Chapter III

A Critical Study of Mahesh Dattani’s Radio Plays

Drama has unique place in the field of literature. It is the representation of human life on the stage. Basically, it is a performing art relying more on performance than on the verbal expressions. The success of drama involves the participation of the three - the playwright, the performers and the playgoers. It articulates message for the viewers largely through stage performance which is marked by its distinctiveness like pluralism and dynamism. It breaks the web of illusion and ignorance developing the understanding and perception of the audience. The stage production of the play requires both the performers and the viewers. However, a play can be enjoyed in three ways - reading, viewing and listening. The production of the radio play cannot be seen; it only can be heard or listened. The radio play can also be called audio play.

It is a universally admitted fact that Information Technology has redefined and revamped almost all the human fields. ICT has contributed a lot in the field of education, art, music and literature. There was no play for listening before the invention of Radio. The arrival of radio has given birth to a new kind of drama i.e. Radio drama. Nowadays, radio plays are increasingly becoming popular all across the world. Such plays are broadcast by the radio stations and the people enjoy listening to them. Hence, the spectators are replaced by the listeners in the radio play. Both the stage play and the radio play are two different kinds of dramas. The former is meant for ‘eyes’ or ‘viewing’, the latter for ‘ears’ or ‘listening’. Both are enjoyed in two different ways. The way of enjoying radio play is quite different from that of enjoying a stage play. The radio play is performed through ‘verbal’ or ‘vocal action’.

The radio play is not meant for stage performance. It reaches us through following some technical and mechanical process. The most potent question that arises in our mind is that ‘does the radio play succeed in
providing pleasure and enjoyment to the listeners in true sense of term? Can it offer experience like stage play?’

There are some differences between a radio play and a stage play. The first and foremost variation is the mode of presentation. The stage play is presented or performed on the stage, whereas radio play is broadcast over a radio station. Secondly, both plays have their audiences/listeners of different tastes to enjoy them. The audience of the stage play sits just before the performers. In case of radio play, the audience or listeners do not sit before the artists. They are located in the remote parts enjoying the radio play. The listeners of the radio play are not visible. Nor are they in a particular group or mass. They are unknown, unseen by the artists and scattered all over. So, it is most likely that the listeners of the radio play may be larger and bigger than the audience of stage play. Thus, the scope for the radio broadcast is quite wide and vast.

There is an eye to eye or face to face contact between the viewers and performers of the stage play. There is no such proximity between the artists of the radio play and audience as they are placed in remote and scattered areas. The radio play has some benefits over the stage play. It can be heard or enjoyed at any place. One can listen to a radio play while doing other jobs. The listening of radio play and listener’s own activity can go simultaneously. The stage play requires direct participation or physical participation of the audience.

Before the broadcast of radio play, it is recorded and passed through certain technical process. The stage play production requires the arrangement of the stage, availability of stage property, choreography, costumes etc. The performer has to take great pain in creating atmosphere befitting to event and necessary make up and choreography befitting to the characters. The radio play is spared from this entire burden as there is only expression of ‘voice’. The element of voice holds prime significance in radio play presentation.
Moreover, the presence of every character on the stage is very necessary in stage play; while in a radio play, the presence of the character with whom dialogue is held, is not necessary. The presence of the character can be imagined by mind. The listeners see the dramatic scene through their mind’s eyes. Briefly, radio play presentation is quite different from stage play production and also a little bit easier than stage play presentation.

It should be noted here that the radio broadcast is done under the government vigilance. So, it has to observe certain rules and regulations concerning broadcast of programmers imposed by government. The dramatists are supposed to take into consideration the guidelines provided by government at the time of writing a radio play. ‘Voice modulation’ is an important technical feature in a radio play. The voice can be used in three ways in radio plays: “(1) Word (2) Word effect (3) Music”. ³

In the radio play, the spoken word is used for two purposes: “(1) Dialogue (2) Delineation”. ⁴ The voice of the artist is the personality of the character in radio play.

The radio play has no visual component. So, the loss of visual effects can be compensated with voice effect and background music. The background or setting is also created with the voice effect in radio play. Super imposed process denotes the use of recorded voice in the main play at an appropriate place.

The responsibility of the radio playwright, artist and presenter is quite different from those of stage playwright, artist and presenter. The roles of viewers and listeners also differ in the way they enjoy the play. Like short-story writer, the radio playwright has to observe economy of characters. The radio play is performed or presented in a limited or shorter time limit. The voice is the only tool or device to introduce and differentiate the characters.

Mahesh Dattani has played an important role in the evolution and enrichment of Indian English drama through his wonderful dramatic outputs. His dramatic genius is marked by diversity and dynamism. He has
also offered a significant mite in the field of radio drama. He has been writing for B.B.C. Radio 3 and 4. He was commissioned to write tales on the six hundredth anniversary of Geoffrey Chaucer, the first English poet and the author of *Canterbury Tales*. Dattani was one of the two writers selected from India. The present chapter studies critically six radio plays of Mahesh Dattani. They are as follows:

- Do the Needful – 1997
- Seven Steps Around the Fire – 1998
- The Swami and Winston – 2000
- A Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child – 2000
- Clearing the Rubble – 2000
- Uma and the Fairy Queen – 2003

Do the Needful is the earliest radio play of Dattani. The play depicts the theme of homosexuality but in a quite different way. The play was first broadcast on 14th August 1997 by BBC Radio 4.

In 1996 Mahesh Dattani was commissioned to write his first radio play for the BBC, the result was the somewhat unconventional ‘romantic comedy’ Do the Needful.  

Since it is a radio play the dramatist discards elaborate stage description. The narrative of the play occurs at two levels – exterior and interior. Dattani writes about the society he lives in. His plays depict the dynamics and mechanism of modern urban families. Therefore, he gives way to old theatrical device to reveal the move and motives of the character. He uses newer devices like ‘thought’, ‘mobile phone’ conversations for revealing the feelings and thoughts of the characters. In this play, he employs the techniques like ‘thought’, phone talk etc.

The plot of the play revolves around the theme of arranged marriage between Alpesh Patel, a young boy of Gujarati parents and Lata Gowda, a Kannadiga. The parents of both the persons look concerned...
regarding their marriage. The dramatic narrative shows the tension and unrest prevailing in the minds of all the characters. Alpesh Patel and Lata Gowda are the two main male-female characters of the play. Alpesh is thirty plus divorced and Lata is twenty four years old and a very notorious girl. However, she is well read lady. Alpesh’s family is richer than Lata’s. Gowda family is very positive about Alpesh’s matrimonial proposal. Both are well to do families and claim to have good names in their respective communities. Even though, they intend to get their children married outside their community. They are brought together through matrimonial correspondence and keen to get their children married soon. Actually, the problem prevails beneath the surface level. Alpesh and Lata are unwilling to marry each other. Alpesh is a gay. He is in love with a man called Trilok, whereas Lata is quite romantic in her notion. She is in love with a man called Salim who is a terrorist. The conflicts and turmoil of their minds are brought on the surface through ‘thought’ technique.

Both the families are worried about their children who have ruined their family name and honour. The whole Gowda community is condemning Lata’s affair with Salim. She has brought social disgrace to the family. So her family is highly eager to get Lata married as soon as possible. Lata’s helplessness and her parents’ wrath are well expressed in the following dialogues.

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

Prema Gowda: You should have thought of our lives before sleeping with that terrorist. (CP: 122)

On the other hand, the Patels are also anxious and eager to get Alpesh married as soon as possible. His first marriage didn’t work as the woman demanded divorce with Alpesh. It was not in his control to stop her. So, being inwardly reluctant about this marriage, he intends to stop his marriage. His inward is thrown out through his ‘thought’ during mother- son interaction over the issue of marriage.
Both families are speculating on a suitable match between Alpesh and Lata. But the bride and the groom are wrapped in their own speculations. Lata contemplates only of her lover, Salim. Alpesh keeps on musing on his gay partner, Trilok. Both are distressed and disappointed. It is quite clear that their passions and urges rationed by the power of patriarchy and parental expectations. As a result of this, their minds and consciousness are anguished and fractured. At the very beginning of the play, they lapse into thought which reveal the tide of their passion.

The feelings of Alpesh are expressed in his following utterances.

Alpesh:


His mother insists him to marry as it is important to get married without knowing the real cause of failure of his first marriage. He knows well that his gay nature was the real reason for the separation with his first wife. Being unable to tell his mother, he just warns her saying that his second marriage might fail.

Alpesh: What happened to my last marriage...
Kusumben Patel: Yes? What do you want to say?

Alpesh: You don’t want it to happen again, do you?

Kusumben Patel: Are you threatening me that it will happen again? (CP: 126)

Alpesh is suggesting her that she should be prepared for the failure of his second marriage. He feels the pangs of separation with Trilok. He is haunted by his association with Trilok. He wants to do justice with his companion, Trilok. Dattani repeatedly employs code mixing technique in the narrative of his plays. At times, he uses words from Indian languages without translating them into English. After listening to Alpesh’s matrimonial prospects, the liftman sings hilariously:

Liftman: (fading, away, drumming on the plywood wall of the lift and singing boisterously) Le jayenge, le jayenge, dilwale dulhaniyan le jayenge! (CP: 124)

The play also informs about certain customs and ceremonies to be undertaken at the time of starting something auspicious task. Gifting or donating money to others especially poor people and poojari, priest etc. for seeking blessings upon the task is highlitied in the play. The Patels are going to visit the Gowda family at Bangalore. Mr. Patel first gives ten rupees to liftman and one hundred and one to the poojari for a special prayer for his son Alpesh.

In the dramatic structure of play, *Do the Needful*, Dattani tries to show clash between the homosexuals’ sentiments and the established and accepted notions of the society which do not permit an individual to lead life according to the call of his/her conscience. The play is built up on the idea of pushing forward the institution of conventional marriage system. Being a master dramatist, he interweaves the theme of homosexuality in the fabric of the play. He is very original in his art of adopting technique befitting to his purpose. In an attempt to depict the complex and conflicting mental spectrum,
he resorts to ‘thought’ device for surfacing inside story before audience properly. This is how he lays bare inside working of Lata’s mind through ‘thought’ technique.

Lata: (thought) Salim, I know you are allowed four wives – what’s the point in thinking of all that now? I will have to be content keeping you as a lover. How are we going to work this out? What if you have to go back to Kasmir? I will have to find another lover. I can have more than f
girl, I will rot in hell. Oh! Damn the Bangalore catholic school, sending me on a guilt trip now. (CP: 126-27)

After mutual matrimonial correspondence, Mr. and Mrs. Patel arrive at Gowda’s portico along with their son, Alpesh to negotiate the matrimonial alliance between Alpesh and Lata.

The character of coconut vendor, Mariappa, is very interesting. His character provides both amusement and sarcasm. He is very out spoken and conventional person of the soil. His character represents the conventional spirit of the people who oppose any idea that brings change in established norms of society. He is furious upon the modern people who allow their children to marry the outside the caste and region. Lata informs Alpesh that Mariappa beats drum when he is very angry with the whole world. His daughter had run away to Bombay to join the movies. So he feels humiliated and hides his face from the villagers. The play highlights wrath and anger of the people against the industrialist for the excessive consumption of water and electricity polluting environment. The play also focuses on sandalwood smuggling going on in this part of the state. Smuggling is done by the local people. So both local and outsiders are thieves.

