Chapter - 4

GENDER IN DATTANI’S PLAYS
As argued earlier in the Third Chapter “A Theoretical Overview of Gender and Violence”, Gender is an aspect of our everyday lives as well as a social, economic and cultural category that subsumes and re-writes the meaning of human sex, the fact of being masculine and feminine.

The image of woman, her position, power and status in the society as well as in the family is central to the study of literature all over the world. Her presence in literature is all-pervading. Nevertheless, the depiction of woman in literature has been according to the social status enjoyed by them; and the status of women, as one finds, has not been the same at all times and in all societies. In Indian drama, too, women characters have been portrayed from different perspectives. Their attitude towards patriarchy differs and they react to it differently. The women characters, as presented by Indian playwright, play either the traditional role of passive, docile, dependent, helpless victims thriving on the mercy of men, or the role of rebels poised against a patriarchal ethos struggling to dethrone the myth of femininity. Thus, the Women characters can be broadly classified into two categories: those who meekly accept patriarchal subordination and those who either challenge or defy the system in the quest for individuality.

In classical Sanskrit plays, we find the portrayal of traditional women who never challenge male authority. Kalidas’s Shakuntala in Abhijnansakuntala does not question the curse of Durvass. She also silently accepts the contemptuous attitude of her husband, Dusyanta, Bhasa’s Vasavadatta and Vasantasena in Svapnavasavadatta and carudatta respectively are drawn in the traditional mould of romantic heroines to be won and possessed by brave and illustrious males. Even many modern playwrights writing in the different vernacular languages have
depicted women characters who accept without questioning the gender-defined role assigned to them by the society. **Kisan Kamat's** *Pollsak Panam Tin* (1960) portrays Sharada as a dedicated wife. **C.N. Sreeketan Nair's** *Kanchan Seetha* (1961) glorifies the image of Sita and portrays her as mother of nature. **Ram Ganesh Gadkaris's** *Ekach Pyala* (1919) portrays Sindhu as a dedicated wife who silently suffers her husband's brutality. **Lobo Prabhu's** *The Family Cage* (1940) presents the plight of a widowed sister in a joint family and **S. Fyzee-Rahamin's** *Daughter of India* (1940) presents Malati as a woman who sacrifices herself for her love (Flowering of Indian Drama: Growth and Development, ed. By K. Venkata Reddy, R.K. Dhawan, Prestige Books, New Delhi, 2004) All these women characters are depicted as meekly submitting to patriarchy, and enacting various roles of mother, wife, daughter and sister. They conform to Manu's principles, which ascribe the following roles to women:

>'During childhood, a female must depend upon her father; during youth, upon her husband; her husband being dead, upon her sons; if she has no sons, upon the near kinsman of her husband...a woman must never govern herself as she likes' (English translation, "The Laws of Manu" by Dongier, Wendy, and Brain K. Smith, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 197-199)

On the other hand, we have a number of Indian playwrights who have also drawn strong women characters, questioning, even opposing the roles traditionally given to them. Sumitra in Tagore's *The King and the Queen* (1889) is not ready to play merely the role of a wife and mistress but eager to shoulder the responsibilities of a queen. She protests against her husband who has given himself up to self-indulgence, sloth and sensuality. Again, Tagore's *Chitra* in *Chitra* (1892) make it clear to Arjuna that she is neither a goddess to be worshipped nor an object of common pity but an individual who claims equal status. Shivakumar Joshi's *Muktiprasun* (1984) underscores the feeling of a woman, kalayani, who wants emancipation from the clutches of a patriarchal society.
Further, modern Indian playwrights have portrayed women characters who try to liberate themselves from the oppressive patriarchal system. Girish Kamad’s Padmini in *Hayavadana* (1975) and Rani in *Naga-Mandala* (1990) try to liberate themselves sexually from the oppressive patriarchal culture. Vijay Tendulkar’s Leela Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1975) exposes the patriarchal system and questions the existing social norms and moral codes. Mahasweta devi’s mother figures like Sujata in *Mother of 1084* (1974) and Chandi in *Bayen* (1976) oppose the hierarchical system. Mohan Rakesh’s Woman in *Halfway House* (tans. 1993) is an assertive wife and mother who dominates over the other members of the house. And in plays like *Reflection* (1989) and *Flower of Blood* (1985), Mahesh Elkunchwar portrays women characters who do not even hesitate to use sex as a potential weapon. All these women characters protest against the patriarchal culture and constantly attempt to establish their rights as individuals.

