Week 6: Mahesh Elkunchwar and Mahesh Dattani

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Lecture 1: *Sonata* (Mahesh Elkunchwar)

- The play depicts the subtle power dynamics between three women, all in their forties and friends from school. Two of them, Aruna and Dolon have been living together for seventeen years in Dolon's lavish flat in a skyscraper in Bombay.
- The play's double, Dolon and Aruna, use Subhadra's affairs and lifestyle, and the lonely typist neighbor to boost their own sense of superiority and privilege.
- Intimacy and animosity are the two mutually reinforcing forces that characterize their relationships.
- They do not approve of Subhadra's promiscuity and her relationship with a violent drunkard.
- For Subhadra, her friends are a temporary source of relief from her violent and intimate relationship with the man. She is a journalist who has just lost her job.
- After Subhadra exits, the secret desires and animosity between Dolon and Aruna is revealed. Aruna is a disciplined Sanskrit Professor who also writes sentimental stories for a women's magazine. She is also emotionally distant and not open to touching and being touched by others. Dolon is a banker who is self-indulgent and restlessly searching for attention and intimacy.
- If Subhadra's insecurities are concealed by her obsession with attractive men, Dolon is obsessed with her own Bengali culture, Rabindrasangeet and food, and Aruna has intellectual pretentions in terms of her career as a prestigious and well travelled scholar and as a writer.

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- Dolon resents the fact that Aruna wrote a story of a woman who leads a reckless life and is a thinly veiled allusion to Dolon. She thinks Aruna has betrayed her.
- Later, Dolon reveals her implicit desire for Aruna and her betrayal when she had an intimate encounter with her ex-husband Avinash. Aruna is willing to let go of the past and restores her friendship with Dolon.

Lecture 2: Mahesh Elkunchwar (Summary)

For Summary, please refer to the lecture notes of Week 5 and Week 6.

Lecture 3: Mahesh Dattani (Introduction) and *Final Solutions*.

Introduction

- The first important playwright to write all his plays in English. He ame from a Gujarati Sindhi family and was born and raised in Bangalore. Initially worked as an accountant and then dedicated his life to theatre and writing plays.
- He was inspired by the work of Alyque Padamsee
- Began writing his plays in the 1980s, all of which were concerned with exposing the hypocrisy of social institutions of family, religion, gender and sexuality.
- Some of his plays were translated into other Indian languages and performed by well known directors and theatre groups.

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Final Solutions

- The play has to do with the problem of communalism. Ramnik and his daughter Smita are liberal Hindus who give shelter to Javed and Bobby who are apparently being chased by a bloodthirsty Hindu mob.
- A parallel intersecting narrative in the play is of Hardika, Ramnik's mother, who from the memories of her youth as Daksha, grows to resent the Muslims, for killing her father during Partition. She has still not lost her prejudice. She has a friend named Zarine, through him, she secretly gets to listen to her favorite female playback singers. Wanted to be a singer herself but her orthodox family forbid her.

- Ramnik and Smita finds the limits of their liberalism tested by Aruna's orthodoxy and Javed's violent intolerance of Hindus. They have to negotiate with two similar ends of the spectrum of religious tolerance.
- Unlike Bobby who refuses to identify with his community and is ashamed to be a part of it, Bobby is initially a rebellious and violent Muslim who wants to avenge the persecution of his community by Hindus. He confesses later that he was not paid by Hindu right wing parties but volunteered to place cow carcasses in the house of a Hindu man, to trigger the riots.
- He is later ashamed of what he did. He identifies with Ramnik's wife Aruna who is an orthodox Hindu woman who observes rituals of purity and pollution. She does not want to share her food or space with people of other castes or religions. Javed identifies with Aruna as they are mirror each other's intolerance. He says he is no different from the bloodthirsty Hindu mob that is allegedly pursuing him.
- By the end of the play the characters undergo a transformation: Javed forces Ramnik to realize only he being Hindu can afford to give him protection. Only he can be liberal. Javed realizes he has lived a meaningless life of violence; Javed compels Ramnik to realize his liberalism is also being tested; when Bobby holds the idol of Krishna in his hand, Aruna's orthodoxy is also being tested and she realizes there are probably many different ways to god; and Hardika/Daksha learns from Ramnik that her in-laws were responsible for burning Zarine's father's shop during Partition.