At her farm house, Lata watches Alpesh smoking in a private place. Alpesh requests her not to reveal it before his father. To the much surprise of Alpesh, Lata expresses her desire to smoke. Alpesh is relaxed to know her smoking habit. He fishes out a cigarette and lights it for her. Lata joins him in smoking. She exhales loud and slow. So Alpesh says ‘Teri bhi
chup, meri bhi chup.' (CP: 142) Lata doesn’t understand this Hindi expression. So Alpesh puts it into English that your silence and mine as well. There after Lata and Alpesh go to see Gauri’s calf. On the way, both are thinking with themselves. They are musing over the dilemma of how to present reality.

Lata: (thought) I had the chance! I couldn’t lose it. I had to tell him about you, then or never.

Alpesh: (thought) What could I say, Trilok? How would I tell her reject me? (CP: 149)

The plays of Dattani offer fine post colonial analysis. They represent the problems and angst of those whose voices were silenced under the pressure of social conventions and prejudices as well as oppressive force of patriarchy. Dattani, since the publication of his first play, Where There’s a Will, has been constantly attempting to present such themes and issues under the hidden agenda of sensitizing the mass about the problems faced by the colonized class in our society. He focuses on the tension and turbulence of the characters resulting from demolition of human hopes and aspiration under the name of healthy socio-cultural practices.

There is a constant conflict between an individual self with the collective self. In other words, the individual self is trying to acquire as much freedom as possible from the grip of collective or societal self. God has given us free will but the society doesn’t allow an individual to exercise his/her free will.

The dramatic narrative progresses through interior and exterior spaces. Actually, they are the two levels of the mental spectrum of parents and mental spectrum of the children. But the interior space dealing with individual’s free will and choice is hidden. It is yearning to express under the weight of exterior space dealing with the society/parental mindset. What parents think good/proper is revealed through exterior mode. And what Alpesh/Lata thinks is revealed through interior channel. Exterior device can be deemed as the curtain to veil the internal reality of human mind and psyche.
When Devraj Gowda asks Alpesh to speak something about their press, Alpesh feels that nothing is worth sharing. The father being a snob and hypocrite, he insists Alpesh to present the glorious saga of his achievement. Alpesh is honest and unassuming. So he is not inclined to impress Gowda family by telling a lie. Alpesh thinks to himself.

Alpesh: (thought). What could I say to them? Daddy had his colleague approve the loan. We paid enough bribes to get the damn thing off. We hired the underworld to have Grandpa’s tenants every time I speak, I am lying (Pause) In case you think I am

(CP: 136)

In the same way, when Kusumben Patel asks Lata what she can cook, she replies to herself something different.

Lata:

(thought) Salim, you will like my lamb biryani. (CP: 134-35)

The conflict between Alpesh and Lata represents the conflict of the gay persons and women against oppressive power of particular social setup. They are crushed under the burden of patriarchal forces. It is observed:

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 their nature. 6

Thus, the play Do the needful focuses on the shared spaces between women and the gay in the society which predominantly promotes the patriarchal family set up and discourages any change that challenges established and existing structure of it. Alpesh and Lata are compelled to marry each other by their parents. Parents’ idealism is confronted with
children's individualism through the exterior and interior dramatic decoding devices. Lata is craving for Salim and Alpesh is pining for Trilok. It is practically impossible for both of them to fulfill their dreams and desire. Socio-cultural tradition prevents them from doing so.

Both, Alpesh and Lata are aching due to their strong passion. They are yearning to express their feelings. While moving towards cowshed, both look puzzled and perplexed due to their commitments elsewhere. But it is Lata who takes initiative of revealing truth. She tells Alpesh.

Lata: Look. I don’t want to marry you; I am in love with someone else.

Alpesh: (thought) That was good of her. (Pause speech) Can we sit down somewhere? (CP: 149)

Lata asks him to keep on walking. They are going to see Gauri’s calf. Alpesh is lost in thinking. He reacts upon Lata’s confession.

Alpesh: (Thought) she was waiting for me to say something. May be I should have told her about you. After all, she was decent enough to bring up her Salman or Salim or whatever. At that moment very moment, I imagine, our parents were sort of clinching the deal.” (CP: 149)

Lata’s candid expression of her love for someone else facilitates private conversation regarding the fulfillment of their hidden motives.

Alpesh: Good, I am glad you don’t want to marry me. Because I don’t want to marry you either.” (CP: 149)

Lata is confused on hearing this response from Alpesh. She feels that she has hurt him. That is why he says so. But soon he explains;

Alpesh: Bullshit. I am glad you brought it up. If you hadn’t, I would have.

After making their intentions clear, both start discussing over how to avoid the marriage. They are contriving a scheme to discard their
marriage for having the persons of their own choices as the partners. Alpesh suggests her to tell her mother that she doesn’t like him. Lata feels that it won’t work.

Alpesh: Oh no, why don’t you just tell her you are in love with someone?

Lata: Look. I don’t think you understand. They know. They just want me to get married to anyone. I have no say in the matter. (CP: 151)

In this way, Alpesh and Lata are applying their brains for avoiding their marriage. They can’t derive out any workable solution. Lata also contemplates over the plan of running away and makes arrangement for this. However, she postpones the idea of running away. She moves towards the cowshed and hears the sound of someone groaning. She goes to Alpesh’s room to herself. She is shocked to see Alpesh being homo and exploiting Mali for sexual pleasure. But soon, she is consoled on his being a gay. Mali is highly frightened and beseeching her not to reveal it before anyone. Lata assures him that she will not do so. As Lata tells Mali “Oh, Mali I am so happy you are alive. I thought the land grabbers or

( CP: 154) There is a bond of affection between Lata and Mali, servant at the farm house. They played and ran here and there in their childhood period.

The play Do the Needful portrays the pain and suffering of the gay and the woman whose nature is not corresponding with the established pattern of behavior of our patriarchal society. They do cow tow before the oppressive forces of socio-cultural practices and also do needful. It is observed:

The possibility of the shared spaces common to women and homosexuals is put to active use here with the identities of its protagonists. The common oppressor is the patriarchal structure that refuses
to allow any space for the growth of individual 
beyond a set pattern of gender determined roles. 

Again Lata tries to run away. Mali stops her. He asks her not to 
dishonor family and requests her to marry Alpesh. After a little later, Lata 
changes her plan and says;

Lata: Why should I run away? Mali has made me see sense. (CP: 

She further tells Alpesh.

Lata: What was the Hindi expression you’d used? Something about 

(CP: 155)

In this way, Alpesh, being homo, appears to her as a safer 

Pause

Alpesh: No, I mean, no, I can’t marry you.

Lata: Are you going to say no to your parents then?


They decide to marry each other as per their parents’ desires 
under the hidden agenda of teri bhi chup, meri bhi chup. Lata takes Mali with 
her after her marriage. She brings Mali as her dowry. They become ready to 
marry each other with twin aims of making their parents happy and hiding 
their relationship which society forbids. In this way, they decide to live under 
the same roof and sleep on same bed providing full space to individual’s free 
will. Even during the wedding function, Alpesh thinks of Trilok and Lata 
ponders on the possibilities of seeing Salim in Bombay. At the end of the play, 
Lata and Alpesh go out but to the different places. They discuss about their 
reunion after their business is over.

Lata: Where do we meet up?
Alpesh: You’ve got my cell phone number, haven’t you? Give me a call
(CP: 158)

The play ends with Alpesh thinking of Trilok and Lata thinking of Salim.

Lata: (Thought) Salim!

Alpesh: (Thought) Trilok! (CP: 158)

Homosexuality has remained one of the major motifs in the dramatic works of Mahesh Dattani. He has courage of conviction to discuss openly what he observes in the society whether it is communal prejudices or gender discrimination, gay relationship or romantic relationship, sexual colonialism or prostitution, consumerism or communal discrimination or apathy towards AIDS affected people.

The play Do the Needful decodes the complexity of homosexual relationship in our Indian society which looks contemptuously at such relationship. The main characters of the play Alpesh and Lata are quite unconventional in their outlook and their parents are people of quite conventional bent of mind. Alpesh and Lata are romantic but in a different way. The play ends with a marriage between Alpesh and Lata. But it is a compromise against the burden of patriarchal social order. It is observed:

ike 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. For me, this was the joy of working on Mahesh’s script: his writing, whilst taking on a conventional form and being readily accessible to an audience, never fails to challenge and surprise. And whilst the play may be set in Indian within the conventions of ‘arranged marriages’, its wider
The title of the play is very brief and attractive. It is very suggestive and also a little ironical. Under the pressure of circumstances, Lata and Alpesh are forced to marry each other. They don’t see any way out of escaping from the compulsion of arranged marriage. So, they think out a midway by agreeing upon the norms of society outwardly and disagreeing inwardly. They are tied up with wedlock. But there is no lock to their hearts. The play alerts us about the excessive parental pressure for conforming to the tradition and conventions of society.

The play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* depicts deplorable condition of hijra (eunuch) in our society. The play begins with chanting of Sanskrit mantras at the wedding ceremonies. It is a gruesome tragedy in the life of a transsexual and also who loves and shows sympathy towards marginalized eunuch community. The transsexuals are not considered as respectable and acceptable human beings. They dress up themselves in women’s costumes but they are not considered women. Transsexual is neither he nor she. It is neuter gender. So pronoun ‘it’ is used for denoting their neuter gender. The human identity of the eunuch is enveloped under the cloaks of myths and conventions. Dattani observes:

Hindi, Persian and Arabic, literally meaning ‘neither male nor female.’ Another legend traces their ancestry to the exception. The purpose of this case study is to show their position in our society. 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.
Not for them the seven rounds witnessed by the fire god, eternally binding man and woman in matrimony, or the blessings of ‘May you be the mother of a hundred sons.’ (CP: 10-11)

The theatre has ability to lay bare the dynamics of human relationship and sensibility and conflict that evolve out of it. It explores what is lying at the bottom of every human heart. It surfaces the truth covered beneath various modes of behavior as well as cloaks of myths and conventions. Theatrical art helps to reveal multiplicity of themes and unfolding varied layers of human identity and love. Mahesh Dattani seems to wrestle with a problem that is the characteristic feature of the postcolonial writers.

The plot of the play revolves around the investigation of murder mystery of Kamla, a beautiful eunuch. Uma Rao, the daughter of vice-chancellor and wife of superintendent of police, Suresh Rao is a student of sociology and doing her research on the life of the eunuch. She goes to the jail to meet Anarkali, another eunuch who is falsely accused as murderer.

Uma gets interested in the murder mystery of Kamla and feels sympathy for Anarkali in particular and enough community in general. She is a very sensitive lady. She develops emotional affinity and bondage with the eunuch. She is grieved at the mal treatment given to them in the jail. She asks her husband;

Uma: Yes, why did you arrest her?

