

CHAPTER II

The Plays of Mahesh Dattani:

A Critical Study

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02.01: Introduction:

The present chapter makes a modest attempt to explore the critical study of Dattani's select plays. In this chapter, the researcher aims at unfolding the various aspects of his plays. Dattani is widely appreciated for his technical excellences as well as displaying a wide range of themes and subjects. The study is basically text-oriented. These select plays have made bold innovations and experiments, dealt with themes related to the present social scenario, in an effort to bring about social change, and socio-cultural revolution to make the people aware of the need to reform the present social structure. The plays deal with the aspirations of the deprived and marginalised sections of society and depict the acute conflicts of contemporary city life. The researcher has preferred to study his plays following the chronology of their creation in a view to assess the various developmental stages in Dattani's career as a dramatist. This study includes the study of his following eleven plays:

1. *Where There's a Will* (1988)
2. *Dance Like a Man* (1989)
3. *Tara* (1990)
4. *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991)
5. *Final Solutions* (1993)
6. *Night Queen* (Short Play) (1996)
7. *Do the Needful* (Radio Play for BBC) (1997)
8. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998)
9. *Seven Steps Around the Fire* (Radio Play for BBC) (1998)
10. *The Swami and Winston* (Radio Play for BBC) (2000)
11. *Thirty Days in September* (2001)

For the sake of the detailed study, the researcher would like to analyze these plays one by one.

02.02. *Where There's a Will* (1988):

Where There's a Will is a play by Dattani which was first performed by PLAYPEN at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore on 23rd September, 1988 as a part of Deccan Herald Theatre Festival. It is very interesting to note how Dattani wrote this first play. Dattani founded his own company PLAYPEN in 1984 and began to look for Indian plays in English. He wanted to play home-grown play which consisted of Indian English that is spoken normally in an Indian tone by essentially Indian characters. He wanted to do more Indian plays with Indian environment and comfortable medium of expression. He didn't want the usual Western canonical texts that were generally performed. Finding such an Indian play was a challenge, because there weren't many good translations which could fulfil his conditions. Dattani solved this problem by writing his own play *Where There's a Will* in 1988, and the playwright came into being. He has recently rendered the production of this play in simple strokes entitling it *Mad About Money* and has staged forty shows successfully.

Where There's a Will has been read and criticised on different levels. As Sita Raina observes that the play has several interesting aspects. Dattani, the playwright, described it as the exorcism of the patriarchal code. Women - be it daughter-in-law, wife or mistress - are dependent on men and this play shows what happens when they are pushed to the edge. The play, *Where There's a Will*, is also interpreted in regard to the passive instinct of the rich and the moneyed in the society. Some critics still view the play in terms of marital profligacy, and still a few opine that the play is about the chaos reigning in a family due to the emotional and temperamental incompatibility of the members. Some regard that the individuals have literally no alternative than living in forced harmony. Gauri Shankar Jha observes that there are feminine questions of identity and dilemma of feminine sensibility. Kiran the mistress of Hasmukh is the representative of women living in the post-colonial society. The play appears to be rich and complex since it has different layers of meanings. When one looks only on the surface level it appears to be the play of a top businessman by name Hasmukh Mehta. When one dives in deep, the play appears to be rich and copious revealing its different interpretations. The

researcher with this perspective in mind would like to restrict herself to the important interpretations of the play.

Where There's a Will is a comedy with slight farcical touches. It is rooted in the Gujarati familial background in which Dattani has chronicled the follies and prejudices of Indian society as reflected within the microcosm of the family unit. It is the most substantial and dynamic reality in middle class Indian families, which makes a point about the way patriarchal men always behave egoistically. The plot of the play revolves around the life as well as after-life of a man named Hasmukh Mehta, who is a rich and successful businessman, and his family. He is a dissatisfied patriarch with the typical problems of familial expectations from his indifferent wife, Sonal and colourless married life; his spendthrift son Ajit, and a crafty and conniving daughter-in-law, Preeti; and last but not least his mistress Kiran Jhaveri. All the four belie their names. Hasmukh is not a smiling face and Sonal hardly shines. Ajit is not victorious, at least in his father's eyes and Preeti has no love for anybody in the family. They are living as a unit under the patriarchal order without any bond of love among them. Hasmukh is neither happy with his wife nor his son. He considers his marriage and the birth of his son as "tragedy after tragedy". He finds his son to be irresponsible and wastrel and Sonal obsessed with cooking and feeding, driving him crazy. What he expects is implicit obedience to him, as he practised it in his father's case. When things drift away from his control, he thinks of a checkmate. He creates a trust and appoints his mistress Kiran Jhaveri its trustee. One night, after a heavy squabble with the family, Hasmukh passes away. But his ghost lingers on to control his family from the other world! By the will his family will lead a frugal life until Ajit turns forty-five. As the Mehta family reconcile to their fate, Kiran walks in who has to stay and manage the family and the business. Kiran's presence disturbs the family, much to Hasmukh's delight, who had planned to teach his family a lesson and hopes they will learn how inadequate they were as wife, son and daughter-in-law. But Sonal and Kiran bond together and share their opinions on his conniving and devious nature. In his moment of recognition, he realizes his own shortfall, living in the shadow of his father. As he decides to leave them and find his place in heaven, Preeti's baby kicks in her womb which is suggestive of Hasmukh's getting a second chance at being with his family as his yet to be born grandson.

The preoccupation with gender and gender roles becomes apparent from this play. It is embedded within the mechanics of the middle class Gujarati family. Dattani has often referred to the subversion of patriarchy in the play as one of his major concerns. Interweaving his story around the scheming and plotting of the family members who have been put in a fix by a dead man's will, Dattani explores the dichotomy between the men-female roles within the archetype of the family headed by a man and what happens when a woman takes over. Through the mechanism of the will, the patriarch assumes that he has finally won the battles that he fought when alive. As his ghost returns to watch with great pleasure, the discomfort of his family, however, is quite surprising.

Dattani presents the archetypal picture of an overbearing father and domineering husband, unpleasant and even nasty. Hasmukh is always unhappy with everyone around him – with no one having lived up to his expectations, the way he had fulfilled his father:

“Hasmukh: Why does a man marry? --- Why did I marry? Yes, to get a son. So that when I grow old, I can live like again through my son. --- Why do I have a mistress? Because I am unhappy. Why I am unhappy? Because I don't have a son. Who is Ajit? Isn't he my son? No. He's just a boy who spends my money and lives in my house. He doesn't behave like my son. A son should make me happy. Like I made my father --- happy. I listened to him. I did what he told me to do. ---I worked hard for him. I made him --- happy. That is what I wanted my son to make me. ---”¹

Dattani brings in references to three successive generations of the male line, and indicates the compulsions under which Hasmukh behaves in the way he does. He underestimates his son in the office before his colleagues, in the house before his wife and mother and the friends on line. Ironically, the tough person who is to run the office is to be a female. Here Dattani points out unfailingly that women deal with things very differently. Though Sonal is mostly mute before Hasmukh, she has brought up her son differently. Ajit refuses to be another extension of his father. He fought back.

“Ajit: All right. I can't fight him now. He has won. He has won because he's dead. But when he was alive, I did protest. In my own way.

Yes, I'm happy I did that. Yes. I did fight back. I did do 'peep, peep' to him! That was my little victory." ²

Men like Ajit are purposefully created by Dattani who react on questions of patriarchy. Preeti is one of the few female characters who evoke little sympathy from the audience. Like chameleon, she changes her behaviour towards Sonal and comes out in open about her reasons for marrying Ajit. She has her eye on the family's money. She is capable of doing anything for money and Sonal senses the wrong in desiring money with such a great passion.

Until the patriarch dies, Kiran, Hasmukh's 'mistress' is on the margins; but the will throws her right into the centre of the action. She is to manage the entire state for twenty-one years –until Ajit's child turns twenty-one and live with the family for the said period. Kiran, marginalized, almost invisible woman, suddenly thrust into the action accepts the challenges. Here Dattani's perception of gender strength is apparent. Hasmukh being a man was arrogant and tactless and therefore was unable to make place in the hearts of his family members, whereas Kiran Jhaveri being his mistress had impressed Sonal so much that she became her confidante. Ajit and Preeti also accepted her as one of them and were quite at ease with her. Hasmukh Mehta whose spirit was a mute-watcher of all the developments in his house after his death was greatly disappointed and frustrated to see his mistress take the place amongst his family members which he had desired throughout his life.

Sonal almost stands in contrast with the character of Kiran. She takes too much care of Ajit, calls him 'Aju' like a small boy and caresses him by serving his favourite dishes one after another. Hasmukh, her husband has become a heart patient and she serves 'halwa' and 'paratha' before him to her Aju. She keeps cooking food like it's a new invention. Rich food, wasting so much ghee and oil has already made Hasmukh a heart patient. Dattani has successfully presented a typical middle class Indian housewife in the form of Sonal.

In the play, Dattani has depicted an important aspect of patriarchal dominance. Let it be, daughter, wife, daughter-in-law or mistress, all are dependent on man for financial and physical security. Man has always taken a woman as a liability and a source of requirement. Women have been looked down upon by men as an object to meet their

needs. They should be there to cook their favourite dishes, run around attending to their needs, and sexually satisfy them whenever they have the urge without hesitation. If the wife is unable to satisfy the husband then there is always a mistress to do that. Hasmukh used Kiran as a substitute to his wife, Sonal. He says,

“Twenty-five years of marriage, and I haven’t enjoyed sex with her. So what does a man do? You tell me. I started eating out. Well, I had the money. I could afford to eat in fancy places. And what about my sex life? Well, I could afford that too. Those expensive ladies of the night in five star hotels!”³

Hasmukh smiles with pleasant memories of these star ladies but that did not go on for long for a man in his position. For safer relationship, he wanted something between a wife and a pick-up. It is a mistress, which he found soon in his own office. He found out a woman whose brain matched his. He kept her in his company, in a posh locality at a walking distance from his house. Thus, Hasmukh thinks of his convenience in a matter of sex, too. A man with money can form any relationship with any woman. In fact, his attitude to woman is quite materialistic.

The central issue of patriarchal dominance, however, emerges in its second scene. It is revealed that none of Hasmukh’s expectant family members have inherited his money, for what he has done is to form a Trust to be administered over by his former mistress, Kiran Jhaveri, as a Trustee. In fact, according to the terms of Mehta’s will, not only his son not inherit his father’s money and property until he is forty-five, but he will also have to compulsorily attend office every day from 9 to 6 and remain under the official watch of Mrs. Jhaveri. And finally and most insulting to all the members of the family, Mehta’s will stipulates that his formal mistress will move in and live in his family till the Trust be dissolved twenty-two years later. Hasmukh does not have any love to spare for his wife - Sonal, son - Ajit or daughter-in-law - Preeti.

First dominant patriarchal note of the play is the father-son relationship in Indian society. Hasmukh is the conventional father who is of the opinion that a father knows what is best for his son. Ajit is the son who believes in living his own life and dreaming his own dreams. The first half on the play presents the father’s point of view where the

dramatist seems to be siding with the father. Hasmukh's reactions to Ajit's project reveal his whole attitude towards his son;

"I didn't like it (Ajit's project) because it was my money. If I let him have his way, we would all be paupers. Twenty-three years old and he is on his way to bankruptcy. My bankruptcy. He was bankrupt up here (points to his) the day he was born. God just forgot to open an account for him."⁴

Hasmukh regards Ajit as an incapable and irresponsible young man of twenty-three who resists all his attempts to take him under his wings. Ajit, on his part, considers his father to be a head-strong person who is just not ready to consider any other opinion except his own. In a series of revealing conversations, the dramatist makes the attitude of both of them clear:

Ajit: Don't I have any rights at all?

Hasmukh: You have the right to listen to my advice and obey my orders.

Ajit: Thank you. You are so generous I could kiss your feet.

Hasmukh: There's no need to do that. Just polish my shoes every morning and I will be happy.

Ajit: You will never be happy. Not until all of us dance to your tune. And I will never do that."⁵

In the patriarchal system the father acted more or less in a tyrannical manner. In his eyes, his son is not grown up. He thought that his experiences of life entitled him to have the last say in everything. This is what happens in this play, too.

Hasmukh's father was a typical patriarch. When his elder son ran away from home to join a group of hippies, he tightened his control over the other son. Hasmukh was taken out of school and put to hard work in the factory that his father had set up. Hasmukh is obliged to his father for the training that he gave him. He holds that at the age of forty-five he is a very successful industrialist and one of the richest men in the city, it is all because of his schooling that he had under his father. He is unhappy with his son, Ajit because he would not follow suit the footsteps of his father. He tells him that he needs 'seasoning' to make him fit to run the company when his father would be no longer there. Hasmukh wants to make his son his true-copy and, Ajit, on the other hand, is not

ready to be merely a prototype of his father. He believes in living his own life and thinking his own thoughts.

What Dattani presents here is not an individual case but a representative of the changes. In the first half of the twentieth century, Indian economy fostered this patriarchal code. The son was expected to till the field in the same way his father did. In social, economic and family life, codes were fixed and each succeeding generation was taught to follow them in a rigorous manner. Business was also carried forward as a family enterprise from one generation to another. So, life was organized around the families rather than individuals whether in villages or in towns. The head of the family was supposed to be the custodian of the family traditions. In the play, Dattani shows both the strong desire of the older generation to preserve its authority over the young and the determined effort of the young to break free of the patriarchal code. Hasmukh thinks that his son is not what he wants his son to be. After his death, too, he manages to run the family according to his will.

Dattani focuses on the point that the real danger of the patriarchal code lies in denying an individual the opportunity for an independent growth. In the name of tradition, good manners and even duty, the son is expected to follow blindly whatever he is asked to do. This will deprive a man of his drive and initiative. Dattani calls the men who demand this kind of obedience as "weak men with false strength." He also condemns those who submit to this type of subjugation. Kiran recalls her own drunkard father who abused her mother and beat her. She remarks that her brothers have turned out like their father. They too come home with bottles of rum and abuse and beat their wives. It was the ill fate of Kiran that the same has recoiled on her life. She also married a drunkard and listened to his swearing. Like her mother, she too has been suffering silently as if everything was right with her and that she was happy in that home. At last, pathetically Kiran asks:

"Isn't it strange how repetitive life is? --- Where will all this end? Will the scars our parents lay on us remain forever?"⁶

In addition to its thematic richness, *Where There's a Will* is also a bold experiment in dramatic technique which holds a unique lesson for all practitioners of Indian drama. The comic elements of its theme are admirably matched by the antiquity of its dramatic

model. It is a comedy with slight farcical touches which yet makes a point about the way patriarchal men invariably fail to exist as true human beings. The action starts with Hasmukh, having come home from office, overhearing his son and Joint Managing Director of his firm complaining about his father's refusal to invest in new business ventures thought up by him. In a series of straight addresses or asides to the audience, Dattani takes the audience into the confidence. While arguing with Ajit, he intermittently addresses the audience and says:

"A smuggler's code! Just listen to him. He is talking to his father, believe it or not. (to Ajit) Son, how do I start explaining to you? (to the audience) Yes, how? You tell me. Well, I'll try. (to Ajit) When you reach my age ---
- Be brief." ⁷

After Hasmukh explains his views to his son Ajit, he turns to the audience and taking them in confidence asks whether he has tried well. This technique of Dattani adds flavour of liveliness to the comedy. All over the play, Hasmukh takes the grip of audience's ears and eyes and audience experiences an active participation in the play.

"The direct addresses by Hasmukh Mehta in *Where There's a Will* both alive and as a ghost owe their effectiveness to this employment of the peculiar craft of theatre. This is because a play lives in its performance and performance can derive its life only in complicity with an audience that shares the entire exercise". ⁸

Dattani has used a lever device of ghost who acts as a commentator on the action, although very biased one, his statements evoke laughter from the audience that meanwhile has learnt more. The culturally rooted idea of ghost hanging from a tamarind tree upside down is used to bring more fun. Even Hasmukh in ghost position lying on his back and letting his head and hands dangle over the side of the table and pointing at someone from the audience asserts the need for polishing that someone's shoes. This is typical Dattani technique which he used in the very first play, he has written. Dattani experiments with great technical daring and stretches the space and fills it in every available direction, even out front, playing thus with the audience and its expectations. John McRae comments:

“--- none of his plays is static within its time frame. They move between past and present, even between life and death, with the ease with which a character enters and leaves the stage.” ⁹

Dattani maintains this flexibility in his technique with a great skill.

Dattani's delightful and quick repartee is an absolutely indispensable part of his style. The audience is comfortable with the language as well as the milieu. While Preeti calls Sonal to the dining table to eat something, Sonal says: “You people sit. I'm not hungry.” ¹⁰ It is a typical Indianised expression. Such expressions add the Indian touch to the play. The conversation between Hasmukh and Sonal is typically Indian. Both of them are shown to be good at repartee and that is the success of Dattani's dramatic technique. When Sonal snatches the cigarette from Hasmukh reminding him of the doctor and her sister Minal:

“Hasmukh: Ha! Doctors! All they have to do is blame it all on my smoking and drinking. As for your sister Minal, she has as much brains as a mad monkey.

Sonal: Don't you dare to talk about my sister like that! She is concerned about your welfare and mine.” ¹¹

That is how a husband refers to the maternal members of wife and how a wife retorts a husband.

The sparkle of the dialogue and the texture of its presentation add new freshness to this play. To cite an example, here is the dead Hasmukh contemplating his photograph, put up by his son:

“What's this? A sandalwood garland? Don't I get fresh flowers everyday? When my father died, I used to put fresh flowers on his photograph everyday for a whole month before getting a sandalwood garland --- it was much bigger than this one. I also had it touched up to make him look more --- dignified. Of course, I don't need help in the department. But still, it could do with a bit of improvement. Those cheeks are too hollow. The lips are too tight ---.” ¹²

This speech possesses a typical Indian flavour in its reference to fresh flowers, sandalwood garland and also the concept of worshipping a photograph after death. But

what is far more innovative and original on the part of Dattani as the dramatist is his use of the injected dialogues of Hasmukh which, though unheard by the other characters introduce a further dimensions of implication for the benefit of the audience:

“Sonal: She (Preeti) is still very upset about the will, I know. I hope it doesn’t affect the baby. Upset mother upset babies.

Hasmukh: What is she carrying on about?

Sonal: I didn’t have a mother-in-law to help me with Aju. At least Preeti has got me.

Hasmukh: That was the trouble. If my mother had been alive when Aju was born, she would have taught her the right way to bring up sons.

Sonal: I brought my son up the right way.

Hasmukh: Rubbish! Any one who treats a grown man like a baby doesn’t know anything about bringing up parrots, I mean children.”¹³

Dattani has scattered such superficially comic and laughter evocative dialogues (sometimes trilogues) all over the play. In the last scene of the play, Kiran and Sonal are talking about the bossy nature of Hasmukh and at that time his ghost is speaking between both of them. Sonal and Hasmukh are putting two contradictory statements about the same person- Hasmukh. It shows Dattani’s unique dialogic strategy that seems to be an extension and a radical one – of the older tradition of having a character say something in an aside and then of showing him to do or say something contrary in the presence of other characters:

“Kiran: He was just like his father, wasn’t he?

Hasmukh: No. I wasn’t.

Sonal: Yes. He was.

Hasmukh: Don’t contradict me, woman!

Kiran: The same bossy nature?

Sonal:] (Together) No!

Hasmukh:] Yes!

Kiran: Did he ever disagree with his father?

Sonal:] (Together) No!

Hasmukh:

Yes!" ¹⁴

Dattani carefully structures the play to fit in with the needs of the plot. Though this is his very first play, he has handled the spacing out of the performance rather admirably.

The play is divided neatly into two halves, one prior to the death of Hasmukh and another post death. Hasmukh manipulatively exercises his power through the entire play: remaining present the whole time in the play; alive or as a ghost. The first half of the play with its resounding bickering sets the background for the complicated trouble that is to come.

Gender discrimination is a theme that Dattani returns to again and again. In this play it is interwoven with the old patriarchal code. *Where There's a Will* shows what can happen when these issues are pushed to the edge. However, this play has many interesting facets. It is a strong comment on the money-mindedness of people today – even personal relationships are based on money. Wife, son, daughter-in-law – are all interested only in the huge amount of wealth that garment tycoon Hasmukh Mehta has acquired. After his death too, his ghost stays on in the house observing all that is going on. All his life he has controlled his family not through love and affection, but through his money. Even after his death he tries to rule over them through his will about his money and property. Kiran's relationship is also based on money. She was useful to Hasmukh for the sake of money. She tells Sonal the reason of having affair with him:

"Sonal: Yes. I know that. So you had an affair with my husband because he respected you and trusted you.

Kiran: Mrs. Mehta, no woman has an affair with an older man, especially a married man, for a little bit of respect and trust. It was mainly for the money." ¹⁵

Kiran is at least honest. But Preeti madly and badly desires money with great passion which is very wrong. She managed to kill her father-in-law in a brilliant natural way by exchanging her vitamin tablets with his blood pressure controlling tablets. She was so much impatient to get his money.

Siam Sindhi Association arranged this play in Bangkok with the name '*Mad About Money*', which received both critical and popular acclaim. The colourless relationships between the two couples that comprise the family are developed in elaborate

portrayals that represent typically materialistic and money oriented upper middle class milieu.

Dattani treats his characters with understanding and sympathy whether they are good or bad, right or wrong. He portrays Kiran Jhaveri as an epitome of strong woman. Smart, shrewd, calculating and worldly wise Kiran, embodies qualities that Dattani trustworthily holds as positive, strong, and necessary for a woman. Like most women, who play gendered roles, Kiran is a victim too, but one who refuses to stay victimized. She prefers to be Hasmmukh's mistress with her eyes wide open, and aware of the benefits that she will derive from the relationship. Yet, she is a good hearted woman to whom even Sonal admires and denies comparing with mean-hearted Preeti. She turns the while house in a good family and promises to remain good friend forever.

The humour in the play, however, is a major redeeming factor and has its source largely in the interjections and asides of Hasmmukh as a ghost. Dattani's wicked humour is at its best in the first half, revealing itself in his better speeches like venom that Hasmmukh spits at everybody in general. Whatever he comments about his wife, Sonal and son, Ajit in front of the audience, creates humour as it is a general comment found everywhere. The audience harmonizes with their own experiences. Here is an instance:

"Hasmmukh: (sits on the sofa) Have you ever noticed how women are all alike in their behaviour? For instance, if you ask them whether breakfast or lunch or dinner is ready, they always say 'Yes'. And it never really is ready. An hour ago, before going for my walk, I asked my wife the same question- 'Is dinner ready? And she said, (imitates Sonal) 'Yes.' And it still isn't. I expected my daughter-in-law to have more sense. But what did she say when I asked her the same question? You heard her. (Imitates Preeti) 'Yes.' But she is an intelligent girl, I can tell you. She has her eye on my money. Why else would she agree to marry a dead loss like my son? ----." ¹⁶

Sonal never thinks independently. Whenever she wants to take any decision, she takes the opinion of her sister Minal. May it be about Hasmmukh's health or about appointing new maharaja or about rubbing cologne water on her forehead for migraine, every time

she consulted her sister on the phone. Sonal always lives in her sister's shadow. It was always Minal who decided what they should wear, what games they should play. She even decided which maharaja was suitable for their family. Even at Hasmukh's funeral, she sat beside Sonal and told her when to cry. Thus, Sonal's extremely relying on her sister Minal for everything, creates humour in the play. Such eccentricities of Sonal are the source of humour in the play.

In the second half of the play, the interjections and asides of Hasmukh as a ghost create major part of the humour in the play. When Hasmukh dies, he rises slowly, gets up and looks at his 'body' on the bed. He speaks in a natural voice, but much more calmly now. It creates humour:

"Hasmukh: I'm dead. I can see my own body lying still on the bed. Looking peaceful, but dead. I never imagined it would happen so soon. Well, it has. (To the audience) Didn't I tell you that if I carried on smoking like that I'd be dead in no time? I didn't believe it myself. I thought I was joking! --- (Sonal enters) --- There's my wife coming up to our bedroom. I can see through the walls. How will she react when she finds out? She will howl, she will wail, she will tear her hair and beat her head against the wall! Let's see."¹⁷

The ghost Hasmukh, hanging upside down as ghosts are wont to do in Indian cultural belief – the audience is forced to laugh by a community understanding. It is an Indian middle class parody. Hasmukh talking on the stage, unheard by the other characters, arouse laughter from audience. Kiran is asking questions to Sonal about dead Hasmukh. When Sonal answers positively, Hasmukh answers the same questions negatively and when Sonal answers negatively, Hasmukh answers positively; it is superficially comic and evocative of laughter.

The comedy runs riots at times but at times, it hints at pathos, in the special kind of bonding that takes place between Sonal and Kiran. They share their opinions on Hasmukh's conniving and devious nature. In their intimate moments, Kiran says that her father and Hasmukh were weak men with false strength. Pathetically, she reveals herself to Sonal, saying that she learnt her lessons from being so close to life, watching her

mother tolerating her father when he came home every day with bottles of rum beating her mother and calling her names. It is the height when she says:

“Kiran: Isn’t it strange how repetitive life is? --- I – I too I’m like my Mother. I married a drunkard and I listened to his swearing. And I too have learnt to suffer silently. Oh! Where will all this end? Will the scars our parent’s lay on us remain forever?” ¹⁸

Dattani has a way of creating and locating the self of his characters. In this play Hasmukh Mehta exercises hegemonic power over the rest of his family to perpetuate his own conception of the self, which he has in turn, received from his father. To cite an example:

“Ajit: I mean that you want to run the show, play Big Boss as long as you can or as long as God permits. And when all of a sudden, you are ‘called to a better world’, you will still want to play Big Boss. And you can do it through me. In short, you want me to be you.

Hasmukh: I should have prayed for a daughter. Yes, I want you to be me! What’s wrong with being me?

Ajit: And what becomes of me? The real me. I mean, if I am you, then where am I?” ¹⁹

Hasmukh devices the means to continue this hegemony even from the grave. His will becomes the ironic instrument to power and shapes the destiny of the family after his death. But the irony is that Hasmukh transfers his controlling power to a woman – Kiran who is a woman of strong identity. His own sense of self remains undefined until Kiran and Sonal sit together to peel out the true identity of Hasmukh. Kiran explores that Hasmukh was living his life in his father’s shadow, he had no life of his own; whatever he did was planned for him by his father. In the end Sonal too confesses that she had always lived in her sister Minal’s shadow. Interestingly, it is after dismembering Hasmukh and membering Kiran that Sonal finds herself into her own. Now Sonal wishes to keep Kiran with her forever.

Though Dattani has abundant stage sense, it is at places (particularly in his later half) marred by his over enthusiasm in presenting comic pictures, somewhat loose structure and an unlimited use of novel techniques.

To conclude, through *Where There's a Will*, Dattani raises certain cardinal questions regarding the follies, foibles and prejudices of Indian society. It is a comedy with slight farcical touches, making a point about the way patriarchal men invariably fail to exist as true human beings. The play points at the patriarchal dominance of the family head, Hasmukh Mehta, a money oriented man who is ready to sacrifice human values. He is a domineering husband, heavy father and tyrannical boss and is gradually dwarfed and diminished to the point of insignificance. A well-made plot provides opportunities to the characters to interact and illustrate through their relationship Dattani's motif of exposing the human eccentricities.

