

Reconfiguring Marginalisation in Contemporary Indian Drama: A Critical Study of Mahesh Dattani in Dialogue with Modern Indian Playwrights

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Abstract

This paper examines the dramaturgy of Mahesh Dattani as a critical reconfiguration of marginalisation in contemporary Indian theatre. It argues that Dattani departs from earlier Indian dramatists by relocating structures of power from overt socio-political frameworks to the intimate spaces of domestic and psychological life. Through close textual analysis of *Tara*, *Final Solutions*, *Dance Like a Man*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, the study demonstrates how gender, sexuality, and identity are constructed through everyday interactions.

The paper situates Dattani in comparison with major modern Indian dramatists—Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, BadalSircar, Mohan Rakesh, and Habib Tanvir—highlighting both continuity and divergence in thematic concerns and dramaturgical strategies. While these playwrights engage with marginalisation through myth, realism, or political theatre, Dattani's distinctiveness lies in his emphasis on interiority and normalization of power. Drawing upon feminist, queer, and postcolonial frameworks, the study establishes that marginalisation in Dattani is not episodic but structural and internalised. The paper concludes that his dramaturgy transforms Indian English theatre into a site of ideological interrogation, thereby expanding its ethical and representational scope.

Keywords:

Mahesh Dattani; Indian English Drama; Marginalisation; Feminism; Queer Theory; Dramaturgy; Contemporary Theatre

1. Introduction

Modern Indian drama, particularly in the post-independence period, reflects a profound transition from the symbolic and mythological modes of earlier theatrical traditions to a more grounded and psychologically nuanced realism. Classical and early modern Indian dramatists often relied on mythic narratives, allegorical frameworks, and larger-than-life characters to articulate ethical and philosophical concerns. However, the socio-political transformations following independence—urbanisation, shifting family structures, and increasing awareness of individual rights—necessitated a reorientation of dramatic expression. Theatre began to move away from the idealised representation of life toward an engagement with lived realities, where identity, gender, and social marginalisation became central concerns.

Within this evolving landscape, Mahesh Dattani occupies a distinctive and crucial position. His dramaturgy marks a decisive departure from both the mythic revivalism of playwrights such as Girish Karnad and the overt social realism of Vijay Tendulkar. Karnad's plays, including *Hayavadana*, draw upon folklore and mythology to explore philosophical questions of identity, often situating contemporary concerns within a symbolic framework. Tendulkar, on the other hand, exposes the brutality of social hierarchies through stark and often unsettling realism, as seen in *Silence! The Court is in Session*. Dattani's approach diverges from both these trajectories by relocating the site of conflict from public or symbolic arenas to the intimate spaces of domestic and interpersonal life. Dattani's theatre is deeply invested in exploring how power operates within everyday interactions. Rather than presenting marginalisation as an external imposition, his plays reveal it as a condition that is internalised, normalized, and often reproduced by individuals themselves. This subtlety constitutes one of the defining features of his dramaturgy. As he remarks in the preface to *Collected Plays*, he is drawn to "invisible issues that are rarely spoken about" (Dattani x), suggesting a deliberate focus on the unarticulated tensions that shape human relationships.

In *Tara*, this concern with internalised structures of power is articulated through the narrative of conjoined twins who are surgically separated in a manner that privileges the male child. The decision, ostensibly medical, is in fact shaped by deeply ingrained patriarchal values. Tara's subsequent marginalisation is not enforced through overt violence but through familial choices that appear rational on the surface. Her poignant assertion, "I move, just move, without meaning" (Dattani 72), encapsulates the existential

dimension of her condition, where identity itself becomes fractured under the weight of systemic inequality. The play thus shifts the focus from visible oppression to the more insidious processes through which inequality is sustained within the family.