Suresh: (off) Didn’t you go through the file? (Sound of gargling)

Uma: (CP: 9-10)

Suresh doesn’t have any sympathy for the eunuch and advises her wife not to develop good relationship with Anarkali. He calls them liar and castrated degenerate men. (CP: 10) But Uma is greatly interested and believes that Anarkali is not a liar. She hasn’t killed Kamla. So she raises the very subtle and logical question.
Uma: What is the evidence against Anarkali?

Suresh avoids answer as he is not interested in the release of Anarkali. In fact, he is wooing mood at present.

The eunuch is also human beings like us. They also long for human relationships. They want to bind themselves in the relationships of brother, mother, sister, father etc.

Anarkali: (Sympathetically) Oh. (smokes) if you were a hijra, I would have made you my sister.

Uma: Oh. Thank You. (CP: 13)

Uma symbolizes the centre and Anarkali symbolizes the margin. The play presents social dichotomy through their characters in an interesting way. Anarkali is hopeless and frustrated. However, after befriending with Uma, she starts anticipating her release. She wants Uma’s help in coming out of jail. She beseeches her for the support.

Anarkali: Get me out of here.

(Pause) Sister, I did not kill Kamla. You believe me, No?

(Pause) You don’t believe me? You doubt your own sister?

Uma: Er-no. I do (CP: 13)

Anarkali believes that Uma has got wealth and power. So she can help her get herself released from the jail. She is disappointed when Uma expresses her inability to help her.

Anarkali: Then say that. Don’t pretend to be my sister.

Uma: I don’t have any power! (CP: 13)

In the play, Dattani explores plurality of subalternity. The two dimensions of marginalization-the one sexual subaltern and the other
gendered subaltern are explored dexterously in the play. Anarkali and Uma Rao represent these two facets of subalternity. If Anarkali is biological subaltern, Uma is gendered subaltern. Uma wants to help and pay for the bail of Anarkali, but she has no money. She can’t demand money from her husband for this purpose. She has no such liberty as such. She explains:

Uma: Here. That is all the money I have. Even if, I wanted to, I couldn’t explain to my husband why I am paying for your bail. (CP: 15)

If we observe very minutely, we’ll find that the condition of Uma is also not much better than that of Anarkali. Both of them are sailing in the same boat which is swayed by the winds of social myth and pride. Uma tries to unmask the real condition of Anarkali. But surprisingly, she unveils her own subaltern hood before her husband. Anarkali points it to her in a very subtlest way.

Anarkali: Maybe you are unhappy than I am.

Uma: Look, I want to help you but I don’t know how.

Anarkali: If you give them money, they will release me.

Uma: But I can’t bail you out! (CP: 14)

The play highlights the brutality and cruel treatment of our cops to the eunuch community. The helplessness of Anarkali is highlighted in the following dialogues.

Uma: You can’t do that! You have to report to the police station.

Anarkali: They will kill me also if I tell the truth. If I don’t tell the truth, I will die in jail. (CP: 14)

During the process of unmasking the murder mystery of Kamla, Uma Rao displays various merits of head and heart. She is convinced that Anarkali is innocent. She has been falsely accused for the crime.
Uma is investigating for academic pursuit. But now it is not merely academic venture. She is deeply attached to eunuch community and receives acute pain after knowing the pathetic plight of the eunuch community.

Munswamy constantly requests Uma not to involve in the affairs of hijras. Despite this, she goes to Champa’s house to know the truth. Since Uma is embodied with essential human goodness and qualities, she also develops emotional bondage with Champa.

She takes money from her father and meets Champa.

Champa: Have you brought money for her bail?

Uma: Yes.

Champa: Oh, may you have a hundred children! I knew that you are really a social worker. (CP: 24)

Thus, Uma hands over money to Champa for getting Anarkali’s bail. In the beginning, Uma doubts that the cause of murder is competition between Kamla and Anarkali. But later on, she realizes that it is not the real cause of the murder. When Uma and Champa are conversing, Salim comes over there for getting one particular portrait.

Salim: You can keep all that. Let me first go through her trunk. And I didn’t give her anything. (CP: 26)

On knowing Uma being the daughter-in-law of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Salim hurriedly leaves the place to avoid further inquiry. Uma has become very curious to know about Salim and the thing he was searching for. Champa informs her that Salim is the bodyguard of the minister, Mr. Sharma. He used to come for Kamla every day. Surrendering to the Uma’s threat, Champa reveals that Salim was searching for the photograph. This adds more complexity and element of suspense to the plot of the play. Uma is very restless and anxious to meet Salim. Escorted by constable Munswamy, she goes to minister’s house to inquiry about his
relationship with Kamla. She wants to meet Salim’s wife as she heard that Salim’s wife had killed Kamla.

Mr. Sharma:

and his wife found out?

Uma: Possible. I am just checking out the story. One of the hijras who has been arrested says it could be Salim’s wife who killed Kamla.

Mr. Sharma: It is all very disgusting. (CP: 30-31)

During this conversation, Subbu, the son of minister, appears and makes strange statement:

Subbu: Are you going to arrest Salim?

Mr. Sharma: Go back to your room, Subbu. You are unwell.

Subbu: Please don't arrest him. He is a good man.

Mr. Sharma has arranged Subbu’s marriage with a beautiful lady. But he is unwilling to marry any one else. Uma tries to talk with him in a friendly manner. Subbu’s utterances and behavioral patterns also create some more complications. The end of the play is very depressing and disgusting. It reveals the truth of murder of Kamla. The dramatist unveils the mystery of Kamla’s murder during the wedding ceremonies. It is revealed that Mr. Sharma got Kamla murdered as his son, Subbu loved her. Displeased by this, he got Kamla murdered. There is an occasion of wedding ceremonies of Subbu with a beautiful lady. As usual, a group of hijras including Anarkali and Champa appeared at this occasion. Uma Rao, Suresh Rao and many other celebrities are present as the guests there in. Mr. Sharma suspects the intention of Uma Rao. It is because of this, Mrs. Sharma looks nervous on the most auspicious moment of his life i.e. the marriage of his son. He orders security staff for not allowing the hijras into the campus. Uma Rao convinces Mr. Sharma saying that it is bad luck to turn away a hijra on wedding or birth. Champa thanks and blesses Uma. “May you have hundred sons?” (CP: 38)
Champa seeks the permission of Mr. Sharma for singing and dancing as it was the usual way of blessing the house and the handsome couple. When the hijras’ dance begins, Mr. Sharma requests the young couple to come there. Subbu, seeing dancing Anarkali, recalls the image of diseased Kamla. He becomes restless and fanatic. He snatches Suresh’s gun and cries out;

Subbu: I am leaving you all! You can’t keep me away from Kamla. (CP: 39)

Everybody tries to persuade him but he is mad and adamant. Anarkali tries to subdue his agitated state of mind by giving a photo. It was Polaroid picture that Subbu and Kamla had taken soon after their private wedding in some remote temple. Beena Agrawal rightly observes;

As soon as Subbu looks at the photograph, the living paraphernalia suspends and the dead kamla assumes the role and significance of living entity governing and guiding the entire scene. ⁹

In a state of utter distress and despair, he kills himself crying “You killed her.” (CP: 40) With the death, murder mystery is solved silencing Uma Rao. She is unable to reveal it publicly. The play ends with Uma Rao’s (voice-

The case was hushed up and was not even reported in the newspapers. Champa was right. The police made no arrests. Subbu’s suicide was written off as an accident. The photograph was (CP: 42)

Thus, the play Seven Steps Around the Fire artistically unearths the shamefulness of our public thoughts and brutality of private thoughts. It does not delineate only the subalterns of the eunuch but also of women. The creator of this work gives vent to his anguish against the irresistible forces of social apathy and injustice towards realization of human identity of the eunuch community. Uma Rao is the mouth piece of the dramatist and shares anguish with its creator.
The play gives the message that the eunuch is human being as man and women can be. Their hearts are full of milk of human love and sympathy. It is a grave crime that they are denied human love and identity. Their hearts also throb for love and joy of life. Nature curses them with denial of sexual competency, but society curses them more cruelly with their social boycott. They are finished with social boycott and stigma. Human soul of the eunuch is bruised and bleeding. Longing for love and relationship is the keynote voice of this artistic work.

Mahesh Dattani projects the pathetic plight of the eunuch community without offering any suitable solution. The treatment meted out to the eunuch reflects the social and cultural notions. The attitude of the elitist towards the subaltern is very mean and disgusting. Mr. Suresh Rao looks at them with disgusting attitude. The play is set in Indian metropolitan environment and scenes moves from pose area to peripheral parts of the city. These two localities symbolize the two concepts of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’. The play highlights the creator’s awareness of social hierarchical structure, scenario and changing perceptions.

The play *The Swami and Winston*, another radio play, also probes into the death of a member of the English aristocracy. Again, Uma Rao is doing her research on violence in India. The play was first broadcast on 3rd June 2000 at 3 p.m. on B.B.C. Radio 4 under the directorship of Jeremy Mortimer. The dramatic narrative of the play moves ahead through exterior and interior device. At the opening of the play, lady Montefiore and the driver are negotiating in the car.

Lady Montefiore: Surely this isn’t the place! I know an ashram when I see one.

Driver: No Madam. This is the famous Bull temple. All tourists come to

Lady Montefiore, an English lady of good socio-economic background, visits India. It is explicit that she is not a tourist. She has come to
India to see the beauty and charm of the land, but she has come to find out her brother, Charles Montefiore who has settled down in an ashram in Karnataka. Actually, Charles was fascinated by Advaita Philosophy of India. He met an Indian named Sitaram Trivedi in London. This man impressed Charles with the discourse on Indian Advaita philosophy. Eventually, he turned out to be the most racist and sham philosopher. Charles joined the Ashram and dived deep with the spiritual fervor of the Hindu religion. Even after the death of his sister, he absorbs shock and finds happiness and joy in the life of ashram in India. He asserts that he is experiencing happiness in ashram which he has never experienced earlier. At the bidding of Swamiji, he recites Shanti path for the audience. After chanting Shanti path in Sanskrit, he begins his discourse in English.

wanted me to go back to England with her. She loved me and she thought she knew what was good for me, she felt this somehow wasn’t na as she called it. I tried to explain to her that I was a deeply things. But here in this ashram I have found happiness, I have never experienced before. (Applause from some members of the audience) I feel sad that someone got something out of killing my sister. Nobody would want her dead for any other reason. She was a warm and wonderfu miss her terribly, but India and Swamiji have taught me how to deal with this loss. I am still a happy person. Dhanyavada. (CP II: 312)

Lady Montefiore, with impressive background, was carrying with her dog named Winston who is lost somewhere. She feels nervous and makes announcement of reward of five thousand pounds to the person whosoever informs her about Winston. She visits different places of
Bangalore in a hired taxi. She looks deeply concerned about the loss of her dog. After the disappearance of her dog, her reactions are very sharp and suspicious. They throw lights on the two things- first her attachment and affinity with Winston. She wants to find out her dog first and then wants to go to the ashram or whatever it is. Therefore, she asks her driver to take the taxi to the temple first where her dog was separated from her.

Driver: Oh, Madam. Shall I take you to the ashram? Big ashram?

