CHAPTER TWO

The second chapter explores the attempt of Mahesh Dattani in the two plays *Where There’s a Will* (1986) and *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991) to portray the ways through which Indian women mould themselves according to the “feminine mystique” in order to please men to stay alive in a patriarchal society and finally find themselves trapped in the image of the “Angel In The House”. Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* has aptly commented:

In feminine mystique, there is no other way for a woman to dream of creation or of the future. There is no way she can ever dream about herself, except as her children’s mother, her husband’s wife. (115)

An Indian woman is always expected to be “The Angel in the House” fulfilling the role that patriarchy has assigned to them. In both the plays, *Where There’s a Will* and *Bravely Fought the Queen* Dattani has highlighted that most of the problems of women are caused by adjustment to a ratified image that does not permit them to become what they are capable of being. This chapter has traced the attempt of the women in both the plays to break the patriarchal image of “The Angel in the House”, thereby, creating a new space for themselves.

The popular Victorian image of the ideal wife/woman came to be known as "the Angel in the House" where she was expected to be devoted and submissive to her husband. The Angel was passive, powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious, and above all pure. The phrase “The Angel in the House” comes from the title of an immensely popular poem by Coventry Patmore, in which he holds his “angel-wife” up as a model for all women. As a reaction to this “angel-wife” model, Virginia Woolf vehemently declared in 1931, “Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer”. In her path-breaking work, “Professions for Women: The Death of the Moth” Woolf portrayed a prototypical “Angel in the House” who fights to break free from this stereotypical template. Virginia Woolf thus, describes the "The Angel in the House" as:
She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily... she never had a mind or wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. (Professions 78)

The prototype of Angel as described by Woolf is that of a “charming”, “sympathetic”, “sacrificing” and “unselfish” woman. The society expects that to be a custodian of the moral flame is the chief practical duty of a wife and the home is the first sphere for a woman’s angelic mission. The patriarchal culture is dominated by the ideals of domesticity, family and home; the perfect woman is the godly wife and mother, the domestic woman, the Angel in the House and the women who don’t mould themselves according to the prescribed roles are devil out of the house. Women absorb these stereotypical roles what society imposes on them and try to live accordingly. These so-called qualities since ages have restricted women inside the home and have converted them to speechless creatures that willingly carried on the burden of patriarchy.

Mahesh Dattani presents a remarkable insight into the thoughts of women as portrayed in Where There’s a Will and Bravely Fought the Queen. In both these plays, Dattani’s women protagonists declare aloud their thoughts, speak out, protest and if not anything, then express what they feel. In one of his interviews with Lakshmi Subramanyam, Dattani admits:

They are humans. They want something. They face obstacles. They will do anything in their power to get it. All eye focus on in the fearlessness of these people...and I’m not going to change my sensibility for political correctness either. My only defence is to say I’m not biased against women. (qtd. in Aggarwal 72)
In most of the plays, Dattani’s woman protagonist play an unconventional role and is portrayed as a countable human being gifted with equal receptivity to respond to the sensibility of their male counterparts. He presents the female characters as fringed to the periphery of family but they are competent enough to turn back to their oppressors.

In the Indian socio-cultural context, the main factors which support the widening gulf between the two sexes are socialization, the biological differences, the pressure of religion and mythology. Socialization is the process of preparing children to learn and enact what are seen as enviable attitudes which are framed and accepted by the civilized society. While sex is natural, gender is a social construct. Whether an individual is male or female is decided at birth, but masculine or feminine qualities are assigned by society. As per the feminist views, socialization is the process by which girls and boys become stereotypically feminine and masculine. The girl is imbibed from the birth with the characteristics of martyrdom, patience, politeness and the need to accept a lower status in life. Parents and teachers give emphasis to the feminine principles of obedience, endurance and humility. As a critic writes, “She is taught to be shy, gentle and dignified as a person, pure and faithful as a wife, and selfless, loving and thoughtful as a mother” (Uma 267).

The progression of value-internationalization begins at birth and shapes the self-perceptions and attitudes of women. In the school text-books, the differences in the portrayal of main characters signifies the impact of patriarchy, females rather than males are found to be more noticeable in family or household settings while the latter were more dominant in public settings. According to Renzetti and Curran:

Children’s books have portrayed males and females in blatantly stereotypical ways: for instance, male as adventurers and leaders and females as helpers and followers. One way to address gender stereotyping in children’s books has been to portray females in independent roles and males as non-aggressive and nurturing. (Feminist Philosophies 35)
Ostensibly, the process of education begins at birth and the lessons are reinforced on several occasions. Biological differences result in sexual division of labor which leads to the dichotomizing of masculine and feminine roles. The differences in the physique, the monthly flow, pregnancy, parturitive capacities are used to encourage the view that woman is delicate, frail and weak and much intellectual or assertive activity would damage her health. Education, vocation are seen as de-feminizing factors. Thus, social, cultural and intellectual differences are based on biological dissimilarity and are viewed as natural.

Each religion has given the foundational basis for the stereotypical role of women. As Hinduism evolved, Rama and Sita were sanctified as the two perfect halves, husband (pati) and wife (patni). However, Sita’s situation opens up the Pandora’s box on misogyny and patriarchy in ancient India among scholars. Sita’s situation is obvious throughout the epic, as she chose her husband and went to exile willingly; resisted Ravana’s predations. Courageous till the end, she proved her chastity by returning to the Earth in dignity. Sita is the emblem of female suffering and its redemptive power. The ideal Hindu woman is she who quiescently accepts the control of man as shown in the stories of Savitri and Satyavan, Nala and Damayanti and above all in the Sita-Rama legend. Others like Draupadi, Gandhari, and Ahalya are all seen in the contexts of their husbands. Woman is defined primarily in relation to her husband and her household. All these stories re-affirm the Hindu conception that a husband is a woman’s greatest deity. In Christianity, the subordination of women to men is also reflected, “The man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man and neither was man created for the woman; but woman for the man” (qtd. in Beauvoir 107). The concept is that woman is subordinate to man and that man is superior having been created in the image of god.

