



## REFLECTION OF RADICAL FEMINISM IN MAHESH DATTANI'S PLAYS

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### ABSTRACT

*Feminism is a movement which aims at defining, establishing and defending a state of equal political, economical, cultural and social rights of women. Feminism is committed to the struggle for equality for women, an effort to make women become like men. As a philosophy of life, it opposes women's subordination to men in the family and society along with men's claims to define what is best for women without consulting them; thereby offering a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization and control mechanism. Mahesh Dattani is a versatile Indian English playwright who is a strong supporter of Feminism which can be seen through his plays. His plays 'Bravely Fought the Queen' and 'Where Did I Leave My Purdah' exhibits the feminist views through characters, scenes and philosophical dialogues.*

**Key Words:** *Feminism, Chauvinism, liberation*

### INTRODUCTION:

*"The situation of woman is that she-a free and autonomous being like all creatures-nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other."*

*-Simon de Beauvoir*

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Feminism is a movement which aims at defining, establishing and defending a state of equal political, economical, cultural and social rights of women. Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical fields. Feminism is committed to the struggle for equality for women, an effort to make women become like men. Feminism believes in the promotion of women's rights and interests. Karen Offen defines Feminism as-

*“Feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within any given society.”*  
- (Karen Offen-P.151)

Feminism believes in the feministic consciousness which is the consciousness of the victimization. More philosophically speaking, it seeks to discover and change the more subtle and deep rooted causes of women's oppression.

Present day feminism is a historically specific movement rooted in French Enlightenment thought (Mary Wollstonecraft) and in British liberalism (John Stuart Mill) and consequently wedded in deeply critical style to notions of truth, justice, freedom and equality. As a philosophy of life, it opposes women's subordination to men in the family and society along with men's claims to define what is best for women without consulting them; thereby offering a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization and control mechanism. On the whole, feminist study is a mode of literary analysis which tries to reinterpret literature from the woman's point of view and introduces the notion of sexual differences into the study of literature. Themes explored in feminist study include discrimination, stereotyping, oppression, Patriarchal subjugation etc.

### **GROWTH OF FEMINISM IN INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA:**

Feminism in India can be traced down to the days of Ram Mohan Roy. The earliest feminist were men who had set out to introduce reforms in upper caste Hindu society addressing social evils like child marriage, dowry, female illiteracy and the practice of sati. Social reformers believed that education was the key to social change for improving the position of women.

To begin with, feminist theatre thrived in cities and towns in India primarily in non-commercial spaces. Jan Natya Manch Of Sardar Hasmi.(people's front) formed in 1973 performed an agitprop street play 'Aurat' (1979) which dealt openly with issues like bride burning ,dowry and wife battering. It was exciting because it dared to venture to the public with such diverse representations and expectations of women that it created a new audience

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for theatre. During 19<sup>th</sup> century, many female authors carved out an important place for themselves. In the genre of fiction and poetry, the stage remained largely closed to them. The last twenty years or so have seen a significant change in this respect. The Indian theatre is no longer the male preserve it used to be women directors, previously a rarity, have come to the fore. Writers like Laxmi Chandra, Chaman Ahuja, Jasbir Chandra, Usha Ganguli, Neelam Mansing Chaudhary, Sheila Bhatia Jayshree, and Arundhati Raje, to list a few writers. New women playwrights are not necessarily to be lumped together indiscriminately as explicitly. Feminist authors there is a connection between the greater number of women authored plays in the Indian stage and upsurge especially during the 70s and 80s of feminism as a potent force in society. The women writers writing dramas in different languages are Poile Sengupta (English) Varsha Aadalja (Gujarati) Manjula Padmanabhan (English) Dina Mehta (English) Geetanjali Shree (Hindi) Neelam Chaudhary (Punjabi) Sushma Deshpande (Marathi).

‘**WHERE DID I LEAVE MY PURDAH**’ is a recent play written by Mahesh Dattani which opened on October 27, 2012 in Mumbai at the National Centre for the performing Arts and it was a huge success with a great response of Mumbai audience. After its opening in Mumbai, it was performed at the prestigious annual Habitat Theatre Festival in Delhi with the same applaud. Later the performances of play are attempted across India particularly in all metropolitan cities; without doubt it got immense popularity and response. The play ‘Where Did I Leave My Purdah’ is directed by Lillete Dubey with her sterling performance as a leading character in the stage production of the play.

