Chapter - 6

CONCLUSION
To discuss the representation of gender in a literary, or cultural text is an immensely complex and slippery task. The term representation itself connotes the presence of a concept or object that exists prior to the act of representation. Then comes the process of identifying or defining gender - what is gender? How is it different from sex? Usually the distinction between sex and gender is posited as one between culture and nature - or that gender is culturally constructed while sex is biologically determined. This formulation itself has proved problematic for certain feminist critics. Judith Butler says, 'If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in anyone way .... Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of "men" will accrue exclusively to the bodies of men or that "women" will interpret only female bodies' (Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990, pp. 6).

As pointed out by Butler, assuming gender attributes and assigning them automatically to pre-determined bodies can be a dangerous task. Social mores assign certain values in an arbitrary fixed manner denoting those qualities either as 'male' or 'female', and people or characters in literary or cultural texts are then judged or evaluated on the basis of these pre-determined values. Feminist criticism usually has focussed on the construction of roles assigned to women, rather than examining the gendering of society. However, as Michele Barrett points out, ' ... the imagery of gender affects both men and women profoundly, if differently' (Barrett, Michele. *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*. Great Britain: Verso, 1980, pp. 106). Any society constructs gender roles - the ways in which literary texts
represent these relations are infinitely complex, and the gender meanings generated by any text depend as much if not more on the reception of those roles and ideologies as they do on the ideology of the author or producer. Barrett also points out that" ... it is not possible to take literary texts or any other cultural products, as necessary reflections of the social reality of any particular period. They cannot even provide us with a reliable knowledge of directly inferable ideology. What they can offer... is an indication of the bounds within which particular meanings are constructed and negotiated in a given social formation' (Barrett, pp. 107).

What does it mean to study the representations and reception of gender in any given text? Conventionally, men and women are defined in relation and opposition to each other. What happens when the attributes of 'male' and 'female' are mixed up in a literary or cultural representation? How can an author who wishes to raise questions about the gendering of society do so without falling into the trap of gendered conventions himself/herself? As Butler asks, 'Does being female constitute a "natural fact" or a cultural performance, or is "naturalness" constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?" (Butler, pp. 10).

When Judith Butler describes gender as performative, it is not about choosing to put on a gender - as if it was a performance in the traditional or obvious way. The performativity of gender is meant to suggest that gender is constituted by performative acts which, repeated, come to form or take shape, a 'coherent' gender identity. Gender is not a stable construct, just as performative acts are not, cannot be stable.

Analysing different performances as gender roles as they occur in Dattani’s plays becomes even more interesting when looked at from this
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theoretical perspective, because of the unstable relations that Dattani draws between the characters in his plays. To separate the women characters in Dattani's plays and analyse them at a distance from the other characters is a little difficult, as Dattani writes about women in much the same style as he writes about anybody. One of the main focuses of Dattani's work is his treatment of the different, the handicapped. Women, per se, are of course, neither, but Dattani's work does evidence a belief that in mainstream Indian society, women are marginalised in ways very similar to those employed to segregate other disempowered groups.

This thesis looks at five of Dattani's best-known plays - Dance Like a Man, Tara, Where there is a Will, Final Solutions and Bravely Fought the Queen. These plays are 'about' gender and almost despite this focus, these plays have been commercially quite successful. For e.g. Dance Like a Man, as a matter of fact, has been extremely successful, all over India and also abroad, wherever and whenever it has been performed. Dance like A Man was first performed in Delhi by 'Prime Time' in July 1995 and played to packed houses through the months of July and August, before travelling to Bombay and then being brought back on the Delhi stage. This text perhaps is also one of the most representative examples of Dattani's work, as it highlights almost every issue and every characteristic that his plays have come to be known for.

A parallel thread traces the stories of the younger Jairaj and Ratna, and Amritlal Parekh, Jairaj's father. The title of the play and the main focus is the construction of male stereotypes and the questioning of an 'essential' identity or quality of maleness/ masculinity. As the simile contained in the title suggests, the central question for one of the main protagonists is [if] he [can] 'dance like a man'. That is, is the very notion of dance opposed to that of maleness? Jairaj is the figure whose predicament occupies centre stage, but this position is defined in opposition to his wife, Ratna. Ironically, perhaps, the
question of femaleness is a construct, which overtly remains unquestioned in the text. In fact, it is the given female identity, which is used to question the social structures that construct male stereotypes.