Patriarchy diminishes a woman’s belief in self-worth and makes her believe that her inferiority is pre-destined. The stereotyping of sex roles signifies that boys and girls feel uncomfortable when they are drawn in such activities that have been portrayed to them as out of their sex-bound domain. Woman internalizes the pessimistic image this socialization provides. Partha N.Mukherji has aptly commented in “Sex and Social Structure”:
Just as a society dominated by racist ideology consigns the black population to an inferior status and makes it believe in this ideology, a society based on sexist ideology condemns the woman to an inferior sex and makes her believe in it. (52)

The result of this interaction is that a woman begins to believe that she is unimportant in herself, for herself and comes to feel worthless, contemptible and insignificant. She is hesitant to speak for herself or to act on her own behalf. She is defined entirely through interpersonal, usually domestic and filial relationships. Her identity exists mainly as being-for-others, rather than being-for-herself. Thus, the identification of the self with the needs of others lead to loss of self-sufficiency.

In the first play under analysis in this chapter Dattani exposes the politics of Indian joint family revealing the gender differences and gender stereotyping which are the outcomes of patriarchy. Dattani has focused on the authoritative figure of a staunch patriarch, Hasmukh Mehta, in the first act, who is seen working within the traditional roles of a patriarchal society. Sita Raina while commenting on the Dattani’s effort to give marginalized characters a voice in the play writes in “A Note on the play” in Collected Plays:

Where There’s a Will has several interesting aspects. Mahesh described it as the exorcism of 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. What interested me particularly was its philosophical twist. To be the watcher of one’s self is to make intelligent changes in this life...Consequently, when he became the watcher of his actions, he perceives that his desire for control has led him to be victim of his own machinations unlike Kiran who uses power play to essentially improve her relationships. (CP 451)

Dattani’s theatrical innovation of direct-to-audience address is an attempt to reinforce the idea that patriarchs remain effective even after their death. Hasmukh
Mehta’s address validate and rationalize his patriarchal presence throughout the play. The play portrays the picture of an apparently ‘self made’ industrialist, Hasmukh Mehta, the patriarch. He is the supreme grouch, an authoritarian husband with innumerable familial expectations. His wife, Sonal is an obedient housewife who devoted her whole life to the choices of her husband and family. Hasmukh introduces his wife thus:

Sonal. My wife. My son’s mother. Do you know what Sonal means? No? ‘Gold.’ When we were newly married, I used to joke with her and say she was as good as gold. But that was when we were newly married. I soon found out what a good-for nothing she was. As good as mud. Ditto our sex life. Mud. (CP 472)

Sonal meekly occupies the world of pooja room and kitchen whereas Hasmukh Mehta reigns the world of power and money. From the beginning of the play, we find Hasmukh Mehta exercising his hegemonic control over the family and its members to establish his own conception of ‘self’ which he has imbibed from his father. He thinks that it is he who has made a living for his family. Even his son Ajit is useless before him. He thinks that his son is good for nothing, that it was his mistake to appoint the latter as the Chief managing Director (CMD) of his company. He regrets even his begetting of him:

That was an even bigger mistake. What makes it worse is knowing that I actually prayed to get him. Oh God! I regret it all. Please let him just dropped dead. No, no. What a terrible thing to say about one’s own son. I take it back. Dear God, don’t let him drop dead. Just turn him into a nice vegetable so he won’t be in my way. Ever since he entered my factory, he has been in my way. (CP 455)

Hasmukh wanted to dominate his son like his father who had dominated Hasmukh’s life. He wanted him to become his exact duplicate, a business tycoon and a dictatorial husband. Millet on the phenomenon of double domination comments that “… the principles of patriarchy appears to be twofold: male shall dominate female and elder
male shall dominate young” (qtd. in Bryson 166). But inspite of so many chaos they are supposed to be a family, yoked together and must function together under the patriarchal organization.

The supreme domination of Hasmukh in the life of his wife and son reveals the stranglehold of patriarchy that aims to control freedom and selfhood of everyone. Hasmukh, a domineering father, oppressive husband is discontented with everyone around him. He always blames others for not fulfilling his expectations the way he fulfilled his father’s. He complains:

Why does a man marry? So that he can have a woman all to himself? No. There is more to it than that. What? May be he needs a faithful companion? No. If that was it, all men would keep dogs. No, no I think the important reason anyone should marry at all is to get a son. Why is it so important to get a son? Because the son will carry on the family name. (CP 474-475)

To him, his wife is nothing more than a faithful dog although it is Sonal who keeps a track of everything in his life, his blood pressure, his tablets and his heart attacks. But Mehta is perhaps no exception. He has married for the sake of a family, a son and now the son is the reason of his innumerable worries. Hamukh’s apprehension of his authority, his disrespect for the straightforwardness of his son, his mockery of the compliance of his wife prepares a ludicrous image of patriarchal influence. He considers Ajit to be his investment and expected a return for his investment, “I made him… happy. That is what I wanted my son to make me. But he failed! Miserably!” (CP 475). Hasmukh controls the life of Ajit, his independence and selfhood.