The sparkle of the dialogues and the texture of its presentation add new freshness to the comedy. The speech in the play possesses typically Indian flavour at many instances. Dattani is far more innovative and original as a dramatist in his use of the injected dialogues of Hasmukh which though unheard by the other characters, tells much to the audience. Superficially comic and evocative of laughter this innovative technique of dialogue finitely embodies a kind of dialogic strategy in that we are privileged to hear two contradictory statements about the same person. Dattani's use of a visible / invisible, audible / inaudible ghost significantly pushes back the accepted borders of naturalistic drama. He ends the play with an unstressed symbolism indicating Hasmukh's reappearing through his daughter-in-law's son.

Like most of the plays of Dattani, this too, is a complex one where he has woven more than one theme in a plot. The dominant note of the play, however, is the father-son relationship in the post-colonial Indian society which is increasingly becoming individualistic. With various relationships, issues and murder mystery, the play is gripping one where the audience or the reader eagerly waits to see what happens next. Dattani's wicked humour is at its best in the first-half of the play. In performance, the play works with subtle outlines that are handled deftly, notwithstanding the fact that this is Dattani's first play. It has always been a great success on stage as it derives its life only in complicity with an audience that shares the entire exercise. However, he has real flair for drama which has proved his maturity in his later plays.

02.03: *Dance Like a Man* (1989):

Mahesh Dattani's second play, *Dance Like a Man* deals with Dattani's pet concerns - gender - through one of his principal passions, dance. There is something very "Indian" about the play. He loves the traditional art form, especially Bharatnatyam which is integral to this play. He wrote this play when he was learning Bharatnatyam in his mid twenties. It is a play about a young man who wanted to be a dancer, growing up in a world that believes dance is for women. The play was first performed at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore, on 22nd September 1989, as a part of the Deccan Harold Theatre Festival. It was subsequently performed at the NCPA Experimental Theatre, Mumbai, on 14th February 1990 with Dattani as an actor as well as a director. It was also performed by Prime Time in 1995 with Lillette Dubey as an actor as well as a director. This production continues to tour occasionally.

This is a play about performs; and uses theatre to demonstrate how in a world of hypocrisy, acting becomes a way of life. Some critics say that the play probes into three generations of conflict by exploring and juxtaposing the contemporaneous and the early history of India in personal terms. According to some critics, it is a powerful human drama that provides an insight into the contemporary Indian social scene, reflecting the aspirations of a middle class South Indian couple who, by their choice of profession as dancers, reflect the past and the present Indian culture, identities and gender roles. It demonstrates through the text and the plot, a hybridized state that emerges by both domination and subversion of tradition. It is also interpreted in regard to man's struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, cultural frame of gender and repressed desire.

Some critics view this play as stereotypes of gender roles, pitied against the idea of the artist in search of creativity within the restrictive construction of the world that he is forced to inhabit. Some regard this play as a representative of a post colonial condition, of ambivalent cultural moods, forms, transitions, and translations in Indian society. The play and the playwright create the post colonial scenario, based on new productions of culture through simultaneous assimilation and dismembering of tradition. Some critics consider the play as an exposition of important questions on the very constituents of a

man's identity – in terms of sexuality, as the head of the family and as an artist. The play reflects on the self and the significance of the other, through the frameworks of gender and the gender roles: the prostitute as a dancer and an artist; the man as a dancer; the long-haired guru with an effeminate walk - categories that the older generation fed on its perception of the self cannot come to terms with. The play appears to explore larger issues like the socially sanctioned male-female stereotypes, and the conflicting demands of the marriage and career. Here the researcher attempts to examine how these issues have been tackled and to trace the different levels at which the encounter of patriarchy and gender has been rendered in the play.

Jairaj and Ratna, in their youth, are exposed to the anger of Jairaj's father, who does not understand their devotion to dance. Amritlal Parikh is entrenched in his own tradition and believes that Bharatnatyam is a craft of prostitutes. So he feels that no self-respecting person should perform such a dance, particularly a man. Two decades later, the couple is forced to confront their troubled past when their daughter Lata, brings her fiancé Viswas, to their house to meet her parents. Exposed to this alien environment of dancers, Viswas acts as a catalyst to reveal dark secrets of the family's relationships and its generational conflicts that climaxed in the horrific death of the son of Ratna and Jairaj. Amritlal carries the baggage of his own times and tries to manipulate the next generation- Jairaj and Ratna – to carry it forward. Jairaj and Ratna, ironically, do the same with their own child and try to pass on their preferences to Lata. Lata is sure that her parents couldn't care less who or what their son-in-law be as long as he lets her dance.

In this handling down of cultural context, a number of revelations are made and several hidden stories are told. These stories begin to reveal as fissures and cracks that widen enough to crumble the entire cultural structure. The structure that Amritlal passes on conditionally to his son causes irreparable harm to him and his marriage to Ratna. Amritlal is the icon of new independent India, having fought for the freedom of his country. He grudgingly decides to allow his son to practice the dance form, traditionally performed only by women. He allows this only on the ground of preserving Jairaj's hobby. But he doesn't want that his sons should dance his whole life making it his career. It tortures him that his son with his passion for dance is all set to undo the stereotypes that his imperious father, Amritlal, who claims to be a social reformer, carries. An old *devdasi*

teaching Ratna the ancient secrets of her dance, the prostitute as an artist, his son – a man as a dancer learning from a long-haired guru with womanly walk, tortures him seriously. All these torturous contradictions impose him to make a pact with Ratna. He thinks that he could at least change his son through his daughter-in-law. Dance is a passion to her, too. Now he will consent to her career in dance only if she helps him pull Jairaj out of his obsession and makes him a 'manly man'. The two can enjoy the security of his riches. Thus the social bias against the art of dance among men is highlighted in the play:

“Gender identity is yet another theme that dominates the plays of Mahesh Dattani. *Dance Like a Man* questions the propriety of a man overstepping his jurisdiction by taking to dancing, Bharatnatyam. He is ostracized for he chooses to dance like a woman though his dancing is a way of expressing his identity.”²⁰

In fact, Jairaj with his obsession for dance is all set to demolish these stereotypes,. Giving a twist to these stereotypes associated with 'gender' roles that view solely women at the receiving end of the oppressive power structures of patriarch society, the play dispels this notion and explores the nature of the tyranny than even men might be subject to within such structures. A man is never free to sacrifice his life for the sake of art like Bharatnatyam at his will. Dattani takes his subject from within the complicated dynamics of the modern urban family for this play. He presents the hybridized state that emerges from both domination and subversion of tradition. The play moves around two historical time periods, 1940s and 1980s. Jairaj is reminiscent of his past and lives in the same bungalow, where he has kept various memories of his authoritative father. He refuses to let go off this property despite being offered large amounts of money and shows an awareness of his heritage. He is proud of the symbols that remind him of these heritages and lives with the 'glorious past'. Even, Lata is sure that her father will not present the shawl to Viswas, her fiancé as it was presented by the King of Mysore to Amritlal. Though Jairaj was always in conflict with his father, he preserved the mansion, the library as well as the precious shawl as the symbol of past glory. His father was the first among the educated elite class to shun Western suits and wear *kurtas* and shawls on formal occasions. This process of negation of father's old traditional views and the assimilation by breaking the code and dancing like a woman produces a hybridized

context or a post colonial context for Jairaj. He thus emerges with his own personal identity through negation and assimilation of cultural norms and tradition. On one hand he assimilates Indian traditional grace and negates gender roles in dancing.

Amritlal was a freedom fighter, a revolutionary with a liberal mind. He consented to have a daughter-in-law from outside his community. He gave priority to eradicate certain unwanted and ugly shameful practices like dowry and untouchability in society. Yet Jairaj calls him conservative and prudish as the British rulers, as he objects Ratna's practicing in the courtyard of a prostitute. He sends five hundred rupees to that old woman in compensation for depriving her of Ratna. Amritlal can't tolerate the idea that people peer over her wall to see his daughter-in-law dancing in a prostitute's courtyard. He wishes that his visitors could not find the dance guruji in her house. He wants to see his son and daughter-in-law happy. When they come back defeated he accepts them generously. He gives them money whenever they need. He lets them use his library hall for dance practice. Yet he says that he has far better things to do with his money than handling it all over to them. He lets his daughter-in-law dance as she liked but about Jairaj he says:

"A woman in the man's world may be considered as being progressive. But man in a woman's world is pathetic." ²¹

The title itself is to be noted because the play is about the gender battle but actually it is reaching out to our roots. It is not the matter of being progressive, that is the matter of being sick. Amritlal knows that his son was not a brilliant dancer like Ratna. He begged help from her to make Jairaj an adult, a grown up man.

Dattani realizes the paradoxes that the Indian society faces, and through the system of differentiation, as reflected in this play, he produces a postcolonial construct about the historical reality of India. Dattani is aware of India's rich cultural tradition, which is a great advantage and a disadvantage as well; because we are living in present and there are so many challenges facing us. Thus Dattani's issues put before the audience the question of society and their identity. Gouri Nilakantan Mehta remarks on this:

"His play, *Dance Like a Man* is representative of a postcolonial condition of ambivalent cultural moods, forms, transitions and translations in Indian society." ²²

Amritlal's reformatory ideas about society are a kind of postcolonial enlightenment. His character is thus, the hybridization of negation and assimilation of old and new social concepts. In the materialistic society of contemporary India, Dattani in his typical style raises important questions on the very constituents of man's identity – in terms of as the head of family, as an artist and sexuality. The play reflects on the self and the significance of the other through the framework of gender and gender roles. Vijay Kumar Das writes:

“Dattani's plays hold mirror unto contemporary Indian society in certain respects. The struggle for the individual human beings for a space in the society is upper most in his mind and therefore, he makes an attempt in his plays to create this “space” for them.”²³

When Lata was a little girl, she used to stand near the door and watch her parents practice dancing. She had magical effect of their practice on her and decided to be a dancer. She tells her fiancé about the musical, rhythmic heritage in passion. She is going to marry Viswas on various conditions. He is going to let her practice here, dance through out her life and have children only when she desires. She is marrying Viswas, a son of a wealthy mithai shop owner who owns half the buildings on the Commercial Street. She is the youth of postcolonial era, who knows well how to hybridize ‘art’ with ‘mart’. She is sure that, being the daughter in law of a wealthy mithaiwala, she will never come in conflict with money problems to preserve her art. Her parents and she have chosen Viswas only because he would let her dance forever. Lata finds the golden mid between art and prosperity by marrying Viswas. She is open-eyed towards both these things. In this sense, she is wiser than her father. She yokes art and materialistic view together. So she becomes successful in her life. She finds artistic fulfilment as well as materialistic fulfilment simultaneously. She proves a brilliant dancer as well as a brilliant wife for Viswas. She finds best ‘assimilation’ of art with materialistic life. Her career as well as her married life is in harmony.

Jairaj and Ratna fulfil their dreams in the form of Lata. Though Ratna and Jairaj were presumably happily married, they lived strained relationship. Their life was shadowed by the death of their son Shankar and when they discovered that he died of having extra dose of opium, they dismantled the icon of their past glory. Jairaj sells his

mansion which he had held dearly and lives in the flat. They gain both pity and respect from the audience, not by simple negation of traditional Indian society, but by representing a hybridized post-colonial condition, that questions identity. Thus the play is representative of ambivalent cultural moods in Indian society.

Patriarchy is the recurring theme in Dattani's plays. The play, *Dance Like a Man* is set in Chennai where dance is an integral part of life and a favourite mode of aesthetic expression. Here Amritlal stands as the symbol of patriarchal dominance, who expected that his son and daughter-in-law should follow his advice. Jairaj doesn't earn his living by dancing. Both of them spent the money of Amritlal. He is not happy to provide Jairaj money for 'dancing like a woman'. But he is not as harsh patriarch as Hasmukh in his first play, *Where There's a Will*. Hasmukh Mehta, the patriarch is the supreme malcontent with the typical problems of familial expectations on the other hand, Amritlal heartily wishes to make his son a grown up man. When Jairaj and Ratna come back defeated he says:

"I don't gain much pleasure by reminding you that you had vowed never to come back to this house ----. It never was my intention to get you to hate me. What parent would want that from his children? So I have changed my mind. I will allow you to dance. And I shall be very happy if you can earn your livelihood from it. If you ask me for money, I shall not refuse but I will be disappointed." 24

Amritlal belongs to a noble family. He is sethji of the town and yet he lets Jairaj and Ratna dance. He is good to them but objects them in certain ways of practicing dance as some fears linger in his mind. He knows the blemishes that follow while keeping contact with the artists like long-haired dance guru or the old prostitute as guru. His objection is a part of preventing forthcoming dangers or disgrace. Unlike Hasmukh in *Where There's a Will*, Amritlal is a caring and affectionate father and grand father whose expectations are in fact not selfish. His fatherly anxiety and affection are nicely manifested in the play. In fact, Amritlal's objection is prophetic. It is observed:

"As a person, who knows his past, Dattani talks about the Guru-Shishya parampara but as a modern Indian he is against the Guru

and Chamacha tradition! What Dattani says is that what we call modern India is really a negation of the real India. ” 25

The identity crisis is at the bottom of Dattani's play. Amritlal is trying to keep his noble familiar background intact, but in vain. He wants his son to be a grown up man with a strong honored identity. On the other hand, Jairaj wishes to make his son Shankar a dancer, who will dance like a man the dance of Shiva on his grand father's head – tandavnritya. Unfortunately, Shankar dies and both of them drink to make their daughter talk of the town in dance competition. Ratna wishes Lata more fame than they had. She is ready to do anything to see that Lata reaches the top. Even she is ready to be sweet to Chandrakala, who is her bitter rival. She doesn't hesitate in playing the politics in art. She prepares a ground for her daughter's success by managing rave reviews for her. She promises C. V. Suri to make him the chief guest at the Navratri Utsav as she knows that he loves to be garlanded on stage.

Jairaj: Doesn't she want to read the reviews?

Ratna: She's afraid it's going to be bad.

Jairaj: Only the *Express* gives reviews the very next day.
The others [*Herald* and *The Times*] take at least another day.

Ratna: Not this time. They all promised. I promised C. V. Suri I would make him the chief guest at Navratri Utsav ---- [Exit to the kitchen]” 26

The fast disappearing dividing line between good and bad in the present world of transition – between what is right and what is not, between who is a hero and who is an anti-hero - tends to become meaningless in a society caught in vulgar and chief popularity.

It is obvious that Ratna and Jairaj, who have grown apart under a single roof and have done enough harm to each other and their daughter Lata, have thrust their frustrated ambition on her. Lata is not a brilliant dancer but she has the sense of life. She knows the drawbacks in her mother and vows to abandon them in her own life. Her mother is moody, irritating, and bores Lata by telling her the miseries of her life. Jairaj has lived through these miseries. Muttering to herself Lata says:

“Oh! That’s one thing I’ll never do. Bore my children talking about the failures in my life.” ²⁷

Lata is the icon of assimilation between the heritage of dance and comfortable married life of a common woman. She has balanced ideas of art and life. She becomes the bridge between the crumbled structure of her maternal family and wealthy and materialistic in-laws family. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri puts it very rightly when she says:

“The play focuses on the merits of multiplicity, transcending mere ‘tolerance’ to recognition and empathy, while situating itself historically within the context of the materialistic, acquisitive society of the 1990s.” ²⁸

Dattani is a craftsman in the technique of his plays. In *Dance Like a Man*, he gives much importance to his role-switching. His successful experiment of using Lata and Viswas to play the young Ratna and Jairaj and the old Jairaj taking on the role of his father Amritlal is innovative. It is the height of his craftsmanship as a sophisticated playwright. Lillette Dubey has done more than 150 productions of the play with her group all over the world, making it an all time success. She praises it as a ‘beautifully crafted’ play. She admires the way it moves back and forth in time, its use of one actor to play more than one role which really tests the actor’s talent, too:

“Moving effortlessly between the past, the present and the future (as past), synchronically dissolving the different time shifts, the play travels back and forth between several generations.” ²⁹

Thus, the shifting from living rooms into garden and the changing of the characters accordingly takes the audience into the world of suspense. The tension-ridden, distrustful and suspicious life of the artists is exposed successfully through this method. Such a technique contributes to the fluidity between the present and the past and shifts from the virtual to the fictive space. The schematization of spaces and the use of levels and areas led by lighting are engineered in such a manner that, the characters seem to be in the grip of something larger than themselves.

Dattani shows his deep insight in the handling of situations and characters in *Dance Like a Man*. His art has grown subtle and suggestive in the play. He ably produces both round and flat characters in the play. All the characters are really memorable and

well-developed. Ratna as the wife of Jairaj faces with the feminine question of identity and dilemma of feminine sensibility to an extent that brings forth the colonial perspectives of society. Dattani becomes successful in presenting a mutual distrust and disagreement between Jairaj and Ratna. These two characters stand in contrast with Viswas and Lata. Dattani presents all the characters with vivid outlines of their mental make up.

Dattani shows his command of language in the play. The playwright uses the original Hindi words like – kurta, mithai, guruji, jalebi, gulmohar, Navratri Utsav etc. as the use of English equivalents cannot fully bring out the concepts. His dialogue is crisp and pointed. When Dattani is critical of the contemporary society, he composes powerful dialogue of a serious nature. At the same time, he can be witty as the occasion demands. It is obvious through the dialogue between Amritlal and Jairaj as well as Jairaj and Ratna. Here is an example:

Ratna: Why bring it up now after forty ---

Jairaj: You brought it up. What did you say? I stopped being a man for you because we couldn't survive on our own.

Ratna: I didn't say like that!

Jairaj: Your face tells me you did.

Ratna: You mustn't take notice of what I say when I'm upset.

Jairaj: That is the only time you make sense to me.”³⁰

Thus, the dialogue goes on igniting the issue seriously and there is the height of wit when Jairaj takes the subject very seriously to Ratna's greedy uncle. He repeats her sentence and says: "I'm sorry. You mustn't take notice of what I say when I'm drunk.”³¹

There are some smart comments on social codes in the play. When Viswas tells that his father is busy chasing government officials to sanction a plan for a multi-storied mithai complex, Jairaj comments that that would be a paradise for the Marwari community. The comment throws light on the sweets mania of the community. When there are moments of depression and change in moods Ratna can sit in the kitchen crying, but Jairaj faces the same problem by drinking. He recommends it for it keeps you from time. He says that he never cry and Ratna comments that he never cry because he is a 'man'. Dattani focuses on the fact that crying is the domain of only women and not of the men.

The end of the play, *Dance Like a Man* seems to be a little bit hasty. The discovery of the death of the son of Ratna and Jairaj comes as a shock to the audience. A clever watcher would question Dattani, why the parents were taking it usual when Shankar (their child) was sleeping all the time silently. Could parents remain so careless about their children? The question remains in the mind of the audience. At the end, the garden changes into the living room and Jairaj tells the audience that they have moved to their flat. Here the end of the play seems hasty and too much dramatic but when Jairaj says that they lacked the magic to dance like God; and the comment again lifts the height of the play. The play however, seems to fail in creating an effect of realizing the psychological conflict that Jairaj and Ratna face. As the play is based on the lives of artist, it seems that common audience could not involve deeply in the internal conflict of the protagonists. The second thing is that the sudden and at times unacceptable changes in scenes and times seem to break the link of understanding. These are the limitations of the play. However, there is no doubt that the play *Dance Like a Man* is able to capture the pulse of the urban audience by reflecting the problems of its day.

Many of Dattani's admirers claim, the key to his success is that he uses the family unit as the starting point for all his plays. Keeping in mind thus family unit at center, his dramas are often played out on multi-level layers. As Gouri, Nilakanta Mehta observes; Dattani takes his subjects from within the complicated dynamics of the modern urban family for his play, *Dance Like a Man*. Dattani's use of naturalistic theatre leaves the audience thinking that, "Well, this is happening around us in real life." The audience will empathize with the characters; look into them, with a critical mind. The play deals with various issues and comments on the social structure and the position of the Bharatnatyam dancers, especially male dancers within it. The play has proved Dattani to be a creative genius with serious insight that educates the people by enlightening the people about the merits and demerits of our society and nation.

To conclude, *Dance Like a Man* is a powerful human drama that provides an insight into the contemporary Indian social scene, reflecting the aspirations of a middle class South Indian couple. By the choice of profession as dancers, the couple reflects the past and the present Indian culture, identities and the gender roles. In this handling down of cultural context, a number of revelations are made and several 'hidden' stories are told

that reveal the fissures and cracks in the society that widen enough to crumble the entire structure. Dattani creates a range of layers in the play, in a language close to everyday speech and humour that is easily accessible to any viewer. While situating itself historically within the context of the materialistic, acquisitive society of the 1990s, the play focuses on the merits of a large variety, going beyond mere 'tolerance' to recognition and empathy. Using the flashback technique and the split-scene device, the play moves effortlessly between the past, the present and the future and travels back and forth between several generations. Dattani innovatively uses Lata and Viswas to play the young Ratna and Jairaj during these shifts and the old Jairaj taking on the role of his father, Amritlal with this successful experiment, Dattani displays the sophistication that he has by now acquired the place of a master playwright. *Dance Like a Man*, in its finality, exercises a strong imprint on the minds of the audiences. The multiple layers of the Indian society, the paradoxes of stereotypical gender roles, the strained relationship of Jairaj and Ratna, a presumably happily married couple are dismantled through shock. With great command of language Dattani is successful in creating the post colonial scenario, illustrating the truths about the Indian society through simultaneous assimilation and dismembering of tradition. *Dance Like a Man* is one more feather in Dattani's dramatic crown which unquestionably shows poise and balance of his maturity as a playwright.

02.04: *Tara* (1990):

Written in 1990, Dattani's third play *Tara* is the most often performed play. It used to be '*Twinkle Tara*', but Alyque Padamsee suggested that this might make it sound like a children's play, which it isn't. It is about young people but the issues are serious. It is performed all over the places, in schools and colleges, amateur groups and repertories. It was a box-office success in Mumbai, Kolkatta and New Delhi. It was subsequently performed as *Tara* at Sophia Bhabha Hall by Theatre Group, Mumbai on November 9, 1991. After the Bangalore premier, it was produced in Mumbai and Delhi where it received rave reviews. Dealing with gender issue in the play, he becomes a spokesperson of all the marginalised section. He was also awarded the Sahitya Kala Award for best production of this play, in the year 2000. It is not just the story of the protagonist of the play *Tara*, but it is admired as the story of every girl child in Indian family whether urban or rural. One of Dattani's best loved plays the world over, *Tara*, addresses questions of gender in many ways.

It is believed that Dattani chooses expressionism to illustrate the continuous struggle of contemporary urban Indian in familial, social and cultural spheres to create his individual identity. This struggle is the subject of almost all the plays of Mahesh Dattani including *Tara*. The critics see in the play the battles, the victories and the defeats of an Indian family coping with the trauma of freak children and their survival. It exposes the existing patriarchal stereotypes of the Indian mindset, which has always preferred a boy child to a girl child. *Tara* is an ideal character of Dattani which has been widely applauded and variedly interpreted. To some critics, Dattani in this play has tried to depict the feminine side of oneself which always has to come to terms with the society which favours male in a male dominated world.

According to some critics, though this is a play about injustice done to women, it is also a play about the injustice to men such as Chandan. It opens with Chandan changed into Dan in order to set himself free from the guilt of killing his sister. Though the innocent boy had nothing to do with his sister's untimely death, he bears the strain of his grandfather's and mother's cruelty. To some critics the play *Tara* also relates to the pain of forced separation (due to the partition of the subcontinent) and its lingering ill effects that surface in periodic communal riots and in confusion in our notions of modernity and

our attitudes to the family and community mark Indian social reality. If the nation seems to have been inserted by the force here in the reading of *Tara*, then one can say that, it seems to stage a large part of our nation, particularly our attitude to gender. According to some scholars, the play sets forth for us the deep fissures and conflicts that we have learnt to live with, all our identity markers being obstacle courses in our realization of ourselves - language, religion, caste, culture, class and gender. Some cite that Dattani does not want us to forget that the play is not simply about gender, but about our notions of normality and disability as well. Though the play is about motivations of individual characters, and about the construction of gender identity, to some critics, it is also about the battlefield called the family. According to Dattani, life is complicated, family values are a sham made of compromises, and middle class morality is only a façade. *Tara* is mainly about the battlefield called the family and is about the sense of community as much as it is about money, power and patriarchy, and the basic unit of the nation – the family.

There may be many entry points into *Tara*, but one cannot deny that primary theme is the ways, we Indians, discriminate between male and female children. Our country has a sad history of female feticide and discrimination of women. On one level, it is about the objective inhumanity of science and the perverse uses to which it can be put. It could be classified as a search for the unified self or as a mirror of familial relationships. But the researcher would like to see it in the light of forced harmony. Everybody yearns for a normal life, yet no one is normal. Advances in science and technology are of no importance because they are tainted by their human associations. Our own desires and prejudices will decide how we use our scientific progress and how we use our technological advances. Here, Dattani alerts us to the importance of the motive in the drama of our lives. At one level, the play presents the objective inhumanity of science and the perverse uses to which it can be put. At another, it is about our search for the unified self as Dattani himself comments.

The plot, to put it in a nutshell, is about the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins following the discovery that their physical separation was manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favour the boy – Chandan over the girl – Tara. The play deals with their emotional separation, when they come to know that they were three legs. The third leg actually belonged to the girl. But the grandfather

manipulated the operation in such a way that the boy got both the legs. The leg wasted away as it didn't survive on the boy either and both of them remained with one leg. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan, and attempts to repress the guilt, he feels over his sister's death by living without a personal history. The viciousness of the elders not only takes away the life of Tara, but also ruins the life of Chandan who was very much attached to his sister. For no fault of his own, Chandan is forced to lead a life of guilt. He could not forgive himself for the atrocity done towards his sister. He considers himself responsible for her death which resulted into his refuge in London. When his father informs him about his mother's death, he refuses to come back to India. In fact he is not living his life in real sense of the word; he undergoes a punishment called life.

One of Dattani's best loved plays the world over, *Tara* addresses the questions of gender in many ways. Though it is the generally accepted interpretation of the play in India, for Dattani this play is more about the 'gendered' self about acknowledging the female side of oneself. The first scene of *Tara* is set in London with Dan, a playwright, recalling his childhood with his sister, a Siamese twin attempting to dramatize it all through a series of flashbacks. The play looks at the battles, the victories and the defeats of an Indian family, coping with the trauma of freak children and their survival. It also exposes the existing patriarchal stereotypes of the Indian mind set which has always preferred a boy child to a girl child.