The play ‘Where Did I Leave My Purdah’ is about an octogenarian former star who is nostalgic for the glorious days of historical theatre. It is a comic drama infused with love, passion, denial, humour and grief, based on the life and times of an actress who saw the world in her art, but ignored the harsh realities of the real world outside. Nazia is an actress in the play who has been through four decades of performances but becomes the victim of male chauvinism in her journey of life. Aged Nazia (the role played by Lillete Dubey) is a faded theatre diva of 1950s musical theatre and founder of the fabled theatre group The Modern Indian Theatre, ostensibly a reference to real-life post-Partition companies like IPTA and Naya Theatre. Once famed for portraying the mythical Shakuntala, seduced and abandoned by philandering king Dushyant, Nazia is now reduced to granny roles in mainstream film. Though aware of her fall from grace, she remains a go-getter. Her only aim in life is to revive the character of Shakuntala by starting the legendary play. She has ditched a film shooting and announced her intention to revive the play *Shakuntala* through a gutsier telling.

Nazia discloses the purdah of her past life and portrays the picture of her life i.e. life of exploitation and her adventurous journey. Sisters Nazia and Zarine once lived in Lahore where Nazia, an actress, assumed the role of Shakuntala to Dushyant, played by real life beau Suhail. At the time of Partition, on board a train to India, Zarine is killed and Nazia raped by

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a mob. In Bombay, Nazia and Suhail set up The Modern Indian Theatre and reprise their roles as Shakuntala and Dushyant. But their relationship is nothing but the tale of marginalization as Nazia is a sufferer whereas Sohail is a master who lived for sheer exploitation. Ultimately the relationship is broken and Suhail leaves her in Bombay in wretched condition. Later she manages to build the theatre with strong determination and courage. She lives alone in Bombay without Sohail and shows the world that a woman can no more dependent on men.

Another Play '**Bravely Fought the Queen**' by Mahesh Dattani has a hint of Feminism, though it exhibits the theme of Homosexuality predominantly, but it has the shades of feministic views in it through the women characters- Baa, Alka and Dolly. All three women are the victim of male domination in their life. Baa remembers the cruelty that she suffered at the hand of her husband was so horrible that she feels jittery even after so many years of his death. She expressed her anguish about her cruel husband and the same dislike she expects from her son-

*Baa: Nitin! You don't like your father, no? He's not nice!  
Tell me you hate him! He hits me! Nitin tell me you hate him! (CP P. 302)*

The story of Baa's exploitation is somewhat similar to that of her daughter-in-laws Dolly and Alka. So here we have two generations sharing the same experience at the hand of their chauvinistic husbands and yet the third generation represented by Daksha experiences the same maltreatment from her father even before her birth, as a result, she is born as a disabled child. The title of the play is referred from a popular Hindi poem that celebrates the power of Lakshmi Bai, the Rani of Jhansi, who had fought bravely during the battle against the British forces in 1857 – "**Khub ladi mardani thi / Wo to Jhansiwali Rani thi.**" Unlike Lakshmi Bai, Alka and Dolly, do not venture into the battlefield to establish their rights. Their fight is an indirect and subtle one, remaining within the domain of a stereotyped marital life. Though Jiten represents the conventional male who treats women as sex objects and also gets whores to his office, Alka becomes the 'New Woman' who very boldly questions the authority of her husband and asks for an explanation for his disloyalty. She throws all the shackles of tradition as an alcoholic, a boozier; she goes on cursing all the traditional norms for women in this male dominated society. Thus the play 'Bravely Fought the Queen' presents two kinds of women: one is a submissive and another is an aggressive. Baa and Dolly are the mere sufferer women whom become the victim of male chauvinism whereas Alka is an aggressive woman who throws the dominance of male chauvinism.

**CONCLUSION:**

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Mahesh Dattani depicted many sensational issues in his plays such as homosexuality, communal disharmony, HIV AIDS awareness and so on. Feminism is another significant issue that he dealt in his famous play 'Tara' where he presented the gender discrimination. His recent play 'Where Did I Leave My Purdah' has feministic traits in it through the character of Nazia who suffers at the hand of male chauvinism but like a phoenix bird, she comes out through the ashes of difficulties. 'Bravely Fought the Queen' has three different women characters whom are marginalized by the male domination. On the whole, both the plays display the present status of women in different situations, in different manner with feministic perspective.

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