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’ll be happy. (CP 458)
Through the characters of the three women: Sonal, Kiran and Preeti, Dattani renders different dimensions of feminine consciousness in patriarchy. Sonal in the first half of the play is always busy in making salad and halwas. She manages the kitchen on her own and has the habit of cooking more things both in quality and number than necessary. Preeti tells Hasmukh and Ajit, “I told her that I had made enough food for everyone. She insisted that navratan pulao, malai Kofta, baingan barta, patties, not to forget the halva and salad, are not enough for a proper meal”(CP 465). The role of the women in a male dominated society and within the family is rightly reflected in the words of Beauvoir:

She takes his name, she joins his religion, integrates into his class, His world, she belongs to his family, she becomes his ‘other half’… She breaks with her past more or less brutally, she is annexed to her husband’s universe, she gives him her person: she owes him her virginity and strict fidelity. (*The Second Sex* 455)

Despite all the submissiveness and sacrifices at Sonal’s end Hasmukh considers Sonal’s company as the greatest tragedy of his life. He comments,“When I was twenty-one, the greatest tragedy of my life took place. I got married to my wife, Sonal” (CP 464). But the irony is Sonal is always conscious of his tablets, his blood pressure and heart attacks. Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* highlights the tragedy of a housewife:

But in any case, to give birth and to breast feed aren’t activities, but natural functions; they don’t involve a project, which is why the woman finds no motive there to claim a higher meaning for her existence; she passively submits to her biological destiny. Because housework alone is compatible with the duties of motherhood, she is condemned to domestic labour which locks her into repetition and immanence; day after day it repeats itself in identical from century to century; it produces nothing new. (75)
Sonal represents the plight of the majority of Indian housewives who aren’t valued at home by their husband because they do not produce anything valuable. Hasmukh even blames Sonal for reducing their son, Ajit into a worthless creature. She feels a sense of isolation at home because of the cold and calculative attitude of her husband with her. Hasmukh’s statement for his wife is sarcastic and reflects the image of a wife in a patriarchal system, “Then I should be a very happy man. I’ve got a loving wife who has been faithful to me like any dog would be” (CP 475). The position of women is rightly reflected in the statement of Mitchell, “For the woman, the man must become all; he is all-meaning, the justification and definition of her existence, whereas for him, she is a pleasure, an extra, somehow inessential” (Psychoanalysts and Femininity 307). Women like Sonal spend most of their time and energy in getting their husband happy but alternatively man like Hasmukh spend most of their energy in boosting his professional life and treating his wife just as beast. Hasmukh then tells the audience how he turned to other directions to satisfy his craving:

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 the five star hotels! (Smiles at some pleasant memories.) (CP 473)

In the second half of the play, Dattani utilizes his creative potential to reduce the dominating figure of the first act into the figure of the ghost in the second act. In his invisible self, Mehta becomes an observer of his actions and in a way this illumines his realization of the self deeply. Hasmukh’s ailment leads to his sudden death and the scenario at home changes overnight. He realizes that the “garb of authority maintained… was a method to save his own inner self from the clashes of the outside world” (Aggarwal 110). It is only after the death that his nature comes to light and the comments present a mockery and subversion of his parental authority. Sonal, the naive wife of Hasmukh, hardly realizes that her husband is dead and is instead anxious for his tablets. The second part of the first act begins with the ghost of Hasmukh Mehta. He says, “It feels good to be dead” (CP 479) and the audience/readers are expected to see through the death as the decline of the patriarchy in the household. A dead man, Hasmukh still refuses to admit the natural behaviour of his bereaved wife: “She cried at
all the appropriate moments. I even got a mention in the newspapers. (*Picks up a paper cutting.*) ‘Garment Tycoon Dead’. That felt good” (CP 479). Even after being dead he exercises his rights to judge his wife’s emotions and the news of his death in the papers makes him satisfied. But he hardly realizes what he has done to the family. It is his ‘will’ that runs havoc. He asserts:

> What about all my money? ... I don’t think they deserve all that money. None of them have worked for it, especially not my son. Neither he nor my daughter-in-law will get what they were after – my wife is also in for a great shock. You see, I have made a special will! (*Laughs.*) They are going to hate me for doing this to them! (CP 479).

The new order in the play is introduced with the appearance of Kiran Jhaveri, who has been appointed as the trustee of the will. Kiran like Lalitha in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, depletes the macrocosmic family of Hasmukh Mehta through her microcosmic intrusion. Mehta realizes how his authoritative control has been reduced to nothing. He comes to understand that his measures to control the economy of his family with his invisible presence only break the wall of his illusions in the responses of Sonal, Ajit and Preeti. Sonal becomes conscious of her own freedom; Preeti’s concern has only been money. Mehta’s place in the family is taken up by Kiran, who is an embodiment of the playwright’s vision for emancipated and intelligent womanhood.

However, Sonal’s comment after the death of Hasmukh epitomizes a different aspect of womanhood. When she comes to know about her husband’s will she commented, “If I’d known he had a mistress, I would have left him”(CP 481). These independent and rational comments of Sonal shocked the ghost of Hasmukh and he comments, “…I’ve misjudged the woman” (CP 481). Sonal discards the authority of Hasmukh with a derogatory comment, “He was like a village buffalo. What did he understand about other people’s feelings?” (CP 507).

Likewise Preeti, the daughter-in-law exhibits her intelligence when she advises to declare the will of Hasmukh invalid on the ground of insanity exposes the hollowness of the parental authority of Hasmukh. She advises, “We can say that he wasn’t in the
right frame of mind when he made the will. We’ll get certificates to prove he was senile!” (CP 482). In the later part of the play ‘will’ assumes the role of a living character which controls and guides the lives of every member of the family. The ‘will’ is not the document but the choice of Hasmukh.