The most dominant woman character is Ratna - she is a southie (a southerner) married to a gujju (a Gujarati). Ratna demonstrates her dominance in various ways, overtly and covertly, throughout the text. Ratna, for instance, takes it for granted that, the beverage served in the home will be coffee, and breakfast, either dosas or idlis. Not only does Ratna operate in so-called typical 'female' ways, by throwing tantrums, being unreasonable, constantly launching into a litany of her personal failures and woes, but she also completely dominates her husband and daughter. In fact, it is paradoxically, Ratna's 'non-womanly' characteristics of dominance and control that define her most clearly as the 'wrong kind of woman'.

Both Ratna and Lata are transgressive women - Ratna has married 'outside' her community, and Lata is preparing to do so. Neither of them have the necessary 'female' virtues of demureness, quietness or obedience, both are ambitious and outspoken. Lata is however, the more 'redeemable' woman, as she is quite willing (after a brief argument), to marry Viswas and have children, "one child right away, and another ... let's see" (Dattani, Collected Plays: Dance like a Man, pp. 390).

As the play opens, Lata brings Viswas to meet her parents, who are, however too preoccupied to really notice him, as they have to deal with the problem of finding a replacement mridangam player for Lata's dance performance. The nominated mridangam player has broken his arm tripping on his dhoti. The play straightaway plunges the reader into a scene intensely familiar in its Indianness. This Indianness is not homogeneous, but a heady mix of communities, castes and classes, and it is evoked through strategies,
which exploit the jokes on other cultures which are so much a part of the daily conversation in any urban cosmopolitan city. Viswas, the mithaiwallah's son creates a bond with the reader by joking about his prospective mother-in-law being a tyrant and forcing her Gujarati husband to drink coffee and denying him his tea.

Representing the mainstream modern urban male, Viswas at once frames the parameters through which the reader approaches Ratna. This association of Viswas with mainstream and Ratna and Jairaj as others is cemented when, left alone in the dance practice room by Lata, Viswas puts on an old shawl that once belonged to Amritlal Parekh and assumes his (patriarchal) identity. In this role, Viswas 'naturally' ridicules Jairaj's choice of becoming a dancer and calls it 'unmanly'.

The play *Dance Like a Man* lends itself to a reading that uses the same standards of social stereotyping to reinforce female stereotypes while questioning male roles. Ratna is damned by the same structures that Jairaj fights against. Jairaj is accused of not being a man not only by his father - a representative of the older generation, but also by Ratna herself. In the argument over the mridangam player, Ratna launches into a diatribe against Jairaj: 'You stopped being a man for me the day you came back to this house' (Ibid, pp. 402). Ratna shows she herself is not above using gender politics when it will work to her advantage. Through the text we learn that she married Jairaj because he was also a dancer, and so would not have any objection to her dancing. Similarly, she agrees to Lata marrying Viswas, who has agreed to allow his wife to continue dancing, without being overly concerned with any other aspect of her daughter's alliance.

The same qualities which would qualify a progressive parent work against Ratna the mother, as the text imposes these on her already defined
character as an 'unwomanly' woman. Ratna's ambition on behalf of her daughter, being concerned only with whether or not Lata would be allowed to dance, her single minded obsession at securing all possible advantages for Lata, the bribing of critics to guarantee a positive review, and so on, only reinforce her representation as over-ambitious, and manipulative. This representation of Ratna is set against the ideal role model of woman in society, while Jairaj's character, which is also set firmly in opposition to conventional gender roles, is presented as sympathetic and victimised.

In order to further her own career, Ratna is willing to put up with sexual advances from her uncle, with whom they stayed after leaving Amritlal's house. She even colludes with her father-in-law to destroy Jairaj's dancing career in a bargain to continue with her own. In the end, in the ultimate damning piece of evidence of Ratna's unworthiness the text reveals that her infant son died due to a double dose of opium, [one given by the ayah in order to secure a good night's sleep, the other administered by Ratna] so that she could dance at a concert while her son slept through the night.

Jairaj is shown as wanting to dance because he was consumed by a passion for dancing, while Ratna is accused of enjoying male attention while she danced. The blame for Jairaj's frustration with his dancing lies squarely on Ratna's shoulders.

Lata, as has already been mentioned, in conventional terms is a more acceptable woman than her mother. Ratna is jealous even of her daughter's success, a success that she has worked hard to achieve, but Lata is equally content with marrying Viswas and bringing up children. Both Ratna and Lata somewhere implicitly assume that the men in their lives, husbands, fiances, and fathers-in-law have the power to allow them to dance or to stop them from dancing. The fact that for the young Ratna, at least, there was a very real
socio-economic dependence on her father-in-law which may have been at least partly responsible for the bargain she made, remains unexplored in the text.

