

Dramaturgical Analysis: *Play Within Play* as a Theatrical Technique in Mahesh Dattani's Play *Where Did I Leave My Purdah*

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ABSTRACT

This research study is an attempt to analyze the play Where did I leave my Purdah by an Indian playwright Mahesh Dattani. Primarily, this research study focuses upon a discussion of the employment of the theatrical technique i.e. Play Within Play within the structure of the play by Dattani. Ervin Goffman's (1922-1982) notion of dramaturgical analysis (grounded on his social analysis) has been taken as a theoretical framework to reinforce the proposition that performance of the actors on stage resemble their actual lives. Contextually, the protagonist's creed to perform the role of Shakuntala, a heroine from the classic epic Shakuntala by Kali Dasa, a Sanskrit writer, in the play has been negotiated, subsequently contributing to this corollary that the characters in the play, in their acts to perform legendary roles on stage, actually present their own lives, psyche, self, emotions and personalities through their roles. The researcher has two arguments to carry in this research, first how the text embedded play within play technique in the structure, secondly application of Ervin Goffman's (1922-1982) notion of dramaturgical analysis on the characters and plot. Hence, the lives of characters and their role performance on the stage have been negotiated as echo-perspective in the play by the researcher. So, this research would be a positive addition to the body of modern Indian drama and Sociology. This is basically qualitative research in design and is based on textual analysis.

Keywords: Dramaturgical Analysis, Play within Play, Shakuntala, Modernity in Indian Theater, Purdah.

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Introduction

Mahesh Dattani, born in Bangalore, India, is one of the renowned Indian dramatists who is famous because of his depiction of diverse aspects of Indian society and universal appeal of his plays. He has written a number of plays which have been successful both in India and abroad. "He puts Indian drama in English to the level of world drama" (Bindu, 2014 p.10-11). His plays deal with various social issues: gender discrimination, communalism, incest and child sexual abuse, homosexuality, and other social realities permeated in Indian society. Being a dramatist, Dattani has introduced diverse theoretical techniques in this play *Where Did I Leave My Purdah* (2012) from sound effects, lightening, costumes and stage presentations to dance as a theatrical art but the researcher argues out of all these meta-theatrical techniques, there is one technique which is the most distinct and important i.e. *play within play*.

This research study focuses upon an analysis of the fore-grounded theatrical technique i.e. *play within play* employed in his play *Where Did I Leave My Purdah* (2012). Besides, Ervin Goffman's (1956) notion of *dramaturgical analysis* has been taken as a ground to contextualize this technique to bring out personal lives, psychology, emotions, love-hate relationship of the characters, the exploration of which is the focus of the researcher in this research study.

Consequently, the study of the research paper is two-folded, based on one theoretical: *dramaturgical analysis* and other technical ground: *play within play*. Goffman argues in his book that:

Performers tend to foster the impression that their current performance of their routine and their relationship to their current audience have something special and unique about them. The routine character of the performance is obscured (the performer himself is typically unaware of just how routinized his performance really is) and the spontaneous aspects of the situation are stressed. (Goffman, 1956, p.31).

He further argues:

I shall be concerned only with the participant's dramaturgical problems of presenting the activity before others. The issues dealt with by stage-craft and stage-management are sometimes trivial but they are quite general; they seem to occur everywhere in social life, providing a clear-cut dimension for formal sociological analysis. (Goffman, 1956, p.08)

This statement contextualizes the alliance between theatrical and social life of the characters on stage and in real life. He has talked about the impressions of characters on stage and in real life, and the daily occurrence of performances in real life and on stage by them and the co-relation between two.

Where Did I Leave My Purdah? is a play about the revival of stage dramas and theatrical modernity in India in post-partition scenario. It revolves around the life long struggle of the stage actress Nazia to revive and establish Indian theatre but it also brings to notice the partition communal violence, self-dilemmas of characters, the importance of past in lives of human beings and feminine identity and role in partition scenario. Nazia the protagonist, faces dilemmas in life which the audience comes to know at the end of the play. Ms Bindu (2014), a researcher in her research study titled “Themes and Techniques in the Plays of Mahesh Dattani” argues, “his plays externalize emotional crisis and psychological pain of women of our society. He depicts the inner world and thoughts of the women who have been denied of respectable existence and intellectual entity” (Bindu, 2014, pp. 10-11). Dr. Vikas Jaoolkar and Poonam Matkar (2015) state while talking about him, “Dattani has been very successful in exposing the loopholes in the social structure of our nation and dealing with the subjects which people still feel are alien to our land” (2015, p. 52). So very skillfully a social dilemma has been presented by Dattani.