Kiran epitomes Dattani’s vision of a smart, calculative and worldly wise woman. Ironically, Kiran too is a victim but one who refuses to stay victimized. She has, however, learnt lessons from life, we learn the agony of a woman caught in the web of a man’s world when she tells Sonal:

I learnt my lessons from being so close to life. I learnt my lessons from watching my mother tolerating my father when he came home every day with bottles of rum wrapped up in the newspapers. As watched him beating her up and calling her names! I learnt what life was when my mother pretended she was happy in front of me and my brothers, so that we wouldn’t hate my father…Yes, Mrs. Mehta. My father, your husband – they were weak men with false strength. (CP 508)

Kiran too is a representative of women who undergo maltreatment at the hands of their brother and father. However, she intelligently enters into a relationship with an old and erratic Hasmukh Mehta just for the sake of money with a clear sense of purpose she doesn’t indulge in any kind of self glory. She doesn’t pretend that she is angel come to the family to set it right, although it is quite clear to the audience that she proves to be one.

Some women prefer to be treated like a person, not like a woman. They prefer to be independent, stand on their own two feet and generally don’t care for concessions that imply that they are inferior, weak or that they need special attention and can’t take care of themselves. (Friedan 440)
Kiran boldly admits, “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 money” (CP 506). He was just like a grown up baby who was “insensitive to other people’s need” and “cruel” to Ajit. He has never learnt to live and think independently, as he had “no life of his own”. He lived his life “in his father’s shadow”. Kiran tells Sonal, “Where were his own dreams? His own thoughts? Whatever he did was planned for him by his father” (CP 509). Hasmukh in fact did not want a mistress. The void created by his father’s absence led him to search for “a father”.

Kiran embodies qualities that Dattani staunchly holds constructive, strong and obligatory for a woman. Like most women who play gendered roles she becomes part of Hasmukh’s life with her eyes wide open, and aware of the benefits that she will derive from the relationship, as she reveals to Ajit, “I got a husband, my husband got his booze, and your father got…well, you know”(CP 491). Kiran had a very tough life, her mother was beaten by her father and she was also beaten by her husband and she has become a tough women because of her past life. Kiran’s strength lies in finding happiness in whatever the situation may be, as Beauvoir writes in The Second Sex, “The situation has to be changed in their common interest by prohibiting marriage as a ‘career’ for the women”(532).

Dattani is ultra-critical of authoritarians like Hasmukh Mehta. Towards the end, Sonal, Preeti and Kiran open confession of antagonism against the male authority. Sonal and Kiran come together and their

collective force born out of long annals of exploitation and suffering, is an effort to abolish sexual colonialism. Their collective voice is a declaration of woman emancipation against the ‘will’of Hasmukh. (Aggarwal 114)

Preeti and Sonal inspite of their silent acceptance are intelligent. Mrs. Mehta who had lived and suffered so long under the dominance of her husband and her sister, is shown to come into her own at the end of the play. Sonal, who was a tedious and passive character, suddenly shows the sign of being vibrant. She knows that her
daughter-in-law can exacerbate the situation. Moreover, she understands the importance of Kiran in their lives. She knows that Kiran must be looked after properly so that no problem may arise about the possession of property after the expiry of the will. Things are now changing gradually. The chaos of the household is gradually realizing a shape of pleasing order. Nothing happens under compulsion. Sonal, Ajit, and Preeti yield themselves up to the constructive influence of Kiran to her law as well as regulated impulse of love. The spirit sees with satisfaction how his wife is being transformed from a stupid incapable housewife into a clever capable house maker in Kiran’s company. Sonal comments:

Proud? He thinks he is king of all he surveys! And we are his subjects. But you know the story about the crow painting himself white to become a swan? Well, that’s him. He can put on all the airs he wants to, but he doesn’t fool me. I know who we are. We are just middle-class people with a lot of money. That’s all. (CP 472)

The collective union of Kiran and Sonal born out of the long chronicles of exploitation and suffering is an effort to abolish sexual colonialism. Kiran sarcastically reveals that Hasmukh’s own identity was subordinated to her care and protest. She challenges:

He depended on me for everything. He thought he was the decision maker. But I was. He wanted me to run his life. Like his father had. (Pause.) Hasmukh didn’t really want a mistress. He wanted a father. He saw in me a woman who would father him!..Men never really grow up! (CP 510)

Kiran’s sweet and meticulous management of the chaotic household of Hasmukh, transforms it into a disciplined family tied with one another in the bond of affection which was impossible under the dictatorship of Hasmukh Mehta. The hegemony of the will finally cast off, life continues and the ghost goes and hangs himself and is displaced both physically and symbolically. Each of the family members
having discovered his or her own identity finally separate from Hasmukh over
whelming self. Kiran “enters the scene as a protector of patriarchal values, but by the
deend of the play, she eliminates all forms of patriarchal oppression” (Brahma 14). Hasmukh at the end laments:

No. I don’t think I can enter this house. It isn’t mine…anymore. I will rest permanently on the tamarind tree. (*Laughter at the table.*) They are not my family anymore. I wish I had never interfered with their lives. They look quite happy together. With Kiran sitting in my place. Oh, I wish I had been more…I wish I had lived. (*Exits.*)

(CP 515)

Dattani has borrowed the title of the play *Bravely Fought the Queen* from one of the most popular Indian poems “Jhansi ki Rani” by Subhadra Devi Chauhan. The poem extols the heroic exploits of the Queen by the first woman Satyagrahi who was arrested for her protest in Nagpur. Dattani found the poem relevant for conveying the thought that both the protagonist of the poem Laxmi Bai and the composer of the poem Subhadra Devi Chauhan share a common history of protest against the patriarchal delimitation and definition of gender roles. Both these women, through their life and work resisted the patriarchal mode of arresting the growth or stunting the female into a state of marginalization and of docility.