The tale is narrated by Chandan (Dan), the male half of the whole of which the 'other' is Tara. On the usual split-level stage that is a Dattani trademark, the realistic level is the bed-sitter of Chandan, in London. The set below is the downright zone of memory, where the past is played out, and the god like Dr. Thakkar occupies the one on the highest level throughout the play. Patel, Gujarati, is married to Bharati, a Kannadiga and indeed their marriage is obviously not free from the ramifications of their social context. This inter-caste love marriage forced Patel to leave his parents. Patel's family disowned him. Bharati's father was a very influential person. But Patel without taking any help from him became the general manager of Indo-Swede Pharmacia, the biggest pharmaceutical company in the country. Bharati gave birth to Siamese twins who underwent surgical separation because they were joined at birth. The play deals with their

emotional separation when they come to know that they were born with three legs. The third leg actually belonged to the girl, but Bharati's father got involved personally in the discussion with the doctor. Third leg would have survived on Tara as a major part of the blood supply to it was provided by her. Bharati and her father had a private meeting with Dr. Thakkar and an unethical decision was taken. They manipulated the operation in such a way that the boy Chandan would get both legs. The doctor had agreed for this as he could get help from Bharati's father in starting the largest nursing home in Bangalore. With Bharati's father's political influence he had acquired three acres of prime land in the heart of the city from the state. As planned by them, Chandan had two legs – for two days. The leg was amputated- piece of dead flesh which could have - might have - been Tara. It was the unusual nature of the operation - a forced harmony- a grave mistake by them.

Thus, the society is living and moving in forced harmony. Subhash Chandra rightly states it thus: "It is the socio-cultural system which is responsible for her death. The beliefs, the attitudes and prejudices that are deep rooted in the collective Indian cultural psyche become instrumental in taking Tara's life." ³² With prejudiced concept of male domination, Tara is discriminated by her family and not by nature. In fact, nature had provided the second leg to her, but it is surgically, consciously denied by the family. It is a conspiracy against her. Thus Tara's tragedy is the result of forced harmony.

The cosmos has a natural harmony and everything is in harmony in its best natural order. But man wants to conquer on the natural harmony and put everything according to his notions of harmony. It is the forced harmony. In maintaining the frame-work of society-created concepts of harmony, the family is distorted into great inconsistency. This forced harmony has created complicated family conflicts. Bharati's excessive concern and love for Tara, her concern for Tara's future, her empathy and sympathy for her, her desire to donate her kidney to Tara even when there is another donor- everything is motivated by her realization that she has denied Tara her due leg. It was her unethical decision that caused the particular disability in her daughter. This horrific knowledge leads to her mental breakdown. This manipulated operation was the sole cause of breakdown between Bharati and her husband Patel, too. Though theirs was the love marriage, it turned loveless; instead became full of hatred by this forced harmony.

Neither this couple, nor their children lived in harmony. The grandfather, who left a big property and a house in Bangalore for Chandan, has also not achieved harmony in his life. Even the property left by him for Chandan failed in bringing harmony in his cursed life. Chandan's life is cursed by this forced harmony. At the end of the play there is the voice-over of Dan. He says, "Someday, after I die, stranger will find this recording and play it. ... Only a voice - that once belonged to an object. An object like other objects in a cosmos, whose orbits are determined by those around. Moving in a forced harmony." ³³

Dattani wants to give us the message of natural harmony. God's wish is natural harmony. As Dan says, "May be God never wanted us to be separated. Destiny desires strange things. We were meant to die and our mortal remains preserved in formaldehyde for future generations to study. Our purpose in life was may be that." ³⁴ Thus, under the prejudiced concept of harmony, people are made to work under various injustices. This forced harmony does harm to men as well as women. Bharati and Patel's relationship is no healthier. They are two poles under one roof. Both of them are engaged all the time in humiliating and hating each other. The love marriage has changed into hated bindings. Bharati suffers so much that she becomes mad and is put under the observation of a psychiatrist. Though the surgery was done without informing Patel, he is not free of blame himself. He has been shown to believe in patriarchal values himself, treating Chandan differently from Tara. He makes plans for Chandan's future, and tries to make a man of him. He too believes in gender hierarchy and sends Chandan to England against his will. He doesn't like that Chandan helps his mother sort out her mistake in knitting. He nearly breaks upon in anger: "How dare you do this to him? but you can think of turning him into a sissy- teach him to knit!" ³⁵ He orders Chandan to go with him to the office until his college starts. Helping mother is rotting at home, he thinks.

Chandan is the recipient of all ill-starred, unwanted tragic gifts who carries forever the burden of having wasting Tara's leg and blighting her life. This role is assigned to him simply because of his being born a male. In fact, he loves Tara as his own self and has no notion of any kind of male dominance in him. He wants to apologize from her, wants to ask for her forgiveness, and he wants to demonstrate how much harm we create by marginalizing the feminine. He says: "But somewhere, sometime, I look up at a shooting star ... and wish. I wish that a long forgotten person would forgive me.

Wherever she is.”³⁶ He wants to ask for her forgiveness because he too is a part of the forced harmony of the world in which he lives. First of all he was forced out from one comfortable womb and separated. Then onwards all the time he cried for her company. He felt alone, incomplete, and insecure without her. Even at the college age, he needed her company, but his patriarchal father planned everything for his future, never considering how he felt incomplete without Tara’s presence with him. Chandan’s grandfather left all his property to him and neglected Tara, but Chandan was not interested in the property; the huge house left to him gave him the creeps. He is coward and afraid of meeting new people. Tara had the strength and wit which he lacked he thought. He found no difference between Tara and him. And the thought of this truth pleased him. As G. J. V. Prasad puts it: “.... if we could learn to value both sides of ourselves, give equal importance to feminine and the masculine, we would have a completely differently abled world, a world of real abilities and possibilities. This is why the play ends with both of them whole and complete, with two legs each, because they are finally, in his memory, beyond nature and society.”³⁷ Even Bharati is also the victim of ‘forced harmony’. At a critical moment she managed the surgery with Dr. Thakkar to put herself in traditionally harmonized family. But after that moment of surgery the horrific knowledge of surgery leads to her mental breakdown. From that moment she said goodbye to the peace of her mind and is always close to hysteria.

Familial setting is the typical specialty of Dattani’s plays. Dattani uses rather unlikely ‘freak’ case to lay bare the injustices in the conventional Indian family meted out to the girl child. It is an enthralling play that comments on a society that treats the children who share the same womb differently. It also suggests that it is the woman who continues to be willing instrument in the vicious cycle. Dr. Thakkar is the representative of those who sweep away even scientific considerations for mercenary reasons. The stage settings are invented to mixing the multiple layers of the societal and the familial locations. Dattani effectively achieves an objective distancing by experimenting and juggling with theatrical devices. It is a confined world that Dattani depicts. The play begins at the end and the exposition is through the meta-theatrical dimension. Dan, the older Chandan is a narrator figure who is writing a play about his twin sister, Tara. The narrator is non-linear and the play is predominantly a recall of memory with a

predetermined closure. It moves back and forth in time and arrives at the starting point. Old news paper cuttings, telephonic conversations, snippet from a television interview with Dr. Thakkar who records the progress of the medical advancement with indifference – all build up the action. The doctor occupies the highest level of the multi-level stage. The realistic level shows Dan making an effort to write. The end however shows him tearing up whatever he has written seeking to make Tara's tragedy his own. The dramatic structure, thus, works to produce a feeling in the audience towards something more intangible than the species themselves. But the effect also produces an attitude towards the relation between person and place. As Charu Mathur puts it, "The schematization of spaces and the use of levels and areas laid by lighting is engineered in such a manner that the characters seem to be in the grip of something larger than themselves." ³⁸

The title of this play is most appropriate and expressive. It ironically indicates the nature of the patriarchal issue existing in the Indian mindset which has always preferred a boy child to a girl child extinguishing the shine of a real star, only because India does not allow them to shine in Indian sky. The title suggests the nature of the main character and explains ironically how a mother calling her loving star takes away the shine from her eyes by manipulating the surgery. The star could have shined perhaps with its natural law, if not imposed upon her the manipulated operation. Dattani should really be praised for his witty titles.

It is observed that there is some truth in the saying 'woman is the foe of woman'. It is not the father always, craving for a male child instead; mother had a great desire for a male child. Indian woman finds great honour in being the mother of a male child. By such a biased traditional thinking she discriminates her own counterpart – her female child. When the point of survival is raised or some critical condition arises, she prefers male child to be secured. Tara's case is the outcome of such victimization of the marginalized: "It suggests that it is the women who continue to be willing instruments in the vicious cycle." ³⁹ In fact, a mother should have equal love for all her children. All are carried by her for the same period in her womb. Nevertheless, Dattani wants to state that most of the injustice is perpetuated by in the role of a mother. Chandan and Tara are differentiated by their own mother. Yet, nature is mostly on the side of a woman. Nature herself tries to keep balance in her and harmony in existence of man. That's why natural

rate of the birth of female child is considerably more and rate of the death of female child is considerably less than the male child. In the play Dattani also cleverly uses this basic principle of nature and presents Tara as spirited, tough, a survivor with a sense of humour and delightful repartee – fighting against prejudices, the society has against the crippled, and the female.

Tara got all this strength from her mother's love. She always believed that her mother loved her very much. In fact, Bharati loved Tara, but it was her extra bit of affection she offered her as a compensation of depriving her of her second leg. She believed that love can make up for a lot. When Tara learns the truth that she was discriminated against because of her gender, and it was Bharati's decision that caused her tragedy, she lost her courage and aim in her life. It is a shattering discovery for naturally enthusiastic Tara. She says: "And she called me her star!"⁴⁰ Tara could not believe that her loving mother could do anything so cruel to her in order to ensure the strength and physical perfection of the son. She gradually wasted away and the female in her was killed. She tore herself apart from the adventurous male in herself. She died of losing spirit and belief in life. Thus, the play unveils the bitter tendencies of the Indian families that discriminate women from their very birth. And the irony is that a woman is the main cause of such discrimination of another woman.

All the characters in the play appear to be living human beings found in most of the middle class Indian families. They are drawn from home to home as real ones, living around us in many families. They represent urban India. Tara is the central character in the play. Through her portrayal, Dattani explores the prejudices that our society has for the crippled. She is self-confident, witty, strong and good at repartee with the 'oglers' like Roopa. Charu Mathur says: "Tara, sharper and smarter than her brother is doubly victimized - once at the time at birth and again by her parents' discriminatory behaviour. Her mother's apparent showering of love is the only strength in her".⁴¹ The man-woman relationship is dramatized through the interactions between Mr. Patel and his wife Bharati. Dattani becomes successful in showing Mr. Patel to be often rude and authoritarian, when it comes to dealing with his wife and taking decisions. Most of the times, he exhibits his harshness, even heartlessness towards her. He does the worst by depriving Bharati of the chance to confess her sin to Tara which she has committed

towards her. The confession would have relieved her guilt and possibly her malady. Roopa, an interesting character, the inquisitive and garrulous neighbour of the Patel's brings a lot of humour in the play. Through Roopa's character, Dattani deliberately creates opportunities for the audiences to laugh at her, giving her an uncertain control over languages, both English and Kannada. He successfully presents her mean and slightly corrupt figure, the kind who will grow up to constitute the ever interfering, ever watching ('ogling') society, who will wax moral and laugh at the weakness of others while exploiting them. Rupa's words calling Tara 'a real freak' (p. 342) are representative of the attitude of Prema and Nalini and possibly of the society at large. Though Prema and Nalini do not appear on the stage, Dattani has presented them soundly in the play. All the characters together illustrate the social system, which controls the minds and actions of people.

The play seems to be inspired by Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Menagerie*, which is based on Tennessee's real life story. Tennessee's father belonged to a middle class family like Mr. Patel and his mother belonged to an affluent family of the bureaucrats like Mrs. Patel in *Tara*. Just like the Williams, the Patels also quarrel over this issue. The similarity is most striking when we encounter the fact that in both the situations the mother allows the doctor to perform the surgery which disturbs the life of each and every member of the family. Just like Tennessee, Chandan, too, was very much attached to his sister and the greatest misery falls on him than on any member of the family. Dattani is highly motivated by the fragile characters in the plays of Tennessee Williams, who uses expressionistic technique to depict the trauma of characters.

Use of Kannada words like 'beda', 'heg iddira', 'wondh tarah' and Gujarati words like 'kem chcho', 'majhjha ma', etc. enhances the topical flavour. He uses the kind of English as spoken by people in India which gives it homely touch. The dialogue is moving, cutting and telling.

In the play, Dattani plays with the idea of female infanticide that is prevalent among the Gujaratis. Roopa, 'the ogler next door', has a lot of information about various traditions. She tells Tara: "... It may not be true. But this is what I have heard. The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies - you know dowry and things like that - so they used to drown them in milk." ⁴² Thus, Dattani is a keen observer who

knows that in India, women suffer as a traditional commodity as Tara in this play. Dattani wants to suggest the audience that economic, religious and cultural factors have been responsible for the antipathy against and inferiorization of the girl child. It is believed that it is through a son that the 'vansh' (ancestry) continues and the caste names are carried forward. Dattani criticizes these foul factors that combine to create the social system which kills the girl. He wants to criticize the social system which controls the mind and actions of people.

Thus, the play is about the injustice done in the name of construction of harmony- a forced harmony. This forced harmony is harmful to the whole Patel family – men as well as women. Bharati is punished with her sense of guilt; Patel too, isn't satisfied in his life and is always worried with Chandan's future. Chandan leads a cursed life by becoming the cause of Tara's blighted life. Tara, instead of twinkling joyously, fades away untimely as a victim of this forced harmony. Dattani tries to expose the corruption prevalent in the bureaucratic society and the ethical deterioration of the medical profession. He tries to open the eyes of the audience, to the black manipulations growing in the medical premises.

The play, however, fails in creating an effect of realizing the transformation of Tara as a lively being on the stage at the very end. This sudden change of sending her on the stage seems unacceptable to the audience. This seems the only limitation of the play. Dattani in this play does not provide a solution to the prevalent gender biases in the society, but simply removes the veil and exposes it in its most bitter form. Through the play, Dattani suggests the possibilities for reworking, reconstruction of cultural and religious codes, and identifying family as the foundation of institutional power that builds nation. Through racy and precise dialogue and bare minimum stage-setting, Dattani effectively portrays the interactions among the characters. By just picking out the characters through cross-fading of light, Dattani makes the play speak across linguistic and cultural barriers. The play is remarkable for its abundant use of rituals, traditions and contemporary problems, India is beset with.

To conclude, the researcher asserts that Dattani's *Tara* is a mirror to the Indian society to see its true face. It tries to shock the society out of its grooved thinking and unkind behaviour. It tries to open the eyes of parents who have their bias towards the son

and the daughter is neglected even though she might be smarter than her brother. The play explores a guilty woman's critical condition in the family. It is not only Tara's tragedy but her mother; Bharati's, who too, suffers all her life and undergoes two-fold tragedy - first, her guilty conscious, which leads her to her madness and the second, by being victim of Mr. Patel's anger for whole life. Dattani alerts the audience of these hilarious possibilities hidden in giving too much importance to the social system of exploitation of girl child. Criticizing the foul social systems Dattani gives the audience, especially the women audience the message of natural harmony and makes them aware of the destructive consequences of the forced harmony. He wants to focus that woman is the main exploiter and the cause of discrimination of another woman. The point, the researcher is trying to make, is that all types of discrimination Tara faces at the hands of her family members (and family is the microcosm of society) are the consequences of their being prisoners in the hands of collective unconsciousness that constitutes their psyche. The sources of this collective unconsciousness are the cultural and religious presumptions which determine India's attitude towards women. It is true that Dattani writes his plays to be seen and heard, not literature to be read. Nevertheless, *Tara's* reading raises whole play before our eyes with effective sound effects though not heard. This is certainly the success of his craftsmanship.

02.05: *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991):

A completely different kind of play, much dark, starkly serious and violent, *Bravely Fought the Queen* was first performed at the Sophia Bhabha Hall, Mumbai on 2nd August 1991. The play was subsequently performed by Border Crossings, UK, in 1996, and was directed by Michael Walling and Mahesh Dattani himself. It is Dattani's fourth play, rather disturbing picture of the relations between men and women in a wealthy isolated suburb of Bangalore. The play traces the lives of two sisters married to two brothers, living side by side in identical bungalows. It was partly inspired by Dattani's observation while visiting the home of a Gujarati family that the women of the house were always dressed up but had nowhere to go. A powerful domestic tragedy, this play highlights the circumstances of a woman fighting against all the odds that the forces of the patriarchy have bestowed upon her. As a lively and provocative play, it charts through the emotional, financial and sexual intricacies of a modern-day Indian family. The play is a cry for the acceptance of shifting Indian values and it portrays the clash between the traditional and contemporary cultures that has created a new social scenario.

While some scholars opine that like *On Muggy Night in Mumbai*, this too is a play that concerns with alternate sexuality. The play also looks closely at the politics of the Indian giant family as the setting, it constantly points at the gender divide and the dominance of the one over the other. To some critics, the play deals with the issue of rapidly multiplying consumerism and gender relations in the contemporary urban scenario with its belief in a global world. It focuses on the advertising sector and its impact on class and gender relations. According to some, in this play, Dattani presents the ways in which exploitation of middle class domestic women is couched in terms of culture and refinement. It presents a classical example of the way in which the process of female silencing is at work in the polished ambience of the drawing room in an urban setup. In this play the questions of gender, sexuality, and identity are raised. The unspoken is voiced, and the unseen is made visible. While the women escape to create their own spaces, the men use escapism as a means to avoid unpalatable disclosures. Baa, the mother partakes of both situations – she is both the persecutor and the victim.

To some, it is a completely different type of play much more dark, starkly serious and violent, a powerful domestic tragedy highlighting the circumstances of woman

fighting against all the odds that the force of patriarchy have piled up against her. The play tries to establish the rapidly shifting values and instructing of the self in a locale where the traditional and the contemporary clash but do not fuse to create new social landscapes.

Here, the researcher would like to focus on how Dattani tackles issues that afflict the societies the world over. Just like Ibsen and Shaw, Dattani also exposes the evils prevalent in the society. Dealing with issues mentioned above, in the play, like Bernard Shaw, Dattani also wants to use the theatre as a powerful tool for bringing about the necessary social change. Dattani, like his predecessors, Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar believes in the fact that a playwright should write about the evils present in the society of his time and present it before the audience. In short, Dattani takes on what he calls the 'invisible issues' of Indian society. Tanu Pant says: "He [Dattani] aims not at changing society, but only seeks to offer some scope for reflection in the hope that his plays will give the audience some kind of insight into their own lives."⁴³

The narrative is centred on an Indian family in which two brothers, Jiten and Nitin, co-owners of an advertising agency, have married two sisters, Dolly and Alka. The women remain at home much of the time where they look after the men's ageing mother Baa. Baa, white-haired in a white sari wandered constantly through this space. Jiten and Nitin's father was a cruel and dark man who usually harassed their mother. The kind of cruelty perpetrated on Baa by her husband is brought to light every now and then in the play. Jiten is cruel and bad like his father, so automatically she develops an inclination towards her younger son, Nitin, who resembles her father. So here we have two generations sharing the same experiences at the hand of their chauvinistic husbands and yet to come third generation, Daksha – Dolly's daughter, who also experiences the maltreatment of her father, even before her birth, and is born as a disabled child. Dolly has kept Daksha away from her husband and Baa, as they should not get chance to compensate Daksha by loving her.

There is Kanhaiya, who represents the world of sexuality, whether heterosexuality or homosexuality. He might be the alluring cook who might or might not be Krishna of Dolly and Alka, or the dark auto driver who embodies Nitin's sexual guilt. At the end of the play, Nitin exposes his homosexual relations to Alka, who is fast asleep after getting

drunk. All the three women in Trivedi family have not been presented as sinners, but they suffer because of the men who are part of their lives. The play presents the picture of gay culture prevalent in urban areas.

The plot of the play is in three acts, titled 'Women', 'Men', 'Free for All'. The indoor female world of Act I is pitted against the 'male' world of business of Act II and the characters stand exposed in Act III, where the two worlds clash and collapse, with the home as the site for the battle. The trademark Dattani-stage often uses the various levels to create theatrical resonance in a special way. For instance, the level where Baa is placed remains a constant in all the acts, and the time shifts that occur in terms of her memory carries the audience back and forth in time even the present seems to parody the past. The multi-layered reality in the play suggested by the split-stage, levels more constantly into an internalized reality, as it were.

The play, *Bravely Fought the Queen* questions the male and female roles in society. It depicts the plight of helpless women victims of male tyranny. With the delineation of Baa, he handles the mother-son relationship. Baa represents many Indian mothers-in-law, who set up their sons against their wives. This is an act of vindictiveness because of her angry and sad past, she is embittered. Jiten beats his wife Dolly when she is in an advanced stage of pregnancy. This results in her child, Daksha being born deformed. When Dolly reminds Jiten of that bloody day, Jiten says: "I didn't mean to --- you know I didn't. It was Baa! Blame her but not me!"⁴⁴ Dolly says that they were Jiten's hands hitting her, his feet kicking her.

Dattani's treatment of this mother-son relationship takes on psychological overtones. It is happening around us everyday in any family. Baa encouraged her sons again and again to throw their wives out of house as well. She called Dolly a whore and asked Jiten to hit her on her face. He believed it without reason and hit her while she was carrying Daksha. At a point, Dolly mentions that the fate of her mother was also woeful. She too, was deceived by her father, as Dolly and Alka were deceived by their brother and put into Trivedi family. Baa called them the daughters of a whore, a keep, a mistress.

Dattani's male-female roles in society hints at the problems found everywhere. The problem is related with the women with a rich and powerful father, recurs in most of Dattani's plays. For instance, Ratna in *Dance Like a Man*, Bharati in *Tara* and Baa in

Bravely Fought the Queen are the daughters of rich fathers. The association of these women with money and patriarchal control that finally falls into their keeping is seen as problematic. According to Dattani, in using such situation for his characters, he has not used this problematic as a definitive view of life but it is part of personification of his perceptions. However, Payal Nagpal thinks: "One wonders if this is a comment on the nature of women in financial control or is it Dattani's comment on the men who marry them for their money."⁴⁵ Thus the play explores the psychological damage caused to the women in the Trivedi family, by the hypocrite men who signify patriarchy.

Bravely Fought the Queen begins with a representation of the commodified stereotypes. Individuals – the men and the women with all their limitations are presented in a make-believe world of sexual hierarchy. Jiten represents the conventional male who treats women as sex objects and also gets whores to his office. Baa sees the picture of her husband in her elder son, Jiten. Like *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, this too is a play that concerns itself with alternate sexuality. Nitin is a homosexual and so his wife Alka has a tragic tale to narrate. He is unable to satiate his wife's desire which is also a source of pain for Alka. Nitin and Praful had sexual relationship between them and we learn at the latter half of the play from Nitin's conversation with his mother that Praful tricked him into marrying his sister Alka. No wonder, he had no attraction or concern for Alka which becomes obvious when he declares that he did not care if Alka stayed there or left or drank herself to death.

Mahesh Dattani is here compared to Oscar Wilde, who also presented the stark reality of homosexuality to the Victorians in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. There is Kanhaiya, a character, who represents the world of sexuality, whether heterosexuality or homosexuality. He might be the alluring cook who might or might not be Krishna of Dolly and Alka; or the dark auto driver who embodies Nitin's sexual guilt. At the end of the play Nitin exposes his homosexual relations to Alka who is fast asleep after getting drunk. Just like Girish Karnad's play, *Hayavadana*, Dattani in this play questions the patriarchal moral code which demands the faithfulness of a woman to her husband, but not the faithfulness of a man to his wife.

In this way, Dattani presents to us the gay realities of the urban families and the conflicts and dilemmas they face, which are prevalent in big cities. As Miruna George

aptly says: "Dattani condemns the dishonesty and insincerity in relationships. He does not criticise homosexuality. Sexuality is identified as one way of realizing the self." ⁴⁶ Dattani is interested in gender issues and he wants to bring the issues like the alternate sexuality which is still an invisible issue in India. Though *Kama Sutra* has a chapter on homosexuality, still it's not something people talk about.

Here Dattani writes about issues which are very contemporary in nature, like gender issues, homosexuality, and marginalization and presents his idea of forced harmony. Tanu pant rightly comments: "The whole play is beautifully presented in multi-layered levels which again is Dattani's adroitness. The way he juxtaposes the past and the present, the imaginary level and the realistic level without breaking the flow of interest is simply marvelous." ⁴⁷

Theatre makes us look at social reality from a different perspective. Dattani's socially foregrounded characters move in a world rubbing shoulders with the socially marginalised. He pulls his audience out of complacency, telling and showing them that they are the prejudiced ones and encourages them to be self-critical. To put in summary, Dattani's play, *Bravely Fought the Queen* holds the mirror unto contemporary Indian society in certain respects. The struggle for individual human being for a space in the society is uppermost in his mind and therefore he gives a chance to the people to look into the problem of homosexuality intently.

Michael Walling, the artistic director of the multi-cultural theatre company, Border Crossings notes down about the play: "This is a play about performance; and uses the theatre to demonstrate how, in a world of hypocrisy, acting becomes a way of life."⁴⁸ According to Walling, it is only by the overt performance of the theatre that such acting can be exposed for what it is. Daksha in the play, is never on the stage but Dolly shows Jiten by dancing how Daksha, a disabled child would dance – disjointedly, wildly, with increasing frenzy. Siddiqua Akhatar was performing as Dolly; Dolly as Daksha; Daksha was performing a dance. By exploiting layer upon layer of performance, of unreality, Mahesh Dattani allowed his actress a routed to her emotions in its rawest form: the pain, the anguish in the blood-knot of the family which is his constant theme.

Likewise, every character in the play is seeking hide. They are performing acting and showing themselves as they actually are not. Jiten is seeking to hide his weaknesses

and cruelty in his blood behind violent aggression. Nitin is concealing his homosexuality behind the sham of his marriage; Praful deceives his sister Alka by giving her to Nitin who has homosexual relations with him. He does so to hide his gayness behind innocent Alka's make-believe bad character. Baa hides her face of a persecutor by escaping into senility and a complete divorce from reality. But when the two worlds 'women' and 'men' tend to centre violently in the last Act, all the characters stand exposed, the sham and façade ripped apart. Dolly immerses as the strongest character like the bravely fighting Queen of Jhansi. Jiten, the aggressive lout is driven to guilty tears. Nitin reveals his 'gay' relationship with Praful and the closing spotlight falls on the pitifully huddled figure of Alka in her drunken slumber. Thus, Dattani brings on stage the performance taking place in every house in the middle class Indian family.

Women, in Dattani's plays, are not victims. They are marginalised but they fight back. His plays depict the plight of educated Indian women of our time. Tara in the play *Tara*, doesn't see herself as a victim, she fights back till the end. She spits her anger every now and then on the outside world. She stands strong and does not get disturbed when people like Roopa make fun of her physical disability. In the same way Dolly and Alka in *Bravely Fought the Queen* arm themselves at the end of the play to fight back. Alka very boldly questions the authority of her husband and asks for his disloyalty. She also exposes the betrayal of her brother for not revealing the existence of homosexual relations between her husband and her brother. When she enters limping, completely wet and muddy, she says: "What have I done that I should feel scared? ---- I don't know! I don't know what I was doing outside. Aren't there times when you don't know what you are doing? (To Nitin) What's the harm in that? Huh? (No response.) Tell me. What's the harm?"⁴⁹ This liberal dance in rain signifies the sense of freedom from the shackles of society. She seems to be getting ready to fight back; with an imaginary sword swinging in her hand for all that she has suffered. Dolly, too is ready now to fight with society. Her life is a battlefield and her husband has become her real combater.