Research Methodology

Being the qualitative research study in design, this research study is exploratory, descriptive and is based on textual analysis. The text serves as the

primary source here and it is grounded on self-interpretation. The dramatic dialogues as ‘unit of sentences’ have been interpreted. Besides, the research papers from online journals have been taken to incorporate the views of the different researchers regarding Dattani’s theatrical art. Ervin Goffman’s (1956) notion of *dramaturgical analysis* has been taken as a theoretical framework for this research study.

Results and Discussion

The proposition that the text contains the reference of another play and the dramatic presentation of that play in the theatre by the protagonists is the pivotal point of negotiation by the researcher in this section of the research paper. Not only there are references, but theatrical settings, costumes, even performance vocabulary have been used which will be embedded into the main discussion in this section. Furthermore, proceeding on this discussion, Goffman’s notion of a relation between actors and human beings with their real-life impressions and performances will be contextualized. So, this section proceeds to negotiate two diverse notions: one from art and others from social life, on one argumentative platform upon which this research is based.

The play centers on the staging of the Sanskrit epic *Shakuntla* by Kalidasa which strengthens the dramatic effect of the plot. Nazia orchestrates to perform the

role of Shakuntala herself centuries back and as the narrative unfolds, her passionate desire to act Shakuntala comes to the forefront before the audience but in present she, being a stage director of modern Indian theatre, is in search of a suitable stage actress to play this role. Dr. Manish (n.d) argues that “the inter-textual reference of *Abhigyan Shakuntalam* invokes a live contact between the dramatist and the audience as the play is a part and parcel of our cultural heritage” (n.d., p.34).

The narrative of the text runs on two parallel axes: one in past and second in present. The readers can visualize the flashbacks from past incorporated skillfully into the present. The echo of the relevant and similar incidents has been shown through flashbacks to the audience. Hence, the researcher's argument that this play is based on the technique of *play within play* is grounded on two platforms. On one platform, there would be the discussion that the play contains the plot of an epic, the actors themselves are going to perform in the play. So, this research reveals how different actors represent the characters they are enacting on the stage. Symbolically, they represent those characters as in their act of role-playing on the stage they represent their real lives. So what they say or do on stage as actors, they give vent to their emotions. Everyone plays one or two roles in his life wearing the mask on his face. This notion is grounded on Ervin Goffman's (1956) notion of *dramaturgical analysis*, who

proposes that routine lives of the human beings resemble the performance of the actors on stage since life is a theatre. There is no difference between stage performance and real-life actions. The researcher argues that the roles characters are going to enact on the stage reflect their real life selves and life patterns. The face to face interactions of the actors on the stage contextualize the social interaction in life.

When the dynamic action of the play unfolds, the characters are rehearsing to perform Shakuntala, an epic, on stage, the story of Shakuntala and the king, Dushyant. *Shakuntala* is an Indian epic by a well-known Sanskrit dramatist. The story revolves around love marriage of the king with Shakuntala. After going back to his kingdom he forgets who Shakuntala is until one day she comes to him with his child and he refuses to accept his wife and child and humiliates her in his majestic court.

Hence, the proposition that Dattani has employed the technique of *play within play* holds its significance. In the play, there are three references for performing the epic *Shakuntala* on stage at three different places in three different time-periods. Characters are shown as actors, rehearsing and playing the roles of characters from the epic in three different times of history. One in the 1940s during partition riots, second in 1950s after migration to Delhi after partition and third time in modern times in 2012, when

Nazia, a theatre director, is now trying to locate the exact and the suitable actress for the role of *Shakuntala* to act as modern *Shaku*. The first time the roles of Shakuntala and the king Dushyant have been played by Zarine and Suhel in the 1940s, then Suhel and Nazia in 1950s and now by Viney and the young actress in 2012.