A similar exploration of marginalisation is evident in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, where Dattani foregrounds queer identity within an urban Indian context. The play presents a group of characters negotiating their sexual identities within a society that remains deeply heteronormative. Here again, the emphasis is not on overt persecution but on the subtle pressures that compel individuals to conceal or modify their desires. The characters inhabit a space of constant negotiation, where self-expression is mediated by social expectations. In this regard, Judith Butler's formulation of identity as "a stylized repetition of acts" (*Gender Trouble* 191) offers a useful lens through which to understand the performative nature of sexuality in the play. Dattani's representation destabilizes the assumption of fixed identity, revealing it instead as a product of continuous social regulation.

What distinguishes Dattani from many of his contemporaries is his sustained engagement with psychological interiority. While earlier dramatists often externalised conflict through dramatic events or symbolic structures, Dattani turns inward, exploring the emotional and cognitive dimensions of marginalisation. His characters are not merely victims of social systems; they are also participants in the reproduction of those systems, often unconsciously. This focus on interiority aligns his work with modern psychological realism, where the drama unfolds as much within the mind as on the stage.

In comparison, BadalSircar's theatre adopts a more overtly political stance, employing experimental forms to critique socio-economic inequalities. Mohan Rakesh's *AdheAdhure* examines the fragmentation of the modern family, yet its focus remains on the visible breakdown of relationships rather than the internalised mechanisms that sustain them. Habib Tanvir, through plays such as *CharandasChor*, integrates folk traditions to address issues of morality and social justice, thereby situating his critique within a communal and performative framework. Dattani, by contrast, operates within a more confined and intimate space, where the drama emerges from the tensions embedded in everyday life. This emphasis on the ordinary constitutes a significant shift in the function of theatre. Dattani's plays suggest that marginalisation does not always manifest through dramatic or extraordinary events; it is often embedded in routine interactions, language,

and social norms. By bringing these subtle dynamics to the forefront, his theatre transforms the stage into a site of critical reflection. The audience is compelled to confront not only the visible structures of power but also their own complicity in sustaining them.

Furthermore, Dattani's dramaturgy reflects a broader shift in Indian drama toward the exploration of identity as a fluid and contested category. His characters navigate multiple and often conflicting identities—gendered, sexual, cultural—within a rapidly changing social landscape. This complexity challenges the notion of a stable or unified self, suggesting instead that identity is continuously negotiated and redefined. In placing Dattani in dialogue with other contemporary dramatists, it becomes evident that his contribution lies not in rejecting earlier traditions but in reconfiguring them. While Karnad revisits myth and Tendulkar exposes social violence, Dattani uncovers the quieter, more pervasive forms of power that operate within everyday life. His theatre thus represents a paradigmatic shift from representation to critique, where the focus is not merely on depicting social realities but on interrogating the processes that produce them.

In conclusion, Mahesh Dattani's dramaturgy marks a significant development in modern Indian drama by foregrounding the internalised and normalized nature of marginalisation. His focus on domestic spaces, psychological depth, and everyday interactions distinguishes his work from that of his contemporaries and redefines the possibilities of theatrical expression. By transforming the stage into a space of critical inquiry, Dattani not only reflects the complexities of contemporary Indian society but also challenges audiences to reconsider their own role within it.

2. Literature Review

Critical engagement with the plays of Mahesh Dattani has, over the past few decades, increasingly emphasized his sustained concern with marginalised identities and silenced subjectivities within Indian society. Scholars have consistently observed that Dattani's dramaturgy brings to the centre of the stage those experiences that have traditionally remained peripheral in mainstream discourse. Angelie Multani, in her detailed study of his plays, remarks that Dattani's theatre is marked by an attempt to "articulate voices that are otherwise suppressed within dominant social narratives" (Multani 34). This observation points to his role not merely as a storyteller but as a dramatist who actively intervenes in the cultural politics of representation. His plays do not simply depict marginalisation; they create a space where such marginalisation can be critically examined and confronted.