In this play, women have not been presented as sinners, but they suffer because of the men who are part of their lives. Instead, men in the play are the victims of evilness, which has serious consequences on the lives of women. The play highlights a woman fighting against all the odds that the forces of patriarchy have piled up against her. This

woman is, of course, the “Queen” referred to in the title of the play. The title in itself is an inter-textual derivation sourced from a translation of a Hindi poem about the brave Rani of Jhansi. Tanu Pant aptly says: “The play also reveals the fact that the suppression can not last long as woman will fight back to question the autocracy of men.”⁵⁰

At its most basic, *Bravely Fought the Queen* shows the distance in dramatic maturity traveled by Dattani from his early conceiving of the well-made play, plot structure in *Where There's a Will*. *Bravely Fought the Queen* is a far more complex piece of dramatic construction – which successfully leads to the unexpected revelation made in the end. The play is so carefully plotted whole that all the layered ironies become evident only in the light of what we come to know later. This technically and skillfully made production made the play a success not only in India, but in England, too.

Yet, technical innovations and dramaturgical accomplishments apart, the play is also essentially a character-drama, or more specially a play in which the characters are conjoined with ideological shadows. These characters are themselves cast by such fundamentally societal functions as patriarchy and the will to dominate. As Hasmukh in *Where There's a Will*, Jiten, Nitin and their father (who is not presented directly on the stage) represent the darkest face of patriarchy- intolerance, hatred, dominance, passions fuelled by inner insecurities and complexes of guilt and fear. Praful is perhaps the worst offender in this respect, who is a great hypocrite and cruel brute in guise of a saint, tricking both Alka and Nitin to get married while keeping them in the dark about each others sexual orientation. Alka turns into an alcoholic and Dolly is heaped with defeat after defeat. The characters of sisters- Alka and Dolly are discussed in detail in the previous paragraphs.

The characters become very lively in the hands of Dattani in making him typical of his class; Dattani tries to expose the various details with a psychiatrist's point of view. Baa, the physically and emotionally abused woman, as a reaction, leads to reject her son, Jiten who resembles her husband and to possess the one who looks like her father and to alienate him – Nitin from his father. And though the play does not say this in words, it is clear enough that this Oedipal instinct that drove Nitin into the arms of men who are father-figure to him like Praful or the auto- rickshaw driver with his black, powerful

arms. Alka turns into an alcoholic and Dolly is dwarfed under the patriarchy of the family.

The play is rich in its use of various symbols. Dattani's use of these symbols is apt and telling. Dolly's face mask, which she is careful not to crack by laughing but which nevertheless, cracks a little later, is a cleverly used symbol. Functionally, it represents the image of normality as housewife, daughter-in-law, and mother which she presents before Lalitha and the world in the opening pages of the play, but which cracks open as the dark and sad secrets in her life tumble out. The beggar woman who is occasionally referred to and at the end knocked down by Jiten, represents probably, the guilt-laden burden of the past, which Jiten would destroy if he could. Baa's wheelchair and bell perhaps signal more than the old age and paralytic condition. Reference to the singing of Baa as well as Dolly's mother which was banned suggests the code of patriarchy. The '*thumris*' of Naina Devi played over and over again on the stereo-system simultaneously evoke and comment on the yearning for love and an unfulfilled experience by the major characters in the play. Lalitha's passion for growing bonsai is symbolically reflective of her own mindset. The wiring and trimming, she subjects growing plants to may well be what she has done to her own life; control and restriction. The result may be attractive and unusual, but it can become ugly and grotesque like the bonsai kept on Sridhar's office table. The bonsai presented to Dolly and Nitin in the office is a clear symbol of the deformed relationship the brothers have with their wives. Again, Lalitha gives instructions about the regular watering and nourishment of the bonsai even before leaving Dolly's house; she waters the bonsai by cupping her hands which symbolises that though dwarfed, relations too, need caring. Kanhaiya, a nonexistent one is the most potent symbol in the play. The fantasy of Kanhaiya, who is both present and not present in the empty space beyond the kitchen door, symbolises Radha's eternally young lover Krishna in Indian mythology. Krishna is forever available to the believers like Radha and Meera, whenever they wish him into existence and being. Thus, the play is remarkable for Dattani's use of highly witted and suggestive symbolism.

Lalitha in the play reflects the post-feminist view point regarding women's status in the post-modern, social and cultural environment. She "freelances" and enjoys her reproductive rights, pushes her a few steps ahead of the domestic position of Dolly and

Alka. Her creative writing and growing bonsai is a gift of the post-feminist individual world. She is independent, free, choosy and creative. The evening she spends in the Trivedi household is enough to tell her of the existing cruelties of patriarchy which a modern or a post-modern woman would repudiate to believe. Dattani points out that Lalitha is the you and me in the audience. He has become successful in presenting Dolly's bravely fighting on the home front.

Dattani intends to highlight the masculine arrogance and deceit displayed by Jiten and Nitin. There is no room in their conduct for a conscience, for values. For money, they seem to fool Praful, their brother-in-law and their own clients. The consumer attitude that they lead to the ReVaTee advertisement campaign for their product of colour coordinated women's undergarments and nightwear, reveals their disrespect for femininity. Women are only sex objects in their views. They refuse to acknowledge women as dignified individuals. That is why, they ask Sridhar to pick up a girl from the road for sexual pleasure. They are morally sterile, totally selfish and self-centred adulterous individuals. Dattani presents them as 'normal' men and thereby suggests that this is how every prejudiced patriarchal figure functions. He wants to focus that the consequences of a male ego forced to address its inadequacy is more destructive than the female's acceptance of her struggle.

In creating and locating the self, Dattani constructs the identities of the characters that people his theatre. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri says: "As the enclosed, cloistered female world of Act I clashes with the male world of wheeling and dealing, corruption and adultery of Act II, it becomes obvious that both the men and women have assumed roles that ill-suit them, and hence all the characters have to seek solace in fantasy and the unreal."⁵¹ Dolly yearns for an identity of a normal female life and a loving man's wife. Alka is cursed with a homosexual husband and she could not identify herself as a normal wife. Baa was a victim of oppressive patriarchy is revealed by her sudden outbursts in moments of recall experienced by her. She says: "You hit me? --- No! No! Not on the face! What will the neighbors say? Not on the face. I beg you! Hit me but on -- aaaah!"⁵² Thus, Baa wants to keep her identity as a normal wife and not as a wife of a beating vulgar husband. Her trauma at remembering the physical abuse at the hands of her husband stays fresh in her memory. Dattani makes a strong point here about the manner

in which identity crisis leaves psychological scars and do debilitate mental balance. The insecurity felt by her in the early years of her marriage drives her forward to keep her sons close and loyal to her. Thus, she longs for an identity that eludes her till the end. Patriarchy harms an individual by thus permanently impairing the reasoning power. The anguish and guilt complete in denying the women their peace. However, it is 'bravely fighting' of Dolly that matters most in the play. She fits the social identity given to her, only that she never allows it to unmask and reveals her personal tragedy. All these women and men as well in *Bravely Fought the Queen* are afraid of 'cracking their masks'.

All the women characters in *Bravely Fought the Queen* are the examples of exploitation prevalent in educated urban families and also the examples that the woman fights back if they are ignored or are suppressed for a very long time. Baa, Dolly and Alka, all from a single family were exploited by their husbands. Alka's anguish and frustration is due to her husband's homosexual libido and her brother's deceit of not revealing the reality of Nitin to her. With all this knowledge, she lives in the house and her life is a fight against her fate. While listening to Naina Devi's 'thumri' and the story of her journey from a queen to 'thumri' queen, Lalitha remembered the poem in school 'Jhansi ki Rani':

"So bravely fought the manly queen...."

"Khoob ladi mardani who to..."⁵³

Then Alka decides to dress like queen of Jhansi for the ball. In the last Act, she dances in the rain signifying the sense of freedom from the shackles of society. She seems to be getting ready to fight back with an imaginary sword swinging in her hand; for all that she has suffered. Alka enters limping, completely wet and muddy, says:

"My heel broke.... They've come. (Limps to the sofa, sits down, removes her sandals and massages her ankle. Suddenly angry). What have I done that I should feel scared?"⁵⁴

When Jiten asks her what she was doing in the rain, she furiously retorts:

"I don't know! Aren't there times when you don't know what you are doing? (To Nitin) What's the harm in that? Huh? (No response.) Tell me. What's the harm?"⁵⁵

Thus, Alka takes the spirit of the Queen of Jhansi- fights back bravely like the *manly* Queen. Dolly is, of course, the 'Queen' referred to in the title of the play. The title is quite appropriately chosen. Both the sisters arm themselves at the end of the play to fight back. In the end Alka asks for an explanation for her husband's disloyalty. She also exposes the betrayal of her brother for not revealing the existence of homosexual relations between her husband and her brother. Dolly fights back at Jiten with her violent emotions reminding him his guilt of beating her when she was carrying Daksha. She has to fight a battle against violent and unfaithful husband as well as a tyrannical mother-in-law who rules over her sons and daughters-in-law even from her paralytic bed. After suffering to her limit both the sisters take the stance of fighting back bravely. In this way, the title of this play is very telling and significant.

For Dattani, language is no problem and he shows a comfortable command of it. The metaphor of bonsai and other symbols are aptly used. Dattani should be admired for his Indian English. His peculiarity in using non-English words like – 'masti', 'bol', 'pukka', 'paisa', 'tawaifs', 'sarangi', 'ghungroos', 'mujra', 'raga', 'meghmalhar', etc. give the play Indian flavour. Dattani's use of taboo and abusive words is a part of his natural language. He uses word like- 'chooth', 'arse', 'asshole', 'pee', 'fart' etc. make this play more realistic. Asha Chaudhuri Kuthari writes: "Dattani writes with a dexterously veiled acidity, employing the language that uses both simplicity and serration, pressing the word to its limits, flanked by equally pungent, loaded silence."⁵⁶

Certainly, the play captures the pulse of the urban audience by reflecting the problems on a familial level. However, it focuses only on the middle and upper class of society while eliminating the working class. So the play fails to create a world-view by focusing on a specific section of society. In this play, it seems that there is ample space to deal with a sub-plot related with working class problems. Moreover, it is shown in the last Act that Jiten is affectionate towards Daksha, his daughter, as she was born premature and disabled by his guilt of beating Dolly. He says: "I didn't mean to --- you know I didn't. It was Baa! Blame her but not me! She is my daughter! (*Crying*) Get her back! Get her from wherever she is. I want her home."⁵⁷ It is incredible that, a cruel, gay and a corrupt man like Jiten could cry before his wife for his daughter. Again, one more question arises; had Dolly the freedom in the house to keep her daughter away against the

will of her 'bad blooded' husband and a tyrannous mother-in-law? However, one must appreciate that Dattani is a creative genius able to deal with many complex issues with seriousness and insights in a single play.

To conclude, *Bravely Fought the Queen* is a play about sinners and their secret guilt; it is about violence against women, about exploitation of the weaker, about the mean, squalid corporate world. The play seems to be approving Freud's theory about repression. Jiten, who had a very bad childhood, has turned into a demon of a man. He is a violent, alcoholic, lecherous, wife-beater, inclined to kill at the slightest provocation. Nitin, who is a gay, is cheated by his own friend and suffers a guilt-ridden relationship with his wife, Alka. All the women in the family are victims of male anger and lead fruitless marriages. Shadows of the past are felt throughout the present and since past can't be undone, there seems to be no end to it. The play doesn't even end formally, which is remarkable merging of content and form. Though themes of domestic violence and wife abuse are more often represented in Dattani's plays, he provides each woman a space for self-expression. Dolly and Alka are found in many upper middle class families around us who are dancing on the tunes their husbands play. They are not informed anything properly by their husbands. There is a great communication gap between them. On the other hand, Dattani presents Lalitha and Sridhar, a couple who have no communication gap. He has the knack of letting the audience know the unspoken, the communication gap which indicates marital discard. He employs cultural codes associated with stereo-typical wives preoccupied with their cosmetics, make up and other trivia. He lays down the codes for a socially acceptable relationship in a marital set-up. The technical accomplishments of the playwright in this play also deserve mention for what we have here is an extremely suggestive utilization of the stage as a multilevel space in which time itself is correspondingly layered. The play is a fine example of naturalistic theatre with a poignant presentation of the layers of exploitation in the advertising world as well as in the domestic world. The play presents a classic example of the way in which the process of female silencing is at work in the polished bungalows of urban society. Through his many-fold symbolism, Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen* transcends its function as a performance script, pure and simple and becomes a living and significant work of art.

02.06: *Final Solutions* (1993):

Final Solutions, a stage play in three acts was first performed at Guru Nanak Bhavan, Bangalore on July 10, 1993. It was subsequently performed at Tara Theatre, Mumbai on 11th December 1993, directed by Alyque Padamsee. It was also translated into Hindi by Shahid Anwar and directed by Arvind Gaur for Asmita Theatre in 1998. The play focuses on the problem of communal disharmony between the Hindus and Muslims in India, especially during the period of post-Partition riots. The gruesome rioting and communal / religious disharmony that took seed in 1947 has continued to throw up countless such incidents in independent and secular India. Such unrest and communal violence in India between Hindus and Muslims was underscored emphatically by the brutal bloodshed in Gujarat in 2002. There were the issues that Dattani had actually dramatized in the form of *Final Solutions*. The analysis of the cause of friction between the two communities offered by Dattani carries conviction as it is endorsed by a study of human psychology offering valid explanations of the tendencies and sensitiveness of individuals under circumstantial pressure. The play was actually commissioned before the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992, but was performed only the following year, in 1993. It is written and performed in a period of high tension and violence in urban India. Reeling from the aftermath of Gujarat carnage, and the smaller ripples of violence since, all one can ask is 'What has changed in more than a decade? Has anything changed at all?' and the play itself answers our question in the very first scene of the first Act. "Yes, things have not changed that much"⁵⁸ says Hardika reading her diary written forty years ago, thinking back on the riots that exploded in 1947, when her father was killed.

Final Solutions is a much discussed and well-known play of Dattani. Many critics have admired it for Dattani's adherence to economy of words and the theme of communal disharmony demonstrated largely through action and "dramatic" individual attitudes on the stage itself. Alyque Padamsee, in his introductory lines to the play- "A Note on the Play" underscores the dramatist's externalization of the "communal hatred and paranoia lurking inside ourselves"⁵⁹ in terms of the mob which is a symbol of this hatred. Examining the play from the psycho-analytical point of view, Padamsee, who has directed this play, defines it as "a play about transferred resentments."⁶⁰ According to

some critics, dealing with the recurring rhetoric of hatred, aggression, the monetary and political exploitation of communal riots, Dattani has exposed the chauvinism and narrow-mindset of the fundamentalist, in the context of India of the 1940s interspersed with the contemporary India. To some, Dattani seems to manage to intricately interweave the individual strands of familial identity into the larger picture. Some critics view it as a play about communal riots in India and subordination of women that restricts their lives. However, this is the first Dattani play that actually explores the psyche of particular given social set up, the given constructs within which things take shape. Dattani considers this play as the 'turning point' in his career as a playwright. It is deeply entrenched in the question of multiple identities that become enmeshed with familial identities - issues that we shall consider elsewhere. Nonetheless, as Padamsee points out, the play is also to a large extent rooted in the familial as well as the individual realities that combine to form the complex whole. However, the researcher here would like to explore how Dattani focuses on outward Hindu-Muslim incompatibility and inward mutual agreements among the family members, how the clash between fanaticism of Hindu's verses the fanaticism of Muslim's is highlighted and how the lack of accommodation between the two communities and unacceptability gives rise to terrorism and anarchy. She wants to illustrate the masterly ability of the dramatist in handling various themes under the canopy of communal disharmony.

In *Final Solutions*, setting plays an important role which has many symbolic layers in it. The stage settings of the play are invented to mixing the multiple layers of the societal, the familial and the historical outlines of such a location. The horseshoe shaped ramp with the ever present mob, and the two levels within which the closed doors of the family where the action is played out marks the distinctive zones. The set design of the play emphasises Dattani's contention that the family unit represents society. The living space of the Gandhi family is shown through a 'bare bone presentation', with just wooden blocks for furniture. The only detailed sets are the kitchen and a pooja room. Kitchen and the pooja room are significant, as really, it is largely through food habits and taboos that we all draw the lines that separate us from each other. There is a close relationship between food habits and religious beliefs and the obvious 'otherness' of different communities is manifested through differences in what / how we and they eat.

As with the food, we make sharp distinctions with food related utensils. Taboos are most clearly expressed in our realities through these two particularized species in Dattani's sets- pooja room and kitchen.

The sets could be studied symbolically. They also position the family, signified by the home, in relation to society, which is represented through the mob / chorus (five men and ten masks on sticks), who more or less encircle the Gandhi home. The representation of the younger Hardika (Daksha) takes place on another level which symbolically ensures that the past always remains in present and cannot be forgotten.

The plot in this play also moves backward and forward to mount on the fairly lone time span on the stage. When it moves forward Daksha is Hardika, and the action in Ramnik Gandhi's house is sketched and when it moves backward, Daksha as a young bride is stating definitely her troublesome life. The play opens with Daksha reading from her diary. An oil lamp converted to an electric one suggests that the period is the late 1940s. Daksha thinks that she is "a young girl who does not matter to anyone outside her home." ⁶¹ She says: "Last year in August, a terrible thing happened --- and that was freedom for India." The mob whispers: "Freedom! At last freedom!" ⁶² Daksha closes her diary and now Hardika appears on the stage. She feels the things have not changed that much. A period of forty years is not a long period for a nation. But on the stage, the drumbeat grows louder and the chorus slowly wears the Hindu masks. The words spoken by chorus show the beginning of disharmony and the painful period ahead. As long as persons are on the stage, they are normal but as soon as they are behind the masks, their thirst for blood rises.

Chorus 1 : The procession has passed through these lanes
Every year,
For forty years!

Chorus 2, 3 : How dare they?

Chorus 1, 2, 3 : For forty years our chariot has moved through their mohallas.

Chorus 4, 5 : Why did they?
Why did they today?

Chorus 1 : How dare they?

Chorus 2, 3 : They broke our rath.

They broke our chariot and felled our Gods!

Chorus 1, 2, 3 : This is our land!

How dare they?

Chorus 1 : It is in their blood!

Chorus 2, 3 : It is in their blood to destroy! ⁶³

Thus, the chorus unravels the central issue of the play. The words spoken by chorus are the indications of domestic violence, political mischief and social unrest. The effective use of the chorus in the play is a dynamic technique used by the playwright. Dattani has given minute and ponderable hints on the Mob / Chorus (p. 165).

In the living room of the Gandhis, Aruna- Ramnik Gandhi's wife and daughter Smita are retiring for the night. The Chorus is shouting violently towards Bobby and Javed – two young boys. Ramnik opens the door and two young men enter and quickly shut the door behind them, when the Chorus shouts: "Open up! Or we'll break your door!"⁶⁴ The bitter hatred intensifies. The Chorus calls Ramnik 'a traitor' for protecting the boys. Deep hatred makes the Chorus devoid of any human feelings. Hardika hates these young boys as she remembers that 'they' have killed her father. Aruna wants the boys must go away from the house. Act I ends with the violent words of the Chorus All: "You mad man! They'll stab you in the back! They'll rape your daughter. (Smita enters) You heard us? Throw them out!"⁶⁵

At the beginning of the Act II, the characters are all in the same position as at the end of Act I. The Mob / Chorus is restless. They talk about the broken chariot. Chorus 1 doubts their leader's intentions and laments that the leaders have succeeded in their mission. After lot of bloodshed and bitter enmity, the Chorus understands their flaw. Smita recognizes the two boys as Javed, Tasneem's brother, and Babban or Bobby, Tasneem's fiancé. Tasneem is Smita's classmate. Smita's feeling of hatred for the political parties is expressed when she tells Ramnik that those parties have hired Javed... Javed makes a living by creating riots for these parties; for throwing first stone. Javed turns furious at this and calls Smita a "traitor" (p. 195) for she utters this secret and breaks the vow given to Tasneem.

Act III opens with a spotlight on Bobby and Javed, sitting on the floor, looking troubled. Ramnik says to Javed that his life is based on violence. He is a riot-rouser and

criminal. Yet, Ramnik offers a job to Javed only to give him a chance. Javed admits that he himself doesn't know what he is doing there. He is totally disillusioned. Smita, for the first time in her life, tells her mother Aruna, not to burden her any more with religious prejudices. Ramnik transfers his anger, at his own father's black deed of burning the shop, to his mother.

Thus, the play revolves around a Hindu family that gives refuge to two Muslim boys seeking during a communal riot. Using the family as a microcosm of India, Dattani traces the Hindu-Muslim conflict through three generations of the family, attempting to examine the deeply rooted attitudes behind years of prejudice. The well-known stage director Alyque Padamsee asks in 'The Note on the Play' – "Can we shake off our prejudices or are they in our psyche like our genes? Will we ever be free or ever-locked in combat --- Arabs against Jews, whites against blacks, Hindus against Muslims? Are there any final solutions?"⁶⁶ This is exactly what Dattani attempts to do in this play. It examines the so-called liberal attitude to communalism.

In *Final Solutions*, Javed and Bobby – two Muslim friends take refuge in the house of the businessman Ramnik Gandhi, while a communal riot rages outside. The agony and suffering of both the Hindus and Muslims during the time of partition is still green in Hardika's memory. She could not forget that her father was killed on the road in this riot. Ramnik gives shelter to the two boys only because he knows that his father and grand father had burnt up the shop in the name of communal hatred. They wanted the shop at half its value. Ramnik lived with this shame his whole life. So he had soft corner towards the Muslims and had so-called liberal attitude to communalism. In fact, Ramnik loses his control when Smita tells that Javed is a hired hoodlum. The following dialogue throws light on his real anger towards Javed.

Javed: If I say I have changed, will you believe me? And what makes you think I want your job?

Ramnik: Why do you distrust us?

Javed: Do you trust us?

Ramnik: I don't go about throwing stones!

Javed: But you do something more violent. You provoke! You make me throw stones! Every time I look at you, my bile rises!

Ramnik: (*Angrily*) Now you are provoking me! How dare you blame your violence on other people? It is in you! You have violence in your mind. Your life is based on violence. Your faith is based --- (*stops but it is too late.*)⁶⁷

Ramnik uses word 'us' in the sense of all 'Hindus' and the word 'violence' in reference to all 'Muslims'. The 'you' and 'us' in his dialogues represent this hidden anger about the Muslims. That's why his liberal attitude towards Javed and Bobby for giving shelter and job seems superficial. Here Ramnik thinks that Javed has done an unforgivable act. Hardika thinks that the Muslims have killed her father. On the other hand, Hardika's husband and father-in-law have usurped the shop from Zarine's father by burning it in the name of communal hatred. Satish Barbuddhe rightly says: "We, the people of different communities must stop this hatred and bitterness. The play mocks at the politicians who use people as their puppets. These puppeteers are the real culprits."⁶⁸ Ramnik's actions and deeds arise directly from the guilt he feels about the actions committed by his father and grandfather. It was his family that has caused Zarine's father's shop to be burnt in riots, after which they bought it at a fraction of its cost. The 'emotive' cause of those particular riots is thus clearly demonstrated to be at least partly economic.

As Alyque Padamsee mentions in the note to the play, *Final Solutions* is a play about transferred resentments, about looking for a 'scapegoat' to hit out at when we feel let down, humiliated. Anger is considered as the enemy in human beings which is a negative emotion. Anger can cause violence; it can ruin relationships taking out your anger on somebody from family to outside or from outside to family is a common experience we face every day. This is 'transferred resentment'. The play opens with Daksha reading from her diary- the incidents and memories written forty years ago. At the same time the Chorus with Hindu mass burst with angry words about the Muslims. They are blaming 'them' for breaking the chariot, felling 'our' Gods; they are even blaming 'their blood' which is destructive. Then the Chorus with Muslim masks says:

Chorus 1: Their chariot fell in our street! ----

Chorus 5: Doesn't their God have a warranty?

(*A slow drum beat. The Chorus gathers.*)

Chorus All: We are neither idol makers not breakers!⁶⁹

The border line is clear – “our street”. Nobody thinks it is the land of Indians. Hardika thinks her own way as a victim to ‘their’ anger. Javed thinks that he is changed from a neighborhood hero into a villain by the Hindus, who think they are contaminated by a Muslim’s touch. From this incident, Javed became proud of his religion and Babban felt ashamed of being Muslim. Babban chose to be called Bobby to pretend that he was not a part of Muslim community. He thought he could become superior by not belonging to that community. Thus, Bobby is ashamed of all this game of pretence. Ramnik, who knows all this about Bobby and Javed, feels guilty. Aruna is deeply hurt when Smita says that her mother is wrong in praying, fasting and purifying herself all the day. Smita has mutely followed all this for her mother’s sake till now; but now she declared Aruna that all this stifles her. Now she takes her resentment to the boys Javed and Bobby. The following dialogue makes it very clear-

Aruna: We can’t go on! What do I do tomorrow? How can I carry on knowing that I am stifling my daughter? (*Pause*) All right. Do what you think is best.

Smita: (*Irritated*) What do you want me to do? Say I’m sorry when I am not?

Aruna: You can stop being so cruel.

Pause.

Smita: I’m sorry. I mean it.

Aruna: So this is the end. (*Suddenly, to Javed and bobby*) Are you happy? ⁷⁰

All the dialogues prove that everyone is living in the shade of his/her own prejudices; and when these prejudices are shattered, they become angry. They try to take out their anger on anybody closest to them. It is an age-old custom in India. Whether we are angry with someone or someone is angry with us, each outburst takes its toll on both parties. Satish Barbuddhe rightly comments: “The characters in the play motivate us to think that angry outbursts lead to chain reactions.” ⁷¹ Thus, the play *Final Solutions* can be studied as a play about transferred resentments on both familial and national levels.

At the backdrop of communal violence, Dattani deals with anti-fanaticism concerns in his play *Final Solutions*. Dattani presents not only religious fanaticism but fanaticism in all walks of life. As a successful playwright, he demonstrate this by showing the various ways in which most people, overtly or covertly, are party to acts of

fanaticism and are responsible for a good deal of the conflicts that exist within society. It exists at the micro-cosmic level of the nation, state or even the micro-cosmic level of the family. The fanaticism of Daksha's in-laws prevents her friendship with Zarine from progressing, the fanaticism of Hardika (older Daksha) is a springing response to her 'confinement'; the fanaticism of Aruna, who is the archetypal pious Hindu woman stifles her daughter and of course, the fanaticism of Javed propels him into joining forces with the politicians who always talked about the motherland and fighting to save our fate. Contrasted with such fanaticism is the doubtful pacifism of Bobby; the shaky liberalism of Ramnik and the escapism of Smita arising from sheer avoidance. Such fanaticism is not only self-limiting for each of these individuals, but is also the primary cause for the barriers that are constructed between them and the larger world.

Dattani in most of his plays tries to create and locate and construct the identities of the characters, which people his theatre. *Final Solutions* is not an exception to it. While dealing with the theme of communal conflict, the play indicates at individual as well as social identities of the characters. Everyone as an Indian, in the play faces the most important battle for the establishment of a distinctive identity within a territorial location. The Mob / Chorus comprising five men and ten masks on sticks are the omnipresent factor throughout the play. There are five Hind and five Muslim masks. Dattani carefully uses the same five men in black to double for any given religious group when they assume the role of the mob, which they do in a stylized fashion.