Nazia's authoritative and assertive nature has been emphasized by Dattani since from the beginning. Her self-indulgence in the magic and romance of theatre and music when she is on stage has also been focused. The oblivion of her surroundings, while she dances gives a peep into her commitment to art and her aesthetic taste. Dattani also takes the audience to the past through flashback technique and provides a glimpse of Nazia as a young actress where "Nazia is still dancing, now to a captive audience, a young aspiring audience" (Dattani, 2012, p. 60). The suspense and charm of the play remain alive through this shift throughout the play. Her passion for dance and to be on stage always keeps her young and agile because she deems herself young even in middle age.

The stage setting in the play, that the audience is exposed to, provides the readers with the graphic details related to theatre production which gives an insight to the modern Indian theatre. As it has been said that "in addition to the expected consistency between appearance and manner, we expect, of course, some

coherence among setting, appearance, and manner. In a sense, such coherence represents an ideal type that provides us with a means of stimulating our interest in and attention to exceptions" (Goffman, 1956, p.20). So the idea of the appearance and manners of the characters on the stage, their coherence and artistic presentation of the stage-setting in the text can be inferred from this statement. The idea is reinforced by Parmer as "the theatre attempts to articulate mores and manners of the society intending to cheer people by lifting them from physical, social and mental problems and afflictions and also offers a piece of advice for leading life in a healthier and happier way" (2011, p.45).

In the opening scene, Nazia is giving different instructions to Viney to make her production artistic and good. She then talks to Sanjay on phone after realizing that he didn't read the email sent by her regarding his shoot. Then she comments:

What am I doing here?

No more grandma roles for me I am going back to theatre (Dattani, 2012, p. 58).

She is so obsessed with her dancing talent that even now at the age of eighty-two, she loves to dance and pines for it. Her obsession with dance as an art can be noted from her dialogues like "I want more dances, dances can nobody

take away from me” (Dattani, 2012, p. 59). She further states:

All that space to fill with your body and your voice.

Letting these feelings flow to fill the hall, right to the last row of the balcony.

That is the magic of the theatre (Dattani, 2012, p. 60).

The phrase ‘magic of the theatre’ refers to the fascination the characters feel when they are on the stage. There are two things important here: the voice of the actor on stage which becomes the medium of his expressions of thought and emotions. Secondly, the body of an actor which gives him the identity of being an actor. Likewise, in the above dialogues, Nazia expresses the feelings which every actor feels when he is on stage.

She and her sister Zarine are the founders of the Post Modern Indian Theatre and there are several hints in the play toward this fact. Now in scene two, she is taking auditions for the heroine to act as Shakuntala, for that she has downloaded a few tunes from her iPod. She says:

It was the grandest production in our repertoire

We have done all that Kathak stuff. It’s nice,

I’m not saying it is bad, but it is done (Dattani, 2012, p. 61).

Dr. Manish statement gives us a reason for the dramatization of this modern version as he opines, “the modern version of *Shakuntala* also symbolizes Nazia’s attempt to break away from the painful memories of the past. But the past is part of the present and has seeds for the future” (n.d., p.37). Nazia discusses the staging of this play with her niece Ruby and an actress who yearns to play *Shakuntala*. She envisions to dramatize the modern version of the play and also reminiscences about the performance in past as:

It was great stuff. But now it’s your turn to do great stuff.

We will do a modern version of *Abhigyan Shakuntala*.

(Nazia hold up a poster mockup with the title *Shaku!*

In metallic blue) (Dattani, 2012, p. 64).

Hence, the discussion of Nazia with several characters in the text takes the turn which prompts the readers to discern the employment of the technique of play within the play by the dramatist. The researcher Parmer argues about Dattani, “his dramatic techniques and stagecraft are superb. There are rapid shifts in terms of time and space. He has made use of different images, symbols, devices, techniques etc. to communicate his ideas in a very effective and concrete manner” (2011, p. 35).

The repeated references to trunks and costumes can be taken as dramatic

part of this play within play framework. These costumes are an important asset to Nazia as they bring forth an idea of history and past in the play. Analyzing from the dramaturgical aspect, it can be argued that costumes are also part of the dramaturgical aspect of the play. It would not be an exaggeration if it is said that they are important in a role-playing context. Nazia's dialogues seem to contextualize this aspect.

Nobody is interested in these moth-eaten costumes.