Lady Montefiore: Not the ashram (spelling it out) To the bull temple. Take me to the bull temple. (CPII: 292-93)

Secondly, this incident also reveals the distrust of foreign tourist in our cops. She tries to retrieve her dog by using her own resources as she doesn’t trust police department. She explains, “I don’t trust your police. I have made my own arrangements, thank you. I instructed the hotel manager to advertise in the local papers. I am offering a reward of five thousand pounds.” (CPII: 292)

Dattani’s plays are rooted in diverse themes, technique and structures. The play The Swami and Winston portrays the theme of violence and crime. Since this is a radio play, the dramatist spares the use of techniques and stagecraft which was employed in his stage plays. The story is told in a simple and straightforward way by using exterior and interior devices. Along with the sound of spoken words, the sound of the rainfall is heard again and again in the play. The rain fall lessens the speed of the vehicles and creates some inconvenience in her search for her brother Charles.

Lady Montefiore feels enormous relief and great joy at the rediscovery of her dog Winston. Amidst the dreadful rain, they are moving in a car on a lonely street. The driver is worried and anxious to get her back to the hotel. When they reached near the bull temple, suddenly the car coughs a little and comes to a halt. The driver goes in search of a mechanic in the heavy rain locking the car door behind him leaving Lady Montefiore and
Winston in the car. The sound of the rain is persistent. During this time, a car comes up and stops there. The people, arrived in car, killed the lady Montefiore amidst the collective sound of ‘OM’ and the sound of the conch and rain as well. Soon after this, the dramatic narrative of the play takes us to the place where Swami is dealing with the idea of death especially focusing on relationship between body and soul. He elucidates; “The body is but a garment that the soul discards, and wears yet another garment. So we are trapped in the cycle of birth and death because the soul desires new bodies just as our body desires material wealth. In order to liberate yourself from this endless cycle, you offer yourself to Lord Krishna. Surrender. So let go off your

(CPII: 296)

Now, the scene swiftly moves to the Uma and Suresh’s house. The police superintendent Suresh Rao receives a call and makes to go out. His wife, Uma is greatly interested in such cases and is curious to know what has happened.

Uma: What about her?

Suresh: She is dead. In her car somewhere on whitefield road. (CPII: 296)

Uma intends to accompany her husband at this night-time. Suresh doesn’t like her idea of going with him and also her interest in such murder mystery case.

Suresh: Look. I know you think you are very clever at this after that hijra

Uma: (CPII: 297)

Suresh expresses his displeasure at Uma’s involvement in his profession. He retorts that he is not in interfering in her business. So, she should abstain herself from interfering in his profession. The husband and wife indulge in charges and counter charges about this issue. This is how they blame and counter blame upon each other.
Uma: (Speaking quickly to have her say before it is interrupted) You did. You never let me complete my thesis!

Suresh: Sweet heart let us be clear about this. Your professor didn't like (CPII: 297)

The murder of Lady Montefiore enhances the actions of the play. Despite Suresh’s reluctance, Uma goes with her husband to the police station as she is greatly interested in such cases. Actually, she is a very kind and considerate lady. She doesn’t succumb to the forces that prevent her responding to the call of humanity. She shares the anguish with the dramatist against the ill treatment meted out to the marginalized sections of our society. After reading the sad news of her death in the newspaper, her brother Charles approaches to the police station. He expresses his displeasure for not informing him about her death. So, Suresh explains that the police don’t know who you are in what way he is connected to her.

Charles: She was my sister. I cannot believe it. I had to read about it in the paper this morning!

Suresh: No, we didn’t find any address. Only a book with phone numbers, all foreign. Not a single Indian phone number or address, except a card of the hotel she was staying in. (CPII: 298)

On Charles’ further query, Suresh replies that her dog Winston is being looked after by one of the constable named Munswamy. The police department assumes it as a robbery case and makes the arrest of some people belonging to Muslim community in that area. The police have also arrested her driver Maqsood thinking involved in her murder someway. Uma dislikes this act of arresting him even there wasn’t any loss of money. She decides to meet the driver and tries to know the truth. Suresh forbids constable Munswamy helping her when he is on duty. In the absence of her husband, she goes to the police station to meet the driver accompanied by constable Munswamy. The driver is honest and innocent. He wasn’t involved
in her death anyway. It is revealed through her conversation with the driver that the people belonging to minority community are badly treated even without any fault. The driver feels that he is arrested because he is a minority fellow. He explains his misery in the following manner:

Driver: What is my crime? Being a Muslim? I tell you they will not have arrested if I was not a Muslim! Who will believe me? You are also a Hindu. (CPII: 300)

The driver feels that he is unable to help Uma as he himself needs someone’s help. As a matter of fact, he knows nothing about the murder of the English lady. He wants Uma’s help in coming out of the trouble. don’t you help me also? My life is not important’?’ (CPII: 300)

Here, Dattani explores the marginalization of the minority vis-à-vis the woman. The two facets of subalterns are revealed during the conversation between the driver and Uma. The innocent driver is fit into the crime because he belongs to minority. He wants help from Uma and Uma wants him help her. Both are helpless and vulnerable. Their helplessness results from their marginalizations in different ways. Let us observe how the dramatist explores their subalternity.

Driver: I will try to help you. I don’t know anything. I am just a Muslim. You should help me.

Uma: (CPII: 300)

In *The Swami and Winston*, Dattani dramatises quite newer issue of religious fundamentalism and fraud under the outfit of religion. The play inspects and exhibits how fake religious minded people cheat the innocent people and even goes to the extreme end like killing them for the material gain. It is really shocking that the people, who preach about spiritualism, turn out to be the fundamentalists. They tactfully talk over spiritual gain for achieving material gain. The play reminds us of famous Hindi
proverb *Muh me Ram Bagal me Churi*. Sitaram Trivedi is one such character in the play. He is a fake philosopher. He uses religion as an instrument for material benefits. Uma does her best to solve the murder mystery of lady Montefiore. After meeting the driver, Uma, escorted by Munswamy, goes to see Sitaram Trivedi, a north Indian. Munswamy informed her that he found the dog Winston. So Uma wonders how he has found the dog. Uma meets Sitaram Trivedi at his place and tries to find out the truth. She also clarifies that she is doing her research on violence in India. Therefore, she is simply fascinated to find out the motive for her murder. Sitaram Trivedi explains circumstances in which dog was found. He puts, “I feed the poor people at the temple every day. I too have dogs. So, one of the street boys who found the

(CPII: 301)

Actually, Sitaram Trivedi invited the lady for lunch after finding the dog and had a long chitchat. He also informed Uma Rao that she did not live in England although she was an English lady. He added that England had very strict rules about the bringing of the animals. Sitaram knows all about the lady. He is the murderer of the lady. Despite this, he behaves as a quite innocent and amicable person. In the beginning, Uma is also pleased with his response and behavior.

Sitaram Trivedi: (Laughing) A woman with your fine background needs all the encouragement. I will be happy to tell you what I know of the dear departed English lady.

Uma: Thank you. I appreciate that. (CPII: 302)

Sitaram Trivedi is a pseudo religious person. He does religious practice for the material benefits. The horror of partition still haunts him. He is blinded by his fundamentalism. He is a very clever, cunning, cruel, and scheming person. While talking on European travelling to India. He observes in the following terms,
Sitaram Trivedi: There are two types of Europeans. Ones who understand and appreciate the depth and complexity of Hindu philosophy and the others who feel threatened by it. The world will realize the greatness of the Hindu way of life. Wait and see. It is a question of time. They can't be blind for ever even if they choose not to see. They have to open their eyes sooner or later. We shall have our temples all over the world. (CP II: 303)

Dattani tries to explain that how religious fundamentalism challenges the call of humanity and causes hatred among the people for other religion. They try to enlist the support of others by arguing that they are establishing the pride of their community. After meeting Sitaram Trivedi, both Uma and Munswamy feel that he is a treacherous and dangerous man. On the same day afternoon, Uma also goes to see Charles, the brother of Lady Montefiore, at Swami’s ashram. Strangely enough, the car comes to a halt on the Whitefield road.

Uma: Interesting that it stopped just a kilometer away from the temple.

Munswamy: This is the very good place to kill the English lady. Only fields, no houses or shops. It was raining so heavily that there was no traffic on the road. The road was filled with water. We don’t know whether he came in a car or from the fields.

Uma: Or from the temple. (CP II: 306)

This area is surrounded by sugarcane fields which is quite suitable and safe for hiding spot. Uma walks towards the field and finds a raincoat. Uma expresses her wrath against the police department saying that people don’t have trust in police. The people don’t tell anything due to the fear of harassment. She is sure that the raincoat is from England as she has seen it in a movie. She is also sure that ‘it belongs to a man.’ (CP: II, P 308) Soon after this, Uma and Munswamy ran into Sitaram Trivedi who leads a procession chanting of ‘Jai sri Ram, Sita Ram’. He exclaims, “I know you are
trying to appease the minorities. I too believe in peace. After all we are very
(CPII: 309)

He uses religion to fulfill his mal intention. He tries to deceive the
innocent people by arousing their religious faith and pride. As he asserts, “It is
my dharma to protect what we hold sacred. We must re-establish
(CP: II, P. 309)

Uma and Munswamy start making inquiry of Charles suspecting his hands in
the murder of Lady Montefiore as the rain coat belonged to Charles.

Charles: But why?... Surely you don’t believe I killed her do you?

Uma: I don’t. But you are the only one, it seems, who stands to gain
from her death. You inherit her wealth and property. All five
hundred acres of prime hertfordshire land! (CPII: 317-18)

Charles has become full time ashramite and has recovered from
the shock of her sister’s death. He has become the staunch devotee at the
ashram. He wears dhoti and does ritual in the ashram. He believes that
swamiji stands for peace and love. He has married an Indian girl called Radha
and has also applied for Indian citizenship. Uma wants to have a word with
him in private, but he denies of having any space for private talk in the
ashram. He suggests her to join him at the market way where he goes to sell
vegetable in a bullock cart which he calls Rolls Royce. Uma has also some
past memories associated with the ashram. During her childhood, she used to
visit the ashram with her mother, who was the devotee of the Swami.

On Uma’s further inquiry, it is revealed that Charles gave the
coat to the swamiji. Charles believes that swamiji was at the Bull Temple
when her sister was assassinated. Munswamy is very furiour upon swami. He
wants to inform the police for getting swami arrested. Listening this, Charles
reacts,”Arrest him? Just because he was at the Bull Temple and lost his
raincoat when my sister died? You might as well arrest scare crow.” (CPII:
318)
Charles is worried about some documents which were in his sister’s bag. Uma asks about the contents of those documents. Charles replies, “I-I can’t. I promised her I would keep it a secret. But I guess it doesn’t matter. Now that she is dead. She wanted me to go back and look after our estate. I didn’t want any of it. So we had to set up two trusts. For one of the trusts dealing with my share of wealth, I had the ashram the beneficiary, with swamiji as the senior trustee. So you see, he had no reason to kill my sister. He has no motive to kill her.” (CPII: 318-19)

When swami, Uma and Charles were conversing, Radha, Charles’s wife comes there with milk for swami. Uma helped her that evening when she fainted. She is observing her vow of silence. A little later, she falls to the ground as she has consumed the poisonous leaves of dhatoora. Uma and Charles are taking her to the St. Mary’s hospital in the car. Uma explains the complexity of the murder’s plot.

