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Introduction to Modern Indian Drama

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Good morning. Let us now complete our discussion of Mahesh Dattani's plays through the, through an overview of his, of his work. Mahesh Dattani was the first important playwright to write all his plays in English.

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Mahesh Dattani

- The first important playwright to write all his plays in English. He came from a Gujarati Sindhi family and was born and raised in Bangalore. Initially worked as an accountant and then dedicated his life to theatre and writing plays.
- He was inspired by the work of Alyque Padamsee
- Began writing his plays in the 1980s, all of which were concerned with exposing the hypocrisy of social institutions of family, religion, gender and sexuality.
- Some of his plays were translated into other Indian languages and performed by well known directors and theatre groups.

He came from a Gujarati Sindhi family and was born and raised in Bangalore. Initially worked as an accountant and then dedicated his life to theatre writing plays.

His work was largely inspired by the work of Alyque Padamsee who witnessed many of his plays, also directed them, watched them, appreciated them, critiqued them.

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Final Solutions

- The play has to do with the problem of communalism. Ramnik and his daughter Smita are liberal Hindus who give shelter to Javed and Bobby who are apparently being chased by a bloodthirsty Hindu mob.
- A parallel intersecting narrative in the play is of Hardika, Ramnik's mother, who from the memories of her youth as Daksha, grows to resent the Muslims, for killing her father during Partition. She has still not lost her prejudice. She has a friend named Zarine, through him, she secretly gets to listen to her favorite female playback singers. Wanted to be a singer herself but her orthodox family forbid her.
- Ramnik and Smita find the limits of their liberalism tested by Aruna's orthodoxy and Javed's violent intolerance of Hindus. They have to negotiate with two similar ends of the spectrum of religious tolerance.
- Unlike Bobby who refuses to identify with his community and is ashamed to be a part of it, Bobby is initially a rebellious and violent Muslim who wants to avenge the persecution of his community by Hindus. He confesses later that he was not paid by Hindu right wing parties but volunteered to place cow carcasses in the house of a Hindu man, to trigger the riots.

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part of it, Javed is initially a rebellious and violent Muslim who wants to avenge the persecution of his community by Hindus. He confesses later that he was not paid by the Hindu right-wing parties but volunteered to place our cow carcasses in the house of a Hindu man to trigger the riots.

Javed is later ashamed of what he did. He identifies with Ramnik's wife Aruna, who is an Orthodoxy Hindu woman who observed rituals of purity and pollution. He does not, she does not want to share her food or space with the people of other caste religions.

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- He is later ashamed of what he did. He identifies with Ramnik's wife Aruna who is an orthodox Hindu woman who observes rituals of purity and pollution. She does not want to share her food or space with people of other castes or religions. Javed identifies with Aruna as they are mirror each other's intolerance. He says he is no different from the bloodthirsty Hindu mob that is allegedly pursuing him.
- By the end of the play the characters undergo a transformation: Javed forces Ramnik to realize only he being Hindu can afford to give him protection. Only he can be liberal. Javed realizes he has lived a meaningless life of violence; Javed compels Ramnik to realize his liberalism is also being tested; when Bobby holds the idol of Krishna in his hand, Aruna's orthodoxy is also being tested and she realizes there are probably many different ways to god; and Hardika/Daksha learns from Ramnik that her in-laws were responsible for burning Zarine's father's shop during Partition.

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Bravely Fought the Queen

- The play exposes the hypocrisy of family and the normative role of the family in regulating gender and sexuality. The family comprises Ba, her sons Jiten and Nitin, their wives who are also sisters, Dolly and Alka, respectively, Shridhar who works at Nitin and Jiten's advertising firm and his wife Lalitha. Dolly's daughter Daksha and Dolly's brother Praful do not appear on stage.
- Dolly and Alka seem to be trapped in miserable and violent marriages. Lalitha has been asked her husband to organize a masked ball to feature a model for a new line of female nightwear and inner wear called ReVaaTee. There is a mix up in the dates as Dolly and Alka are supposed to visit the Kapoors with their husbands on that very day.

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- But the visit is cancelled and Lalitha ends up spending time with Dolly and Alka. Lalitha is witness to the hidden animosities and desires that threaten to fragment the Trivedi family. A common motif in the play is the bonsai plants that Lalitha likes to make, a symbol of the trapped and stunted and sterile lives of the women in the play.
- Dolly is also wearing a face mask in the beginning of the play to suggest the artifice of her life. The brothers, Nitin and Jiten, and their mother and wives live in twin houses in Koramangla, Bangalore. They are wealthy but we discover later that their advertising firm is on the verge of bankruptcy. They take Dolly's brother Praful's help who offer them ten lakhs as an interest free loan. They resent Praful and look down on him because he apparently tricked Nitin into marrying Alka.