Do not open them. I do not want to see them. (Dattani, 2012, p. 69)

These 'moth-eaten costumes' are relics. Ruby is seen wearing one of the dresses which resembles those of Shakuntala's because Ruby thinks her mother has played the role of Shakuntala in past so it is her right to wear that the costume, since the memories of her mother are attached to that dress giving it a relic status. She utters passionately "this is her costume... my mother!!" (Dattani, 2012, p. 72). The words my mother means the dress belongs to her mother. So, costumes are important in the context of the role-playing of the legendary character of Shakuntala. Nazia replies to that outburst of Ruby:

Lahore 1948. that is Zarine. yes!
You are wearing her costume.

But this is not Shakuntala costume.

I was always Shakuntala.
(Dattani, 2012, p. 72)

The sentence "I was always Shakuntala" (Dattani, 2014, p. 72) presents the identity of Nazia as Shakuntala as she always yearns to enact the role of Shakuntala. With this dialogue, Dattani takes the audience back into the pages of history. Nazia and her sister (supposed mother of Ruby) both migrate from Lahore to India with their dream of establishing modern Indian theatre. The narrative links to those days since the historical role of Shakuntala was played by Nazia in 1940s, in those partitioned riots days. The narrative of the play deals with past and present framework with this specific intention by Dattani: 1948 and present scenario skillfully. Through flashback, the focus shifts back to the past in the 1940s and in the next scene, the audience visualizes the present scenario. Dattani states about the first time staging of *Shakuntala* in the text, in Lahore, 1948.

Just when the horrors of partition are being left, we start mid performance of the dance drama *Shakuntala* in Hindustani. (Dattani, 2012, p. 73)

The stage transfers to a pastoral scene where Shakuntala and her friends are roaming in the garden and talking. Nazia in disguise of Shakuntala delivers her dialogues which prompt the dramatic action. To the response of her dialogue, "this bee is hovering around my face

instead of the jasmine" (p. 74), Dushyant, the king, hiding behind the tree utters:

Oh! This wicked bee does not give up! (Going to another spot)

Oh! has to come here too.? What should I do now?

(Dushyant suddenly appears in front of Shakuntala and splits

the bee in two with his sword)

(Dattani, 2012, p. 74)

These are the exact dialogues as has been penned down by Kalidasa in his epic and later on translated in different languages. The words of Dr.Manish in his research "Angst in Mahesh Dattani's Play Where Did I Leave My Purdah?" about this aspect of role adaptation of Nazia can be quoted here who states, "but Nazia is not Shakuntala- she is not a helpless, docile character who will succumb to male chauvinism" (Manish,n.d,02). Nazia might not be docile but her fate is of Shakuntala's, the narration unveils this truth. The passionate love between both lovers as expressed in one of the enactments, the rape begotten child of Nazia and unwanted child of Shakuntala and their proceeding separation in both narratives are parallel acts. Manish rightfully opines that "Dattani hints at the plight of women, torn between being and becoming" (Manish, n.d., p. 36).

To mention the history of Nazia and Zarine's migration to India during partition is necessary. At that time, they had been playing on stage the play

Shakuntala. The partition riots started then Muslims came to theatre in Lahore to kill any Hindu present there. Suhal and Nazia loved each other. Nazia decided to leave from Lahore for Delhi because she did not want to part from Suhal. Besides, she also wanted to establish modern theatre. Nazia convinced Zarine for leaving.

Come with us Zarine. We will go to India.

We can set up our own company theatre there. Once, we are there and we set up our company, You can play *Shakuntala*. (Dattani, 2012, p. 82)

So, the second time staging of epic *Shakuntala* occurs in 1950 after Nazia, Zarine and Suhel migrate to India to externalize their dream of establishing a modern theatre in India. The audience is again introduced to the stage setting, costumes display and music by following the dramatization scenario. Dattani states:

The early 1950s.the young Nazia and Suhel are putting on their costumes and accessories in the makeup room. At the same time, the set for act three of *Shakuntala* is put up. (Dattani, 2012, p. 83)

Besides, the characters in the play have used theatrical jargon which bespeaks of this fact that they are playing the roles on stage. Their dialogues manifest the implication of the idea *play*

within play. Suhel asks Nazia that “after the play, you will be surrounded by the group. You will rehearse with them till morning (Dattani, 2012, p. 95). This sentence “you will rehearse” (Dattani, 2012, p. 95) gives the margin to the researcher about his stance as it tells the audience the characters on stage themselves are playing roles from another narrative. There is also an argument between Nazia and Suhel during their performance on the stage. There is a series of arguments as follows.