Mahesh Dattani is a promising playwright. Some of his worth-staging plays are *Where There is a Will, Final Solutions, Dance like a Man, Tara* etc... This young playwright stands out in a group of high profile critics and writers. Acclaimed as a leading playwright in English, he has bagged the Sahitya Academy Award for English literature for his play *Final solutions*. Dattani puts drama on a very high pedestal. Dattani does not write on conventional subject. He exposes the mean, ugly and unhappy things of human life. Mahesh Dattani portrays women characters who strongly react and refuse to accept the patriarchal tradition that exists in the family unit. He says,

‘Gender obviously is a major part of it. And I think it has to do with my own comfort with both feminine and masculine self in me. I think the masculine self is very content, it doesn’t need to express itself. But the feminine self seems to seek expression, so now the focus is definitely on that and perhaps that is also why...I take up cudgels for women. In that sense, it is fighting for my feminine self.’

Dattani portrays women characters in different colours and shades. His women like Sonal, Preeti, Kiran Javeri, Ratna, Lata, Smita, Aruna, Tara, Dolly Trivedi, Alka Trivedi, and Lalitha are free from the Sita-Savitri syndrome. They constantly work to create a space for themselves within the family.

Dattani depicts female protagonists as continually struggling to overwhelm the myth of womanliness—an angel in the house. They silently revolt against the father figures, the chief agents of patriarchy. At the same time, they try to reject the constructs of patriarchal thought that reduce women to toys in the hands of men. Throughout their rebellion, they eventually emerge as the determined type of womanhood trying to deconstruct the patriarchal framework operative within the family unit.

However, Dattani’s women characters differ from the women portrayed by contemporary Indian playwrights. His women react differently to the patriarchal system. They are not outrightly rebellious like Tendulkar’s women. Tendulkar’s women characters like Benare and Champak, for instance, strongly protest against the patriarchal authority, even attempt to throw challenge to it. Dattani’s women differ even from Karnad’s women who stand at crossroads of culture. Unlike Karnad’s Rani or Padmini, Dattani’s women do not try to liberate themselves sexually. They are not even the bad woman archetype as in Elkunchwar’s play ‘party’, using sex for personal benefits. Again, Dattani’s portrayal of the mother figures cannot be compared even with Mahasweta Devi who views the oppressive nature of patriarchy from a woman’s perspective, while Mahesh Dattani as male writer explores the feminine self that lies dormant within him. Besides, Dattani’s women differ from Karnad or Tendulkar’s women in they are not social deviants. They remain within the patriarchal system to fight against the patriarchy in a silent but sustained manner.
It is also interesting to note that Dattani’s women characters cannot be classified into characteristic groups. They do not fall into any neat category, as we find it in the case of women characters portrayed by playwrights like Tendulkar, Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Elkunchwar and others. His women react differently to the patriarchal domination. Dattani portrays a gallery of women characters who in their own way try to subvert the patriarchs. If at all one attempts to categories his women, they may be viewed as constituting three groups—the submissive woman like Sonal Aruna who uses tradition as a weapon to subvert patriarchy; the seemingly submissive but rebellious woman like Preeti or Ratna who adopt devious means in her rebellion; and the constructive woman like Kiran Javeri or Smita whose subversion of the patriarchs is more positive in nature. The only thread that unites them is that they seek freedom from the clutches of patriarchal authority. They all challenge and defy the father figures.

The repressive Indian wives and mothers who suffer under the patriarchal rule of the father figures are not really silent sufferers. They try to create a space for themselves in the family and to assert their individuality. They understand the patriarchal nature of the father figures and revolt against them. They raise their voice of protest and threaten the patriarchal rule as practised by the father figures. These women also realize that they are economically dependent on the patriarchs. Hence, in their effort to destabilize the patriarchal system, they seek support either of their sons or of their daughters. In a way, they represent the modern Indian wives and mothers who no longer cherish the meek Sita-Savitri but raise their voice, though a weak one, in protest.

Mahesh Dattani’s plays bears life to the bone, deals with gender issues. His five plays deals with gender issues. Those are Where There is a Will, Dance Like a Man, Tara, Final solution, Bravely Fought the Queen. He is a spokesperson of all the marginalized people like sexual minority, religious minorities, women, child,
sexual victims etc. Every individual, he says, “we wants to be part of society, of the mainstream but we must acknowledge that it is a forced harmony”.¹

His play *Tara* is a riveting play that questions the role of a society that treats the children of the same womb in two different ways. Dattani’s *Tara* is a poignant play about a boy and a girl who are joined together at the hip and have to be separated surgically, an operation which will mean the death of the one of the two.