The play itself is not always categorically uni-dimensional. It does lend itself to a certain reading, but it is also ambiguous about many issues defining female characters. At various points, there are various accusations hurled at Ratna - she is a bad mother, a bad wife, a bad daughter-in-law, a 'bad' woman. However it is not spelt out whether these are positions inscribed within the text, or emanate only from Jairaj and are so to be taken as part of his own frustration. The voice of Jairaj is not the most privileged one and cannot be taken out of the context of the politics of his and Ratna's relationship.

Going along with the (perhaps) dominant grain of the text, it would be unfair to categorically state that Dattani simply reinforces mainstream patriarchal conventions and attitudes towards women. What the text of Dance Like a Man does manage to demonstrate is the functioning of those power structures as it indicates how those who may be conventionally seen as the 'victims' of those same politics, often use power and gender affiliations.

The other strategy of using the same actor to play Viswas and the younger Jairaj, the same actor to represent the older Jairaj and Amritlal Parekh and Lata also playing the younger Ratna reinforces Dattani's basic premise that not all victims are powerless. Being marginalised depends on where the centre is located. The same Viswas, who is on the outside of the 'arty family', by virtue of being a mithaiwallah's son, uses his position as mainstream male to exercise power over Lata and his future father-in-law. The older Jairaj and Amritlal Parekh are played by the same actor, demonstrating the shift of power, and simultaneously, the retaining of it in older men, patriarchs, and father figures, Amritlal Parekh exercises authority over his son, and the same actor demonstrates that the older Jairaj, formerly oppressed by patriarchy, is
not above exercising a different kind of power over his son-in-law to be. The younger Ratna and Lata are also played by the same actress - for women, perhaps the location of power does not shift very much Ratna was dependant on her husband and father-in-law, Lata is equally dependant on her father and her fiance.

Dattani’s plays is not 'anti-women', but falls into a trap, as has already been said, of exploiting mainstream female stereotypes in order to raise questions about the construction of male stereotypes. The construction of women is after all, more talked about than the construction of male roles. As has already been stated at the beginning of this thesis, gender construction affects both men and women equally, if differently. The construction of one kind of gender role or the attributes assigned to one biological sex is also, very often, in opposition to those assigned to the other. It therefore becomes difficult, if not impossible, to look only at one kind of gender construction without taking the other representations into account.

*Tara* is, according to Dattani, a play about 'the gendered self, about coming to terms with the feminine side of oneself in a world that always favours what is male, but many people in India see it is a play about the girl child' (Dattani, Collected Plays: Tara, New Delhi, Penguin India, 2000, pp. 320).

*Tara* is the story of a pair of Siamese twins and the emotional separation that grows between them on the discovery that their physical separation was manipulated by their maternal grandfather and mother to favour the boy over the girl.

The mother Bharati, is highly possessive and protective of Tara - in an attempt to assuage her guilt at her complicity in ‘taking away’ Tara’s leg and ‘giving it to Chandan’, Bharati has driven herself into an almost psychiatric
condition. At the beginning of the play itself, the reader sees Bharati blaming her husband for something which may seem perfectly innocuous, but which, as the play continues, is symptomatic of the emotional trauma she is putting her husband through.

"TARA : Where are thata's brass tumblers?
BHARATI : They have yet to be unpacked.
PATEL : It's getting late for me. (Gets up and moves to the children to pat them goodbye)
BHARATI : Your father doesn't want us to use them. (Patel looks at her.) He doesn't want us to use any of your grandfather's things.
PATEL : What are you saying, Bharati?
BHARATI : Now that we've moved out of his house, he doesn't...
PATEL : Just a minute. It was you who didn't want us to unpack them. You said so yourself. You said...
BHARATI : Me? 'Why would I not want to use my own father's gifts to us?'" (Ibid, pp. 325).

As the play progresses, we see Bharati as a nervous neurotic woman, who is not above instigating her husband into more meaningless arguments in order to show the children that she is victimised by her husband, or bribing Roopa, to be best friends with Tara. The text focuses on Bharati as highly strung and emotional- she cannot maintain her calm or control on any issue. Even when Tara, caught in the middle of an argument between her parent's, faints, Bharati is rooted to the spot, unable to move or do anything. It is Patel, the calm husband, the male, who retains his composure and gets Tara some sugar and then rushes her to the hospital. Once again, as in Dance Like a Man in Tara, the question of gender construction is an important aspect of the text. And here again, the character of Patel, the male, is constructed in opposition to that of Bharati, the female. Bharati lives with the constant guilt and fear that
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Tara will discover her complicity in the operation. It is Bharati who sets up a contest of a kind between Patel and herself, always trying to prove that it is she who loves Tara more.