NAZIA: why is it that when you play Dushyant specially this scene, I feel that...you are accusing me?

SUHEL: May be because I am a good actor. Or maybe not

May be I should stop playing Dushyant then.

NAZIA: Jagan is more than willing to take over.

SUHEL: So, you have been rehearsing with him. (Dattani, 2012, p. 95-96)

Dr. Manish Sharma further opines that “his central characters are the product of colonial consciousness and they are in search of their lost self” (Dattani, 2012, p. 34). Here, the dialogues of the characters are a direct hint towards the fact that the technique of play within play has been used. Their dialogues show that they are

performing on stage mythological characters and rehearsing their roles.

Taking theoretical instance from Erving Goffman’s (a Canadian-American sociologist of 20th century) notion of analogy between theatrical performances and face to face interaction in real-life, it is inferred that besides performing their theatrical roles, the actors are also demonstrating their real life selves and situations as it is said that “Goffman saw a connection between the kind of acts that people put on in their daily life and theatrical performances” (Goffman, n.d.). So, theatre is the pivotal metaphor used by him in his famous book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, a study of impression management. He argues,

In social interaction, as in theatrical performance, there is a front region where the performers (individuals) are on stage in front of the audiences. This is where the positive aspect of the idea of self and desired impressions are highlighted. There is also a back region, where individuals can prepare for or set aside their role. (Goffman, n.d.)

She has talked about the connection between real life and performances on the stage. As the face to face interaction of the characters occurs in real life similarly, this interaction is monitored by the actors on stage. “We find, then, that when the individual is in the immediate presence of others, his

activity will have a promissory character” (Goffman, 1956, p. 2). Their performances are reinforced by the costumes they wear in front of the audience, the same happens in real life where human beings have to maintain their impressions. Besides, all other stage accessories: lightning, music, stage directions, costumes, dimmers, back-stage room are there to facilitate actors on stage. Goffman has talked about theatrical accessories related to acting. While using a theatrical scenario, his main focus is on interaction: interaction between performers on stage to stimulate positive self-impression on one hand and interaction among human beings in social interaction on other hands. He argues:

In social interaction, as in theatrical performance, there is a front region where the performers (individuals) are on stage in front of the audiences. This is where the positive aspect of the idea of self and desired impressions are highlighted. There is also a back region, where individuals can prepare for or set aside their role. The front or performance that an actor plays out includes ‘manner’, or how the role is carried out, and ‘appearance’ including the dress and look of the performer. Often, performers work together in ‘teams’ and form bonds of collegiality based on their common commitment to the performance they are mutually engaged in. (Goffman, 1956, n.p)

From the discussion of real-life interaction and analogy between theatre

and real-life actions, the researcher has taken one step ahead in negotiating that through interaction the characters reveal their love-hate relationships, their varied emotions and psychology maintaining their self-impressions. He states in this regard that “the maintenance of the surface of agreement, this veneer of consensus, is facilitated by each participant concealing his wants behind statements which assert values to which everyone present is likely to give lip-service” (Goffman, 1956 p.04). Goffman calls “this level of agreement as a ‘working consensus” (Goffman, 1956, p. 04). The word ‘consensus’ means an agreement and the harmony which means to evoke the sense of harmony among the actors on the stage.

There are a series of dialogue which can be analyzed from this perspective. In the previous conversation, Nazia feels that Suhel is accusing her about her tragedy ridden past under the mask of their performance conversation. Psychological tension can be noted in her abrupt replies to Suhel. Here Nazia, an actress has taken the place of Nazia, a wife who is concerned with her relations and her domestic life. In another scene, conversation between Suhel and Nazia runs as:

SUHEL: Is it the company you care about?

Or the roles you play? Jasma Odan, Shakuntala.

You choose the scripts with care, making sure you have the meat, while you feel the rest of us the bones. (Dattani, 2012, p. 97).