The fact that the injustice perpetrated by the victim’s own mother whose preference is to the male child makes the play more powerful suggesting that it is women who continue the chain of injustice. Another very pertinent example of the injustice perpetrated by a mother on her daughter is Shashi Despande’s *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), where Saru’s mother does not get reconciled to the birth of a daughter. Saru’s birth is accompanied by terrible rain; the mother perhaps sees the birth as a catastrophe. She shows her dislike of Saru openly as compared to her brother Dhruva. Dhruva dies young and the mother constantly wishes Saru dead ¹

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1. Mahesh Dattani. Interview to Indian Express.com
in his place. The mother daughter are estranged till the end. The mother daughter relationship has been discussed critically by many feminists. Perhaps the explanation provided here is very simplistic. But it is not the central area of this thesis. Hence, the meager explanation.

_Tara_ is not just the story of the protagonist of the play _Tara_, but it is the story of every girl child born in the Indian family whether urban or rural. The situation is aggravated if the girl is physically challenged or there is any other physical or mental deformity in her. It is a bitter example of child abuse present in the Indian societies. Every girl child born in an Indian family does suffers some kind of exploitation and if there is a boy child in the family then the exploitation is very much visible as the privileges are consciously or unconsciously provided to the son. _Sudhir KaKar_ makes a very fine point when he says: “in daughterhood, and Indian girl is a sojourner in her own family and with marriage she becomes less a wife than a daughter-in-law. It is only with motherhood that she comes into her own as a woman and she can make a place for herself in the family, in the community and in her life circle”.

The play seems to inspired by Tennessee Williams’ play _The Glass Menagerie_, which is based of Tennessee’s real life story. Tennessee’s father belonged to a middle class family like Mr. Patel and his mother belonged to an affluent family of the bureaucrats like Mrs. Patel. Just like the Williams, the Patels also quarrelled over this issue.

The similarity is most striking when we encounter the fact that in both the situations the mother allows the doctor to perform the surgery which disturbs the life of each and every member of the family. Just like Tennessee, Chandan too was very much attached to his sister and the greatest misery falls on him than on any other member of the family.

Chapter 4  Gender in Dattani's Plays

The scene opens in London with Chandan, now a playwright, reminiscing about his childhood days spent with his sister Tara. Tara and Chandan are two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities and the Dan, in trying to write story of his own childhood, has to write Tara's story. Dan writes Tara’s story to rediscover the neglected half of himself, as a means of becoming whole. He says: "I have my memories....But now I want them to come back. To masticate my memories in my mind and spit out the result to the world in anger" (Dattani, Collected Plays: Tara, pp. 323,324).

Through a series of flashbacks we get an insight into their early family life. The play revolves around the Siamese twins, Chandan and Tara Patel; an operation to separate the twins at birth leaves Tara crippled for life. Fighting against the prejudices the society has for the crippled Tara, the protagonist of the play. Mahesh Dattani mentioned in one of his interviews to Lakshmi Subramanyam: "I see Tara as a play about the male self and the female self. The male self being preferred (if one is to subscribe to conventional categories of masculine traits and feminine traits) in all cultures. The play is about the separation of self and the resultant angst" (Lakshmi Subramanyam, ed., Muffled Voices: Women in Modern Indian Theatre).

Chandan the privileged brother wants to turn his anguish into drama on his sister’s childhood. Throughout the play we can feel in Tara that she bears some kind of grudge against the society. She seems to have some kind of aversion with the outside world and her world consisted of only her parents and her brother who she was very close to Tara’s attachment to her brother and the internal anguish is expressed in her conversation with her brother, Chandan, when she says: “May be we still are like we’ve always been inseparable. The way we started life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out.....and separated” (Dattani, Collected Plays: Tara, pp. 325). In one of the interview given by Dattani to Erin Be Mee, Dattani says “Tara is about Siamese twins who’ve
been conjoined from the chest down, and I’ve taken the liberty of making them boy and girl twins. I think it’s a play about the self, about the man and the woman in self, but a lot of people think of it as a play about girl child. It is a play about the male denying the female and how the cultural construct of gender favours the male. Whether it’s a biological woman or biological man, the favour is to the male, so I think it has to do with coming to terms with one’s own self in terms of the feminine in the self. There’s a woman in every man; There’s definitely woman in me” (Mee, Erin Be. ‘Contemporary Indian Theatre : Three voices Mahesh Dattani : Invisible Issues’ google.com, 7th Aug. 2004).