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- Alka seems to have an alcoholic past, which is why her mother-in-law, Ba, does not approve of Nitin's marriage to her. Ba who is losing her memory, and is confined to her bed, constantly calls for Dolly and Praful. From her memories we learn that she also had a violent marriage and she had to ask her father for money to raise her sons. Jiten is violent like his father while Nitin is gentle like his mother.
- As Lalitha, Dolly and Alka, share drinks, they lose their inhibitions and all their secrets are revealed. Dolly, for instance, is having an illicit affair with Kanhaiya, their cook, who later ends up being a pure fantasy for her desire for love. Alka is unhappy in her marriage and Dolly resents her for always being the more popular of the sisters. But appearances are different from the reality.

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- We discover Jiten is a violent and unscrupulous man who exploits Shridhar. When Shridhar agrees with the customers' hostile feedback on ad campaign for the inner wear and nightwear, saying it is too sexist and objectifies women, Jiten insists on carrying on with the campaign and targeting men, who have the buying power to make their wives look sexy. Jiten desperately needs the ReVaaTee account to lift their firm from bankruptcy.
- Jiten orders Shridhar to find him a sex escort who will fulfill his pleasures. He wants to sell their ancestral home to redeem their debts. He wants Nitin to order Alka to leave the house because of her alcoholism and her alleged affair with another man, to win Ba's approval.
- Nitin discover from Ba that the house has been willed to Daksha and Praful is her trustee as Ba thinks he was the only one who loved Daksha.

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- We discover that Jiten had hit Dolly when she was pregnant and she had an accident, which resulted in Daksha's disability. Daksha studies in a special school in Ooty and it is the sheer guilt that compels Jiten and the rest of the family to take care of Daksha. We also learn Praful is Nitin's lover and that he had gotten Alka married to him to continue their affair. Even the auto rickshaw driver whose auto was driven over by Jiten's car is Nitin's illicit lover.
- Dolly decides to leave her husband by the end of the play.

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Dance like a Man

- The play questions the equation between gender and performance. Ratna and Jairaj Parekh are dancers in their sixties. They have a daughter, Lata, who is also an upcoming dancer, who wants their permission to get married to Vishwas, the son of a sweet storeowner, provided her allows Lata to continue dancing after their marriage.
- Through a series of flashbacks, we discover that Jairaj's father Amritlal disapproved of his passion for dancing and berates him for growing his hair long. He think dancing is meant for women. Although Amritlal was a freedom fighter who fought against dowry and child marriage, he regrets consenting to Jairaj's marriage to a woman from a devadasi community.

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store owner and provides, provided he allows her to, allows Lata to continue dancing after their marriage.

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Now if you remember devadasis are women who are dedicated to temples at very young age and they, they work their living by, they earn the living by dancing for the temple and for the patrons and devotees who visit the temple.

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- Ratna and Jairaj's guru would visit Amritlal's home to teach them dancing. When Amritlal tries to stop them from dancing, they go to Ratna's uncle's home but return when the uncle makes sexual advances to Ratna. Ratna insists on learning dance from an old devadasi woman much against her father-in-law who bribes the devadasi to not teach Ratna.
- Amritlal tries to use Ratna to prevent Jairaj from dancing, but later is forced to relent; he allows Ratna to dance.
- Jairaj feels insecure because of Ratna's greater success as a dancer. He feels eclipsed by her and is reluctant to dance with her. He has to face stiff competition as a male dancer. He becomes a regular drinker to lighten his sense of insecurity. Ratna blames him for not accepting invitations to dance and for not working hard on his own dance.

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- They had a son named Shankar, who died in his sleep on one of Ratna's performance nights, because the nanny had fed him with an overdose of opium. Jairaj tries to make Ratna feel guilty for being a negligent mother.
- Ratna wants Lata to become a famous dancer and get selected in the foreign dance festival in Canada for which she is willing to compromise her own principles. She is unable to find a mridangam player to replace theirs who had an accident for Lata's performance. She has no choice but to ask Sheshadri, a lecherous man, who is having an affair with Chandra Kala, another dancer, who is on the selection committee. Ratna has to flatter and win the favour of the various patrons of the performance competition.
- Later Jairaj and Vishwas have an argument on Lata's performance, that got rave reviews in the papers. Vishwas is uncomfortable with some of her overtly erotic performances that Jairaj had once performed himself before the army.
- By the end of the play, there is a vision of Jairaj and Ratna rising to heaven, having learnt from their past mistakes, and Lata becoming a rising star, who now has a child of her own.

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That ends our discussion of Mahesh Dattani. Thank you.