So, this idea of ‘working consensus’ (Goffman, 1956, p. 4) seems to work for Nazia and Suhel as they both are found accusing each other about their relation indirectly. On the immediate analysis, in this exchange of dialogues, in researcher’s view the words ‘role,’ and ‘scripts’, are part of dramatic or performance vocabulary. Besides, the audience can also spot the verbal accusations both the characters are putting on each other through these dialogues manifesting their emotions. During their enactment of the play *Shakuntala*, there is another important exchange which is important to put under analysis. See the series of dialogue:

SUHEL: You never gave your sister a chance to play *Shakuntala*. She was talented and far more suited to play this role.

NAZIA: This is your last performance, I can never perform this with you as Dushyant after what you just said.

SUHEL: But that is the truth, don’t you think Zarine would have made a good *Shakuntala*?

NAZIA: She would make a great *Shakuntala*. But she isn’t here. (Dattani, 2012, p. 97)

In the above-written dialogues, both the characters talk themselves about the enactment of the play as the words *play this role and performance* etc. can be taken to support dramaturgical vocabulary. Here, regarding the proposition of the analysis of personal feelings of characters, it can be noticed how Nazia is being accused by Suhel that she has not given a chance to her sister to perform *Shakuntala*. Suhel is giving vent to his resentment here. When Suhel asks Nazia at one place during their rehearsal, “put more feelings into your role and some into our relationship” (Dattani, 2012, p. 97), this dialogue gives an insight into their real-life relationship as they both are lovers, later on going to be husband and wife. Metaphorically, it is implied that they are concerned about the manifestation of their personal feelings. It is argued by Manish also who states that “while playing the role of *Shakuntala*, the lines between the character and the person blur” (Dattani, 2012, p. 37).

The analysis of the conversation of Nazia with Suhel gives a peep into their real-life relationship. On contextual grounds, it also represents the relation of *Shakuntala* and Dushyant. *Shakuntala*’s blunt question to Suhel “Why do you call after fifty bloody years”? (Dattani, 2012, p. 91) makes the readers conscious of the rift between them. She further gives vent to her feelings by telling him, “I do not want to see you. I cannot even bear to hear your shaky voice” (Dattani, 2012, p.91). The following dialogue exchange

between Nazia and Suhel takes the readers from the theatrical world to give the peep into the real-life scenario. These dialogues represent the contrasting situation from the past, where an echo of the Suhel's plea is heard when he demands from Nazia that "put more feelings into your role and some into our relationship" (Dattani, 2012, p. 97). The transformation of the past lovers into the present day reality that they are now strangers is the point to consider here.

Through the analysis of the above dialogues, the two perspectives of the researcher, in the context of the theoretical framework of this research study has been highlighted. The prime concern of the researcher is to bring to notice the similitude between theatrical performance and real-life interaction. Human beings maintain personality impressions with each other in the real life as they do on the stage. The series of accusations are the real-life phenomenon, which also happens between actors on the back-stage in the theatre. So this accusation, demand for care, and un-reciprocal behaviour are Nazia and Suhel's real-life story. "As the interaction among the participants' progresses, additions and modifications in this initial informational state will of course occur" (Goffman, 1956, p. 5).

Secondly, according to the researcher, these dialogues have provided the linguistic clues to reinforce the idea of theatrical jargon used by the performers

which strengthen in return the proposition of the researcher that *play within play* technique is used in this text. The synthesis of these dialogues is Dattani has skillfully conveyed the feelings and personal dilemmas of the characters through their vocation as actors. As Goffman has argued that:

In saying that performers act in a relatively informal, familiar, relaxed way while backstage and are on their guard when giving a performance, it should not be assumed that the pleasant interpersonal things of life —courtesy, warmth, generosity, and pleasure in the company of others—are always reserved for those backstage and that suspiciousness, snobbishness, and a show of authority are reserved for front region activity. (Goffman, 1956, p. 80)

The above statement from Goffman throws light on the above-mentioned accusation exchange between the characters. Goffman has talked about the range of real-life and emotions which are also expressed by the actors on stage and offstage during their stay on stage.

Besides, the repetition of the words 'performance' 'perform' and 'Shakuntala' are part of the dramaturgical vocabulary. Every action of the actors on stage from their act of 'acting' 'rehearsing' and 'performing' which are the counter-balanced actions performed by human beings in real life are focused to negotiate the similarity between

dramaturgical vocabulary and the actual actions performed on the stage.