Uma: It’s not your sister’s death which is important to him. But yours.

Charles: Then why was my sister killed?

Uma: He had to stop her from executing your letter of intention to brains worth and milling. That would leave the swami with everything. And he would get nothing. He wanted that raincoat to be found. That’s why he threw it in the field, knowing it will be found. So he could put the suspicion on swami. Now listen to me. Once we get her to the hospital, you are going to move into a hotel in town and make sure that the police provide you with enough security until you have set up your trusts.

Charles: (CPII: 322)

Uma feels that assassinsators were interested in his property for setting up township or mega ashram. The political motive is also involved in this case. Suddenly the car comes to a halt as Munswamy forgot to put the fan belt on again. They are soon approached by another car. The man fires
from the gun and hits the body of the car. Soon it is discovered that the man who is firing is Sitaram Trivedi. He shouts, “Get that man to come out! (Yelling) Get out of that car Charles or I’ll shoot her.” (CP: II, P. 324) Radha is dying in the car. He goes to see Radha for himself. Charles grapples with Sitaram accusing him killing his sister. And the gun goes off. Sitaram falls on the ground. Sitaram is also taken into the car. Charles asks a very subtle question to Sitaram Trivedi.

Charles: How could you have killed her? How do you wake up in the morning and justify your actions to yourself.

Sitaram Trivedi: I-I didn’t want any of it for myself. (his breathing is heavy) I-I only wanted to help the Hindu cause. (CP:II: 324-25)

This is how Sitaram Trivedi is exposed as a cruel and scheming religious fundamentalist. He is dismissed as the Hindu fanatic and pseudo scholar. Suresh tries to persuade Uma to present false account of the incident before the court as he wants to prove it as an accident. This is how Suresh tries to defend Sitaram Trivedi.

Uma: of course I do. Why would he pull out a gun and shoot real bullet at us?

Suresh: In the court, I want you to say it was an accident.

Uma: The man tried to kill your wife!

Suresh: No he did not. That’s just your imagination. (CP:II: 325)

Uma is exceedingly a lady of good head and heart. She is kind, considerate and honest. She can’t act against the call of her conscience. She plainly denies her husband to help him manipulating and fabricating the things. She boldly presents truth in the court displeasing her husband considerably. Charles is leaving for England with the dead body of his sister. He wants his sister rest peacefully in his family graveyard in England. He intends to come back for taking Winston to England. The play ends Charles
offering of reward of five thousands pound to constable Munswamy for looking after Winston. This amount, originally, was made his sister for Sitaram Trivedi for finding Winston. Uma solves another murder mystery and wins the credit of solving the two most complicated cases. The one of hijra case which she solved in the play Seven Steps Around the Fire.

The action of the play follows pyramid structure of the drama. At the beginning of the play, the lady Montefiore is seen in her search of her brother Charles, with the rise of the plot, she is slain. The play reaches to the climax when Sitaram fires on the car of Uma and Charles. At the end, Charles Montefiore is seen taking dead body of his sister to England for resting her in his family graveyard. Dattani’s dramatic genius presents scheming and pschedo philosopher and exposes them eventually. He also decodes how religion is used to trick the innocent and gullible folk for getting hold of properties and political position. The play is full of surprises and suspenses. The character of Munswamy offers a significant help in arriving at the criminal all though Uma unveils the murder mystery. The play holds red torch against sham-religious minded people who are devil in the forms of saints and sadhus.

Dattani looks concerned with the issue of fundamentalism which hinders the call of humanity. In the play Final Solutions, he delves deep on the issue which causes wrath and hatred for the members of other religious segments. People like Sitaram Trivedi can go on any extreme for their self-interest and self-motive. The play shows us how such people attract other expatriate millionaire Indian get them offering donation for the ashram, temple etc. Sitaram Trivedi uses religion as tool to get his own motives fulfilled. He is very shrewd, cunning, crafty and cruel. His religious hypocrisy and shamness is unmasked by Uma. Sitaram Trivedi stands for all those who exploit other in the name of religion. They want to build ashrams and temples at home and abroad for gratifying their self interest.

Dattani observes the contemporary society minutely and presents them through his theatrical mechanism. He presents true picture of
society by capturing the nature of an individual and contemporary social culture.

*A Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child* is a very brief but a moving radio play. It was commissioned as the part of 2000 tales, a landmark drama series on the occasion of six hundredth anniversary of Chaucer, the father of English poetry and the author of the *Canterbury Tales*. Dattani was one of two authors selected for writing plays on this event from India. The present play is one of 2000 Tales which were retold to groups of travelers who were compelled to stay night together at a service station on a motor way in England. Directed by Jeremy Mortimer, the play was first broadcast on 29 October, 2000 at 6.30 p.m. on BBC 3. Jeremy Mortimer puts this in the following terms:

> 2000 Tales created a vibrant, entertaining and challenging piece of contemporary drama which reflected topical concerns as defined by the leading writers of today.  

Along with the main issues of human sensibility and social stigma, Dattani also weaves into the fabric of the plot some other issues like racial discrimination, the poverty, negligence on the part of government administration setup, the impact of drought in this play. Gujarat is consisted of several regions. Saurashtra and Kutch are its two distinctive adjoining regions due to their rich socio-cultural heritage. Dattani has tried to show the pride and spirit of these people through two different plays. The play *Clearing the Rubble* portrays the plight of the earth quake affected people of Kutch region, whereas the present play also throws some light on the plight of drought affected people of Saurashtra region, while dealing with the human sensibility that crosses beyond the boundary of class and caste as well as language and nation. It doesn’t respond to any such barriers or bump. Instead of depiction of urban middle class family, Dattani deviates from it and depicts the miserable condition of the poor and lower castes people of our society in this play. He
invests his theatrical art to reflect upon what he observes and views in day to
today social life.

Theatre is not a secluded art, but it develops and blossoms in the vicinity of social scenario and scene. It captures the societal view with its mode of behavior and patterns as well as tide of changes and challenges. Dattani focuses more on human psyche and emotional upheavals in the mind of the character. He also tries to do justice with them. It is his attempt of justification that makes his dramas more live and powerful. It is observed:

He could, in a sense be seen as one of the strands
that carry forward the tradition of Indian theatre
through the necessary dynamics of change and
innovation. 11

The play is designed in the form of ‘monologue’ a literary device
to reveal the secrets and motives of the character. With the help of effective
use of dramatic monologue, Dattani provides us an insight into the feelings
and thoughts of the protagonist, Anna Gosweb. Dramatic monologue is
defined as

A literary work which consists of a revealing one-
way conversation by a character or persona,
usually directed to a second person or to an

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The ‘dramatic monologue’ is generally used in poetry and
drama, whereas ‘stream of consciousness’ is a fictional device. The term
‘stream of consciousness’ was coined by William James, who was a pioneer
American psychologist and philosopher and also brother of novelist Henry
James. In the present play, there is a one-way conversation by a single
character named Anna Gosweb to an imaginary audience of the radio play.
The plot of the play is enhanced through her consciousness. The play
reminds us of the technique of dramatic monologue employed in Robert
Browning’s My Last Duchess.
Anna Gosweb, a quite young English lady, revisits India after twenty years. She narrates the tale of her journey back to India especially to a village called Kapaswadi in Saurashtra where her erstwhile lover named Jaman lived. The plot of the play moves further in the form of memoir. She had developed an affair with this poor labourer during her first visit to India. Following letter of help during drought from Jaman, she arrives to find his village in drought affected Saurashtra for providing help to him. Despite some odds and obstacles, she arrives to the village of Saurashtra where Jaman lived. Unfortunately, he had died before she rescued him. But the charms and the beauty lie in her resolution to rescue his family. The title of the play is also very interesting and appropriate. It indicates her efforts to feed the daughter of her past boy friend, Jaman. The irony of the situation is that she rescues the daughter of her past lover, while her own daughter is unattended and unaided.

Anna Gosweb came in contact with Jaman, a labourer of Saurashtra, in Goa. Being very poor, he went to Goa for some stray jobs. He was handsome short and well built man. He had a daughter and wife to feed. He met Anna there and served her as a servant. He escorted her to the beaches and did light camp fire for her. Anna puts; “He escorted me to the beaches and old part of the town. He protected me from drug peddlers and con men. I didn’t take his address when we parted. But he wanted mine. (CPII: 565)

They were drawn closer and developed friendship. Ultimately, their friendship resulted into a sharing bed together. He took her address on the paper napkin, thinking to correspond with her in future. Anna didn’t expect that he would write her ahead as he himself was not able to write any language. But almost after two decades, it so happened that God failed to favour people of Saurashtra in the form of rain. There occurred drought in this part of Gujarat. People were struggling for food and water. Since Jaman belonged to the poor class family, he had a great struggle for food and water. In the hours of crisis, he recalled Anna and wrote her a letter in English which was originally drafted by the postman of the village. Jaman Gopalia wrote,
“Dear Miss Anna Gosweb, I hope your God has been kind to you and favoured you with a good husband and many children. Our Gods have failed us, or should I say that He did not succeed in reaching us. They were too busy favouring our brethren in the cities and of course, the higher caste people of the villages. I have never begged you or anyone else for anything in all my life. I cannot bear the humiliation any longer of seeing my wife and child

(CPII: 555-56)

Anna was wonder struck to receive his letter as she had never thought of it. When she read, she was grieved to learn the pathetic condition of her past friend and soon decides to fly to India and saves her friend and his family. She immediately manages money for him. She explains; “I drew all the cash I had in my bank account. About four thousand pounds, I wasn’t too sure whether traveller’s cheques would be of any use where I wanted to go. I got

(CPII: 566)

The play can also be interpreted from the point of view of ‘guilt’ and ‘redemption’. She feels a sense of guilt due to her relationship rather ‘one whom I had met several years ago in Goa- one of those wild trips that, at nineteen, you think will take you to paradise and nirvana-. (CP:565) Thus, she was carrying the weight of this quilt for these many years. So when she receives a letter from Jaman sending him money, she grabs this opportunity for freeing herself from the guilt inhabited in her consciousness and as a redressal of loss. It is observed:

These two distinctive spaces of conflict dramatized in the play, extend the impression of splited stage and in that process the text of the play has become self-

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She arrived in Gujarat by railway journey. She peered through the thick glass of the train to see the miserable sight caused by drought. She narrates,”The land was tawny, deathly and broken down to flakes of dunk-of dried earth. The number of carcasses strewed around
increase as the hours go by, and we get closer to Saurashtra.” (CP: 566) Anna knew the topical and social setup of Saurashtra before she left for India. She knew that there was scarcity of water and other necessities. The water level was so deep that it was impossible to access it. She also knew that Jaman was lower caste Hindu and his family had no direct access to water due to their lower caste. The events that pass through Anna Gosweb consciousness can be compartmentalized into two groups. Social stigma of liaison between Anna Gosweb and Jaman Gopalia and the plight of the poor and lower caste people in Indian villages. She expresses her wrath and anguish against the injustice done to the lower caste people. She puts; ...