Javed and Bobby, friends from childhood were only playmates, without any communal identity. But the incident of 'leaving the letter on the wall' of the 'praying neighbour' changed Javed from a neighborhood hero into a hoodlum. An innocent playboy became rebellious and threw pieces of meat and bones into the backyard of his fanatic neighbour. Then onwards Javed identified himself as a 'Jehadi'. He was not prepared for Jihad – the holy war where he actually 'felt that that is where I belonged' (p. 206) and became a hero once again. He achieved the identity of 'being true sons of our mothers' with several other youths like him.

Daksha is a music lover. She wants to be the friend of Zarine, the Muslim girl, who has a lot of records of Noor Jehan. Daksha's in-laws didn't allow her to play their gramophone. When she went to Zarine's house taking a saree for embroidery, she

listened and sang along with Noor Jehan on the gramophone. She even danced a little and spun across the room and leaned against the window looking out into the bright sunlight, like the heroines do in the talkies. This is Daksha in true sense. This is her identity, but it is crushed under the patriarchy of the Gandhi family. Then onwards, Daksha had to forget Zarine and the songs, too. She had to discard her true identity of a naïve, appreciative girl and remain “confined. Never let out of the house. Like a dog that had gone mad!” ⁷²

Smita is not fanatic like her mother. She thinks that praying and fasting and purifying all the day is not embracing religion. In fact, she is embarrassed with her mother’s false ideas of sanskar, belief and truth and that’s why she finds herself stifled. In college, Smita is free. She has Muslim friends like Tasneem. She had close relations with Bobby. Liberal minded Ramnik, her father too becomes angry when she says that she recognizes Javed and Bobby well. Her mother Aruna declares – “Stop her studies! From now on, she can stay at home!” ⁷³ In her own house, Smita is under the strict ‘sanskar’ of her mother. That’s why, Bobby hardly recognized her when they first entered her house. In her house she was looking ‘like a mouse in a family of cats’ (p. 218) hanging her head down in patience. She is so dull in the house and in the college, she is equally free. Her stifling sense is obvious in her words to Bobby – “Maybe we should all run away from home like Javed. For five minutes everyday. So we can quickly gulp in some fresh air and go back in.” ⁷⁴ This desire to gulp in some fresh air is gulping livening with her own identity. She is a capacious, amusing girl and that is her real identity. But in actual life most of the individuals have to live on hiding real identities like Smita. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri notes – “The diminutive Smita suddenly gains stature and individual identity, unafraid to speak up for what she thinks is right, maintaining that she had kept her silence only to remain non-partition, to both her parents.” ⁷⁵

Initially unassertive Bobby too, hides behind a name (Bobby) that conceals the identity into which he was born. He doesn’t use his real name Babban, which has always been uncomfortable. Not only he hides behind the name, but also hides behind Tasneem in another way. He loves Smita and that night Bobby and Javed deliberately came to her house to meet her. He wanted to ask her if there is ‘anything’ between Bobby and her

‘still’. The audience easily comes to know that their relationship didn’t work between them because as they belonged to different communities, they were trying to make it more convenient for themselves.

Aruna is shaken out of her complacency through Smita’s outbursts against her rigid and restrictive practices that have for long choked her. Aruna is spending the day in pooja-path and keeping the purity, holiness of the house. She grew up listening to stories of Gods and how they slew the demons to protect the good people of their land. She is thankful to her mother for showing her the path of truth. All this is her happiness and so she believes that God is the saviour. She wants to do the same ‘sanskar’ on her daughter Smita. But when Smita outbursts against her rigid and restrictive practices, she is shocked because her identity is shaken by the outburst. Thus, Dattani suggests the struggle for identity of the characters in this play, too. Bobby and Smita both reject their communal identities- Smita because, she feels stifled, and Bobby because, he feels ashamed. This puts each of them in a weaker position vis-à-vis the ‘other’- Javed and Aruna. This however, is a kind of ‘final solution’ to deny and context, to attempt to live on one’s own terms to reject the past and any other social framework of identity and self-formation.

Final Solutions is a play about communal riots in India; but at the same time it explores the subordination of women that restricts their lives. It presents three women who belong to three significant times in the history of India. Daksha (Hardika) belongs to pre-independence period; Aruna, her daughter-in-law, belongs to independence period; and Smita. Aruna’s daughter is a contemporary, post-independence Indian woman. Daksha’s childhood memories are tainted with communal clashes associated with her father’s death. She continues to suffer in her married life with her husband- whom she thinks has the ‘brains of a silly goat’ (p. 175). Daksha’s movements were highly restricted because of the imposition of family and society’s strict norms of female decorum. Her attachment with Hindi film-songs leads her to befriend Zarine. Once she asked Hari why they were not giving Zarine’s father a loan or something to start his business again. With this question Hari became angry and shouted loudly like his father. He called names upon Daksha- that are too shameful to mention. After a long period, when her mother-in-law was asleep in the afternoon, she went to Zarine’s house with Kanta, the servant woman. While all the women in Zarine’s family were having their

meal, Daksha sat with them not even touching the table. Yet her head started spinning from the smell and she could feel her stomach churning. Then and there, she omitted. When she returned home, she was beaten by her husband. The following dialogue highlights her exploitation:

Daksha: (*As if to Hari*) No. what are you saying, Hari? It is not true! Kanta is lying. She lied to you! I did not touch their food! (*Recoils as if she has been hit*) Ah! Don't hit me! (*Angrily*) Don't do that! I swear I didn't eat anything! Aah! Stop that! Stop it! All right. I won't go there again. Please, leave me alone. (*Crying*) Please! Stop! (*Lies on the floor, sobbing*)⁷⁶

Daksha's tormented psyche is thus placed on the stage which symbolises the position of women in Indian society. The above words reveal their striving to lead an individual life and their suffering. Dattani's use of 'diary reading' is a unique experiment that unravels the feelings of Daksha. Hardika is pleased to see her grand-daughter, Smita talking freely with her friends Javed and Bobby. She wishes her the same freedom in her house in-laws. Hardika remembers her days when she was confined to four walls. She doesn't wish the same fate to her.

Hardika doesn't tell the story of her own exploitation to Smita but she could not hush away the possibility of the same exploitation of Smita from her mind. Experience has taught her a lot about the exploitation of women. Hardika in her diary puts her name as Daksha. Hardika is her changed name after marriage- changed to match with Hari – her husband. Both of them were never a good match but the tradition allows them to change the name of a bride to match with the name of her groom. Even the pen which she uses to write the diary is an old and discarded pen of her father-in-law. The ink comes out too thickly. While writing, she is choked with emotions. She has dared to write a diary as she needed to tell the secrets to somebody. But a bride, a daughter-in-law in a patriarchal family could not tell anything from her personal life to anybody. So she felt the need of writing a diary where she could disclose her desires and hopes and secrets. All her dreams had been shattered. She knew that she could never be a singer like Noor Jehan. Her in-laws didn't allow her to play gramophone, though she was fond of songs. There family was against her singing film-songs. Hari's parents heard her humming a love song

to Hari the previous night. And the next morning they told him to tell her never to sing in the house. Dattani should be certainly admired for his lurking into the hearts of women-the second sex.

The title of Dattani's play on communal violence and tension in contemporary urban India itself, calls to attention the apparent insolubility of this situation. Apparently, not a single solution will work as Dattani interestingly sticks to the plural- 'solutions'. Are there any solutions possible for a cycle of violence, which has continued in some form or the other ever since most of us can remember? Is any solution possible at all, when each community, section, class of our society has its own solutions to the crisis? Or the cycle of violence and hatred is eternal? Communal disharmony is based upon many complicated issues and that is why Dattani seems to suggest not a single solution, but the solutions too are complicated and inter-dependent. As long as 'us' and 'them' are used now and then by every community, the problem of communal riots, disputes and acts of hatred seems insoluble. Dattani doesn't give any answer, but leaves the viewers delving deep in search for an answer to the problem posed. Every character has some fears and prejudices in his/her mind; these fears and prejudices should take the place of open-eyed realities. Bobby's words are suggestive in this matter. He says, "The tragedy is that there is too much that is sacred. But if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed. (*Puts on his footwear and looks at Hardika*) And if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate." ⁷⁷

The open-ended finale leaves the audience musing as to what solutions there can be to the mutual hatred and intolerance that prevails between the Hindus and the Muslims in India. But the Hindus as well as the Muslims have always inherited preconceived contradictory notions about mutual religions and relationships. Hence, the title is biting and brainstorming.

There are six characters who actually speak in the play. Hardika is at the centre of the play. The plot of the play moves backward and forward to mount on a fairly long time span on the stage with her character at centre. When it moves forward, Daksha is Hardika- Ramnik's mother and the action in Ramnik Gandhi's house is sketched and when it moves backward, Daksha is a young bride enunciating her troublesome life. Through her character, Dattani presents the striving of Indian women to lead an

individual life and their suffering. The play opens with her reading the diary as Daksha; and ends with her feeling of remorse for the unraveled shameful truth – that her husband and her brother-in-law had burnt Zarine's father's shop in the name of communal hatred.

Aruna, Hardika's daughter-in-law and Ramnik's wife, is a typical Gujarati housewife doing 'pooja-path' everyday and giving the same lessons to her daughter. She is overburdened by kitchen work and pooja-path. Dattani presents her character as a prudish Hindu woman who believes that the prayers always protect the house. She is a great Krishna devotee. God-fearing Aruna believes in Krishna very much. She is proud of being Hindu. She is a typical Hindu woman who believes in karma. Finally, Aruna realises the position of an outsider and she is changed but not crushed. She remains steadfast to her faith, but changes with time.

Ramnik, Hardika's son is a liberal minded person who lived throughout his life bearing the shame of his father and grandfather's black deed of burning the shop of an innocent Muslim. He saves the two boys, Bobby and Javed despite the shouts of the angry mob outside his house. He also offers Javed a job. But in fact, he wants to compensate the wrongs his family has done with the Muslim family. He transfers his anger at his own father's black deed to his mother, Hardika. Ramnik is rebellious in the view of Aruna. He thought that there was no reason in doing pooja-path all the day. Ramnik had deep sense of guilt and remorse for his father's deed which he cannot forget. Aruna's prudishness, Hindu pooja-path reminded him the burnt shop of the Muslim. Although he thinks himself liberal-minded, he became skeptical when he came to know that Smita knows Javed and Bobby and sternly asks her how she knew these boys. Ramnik, despite his tolerant image is extremely uncomfortable with the idea of his daughter knowing the two socially and personally. He is a progressive secularist. He not only saved Javed and Bobby from the mob, he also forces Aruna to serve them water. At the end, he disclosed the secret of the burnt-up shop to his mother Hardika, because now only for a few years she has to live with the shame; with which he lived his whole life.

Two other characters- Bobby and Javed too, play an important role in the play. The theme of communal disharmony, identity crisis and the theme of transferred resentments are worked out through these characters. Javed, the young Muslim fundamentalist and the member of a gang has long nursed a resentment against the world

because of the 'otherness' and the demonstration of his community and religious identity by the dominant community. Javed has a strong belief in himself and his own faith; it is this belief that has led him on the paths of violence. There is an unexpected alliance between Javed and Aruna. They are both individuals who have a strong belief in their faith, in the things that shape their identities and their ideas of their selves. It is only Javed, the 'other' believer who is able to recognize and accept Aruna's position.

Bobby grew up with Javed but was not happy with his identity as a Muslim. He was being ashamed of being a Muslim. He pretended that he was not a part of that community. He chose to be called Bobby instead of Babban. He always tries to understand others and has faith in humanity. In the last scene, Bobby picks up the idol of Krishna from the pooja room and holds it in his hand. He says, "See Javed! He doesn't humiliate you. He doesn't cringe from my touch. He welcomes the warmth of my hand. He feels me. And he welcomes it! I hold Him who is sacred to them but I do not commit sacrilege. (*To Aruna*) You can bathe Him day and night, you can splash holy waters on Him, but you can not remove my touch from His form. You can not remove my smell with sandal paste and attars and fragrant flowers because it belongs to a human being who believes and tolerates, and respects what other human beings believe. That is the strongest fragrance in the world."⁷⁸ Thus Bobby, playing the role of a pacifist between Ramnik and Javed, handling and caressing the Hindu God, gives the message of real liberalism that is humanity.

A minor character, Kanta is a maid servant mentioned in the diary by Daksha. Kanta gives Daksha details about Zarine's family. But Kanta disapproves Daksha's friendly relations with Zarine. Daksha wanted to know about Zarine's well being. Daksha never trusted Kanta as she cooked up her own stories when she didn't know the truth. Kanta is liar too. She lied to Hari that Daksha has eaten the food from Zarine's family and for this Daksha has been beaten ruthlessly by Hari.

Another minor character, the neighbour of Bobby and Javed, the puritan Hindu plays an important role in taking the plot on a height. The neighbour praying and ringing the bell, wiping the letter with a cloth as it was contaminated with Javed's touch, stands for a fanatic Hindu, who changes Javed into a hired hoodlum and Bobby into an ashamed pacifist.

The Chorus in the play is as important as the protagonist of the play. Through it, the playwright seems to communicate to the audience, the present scenario of communicable frenzy and hatred. Amar Nath Prasad remarks: "Through this beautiful technique of masking and unmasking the same person, the author seems to speak a lot of things. Religion is one; God is one; but the interpreters are different."⁷⁹ Thus, the Chorus is suggestive, too. The words spoken by Chorus are the indications of domestic violence, political mischief and social unrest. The effective use of the Chorus in the play is a dynamic technique used by the playwright. It sometimes assumes Hindu masks and sometimes Muslim ones. The words rendered by the Chorus are clear indications of the communal disharmony and its painful consequences that are soon to be experienced by the characters in the play.

Dattani places history as an active character in this play. Opening with the main figure of Hardika as a young girl- then known as Daksha, the first scene shows us the writing of history. This diary establishes the history of division – the sense of 'us and them', the link between personal experience and political belief and social hatred. History is present throughout the action of the play, sometimes repeating itself directly, through statements made by Daksha / Hardika, sometimes indirectly through situations of violence. History is also evoked and used by almost every character on stage, as a justification, excuse of each fresh outbreak of violence. Thus, the history plays the role of an active character in the play which leads action of the play further.

Dattani uses many Hindi words in an effortless way in his plays. As the play is based upon the theme of communal conflict, mostly between the Hindus and the Muslims, he uses many words that typically introduce with their respective cultures. As alternative words in English could not convey the expected effect, he uses them in their original form. Utensils like 'thali', 'dekshis', and clothes like - 'dupatta' with 'chamkis' are generally used by the Muslims. Ganga jal, Vishnu Mandir, sadhu, sants, sanskar, karma, Laxmi Pooja, Krishna Janmashtami – these words create the picture of Hindu culture. Indian expressions like 'baap re', 'wah' give Indian atmosphere to the play. The words 'hando', 'haram ki aulad', 'matka', 'gallis', 'topis', 'mehandi', 'chokra', 'attars', etc. are deliberately used by Dattani to keep the Indianness fresh in the play.

Dattani's use of spoken language is according to the demand of the social theme. Dialogue is crisp and pointed. He uses original Hindi words mentioned above as the use of English equivalents cannot fully bring out religious and cultural concepts. Dattani shows his command of language which is his unique achievement.

The beauty of the play lies in its excellent use of chorus, symbols and images. The play is full of animal images, very loathsome and fierce. It suggests the easily behaviour of the fanatics who have no religion as such. The image of 'mouse' and 'cat' suggests the fear and the strength in a group-dominated society; if people are in majority, they behave like cats and if they are in minority, they prefer to hide in their hole like mice. The images of 'swine' and 'dead pig' connote hatred and contempt. The dropping of a lizard on a milk vessel is supposed to be very inauspicious in the Hindu tradition. The word 'hound' suggests dog-like ferocity of the fanatics. Daksha has secret names for her mother-in-law as 'Gaju' and father-in-law as 'Wagh'. Dattani uses extended metaphor of music – the music of Noor Jehan, Shamshad Begum and Suraiya frequently. This music is suggestive as the need to ease the savage blows of cruelty. Music creates the sense of equality, fraternity and creativity in human beings barring caste, class and creed. Music is used in a highly suggestive manner in the play.

To conclude, the play was a turning point for Dattani in more senses than one. He turned here from the intensely personal focus that marked his earlier works, and looked at history and its ramifications within the localized context, with simple and powerful visual texture that made it one of his most important performed plays. It fetched him the prestigious Sahitya Academi Award and created a space in the Indian literary scenario for Indian drama in English. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri's observation is remarkable. She writes: "While never making the overt comment, Dattani handles the difficult contours of the play with a subtle dramatic mechanism of using the family to mirror the community as also using the community to reveal the hidden ugliness within the family unit."⁸⁰ The play foregrounds the Hindu-Muslim problem and also tackles the themes of transferred resentments, communal hatred and paranoia, individual and social identity, and exploitation of women and throws light on the narrow mindset of the fundamentalists and fanatics. The larger part of the play is good theatre and that makes it technically sound. The language is handled quite competently. Dattani successfully presents the Gandhi

family at the backdrop of communal riots. Unconscious and conscious fears and prejudices rule the family as well as the intruders Bobby and Javed. Dattani wants to suggest that quite a few kind of liberalism are often only skin-deep but these are needed nevertheless. Collectively a lot of healing and introspection needs to be done. Better education and greater mixing with frankness would be a part of the answer. Dattani resolves the play with inconclusive end and leaves the audience delving deep in search for an answer to the problem posed. Sangeeta Das asserts, "The play itself is a question mark on this age-old enmity between the two communities wondering if there would ever be a final solution to this endemic problem."⁸¹

With a great artistic skill, Dattani has exposed the fears and anxieties of the two communities as an aftermath of partition. The feeling of being second grade citizens, sensitivity to music being played near masque, the Hindu sensitivity in the matter of general Muslim food habits that go against vegetarianism and the credulous fears of contamination, all this is conveyed more dramatically.

Dattani allows his characters room to develop. He has a good theatre sense and command of language, mostly crisp dialogue and character-contrast work well in this play. The Chorus is a good device to express the broad way, in which, the thinking of excitable elements within the two communities, goes. Dattani, with masterly skill, delves deep into the unconscious levels of community thinking and brings a lot of objectivity and balance to his analysis of the problems that bedevil us. The play is at once expressive, informative, persuasive and refreshingly enriching.

02.07: *Night Queen* (Short Play) (1996):

Night Queen, written in 1996 and published in *Yaraana: An Anthology of Indian Gay Writing* (1999) covers almost the same areas as *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. But *Nigh Queen* is a one-act play and has only two characters: Raghu and Ash, two young men who pick each other up in a park and come to Raghu's home for sex. Ash is to be engaged to Raghu's sister, Gayatri, the following day and is not aware that Raghu has already recognized him as Gayatri's soon-to-be-fiancé. The play is about these two homosexual characters who meet up for a 'one night stand' of sorts and how their lives spill into their tryst. In the middle of the play, it is revealed that their lives intersect at a very volatile and unexpected point. Dattani shows "gay-bashing" by straight people in a very sensitive yet unsentimental way. The interactions between the gay characters were not written to appease the curiosity of the "straight-yet-sensitive" reader. Dattani did not pander to that audience.

The major concern of Dattani in plays depicting homosexual situation is the identity crisis which results from being marginalised and oppressed. Identity crisis forms the basis of *Night Queen*, another work by the playwright dealing with gay experience. Responses to rejection, alienation, persecution and social conditioning are explored and highlighted. Dattani chronicles the struggles of character when faced with pressures from outside as well as from within. At one level, the confrontation is directed towards, facing the prejudices and rejection of the society and at the other, it is directed inwards where the confrontation is with a divided self, the product of social conditioning and sexual impulses.

Hoshang Merchant in Introduction to *Yaraana: Gay Writing from India* declares: "... Most homosexuals get married due to social pressures. Some commit suicide. Most adjust to a double life, so do their wives." ⁸² Subbu, in *Seven Steps Around the Fire* commits suicide; while Ashwin and Raghu from *Night Queen*, seek each other out for love, understanding and support.

The play explores the identity crisis faced by Ashwin, a homosexual character who learns to hate himself because his brother, whom he loves, thinks of his preference for same-sex love, as, ugly and repulsive. Ash cries out his fear to Raghu, "In his eyes, I

didn't want to be so ugly.”⁸³ The pressure to conform can be strongest from within the family as in the case in *Seven Steps Around the Fire* where his father almost pushes him into arranged marriage and definitely into committing suicide. While in *Seven Steps Around the Fire* the coercive power of father leads to the crisis, in *Night Queen*, the brother's disapproval combines with Ashwin's complicity. Dattani in this play questions this complicity on part of the homosexuals – the identitarian unease they face is to some extent of their own making. Closely interlinked to the standing up for their right to be what they choose to be is the question of economic independence. Economic self-independence of the marginalised serves as a great impetus towards empowerment. Ashwin rants at Raghu: “... You have a secure job. . You can tell the world to fuck off.”⁸⁴ Raghu is definitely lucky to have a secure job and supporting sibling yet the insecurity comes through when he confesses to Ashwin: “I too am looking for help from you. Help me.”⁸⁵ It is his bonding with Ash which finally enables him to laugh loudly and declare: “At last I am playing.”⁸⁶ Dattani highlights the hypocrisy inherent in arranged marriage of convenience that homosexuals enter into due to their inability to take a stand against societal pressures. The victim in such marriage is the wife who either develops self-doubt if unaware of her husband's preferences, or is left with little option but to adjust, or like Alka in *Bravely Fought the Queen* drown her sorrows in booze. Dattani critiques the workings of personal and moral choices of the gay sensibility.

Like in *Do the Needful* (a radio play), in this one-act play too, Dattani makes ample and effective use of ‘sound-scapes’ to create sense of directness and closeness as well as atmosphere. There is a symptomatic use of sound in the play. The old woman in *Night Queen* calls out to Raghu in short intervals underlining the presence of familial and social obligations beyond the premises of his room. Dattani uses sound to create a sense of outer world pressing in and impinging upon the private space of the homosexuals. In this play too Dattani does not provide readymade solutions or fully resolved endings. For him, theatre is a collective experience and the audience has to finish in their own heads what the playwright began. Dattani aims not at changing society but only seeks to offer some scope for reflection in the hope that his plays will give the audience some kind of insight into their lives.

The play poses the following questions:

What is it that has put the gay population on defensive?

Was Indian society always closed to the issue?

Is there the tradition of rejection of gay populace due to their gender preferences?

In 1861, anti-sodomy law was passed which criminalized homosexuality in Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. Raj Ayyar in the review of Yaraana: *Gay Writing from India* holds that the law criminalizing homosexuals remains the same to date and is often used as an excuse to execute and silence the gay community. The ensuing struggle is for visibility, voice and social space, not to be frozen into stereotypes but to have freedom of choice as individuals. The play was first produced successfully in 1996.

02.08: *Do the Needful* (Radio Play for BBC) (1997):

In 1996, Mahesh Dattani was commissioned to write his first radio play for BBC; the result was the somewhat unconventional 'romantic comedy', *Do the Needful*. The play was first broadcast on 14th August 1997 by BBC Radio 4, directed by Salley Avens. Once more adopting the all too familiar locale of the upper middle class family in *Do the Needful*, Dattani again manages to spring his usual surprises in the narrative pattern of the play. Considering that this was his first radio play, commissioned by BBC, and the genre he chose was that of a romantic comedy, he manages to take effortlessly on a conventional form, firmly root it in the mechanism of two ethnically diverse upper middle class Indian families. Like all the best love stories, the hero and heroine end up getting married, but the road to marital bliss is full of the most unexpected twists and turns. Though the play is set in India within the conventions of arranged marriages, its wider themes are universal. It was also well received abroad-playing to British audiences that could easily identify with its wider and universal themes.

Although, this is a first radio play, it is admirably and remarkably successful. Some critics admire it as it culminates in confessions of homosexuality by Alpesh whose hope for a better life is ruined for the same reason. Some critics say that, Dattani's cry of dichotomy is apparent in *Do the Needful*, where outcasts are agents of change. 'Moderns' here are the ones with no alternatives. The play is a study of modern psyche. According to some critics, Dattani simultaneously explores the twin issue of gender and alternate sexuality in the play. Some critics believe that Dattani's exhibition of conflicts and desires of gay male in his first radio play *Do the Needful*, is an unconventional and bold attempt. To some it is the love-hate drama of the colonizer and the colonized of the pre-independence period exhibited through the homosexual relationship between Alpesh and the Mali. To some critics, the play is about social restraints against the gays and against the social inhibition of inter-caste marriage. All the critics are unanimous on the point that, this is apparently a romantic comedy, set around the theme of the Indian system of arranged marriages.

However, the researcher here discusses the following questions which she thinks Dattani is haunted by:-

Are arranged marriages really successful?

Will the marriage for convenience of Alpesh and Lata last long?

Will this marriage lead to some meaningful goal?

Will the expectations of parents be fulfilled by Alpesh and Lata?

Does Alpesh truly love Trilok? Is he loyal to Trilok?

Will Salim remain loyal to Lata?

Could such a marriage of convenience be an alternative to established norms?

Is it a quest for some exclusive identity?

Should human life be interpreted in terms of sex only?

Dattani sees himself as very contemporary and he sees the clashes of the old and the new in our society – especially on a familial level and on a societal level. He tries to reflect all these clashes on the stage, which he thinks to be absolutely vital and necessary for this to happen. Perhaps, Dattani projects homosexuality as a mode of sexual perversion which finally drags one down, isolating from the social platform, destroying conjugal relationship, forcing to suffer in solitude. It also points towards the postcolonial design and concept that is responsible for dichotomy, evident in its continuous erosion of moral and spiritual values and discipline.

Do the Needful is another play of Dattani that deals with the problem of homosexuality, but what makes it different, is that the love interest in the play cannot culminate in marriage because of communal consciousness in the India society. Lata, the daughter of Devraj and Prema Gowda is in love with Salim- a Muslim terrorist. Lata's mother is cursing herself for not taking care of her daughter well. She thinks that instead of helping her husband with the nursing home, she should have been a proper housewife watching her young daughter. The Gowdas are desperately finding the matrimonial ads to send her in-laws as early as possible. They are ready to give their daughter in the Gujarati family, in an inter-caste marriage to make Lata forget about Salim, who belonged to separate community. They desperately wish to give her in the Patel family, though Alpesh is a divorced and less educated young man. Lata is a girl of independent thoughts. And she doesn't like that her parents run her life by agreeing to Alpesh. The dialogue between Lata and her mother throws light on Lata's relation with Salim.

Lata: Please, Amma! Please don't insist I agree to this! You are running my life.

Prema Gowda: You should have thought of our lives before sleeping with that terrorist.⁸⁷

Prema thinks that Lata has ruined the family name by making her relations known to the hostel boys. Because of the stupidity of Lata, she had to accept a son-in-law who was 'thirty-plus and divorced'.