The discussion also entails the third time dramatization of the play *Shakuntala* on stage which is being dramatized in the present time, when Nazia is eighty years old. She has passed her youth now but her vitality to produce stage production is as active as it used to be in her past. Now she wants to stage the modern version of the *Shakuntala*.

I have found a great actor for dushyant. dash. butshaku... if only I were younger by sixty. This is the interpretation I always wanted for *Shakuntala* (Dattani 2012, p. 112).

For that she takes auditions and during auditions Nighat, the granddaughter of Ruby comes with a poster. The descriptions related to that poster can also be taken as evidence of the above-discussed point which runs as:

It is an original lithograph of the 1950 production of *Shakuntala* with the huge picture of the Nazia. The credits have been blanked out (Dattani, 2012, p. 122).

The names have been blanked out to conceal the Muslim identity of the characters in the post-partition scenario. This is the scene where a young actress is rehearsing to play the role of *Shaku*. Nazia plays modern version of music from her iPod instead of music of the 1950s. Nazia gives her different directions to enter with music but every time she fails to do that. She instructs her that “this time if you do not enter when I tell you to...You are fired” (Dattani 2012, p. 117). On the other hand, the young aspiring actress is also excited to perform this role of *Shakuntala* as she cries out: “You know when the role is meant for you...I can see this one for me” (Dattani 2012 p. 67).

Even Zarine, Nazia’s sister wishes to perform the role of *Shakuntala* in past because Nazia promises her to give her that role. This is a very beautiful and dramatic moment in the text when the audience is told that:

An apparition of Zarine dressed as *Shakuntala*, holding an infant, appears in front of her. You promised me I can play *Shakuntala*. What a lovely baby

Shakuntala has... a real prince.
No...princess (Dattani,2012, p. 101).

The declaration that Shakuntala has a daughter is implied reference towards the daughter of Nazia because Nazia had a child in the result of rape during partition riots who is now Ruby. This point has been discussed to negotiate the clear similarity between the lives of characters and the roles they perform on the stage. The similarity between the real-life and the plot of the performance story comes to forefront as in the play Shakuntala has a son whom she takes to the king to introduce him to his father but the king refuses to own him, similarly Nazia being Shakuntala too has a daughter who is rejected by the society since she is an illegal daughter.. a stigma on Nazia's honour. During her performance of the role as Shakuntala, she used to go to her child during intervals and feed her and the audience is told that meantime Suhel delays the next act so that mother and son can have time.

In the end of the play, when Nazia talks about her the modern version of the Shakuntala, and at the time of reception of the award as life time

achievement regarding her contributions, we again see Nazia talking to Zarine's ghost dressed as Shakuntala. It can be negotiated that Nazia performs the triple roles in the play, the one her role of being a director of this Indian theatre and second the legendary role of Shakuntala and third her real-life role: Nazia as Suhel's wife, as grounded in the theoretical grounds of Goffman.

The resemblance between the lives of the characters and the roles they perform on the stage from the play is the point of negotiation here as Goffman saw a connection between the theatrical performances and the acts they perform in their daily lives as "the 'true' or 'real' attitudes, beliefs, and emotions of the individual can be ascertained only indirectly, through his avowals or through what appears to be involuntary expressive behavior" (Goffman, 1956. Pp. 1- 2).

Analyzing from this point of view it can be negotiated that the similarity between Shakuntala and Nazia is manifold. Shakuntala was in grip of her past so was Nazia but both had different types of past. After partition Suhel was unable to accept Nazia, physically and

psychologically. Suhel leaves her without understanding her dilemma. In abandonment from the king Dushyant, there is the echo of the same situation. He leaves her because of his inability to recall his relation with her. Both have abandoned children without the name of their father. Similarly, in the dialogues spoken by Suhel to Nazia at the time of divorce also echo the same dialogues with little bit difference by the king Dushyant with flavor of insult and indifference.

However, music is an important theatrical element in the presentation of the plays and dramas on the stage. Dattani has also focused on music in two perspectives in this play, in setting the 40s stage and exhibiting modern-day stage production. Nataya Sangeet was the form of classical Indian music which got its popularity in the 19th century in Maharashtra. It means dramatic music and the staged musical drama under Nataya Sangeet were known as *Natak*. Nataya Sangeet appeared as a form of music for the common people and this form of music got popularity and the dramatists started presenting many social issues through the medium of Nataya Sangeet.