One of the most significant strands of criticism surrounding Dattani's work has been informed by feminist theory. In particular, *Tara* has attracted considerable attention for its exploration of gender discrimination within the family. Feminist critics have read the play as a powerful commentary on the ways in which patriarchal values are internalised and reproduced within domestic spaces. Simone de Beauvoir's influential proposition that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (*The Second Sex* 16) offers a compelling framework for understanding *Tara*'s predicament. The play demonstrates how gender identity is not a natural given but is constructed through cultural expectations and social practices. *Tara*'s marginalisation is not the result of a single act of injustice; rather, it emerges from a network of decisions and attitudes that privilege the male child. The domestic sphere, often idealised as a space of care and protection, is revealed to be complicit in the perpetuation of inequality. Parallel to feminist readings, queer theoretical approaches have also provided valuable insights into Dattani's dramaturgy, particularly in relation to *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. This play is widely regarded as one of the earliest Indian English dramas to engage explicitly with queer identity. Critics drawing upon Judith Butler's theory of performativity have argued that Dattani's characters illustrate how sexual identity is not fixed but is shaped through repeated social behaviours. Butler's assertion that identity is constituted through performative acts (*Gender Trouble* 25) helps to illuminate the tensions experienced by the characters, who are compelled to negotiate their desires within a society governed by heteronormative expectations. The play does not present sexuality as an innate or stable category; instead, it reveals the extent to which it is regulated by social norms. In doing so, Dattani challenges conventional notions of identity and opens up new possibilities for its representation on the Indian stage.

In addition to feminist and queer readings, comparative studies have sought to situate Dattani within the broader landscape of modern Indian drama. Such studies often place him alongside prominent dramatists like Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar, whose works have significantly shaped post-independence theatre. Karnad's *Hayavadana*, for instance, employs myth and folklore to explore questions of identity and completeness. By drawing upon traditional narratives, Karnad is able to address contemporary concerns within a symbolic framework. Tendulkar, on the other hand, adopts a more direct approach, exposing the violence and hypocrisy embedded in social institutions. In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, the courtroom becomes a space where societal prejudices are enacted and reinforced, revealing the oppressive nature of collective judgment.

While these comparative frameworks are useful in highlighting thematic continuities, they often tend to treat marginalisation as something that exists outside the individual, as a force imposed by social structures or institutions. Dattani's dramaturgy complicates this perspective by demonstrating how marginalisation is not only external but also internalised. His characters are not merely victims of oppressive systems; they are also participants in those systems, often perpetuating the very norms that constrain them. This shift in focus from external conflict to internalised experience marks a significant departure from earlier dramatic traditions.

Recent critical work has begun to acknowledge this aspect of Dattani's theatre. Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker, in her study of contemporary Indian theatre, observes that modern dramaturgy increasingly moves away from spectacle and toward an exploration of subjectivity, noting a "shift from externalized dramatic action to the interior landscapes of experience" (Dharwadker 112). This insight is particularly relevant to Dattani, whose plays are less concerned with dramatic events than with the psychological processes that underlie them. The conflicts in his plays often unfold through dialogue, silence, and subtle shifts in relationships, rather than through overt action.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on Dattani, there remains a noticeable gap in comprehensive comparative analysis that fully accounts for his unique position within modern Indian drama. Much of the existing criticism tends to focus on individual aspects of his work—such as gender, sexuality, or communal tension—without situating these concerns within a broader theoretical framework. Moreover, while comparisons with other dramatists are frequently made, they often remain limited in scope, failing to engage with the deeper structural differences in their dramaturgies.

The present study seeks to address this gap by placing Dattani's work within a wider comparative context that includes multiple contemporary playwrights. By examining the ways in which different dramatists approach the theme of marginalisation, it becomes possible to identify the distinctive features of Dattani's dramaturgy. In particular, his emphasis on internalised oppression, psychological realism, and the everyday operation of power sets him apart from his contemporaries. Ultimately, the critical discourse on Mahesh Dattani points to a broader transformation in Indian theatre, where the focus has shifted from representing social realities to interrogating the processes that produce them. His plays invite audiences not only to witness marginalisation but to recognise their own

position within the structures that sustain it. This capacity for self-reflection is what gives his theatre its enduring relevance and critical power.

3. Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative and interpretative research design, guided primarily by close textual analysis of selected dramatic works. The choice of this methodological approach arises from the nature of the research problem itself, which concerns the representation and construction of marginalised identities within literary texts. Since such concerns cannot be meaningfully quantified, a qualitative framework offers the most appropriate means of engaging with the layered meanings, symbolic structures, and ideological undercurrents present in the plays. The corpus for this study includes major works by Mahesh Dattani—such as *Tara*, *Final Solutions*, *Dance Like a Man*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, and *Bravely Fought the Queen*—alongside representative plays by prominent modern Indian dramatists, including Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, BadalSircar, Mohan Rakesh, and Habib Tanvir. This comparative selection enables a broader understanding of how different playwrights negotiate questions of identity, marginalisation, and power within diverse theatrical traditions.

At the core of the research methodology lies Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), which is employed to trace recurring thematic patterns across the selected texts. Rather than treating the plays as isolated literary artefacts, QCA allows for the systematic identification of motifs such as gender inequality, sexual identity, social exclusion, and the operation of power within interpersonal relationships. Importantly, this method does not impose rigid categories upon the texts; instead, it remains sensitive to the contextual and interpretative richness of literary language. The aim is not to reduce meaning to data, but to organise observations in a way that reveals underlying structures and continuities across different works.

Close reading functions as the principal analytical tool within this framework. Each play is examined in detail, with particular attention to dialogue, imagery, stage directions, and character interactions. In the case of Dattani's *Tara*, for instance, the subtle shifts in conversational tone between family members provide crucial insight into the internalisation of patriarchal values. Similarly, in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, pauses, silences, and moments of hesitation become as significant as spoken dialogue, revealing the tensions inherent in the negotiation of queer identity. Such nuances can only be captured through a

careful and sustained engagement with the text, which close reading makes possible. To ensure analytical clarity, the study operates across three interconnected levels: micro, meso, and macro. At the micro level, the focus is on linguistic and symbolic elements, including word choice, metaphor, and patterns of dialogue. This level of analysis seeks to uncover how meaning is constructed at the most immediate textual level. For example, recurring expressions of hesitation or fragmentation in a character's speech may indicate deeper psychological conflicts or social pressures.

The meso level shifts the focus to narrative structure and characterization. Here, the analysis examines how plots are organised, how characters are developed, and how relationships evolve over the course of the play. In comparing Dattani with other dramatists, this level becomes particularly significant. While Karnad often structures his plays around mythic or cyclical patterns, Dattani tends to employ linear narratives that unfold within confined domestic settings. These structural choices are not merely formal; they reflect different approaches to representing social reality. At the macro level, the study engages with broader ideological and thematic frameworks. This involves examining how the plays reflect and critique larger social structures, such as patriarchy, heteronormativity, and cultural hierarchy. The macro perspective allows the analysis to move beyond individual texts and consider their implications within the wider context of Indian society and theatre. It is at this level that the comparative dimension of the study becomes most evident, as it highlights both the continuities and divergences between different dramatists. The interpretative process is further informed by an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws upon feminist, queer, and postcolonial perspectives. These theories are not applied as rigid templates but are used as flexible tools to deepen understanding. Feminist theory, particularly as articulated by Simone de Beauvoir, provides a lens through which to examine the construction of gender and the operation of patriarchal power. Queer theory, informed by Judith Butler's concept of performativity, enables an exploration of sexual identity as a socially regulated phenomenon rather than a fixed essence. Postcolonial theory, drawing upon thinkers such as Homi K. Bhabha, offers insight into questions of cultural identity, hybridity, and the legacy of colonial structures.