Consequently Patel's attempts to construct Chandan into a traditional male role seem to almost find legitimacy and acceptance within the text as a natural fall-out of Bharati's possessiveness of Tara. Shut out from his daughter's life, Patel has to turn to his son. When Chandan refuses to go to college without Tara, or to the office with his father, or helps his mother with her knitting, he is attacked by his father for being unmanly, and the blame for this emasculation of Chandan is laid at Bharati's door. In Act One of the play, Bharati herself, appeals to Chandan to 'protect' Tara, she tells him:

"The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you - but not her! Oh, the pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable. And what about forty or fifty! Oh God!" (Ibid, pp. 349)

Bharati takes it for granted, and so does the world view of the text, in which the reader is implicated, that this is the way it is going to be ... that pain is inevitable for Tara, not because of her handicap, but because she is a woman, which makes her challenged twice over. Chandan recognizes that his twin is more self-sufficient than him, even smarter - she is ambitious, aggressive, has initiative - but it is his duty to protect Tara, from his mother, from the non-caring father, even from her own self.

The might that Bharati exercises over Patel is that of economic power - it was her father's social status and his money which enabled them to bribe the doctor to give Tara's leg to Chandan. And later in the text, it is Patel's maleness which he exercises against her. In an ironic subversion of perhaps the main point of this text, the narrative provides an ironclad justification for Patel - he is even admired for his forbearance and tolerance, while Bharati's
use of her father's financial and political strengths is completely condemned. And apart from the blame that Patel heaps upon himself for his tacit acceptance (he did try to fight it) or their decision, the text is largely silent vis-a-vis his collusion. It is taken for granted by Patel that Chandan will go abroad for higher studies, but when asked about Tara's future, he can easily turn around and accuse Bharati of never having allowed him to take decisions for Tara.

The character of Tara herself is etched in beautiful detail, once again in conjunction or opposition to that of her twin brother. Tara constantly reaffirms her femaleness - 'women mature faster', 'women are more sensitive' - her lines are full of cliches about essential qualities of 'femininity' in a text, which overtly denies essentialisms. By asserting her differences from her brother, Tara shows that she too, the victim of a gendered society is susceptible to those mainstream cliches which all of us hear/sense/have to deal with. Tara is sensitive, vulnerable but fully capable of defending herself and those whom she loves.

One of Dattani's strategies is clearly to lull readers/audiences into identifying with the characters and milieu of his plays. In order to do this, he openly subscribes to all the mainstream ideologies, at one level, while using the individual characters to subtle undercut those very ideologies. The reader eventually asks the question - 'why?' why does Tara have to live without the leg, which she wants more than anything else in the world, just because she was not born male? It is the deliberation with which Tara was handicapped that chills the readers - handicaps are, after all, nature's will. It is also somewhat 'accepted' that certain families drown female babies, but that was a long time ago. The horrifying reality of Tara is that her family consists of people like us. The Patels are mainstream, educated well-to-do folk - that prejudices against women were so deeply ingrained in them that they chose to
take the risk that the third leg belonging to the Siamese twins would waste away, rather than leave it with the girl, while the boy had only one leg, seems unthinkable, but is the truth of the text. What remains in the text, which is perhaps not articulated loudly enough, is that the same prejudices exist in the family even sixteen years later. While absolving himself of the direct guilt of 'depriving' Tara, Patel continually differentiates between his son and his daughter, he wants Chandan to study, go to the office, become male. Tara should, on the other hand, help her mother, and if she chooses to stay home and watch movies all day, well, he has nothing to say. The fact that Patel is overtly constructing a gendered identity for his son, and that such an identity, is, therefore not necessarily intrinsic or naturally pre-assigned to a particular biological sex, is again, easily overlooked in the action of the play.

It is the third female character, Roopa, who perhaps is the most challenging. Roopa is malicious and silly, she gossips, backbites, and is completely insensitive to Tara and Chandan's 'difference'. Roopa is the most ordinary character in the play - perhaps she represents ordinary mainstream society. In which case, it is alarming that this society is shown through a female character who seems to embody every cliche and negative stereotype that women have ever been accused of possessing.

Roopa first pretends to make friends with Tara for gossip value, then is bribed by Bharati to spend more time at the Patel home. Roopa is vain, crass and normal - it is the contrast between Roopa and Tara, which differentiates Tara from 'other' girls as much as Tara's handicap. Perhaps it is because of the handicap that Tara is so different? Towards the end of the text, Roopa makes a pass at Chandan - or rather leads him on, then accuses him of practically raping her! When Tara wreaks revenge on Roopa for hurting her brother's feelings, Roopa allies with the other neighbourhood girls to tell Tara what they really think of her! In the end, Roopa is unchanged and unabashed about her
interaction with Tara and Chandan. It is Tara and Chandan who abandon centre space to the Roopas of our society - Tara dies and Chandan migrates to the United Kingdom.