The Patel family is too eager to settle Alpesh's life by marrying him as early as possible. Chandrakant Patel gives hundred and one rupees to the Poojari for a special prayer for his son. Kusumben Patel wants to take the blessings of Swamiji. But at any cost, their son should get married soon. However, Alpesh asks: "Is it is it very important for me to get married?.... what if... I don't want to get married? Because I am happy being alone."⁸⁸ Alpesh is a homosexual, who loves Trilok and so his first wife divorced him. But the reason is not known to his mother. She thinks that Lata, the Gowda girl must have something to hide. So, they are calling the Patels to see Lata. Setting the children in their own household in time is the goal of all parents. The Gowdas and the Patels wish the same. Dattani successfully presents the picture of Indian responsible elders in any family. Reena Mitra aptly remarks: "The play is a fabric of complex relationships, which expose the fact that the institution of marriage today has lost its sanctity and is nothing but a compromise to promote personal ends."⁸⁹ Neither Lata, nor Alpesh wanted to marry each other. In fact, that night Lata was going to run away from her house to save herself from the arranged marriage, her parents were projecting. She came to the cowshed to say goodbye to Gauri- her favourite cow. She heard a groaning sound and thought that Mariappa and his smuggler friends were killing somebody. She went to Alpesh's room and turned on the flashlight. There she found that Alpesh was a homo and was forcing Mali- doing it. Now she decided to run away with Mariappa and his smuggler friends where the sandalwood was going. But Mali told her that she should not run away and let the Gowda family honour die. He begged her to marry Alpesh. Now, taking the advantage of Mali's 'clue', she manipulated her marriage with Alpesh - in 'Teri bhi chup, meri bhi chup' manner. It was 'doing the needful'. As Alpesh and Salim are living in Mumbai, she agrees to marry Alpesh so that she could see 'her' Salim whenever she wanted to. Alpesh, too, was happy as he could carry on his homosexuality for which Lata has happily consented. Lata resorts to an incompatible marriage with

Alpesh, a homosexual, because his homosexuality proves to be a feasible cover up for meeting their respectable lovers – Trilok and Salim. Here, the question is of sanctity of marriage. Lata and Alpesh pursue their extramarital love liaisons even after they have tied the knot. Their marriage remains an expedient mode of co-existence. Sangeeta Das disapproves this type of contract. She says: “We being Indians hold the institution of marriage with great esteem. Treatment of this great institution as a trifle contract to facilitate their selfish ends fills us with great distaste.”⁹⁰ Marriage is a sacred ceremony based on each other’s loyalty. The chanting of mantras and seven steps taken to the witness of fire has sacred meaning. The Panditji, Swamiji – all the saintly people and guests are called to bless the married couple. All have given feast to take their gratified mouthful best wishes. Marriage is thus, a beautiful and divine religious ceremony but this sanctity is shattered by the marriage of Alpesh and Lata. Both of them could see no way out of the marriage, arranged by their parents and were not ready to give up their respective lovers. So they got ‘happily married’ for their own conveniences. The path, they chose, is a default and it desecrates the sanctity of marriage which can never be acceptable to Indian society. As soon as Lata and Alpesh marry, Dattani shows them meeting their respective lovers by deceiving their families. The following dialogue brings forth the contentment of their hearts:

Chandrakant Patel: (*well over the din*) Alpesh is very happy with his choice. After all, he is independent, he has his own business. He can make his own decisions. Now that he is settled in life, I am going to devote my time to God’s work.

Kusumben Patel: (*Amidst a commotion*) Welcome, Swamiji! We are honoured with your presence! Alpesh, Lata – touch Swamiji’s feet. Bless them, Swamiji! Bless them for a long and happy life! (*Crying*) Bless them. May our lives be added to their lives. May they have many children. At last God has answered our prayers!⁹¹

The dialogue throws light on their overwhelmed emotions of accomplishment. Ironically, the audience starts thinking of her blessings – Will the blessings of Swamiji serve fruitful? Will the married couple have children? If yes, will they be from Alpesh or

Salim? Will this marriage last long and remain 'happy' forever? Has God really answered the prayers of the Patels? Dattani has not given answers to these questions but they stir the feeling of misgiving for the characters - Lata and Alpesh. The audience will start thinking and finding out such characters - may be present in our midst, but such blatant disregard for such a pious ceremony fills with horror.

Dattani drops the curtain here, but the audience starts thinking about the conjugal life of this couple. Despite the above questions in the mind of the audience, there lurks the shadow of some misgivings. Alpesh is not only homosexual, but it seems that he is a disloyal gay. When they went to the farm house of Gowda as guests, he took the name of Trilok and forcedly used the Mali as a sex object. Won't Alpesh use many other men as sex objects after marriage? What will be the result of such gay relationships on his physique? Isn't there the fear of AIDS through such relations? Will he prove to be a good householder in the eyes of his parents? What about his old age? And the most important question is - Will Trilok understand and accept him after this marriage? Likewise, there are another misgivings associated with Lata. Will Salim accept her after her marriage to Alpesh? If not, she has to live a long loveless life in the Patel's family - acting as a daughter-in-law. The following dialogue throws light on these lingering misgivings:

Alpesh: *(Thought)* Trilok, I don't know how much I am actually going to say to you. I assume you will not understand some of it. I am certainly not going to tell you about Mali. One more lie, I guess. I am used to it.

Lata: *(Thought)* Salim, I will be meeting you soon. I hope you understand. You had better. At least with you I can be more honest. And demanding.⁹²

It is obvious in the dialogues that Alpesh is not loyal to Trilok and he has more lies likewise. He is used to lies. Lata is honest to Salim, and hopes that he will understand her. She could not be honest with her parents as well as her parents-in-law and she is aware of this. Thus, the conjugal life of this newly married couple creates a big question mark. Dattani successfully suggests the probable fears in such marriages – overtly arranged but inwardly – made for convenience. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri remarks: "Dattani once again points at the shared spaces between women and gay men, both under

the tremendous hegemony of 'mainstream' patriarchal society that forces them to conform and live lives that are alien to nature." ⁹³ Dattani targets not just the mind of the young generation; but the mind of the contemporary parent generation too, which explore their inner self to the audience. Dattani emerges as a compelling playwright to rearrange the social fabrication and project the post-colonial dichotomy operating at different levels. We are living in two cultures. Gowda and Patel families are the victims of this dichotomy. Tradition pulls the parent generation back and post-colonial modernity pulls the new generation ahead. The family is in the state of tearing off by these opposite pulls. Western education has liberating influence on women, bringing promise of new life outside the conservative measures. The old generation is the 'mainstream' patriarchy. They adjust themselves according to 'time' and allow the young, going for inter-caste marriage. But they could not accept inter-community marriage which is out of frame. They force the young to accept again 'framed-forced-harmony', force them to conform and live lives that are alien to their nature and the result is the marriage of 'mutual convenience' which is despicable. Such marriages are not the solutions. The problems and many hidden questions remain unanswered. And so is Dattani, who proves inconclusive in his drive towards settlement of such controversies. May be it is the failure of post-colonial claims to resolve all complications in a unique way – the wide-spread dichotomy.

These shared spaces, which Dattani points at, may not be healthy. Alpesh and Lata will lead free life sharing spaces between them. But such spaces between women and gay men are disastrous and deformed. Salim has already married four women and Lata's relation with him is only extra-marital which Indian society will never accept. Alpesh would also have many problems awaiting which are inevitable in homosexual relations. Possibly both of them could not be accepted by their respective lovers after marriage. Then what is their future? Shared spaces between them will prove to be useless and now they seem unreliable.

Dattani's titles are always subtle and meaningful. They penetrate the main theme of the play. *Do the Needful* is not an exception to it. The clause 'do the needful' is used four times in the play in the following manner. First of all, we come across the phrase in the letter of Chandrakant Patel to Devraj Gowda. It is projected in the letter suggesting

the requisite discussion for arranging the marriage. Secondly, Lata repeats the phrase ironically, reading it from the letter, as she hates everything associated with the arrangement of marriage. Thirdly, Prema Gowda wants to fix this marriage anyhow and that's why she asks her husband to provide the guests whatever they require and prefer (including favourite music). Lastly, Lata uses the phrase very skillfully. She is resolved on running away when she discovers Alpesh with the Mali in the cowshed. She comes to know that Alpesh is a homo. Her initial and expected disgust gives way to a gleeful sense of freedom. She thinks that she would not have to sleep with this man if she marries him. Both of them will be able to give each other ample space- freedom and do their own thing – requisite thing, also keeping the families and society happy- 'doing the needful'. The mutual agreement comes in the form of a Hindi phrase that Alpesh offers: "Teri bhi chup, meri bhi chup.... Your silence and mine as well".⁹⁴ Thus, the title is symptomatically used cleverly and aptly by Mahesh Dattani. It shows the fervor and struggle of the parents in both the families to 'do the needful' to arrange the marriage of Lata and Alpesh and see them settled.

Dattani has written this radio play with a remarkable accomplishment – with apparent ease. By setting his play partly in Mumbai and partly in the South, in Bangalore, he immediately gave us two different sound-scapes to work within; the teeming masses of the big city pitched against the quieter rural backdrop of the Southern countryside. Dattani artistically makes music work for him within the story by playing M. S. Subbalakshmi's Meera bhajans and the popular tunes of Bollywood (Le jayenge, le jayenge, dilwale dulhaniya le jayenge!) sung by the lift-man in Mumbai, underline the North and South union of the two families. Traffic noises and honks in Mumbai, slapping of oily flesh in massage room, rustle of paper indicating letter, grinding start and halt of lift, closing of lift gates, birds' chirping and the gentle breeze in the trees at the farmhouse in South, exhaling loud and slow of cigarette, sound of drum beat, sound of water pump and rush of water into canal, crickets in the distance, Chandrakant Patel's snoring, Carnatic wedding music, hubbub of guests, taxi-traffic noises- all these sound effects put life into the play. Dattani becomes successful in presenting dynamically the picturesque quality to the play.

Radio play mostly succeeds on artistic projection of montage of sounds. *Do the Needful* begins with a montage of sounds that juxtapose all the major characters and locate them in heterogeneous settings at Mumbai and Bangalore, as also in terms of their orientation.

Dattani's characterization is suggestive. All the characters are clearly portrayed to bring about the theme with its complications. Alpesh and Lata are the central figures in the play. They play an important role of post-modern generation in India. Their respective parents take the theme of patriarchy ahead. The minor characters- the liftman and the coconut vendor and Mali too, play important roles in the play. Through the characters of Devraj Gowda and his wife, Dattani presents the typical Indian parents as 'parents of the bride'. They are ready to make all the adjustments for only one thing that is the arranged marriage of their daughter. They belong to Marasu Vokkaliga Gowdas family. They have been land owners since the Vijaynagar Empire from the 11th century. Devraj is proud of being a Gowda. Nevertheless, he is not giving his daughter in his own community, in marriage. He is aware that his parents and his forefathers will be hurt very badly and he is betraying them by giving his daughter in inter-caste marriage. Mrs. Gowda, too, is ready to give her daughter to a 'divorced groom' because she knows well about her daughter. She wants to send her daughter according to family 'customs' before any 'disgrace' come to the family with her notorious daughter. Gowda community will not accept Lata, a notorious girl as their daughter-in-law; that's why they have to compromise with the Gujarati Patel family. Patel and Gowda parents represent the traditional views of Indians associated with the institution of marriage. Through their thoughts, Dattani questions the relevance and validity of conventionally arranged marriages in the contemporary society. He takes the play beyond the familiar track of family drama. Alpesh and Lata represent the imprudent youth of the contemporary society. This new generation thinks of the 'moment' and lives the 'moments'. They don't want to get chained in the bondage of marriage.

The liftman, Mali and the coconut vendor talk a little in the play, but they suggest a lot. The liftman is a talkative but good-humored person. He gives good advises without asking for. He seems to be the caretaker of everybody. He sends a message for Alpesh to say 'yes' to Lata, bride-to-be. He advises Alpesh to take Lata to see cinema, only a love

film. He is a cheerful person, singing at anybody's wedding. Mali is presented as an innocent country bumpkin. He is the well-wisher of the Gowda family. When he was forced by Alpesh, he was filled with a lot of fears. He always valued chastity. His conversation with Lata brings forth his innocence and dignity. Dattani has juxtaposed this straightforward, credulous character against the backdrop of the perverse characters of Alpesh and Salim.

The coconut vendor is a forthright person like the liftman and has attachment for the Gowda family. He fearlessly says that Alpesh looks a little old for Lata and advises the Gowdas to find a nice Gowda boy for her. It seems that the coconut vendor is the mouthpiece of Dattani. He hates 'big', 'modern' people. He seems to be 'old' in the 'kaliyuga' – in the contemporary urban society. Salim and Trilok are only mentioned in the play. However, they play an important role in taking the plot ahead. Along with the minor characters, they contribute to the richness, intensity, and complexity of the theme and structure. Swamiji's character is mentioned in the play by Kusumben Patel. He represents the trustworthy person in the life of worried Indians. Sally Avens, a producer and director in BBC Radio drama rightly says in 'A Note on the Play': "Mahesh in a Chameleon-like manner finds it easy to draw the character of a fiercely spirited modern girl as he does the early landowner proud of his eleventh century heritage." ⁹⁵

The language is highly naturalistic. It is simple, easy and precise. The language of the people from the lower strata of life, like the liftman and the coconut vendor is direct, simple and powerful. All the dialogues in the play furthers the various themes of the play. Giving an insight into the North and South Indian cultures and regional differences, the words in the play acquire dramatic vitality easily. All the conversations are equally interesting and powerful. Essential pauses and thought mark a silent interplay of conscious and unconscious motivation. Alpesh and Lata's thoughts reinforce the meaning of the play.

To conclude, *Do the Needful* is undoubtedly a radio play "par excellence". Dattani experiments with a variety of dramatic techniques to create visual and auditory images, thereby producing the desired dramatic effect on the audience. By employing a variety of interiors and exteriors, quick shift of scenes, Dattani tries to control the movement of the play and its impact on the audience. It is a romantic comedy with no overtone of morality

or shame – merely a sense of glee at having achieved one's purpose that typifies the genre. At the same time Dattani manages to enmesh the dominant issues of homosexuality, intercommunity arranged marriages and the marriages of convenience arriving at an ingenuous solution that finds liberation in the teeming up of two subversives - Lata and Alpesh with different agendas - Salim and Trilok against the hegemony of a common oppressor - the family in the contemporary society. Dealing with hypocrisy and sham in the society, Dattani, in a comic way, suggests maintaining peace and status quota.

Dattani successfully presents the curious situation as anyone familiar with the Indian milieu would immediately grasp, for rarely does one come across intercommunity arranged marriages. It gets curio-seer as it is revealed that both parties are themselves wary of the situation, and highly skeptical of each other. Yet they are eager to arrange the marriage because of social pressures. The audience is let into the 'thoughts' of both Lata and Alpesh, and realises that while the prospective bride is involved with a terrorist-a Muslim, the 'groom-to-be' is gay. It is a romantic comedy of 'shared spaces'.

Using simple and dexterous dialogues, thoughts spoken out loud for the listener and sound patterns that are richly evocative of different spaces, the play travels through the sound-scapes of Mumbai and Bangalore to the Kannada countryside and back. Dattani has adapted this play for the stage with his usual talent for bringing in unlikely twists in the worldliest situations. Dattani unmistakably and incidentally puts forth the issue of individual identity which is as usual refused to by the common oppressor- the patriarchal structure. In spite of being so different in language and ethnicity, they settle the marriage of their subversive children. The question remains unanswered- won't the identities of both the families get damaged with an anarchic decision of the marriage of their subversive children? Will this arranged marriage indeed, bring dignity to their families? Whatever may be the answer, *Do the Needful* emerges as one of Dattani's significant radio plays.

02.09: *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998):

On a Muggy Night in Mumbai is one of Dattani's best loved and most performed plays, both in India and abroad. Dattani adapted it for the film version *Mango Soufflé* that went on to win rave reviews, the world over. It was first performed at the Tata Theater, Mumbai, on 23rd November 1998. The theme of this play touches the whole society. It is a play about how society creates the patterns of behaviour and how the individuals fall victim to the expectations, society creates. Sudha Rani D. comments about this play: "In this play a whole range of homosexual characters are presented and their experiences throw light on various aspects of the struggle of the homosexuals in the traditional Indian society."⁹⁶ Responding to a question in an interview published in 'Sahara Time', Dattani asserts: "My characters are simply personification of my perception. What moves me actually is an individual's struggle for identity. In fact, more realistic view of things in life is my 'credo'."⁹⁷ In the light of this comment, Dattani discusses the issue of homosexual identity in the play. He has dealt extensively with the different aspects related to gay identity in his two radio plays *Do the Needful*, *Seven Steps Around the Fire* and another work, *Bravely Fought the Queen*. However, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is a path breaking play where the core issue is of homosexuality. The major concern of Dattani in plays depicting homosexuality is the identity crisis which results from being marginalised and oppressed. Identity crisis of the play forms the basis of the play. Responses to rejection, alienation, harassment and social conditioning are explored and highlighted. Dattani presents the struggle of characters when faced with pressures from outside as well as from within.

The play has caused a lot of itching for the hands of the critics. According to some critics, this is a play that looks into sibling relationships and bonding that is at the core of the plays like in *Tara*. Some consider it as a tragi-comedy dealing with homosexuals. It creates ambiguous spaces that Kiran and Kamlesh must negotiate to arrive at the relations that will redefine the given structures. All the critics have one opinion on the point that in this play, Dattani brings out the psychological pressures and fears, the real and the imaginary, gays have to live with. Many critics agree that the play is the first in Indian theatre to openly handle gay themes of love, affiliation, trust and

betrayal raising serious 'closet' issues that generally are invisible. To some, the play is a plea for empathy and sensitivity to India's 'queer culture'. The play also tries to dispense with conventional man / woman role-playing. In fact, the play throws up a number of questions lifting the veil of secrecy that shrouds the marginalised cultures, sexualities and life styles. The questions are –

Can homosexuality change to heterosexuality?

Is homosexuality an 'unnatural' aberration of human society at all?

Is Dattani himself substituting one stereotype with another?

What, for example, happens to bisexuals?

The play attempts to pose these questions, knowing that final answers are hardly possible. Dattani deals with a difficult subject with a bold pen and lays open the hypocrisies of social life which imposes stereotypical roles to men and women and confesses and legitimizes only these roles. The researcher would like to look in detail into the problems of identity, loyalty, social ethos, security and the psychological pressures of gays with reference to this play.

The play is like a charter of demands for homosexuals whose activities are absolutely taboo in the Indian society. Their sexual tendencies are still strongly forbidden by social custom and are greatly offensive to the prevailing moral and social code. The narrative is set in one place – the living room of Kamlesh, a rich fashion designer, living in Mumbai where he has invited a few guests – gay friends to seek help from them. Sharad, Deepali, Bunny and Ranjit are invited by Kamlesh. Kiran Kamlesh's sister abruptly comes there with her fiancé Ed. The guard too, is used by Kamlesh in his gay business.

Of the characters, Sharad and Deepali are comfortable with their sexuality, and have different ways of being gay, though Sharad truly loves Kamlesh. Sharad is camp and showy; Deepali more restrained, perhaps more stable. Kamlesh is anguished, and Ed, the most obvious victim of his own insecurities. Bunny, the T. V. actor is rather more traditional Indian gay man – married (happily he would say) while publicly denying his own nature, and Ranjit has preferred an easy way out by moving to Europe where he can 'be himself' more openly. More stress is laid on the character of Kamlesh and Prakash who is also Ed and romances with Kamlesh's sister, Kiran. Initially, Kamlesh and Prakash were ardent lovers, when Prakash suddenly turncoats and changes into Ed.

Prakash who has now changed to Ed suddenly emerges into the room to meet Kiran. He feels insecure in the house, when he sees all the gays gathered together. He wants to get married to Kiran without any obstacle and tries to leave the place with Kiran as soon as possible. He wants to escape the cynical eyes of the others who knew about his relationship with Kamlesh. Kiran is shown to having all compassion for the gay people and wishes that they should marry for happiness. The irony of the whole story is that, Kiran did not know that the man to whom she was going to get married was a homosexual and an ex-lover of her brother. The revelation in the end comes as a shock to her, and Ed becomes crazy with shame and anger.

The whole play throws light on the homosexuality and its non-acceptance by the Indian society. At one stage, Kamlesh says: "I don't want camouflage and I don't want glitters. I don't want to flaunt or hide anything."⁹⁸ To which, Ranjit cynically replies: "Well, this is the price one pays for living in India. My English lover and I have been together for twelve years now. You lot will never be able to find a lover in this wretched country."⁹⁹ Bunny suggests Kamlesh to get marry and pretends to be 'straight'. He is sure that the gays won't be accepted by the millions if they screamed from the rooftops that they are gay. According to him, even animals camouflage – blend with the surroundings.

Homosexuality is an upcoming issue of today, Dattani has exposed in the play. Every second person may be a homosexual but fear of shutting out from society restrains him/her from exposing himself/herself. The society imposes hypocrisy upon them, which demand deceit and negation, rather than allowing self-expression, sensibility and dignity to them. Sangeeta Das aptly says: "Through this play, Mahesh Dattani has tried to soften the society towards the gay and subtly tried to stir up compassion for this class."¹⁰⁰ Dattani prefers the virgin field, that of homosexuals, eunuchs, etc. to some extents, in Indian writing, this comes in the realm of taboo. Though Dattani is not the first to visit this unexplored piece of land, his approach is certainly different. In the play, homosexuality is the core issue where the team of affluent lesbians and sodomites gather together and fight their own prejudices and end in meaningless nothingness. While the traditionalists consider such a relationship as something unnatural, nasty and even

disrespectful, the gays think otherwise. Among themselves, they even like to assert their true identity and sanctity. When the guard comes with a package, Sharad says:

Sharad: Oooh! Daru ki botalein?

Guard: Ji.

Sharad: To aise bolo na. kya daru bolnein me sharam aati hai? (Points to the bar) Wahan rakho. Yahan kuch bhi bolnemein ya karne mein sharam nahin rakhte. Hum log sab bahut besharm hain. Tum bhi besharm ho jao.¹⁰¹

Sharad is clever enough to recognize that the guard is Kamlesh's new lover who is paid for sex. Deepali says to Kamlesh that if he were a woman, they would be in love. Upon this, Kamlesh says that if she were a man they would be in love. If they were heterosexual, they would be married. Thus, the play is full of shameless expressions, experiences and relations. Taboo relationships are exposed on the stage. Even the start of the play is shocking. The sets are dimly lit and the audience begins to discern a couple in bed, realizing that they are witness to an intimate and tender moment of love. The lights gradually grow brighter, and the audience is able to see a man's figure, the other – the very significant other – remains yet invisible, except in silhouette. A moment later, the man stands up and the invisible is made visible. The viewers come face-to-face with a middle-aged man – a security guard – being paid for sex. Thus, the very opening throws light on the taboo relationships within the gays in Kamlesh's party. They represent the varied faces of the homosexual community- Sharad, the flamboyant gay, not cares in the least about how the world use him, Bunny, his exact opposite, the secret homosexual who plays a happily married father on a T. V. sitcom as well as in real life, and Deepali, the sensible lesbian, even in gay culture. Tanu Pant says, "By pulling out taboo subjects from under the rug and placing them on stage for public discussion, Dattani challenges the constructions of 'India' and 'Indians' as they have traditionally being defined in modern theatre."¹⁰² Dattani not only unveils the taboo issues and relationships but he also uses the taboo language of the gays. Sharad is shown as a ruder and foul mouthed gay.

The plot moves around the dilemma Kamlesh is in, owing to his sister Kiran's decision to marry Ed who had been his lover and whom Kamlesh still loves. Unable to

resolve the situation himself, Kamlesh invites his friends over to his place. As his friends drift in and conversation begins, various issues are taken up and discussed. They are - lack of choice for women in heterogeneous marriage, extra-marital affair, marital violence, exploitation of a person as a sex object - be it male or female, the need for support group and bonding among homosexuals, shifting love relation between gays, hypocrisy of 'closet' gays, demonizing of homosexuals by religion, stereotyping homosexuals, gay marriages, non-congenial Indian milieu in relation to homosexuals, the need to conform owing to social pressures, marriage of convenience to camouflage gay identity, and gays not at ease with their sexuality. The problems of these gays are hard to bear and difficult to tell. Kamlesh, the central character needs help from his other gay friends. So he confesses that he is still in love with Prakash, a man who has apparently moved on, gone 'straight'. He is going to marry Kamlesh's sister Kiran. The already complex situation becomes more confusing when he finds that Prakash is yet homosexual and wants to marry Kiran, to be able to show the society that he is a 'normal' - 'straight' one. However, their sexually unambiguous photo tells everything to Kiran. When the guard tells that the people in the wedding had seen the photo, Prakash thinks of ending his life to save his defamation. Meanwhile, he listens to the explosion of fireworks and is stunned. When his friends grab him, he hits out at Kamlesh crying with anger: "Faggot! Pancy! Gandu! Gandu!"¹⁰³ Ed (Prakash) wants to live but feels life difficult to live in the role of a homosexual. To hide this identity, which is despised by the society, he had planned to marry Kiran and meet easily to Kamlesh - Kiran's brother. Kamlesh is taking the treatment from a psychiatrist to come out of commotion, but fails. Three years ago, he moved to Bombay (Mumbai) to get over a relationship - the pain of separation from Prakash. He loved Sharad to forget Prakash but failed. He hurt Sharad by making him go through the same pain and suffering that Kamlesh was trying to get over. When Sharad went away, again he felt void. Prakash left him because he was ashamed of their relationship. Leaving his parents and sister, he left for Mumbai because of Prakash. Then he wished for the first time in his life that he wasn't gay.

Sharad is the most upfront about his identity. When Kamlesh says that Prakash has changed from homosexual to heterosexual, Sharad says: "If any one of us can be straight, I am Madhubala".¹⁰⁴ Sharad doesn't refuse what he is. That's why he hardly

believes that Prakash has changed into a heterosexual. Instead, he alerts Kamlesh to save his sister Kiran from the devil Prakash who is going to spoil the conjugal life of Kiran. It is obvious that Sharad never denies his 'dizzy Queen' identity and advises the other gays (Kamlesh and Prakash) to identify themselves and locate their identities and nurture them. He is not ashamed of being a gay and playing the 'Queen'. In a way, Sharad is the mouthpiece of Dattani.

Bunny's thoughts are penetrating concerning the identity. He is a considerate husband, who loves his wife. He gives her much than any heterosexual man can give, look after her well and thinks that she is content. Nevertheless, he admits that he cannot love his wife with the same intensity with which he can love a man. He advises Kamlesh, too, to get married to forget Prakash. He suggests: "Camouflage! Even animals do it. Blend with the surroundings. They can't find you. You politically correct gays deny yourself the basic animal instinct of camouflage."¹⁰⁵ This is the typical Indian manner of constructing an acceptable identity as a cover for the true self. The other way to 'be yourself' would quite simply be to run away. Thus, Bunny runs away from 'himself' to maintain his identity in the society. On the other, hand Ranjit runs away from India, this 'wretched country' to maintain his identity. Sharad puts it as turning into a 'coconut' - brown on the outside and white on the inside. Ranjit boasts of having a steady relationship with his English lover where his sexual identity ceases to be a problem; but other problems of racial identity are there. And he is ready to pay the price of social identity for the sake of sexual identity. Ranjit is sometimes regretful of being an Indian, because he can't seem to be both Indian and gay. On the contrary, though a Sardarji, Bunny cuts his hair not because he is ashamed of being a Sardar. He is proud of it. He cuts his hair because if he had a turban, he will end up playing a stereotypical Sird in all those movies.