There were patches of green land, the ones I came to know that belonged to higher caste farmers. But I knew that they didn’t belong to Jaman or his

At last, she got down from the train and started for Jaman’s village. In a very hot climate, she reached to Kapaswadi, Jaman’s village, with great difficulties. A woman was traveling with her. She helped her otherwise she couldn’t the reach. Local people walked with her and guide her to the next settlement. They were thinking that she was going to wrong man’s place. She had some mineral water bottles to save a child from dehydration and certain death. In the beginning, she couldn’t pronounce name Jaman properly. When she pronounced Jaman correctly, soon there was murmur of recognition followed by a long silence. She realized that her visit was in vain. She broke down that Jaman was no longer alive. As she speaks painfully, “I didn’t have much strength left in me and yet I cried. I wanted to tell him about Jennifer. I wanted to show him pictures of our daughter and perhaps invite him to England to meet Jennifer. At that point I simply wanted to come back to England. If only I had tried to contact him earlier. If only I had arrived a week

She wept saying that she should have come earlier or she should have at least contacted him earlier. Jennifer was the sign of her physical encounter with Jaman. Jaman didn’t know that she became pregnant and delivered a baby. Emotional crisis of Anna Gosweb’s life and existential
crisis of poor villagers of Saurashtra are counterpoised in the play. Drought has caused pain and suffering to the villagers and her physical relationship with Jaman has left her guilt ridden. She also feels pain of social disgrace for Jaman resulting from their relationship. This has prompted her to help the family of Jaman. It is an attempt to compensate the loss as much as possible. She is sensitive, frank, and a very kind lady. She candidly admits; “I could barely understand the few English words he spoke. At that time, I must confess I wasn’t really paying attention. All that mattered was that I was (CP: 565) She also avers that his financial crisis forced him to sleep with her. Otherwise he wouldn’t do it. He was having a strong sense of pride and dignity. It is also revealed through Anna Gosweb’s narration that she was encouraged to revisit India for sharing the secret of her relationship i.e. birth of daughter out of their relationship. She doesn’t consider their relationship illicit or unethical. She is a daring and gusty enough to bring and nurture her on the face of society.

She had apprehension that people gathered over there, would plead her for help but she understood their pride and sense of dignity after meeting Jaman’s wife. Jaman’s aunt and other women brought her Jaman’s hut. She couldn’t see the face of Jaman’s wife because she had wrapped sari over her head. In the beginning, she didn’t like Anna’s arrival. But her daughter Shanti insisted her to allow Anna stay with them for some time. She showed them the picture of Jennifer. Shanti was pleased to see the picture of Jennifer. Anna felt connected. There was argument between Shanti and her mother about Anna. All these didn’t matter for Anna as she wanted to help can be mature about such things. I didn’t have the words to tell her that it was just one of those one night things. I wanted to tell her that he slept with me only for the great deal more out of it. More than I wanted really. I-I was only nineteen! Of (CP: 568)

She had enough money to tide over several droughts. She wanted to speak them in Gujarati. She wanted to learn more about Jaman.
And she wanted to tell them that Jenny was in university. She had her troubles but she hoped that everything would be fine with the passage of time. Anna came out into the streets and saw that all the houses were of low caste people in that settlement. So, they were not allowed to draw water from the well nearby. Of course, now all the wells were dried up due to droughts. They had to walk three miles to fetch a pot of water. They had to wait to fetch water from relief tanker till the upper caste people had fetched. Anna didn’t know as to where she would spend the night. She heard a moan of Shanti. She was dying out of starvation. She was given sugary water, but she was not able to swallow it. Her relatives were not able to heal her. Anna picked her up in her arms and started to walk for taking her to hospital nearby. Jaman’s wife also joined with her. They took Shanti to Kapileshwar for hospitalizing her. Anna is very humanistic and liberal lady. She is greatly grieved to see the humiliation of the lower caste people. She can’t tolerate all these. That’s why she kicked off the higher caste fellow who yells at Jaman’s wife for sitting next to his wife. She narrates; “A bus was about to leave. Jaman’s wife stopped a little away from the bus. I felt annoyed with her for taking this caste thing so woman. He raised his voice and ordered her to get out. He turned around to gather support from other people. I planted my foot on his butt and pushed

( CP: 570-71)

Ultimately, with Anna’s brave and prompts efforts, they were able to reach volunteers tent. Shanti was given treatment there so her fever subsided slowly. She swallowed some gruel. It gave great relief to Anna as she could help her. She could save her life rather life of her child. She stayed with Jaman’s family for months. She experienced their suffering and difficulties. She brought sweets for them from the sweet shop and necessary food stuff. Earlier, they were barely able to drink dirty water from earthen pot. Now they were drinking mineral water. In the place of little and unhygienic food, they were eating jalebis, samosas, kachoris etc. She plays with Shanti in sands and learns songs from Jaman’s wife and his aunt. The days of drought were over. In the monsoon, it rained sufficiently. Anna danced in rain with
them and helped to plough the land. God has favoured them with rain. Mother Earth’s breasts were swelling up once again with nourishment for her children. She was happy as she was the part of Jaman’s family. She felt connected and elated. Jaman’s family was at the peak of joy. Anna wanted to be there forever. But she had to go back to England. Her Jennifer fell ill. She was being hospitalized now. She is not sure about Jennifer’s life. However, she had satisfaction of saving Shanti. She wants to feed her forever. She is concerned about Jennifer. She was unable to help her own daughter. The play ends with her following monologue: “I saved them. At least I saved Shanti. I fed her every day and will do so as long as I live.” (CP: 572) These ending words throw ample light on her own helpless condition. She further says; “I am as helpless with Jennifer as Jaman’s wife was with Shanti. There is a veil between us. But it is Jennifer who wears it. She can’t see me, she can’t see help. She just won’t eat. She just won’t eat. At least, I saved Shanti.” (CP: 572)

Anna Gosweb’s present narration revives her own past and brings other characters into the light. It is quite identical that dramatic narrative is greatly influenced by the concept of ‘streams of consciousness’. It helps the present to mingle with past action and reconstruct the past actions. Dattani has made extensive use of juxtaposition of past with present in his plays. The beauty of this device is that it helps present unite with past and past is animated with present. There is a free flow of rhythmic prosaic expression which beautifies the thought and feelings of the character. Honesty and sincere are the eye catching characteristics of Dattani’s characters. They are the hallmark qualities of his dramatic art. It is observed:

Dattani’s plays deal with contemporary situations with a rare touch of honesty, sincerity and objectivity. He presents situations, and events authentically to re-create the characters as they are seen in the contemporary society.
Critically speaking, the play displays three facets of Anna Gosweb’s personality. In the first phase, she appears to be a girl of unbridled sexual urges who tempts Jaman to sleep with her for the sexual gratification. Secondly, in her desire to help her late boy friend’s family, she displays the qualities of ethical richness and human sensibility. Her heart is teeming with milk of human sympathy and compassion. In the third stage, she tries hard to help and cure Shanti, daughter of Jaman. The way she cares and cures her speaks volume of her motherhood status. In this way, the character of Anna Gosweb passes through the three different stages of evolution in the theatrical frame work of the play. It is observed: “This evolution of Gosweb’s character justifies the different phases of feminism. The quest for sexual desires, the idea of guilt and shame and craving for motherhood, are the parts of universal (CP: 158)

The play shows how human love and sympathy unite the people residing in the two opposite poles of the world even without knowing mutual languages. It is rightly said that love needs no words. It has got its own course and mode for communicating and understanding each other’s feelings and thoughts.

Clearing the Rubble, a radio play for three voices, is a touching tale of the victims of natural calamity and social discrimination simultaneously. Though the play is very short, it puts long lasting impact on the minds of the listeners. Mahesh Dattani is often commissioned to write a play by BBC Radio on different occasions. After the terrific earthquake in Bhuj, Gujarat in January, 2001, he was commissioned to write a play by BBC Radio for broadcasting on the first anniversary of the tragedy. The play Clearing the Rubble was first aired on 17th January 2002 at 2.00 p.m. by BBC Radio 4 and was also re-aired on 26th January 2002 on the BBC world service under the directorship of Jeremy Mortimer.

The play Clearing the Rubble revolves around the three characters who were affected by the devastating earth quake in Kutch, a region of Gujarat, in 2001. An English journalist namely Jeffrey visits Bhuj a
year later. He tries to find out the boy named Salim whom he had met a year ago when he was helping with relief operation. At the beginning of the play, there is a recess in the school. So, school children are seen on the ground. Salim is wrapped in the thoughts of consequences of cruel stroke of nature. i.e. earthquake.

Salim: (thought) Rahul lost his left leg. Pasha lost his sight. Nilima lost

And I lost my mother, my uncle, my aunts, my grandfather and my

Jeffrey. (Pause) Poor Jeffrey. He tries so hard. (CP: 65)

After the devastating calamity in Kutch in 2001, the relief operations were undertaken to save humanity against the cruel attack of nature very soon. The relief tasks like clearing the rubble, providing food, water, medical aid, shelter, clothes etc. were the chief businesses of the day. The peoples across the world were showing their sympathy and praying for the lives of this mishap affected people. It was the time of showing compassion and love for the grief stricken people. Amidst this scenario, the social prejudices were at work. There was disparity in the distributions of relief to the earthquake affected people. Under the name of religion, the Muslims were not properly provided help and relief. They were the worst sufferers. Upon the stroke of fortune, they received the stroke of communal discrimination that broke them within. Dattani unearths such crime and injustice in this play. Like voice-over technique in other plays, he makes effective use of ‘thought’ techniques in this play. In fact, he always chooses his technique in accordance with the nature and complexity of the problem and themes. Through the thought process of Fatima, Dattani tries to narrate the plight of the minority people during the earth quake in Kutch.

Fatima: (thought) Allah be merciful! It is time for my prayer. Forgive me, but I cannot face Mecca. I cannot move. My Allah, please forgive me! Please show compassion. Both my daughters are
with you now. I am coming too. Take me away from this unjust world now. I will hold the bodies of my daughters till I follow them to your world. I have no more strength to call out to those people who help others but not us. I cry out for you now. Only in your world is there justice. I want to be in your world. (CP: 65)

Jeffrey revisits India after a year. He first visited on 28th January, 2001, two days later a terrific earthquake in Kutch. He starts his journey to Kutch again writing a letter to Nora. Interalia, he narrated all about the massive earth-quake that devastated land and his own experiences regarding his own on site visit. Through his letter, it is learnt that he first came at Malliya town, a close town to the region of Kutch. He was mistaken by the man as the official rescue workers. He informs him that he is a journalist coming from England. To the question asked by the man, Jeffrey replies that “It means a lot to me, to write about the condition of humanity in other parts of the world.” (CP: 66) He describes the sorry state of the land as he has seen during his visit. There was no sign of buildings for miles and miles as all of them have reduced to heaps of rubble. People were seen standing outside the relief camps for completing paper works to get shelters and foods. Jeffrey arrives at a village in Kutch and grieved more to see the plight of the earth quake e here has lost something or someone. They are not crying. There are no wails. Only silence. Grief hem a new momentum. (CP: 67-68)

The hospital of the village collapsed during earthquake killing and injuring many people. During the night, Jeffrey heard the voice and went to place where the cry was coming out. He met there a young lad who was crying out “Don’t go! Help me! Help, please!” (CP: 69) Jeffrey approached him and tried to know all about him and his misery. His name was Salim. His mother and sisters were under the debris of the fallen hospital. The journalist tries to dress his wounds. He doesn’t want to heal his wounds, but he needs
someone help him. He wants to remove the debris to take out his mother and sisters. The lad exclaims; “They tried! Not enough!” (CP:69) Some people were working there but he was not satisfied with their efforts. The men were trying to pull down the beam. It was so heavy and massive. So, the earth moving equipment like crane was necessary for doing that task. Jeffery tries his best to console the boy in various ways. He is also unable to help him right away. The boy is extremely grieved and panicky. He tries to explain the journalist that the communal discrimination has aggravated his problem. The boy tells the journalist; “We are Muslims!” (CPII: 69) So, they are not paid due attention to them.