In this way, Dattani’s plays demonstrates the different attitudes society has towards anybody who is different or who is at the lower end of the political balance. Seven Steps Around the Fire, has a Kamala suffer because of the non-conformity of gender or because of the other gender which is not normal or different from the rest of the gender.

The women character in Dattani’s plays are victims as much as they are oppressors, survivors of gender politics as well as equal players. In the plays, Dance Like a Man and Tara the principal female protagonists collude with patriarchal authority to take regressive decisions. In one play, that decision affects the son/husband; in the other it affects the daughter. If the play of Dattani’s Dance Like a Man prompts us to blame Ratna for the death of her infant son, surely we must acknowledge that it is so at least partly because somewhere the reader does accept that it was primarily Ratna's duty to nurse him, despite her career commitments? And that despite his lack of a career (for whatever reason) it was not Jairaj's duty? We must also acknowledge that however much it may have been Bharati's active decision to manipulate the separation of her twins, that does not 'excuse' or legitimise Patel's continued prejudices and his continued support of gendered roles for his son and daughter, both of whom he professes to love 'equally'.

What is the politics of Mahesh Dattani's plays with respect to gender roles and the construction of images in society? It might be safe to say that while on the one hand he consciously seems to be refuting the conventional understandings of pre-assumed characteristics of what men and women are, the plays themselves tend to fall into the trap of subverting one kind of
characterisation or construction while unconsciously endorsing the other. The undermining of traditional male roles through Jairaj is ultimately overshadowed not just by the defiance of the title of the play *Dance Like a Man*, but also by the characterisation of Ratna, who stands in opposition to Jairaj. Chandan may ultimately have rebelled against his father and not joined an office, but he also refutes his own identity, becomes Dan and writes about his guilt vis-a-vis his sister in a lonely attic in London. The stable notions of gender are, in the final analysis, perhaps simply not countered effectively enough. Perhaps this is one of the most valuable things to emerge from a reading of Dattani's plays - that they make us confront some of our own demons of prejudice.

Responding to a question in an interview published in Sahara Time, Dattani asserts, "My characters are simply personification of my perceptions. What moves me actually is an individual's struggles for identity. In fact more realistic view of things in life is my 'credo'" (34). In the light of this comment it is not surprising that Dattani chose to explore issues related to homosexual identity in his plays. To him goes the distinction of writing the first Indian play openly depicting the 'gay' scenario in India, an issue which has been pushed under the carpet as far as Indian drama is concerned. The path-breaking play *On a Muggy Night in Mumhai* was followed by other works which dealt extensively with different aspects related to gay identity as in the two radio plays *Do the Needful* and *Seven Steps Around the Fire*. Another work, *Bravely Fought the Queen* too has a gay character hounded by sexual guilt.

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

What is it that has put the gay population on defensive? Was Indian society always closed to the issue? Is there a tradition of rejection of gay populace due to their gender preferences? Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai trace the same sex love in readings from literature and history in the book *Same Sex Love in India*. Beginning from 2nd century ancient India to medieval era spanning 8th to 18th century, the book moves on to 19th century modern India. A trend of general tolerance if not approval has been traced till the closing of medieval times. In introduction to the section ‘Modern Indian Material’, Vanita and Kidwai define modern as 19th and 20th century India. They point out in their work *Same Sex Love in India*:

Two significant phenomenon develop during this period - first the minor homophobic voice that was largely ignored by mainstream society in pre-colonial India becomes a dominant voice, and second, sexual love between women is depicted increasingly explicitly while such love between men is almost entirely silenced (pp. 191).

In 1861 anti-sodomy law was passed which criminalized homosexuality in section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. Raj Ayyar in the review of *Yaraana: Gay Writing from India* holds, “not only did colonialism stigmatize traditional non-puritan sexualities, it also criminalized some of those behaviours ...” (pp. 3). The law criminalizing homosexuals remains the same to date and is often used as an excuse to execute and silence the gay community.
The ensuing struggle is for visibility, voice and social space, not to be frozen into stereotypes but to have freedom of choice as individuals. Gay marriage too emerges as an issue challenging the sanctity of marriage with procreation as the natural and expected outcome. Love between same sex, since it cannot be procreative is seen as unnatural and carnal. Dattani in *Seven Steps Around the Fire* questions the stance which rejects the possibility of love, loyalty and dedication in a relationship between a eunuch and a homosexual. Using a ‘who-dun-it’ detective plot, Dattani skillfully brings out the petty jealousies and strong loyalties that regulate the 'hizra' community and the hypocrisy that permeates society at large.