Prakash is marrying Kiran to stop feeling simply ashamed of being gay. All this is 'sham to cover up shame' in the words of Ranjit. In words of Deepali it is 'fear' - of the corners we will be pushed into where we don't want to be. In short, as Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri puts it: "The intricate web of identities embedded within the diverse frameworks does not appear in the play only in terms of sexuality but as complex and multi-dimensional - cultural / racial / sexual polyphony."¹⁰⁶

Deepali is also a gay but she is very loyal to the other lesbian – Tina. She is proud of being a woman. Sexuality apart, the gender war remains intact. Deepali says: “I am all for the gay men’s cause. Men deserve only men! ” and “I thank God. Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am a woman.”¹⁰⁷ Deepali doesn’t like abusing by female words like ‘bitch’. She says: “Don’t – don’t use that word. (clenches her fist at him) You can call yourself a dog, call yourself a pig, but never, never insult a female.”¹⁰⁸

Dattani focuses on gender differences and the rupture between the world of men and women. Kiran was extremely exploited by her ex-husband. There were fights at night. She faced a lot of humiliation while explaining friends or neighbors that the black eye was from banging her head against the door, or the broken rib was from a fall and it was the cigarette burns on her arms, she couldn’t explain. Then finally, her brother called the police. He was arrested but was free the next day as his parents bailed him out. Kiran’s parents instead, wanted her to adjust. A woman should die at home where she is sent in marriage – is the attitude of the Indian parents. After getting divorce, she finds hope in Ed and loves him intimately but soon she came to know that Ed was Prakash in fact, who had homosexual relations with her brother. Here Dattani effortlessly throws light on the rupture between the world of men and women. Also he throws light on the naughty pleasure loving attitudes of the gays. In the First Act, Dattani mentions an incident. Sharad picks up the pair of binoculars and watches from the window the diamond merchant and his wife at sex. Kamlesh says: “You should come by sometime about eleven in the morning on a working day. That’s when she does it with the doodhwalla.”¹⁰⁹

Thus, Dattani in the play, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* works out the problematic identity of the gay people who begin to doubt their own reality, and visit to ‘straight’ homophobic psychiatrist to rid themselves of depression. The real identity of being gay will never give happiness to the individual because the society will not accept this identity. An Indian can accept only traditionally imposed identities. Dattani asserts that it is impossible to change society and it may be possible to you to reorient yourself. In Bunny’s words it is called ‘camouflage’ – blending with surroundings to secure the real identity.

In the play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Dattani makes use of a very remarkable stagecraft in terms of spaces. The spaces within the home are 'muggy', too hot to be comfortable, the air-conditioning breaking down. Even as the interior, spaces of the psyche of the gays have to be confronted. There is not only the skyline of Mumbai beyond, but there is the real world out there, indicated by the niggling presence of the wedding going on at ground level. Meanwhile, the exteriors keep exerting pressure, intruding into the other spaces occupied by the characters in the play. These pressures and the outside wedding music remind the characters of their isolation and 'queer'ness. Though the play is situated in Kamlesh's well-furnished flat in one of Mumbai's more privileged spaces at Marine Drive, there is always the fear of the outside world which oppressively intrudes through various devices like the marriage next door, the children following Bunny, the need to conceal and the ultimate discovery of the incriminating photograph by the children, pitted against the 'muggy' atmosphere that is suffocating in many senses.

John McRae admires Dattani in the following words: "Mahesh Dattani is always adventurous in his ways of using the theatrical space at his disposal; multiple levels, breaking the bounds of proscenium, wondrously inventive use of lighting to give height, breadth and depth. In *On a muggy Night in Mumbai* he reaches new heights of achievements."¹¹⁰ In fact, very few dramatists are able to give this sense of a whole society touching the participants in the on-stage drama. This dramatic technique recalls Ibsen at his social best.

Characters in the play are not stereotypical. They are a carefully balanced range of individuals with a depth of experience that exceeds traditional expectations. They are brought together in such a way that they easily bring out the conflicts, repressions, fears and past secrets which are violently attacking Kamlesh and Prakash, the two main gays in the play. The past relationship between Kamlesh and Prakash, and the new 'romance' between Ed and Kiran are beautifully counterpoised. The revelation at the climax of the First Act that Ed and Prakash - the same person - always draws a gasp of astonishment from the audience. Thus, Dattani very successfully applies his innovative dramatic techniques. This is his refinement and a development of techniques Dattani has

developed in his plays. His special theatrical quality is to build tension in a social context, which involves not only the characters but also the audience.

Each Act builds to a climax of revelations and self-discoveries. The intrusive wedding music becomes the accompaniment to the hot discussion indoors and the audience goes through the classic cathartic emotions of terror and pity as the characters' masks fall. The language Dattani uses in the play is highly 'Mumbai' accented. Taboo words are boldly used to create a sense of real gay world of the homosexuals. The First Act almost begins in Hindi. Kamlesh and Guard are conversing in Hindi. Many Hindi words are used of which comprehensive meaning cannot be fully conveyed by their English equivalents. Dattani shows considerable command of spoken language using the realistic language suited to the level and the status of the characters. The dialogues are so easy-going that they create the impression of everyday social intercourse. The language, the foul phrases the gays use, like – 'penis power', 'faggot', 'pancy', 'gandu', 'that has bulge in the pants', 'you selfish beast', etc. are scattered all over the play. They underline the muggy atmosphere and taboo relationships between the gays.

To conclude, the play asserts the place of Dattani in the history of Indian English drama as he is the unique dramatist in India who has, for the first time, skillfully handled the issue of homosexuality at its core, in this play. No other playwright in India has dared to rip off the veil of secrecy that covers marginalised gay cultures, sexualities, lifestyles and taboo relationships in cities like Mumbai. He is the first playwright who has used all the gay characters in his play *On a muggy Night in Mumbai* to handle openly gay themes of love, affiliation, trust and betrayal, raising serious 'closet' issues that remain generally invisible. This is the first play in Indian theatre where the playwright points out at the male-male and female-female dealing openly with homosexuality where a gay prefers to be called 'brown' in West than to be called 'homosexual' in India.

Dattani minutely explores that the homosexuals have certain roles in their relationships. Sharad has feminine love for Kamlesh. He becomes a housewife for Kamlesh. As well, gays have also their loyalties. Kamlesh loves Prakash - his first love and is unable to forget him. Even he left Bangalore to forget him and tried to drown himself in his business. Then he came in contact with Sharad who poured feminine love upon him. Even then he could not forget Prakash. He cherishes Prakash's memories in

the form of their photograph together. He has no courage to tear it off to get rid of his memories. On the other hand, Sharad too, loves Kamlesh devotedly. He doesn't like that Kamlesh has not yet forgotten Prakash. Prakash too, asks Kamlesh in anxiety whether he loves Sharad and gets hurt when Kamlesh replies that he loves Sharad and can be honest with him to live openly as two men in love. Deepali and Tina, the two lesbian women are presented more loyal and fearless than the men. These women characters, though lesbians, have their own ethics and wisdom.

The play depicts marginalized groups of the society, like the homosexuals, bisexuals, and lesbians – people who are considered misfits in a society where stereotyped attitudes and notions reign supreme. Dattani successfully suggests that the fault is not just the characters' – it is everyone's, in a society which not only condones but encourages hypocrisy, which demands negation rather than allowing self-expression, responsibility and dignity. Moreover, he wants to suggest that there is harm in the oppression which is symbolized throughout by the muggy heat and the failing air con. The word 'muggy' denotes the unpleasantly warm and damp night of the homosexuals together. The title of the play is itself symbolic. In a muggy weather, the atmosphere is unpleasant, warm, damp and clammy and it makes us feel uncomfortable or tired. As a matter of fact, all the characters are feeling ill-at-ease and they want to set themselves free from suffocation, frustration and isolation, hence, the title of the play throws a lot of light on the clever, moving and hugely dramatic tragi-comedy.

In a post-performance panel discussion about the play in the USA, Gayatri Gopinath, a professor of Women and Gender Studies at UC Davis, said: "South Asian culture has a new visibility in the West.... this is also coinciding with a new interest in gay life. South Asian queer culture is slowly coming out of the closet."¹¹¹

02.10: *Seven Steps Around the Fire* (Radio Play for BBC) (1998)

Commissioned by the BBC, *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, a radio play, is a “whodunit” says Dattani in one of his interviews. The play was first broadcast as *Seven Circles Around the Fire* by BBC Radio 4 on 9th January 1999. It was first performed on stage at the Museum Theatre, Chennai, by MTC Production and Madras Players on 6th August 1999, directed by Mithran Devanesen. Jeremy Mortimer, the Director in BBC Radio observes that the listener response to the play was extremely positive. The play carries more messages than the central issue of the murder of a transgendered. The play presents the transgendered as the victim of a society which has its own fixed notions about the social status they have. Here too, Dattani makes use of a familiar genre only to subvert it, skillfully enmeshing the modes of detective fiction with a social issue that is unusual- to explore themes that once again focus on the ‘invisible’ zones of social behaviour. This time, the play revolves around the ‘third’ gender – the community of eunuchs and their existence on the fringes of the Indian milieu.

According to the critics, *Seven Steps Around the Fire* deals with the suppression of the marginalised hijra community. It also deals with the bias of squarely blaming the woman for her barren state. Some scholars observe that the play is faced with the feminine question of identity and dilemma of feminine sensibility to an extent that it brings forth the colonial perspectives of society. Some critics believe that the play looks at human relationships within the institutions of marriage. It undermines the sanctity of marriage by laying bare the fault lines in husband and wife bondages. To some critics, it seems to reflect the post-colonial trend of subversion and liberation against the politics of hegemony. Some critics remark that the playwright seems to plunge into the lived reality of hijra people, their struggle through fears, losses and indignity. Dattani deals with the issue of marginality and chooses this unconventional area as his focus to offer a different kind of stuff to the English knowing elite of India.

The unconventional themes in his plays make Dattani unacceptable to the conservative audience. But the playwright overcomes this by his forceful dialogue and insight into human nature. He writes about hijras, homosexuality and politics in present day society with confidence and fortitude. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, he presents the

life story of a hijra named Kamala, a beautiful eunuch who was mysteriously murdered. The play narrates the plight of the hijras who are equidistant from men and women. They sing and dance at weddings and childbirths. But the irony is that they can neither marry nor give birth to children. Dattani is bold enough to depict the life of hijras who are looked down upon in the society. On this backdrop, the researcher would like to focus on the post-colonial spirit of one marginalised element, fighting bravely for another marginalised element emphatically. She would also like to focus on Dattani's dramatic skill, as a radio playwright.

Uma, a Ph. D. Scholar in sociology, wife of the superintendent of police, Suresh Rao, and daughter of a vice-Chancellor, is researching on the living conditions of the eunuchs. Now, she is following up the murder of a beautiful hijra, Kamla. Constable Munswamy assists her, set to the task by his boss- Suresh in order to keep her out of any possible trouble in her sleuthing. The central concerns of the play are set on uncertain ground, that are hardly well-documented, given the disgrace attached to them – hence, making Uma's research appearing reasonable while being sensitively humane.

The play is not divided into acts. It opens with the chanting of the Sanskrit marriage mantras that fade out to the sound of the rustle and hiss of fire. This in turn, is pushed to the background by a piercing scream. The sound of the fire engulfs the setting. After a significant pause, the action begins. Uma, in the police station visits the cell of Anarkali, a hijra – an accused, who is to interview. Listening Anarkali's filthy language, Munswamy declares that a lady with antecedents like Uma, should perhaps look at more acceptable cases like "man killing wife, wife killing man's lover, brother killing brother...dowry death cases" as such cases would be 'simpler' and more 'honourable' for her to study. Anarkali cautiously spits venom and abuse and lays bare a number of unpalatable truths. Then she changes tactics and decides to use the operating power situation to her own benefit by manipulating Uma to obtain her freedom, money, and even cigarettes. Anarkali's conversation with Uma reveals many of the veiled truths that lie shrouded within the multiple layers on myths and cultural beliefs. They also reveal the problems of relationships within accepted norms. Uma borrows money from her father to bail out Anarkali, bribes Champa with it and relentlessly pursues the minister's bodyguard, Salim, looking for clues. In the end, she finds that the murder victim Kamla,

the beautiful hijra, had been secretly married to Subbu, the son of a wealthy government minister. The minister had the young hijra burned to death, and hastily arranges for his son to marry an acceptable girl. But at the wedding, Subbu produces a gun and kills himself. The truth behind the suicide is hushed up, but Uma has been keeping full notes for her thesis on the hijra community.

The society accepts a hijra for gracing the ceremonies of marriage and births, but would not allow them to partake of such ceremonies. Dattani has ironically portrayed this aspect which would not have been given any heed, for any matter related to hijra community is of no importance to anyone. The heart-rending story about a hijra, murdered simply because she married Subbu, a young man having a status of importance in society, fills us with horror and sense of injustice. The preoccupation with 'fringe' issues forms an important element in Dattani's work – issues that remain unrevealed and suppressed, or are pushed to the periphery come to occupy centre stage. He pushes thus, the 'invisible' issues forward, to create at least an acknowledgement of their existence. Dattani putting this issue before the audience makes them think of their (eunuchs) marginalised conditions. Society should do something to help them and allow them a place of recognition and deal with them with compassion. As Amar Nath Prasad says, this most popular play "expresses the identity crisis of the hijras and their heart-felt longing for being treated as a social being in an indifferent society where people like the government minister seldom feel a qualm of conscience in getting a hijra burnt to death."¹¹²

In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Dattani's reference to marriage is two-fold. One a 'normal' arranged marriage where Subbu shoots himself and the other is the reference to his earlier 'hidden' marriage with the beautiful eunuch. Why was the first marriage 'hidden'? Why was the first wife Kamla burnt alive by hired goons? If we find answers to these questions, we have to face the identity crisis in society. People in 'no man's land' haven't their identity. By enquiring into the conditions of the marginalised existence like hijra community, Dattani throws questions like – what is 'normal', 'regular', 'stable' and 'fixed'? Such abnormal, irregular, unstable and unfixed victims have no identity as normal human beings in society. That's why, possibly, they try to gain the identity as dancers and singers as well as blessers at rituals like marriage and birth ceremonies.

When Uma calls Champa 'Madam' and Anarkali 'she', Munswamy laughs at it. They call 'it' to the hijras. It is their identity. However, through his plays, Dattani suggests the possibilities for reworking, reconstruction and resignification starting from the basic unit of the society, and identifying family as the foundation of institutional power.

Subbu secretly marries Kamla as he knows that his identity as a son of minister will never let him marry openly a hijra like Kamla. Though he loves her passionately, his love has no honourable identity in the society. However, love can lead a person to any tragic step. He kills himself and wins over the 'forced harmony' and 'forced identity' managed by his father.

There is also the special connotation to what it means to be a eunuch in the Indian context, and the strong identifying marks revealed in how they speak, walk, clap, sing or dance. These are the unmistakable marks that the eunuch assumes to formulate a distinctive identity that sets them apart as community in India and are easily recognized by Indians. Dattani emphasises on the unseen, invisible and even unspoken nature of such identities; on issues that are swept under the rug and presumed non-existent.

Dattani's protagonists search for their identities with the often oppressive structures of custom, tradition, and gender. In Uma's character, Dattani sketches the prototype of his female identity- plucky, courageous, unafraid to undertake risks and working from within the established limitations or boundaries. Uma draws her identity in multiple ways, firmly and perhaps happily, tethered to mainstream society. She works as a woman fully conscious of her social role as a daughter, daughter-in-law and a wife. Above all, she is portrayed as an individual, fully conscious of her roles and the fact that there exists a self, independent of all these socially imposed roles. She acknowledges the humanity and the emotional bond among the eunuchs, which places her at a higher level of social consciousness than Suresh- her husband, Munswamy- the constable, Mr. Sharma- the minister and Salim. The play revolves around Uma's choice to help Anarkali and free her from victimization, creating an aura of an unusual identity around her.

Seven Steps Around the Fire is faced with thus, feminine question of identity and dilemma of feminine sensibility to an extent that it brings forth the colonial perspective of society. Uma Rao emerges as the most powerful character of the play, the mouthpiece of the playwright, who fights to establish the identity of the eunuch. The mystery behind the

murder of Kamla is the police-politician-crime connection which is a post-colonial development. Murder of Kamla raises the issue of an abandoned section of humanity without a legal system or a forum for compensation to protect the lives and dignity of the eunuch. Total lack of accountability on the part of the police and the legal machinery is alarming. The play addresses the question of concern and possibility of support for the transgendered. Uma's repeated attempts and smart planning bypassing her husband Suresh is due to her genuine concern and interest in establishing justice. Uma becomes the agent of change in this post-colonial state of indifference of security and law section in the post-colonial time. Gauri Shankar Jha observes: "The weakness of judiciary, that depends on evidence only, is also remarkable. The play speaks of subaltern and thus fulfills the post-colonial condition of writing."¹¹³ In postcolonial India, there are a few social agents like Uma, characterized by an open mind, a consciousness that dares to think differently, reacting against social conditioning, questioning the existing social norms and their rationality and merit.

As a wife, loyalty, obedience and motherhood are the qualities expected from any woman and Uma is determined to finish her investigation in spite of the danger involved in it. She is aware that she needs Ph. D. for a job if the in-laws throw her out of the house. As a post-colonial woman, she knows the limitations. The post-colonial subaltern in Dattani's play has a sense of self-dignity, inner strength and the courage to endure their pains and struggle. He tries to shatter the social norms and challenges, the assumptions as hypocritical practices. Thus, the post-modern art breaks through the stereotypes questioning the refusal to recognize the differences and the unrepresented. About this change Dattani says in one of his interviews: "I think it is all about reflecting the time which we are in and if those times are changing, then I think that it needs to be reflected in the theatre. If the things aren't changing then even that needs to be reflected."¹¹⁴

The eunuch community is of course, correlative of Dattani's pet concerns – homosexuality. Subbu marries Kamla, a eunuch as it is obvious that he is a homosexual to an extent that he can't keep himself away from Kamla even after her death. Once he said to Uma: "I hate weddings. I don't want all this. I don't wish to go ahead with this."¹¹⁵ In order to convey his message to the audience and the reader as well, and to make them realise and accept that such things like homosexuality and manipulation of

hijra community by the mainstream do happen in the society; Dattani exposes the common Indian day-to-day abuses.

It is a paradoxical situation that the eunuchs are believed to assure parenthood to the couple who themselves are unable to give birth to child, being transgendered – ‘neither male nor female’. Perceived as the lowest of the low, they yearn for family and love. The two events in mainstream Hindu culture where their presence is acceptable – marriage and birth – ironically are the very same privileges denied to them by man and nature. Anarkali in the play says that they make relations with their eyes and with their love. There are many beliefs about them. They are objects of mistrust, ridicule and contempt. They exist only on the margins and are discriminated in physical, sexual as well as violent ways. They visit the wedding to bless the marriage with their singing and dancing. When they enter on the scene of Subbu’s marriage, his father Mr. Sharma, under tension tries to drive them out but Uma says, “No. it is bad luck to turn away a hijra on a wedding or a birth.”¹¹⁶ So Mr. Sharma gives them money and lets them sing and dance. At the end of the play Anarkali offers Uma a locket with special mantra given to her by Champa. She asks Uma to wear it by which Uma will be blessed with children and will be happy with her family. Dattani presents the circumstances and contexts in which these hijras are viewed with suspicion emphasizing their outcaste status. The dehumanized conditions of their existence and the humiliation of sexual abuse even within the prison premises point out the manifold discrimination of the transgendered. Miruna George mentions: “The issue of the transgendered is no more a marginal issue but becomes a mainstream concern. By deliberately bringing in the light of the transgendered to the central stage, Dattani hopes to have their voices heard, signaling the dawning of a new social awareness.”¹¹⁷

Use of natural language makes the play more alive. What matters most in this short play is the proper use of some words and phrases symbolizing the character and activities of the hijras. Making relations with eyes and love, speaking in sexual manner, using taboo words like ‘bitch’, ‘sister-fucker’, ‘sons of whores’, etc. Dattani creates a lively world of the hijra community. Rude and vulgar expressions present their filthy conduct. Some dialogues have great power of presenting picture before eyes. Here is an example:

Anarkali: We make our relations with our eyes... Oh, brother, give me a cigarette, *na*.

Munswamy: Shut up. And don't call me brother.

Anarkali: Just one, *na* (*very sexual*) I will do anything for you, brother. Give, *na*.

Munswamy: *Chee!* Who would want to (*flustered*) I – I don't smoke.

Anarkali: If you had a beautiful sister, you will give her a cigarette for a fuck, no? ¹¹⁸

Dattani uses many Hindi words which give the play peculiar Indian touch and helps in creating homely atmosphere. He uses abundantly the words like – 'salaam', 'memsaab', 'saab', 'na', 'paisa', 'namaskar', 'baksheesh', 'poojari', 'mantra', etc. in the play which help in reflecting honestly and purely the lives of Indians with their traditions and culture.

The relationship between the three characters Uma, her husband - Suresh and the constable - Munswamy is beautifully crafted, and is all the more successful for fitting within an established pattern of detective fiction. Commenting on Dattani's language and characterization, Jeremy Mortimer, director in BBC Radio drama aptly says: "Here was a playwright who was not afraid to work within a relatively conventional dramatic structure to tell a story that was bold and powerful without ever being melodramatic." ¹¹⁹

Dattani's characters stand bold questioning their identity who feel isolated in some way. Uma certainly feels isolated in her marriage, and this sense of isolation makes her empathize with Anarkali – the hijra she besisters. By using appropriate sound effects, Dattani makes the radio play happen before our eyes. Rustle of paper, whirring of fan, pouring of tea in cup, stirring up, bazaar noises, film music in bazaar, dog barking on road fading in car in motion, occasional honks from other vehicles, chatter of guests at wedding, chanting of Sanskrit marriage slokas, clapping of hijras at wedding, Subbu's sobs, a gunshot and screams – all these sound effects at appropriate occasions add picturesque quality to the play. The radio audience too, gets involved in it as if they are watching a real performance before their eyes. With the hand of a craftsman, the playwright fills the places with deep meanings.

Even the title of the play is very significant. An Indian audience will immediately catch on and understand the reference to marriage and realise the significance of the

chanting of the marriage mantras, the sounds of the fire at the beginning and at the end of the play. The question remains only with an English or foreign audience. There are many problems in presenting a radio play that are associated with voice and real visual item – in this play – the hijras. Again it is not so easy to present on the radio play the strong identifying marks revealing hijra's speaking, walking, clapping or singing – and expressions of eyes. These are the unmistakable marks that the eunuchs assume to formulate the distinctive identity that sets them apart as a community. There is the danger of disappearing these minutes leaving only 'male' voices heard by the listeners. These are the resonances that must not be missed in a radio play. As Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri mentions: "During such negotiations, there is the danger of reductionism and oversimplification in trying to explain the cultural context, especially so if the medium happens to be radio drama where one is required to create the correct ambience and the context within the narrative through sound only." ¹²⁰

To sum up, the play is a fascinating slice of life, presenting reality as it exists reminding Ibsen, the Father of Realism. While concluding, the researcher would like to highlight a question – Where did the seven steps around the fire take Subbu? For the first time they took him secretly to the heaven of homosexuality, which is denied by the society as well as his own family. For the second time, these steps took him to the hell with the sin of suicide. These fire steps burnt Kamla to death and offered widowhood to newly married bride. Dattani wants to tell the audience that the police department and the law are meant to establish harmony and peace in society, but both the departments are today trying to bring a 'forced harmony' destroying the peace of the individuals and changing it into bloodshed. Maybe Kamla or the new bride, they are seeking courage to endure their pains and struggles. By operating within the realistic context of a given culture, Dattani intends to shatter the social norms and challenge social assumptions. Norms and rules, challenged as irregularities are exposed. At the centre of the play Dattani appears to be an avant-garde feminist. The seven rounds witnessed by the fire God, eternally binding man and woman in matrimony are useless and forced for the eunuchs as well as homosexuals like Kamla and Subbu. The play questions the relevance and validity of this convention of walking around the fire of the marital couple taking the seven steps signifying the sacred vows of marriage in the contemporary society. It

interrogates the stance which rejects the possibility of love, loyalty and dedication between a eunuch and a homosexual. Putting the 'fringe' issue of hijra community before the audience through the play, Dattani suggests helping them and allowing them a place of recognition and deal with them with compassion, sharing the social and human responsibility like Uma. As a radio as well as a stage play, *Seven Steps Around the Fire* has been a great success. It has established Dattani as one of India's most daring, innovative and important playwrights in English today.

02.11: *The Swami and Winston* (Radio Play for BBC) (2000)

The Swami and Winston, another 'whodunit' radio play by Mahesh Dattani was first broadcast on 3rd June 2000 at 3.00 p.m. on BBC Radio 4. The play was directed by Jeremy Mortimer. This is another case for the scholar-sleuth, Uma Rao, daughter-in-law of Bangalore's Deputy Commissioner of Police, and wife of the Superintendent. Still researching her thesis on violence in India, and having one solved case to her credit, Uma comes into contact with religious fanaticism at its most extreme when investigating the death of a member of the English aristocracy. Using rather unconventional means, Uma, the sleuth, uncovers the truth behind the brutal murder of Lady Montefiore. An English Burberry raincoat and a mischievous dog provide the only clue to the identity of the murderer. Uma stumbles upon some unsavoury truths and keeps notes on the murder that is politically motivated and hence, hushed up. Here too, Dattani makes use of a familial genre only to subvert it, skillfully enmeshing the modes of detective fiction with social issues. The researcher would like to explore the thematic fabric of this play as well as she aims at examining it as a radio play.

Lady Caroline Montefiore was a wealthy woman even by European standards. She has lost her dog- Winston who is more than a child to her. Actually, she wanted to go to the ashram, but the driver insisted her on looking the Bull Temple and Winston got lost from the hands of the Lady. She made her complaint to the police. Munswamy was ordered to find out the dog in twenty four hours or the Superintendent would be getting him transferred to some village. Lady Montefiore didn't trust Indian police, so she made her own arrangements and instructed the hotel manager to advertise in the local news papers. She was offering a reward of five thousand pounds for the dog. Soon, Winston was found with Sitaram Trivedi.

The Lady had been to India to sort out some business with her brother, Charles. So she wanted to go to the ashram where Charles lived. In fact, the English woman had been to India for executing the letter of intension to Barnsworth and Milling. However, on the way to the ashram, when they (the Lady, Winston and the driver) were near the Bull Temple, the engine got over-heated and the car came to a halt. The driver went out to get a mechanic near the Bull Temple and meanwhile the English woman was strangled with

Winston's leather leash. The police superintendent suspects that the murder was probably one of the robbery cases. Lady Montefiore must have put up a fight and so she got killed and some of those Muslims in that area had been arrested before. They must have stopped the car. Charles, who lived at the Swami's ashram in Whitefield, read about the murder in the papers and came to the police station. Winston, her dog was kept under the care of Munswamy. The driver was arrested. Uma wanted to help the dead English woman and her dog, Winston. So she decided to go to the ashram to find out the truth. Uma went to Sitaram Trivedi, a North Indian vaishnav Brahmin, with whom Winston was found. He also invited the Lady to lunch and collected information about the English woman. He came to know that she was an extremely wealthy woman, a spinster from an illustrious English family from Hertfordshire.