Jeffrey’s heart is full of love, care and sympathy for the boy and his family members. Under the circumstances, he was also helpless. As Jeffery puts, “He needs my help. What can I do? I can only do some first aid on him and give him a mild sedative if he is in shock. But he wants me to do something about his mother and sisters buried alive.” (CP: 69) Jeffrey barely understands what exactly the boy wants him to do. Ultimately, he realizes that boy expects Jeffrey go and fetch crane to remove the rubble. Salim has two sisters namely Saira and Mumtaz who were buried under the debris of the building along with his mother Fatima. Again, there were so many questions in the journalist’s mind to ask Salim. He was sensitive and sensible enough to understand that there is neither time nor scope for asking him questions. As he writes, “

(CP: 70) Jeffrey approaches the man he met earlier and convinces him to go to city for getting crane. The man says; ‘If we move any of that, we will cause the debris collapse further and might kill the people who are alive. That’s why we stopped our work’ (CP: 71) Ultimately, Jeffrey, the man and some other people arrive in Bhuj in the morning and meet a German lady in charge of the operations at the Red Cross. She hands over a key of the truck containing mini crane in it.

The play deals with the wrath of nature along with injustice by government officials to the poor and the minorities. On their way back to the
village, as predicted by the wiseman of Malliya, they were stopped and interrogated. The officers were making inquiry of the man who was driving the truck. The officer asks to get them off. Jeffrey tries to take his photograph. So, he was annoyed and asked “who are you?” (CP: 71) Jeffrey replies in a furious mood that he is a journalist, writing on the communal and caste biased nature of the relief operations. Jeffrey makes counter questions; “Are you preventing equipments and supplies from reaching Muslims and Dalit population?” (CP: 71-72) However, they succeeded in reaching the village with the crane. After physical verifications of the contents of the truck, they were surprised that truck contains many more things along with the crane. There were blankets, vitamins, foods, clothing, tents etc. in it. They set up the crane and remove the heavy beams. The journalist wants Salim unite with his mother and sisters. He searched for Salim to identify his family members, but he was not there further. Jeffrey’s hope to unite him with his mother and sisters was unfulfilled. He was consoled with the idea that he helped to save the villagers. At least, some human lives were saved. Today now, after a year, Jeffrey is revisiting Bhuj, the epicenter of earthquake of 2001 and tries to track out Salim who had met during his first visit.

Dattani depicts contemporary socio cultural scenario of the society in his plays. He is a keen observer of the modern society and its problems. In this play, he condemns rigidity and oddities of government who pays less attention to the problems faced by the deprived sections of the society. Dattani intends to indicate that religion and caste consciousness is so down deep in the blood of the people that it hinders the call of humanity. As village any more. It has withstood many calamities. Droughts, floods, caste wars. But the earthquake that brought you here, took my village someplace (CP: 79-80)

Generally, Dattani deals with the dynamics of human relationship within the range of urban Indian families in his plays. However, the play Clearing the Rubble and ATale of Mother Feeding Her Child deal with the problems and pains of the poor village folk. Both the aforesaid plays have
been set against the backdrop of natural calamities. A Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child brings forth pitiable condition of drought affected villagers of Saurashtra region, whereas the play Clearing the Rubble focuses on the problems and misery of the villagers of Kutch. The concern for the human predicament is at the centre in both plays. The present play seeks to present the pitiable plight of the villagers. The irony of the situation is that the stones of the building fell upon those who built it. They fell on the heads of those people who put them on their heads to get them up. It is explained well through Fatima’s thinking.

Fatima: hose who built this hospital! If were in our home, at least we would have all been alive. Saira! Your fever is gone now. I do not have to worry about typhoid or malaria for you. I don’t have to bring you here and wait in line for a doctor to finally see us. Just to tell us that we have to go to Rajkot for medicines. Saira, you will be more happy in Paradise. There will be justice and peace for you in Allah’s Kingdom. (CP: 73)

These utterances throw ample lights on the penury and pain of routine life of these villagers even before the earthquake devastated the land. Dattani takes his pen against all these ills and evils besetting the lives of marginalized sections of the society beyond endurance. The plight of the poor and minorities attracts Dattani’s attention again and again. The play also throws some light on profession biased behavior. Salim’s father was a cobbler. So, he was treated badly. Therefore, he lied to his school fellows that he was a son of a farmer.

Salim: oys and girls from different castes. I was too little then to realize it, but as the months and years went by, I began to feel inferior to them. There were other Muslims boys too. But somehow they treated me differently. One day, there was a dead rat in the classroom. The smell was so strong that no one could enter the room. One
of the children told the teacher that I should be sent in to pick up the rat and clean the room. I did not want to do it. The bigger boys called me a cobbler’s son and said that it was my job to do these things. If I could touch the hide of a cow, I could pick up a dead rat. The teacher did not say a word  (CP: 78-79)

Dattani has enriched Indian English theatrical tradition with innovations and experiments. He has discarded the old dramatic device called ‘aside’ and made extensive use of ‘thought’ and ‘voice-over’ techniques in many of his plays. He has used successfully these techniques in the plays like Seven Steps Around the Fire, Do the Needful and Clearing the Rubble. The ‘thought’ device reveals the characters’ reactions and responses as well as their motives and movements. With the help of this technique, Dattani explores inner recesses of the characters. The play Clearing the Rubble is the fine example of his effective and extensive use of ‘thought’ technique. The plot of the play is presented through this technique barring one letter device. The feelings of the all the three major characters are presented through ‘thought’. For example, Fatima thinks to herself.

Fatima: (Thought). The mosque is all right. Oh! We are fortunate! Everything will be fine soon. Everything will be like before. God knows that we are living in this not so fine world. But it is his

(CP: 73)

The technique of ‘thought’ is used to hold direct dialogue with audience without allowing character concerned know the thing. The technique of thought and linguistic investment lends a greater height to the play.

Uma and the Fairy Queen a detective play in nature. Seven Steps around the Fire, The Swami and Winston and Uma and the Fairy Queen together forms the trilogy which have the same female protagonist named Uma Rao, a researcher who unravels the three murder mysteries, one in each play.
Played out against the backdrop of a hot and bustling Bangalore, a third case, for Uma Rao, intrepid sleuth and wife of Suresh Rao, the police superintendent. 

The Play Uma and the Fairy Queen was first broadcast on 16th August, 2003 at 3 p.m. B.B.C. Radio 4, directed by Mark Beeby. Like The Swami and Winston, there is no detailed arrangement of stage or any other stage craft device. The dramatic structure of the play develops through exterior and interior devices. The play encompasses the personae of three countries—India, Pakistan and England. At the outset of the play, the audience hears Michael talking with someone. At the exterior level, the audience hears the honks of the impatient drivers of the car which has stopped to pick up its passengers. Michael asks, "where are we going? Listen! I have to be at the hall by six! Take it easy! Stop pushing me! Oh I say!" (CPII: 425)

Soon it is perceived that the characters are excited as something unwanted has happened. There is an air of tense and unrest prevailing at the very beginning of the play. Nila rings the doorbell at Liam’s house. She seems to be panicky and wants to share something serious with Liam.

Nila: It’s, it’s Michael! I am so afraid, I don’t know what to do! Liam, you are the only one I can turn to. (CPII: 425)

It is clear that something has happened to Michael and Liam is very close to Nila. On the other hand, Suresh and Uma Rao are moving in a car conversing something important. It is also clear from their conversation that Uma Rao has successfully unraveled the mystery over the death of English lady. Her husband doesn’t like her involvement in such cases and Uma’s visiting police station for going through the office files.

The British Council has organized theatrical show of Shakespeare’s famous drama A Mid Summer Night’s Dream for celebrating the Independence Day in Bangalore. Uma views this as a special occasion and considers it a nice gesture from the British Council. Suresh thinks altogether otherwise than her. He says, “Bringing a Shakespeare company to
mark our Independence Day! If you ask me, they only want to remind us that they ruled over us once “(CPII: 428) Liam Tate is the British cultural ambassador. He wants to have a word with Uma in a private. So, they walk down a passage for sharing confidential news. Mr. Tate informs Uma that Michael has been kidnapped. Michael, Nila’s husband is a British actor. He is one of the major performers in the stage production of A Mid Summer Night’s Dream. Mr. Tate also informed her that Nila had seen some men pushing him into a car. However, he wants to keep this news confidential. He feels that they can’t perform without Michael. They are not in a position to announce the cancellation of the show suddenly. Mr. Tate wants to create too much of suspicion so that they can later cancel the show. He wants Uma’s advice in this regard.

Nila Ahmed is a Pakistani descent. She is a very famous TV serial artist. Mr. Tate and Uma go to see Nila Ahmed. Mr. Liam informs Uma that they were not having happy married life. As Liam tells Uma, “As the Fairy king and queen they certainly share a destructive chemistry on stage, like they do off it. Uma, I think you ought to
It’s an open secret in London, but- it’s not something they like to talk about.” (CPII: 430)

Liam introduces Uma to Nila as the detective person. Thereafter, he leaves the two ladies and goes for the announcement about the cancellation of performance due to technical reasons. Nila is talking about Michael with Uma. She informs her that there were three persons of medium height with beards. She adds that her husband also received a written threat simply saying “I will kill you.” (CPII: 433) She adds that she loves him very much. She doesn’t want another divorce. At this juncture, Michael appears and expresses his love for Nila.

Dattani is famous for fusing old and modern devices to peep into the past and present. He gives up traditional theatrical device of ‘aside’ and ‘soliloquy’. He invests newer technique like dramatic monologue, voice over thought, phone call etc. In A Tale of Mother Feeding Her Child, Dattani makes
effective use of dramatic monologue, In this play, Dattani invests newer technological device i.e. a phone call. He replaces dramatic monologue or thought with phone call for gathering significant information. It helps the character access the significant details which enhance the plot of the drama and also offers help in revealing truth. Uma Rao, the researcher, makes effective use of phone call for gathering past details about Nila.

