

# Indian Drama “is still at a nascent stage”

## (Interface with Mahesh Dattani)

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R.P.S.: How did you get inspired for writing plays, the first time?

M.D.:Before I began writing plays, my theatre group in Bangalore focused only on European plays. There were very few Indian plays available in English translation that were stage worthy. So I decided to try my hand at writing an original play.

R.P.S.:Most of your plays are couched in Indian cities, how come, you being a realistic playwright, set aside the rural India, where more than 75%of India lives?

M.D.:A writer has to be true to his time and place. I am an urban and the urban Indian milieu is what I know best. I have written a play Clearing The Rubble which is set in a village near Bhuj.

R.P.S.:Your plays mostly entrap us about thinking the contradictions of our values and assumptions; do you see any cultural

crisis for a common Indian, in the twenty first century?

M.D.:I think the world may face a cultural crisis with most social needs being taken care of by online networking. As our lives grow more fragmented, the need for culture that brings people together will become more of a necessity than an aesthetic pursuit.

R.P.S.:Most of your plays focus social stereotyping as a very potent theme, would you see the 2020 India slashing it out?

M.D.:All of us are victims of social stereotyping. Either we are subject to it or we perpetrate it. Maybe your assumption that we will set things right in the next ten years is an idealistic one, but I would certainly like to see it happen!

R.P.S.:You are a known master in screen, stage and radio plays, which, among these all, fascinates you most?

M.D.:I am fascinated by all. That is why I continue to work in all these mediums.

R.P.S.: Film and theatre ,both the media, have immense possibilities to reach the audience, and you have successfully mastered both, please let us know, which pampers you more and why?

M.D.:I guess if its pampering, theatre tends to do that more to me. I am more known in theatre circles. Also I have been doing theatre for a considerable period of time which make it a comfort zone for me.

R.P.S.: *Mango Soufflé*, very forcefully, presents metro sexuality, in your observation and personal view, how deep, metro sexuality is rooted in the metros?

M.D.:Metrosexuality by its nature is a definition of urban trends where sexuality is expressed in unconventional ways. Homosexuality on the other hand is a lot more conventional and can be found in both urban and rural cultures across the world.

R.P.S.: How much you support that Indian elite ,most of the time ,live in their pre-conceived notions ,dissociating themselves from the harsh realities of life and pretending that some situations do not exist, I want a co-relation between your

personal point of view and its literary presentation as you have made through the plot of *Final Solutions* ?

M.D.:Yes, I have come down heavily on arm chair idealism as in the case of Ramnik Gandhi in *Final Solutions*. I am not in support of such an attitude.

R.P.S.:What, in your view, is the “Final solution”?

M.D.:As one character says ‘If you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate.’ Although the title *Final Solutions* is drawn from Hitler’s pogrom for the annihilation of non-Aryan races as his ‘Final Solution’. It is a reflection of political agendas in our country that drive people towards communal hatred.

R.P.S.:You also teach theatre courses, how do you feel like teaching theatre and acting?

M.D.:I enjoy it very much.

R.P.S.:How do you rate mother as a character in *30 Days in September*?

M.D.:She is the quintessential Indian woman. Without a voice and living without expressing her own oppression. In a way, she is the more tragic figure in the

play than Mala. Mala at least can cope with her trauma and give it expression whereas Shanta cannot.

R.P.S: “Forget all the bad dreams”, the statement of mother in *30 Days in September*, speak volume on the hidden trauma in most of the Indian families .How can our society, in your view, stop the bad dreams to happen?

M.D.: It is important to remember and express. Society will then have to accept the wrongs and find ways of setting it right.

R.P.S: I find the impression of G.B. Shaw and Henrik Ibsen on your art, when you take up any social problem, do you agree?

M.D:I guess societal conflicts are at the centre of most modern drama. So yes, Shaw and Ibsen commented on their societies through their plays and I am doing the same.

R.P.S: Please comment on the state of contemporary drama in contemporary Indian Writing in English.

M.D:It is still at a nascent stage. It will be interesting to see what the next generations make of it.

R.P.S: How would you brand your plays? I mean theory ridden or something else?

M.D: I don't brand my plays. I leave that to the academicians.

R.P.S: What other issues are set to be explored in future, in your literary agenda?

M.D: The same issues I expect. They are timeless and universal.