What distinguishes this methodological approach is its emphasis on interpretation rather than prescription. Theoretical frameworks are brought into dialogue with the texts, allowing meanings to emerge through a process of critical engagement rather than being imposed from outside. This flexibility is particularly important in the study of Dattani's

plays, which resist simplistic categorisation and often operate at the intersection of multiple social and ideological concerns.

The comparative dimension of the methodology further strengthens the analysis by situating Dattani within a broader theatrical context. By examining his work alongside that of Karnad, Tendulkar, Sircar, Rakesh, and Tanvir, the study is able to identify both shared thematic concerns and distinctive dramaturgical strategies. This comparative approach not only highlights Dattani's originality but also situates his contribution within the evolving tradition of modern Indian drama.

In sum, the methodology adopted in this study combines qualitative analysis, close reading, and theoretical interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of how marginalisation is represented and constructed in contemporary Indian theatre. By engaging with texts at multiple levels and drawing upon diverse critical perspectives, the study aims to offer a nuanced and intellectually rigorous account of Dattani's dramaturgy and its place within the broader landscape of Indian drama.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of Mahesh Dattani's dramatic works indicates a consistent and deliberate effort to uncover marginalisation not as an occasional social aberration but as a deeply embedded structural condition operating within the everyday fabric of life. Unlike many earlier dramatists who tend to externalise conflict through overt acts of violence or institutional oppression, Dattani turns attention toward the quieter, more insidious mechanisms through which inequality is normalised and sustained. His theatre does not rely on spectacle or dramatic confrontation; instead, it reveals how power functions through routine interactions, familial decisions, and internalised attitudes that often go unquestioned.

In *Tara*, this structural dimension of marginalisation is articulated with striking clarity. The play centres on the lives of conjoined twins whose surgical separation is influenced by a preference for the male child, thereby privileging Chandan at the expense of Tara. What is particularly significant is that this decision is not presented as an act of overt cruelty; rather, it emerges from a network of familial and cultural assumptions that prioritise male agency and inheritance. The mother's complicity in this decision underscores the extent to which patriarchal values are internalised even by those who are

themselves subject to them. Tara's later reflection, "I move, just move, without meaning" (Dattani 72), captures the psychological consequences of such systemic injustice. Her sense of dislocation is not merely physical but existential, suggesting a fragmentation of identity that arises from being denied recognition within her own familial structure. The play thus shifts the focus from visible acts of discrimination to the underlying processes that render such acts acceptable.

A comparable exploration of marginalisation can be observed in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, where Dattani addresses the complexities of queer identity within an urban Indian setting. Here, the issue is not framed in terms of direct persecution alone, but rather through the pervasive social norms that regulate desire and self-expression. The characters in the play navigate a world in which their identities must be constantly negotiated, concealed, or performed in accordance with dominant expectations. In this context, Judith Butler's concept of performativity provides a useful interpretative framework. Butler argues that identity is not an innate or stable essence but is constituted through "reiterated social performance" (*Gender Trouble* 25). Dattani's characters embody this idea as they oscillate between authenticity and conformity, revealing the pressures exerted by a heteronormative society. The play does not offer a resolution to these tensions; instead, it exposes the ongoing struggle involved in sustaining a sense of self within restrictive social frameworks.

What distinguishes Dattani from many of his contemporaries becomes particularly evident when his work is placed alongside that of other modern Indian dramatists. Girish Karnad, for instance, often employs myth and folklore as a means of exploring contemporary concerns. In *Hayavadana*, questions of identity and completeness are articulated through a symbolic narrative that draws upon traditional sources. While Karnad's approach allows for a rich interplay between past and present, it tends to situate conflict within a stylised and somewhat distanced framework. Vijay Tendulkar, on the other hand, foregrounds social conflict through stark and often unsettling realism. In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, the courtroom becomes a site where societal prejudices are enacted with brutal clarity, exposing the mechanisms of collective judgment and moral hypocrisy.