The English lady was not a Palace-on-Wheels tourist or a devotee of the Swami. She came to India to settle with the business to her brother. Skillfully, Uma unveils the murder mystery. When she went with Munswamy to the place where the English woman was murdered; she found a scarecrow wearing a raincoat. She guessed that only Charles could afford Burberry's raincoat from England. The right sleeve of the raincoat was torn, as poor Winston had tried his best to save his mistress. So it was clear that the murderer wanted to get rid of the raincoat. Then Uma guessed that someone must have cut the fan belt of the English woman's ambassador to stop the car, on a lonely road where there were only fields and no houses or shops. It was raining so heavily that there were no tire marks, footprints or anything to find out whether the murderer came in a car or from the fields or from the temple. In a short while, Uma became successful in finding out the murderer, Sitaram Trivedi. He had killed the English woman to stop her from executing Charles's letter of intension. The murderer wanted to kill Charles as Charles was the only inheritor of her property. He wanted to put the suspicion on the Swami so he used Swami's raincoat and threw it in the field, knowing it would be found. When Uma told all this mystery to Charles, the car came to a halt as Munswamy had forgotten to put the fan belt on again. Meanwhile, a car came and Sitaram Trivedi got out from the car in the intension of shooting Charles to gulp down his property. Charles and Trivedi fought a while before the gun had gone off. Trivedi fell to the ground. His daughter, Radha had

been married to Charles and was now dying as she had consumed the poisonous leaves of dhatoora. The fanatic Trivedi had killed her. At last, Trivedi confessed:

Sitaram Trivedi: I – I didn't want any of it [property of English woman] for myself. (*His breathing is heavy*) I – I only wanted to help the Hindu cause.

Uma: You could have helped the Hindu cause by being a good Hindu yourself.¹²¹

By framing the Swami, Trivedi would get rid of an opposer; because the Swami was truly spiritual and wanted none of the new brand Hinduism. He wanted to manage the property from Radha, his daughter as she inherits it from Charles, her husband. He had managed to kill Charles to fulfil his grand plans of setting his own pseudo ashram in England. When Uma told all this to Suresh, her superintendent husband, he ordered Uma to declare in the court that Trivedi's death was an accident. Uma disagreed with Suresh. Charles went to England for setting up the trust for Winston, the way his sister wanted it.

Dattani's plays are different due to the rational and objective stand taken by him in revealing the layers of hypocrisy and fanaticism. The female protagonist of the play, Uma Rao is portrayed as an individual, fully conscious of her roles and the fact that there exists a self-independent of all these socially imposed roles. As she sets out to prove the crime of Trivedi, a mad fanatic and hypocrite, she is opposed by her husband. He didn't want Uma and Munswamy, getting involved in the case of the English woman. Yet she boldly and secretly investigates the case. When Suresh ordered her to declare in the court the murder as an accident, she opposed him daringly and facing the resentment of her husband, blamed him as a supporter of bad fanatics like Mr. Trivedi. She, in the court, said what she wanted to say. She fought bravely in the courtroom. She fought though she knew it was pointless. She says: "What's the point? It's his story which will have more weight. The real issue is going to be sidetracked."¹²²

To conclude, the play undermines the hypocrisy of police system, by laying bare the fault-lines in the profession. Dattani questions the competence and sincerity of the police department in the contemporary society. It is the clever venture into the detective genre, sustaining the interest of the audience. Patriarchy is characterized by the

presence of Suresh and Mr. Trivedi, Radha's fanatic father. Suresh and Charles are put at contrast in a well manner. In the detective radio play, *Seven Steps Around the Fire* Dattani uses the scholar sleuth, Uma Rao to rip off the veneer over the hijra community and in this play, he uses Uma Rao to rip off the extreme communalists who use the facade of Hinduism to win seven hundred million strong Hindu vote bank. He has used totally a different issue of religious fanaticism and has exposed the unique façade of Hindu pride in the form of Sitaram Trivedi. Religion is used as a tool for fetching votes and property. British principle of 'break and rule' is used by the religious fanatics like Trivedi. In the name of protecting 'dharma', Trivedi's character reminds us the Hindi proverb – 'Moonh mein Ram aur bagal mein churi'. All the time saying 'Jai Sri Ram', Trivedi plays the politics of religion. Thus, Dattani has successfully pulled out the facade of hypocrite Hindu fanatics who are in fact, too cruel and loveless. Radio drama is a form of audio storytelling broadcast on radio. With no visual component, radio drama depends on dialogue, music and sound effects to help the listener imagine the story. Treating all these aspects very skillfully and using them to their brim, Dattani has made this play a great success in detective genre.

02.12: *Thirty Days in September* (2001):

Mahesh Dattani's latest play *Thirty Days in September* was first performed at the Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai on 31st May 2001. A play about silence and betrayal, it treats the sensitive and generally taboo issue of child sexual abuse. The play was commissioned by RAHI (Recovery and Healing from Incest), a support group for women survivors of incest, (RAHI was supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation) a Delhi-based support centre for adult women survivors of childhood abuse. The play endeavors to lift the veil of silence which surrounds child sexual abuse and addresses the issue unflinchingly. The play is described as 'a silent scream ... on the issue of sexual abuse'. Dattani's much acclaimed play, *Thirty Days in September* was organised on 7th April 2006 at FICCI Auditorium. Child sexual abuse is a heinous crime prevailing in the society. The play aimed to sensitize the masses about this issue.

In the play, the focus is on an interior kind of story, with a lot of happenings inside the minds of the characters. Dattani personally feels that it is a kind of progression in his writing. The style is more sub-textual than overt text. Dattani personally went to Delhi to research the play; visited and spoke to eight incest and child sexual abuse survivors for about a week. With intense interviews, they came out with their stories talking about what had happened to them; which was also a kind of therapy. Of course, with this material, Dattani could not write the play all at a stretch; it took him a little over a year. Dattani says, "I need to be objective to look at the material and say now that's an interesting plot-line and work on a structure. But then I have to get subjective again to feel as these survivors felt and speak as they would. I need to bring their stories alive through the play." ¹²³ Dattani has woven together many real stories to form this play.

Dattani feels that *Thirty Days in September* is his most severe play till date, contravening his usual design. The seriousness has to keep going throughout the play. It is by far the most melancholy of all his plays, with a weightiness that is maintained throughout the play. Given the seriousness of the problem that it addresses a malaise that can at no level be taken lightly, Dattani tackles it with raw emotion and the stark realities are dramatized vividly. For want of space, the researcher would like to restrict the study of this play only with the thematic concern. She would like to explore the theme of child

sexual abuse in the play *Thirty Days in September* and discuss how far Dattani becomes successful in his endeavour to lift the veil of silence that surrounds child sexual abuse by sensitizing the masses about this issue.

Thirty Days in September is a stage play in three acts. The stage is divided into four acting areas. The first area has a comfortable chair and a simple table with magazines and a double seater. The chair is reserved for the counselor whom we never see. The second area, occupying the central portion of stage, is the living room of Shanta and Mala's home in a suburb of Delhi. The dominant feature is a large picture of Shri Krishna. Here the family would meet and receive the people. The third area is the pooja room which is perhaps behind a scrim so that it is visible only when required. The fourth acting area is the most flexible representing several locations - a party house, two restaurants and Deepak's home. During Mala's taped conversation, we see back of a life-sized doll of a seven-year-old girl propped on a chair.

The play is entirely Mala's story and Dattani uses very little sub-plot, dealing with the memories of the molester, visualizing him, and confronting those terrifying moments that will leave the spectator feeling sickened to the core. The play centres on a mother, Shanta and her daughter, Mala who was sexually molested by her uncle, Vinay, while young. The plot, however, is rooted in this very milieu, the final system that betrays the individual - a child called Mala - who will carry these scars into adulthood, and never trust it again. The story is about Mala's recovery and survival and the keen sense of betrayal she feels towards her mother. People, who are abused when young, go through a range of emotions starting from betrayal to anger, to guilt, to feeling that their body is not their own and that it's a tool to attract attention. The story is told in retrospect through the eyes of Mala - the survivor. It is not true that child sexual abuse happens only in upper class households. In fact, many people receive it as a working class condition. Dattani says: "Actually, I would see the setting of *Thirty Days in September* as upper middle class. I chose this setting, because I did not want them to dismiss sexual abuse as something that does not happen to people like them."¹²⁴

At the opening of the First Act, Mala, the protagonist of the play, is sitting before the counselor. She is under the treatment of a psychiatrist and now is improved better. She is now much more confident and happy, as she knows that what happened to her

previous life was not her fault and now, there is nothing to hide. Today, she doesn't hesitate to use her real name. Mala, when a girl of seven was sexually abused by her uncle continuously, till she grew thirteen. As a result, she became fond of sex. It seemed to her that she was made for it; she was born that way. She thought that it was her born fault that she is like this - incest. Sex was a game for her and as she liked it, she thought herself a bad person without character. She knows her fault, but she could not stop herself doing that. She thinks that her mother is responsible for her incest behaviour. Mother could have prevented all this by telling her to stop all this. She could have prevented a lot from happening. Her mother, Shanta, never prevented her. It was her silence that took Mala towards the feeling of betrayal. So, Mala is always angry with her mother. There is a good deal of communication gap between them. There is no third person who could have taken care of her in this matter. She thinks that her father left the house as she was like this. Now, they were living in her uncle's house. Deepak, a young man from a good family wanted to marry Mala. He wanted to take her on good path of life. Shanta thinks that her prayers to Shri Krishna have been answered. All those years, she was waiting for this moment. But Mala is not ready to marry Deepak, saying: "I told you so. I know it won't work between us." ¹²⁵

The Second Act too, starts with Mala's conversation with the counselor. From her voice on tape, we come to know that her father sends them money every month, pays the rent, but never comes to see them. She tells that it's not just the men in the office, but much before she had seduced her uncle when she was thirteen. She slept with her cousin and anyone who was available. Now she requests the counselor to help her stop this behaviour. She wants to smile as a little girl for the first time. Her uncle left her saying he was disgusted with her - her behavior. She is attracted towards her uncle and now confused. She doesn't know what she feels for him. Shanta now tells Mala the truth that the money that they kept receiving after her father left them was from this uncle. This uncle has helped them so much after her father left them. Mala angrily says that Shanta was a failed wife and a failed mother.

In the Third Act, Shanta requests her brother to talk to Deepak about marrying Mala. In the dinner party, Deepak asks Shanta whether Mala was abused as a child. Shanta rejects it. However, when uncle offers the legal documents of the flat to Shanta,

Mala gets excited and reveals the truth that her uncle was giving his flat to shut her mouth. She was abused by this uncle, everyday, during the summer holidays. In the end, it is revealed that her mother too, was molested for ten years, since she was six years old. As a result, she looked at Shri Krishna for help and He helped her by taking away all her feelings, giving her only silence. Her tongue was cut off. At the end, Mala gains control over herself and as a fellow-sufferer understands her mother; asks for forgiveness for blaming her all her life.

Dattani has been appreciated widely for his use of naturalistic theatre to define the problematic of the urban Indian bourgeoisie in the twentieth century. Naturalistic theatre allows for a discussion of complex and intricate matters with ease in the confines of the drawing room. In the hands of Dattani, naturalistic theatre lays bare the hypocrisies and the entrenched secrets of the middle and the upper classes. But these secrets, when entrenched with silence, take the shape of demon and leave the psyches of the sufferers' scarred. Mala's voice on tape reveals her scarred psyche. As she was sexually abused in her childhood by her own uncle, she turned to be a whore-like woman from her thirteen. She knows that this is terribly wrong, but she don't know why she do it, why she behave like this. She enjoys sex, timing it for thirty days, even mark it on her calendar and after that she moves on – as it is no longer satisfying to her. She enjoys it with the right kind of people, and the right kind of people are usually older men. Deepak, her fiancé, is only a few years older to her and loves her very much. She could stop all this vicious circle; but she thinks it is too late. She goes on visiting men after men and blames her mother for not preventing her from such misdeeds. Deepak is trying to understand her and is ready to accept her as his wife, in spite of all her blotted history. But Mala is not confident about herself, as she is aware of her adultery and thinks that no man can accept and live with such a wife. Mala wants to stop this vicious circle, but now she thinks that it is not in her hands to stop all this. As a result, she psychologically suffers a lot; transfers her resentment upon her mother who kept silent throughout her life.

Shanta, Mala's mother too, is the victim of the same problem of child abuse. At the end of the third Act, it is revealed that Shanta too, was sexually abused from her sixth and it wasn't only summer holidays. For ten years she was abused badly and kept silent as if her tongue was cut off. She lost all her feelings of pain or pleasure. It shocked her so

much that she got 'frozen'. Her husband left her saying, "I married a frozen woman" (p.36). She lost all her sensitivity and sensation for love and sex. Sex was neither a thing of joy, nor pain for her. She had no meaning for any feeling or relation. She was a 'failure as a wife and as a mother'. That is why she remained silent throughout her life. She remained silent not because she wanted to, but she didn't know how to speak. She could not save herself, then how could she have saved her child? Nobody could see the pain in her eyes. Her child was suffering the same agony, through which she herself has gone. Suffering was stuck to their bodies because they were born female. When the close relatives- family members do the black deed of sexual abuse, no girl has way to escape and no mother has tongue to utter. These incidents of child abuse leave its scars upon the psyche, forever. The pain these scars bear, could not be cured the whole life. Their marks have rotten the whole life of the survivors. Mala became incest and Shanta became cool. Mala got burnt into the fire of lust and Shanta got frozen to ice. Both of them bear the scarred psyches. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri commenting on this problem says: "Every other character is implicated and made party to the crime, even the mother's complicity through her silence that betrays her own child, affirms her guilt." ¹²⁶

Lecherous hypocrites like the uncle are present in many families. They do what they want with the small girls and let them suffer their whole lives forever. They may provide shelter and money to their victims; but the scars on the tender minds will never get cured. These hypocrites make a show of their care and generousness in the society, as if they have done nothing wrong. It is very ironical when he says repeatedly-

"Isn't she like my daughter also?" (p. 38)

"I shall play the dutiful uncle tomorrow at dinner." (p. 38)

"I have always been there like a father for her, in spite of everything." (p. 42)

"If I'm Mala's uncle I can be your uncle, right?" (p. 47)

Under the veil of uncle's so called pious relationship, he abused Mala. Under the veil of sister's pious relationship, he abused Shanta. Yet, both of them could not utter a single word against this hypocrite. Thus, the play reveals the silent screams of the sexually abused survivors.

People abused, when young, go through a range of emotions, starting from betrayal to anger, to guilt, to feeling that their bodies are not their own and that's it is a

tool to attract attention. Mala suffered going through all these emotions. All the time, Mala was angry with her mother as if her mother is responsible for all this stuff by remaining silent. Once, Mala pleaded Ravi to take her to his room as she badly needed 'it' from him. Ravi was with his fiancée, Radhika, and when Mala was getting very close to him while dancing, Radhika pulled them apart. Mala stood humiliated and looked around at all the people who were staring at her. She was angry with herself and felt guilty too. Leaving out the party area, she went into the living room and angrily started quarreling with her mother for letting Deepak in the house against her wishes. Shanta tries to pacify her by saying that she will prepare 'alu-paratha' for her, the next day. Mala angrily said, ".... that's what I got whenever I came to you hurt and crying. Instead of listening to what I had to say, you stuffed me with food.... Every time I came to you mummy, you were ready with something to feed me." ¹²⁷

Mala angrily flings the painting of Krishna out of the door. When her uncle came to her house after a long gap, she went to Deepak's house and told him that she likes to attract the people, want them to come to her and allow them to do anything to her. Mala thinks that her body is the tool to attract the attention of the people. Dattani in one of his interviews says: "It's the silence and the betrayal of the family that affects me the most. Like in this case the mother knew that her daughter was being sexually abused by her uncle, but still chose to keep quiet. It's this silence that makes the abused feel betrayed." ¹²⁸

The play, *Thirty Days in September* is a voice against this silence and the betrayal of the family. Many times Mala took out the subject for discussion. But Shanta sometimes pretended that she doesn't remember anything, sometimes pretended that Mala was making stories or seeing bad dreams, sometimes she changed the subject, sometimes started praying and chanting before the portrait of Krishna to avoid Mala's questions and sometimes pacified her by stuffing with food to shut the mouth. Mala recognized all these escapes of her mother and was certain that her mother knew everything and that's why she was prepared to avoid the subject anyhow. Whenever Mala said something serious, mother took it lightly, deliberately. After all, she told her mother the incidents glaringly. She told her that she was speaking about the time when uncle Vinay would molest her, when she was seven, eight, nine, ten – every vacation. Mother

was busy in either pooja room or the kitchen. Then she went to papa and cried, but before she could even tell him why she was crying, papa would tell her to go to her mother. Mother always used to hide herself behind Krishna's portrait. Shanta had seen Mala pushing herself on her uncle in the bedroom when she was thirteen. She had seen Mala forcing him to do things to her. She remembers the days when Mala's cousin, her father's nephew, came for holidays, Mala enjoyed sex with him. Shanta was praying her God, so he could send His 'Sudarshan Chakra' to defend Mala from the demon inside her. However, instead of praying God, she should have warned Mala. She should have told Mala that she was doing all the wrong and should stop at once. She should have been rebellious with her brother, nephew and Mala, long ago. If she had done that, Mala could have been reformed. She could have abandoned the filthy path of incest behaviour. Instead, she kept silent and prayed God. Mala went on enjoying the pleasure of sex from anybody she could find. Free sex becomes her addiction. As her uncle said before, at thirteen, she turned into a 'bitch' – a 'whore'. Thus, the silence of her mother made Mala feel that she was betrayed. She thought that it was her mother's fault. So she went on taking the pleasure to forget the pain. In fact, it is of no use totally blaming her mother. However, there is some sense in her words when she says: "I suppose it's these Western values, I wish I were more traditional then I would not behave like this.... no, no, that's stupid, I know, that's very easy to put the blame elsewhere..."¹²⁹ Mala knows where the wrong is. But she is unable to put herself right. She needed help and surely, it was her mother who could have helped her in time before she turned to be the addict of the bad habit. Mala's family, as well as the social milieu too is responsible to spoil Mala. Out of fear of disgrace and sense of shame keeps many women mum; but Shanta had gone through the same state of disgrace and out of resentment for the misdeed which happened to her, she should have revolted against her own child's exploitation. Instead, she preferred accepting money and other help from her brother. The following dialogue is telling:

Mala: Yes you did. He didn't just buy a flat. He bought you!

Shanta: That's not true! Oh God!

Mala: He bought your silence. So that you can never tell anyone what he did to your daughter! ¹³⁰

Mala is absolutely correct when she accuses her mother. Many questions arise in the mind of the audience, and haunt them as they haunted Mala. Where was Shanta when Mala was being abducted almost every day in summer vacation, every year? Was it not her duty to pay attention to her daughter and be careful herself, when she had such bad experiences of sexual abuse in her childhood? Was it not her duty as a mother, to ask her daughter what was wrong with her? Wasn't there a bit self-respect and resentment in Shanta? Can a mother in India who has a great tradition of self-sacrifice for her child, sell herself off to a sick bastard brother? Why was Shanta's tongue cut off? Whether it was for the livelihood she received from him? Is character less important than bread in our society? Shanta should have known that instead of spending time in praying Krishna for Mala, she should have given time to build Mala's character. At least, she should have fought against her daughter's sexual abuse. She should have abandoned her filthy brother for the sake of her daughter's future. Dattani doesn't give any sound and direct suggestions for the problem of child sexual abuse; but he hints at all these suggestions.

Dattani's plays capture the pulse of urban audience by reflecting the problem of its day. However, the problem that Dattani has handled skillfully in the play is related to all the classes of society. He has rightly mentioned that the audience needs to arrive at the "moment of truth". If we look around us with open eyes, and read the every day papers carefully, we come to the truth that this is happening around us, even in the working class, but was not articulated with such a focus by any other writer. Dattani should be thanked and praised for this unique contribution to the Indian drama in English. He has successfully created a world-view by focusing the issue of child sexual abuse. His use of naturalistic theatre leaves the audience thinking of such problems around them. They experience what Dattani calls 'a catharsis-like-situation' and will empathize with the characters, look into them and think about such problems with a critical mind. Lillette Dubey, the director of this play, notes down her experience in the following words: "After every performance, women have come back stage with their own traumatic stories writ large on their faces, grateful for the catharsis the play offers, but even more, I think, for the expiation of their own guilt which they have arrived as a heavy burden for so long For through it they believe, their silent screams have finally been heard."¹³¹

The title of the play is unique and symptomatic of the climatic incident of the play. The abuser in the play, while abusing the child, asked her to sing the song learnt in school. It is 'Thirty days has September. April, June and November. February has twenty-eight. All the rest have thirty-one!' he asked her to keep on singing till he stops. The song became the filthy rhythm of her life. She grew fond of sex as a game for enjoyment. She started fixing people who she liked best for continuous thirty days. After thirty days, she moved on – in search of people older than her who were right kind of people for her. Whenever she saw a man, she got stimulated, she remembered her uncle and then the song - 'Thirty days has September...' Thirty days in summer holidays was a vicious circle in her life. She moved with this vicious circle singing the song. Thus, the title is symbolic and penetrating.

To conclude, *Thirty Days in September* is the most somber of all his plays with a theme of child sexual abuse, rarely touched with such an intense devotion by any other playwright. This is Dattani's unique contribution in the field of Indian Drama in English. For the actors, who played the abuser- first, Darshan Jariwala and later, Amar Talwar – it was a process that took them into the heart of the darkness. Their reward was the passionate dislike they evoked in the audience for their superb portrayals. It evoked in audience amazing depth of emotion and strong outrage across the world from varied critics in India to Colombo, to the US and Malaysia. There is a lot of movement in the play in terms of time and space shifts. The dialogue is brief and to the point, pregnant with raw emotion barely held on leash. Dattani makes extensive use of monologues in the form of taped voices. This technique intensifies the empathy of the audience with Mala. The technique is used with great workmanship to show the victim slowly recovering from her abused and tortured past. The action is presented starkly and undiluted. The narration of the abused is as naked as possible, which literally drags the audience into facing the molester. With *Thirty days in September*, Dattani pulls up one more 'invisible issue' from under the carpet and puts forth before the society. Dattani is indeed, a creative genius able to deal with such complex, invisible issues with seriousness and insight. The play is Dattani's unique creation which reveals some intensely horrifying faces that haunt the society. As a dark piece, powerful and immensely moving, the commercial success and critical acclaim of the play were surprising.

2.13: Conclusion:

One of the most obvious and most commented aspects of Dattani's plays is the questioning of dominant gender roles. He has managed to bring into centre-stage certain issues of marginalised identities as well as aspects of hegemony and chauvinism present in our daily lives. The main themes of Dattani's plays encompass issues not conventionally associated with main-stream or 'entertaining' theatre. He focuses on problems of the everyday – of learning to live with individual demons as well as those which are fostered by society – communalism, personal prejudice, class, female infanticide, domestic abuse, patriarchy, identity crisis, homosexuality, discrimination on grounds of gender and the peculiar positions of hermaphrodites in Indian society. Each of these themes is dealt with sensitively and in the best dramatic tradition. There is no preaching, no dogmatism, just a quiet, often laced with irony, gentle humour, and a direct presentation. With his themes, he places the contemporary India in the force. The themes are picked up from contemporary issues but are invested with universality, so that in the ultimate analysis his plays qualify as genuine human drama. Sexuality, communal tension, society versus individual, gender issue and consumerism are some of his dominant themes. Theme of carrying guilt and gender discrimination occur again and again in his plays.

Dattani has a good theatre sense and the ability to bring a lot of equanimity to his handling of tricky issues. The stage settings of Mahesh Dattani are more complex. There are multi-level sets so that the whole interior of the house is visible to the audience. He reaches new heights in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* by creating mental spaces – dark, expansive areas where the characters are left to their innermost thoughts. Dattani is even more innovative in the way he uses multi-level sets for flashbacks in *Final Solutions*. Here the stage setting is more complicated as both exterior and interior are presented on the stage. *Tara* again has a multi-level set. Dattani takes pains to make his stage look as close to the real thing as possible. His plays are remarkable for detailed stage directions and also about his choice of themes. They are meant to be performed, not just read as literature. They are first workshopped with his company 'Playpen' in Bangalore. He puts his finishing touches on his dialogues only when it is spoken aloud by actors in rehearsal. As language barrier prevents the lower classes and rural people from coming to the

Indian English theatre, his plays address only English-knowing people especially living in urban areas.

Dattani treats his characters with understanding and sympathy whether they are good or bad, right or wrong. He never pronounces any reward or punishment, thereby allowing the natural law of justice to prevail. He seems to be a genuine artist in his characterization. His plays have deep moral undertone but never really he takes the stance of the moralist or a preacher. His character contrasts work well.

To separate the women characters in Dattani's plays and analyse them as different from the other characters, is a little difficult because Dattani writes about women in much the same style as he writes about anybody. One of the main focuses of Dattani's work is his treatment of the 'different' and the 'freak'. He believes that in 'mainstream' Indian society, women are marginalised in ways very similar to those employed to segregate other disempowered groups such as homosexuals and physically challenged people. The questions about gender roles, about discrimination and about constructions of identities are revealed slowly through the reader's /audience's reactions to the characters and situations as they unfold the play.

Dattani has good command of language. The dialogue is mostly crisp and completely natural. The English, used in the plays studied above, contains the natural rhythm of the bilingual speaker- whether the character is Gujarati, Kannadiga or any 'degeneralised' urban. The speech patterns and vocabulary are both expressive as well as indigenous. The characters are easily differentiated by the register of English they speak. Sometimes there are accents or language politics that come into play to score a point or illustrate their class-identity. *Tara* is the best example in this matter, in which there is a clear divide between the twins Chandan and Tara and 'the girl next door', Roopa. All this is explained in detail in the critical study of his plays.

Humour is a strong part of all Dattani's plays except the serious plays like *Thirty Days in September*. In the comedy *Where There's a Will* and in the plays like *Dance Like a Man*, *Do the Needful*, the comic element is characteristic of how prejudices and biases lie beneath the surface of so much of our humour.

Dattani stands for a new generation of Indians who write in English. His writing is reflective of the 'here and now' of modern contemporary urban India, of his own life

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and as the success of his plays has proved, of so many others, too. His contemporaneity is demonstrated not only through his choice of language, a vibrant, colourful and remarkably recognizable 'Indian' English, but also through the subjects he chooses to write about. From his first play, *Where There's a Will to Thirty Days in September*, Dattani's themes reflect and comment on the ordinary and everyday conflicts of so many urban people who may be living in transitional periods of history, caught between the firm undertow of tradition and social values and the pull of modernity and globalization. His plays are the essence of what contemporary urban life in India is about for so many middle and upper-middle class Indians. The greatness of Dattani lies in the fact that he is one who believes that theatre is an art with a function.

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