arranging the crane from the city and removing the massive wreckage of buildings so that his mother and sisters may be taken out alive. Jeffrey feels a deep sympathy and affection for Salim and wants to help him but the circumstances are really unfavourable, yet, he convinces a few people to accompany him to the city to get the crane. Jeffrey and his companions reach Bhuj where they meet a German lady, leading the operations of the Red Cross, who gives them a mini truck containing a mini crane in it. On their way back to the village Jeffrey and his companions are detained and interrogated by the Government officials. Jeffrey's counter question to the officer, *"Are you preventing equipment and supplies from reaching Muslim and Dalit population?"*(CP II 71) is an attack on the reality that injustice and bias is meted out to people belonging to the marginalized sections like Muslims and Dalits by government officials.

The people are doubly marginalized by the fury of nature as well as the injustice of government officials. However, as soon as Jeffrey and others reach the village they are happily amazed to discover that the truck carrying the crane was also loaded with food, medicine, tents and clothing etc. They start their rescue operations removing debris and heavy beams with the help of the crane and are able to save a number of people buried under the rubble. Jeffrey looks for Salim so that he could recognize his mother and sisters but he was nowhere to be seen. Thus, Jeffrey's desire to unite Salim and his family remains unsatisfied but he can console himself that his efforts have saved many lives. After one year of the Bhuj earthquake, Jeffrey revisits the village hoping to see Salim and his family. Through the experience of Jeffrey, Dattani, in this play, aims to depict the contemporary social reality pertaining to the marginalization of poor and weaker sections like the Muslims and Dalits. He tries to divulge the fact of gross injustice and inhuman treatment meted out to these people by the government. His articulation of the suppressed voices of marginalized people, who are crying under the worst fury of nature and who know no bounds of caste, creed or religion, serves as a prominent voice toward reformation of the excising anomalies.

Conclusion

In a draught situation in Gujarat, people of higher castes are privileged and the women and children of low caste in particular are forced to suffer and die. The stage setting, plot structure, thematic variations, indigenous English and the sequence of events are so designed as to create a flux of images that stir the insight of a reader or audience to the

disturbing reality of contemporary Indian society. The play gives us a glimpse of modern Indian society which claims to be shining and advancing into a developed nation against the backdrop of socio-political discrimination, prejudice and social evils. The dramatist exhorts us for a change of societal mindset in order to make India a place, known for its harmony and a place for better living. Thus, the revelation in general is the playwright's power of observation of the marginalized conditions, expressed through varied themes, plot structures and characterization and the language seems to be of the author's, yet he keeps himself away as a non-judgmental observer.

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