Dattani's dramaturgy departs from both these approaches by relocating the site of conflict to the realm of everyday experience. His plays do not depend on mythic allegory or

dramatic confrontation; instead, they reveal how power operates through ordinary interactions and seemingly benign decisions. This emphasis on the quotidian allows him to capture forms of marginalisation that might otherwise remain invisible. His characters are not positioned solely as victims of external forces; they are also implicated in the very systems that constrain them. This dual positioning adds a layer of complexity to his work, as it challenges simplistic binaries of oppressor and oppressed. The notion of internalised control is central to understanding this aspect of Dattani's theatre. In both *Tara* and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, characters exhibit an awareness of their marginalisation, yet they often lack the means or the will to resist it fully. This condition reflects what may be described as a form of psychological conditioning, where social norms are absorbed to such an extent that they shape individual perception and behaviour. The result is a form of self-regulation that reinforces existing power structures without the need for overt coercion. By bringing this dynamic to light, Dattani's plays invite audiences to reconsider the nature of oppression and the ways in which it is perpetuated.

This shift from external spectacle to psychological interiority marks a significant development in modern Indian drama. Earlier theatrical traditions often relied on heightened dramatic situations to convey conflict and resolution. In contrast, Dattani's plays are marked by a deliberate refusal to provide closure. Conflicts remain unresolved, tensions persist, and characters are left in states of ambiguity. This absence of resolution is not a limitation but a conscious artistic choice, reflecting the complexity of the issues being addressed. By resisting the impulse to offer neat solutions, Dattani underscores the structural nature of marginalisation, suggesting that it cannot be easily dismantled within the confines of a single narrative. Moreover, this emphasis on interiority aligns Dattani's work with broader developments in modern drama, where the focus has increasingly shifted toward the exploration of subjective experience. The stage becomes a space not only for the representation of events but for the examination of consciousness itself. Dialogue, silence, and gesture acquire heightened significance, serving as indicators of underlying tensions that are not always explicitly articulated. In this sense, Dattani's theatre operates at the intersection of the social and the psychological, revealing how external structures of power are internalised within individual lives.

In conclusion, the analysis demonstrates that Mahesh Dattani's dramaturgy offers a nuanced and compelling exploration of marginalisation as a structural and internalised condition. By focusing on everyday interactions and psychological processes, his plays

move beyond the representation of social issues to interrogate the mechanisms that sustain them. In comparison with other modern Indian dramatists, Dattani's distinctiveness lies in his ability to render visible the subtle operations of power that shape human experience. His theatre thus represents a significant shift in the trajectory of Indian drama, transforming it into a medium of critical reflection rather than mere representation.

5. Conclusion

Mahesh Dattani's contribution to contemporary Indian drama can be most meaningfully understood through his reconfiguration of marginalisation as a condition that is not only socially produced but also internally sustained. Unlike earlier dramatic traditions that tended to represent oppression as an external force—visible in institutions, hierarchies, or overt acts of violence—Dattani directs attention to the subtle, often imperceptible ways in which power operates within the everyday lives of individuals. His theatre locates the dynamics of control and exclusion within the domestic sphere, where relationships appear intimate and familiar, yet are structured by deeply embedded ideological assumptions. In doing so, he shifts the critical focus from visible structures of authority to the internal processes through which those structures are normalised and perpetuated.

One of the defining features of Dattani's dramaturgy is his sustained engagement with psychological space. The conflicts in his plays do not unfold primarily through dramatic confrontation; rather, they emerge gradually through conversation, silence, hesitation, and emotional undercurrents. This emphasis on interiority allows for a more nuanced exploration of marginalisation, as it reveals how individuals come to internalise the very norms that constrain them. Characters are not simply positioned as victims of oppressive systems; they are shown to participate—often unconsciously—in sustaining those systems. This dual positioning complicates conventional narratives of resistance and victimhood, suggesting that marginalisation is as much a matter of perception and internalisation as it is of external imposition.