Hoshang Merchant in introduction to *Yaraana, Gay Writing from India* declares “.... most homosexuals get married due to social pressures. Some commit suicide. Most adjust to a double life, so do their wives” (pp. xvi). Subbu commits suicide while Ashwin and Raghu from Dattani’s *Night Queen* seek each other out for love, understanding and support. The play explores the identity crisis faced by Ashwin a homosexual character who learns to hate himself because his brother whom he loves, thinks of his preference for same-sex love as ‘ugly and repulsive’. Ash cries out his fear to Raghu, “In his eyes, I didn't want to be so ugly” (Dattani, Mahesh. *Night Queen in Yaranna: Gay Writing from India*. Ed. Hoshang, Merchant). The pressure to conform can be strongest from within the family as in the case of Subbu where his father almost pushes him into arranged marriage and definitely into committing suicide. While in *Seven Steps Around the Fire* the coercive power of father leads to the crisis, in *Night Queen* the brother's disapproval combines with Ashwin's complicity. Dattani in this play questions this complicity on part of the homosexuals - the 'identitarian' unease they face is to some extent of their own making. Closely interlinked to the standing up for their right to be what they choose to be is the question of economic independence. Economic self-
dependence of the marginalized serves as a great impetus towards empowerment. Ashwin rants at Raghu "... you have a secure job ... you can tell the world to fuck off" (Ibid, pp. 67). Raghu is definitely lucky to have a secure job and supportive sibling yet the insecurity comes through when he confesses to Ashwin, "I too am looking for help from you. Help me" (Ibid, pp. 70). It is his bonding with Ashwin which finally enables him to laugh loudly and declare, "At last I am playing" (Ibid, pp. 70). Dattani highlights the hypocrisy inherent in arranged marriage or marriage of convenience that homosexuals enter into due to their inability to take a stand against societal pressure. The victim in such marriage is the wife who either develops self-doubts if unaware of her husband's preferences, or is left with little option but to adjust. Dattani critiques the workings of personal and moral choices of the gay sensibility. Same type of situation can be seen in Dattani's plays, Bravely Fought the Queen and Muggy Night in Mumbai where characters like Nitin and Bunny Singh though they were homosexual, yet they were married due to their inability to take stand against societal pressure.

What is common to all the plays of Dattani is the elite urban milieu to which his characters belong. Bijay Kumar Das in his book Postmodern Indian English Literature holds, "Dattani's plays are about contemporary reality that one encounters in the metropolis of our country". On a Muggy Night in Mumbdi is, as has been pointed out earlier, Dattani's first play dense with a host of issues related to homosexuality. A gathering of gay characters, a lesbian and a heterosexual provide multiphonic perspectives. They meet in the house of their host Kamlesh, the perfection of which is described by Dattani in detailed stage directions as an attempt on the part of Kamlesh "... at creating a world where he can belong" (Dattani, Collected Plays: On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, pp. 49) thus, introducing the theme of alienation. In the introductory note to the play, John Mc Rae holds, "... it is a play about how
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society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates” (Ibid, pp. 45).

Depicting characters who are diametrically opposed to each other, Dattani projects alternative realities about sexuality: Kamlesh the romantic riding the high horse of sacrifice and duty, Sharad the witty and the only character at ease with his gay identity, Guard the exploited heterosexual with unacknowledged homosexual leanings, Deepali the lesbian feminist in command of herself, and Kiran is the only straight character projecting heterosexual womanhood. Though a close reading of the play projects the essence of each character, yet the felicity with which Dattani portrays them prevents their emerging as stereotypes. John Mc Rae comments, “They are carefully balanced range of individuals with a depth of experience that exceeds traditional expectations” (Ibid, pp. 45). Through these characters, the writer explores the dynamics of personal and ethical choice made while focusing on interpersonal relationships and themes of friendship, love, deception and betrayal. M.K. Naik says about On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, “The play presents a group of well-to-do homosexuals in Bombay, their changing mutual relationships, their revelations, their self-delusions and self-discoveries”.