The play *Bravely Fought the Queen* is the locus of the timeless face of exploitation of women and the sense of wrong carried about by patriarchs in the four women characters – Dolly, Alka, Baa and Daksha – and even in the marginal figure; Dolly’s mother. Dattani begins the play with the projection of the commoditized stereotypes in which both men and women are portrayed with all their boundaries within the framework of sexual hierarchy. Dattani named the first act as “Woman”, the second act as “Man” and the third act as “Free for All”. The names of the acts suggest the ongoing evolution of psyche of the characters in relation to their social connotation. In the first act, the focal point is the home-confined identity of a woman. In the second act, there is a fine exposition of the world of man representing the outer spaces of business world. Both these spaces are perfectly molded and well defined. However in the third
act “Free for All”, Dattani re-visions the norm that makes the distinction between male and female spaces because the vital human experiences are always the same.

The play explores the psychological injuries caused to the women in the Trivedi family by the bigoted men who are the epitome of patriarchy. Mahesh Dattani projects the life of two sisters; Dolly and Alka who are married to Jitin and Nitin Trivedi in a stereotypical manner. Dattani also projects cultural mores linked with stereotypical wives by relating them to cosmetics, make-up and other trivia. Social norms in an Indian society demand that it is the duty of the daughter-in-law to look after parents-in-law in an abiding manner. The relation between Baa and the institution of patriarchy isn’t lost in the play.

The first act “Woman” portrays the position of women in Trivedi family. The act begins with the Lalitha’s entrance in the Trivedi house and the three women Alka, Dolly and Lalitha get introduced to each other in terms of their patriarchal identity as ‘wife’ and also capitalist identity as ‘employer and employee’. Betty Friedan in the Feminine Mystique elaborates the inherent patriarchal attitude of society when she writes:

The identity issue for the boy is primarily an occupational-vocational question, while self-definition for the girl depends more directly on marriage. A number of differences follow from this distinction. The girl’s identity centers more exclusively on her sex-role — whose wife I will be, what kind of family will we have; while the boy’s self-definition forms about two nuclei; he will be a husband and father (his sex-role identity) but he will also and centrally be a worker.(245)

The wife after her marriage is recognized by the identity of her husband and her sole profession is being the “Angel in the House”. Lalitha in the conversation is recognized as someone’s wife but not as an individual.

Dolly. Look, I know we have met but I have an awful memory…
Lalitha. Oh, that’s okay, I understand. You must be meeting a lot of people at parties. I’m Lalitha.

Dolly. I did remember your name, Lalitha…

Lalitha. *(smiling).* It’s okay even if you didn’t.

Dolly. No, no. I did. What I was trying to remember was — *whose wife are you?* I know we met at the office party last month so *you must be some body’s wife.* *(Pause.* What I mean is your husband – I know — is working for my husband. Jiten did mention that Lalitha will be coming and *she happens to be so — and so’s wife.* Which is what I have forgotten. *Whose wife are you?* *(Emphasis Mine.)* *(CP 234-235)*

The repetition of the question “whose wife are you” highlights how a woman’s identity is shrouded in the identity of her husband. The existence of Dolly and Alka at home is expected to be a constant presence. They are expected in their stereotypic role and they are expected to understand the wants of the ones who are in power. Dolly, after so many years had planned to go out with her husband because her husband had no time for her. Moreover their marital life is very chaotic, she dressed herself in the best possible way to please her husband and waited the whole evening for a response from her husband. But her husband, Jitin asked his employee to refuse Dolly that he is not coming and then blamed her for not understanding the professional needs of her husband. Dolly expressed her frustration to her husband when she said:

Okay, okay, I was around. But I didn’t gather they were calling it off… sorry, right – you were calling it off… No, I don’t recall. *(Sighs.* What difference does it make whether I do or not? The fact is you didn’t tell me directly… *(CP 250)*
Both the women characters Dolly and Alka are only supposed to pick up the clues from conversation and to recognize their job, keeping in mind the working schedule of the men who are in power. The dependency and continuous attempts to be happy with her subordinate place makes woman non-functional in society and this is a personal as well as a national waste. Commenting on the dependency and slavishness of women, Betty Frieden said:

A women is handicapped by her sex, and handicaps society, either by slavishly copying the pattern of man’s advance in the profession, or by refusing to compete with man at all. (The Feminine Mystique 509)

The dependency makes it impossible for a woman to live and develop as a human being capable of leadership and decision-making roles. Women's second class position in patriarchy is reflected in their psychology, lack of confidence, powerlessness, overdependence, insecurity, competitiveness with other women and self-condemnation.

