

**GLORIFICATION OF MOTHERHOOD IN MAHESH DATTANI'S  
SELECT PLAYS**

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**Abstract**

In nature and the language of the sense,  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart and soul,  
Of all my moral being. (Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*)

The word mother like nature also signifies sacrifice, secured feeling, comfort, love, affection, and protection. A mother stung by a scorpion underwent a lot of happy suffering. Yes! The suffering was happy because the mother felt that by God's grace the scorpion had not stung her child. "Thank God the scorpion picked on me and spared my children" (Nissim Ezekiel, *The Night of The Scorpion*).

This paper is an attempt to glorify the selfless motherhood and prove that mother's love is the purest form of love through select plays of Mahesh Dattani.

**Keywords:** Dattani, motherhood-actual mother; acting mother-glorifying the mother role

**An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal**

Mahesh Dattani is one of the greatest dramatists in Indian writing in English. He has won the Sahitya Akademi award for his play “*Final solutions*”. He has treated contemporary issues in all his plays. Being a keen observer of life he could bring reality into his plays. His plays reflect the events that happen in the society without hiding anything like a mirror. His plays show everything that happens in our day to day life.

Mythology and history are Karnad’s favorite’s subjects, while Dattani is preoccupied with social and political realities in India today. His themes are the Indian joint family and its impact on the individual; the flight of the women in Indian society; and homosexuality – an exploring subject (for an Indian), Dattani is the first Indian playwright of note to deal with these themes. (M. K. Naik 206)

Besides many strange and bold themes celebrating womanhood and motherhood is also one of the common domains of Dattani.

Many of his plays graphically and vividly portray the “new women”, bold, courageous, selfconfident and rebellious reacting against unjust set traditional social patterns. (Myles Anita 114)

A thorough Analysis of Dattani’s plays would show two distinctive mothers; the actual mother, the acting mother. The actual mothers are the mothers with biological birth connection. The acting mothers are the ones who do not owe any biological connection but bound into motherhood through their motherly binding for the growth of a child.

This paper investigates not about the biological mothers who have failed in their character to shower selfless love and sacrifice without any partiality. Each biological mother has her own reason for not playing the purest role. Accounting for society, freedom, economy, situation or their own personal whims; they have failed in being a neutral role; to exhibit their impartial love. The mother characters in many of Dattani’s plays are not only strong and daring but their role is inseparable from the play. They are inseparable as the plot of the plays revolves by the decision that these mothers make and that leaves a darker shade to their children’s character. Most of their children’s tragedy arises as the result of the decision that their mothers make.

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In *Thirty Days in September*, the mother Shanta remains quiet when her daughter's soul is being destroyed. In the play *Tara*, the mother Bharathi wishes to provide two legs to her son and one leg to her daughter, in the separation surgery of the conjoined twins with three legs. In *Uma The Fairy Queen*, the mother Nila, the TV actor fails to take care of her son Feroze and her negligence turns him to become an agent by murdering his own mother. In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Dolly leaves her only daughter Daksha in a boarding school, In *Where Did I Leave My Purdah?* Nazia could not disclose the truth that Zarine is her daughter because she gave birth to the child as the consequence of the gang rape. In *Clearing the Rubble*, Fatima herself acknowledges that she has brought up her daughter in a biased manner. She felt sorry for taxing her daughter Mumtaz by sending her for doing cleaning work in the hospital. In the above list the biological mothers fail to do the duty of a mother for one or the other reasons. They could not acknowledge themselves as perfect in discharging their duty as mother.

On contrary to all those biological mother is the character of Champa, the head Hijra in *Seven Steps Around the Fire*. She is not a biological mother and in fact she could never become one as a transgender. But she is far beyond a biological mother in exhibiting motherliness. She does a lot. She protects the homeless child, kamala who was forsaken by her own family and society. She gives moral support and guides in the right way. She extends her helping hand to Kamala to shine like a star in the chosen field. She educates her and makes her stand independently. She has proven herself that distance, colour, creed, language and culture are not barriers in showering real love. She saves the life of kamala by exhibiting her moral courage and steals the place occupied by actual mothers.

Champa adopts Kamla a transgender, who steps out from her house. She is left with no shelter to protect herself. Champa comes in as her rescuer. She adopts her as her daughter who would inherit the head position after her. Champa protects kamala and showers motherly affection on her. But unfortunately kamala becomes the victim for the pride of the Minister's ego which results in her murder. Anarkali, another transgender is trapped into the murder case and the actual accused is brought to the limelight through Uma, a researcher on transgender.

*Ek Alag Mausam* is yet another play which shows the priceless love of a non-biological mother Aparna. Aparna gets infection from her husband and becomes HIV positive. She is

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compelled to abort her fetus after which her life becomes dark. She gropes in darkness until she enters Jeevan Jyoti, a shelter created by Dr. Machado for HIV positive people. It is where she finds a prostitute named Rita along with her daughter Paro who are also the inmates of the shelter. When Rita sees Aparna she tells her daughter that she has to say; “Aunty, you are soooo nice. I wish you were my mother(539).When often Paro repeats it , Aparna gets irritated ;and utters “For the last time, I am not your mother!” (539).

Aparna arranges a programme to be telecast on the World AIDS Day. Before the programme she receives a message that Paro’s mother passed away. But Aparna could not tell it to Paro. The following conversation will illustrate Aparna’s position.

Little Paro :Aunty, I am scared

Aparna :(Kneeling down) Oh, don’t be. They will all alone you. Just – just think of your mother and you will be fine.

Little Paro :Aunty, you are soooo nice.

Aparna waits for her to say the rest of her line. But little Paro doesn’t .Aparna hugs her tightly. (544)

Transformation look place in Aparna’s thought after Rita’s death.

It is when Aparna transforms to be her mother; She treats Paro like her daughter.

“You will concentrate on your studies and your career. You’re said you wanted to be an engineer. You are not going to become one by spending time with me” (475).

She also lets Paro to inherit all her properties.

“I never pretended to be your mother. You will have enough money to see you through college. After college, you are on your own. I have left my flat to you so you won’t have to worry about not having a home...”(474)

In the play *Morning Ranga*, Swarnalatha could not come out from her village to give any performance in the city. She is a Carnatic singer. Twenty years before she along with her friend Vaishnavi and with their children travelled in a bus for giving performance in the city. But unfortunately an accident happened in which Swarnalatha lost her son and her friend Vaishnavi. She was left without her son and Abinav, Vaishnavi’s son was left without his mother.

Twenty years later Vaishnavi’s son Abinav wants to shine in the field of music. He gives performance along with his friends but it is not much appreciated by the audience. so he meets

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Swarnalatha and requests her to guide him and give performance in the city. First she refuses, after making lots of attempt he convinces her. She agrees to sing before the audience in the city. After her performance, Swarnalatha utters the following words to the audience. “Thank you. It has been a different Raga for me to learn. Twenty years is a long time. Music is never ending journey. (416 Volume 2 )

Swarnalatha transforms to become Abhinav’s mother. That night after the stage performance she addresses the audience in the following manner:

It has been my dream to sing for an audience such as you. But . . . (finding it difficult to get the words.) tonight, I will sing this song for you my son, who like my music, has returned after a very long journey.(Looking at Abhinay) Abhinay, I sing this raga for you- my son. (416 Volume 2)

Thus through Champa, Aparna and Swarnalatha, Dattani has proven that one need not be a biological mother to show the motherly love. He has glorified the true motherhood which finds no umbilical connection to love and be loved. Thus Dattani’s “plays are about contemporary reality and therefore, the interaction between society and individual fascinate his imagination”. (Das 89)

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