The dramatic structure of the play *Uma and the Fairy Queen* presents sensuality as the cause of crime. Nila, a famous Pakistani actress, has remarried Michael Forsyth, a famous British actor. In the past, Nila was Mr. Malik’s second wife. She was known as Ruksana, an ideal housewife in Pakistan. She was pregnant. Everything was fine. However, a storm took over her as Sohaila, the first wife of her husband, disclosed that their husband was unable to father a child. Sohaila did so because she was in difficulty. People were pointing finger at her. If Nila can conceive, why can’t she? She had become the object of criticism and condemnation. Under the circumstances, she was forced to prove her innocence. In a mood of fit, she showed the medical report to her friends stating Mr. Malik’s inability of being a father. In this way, the scandal broke out putting Nila in a very awkward and difficult condition. Nila tries to defend herself by saying that she informed her husband the same. Her husband was quite considerate and cooperative. This revelation spoiled Nila’s prestige and popularity as an artist. Her existence was endangerer. She puts, “More grave than that. Overnight I became the adulteress from an ideal housewife! Public anger built up and there was a fatwa on me! That I should be stoned to death in public!” (CPII: 462) After this scandal, she managed to flee from Pakistan and sought asylum in UK where the fairy queen met her fairy prince, Michael. Michael was her rescuer. They were in love.

In the present, the show is going to start soon. Mendelsohn’s music is played on. Michael is played as Oberon and Titania is played by Nila of Shakespeare’s drama. Nila enters as Titania. People receives her with mild applaud. This is how Shakespeare’s dialogues between Oberon and Titania go on.
Michael (as Oberon) I ’ll met my moonlight, proud Titania!

Nila: (as Titania) What, jealous Oberon? Fairy, skip hence. I have

(CPII: 434-35)

The play was performed very successfully. They performed their roles in an amazing manner. So, people greeted them with a huge round of applause. The artists were waiting for curtain call. Suddenly a gunshot is heard. Something has happened at the backstage. Soon it is discovered that Michael was murdered. Police started inquiry into the murder of Michael. Suresh doesn’t want Uma’s meddling around in this case. He has instructed his subordinates not to allow her in the greenroom. He advises her to concentrate in other jobs. It is also revealed that absentee of the children in their marital life is also creating tension between husband and wife. Uma is greatly interested in this case. She wants to have clue to the case. She also makes a call to Charles in England for collecting information and getting his help.

Uma (tentative at first, softly) Hello! Charles?
sorry to call at this hou

Where is the gun?
tell me a little bit about Liam. (CPII: 440-41)

Uma is smart, energetic, and active. She leaves no stone unturned to gather the past details of Nila. She also calls up Menon for procuring clues to the case. After this telephonic talk, she contemplates a little over the sentence “There are the forgeries of jealousy”. After this, she calls to Mumtaz in Pakistan. She wants to know Nila’s past record in Pakistan.

Uma:

she acted in? The one that made her really famous? (Scribbling

here Scribbling down the name.) Wasn’t she married when
she met Michael? But Ahmed is really her screen name? What scandal a

back. (CPII: 445-46)

Before inquiring Nila, Uma Rao collects all the relevant details of Nila’s past. This is her third case in the murder mystery. There is an apprehension that Nila has killed her husband. She wants to leave India, but she is not allowed to do so. She is detained for the police inquiry. The police have collected the gun from the site of the murder. They are working on it. The Police is making inquiry in their own way. Since, Nila is Pakistani descent; the police is looking at the other side of the issue. The police suspects Pakistan’s hand in this murder. Suresh tells Uma,” You don’t understand these matters. They don’t want us to have good relations with

(CPII: 443) Uma thinks in a different way. After this, Suresh is informed through a phone call that the case is transferred to the commissioner’s office. Interpol is now involved. Uma is keen to resolve this case. Her help is sought for the solution of the murder mystery. Suresh hands over the copies of the forensic reports to her. She replies to Suresh in the following manner.

Uma: Suresh. It is you who don’t understand. It is not in our interest that this murder gets to be more political than it really is. The relations between Pakistan, India, and UK are at stake. This is the real issue (CPII: 444)

Suresh feels that Uma has got the case transferred by using her influence. Nila is a British citizen of Pakistani descent. Uma opposes the idea of arresting her without substantial evidence against her. She feels that it will harm our diplomatic relations. She takes the help of Liam Tate for making things in proper order. She is now an authorized person to make inquiry into the case. She has permission to examine the green room, stage, properties room etc. She goes to the place where Michael was murdered after the
performance of the play. She is reminded of the famous words of the play. She speaks these words to herself.

Uma: And this same progeny of evils

Comes from our debate, from our dissension.

We are their parents and original  (CPII: 446)

Uma visits the green room and makes the inspection of the site of the murder. At first she is convinced that Michael was not kidnapped as he himself ordered the taxi. So, he was not being forcefully taken to the taxi by ruffians. She also checked the things at hotel and gets hold of the death threat note which was torn at the last word. This torn note sets Uma’s mind into two directions.

Liam: One of them being where is the rest of the note?

Uma: Absolutely.

Liam: And the other?

Uma: Where did Michael go, after deliberately tearing up the note, destroying a part of it and throwing the rest in the waste basket, and calling for a taxi? Also, who were the three men who joined him outside the hotel? Let’s go. (CPII: 450)

Mr. Malik is the former husband of Nila. Michael used to visit him. So, Uma approaches Mr. Malik for eliciting relevant information from him. He informs her that he helped his son during school education and has plans to pay for his higher education abroad. During Uma’s investigation, he was enraged and asks them to leave his house. Uma warns him in a polite way.

Uma: I am afraid, Liam, there is every reason to get emotional. Mr. Malik, I know who you are and who your son is. I understand your reasons for secrecy. It is not something our society
approves of. But believe me, all I am interested in is finding out some more details that will help us solve this crime. If you don’t cooperate, it will leave me no option but to send the CID over, and they will not so understand about your family matters. (CPII: 454)

Malik explains that his son Feroz was telling him about his future plans regarding his higher studies at London. Uma is not convinced because Michael was more needed at the theatre at this time. It is not possible that he missed the performance simply because of listening this. Uma expresses her desire of talking to Malik’s son Feroz. Malik denies on the ground that he is very shy. Quite dramatically, Feroz appears before them and looks worked up. He shows his willingness to be inquired. He accuses that they have come to throw mud on their faces and to disturb their peaceful life. On further inquiry, he speaks in a furious mood.

Feroz: She is a whore! She killed him! She was responsible entirely for his death. (CPII: 456)

He hates her so much. He is not ready to acknowledge her as a mother. Uma is persistent in her inquiry. She wants to know the truth. She wants to know why she has killed her husband.

Uma: Tell me Feroz! Why?

Feroz: Because she is in love with this white man! (CPII: 457)

At this juncture, Suresh Rao appears with order papers that set Nila free to go to her country. Nila is no longer held back for questioning. In a smart and daring move; Uma tears up the order papers so that she can make further inquiry of Nila Ahmed. She tells Suresh,” remain here because your bureaucratic office will want papers to release her and you don’t have them. Come on, Liam.” (CPII: 458)

Quite dramatically and also daringly, Uma approaches Nila along with Liam for making her inquiry. In the beginning, Nila doesn’t accept
the crime. She raises counter question to Uma as to why she would kill her own husband. Uma argued that she was the only one near him when he was killed. Moreover, she was not having good relation with him. Uma also convinced her that she lied about his kidnapping. Uma is convinced either Nila has killed him or she got it done by someone. This is how Nila defends herself.

Nila: I don’t know! I wasn’t in the green room! I was prepared to come on stage for the curtain call. I was waiting for Michael to come out and join me for the curtain call! I heard the gun shot, I went in and saw him lying on the floor with blood all over.

Uma: By then the murderer had escaped!

Nila: Yes!

Uma: Nila, it was impossible for the murderer to leave the greenroom without bumping into you! (CPII: 460-61)

Uma is exceedingly smart sleuth. She is persistent in her inquiry. At last, she strikes hard stroke which compels Nila to confess her crime.

Uma: No you weren’t. You were in the room with Michael. So, you either killed him yourself or- you know who killed him and you are not telling.

Silence.

Nila: I killed him. (CPII: 461)

In this way, Nila confessed her crime under pressure of Uma’s unceasing and logical inquiry. She further asks,

Uma: And the note? Who wrote the note?

Nila: I did.

Uma: It doesn’t look like your handwriting.
Nila: I got one of the waiters to write it for me.

Uma: More strange than true’ (CPII: 461)

Uma keeps on her questioning her. She wants to know about the access of the gun used in the murder. Uma is investigation various implications. Feroz reappears in a very desperate mood and fires from the gun. Before killing Nila, he empties his wrath and anger towards Nila in the following words:

Feroz:

forgive! She slept with her actor friends! For money, for pleasure, or just to please the Devil. And I was born out of her cesspool of lust (To Nila) You! You don’t know what I had to suffer. In school, I was known as the bastard! At home I was the unwanted child. We had to move to India and live in hiding to run away from the disgrace, but you won’t let us live in peace. Unless you are dead you won’t let me live in peace. So die. Prepare to go to hell, Mother! (CPII: 464-65)

Uma tries her best to divert Feroz’s mind from his intension of killing his mother. Uma informs him that Nila is ready to surrender herself and go to jail. Feroz is highly agitated and frenzied. He shouts that ‘Jail is not hell enough for you’ (CPII: 465). And in an extremely agitated mood, he fires at Nila. She is in the ICU of the hospital and Feroz is likely to be put into juvenile home as he is still a minor. This is how Nila speaks to Uma.

Nila: He is young. He needs me.

Uma: And you?

Nila: I need to make amends

Uma: Yes, I will try. Now rest. (CPII: 466-67)

The play Uma and the Fairy Queen also focuses on the theme of longing for children. Nila’s tragedy emerges from her desire of being
mother. Uma and Suresh have no children. Suresh is more upset at the want of children. He thinks that his wife Uma is taking interest in the other affairs because she has no child.

Inset story of ‘changeling child’ is also very symbolic in the play. The play shows sorry state of the parents both having children and non-having children. Nila has the son Feroz. She is suffering because of him. On the other hand, Uma and Suresh are suffering for having no child. The play ends with Uma’s concluding remark comprises both situations. “Damned if you have children and damned if you don’t.” (CPII: 467)

Like an archeologist, Dattani unearths the truth hidden beneath the surface and presents through his theatrical medium. He reflects serious issue of human life through his theatre. He interacts with audience about various visible and sometime invisible issues of the society by innovative use of theatrical art retaining his affinity with the native theatrical tradition. His theatrical performance is not mechanical and routine presentation of human experiences, but it is real life experience. So, it is called real life theatre. In Uma and the Fairy Queen, the dramatist has successfully carried out the thematic and technical innovations. In this play, Dattani deviates from the themes he dealt with in his major plays. The movement of the play is enabled through the use of interior and exterior devices in the play. Uma Rao is credited with the successful inquiry into three cases with the successful unmasking murder mystery of Michael in this play.
References:

2. Ibid., p. 6
3. Ibid., p. 10
4. Ibid., p. 10