In order to highlight the roles imposed on women by patriarchy, Dattani opens the play with an image of the “mud mask”. Dolly is first seen as wearing a mud mask. The “mask” in the play signifies performance as a way adopted by women to live in the patriarchal society. Dolly is a performer who is performing the role of a contended middle class wife and a perfect mother. She has been using this mask/ performance since a long time and now it has become an eternal part of her life. Germaine Greer in The Female Eunuch has aptly commented:

Women have been charged with deviousness and duplicity since the dawn of civilization so they have never been able to pretend that their masks were anything but masks. (129)

Dolly’s perfect poise, her patience, her domestic role makes her a perfect fit in the social identity given to her and like stereotypical Indian woman she never wants to get unmasked and to reveal her personal tragedy. Dolly in conversation with Lalitha has reflected her fear of breaking the mask/ role imposed on her by the patriarchs.
Dolly. I’m sorry. I wanted to laugh but I was afraid.

Lalitha. Afraid?

Dolly. Afraid I would crack my mask.

(CP 234)

The mask of docility and patience that patriarchy expects from woman is perfectly wore by Dolly. In the beginning of the play, she has decided to remain within patriarchy by wearing a white mask, an empty white surface which reflects the blankness in her life and the colors are constantly fill by the patriarchy. The emptiness in her life is reflected by Dolly when she witnesses Lalitha looking into dark, empty space and she comments, “Empty space. That’s all she’ll find!” (CP 313).

The conversation between Alka and Lalitha highlights the hidden malady of the Trivedi family and the patriarchal social matrix where women are coerced or accustomed to curtail their emotional and mental growth. The image of the bonsai, a plant whose growth has been arrested artificially through human intervention, assumes a dominant metaphor in the play in order to introduce the theme of stunting the mental and emotional growth of women.

Alka. You said you make bonsai?

Lalitha. Yes. I’ve got a whole collection.

Alka. How do you make them?

Lalitha. You stunt their growth. You keep trimming the root and bind their branches with wire and . . . stunt them. (CP 244)

The image of the bonsai, the detailed process of its creation, draws parallels between the stunting of a plant’s natural growth through unnatural and artificial means with the strategy used by patriarchy to arrest the natural growth of women, who are then reduced to artificial objects capable of exhibiting the superiority of the creator but unable to display the natural qualities it was endowed with. Lalitha’s elaborate description of making a bonsai is almost metaphorical of the way in which patriarchy
stunts the growth of women and moulds the women according to feminine mystique either to be children’s mother or husband’s wife. This is done in order to suit its own purposes of displaying superiority and establishing hegemony. Asha Kuthari Chaudhari, a known critic commented on the use of the use of bonsai as a metaphor:

The grotesque looking tree is deliberately acclimatized to its environment and adapts its growth accordingly, even bearing fruit (that are, however, inedible) and turns into a dwarf, stunted in every way and yet surviving. (Contemporary 85)

In the first two acts of the play, Dattani shows the suffering of women through the characters of Alka and Dolly who have valiantly suffered the injustice meted out to them by their brother, or husband or mother-in-law. However, in the third act of the play they make an attempt to attain the heroic stature of Laxmi Bai, the Queen of Jhansi, whose unspoken and invisible presence casts its looming shadow over the play. Violence is the norm with which the women are controlled. Alka and Dolly are managed first by their brother and then by their husbands. As a brother in a patriarchal society, Praful has the complete right to resort to violence if he feels his sister is astray. Alka gives a horrifying description of her brother’s callous behavior when she tells Dolly:

I told him to drop me before our street came. He didn’t understand and dropped me right at our doorstep. Praful saw. He didn’t say a word to me. He just dragged me into the kitchen. He lit the stove and pushed my face in front of it! I thought he was going to burn my face! He burnt my hair. I can still smell my hair on fire. Nitin was right behind us. Watching! Just…Praful said, ‘Don’t you ever look at any man. Ever.’ (CP 257)

As reflected in these words, women are given liberty according to the whims and choices of their patriarchs. Mary Wollstonecraft in her book, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman while commenting on the dependency syndrome makes an apt comment, “The child isn’t left a moment to its own direction- particularly a girl and this rendered dependent. Dependence is called natural”(43). The girls right from their birth suffers
from the dependency syndrome and live a parasitic life depending on their father and brother before marriage and after marriage they are legally transferred to their husbands. Alka is passed like an object from the guardianship of Praful to that of Nitin, a trusted friend.

The Trivedi family considers Alka as a deceptive person unable to become mother and entirely lacking in family morals. She faces the brunt of domestic violence and she is thrown out of the house by the patriarchs. Dolly, her sister has to plead for the comeback of her sister, which reflects the situation of women in a patriarchal setup. The women still are judged in age-old parameters as given by Friedan, “The woman’s fundamental status is that of her husband’s wife, the mother of his children” (*The Feminine Mystique* 201). Such self-surveillance perpetuated by the dictums of phallocentric society makes a woman renounce any thoughts of rebellion and she has to act within the boundaries of patriarchy.

Alka. Oh. In that case…let me just add some in mine. I have an occasional one. It’s good for digestion.

Lalitha. I have not-so-occasional ones at parties. It’s nice to get high once in a while.

Alka. (*guardedly.*) Your husband doesn’t mind?