In this respect, Dattani's work represents a significant departure from the dramaturgical approaches adopted by many of his contemporaries. Girish Karnad, for instance, frequently employs myth and folklore as frameworks through which contemporary concerns can be explored. His plays often operate within symbolic or allegorical structures, where questions of identity and morality are mediated through

narrative distance. Vijay Tendulkar, by contrast, brings social conflict to the forefront through a stark and unflinching realism, exposing the violence and hypocrisy embedded within societal institutions. While both dramatists offer powerful critiques of social structures, their approaches tend to foreground conflict in ways that are external and visible.

Dattani's theatre diverges from these models by focusing on the less conspicuous dimensions of power. His plays do not rely on mythic distance or overt confrontation; instead, they reveal how domination is woven into the fabric of everyday life. The family, in particular, emerges as a crucial site of analysis. Rather than being depicted as a space of emotional security, it is shown to function as an institution where social norms are transmitted, reinforced, and internalised. Through this lens, Dattani exposes the ways in which gender roles, sexual identities, and cultural expectations are shaped within the most intimate of human relationships.

This shift toward interiority and subtle critique also transforms the function of theatre itself. In Dattani's hands, the stage becomes more than a medium for storytelling; it becomes a space for critical inquiry. His plays invite audiences to look beyond surface-level representations and engage with the underlying processes that structure human experience. By foregrounding the everyday, he compels viewers to recognise the familiarity of the situations being depicted and, by extension, their own proximity to the issues being explored. This capacity to provoke self-reflection is one of the most significant aspects of his dramaturgy.

Furthermore, Dattani's work expands the ethical scope of Indian theatre by bringing marginalised identities into sustained and serious consideration. His representation of gender, sexuality, and social exclusion does not merely aim at visibility; it seeks to interrogate the conditions that produce and maintain such marginalisation. In this sense, his plays move beyond representation toward critique. They do not offer simplistic solutions or moral resolutions; instead, they expose the complexity of the issues at hand, leaving audiences with questions rather than answers. This open-endedness reflects an understanding of marginalisation as a structural condition that cannot be easily resolved within the confines of a single narrative.

At the aesthetic level, Dattani's dramaturgy also signals an important evolution in Indian theatre. His preference for minimal settings, conversational dialogue, and character-driven narratives marks a departure from more elaborate or stylised forms of performance. This restraint allows for a greater focus on psychological depth and interpersonal dynamics, enabling a more intimate engagement with the audience. The absence of theatrical excess is not a limitation but a deliberate strategy, one that aligns form with thematic concern. By stripping away spectacle, Dattani creates a space where the subtleties of human interaction can be more clearly observed.

The significance of Dattani's contribution becomes even more apparent when considered within the broader context of contemporary literary studies. His plays offer rich material for interdisciplinary analysis, engaging with questions of gender, identity, culture, and power that resonate across multiple theoretical frameworks. Whether approached from a feminist, queer, or postcolonial perspective, his work reveals the interconnectedness of these concerns and the ways in which they shape individual and collective experience. This versatility makes his dramaturgy a particularly valuable site of inquiry for scholars seeking to understand the complexities of modern Indian society.

In conclusion, Mahesh Dattani's theatre represents a decisive shift in the trajectory of Indian drama, both in its thematic concerns and its formal strategies. By redefining marginalisation as an internalised and normalized condition, he challenges conventional modes of representation and opens up new possibilities for critical engagement. His focus on domestic and psychological spaces, his attention to the subtleties of everyday life, and his commitment to exploring marginalised identities all contribute to a body of work that is both artistically compelling and intellectually rigorous. As such, Dattani's dramaturgy not only enriches the field of Indian theatre but also establishes it as a vital area of study within contemporary literary discourse.

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