The plot moves around the dilemma Kamlesh is in owing to his sister Kiran's decision to marry Ed who had been his lover and whom Kamlesh still loves. Unable to resolve the situation himself, Kamlesh invites his friends over to his place. As his friends drift in and conversation begins various issues are taken up and discussed: lack of choice for women in heterogenous marriage, extramarital affair, marital violence, exploitation of a person as sex object be it male or female, the need for support group and bonding amongst

homosexuals, stifling love relation between gays, hypocrisy of 'closet' gays, demonizing of homosexuality by religion, stereotyping homosexuals, gay-marriage, non-congenial Indian milieu in relation to homosexuals, the need to conform owing to social pressures, marriage of convenience to camouflage gay identity, and gays not at ease with their sexuality. In the course of conversation subtle shifts of perception take place. Kamlesh is able to get over his infatuation for Ed and learns to appreciate Sharad. Kiran on learning the truth does not break down or look for support rather emerges a stronger individual with decision taking power. The closet homosexual Bunny acknowledges, "I have tried to survive. In both worlds. And it seems I do not exist in either" (Dattani, Collected Plays: On Muggy Night in Mumbai, pp. 103). He resolves to be true to himself and to his wife by confessing and asking for her forgiveness. Sharld and Deepali, on the strength of their conviction remain unchanged while Ranjit's decision to leave India gets reinforced, for to quote him, "I can't seem to be both Indian and gay" (Ibid, pp. 88). Ed emerges as the most pathetic character. Once the mask of masculinity slips a weak, treacherous and hypocritical character is revealed who in his machinations to conform to heterosexually, ends up becoming self-alienated. Homosexuality is not a matter of choice and so discrimination based on these grounds is questioned.

So, these plays discussed the issue of marriage of convenience in one form or other, the tone is serious - implicating the society as well as the homosexuals. These plays also throws light on the growing homosexuality its non-acceptance by the Indian society and fear of Ostracism. Male and female are the only sexual categories which have secured social existence and society's approbation. People who do not fit into these two classes either keep trying to fit into the rut and suffer throughout their lives a burden of living. The big lie, or if they choose to live with the truth they have to bear social ostracism and contempt.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

The same issue is dealt with in Do the Needful but in a humorous way. The gay hero and the notorious heroine get into a marriage of convenience with a secret understanding that they will be free to follow their natural inclinations. The humour arises out of the honest-dishonesty of the situation yet there is also an undercurrent of fear whether their lovers will understand and sympathize with them or not.

Apart from gender and sexuality, he also focused on communal violence and violence on children. For the Indian, the most important battle for the establishment of a distinctive identity within a territorial location lay in the partitioning of India. National identities were conceived and took shape in accordance with the ideologues that formulated these on the basis of religious (and later, linguistic, ethnic, caste) identities. The gruesome rioting and communal/religious disharmony that took seed in 1947 has continued to throw up countless such incidents in independent and secular India. Such unrest and communal violence in India between Hindus and Muslims was underscored emphatically by the brutal bloodshed in Gujarat in 2002. These were some of the issues that Dattani had actually dramatized in the form of Final solutions earlier, dealing with the recurring rhetoric of hatred, aggression, the monetary and political exploitation of communal riots, the chauvinism and parochial mindset of the fundamentalist, in the context of the India of the 1940s interspersed with the contemporary India.

In confronting and negotiation response to the post-Babri Masjid demolition and the post-Godhra Hindu-Muslim communal violence in Gujarat, through varied discursive frames of history and theater, Dattani subsequently explored issues of identify, memory, suffering and loss, and the resulting ‘other’- bashing, either/or terms of reference within the larger political context through the various productions of this play. The play opens with the partition of India in 1947 and then shifts between the past and the present while
negotiating the changing nuances of Hindu-Muslim relationships. This involves three generations of people who convey complex and abstract messages about guilt, tolerance, religious bias and cultural prejudice. The play *Final solutions*, in the end, avoids a clarity of the fictional situation suggesting that the ‘final solutions’ are ultimately in the choices that people make. As a socially sensitive playwright, Dattani makes use of the onstage fictional space to tackle the disturbing abstractions of society that he encounters in the actual world.

The play deals with communalism, religious fanaticism and the Hindu-Muslim riot mostly engendered by the self-centered politicians. The psychosis that prevails among the Hindus as well as the Muslims in India after the event of the partition of the country cause a chain of neurotic reactions to even the most inconsequential of happenings. Dattani’s purpose in depicting the post-Partition communal violence in India at the very outset is not to convey to us events as they actually took place but to impress upon us the consciousness that a more primitive logic now prevails. The realization that there is a total absence of restraint in the perpetration of tragic violence leads us to the painful experience of confronting an advancing foe all set to demolish the human laws of love and mercy.