Lalitha. No, I don’t think so. As long as he’s around when it happens, he doesn’t mind. You must do a bit of social drinking too. (CP 244)

This conversation suggests a sense of possession between a husband and wife within the family institution. Alka isn’t supposed to drink and when she drinks she is considered to be a corrupt woman. Lalitha can do it under the guardianship of her husband which reveals that how under the veil of elegance and sophistication, exploitation in one form or the other exists.
Dattani has portrayed Baa as the sufferer of oppressive patriarchy and her state is revealed by her abrupt outbursts of her past experiences. Baa who wanted to be a singer is thwarted because of the stigma attached to singing as the profession of courtesans. Like Rani Laxmi Bai, who successfully revolted and attained the stature of a venerable martyr, Naina Devi, the thumri singer, is the other successful rebel whose unseen presence looms large over the narrow, cloistered lives of these urban-middle class women centered amidst petty rituals. At one point in the play Dolly enumerates Naina Devi’s achievement:

She married into royalty. Imagine. She could have lived her life comfortably in royal grace and become a rajmata. But she wanted to sing! She wanted to sing songs of love. Thumris – sung in her days only by tawaifs. The queen wanted to sing love songs sung by whores! Why? Nobody knew. She’d seen a performance by a tawaif in her youth. The sound of the sarangi and ghungroos remained with her forever. She went ahead and sang! Her husband supported her. At times she was mistaken for a tawaif but it didn’t matter! It didn’t matter to her because she was singing! That was all that was important to her. Today, she is called the queen of thumri. (CP 295)

If Naina Devi was able to achieve her life’s true calling it was due to the support of her husband. Baa, nevertheless, is the victim of marital violence, stunted to take the shape of a potted plant, forced to sacrifice her desire for a vocation of singing by her husband. Later she turns as perpetrator of patriarchal violence on her daughters-in-law, forcing them to fit into fixed roles predefined for them. Her trauma of the violence and the physical abuse done to her by her husband is unsullied in the mind of Baa as she recollects:

You hit me? I only speak the truth and you hit me? Go on. Hit me again. The children should see what a demon you are. Aah! Jitu! Nitu! Nitin! Are you watching? See your father! (Jerks her face as if she’s been slapped.) No! No! not on the face! What
Indra in *The Status of Woman in Ancient India* commented:

Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) talked of the distortions which women suffered from being confined to domestic life—how, often lack of exposure and ruling in a small domain made many a woman tyrannical, despotic, cunning, petty. This perhaps, explains the proverbial cruelty of the Indian mother-in-law towards her daughter-in-law.

Consequently, the victim has become the perpetrator of patriarchal oppression. The desire to remain close to her sons, results from her own sense of dislocation. There is no space for self-expression. While she rejects her husband’s authority, there is a desire to overpower through her sons authorities. The consequences of socialization pass from generation to generation, from mother to daughter, from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. The mother-in-laws provoke their sons into ill-treating their wives and derive sadistic pleasure from this.

Baa dominates her sons so much that Nitin loses his manliness and Jiten becomes a dehumanized individual. Nitin’s turning into a homosexual shows how mothers turn possessive due to the lack of meaningful relationships with their husbands which adversely affect the marital lives of their sons. Commenting on this Germaine Greer writes:

… if children are presented to women as a duty and marriage an inescapable yoke, then the more energy they have the more they will fret and chafe, tearing themselves and their dependents to pieces. When children are falsely presented to mothers as their only significant contribution, the proper expression of their creativity and lives work,
the children and their mother suffer a lot.  
*(The Female Eunuch 74)*

Thus, woman's subjugation as wife is more than compensated by her dominance as mother over her son, a role in which she finds true fulfillment. In Baa’s role, the age-old custom of the violence against Indian women is made alive and the way it has taken a new form in Dolly and Alka. Baa isn’t merely a woman; she is the patriarch in the guise of a woman. She urges Jiten to beat up Dolly even though she is pregnant and the result is a physically and mentally challenged child, Daksha.

Through Daksha, Dattani has portrayed how a child becomes the victim of patriarchal stunting and pruning while still in the foetal stage. Dolly’s fanciful thoughts about Daksha coming out in dancing costume and performing, are not just imaginative but deeply moving insights into a mother’s concealed pain of helplessness:

Lalitha.     …And Daksha? What about her?  
What will she come as? *Pause.*

Dolly.     She can wear a splendid dance costume! All silk and brocade!  
And temple jewellery, lots of it!  
And of course bells! Dancing bells! (CP 296-7)

Patriarchal violence has reduced Daksha to a damaged non-person who will dance alone and can never stand on her feet. It’s because of the trimming of her roots by the brute force of patriarchy.

Mahesh Dattani has forcefully depicted the established belief that this is men’s world in Act II which is labeled as “Man”. The world of advertisement is like a capitalist system which facilitates its profit making motive by transforming women into brand slogans that will titillate viewers and in turn promote sales. Advertising agency as a patriarchal institution makes women a toy and the target of male gaze. Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Right of Woman* has commented on the treatment of women as a commodity when she writes, “She was created to be the toy of man, his rattle and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused” (68). The
Trivedi brothers weigh their Re-va-Tee project with their decayed and rotten male centric ideas.

Nitin. The ball was a good idea. Makes all the top shots happy.

Jiten. At the client’s expense. And get this Shirley girlie to strip at the end. (CP 265)

The brothers are unable to understand that women are the ones buying the products so to facilitate selling they have to respect their sentiments as consumers. They believe that the product is meant to transform women into more lucrative and saleable commodities. Jiten’s view represents the male centric power structures in our society:

Yes! Men would want to buy it for their women! That’s our market. Men. Men would want their women dressed up like that. And they have the buying power. Yes! So there’s no point in asking a group of screwed-up women what they think of it. They will pretend to feel offended and say, ‘Oh, we are always being treated like sex objects.’ (CP 276)

