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MAHESH DATTANI'S CLEARING THE RUBBLE : PORTRAYAL OF SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION

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Abstract:

Being the multifaceted literary and dramatic figure, Mahesh Dattani has given a new height and dimension to Indian English Drama. He has enriched and embellished tradition of drama with his experiments and innovations. He has authored a good number of dramas diverse in themes, techniques and devices. The themes of his plays are quite contemporary and modern, radical and unconventional. He has dramatized problems and issues of the modern urban Indian Society ranging from communal tension, homosexuality, child sexual abuse, gender discrimination, marriage and career conflict between tradition and modernity, patriarchal social system, constraints of hijjars, women children labourer, interpersonal relationship workings of personal and moral choices, identity crisis, revelations of the past, the problems faced by HIV positives. Clearing the Rubble, a radio play is a touching play of the victims of natural calamity and social discrimination. While commenting on his plays, John Mc Rae calls him 'the voice of India' and observes as follows:

KEY WORDS:

Portrayal , multifaceted literary ,dramatic figure , innovations.

INTRODUCTION

They are the plays of today, sometimes as actual as to cause Controversy, but at the same time they are the plays which Embody many of the classic concern for world drama.

Mahesh Dattani wrote the play '*clearing the Rubble*' after he was commissioned to write a play by B.B.C. Radio after the terrific earthquake in Bhuj, Gujarat in 2001. The play concentrates on the three characters who were affected by the devastating earthquake in Kutch, a region of Gujarat, in 2001. Jeffery, an English journalist, visits Bhuj a year later. He wants to meet the boy named Salim whom he had met a year ago when he was helping with rescue operations. The play begins with the scene at the school. There is recess in the school and Salim is remembering his dear-ones whom he lost in earthquake.

After the natural calamity of earthquake in Kutch in 2001, the relief operations were undertaken to save humanity. The relief tasks like clearing the rubble, providing food, water, medical aid etc. were done. The people across the world were showing their sympathy and praying for the lives of this mishap affected people. Amidst this scenario, the social prejudices were at work. Mahesh Dattni depicted the reality through the characters of Salim, his mother Fatima, an English journalist Jeffrey. There was disparity in the distributions of relief to the earthquake affected people. Under the name of religion, the Muslims were not properly provided help and relief. They were the worst sufferers upon the stroke of fortune, they received the stroke of communal discrimination. Through the thought process of Fatima, Dattani tries to narrate the plight of the minority people during the earthquake in Kutch.

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MAHESH DATTANI'S CLEARING THE RUBBLE : PORTRAYAL OF SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION

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. (Cp65)*

Thus, it is evident in the words of Fatima that communal discrimination is done in relief works.

Jeffrey, an English journalist revisits India after a year. He first visited on 28th January 2001, two days later a terrific earthquake in Kutch. He starts his journey to Kutch again writing a letter to Nora. He narrated all about the massive earthquake that devastated land and his own experiences on site visit. Through his letter, it is learnt that he first came at Malliya town, a close town to the region of Kutch. He was mistaken by the man as the official rescue workers. He informs him that he is a journalist coming from England. He further told the man that he is going to write about the condition of humanity in other parts of the world. He described the sorry state of the land as he has seen during his visit. There was no sign of buildings for miles as all of them have reduced to heaps of rubble. People were standing outside the relief camps for completing paper works to get shelters and foods.

Jeffrey arrives at a village in Kutch and grieved more to see the plight of the earthquake. The hospital of the village collapsed during the earthquake killing and injuring many people. During the night Jeffrey heard the voice and went to place where the cry was coming out. He met there a lad who was crying out,

Don't go! Help me! Help, please! (Cp69)

Jeffrey approached him and tried to know all about him and his misery. He was Salim, his mother and sister were under the debris of the fallen hospital. The journalist tries to dress his wounds. He doesn't want to heal his wounds, but he needs someone help him. He wants to remove the debris to take out his mother and sisters. Salim exclaims : *They tried! Not enough! (CP69)*. Some people were working there, but he was not satisfied with their efforts. The men were trying to pull down the beam. It was heavy and massive. So, the earth moving equipment like crane was necessary for doing that work. Salim was extremely grieved and panicky. He tries to explain the journalist that the communal discrimination has aggravated his problem. The boy tells the journalist, *'We are Muslims!(CP69)'*. So they are not paid the due attention to them.

Jeffrey's heart is full of love, care and sympathy for the boy and his family members. Under the circumstances, he was also helpless. The boy needs his help. Jeffrey realizes that the boy expects Jeffrey go and fetch crane to remove the rubble. Salim has two sisters namely saira and Mumtaz who were buried under the debris of the building along with his mother Fatima. Jeffrey approach the man he met earlier and convinces him to go to city for getting crane. The man says:

*If we move any of that, we will cause the debris collapse further
and might kill the people who are alive. That's why we stopped
our work.(CP71)*

Ultimately, Jeffrey, the man and some othere people arrive in Bhuj in the morning and meet a German lady in charge of the operations at the Red Cross. She hands over a key of the truck containing mini crane in it.

The play deals with the wrath of nature along with injustice by government officials to the poor and minorities. On their way back to the village, they were stopped and interrogated. The officers were making inquiry of the man who was driving the truck. The officer asks them to get off. Jeffrey tries to take his photograph. So, he was annoyed and asked *'who are you?'* (Cp71) Jeffrey replies in a furious mood that he is a journalist, writing on the communal and caste biased nature of the relief operations. Jeffrey makes counter questions; *"Are you preventing equipments and supplies from reaching Muslims and Dalit population?"*

After reaching the village, they were surprised to know that there were many things along with mini crane. There were blankets, vitamins, foods, clothing tents etc. in it. They set up the crane and remove the heavy beams. The journalist wants Salim unite with his mother and sister. He searched for salim to identify his family members, but salim was not there further. Jeffrey's hope to unite him with his

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mother and sister was unfulfilled. He was consoled with the idea that he helped to save the villagers. At least some human lives were saved. Today, now, after one year, Jeffrey is revisiting Bhuj. He tries to track out Salim who had met during his first visit.

Thus, Dattani depicts contemporary socio cultural scenario of the society in his plays. He is keen observer of the modern society and its problems. Here, Dattani condemns rigidity and oddities of government who pays less attention to the problems faced by the deprived sections of the society. Dattani intends to indicate that religion and caste consciousness is so down deep in the blood of the people that it hinders the call of humanity.

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