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Lecture 4: *Bravely Fought the Queen (Mahesh Dattani)*

- The play exposes the hypocrisy of family and the normative role of the family in regulating gender and sexuality. The family comprises Ba, her sons Jiten and Nitin, their wives who are also sisters, Dolly and Alka, respectively, Shridhar who works at Nitin and Jiten's advertising firm and his wife Lalitha. Dolly's daughter Daksha and Dolly's brother Praful do not appear on stage.
- Dolly and Alka seem to be trapped in miserable and violent marriages. Lalitha has been asked her husband to organize a masked ball to feature a model for a new line of female

nightwear and inner wear called ReVaaTee. There is a mix up in the dates as Dolly and Alka are supposed to visit the Kapoors with their husbands on that very day.

- But the visit is cancelled and Lalitha ends up spending time with Dolly and Alka. Lalitha is witness to the hidden animosities and desires that threaten to fragment the Trivedi family. A common motif in the play is the bonsai plants that Lalitha likes to make, a symbol of the trapped and stunted and sterile lives of the women in the play.
- Dolly is also wearing a face mask in the beginning of the play to suggest the artifice of her life. The brothers, Nitin and Jiten, and their mother and wives live in twin houses in Koramangla, Bangalore. They are wealthy but we discover later that their advertising firm is on the verge of bankruptcy. They take Dolly's brother Praful's help who offer them ten lakhs as an interest free loan. They resent Praful and look down on him because he apparently tricked Nitin into marrying Alka.
- Alka seems to have an alcoholic past, which is why her mother-in-law, Ba, does not approve of Nitin's marriage to her. Ba who is losing her memory, and is confined to her bed, constantly calls for Dolly and Praful. From her memories we learn that she also had a violent marriage and she had to ask her father for money to raise her sons. Jiten is violent like his father while Nitin is gentle like his mother.
- As Lalitha, Dolly and Alka, share drinks, they lose their inhibitions and all their secrets are revealed. Dolly, for instance, is having an illicit affair with Kanhaiya, their cook, who later ends up being a pure fantasy for her desire for love. Alka is unhappy in her marriage and Dolly resents her for always being the more popular of the sisters. But appearances are different from the reality.
- We discover Jiten is a violent and unscrupulous man who exploits Shridhar. When Shridhar agrees with the customers' hostile feedback on ad campaign for the inner wear and nightwear, saying it is too sexist and objectifies women, Jiten insists on carrying on with the campaign and targeting men, who have the buying power to make their wives look sexy. Jiten desperately needs the ReVaaTee account to lift their firm from bankruptcy.
- Jiten orders Shridhar to find him a sex escort who will fulfill his pleasures. He wants to sell their ancestral home to redeem their debts. He wants Nitin to order Alka to leave the house because of her alcoholism and her alleged affair with another man, to win Ba's approval.

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- Nitin discover from Ba that the house has been willed to Daksha and Praful is her trustee as Ba thinks he was the only one who loved Daksha.
- We discover that Jiten had hit Dolly when she was pregnant and she had an accident, which resulted in Daksha's disability. Daksha studies in a special school in Ooty and it is the sheer guilt that compels Jiten and the rest of the family to take care of Daksha. We also learn Praful is Nitin's lover and that he had gotten Alka married to him to continue their affair. Even the auto rickshaw driver whose auto was driven over by Jiten's car is Nitin's illicit lover.
- Dolly decides to leave her husband by the end of the play.

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