Through these words of Jiten, Dattani sheds light on the mind-set of Indian society which is infested with views of male dominance. Jiten's words perpetuate the belief that the buying power rests with the men alone and it has nothing to do with women that’s women are just treated as sex objects. Those women who have the buying power doesn’t fit in the patriarchal system. They can only exist within the category of “screwed up” women whose voices are unusual. The only acceptable position for the women in this scenario is that of a commodified body. Germaine Greer in The Female Eunuch elaborates the strategy adopted by the patriarchal society to deform women physically, mentally and psychologically when she writes, “Whenever we treat women’s body as aesthetic objects without function we deform them and their owners” (Greer 42). Jiten nevertheless, treats women as a commodity when he says:
It’s the biggest advantage of having an office on Grant Road. It was pointed out to me by the bugger who sold this place to me. No checking into seedy hotels in City Market. Just drive down Lavelle Road and pick one up. Bring her here and pack her off in half an hour. You save a lot of time. (CP 286)

Dattani views the institutions of marriage and family as the most important perpetrators of patriarchy. That is why, he has given his women characters the right to seek alternate ways of expression which suggests that inspite of patriarchal impulses, women still have the potential to resist such degenerate social forces. Dattani’s women do create their own spaces to assert their voice against the injustice done to them while men used escapism as a mean to avoid unpleasant situation. Alka and Dolly have their moments of resistance that make them survive in the oppressive atmosphere of the Trivedi house. Dolly listens to the thumri of Naina Devi who had the support of her husband and was able to flout convention. She defines her sexuality through a fantasy with the cook, Kanhaiya who satisfies her emotional and physical needs. Alka creates her identity through acts of defiance such as drinking, alcohol and dancing in the rain. All this manifests itself in her desire to dress up as the Rani of Jhansi, to be the brave queen in the party.

The last act “Free for All” unmasksthe atrocities of male dominance where women muster courage and strength to fight against injustice. Dolly who in earlier scene appeared as a tortured character, emerges as a strong and confident women to identify her oppressor and to fight against injustice. She supports drunken Alka, reveals the painful truth about Daksha and exposes the horrors of her brother Praful. Dolly makes an encounter with Jiten in the last scene, when she breaks the bonds of her stereotypical role.

Dolly. You were angry with Praful and you hit me?

Jiten. That was fifteen years ago! (CP 310)
Jiten. 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.

Jiten. No! No! She made me do it! She did it!

Dolly. No! Oh no! I will not let you get away so easily! They were your hands hitting me! Your feet kicking me! It’s in your blood! It’s in your blood to do bad! (CP 312)

The conversation initiates Dattani’s tirade against women oppression when both the “submissive” and sacrificing” women characters raised their voice against the oppression. Alka speaks boldly against the authority of the patriarchs when she says:

Our saint of a brother used to warn us against men like you. And what does he do? The saint gives his sister to the sinner and disappears! Finished. Matter over. Or is it? The saint has another sister who is *(slaps her own face)* bad, bad, bad. He beats her till she gets better. And he has this friend. A best friend! The sinner’s brother turns out to be his best friend. Not such a coincidence. (CP 300)

In the whirlpool of oppression and exploitation where women like Dolly and Alka suffer, Dattani exhibits his vision through the character of Lalitha in the present world. Lalitha ‘freelances’, enjoys her reproductive rights, grows Bonsai-plants, does a bit of creative work, is independent, choosy, free, creative and a step ahead of the domestic position of Dolly and Alka. Lalitha is a loquacious lady who can chatter away with anyone on the topics of her liking. She loves to talk about herself and her bonsais.

Lalitha. Oh I keep myself occupied. I do a bit of writing. Freelance. I write an occasional woman’s column for the *Times*. Sometimes I
review cultural events. I am into meditation. And, oh yes, I grow bonsai plants – I have been growing them for years. I do a bit of creative writing as well. You know, poetry and stuff like that. (CP 243)

In addition to all this, Lalitha could make her own independent decisions which is, however, viewed negatively by men:

I know. Sridhar thinks I’m crazy spending so much time over them when I could be going out and having fun. Once we won a raffle at one of those made-for-each-other contests. The prize was two free tickets to Goa or cash. Sridhar wanted Goa and I wanted cash. I just couldn’t imagine leaving my bonsais with the neighbor, worrying whether she had remembered to water them. So I talked him out of it. I can be quiet stubborn. Sridhar says its typical of women to do exactly opposite of what their husband’s want, just to prove they are independent. What do you think? (CP 252)

Here the dramatist reinforces the belief that for making an independent identity, it’s very necessary to exercise the power of understanding and reason as there is no other foundation for independence of character. Women should bow to the authority of reason rather than being the modest slave of the opinion that is formed by the patriarchal society. Dattani tears the veil of illusion and questions that in a patriarchal moral code there is a possibility for a woman to ask about the faithfulness of a husband to his wife. Both Alka and Dolly turn out to be confident, breaking off their barriers and sharing the common space or the centric force with their male counterparts.

In both the plays Where There’s a Will and Bravely Fought the Queen, the women characters Dolly, Alka, Lalitha, Kiran, Sonal, Preeti convey the vision of the dramatist who too like Woolf is not an advocate of “The Angel in the House”. Greer in the similar vein comments:
Abandonment of slavery is also the banishment of the chimera of security. The world will not change over-night and liberation will not happen unless individual women agree to be outcasts, eccentrics, perverts or whatever the powers-that-be choose to call them. *(The Female Eunuch* 367)

Dattani’s women, therefore, do not seek refuge in the traditional means of protest like hysteria and suicide. They demystify the “feminine mystique” which claims that women can be happy only in subservience and effacement in a patriarchal society. The beginning of both these plays divulges suppression of women but later exhibits progression because the women become conscious of their exploitation and begin to utilize their capabilities against exploitation and injustice. The independent Indian state considered the granting of equal political and civil rights to women adequate. But without questioning the patriarchal authority, women cannot assert and realize their rights.