So, here the Natya sangeet plays to show the dramatic presentation of the play *Shakuntala*. Dattani narrates about the first time staging of *Shakuntala* in the text as:

The lights fade as music,
Natyasangeet of the 1940s, plays

The vanity van is now green room
of the 1940s (Dattani, 2012, p. 72).

The metaphorical implication of the word '*pardah*' also needs to be embedded in this research study. The word '*pardah*' literary means '*hijab*', or *curtain*, contextually, it is the *pardah* which Nazia forgets during partition riots in Lahore and being an epitome of Muslim woman identity, the absence of which causes the death of Zarine, Nazia's sister. Symbolically, there is also *pardah* between past and present lives of Nazia, her painful past and struggling present. Secondly, it is the curtain used in the theatre on stage which is lifted before any dramatic performance to be enacted for the audience. Analyzing from Goffman's viewpoint about the resemblance between life and stage, the word *pardah* brings dramatic connotation since it monitors the

link between the audience and the performers. The researcher anticipates from this discussion of word 'purdah' that, while analyzing from the perspective of the resemblance between real life and theatrical performance, there is a fringe of difference that separates theatre and real-life phenomenon.

Dattani has employed various meta-theatrical techniques in the play as his plays are renowned for their theatrical modernity and innovative theatre techniques. An anonymous researcher states about Dattani that "Dattani's modernity consists in his dramatic vision and mode of presentation. He brought about a paradigm shift in the Indian English Drama from page to stage. Dattani's plays elevate the audience to a unified aesthetic experience" (SocialIssues, n.d., pp. 245-246). He further asserts that "his mode of presentation is eclectic. Realism, symbolism, inter-textuality and meta-theatricality are some of the modes he experimented in his plays" (Social Issues, n. d., p. 248). Rajput in his research work "Post-Colonial Approach in Mahesh Dattani's Plays" talks about Dattani as:

"His plays appeal to us in our situation and make us see into the rot that has set in. He deals with the discriminations against people in our society on the basis of religion, class, gender and sexuality with insight and empathy" (Rajput, n.d., p.2).

The researcher argues that Dattani has also presented the psychological study of Nazia's personality when *Purdah* from her past gets lifted. Behind this mask of honour and respect, she has sacrificed her self-respect and honour. In her attempt to materialize her desire to establish her theatre she has to go through physical pain and psychological agony. Beneath the hard and vulnerable self of Nazia, there is a woman whose vulnerability is questioned. She is one of the fine studies out of the rows of Dattani's women characters. It is in the third part of the play the readers and the audience comes to know about the painful past of Nazia. Dattani lifts the pardah from the past life of Nazia by interlinking past into the present so that the readers can understand her callous nature and indifferent treatment to all and above all her obsession to elevate the status of her

established modern Indian theatre. Parmer states that “Dattani’s theatrical creed asserts that human nature has its own autonomous space. Any act of encroachment to this space, either through conventional ideology or by any other means, will result into agitation and uprising causing chaos and destruction.” (2011, p.35-36).

Dattani means to present a new wave of modern theatre by exposing his theatrical techniques. The researcher argues that the technique of *play within play* has been introduced and demonstrated on stage through her character because it was she who wanted to play and then replay *Shakuntala* on stage. On the other hand, Dattani has exposed the injustices done to women during partition in subcontinent through her character.

Conclusions

The negotiating point as argued by the researcher in this research study is that the dialogues, situations and shifts in the text show that Dattani has skillfully used the theatrical technique of play within play in the text. It seems the

characters, in reality, resemble the characters they are performing on stage. Besides, they are passionately involved in playing those roles. They have given their energy, their life span and their youth to dramatize the characters from the epic *Shakuntala* on modern Indian theatre rather their selves have been transformed during this process. Besides, while performing their theatrical roles on stage, their roles mirror their lives, and emotional turmoil they go through in life, hence supporting the dramaturgical analysis postulated by Ervin Goffman through his notion of *dramaturgical analysis*. The characters are artistically connected in the way it seems to weave a tapestry. All characters exhibit the true nature of their selves, their dilemmas and struggles they have to go through during and after partition in their dream of establishing Post -Modern Indian theatre.

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