On the second level of meaning the play also suggests the deep-rooted hatred planted by our forefathers. The demons of hatred are not in the procession or on the street but they are sitting stably in our hearts. The playwright seems to fling a mild satire on those fanatics who don’t understand the true property of religion, boast the merit of their religion and are mostly driven like dumb cattle by the egocentric and selfish politicians. In “A Note on the Play, Alyque Padamsee observes: “The mob in the play is symbolic of our own hatred and paranoia. Each member of the mob is an individual yet they meld into one seething whole as soon as politicians play on their fears and
anxieties .... This is a play about transferred resentments. About looking of a scapegoat to hit out at when we feel let down, humiliated. Taking out your anger on your wife, children or servant is an old Indian custom” (Alque Padmsee, “A Note on the Play”, Dattani, Collected Plays: Final Solutions, pp.161).

The issue which Dattani has raised in this play is not confined to only our land, but it has assumed a universal character. It is a confrontation between Arabs and Jews, whites and blacks, Hindus and Muslims, traditional and modern and above all, between the innocent general people and crafty politicians. The play itself is a question mark on this age-old enmity between the two communities wondering if there would ever be a final solution to this endemic problem.

30 days in September is a gripping tale of love and betrayal, which reveals the horror and insecurity that haunts young victims of child abuse.

So, Mahesh Dattani plays demonstrate the different attitudes society has towards anybody who is different or who is at the lower end of the political balance like it may be sexual minorities, religious minorities, women, sons under the strong father figures, victims of child abuse etc. These marginalized section face threat or violence because of their position in the society. So, like this we find gender and violence in the plays of Mahesh Dattani.

Dattani, like his predecessors Sircar, Tendulkar and Karnad, wants to highlights the issues of the contemporary society. Widely varied in thematic and stylistic content, Dattani’s plays transformed the fact of urban theatre in India. Dattani, like his predecessors believes in the fact that playwright should write about evils present in society of his time and present it before the audience as theatre is very close to real life.
Chapter 6

Dattani takes on what he calls the ‘invisible issues’ of Indian society. By pulling out taboo subjects from under the rug and placing them on stage for public discussion, Dattani challenges the construction of ‘India’ and ‘Indian’ as they have traditionally been defined in modern theatre. His plays have varied content and varied appeal. His characters struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, cultural construction of gender and repressed desire. Mahesh Dattani is one playwright who is not afraid to work within a relatively conventional society and to tell a story that is bold and powerful. He is one playwright who does not hesitate in mirroring the issue of sexuality, both heterosexuality as well as homo sexuality and presenting it to the audience.

Mahesh Dattani in one of his interviews says: “You can talk about feminism, because in a way that is accepted. But you can’t talk about gay issues because that’s not Indian, (that) doesn’t happen here” (Interview, “Mahesh Dattani : Invisible Issues,” Performing Arts Journal). So, Mahesh Dattani boldly portrays homosexuality in his plays and many of his plays like On a muggy night in Mumbai, Do the Needful and Bravely Fought the Queen deal with issues of gays. Dattani’s motive in writing such play is to force society to think about issues that it may not want to deal with. His characters are rooted in the urban cosmopolitan setting of modern middle class India. He deals with issues which are very much a part of the educated urban society but the people do not want to confront them and Dattani provides a platform for these issues, so that people are aware of the fact that they are a reality and not just the fantasies of a playwright.

The plays of Mahesh Dattani bring Indian English Drama into the post-nineties. His plays are so realistic that sometimes they generate a lot of discussion and controversy. Human relationships and family unit have always been at the heart of his dramatic representation.
Thus, Mahesh Dattani through his plays focuses on many contemporary social issues. “I write for my milieu, for my time and place — middle-class and urban Indian .... My dramatic tensions arise from people who aspire to freedom from society .... I am not looking for something sensational, which audiences have never seen before ... some subjects, which are under-explored, deserve their space. It’s no use brushing them under the carpet. We have to understand the marginalized, including the gays. Each of us has a sense of isolation within given contexts. That’s what makes us individual” (The Hindu, Sunday, March 9, 2003).

A reading of Mahesh Dattani plays brings to the fore many burning issues that be set the post-independence Indian society. It can be stated that every one of these central thematic issues stem from the opposition between tradition and modernity in perception of matters relating to core human relationships like love, sex, marriage and even faith. His plays also raises the questions like How are men and women constructed in terms of gender? What is feminine? Why it should be so? Why can’t women go out in the world? Why should men be masterly and women subservient? Why can’t men and women be open about their sexuality? So, Dattani plays raises these and host of other questions regarding gender and social stratification and hierarchy and sexuality but has left them to be answered by us. We have to ponder over these issues. Dattani’s plays have deep moral undertones but never really does he take on the stance of the moralist, never raises himself to a pedestal form where he could preach. He treats his characters with understanding and sympathy whether they are good or bad, right or wrong. He never pronounces any rewards or punishments, thereby allowing the natural law of justice to prevail.