The play explores besides exposing the typical Indian mindset, which has from time immemorial preferred a boy child to a girl child. It looks at the triumphs and failures of an Indian family, comprising of a father (Patel), mother (Bharati) and two children [Chandan and Tara] coping with the trauma of disability which is well expressed by Mahesh Dattani in his interview to Lakshmi Subramanyam: “I focus on cultural emphasis on masculinity and how all the characters are at conflict with that. The parents, the grandfather, the neighbour-they are all in that sense in tension with their own sensibilities, as opposed to cultural sensibilities, they may have knowingly or unknowingly subscribed to” (Lakshmi Subramanyam, ed., Muffled Voices: Women in Modern Indian Theatre).

It is later revealed that a decision taken by the mother left Tara crippled for life, and it is this guilt that we notice in Mrs. Patel being revealed throughout the play. She seems to compensate this one decision about her daughter through her excessive concern for her. Her sense of regret is so deep that she agrees to donate her kidney to her daughter so that she may survive for a few more years. In a conversation with her son, she tells him: “I plan to give her happiness. I mean to give her all the love and affection which I can give. It’s what she....deserves. Love can make up for a lot” (Dattani, Collected Plays: Tara, pp. 349).
As the play progresses, we are introduced to another interesting character Roopa, the inquisitive and garrulous neighbour of the Patels. She brings some humour to the play. For example when she comments on how dissimilar the twins look.

*Roopa:* Funny, you don't resemble each other  
*Chandan:* Not all twins are peas in pods.....Two peas in a pod.  
*That's something we aren't* (Ibid, pp. 336-37)

On hearing this description Roopa bursts out laughing, much to the surprise of the twins and tells them that the imagery of two ‘peas in a pod’ is hilarious. Bharati imposes her sense of regret on Roopa too when she bribes her to be her daughter’s companion. What follows is an interesting conversation between Bharati and Roopa where Mrs. Patel is just ready to do anything for the sake of Tara's happiness: “You can watch whatever you want! Just be my Tara’s friend” (Ibid, pp. 341).

Mrs. Patel’s internal turmoil is so strong that it often comes out in her relationship with her husband where she is perpetually complaining about something or the other. Mrs. Patel’s father’s affluence has always been a bone of contention between Mr. Patel and Mrs. Patel. We see Mrs. Patel constantly complaining to her children about their father and especially about his attitude to their grandfather: “Your father doesn’t want us to use them. He doesn’t want us to use any of your grandfather’s things” (Ibid, pp. 325).

Mr. Patel bears the grudge that Mrs. Patel had always used her father’s wealth as a strength against him, and it was this strength that Mrs. Patel used in taking the decision about the separation of the two Siamese twins who were conjoined from the breastbone down through the pelvic region. The surgery was carried out by Dr. Thakkar at the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital in Bombay. The parents were warned of the odds against survival and in almost all the cases of such kind, one of the twins has always died by the age of four.
Dattani writes plays to be seen and heard, not literature to be read. Hence the play *Tara* has two-fold purpose, first to expose the modern educated urban family’s adherence to the conventional attitude of favouring anything that is masculine. The second purpose is to expose the corruption prevalent in the bureaucratic society and the ethical deterioration of the medical profession. This has been very well described by Mr. Patel in his conversation with his children:

A scan showed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl...The chances were slightly better that the leg would survive...on the girl. Your grandfather and your mother had a private meeting with Dr. Thakkar. I wasn’t asked to come....I couldn’t believe what she told me—that they would risk giving both legs to the boy ......The doctor had agreed.....It was latter I came to know of his intention of starting a large nursing home-the largest in Bangalore. He had acquired three acres of prime land-in the heart of the city-from state. Your grandfather’s political influence had been used...Chandan had two legs for two days. It didn’t take them very long to realize what a grave mistake they had made. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead flesh which could have-might have-been Tara (Ibid, pp. 378)

This long and moving speech by Mr. Patel sums up the entire essence of the play. The play centres around the theme that how the physical separation manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favour the boy (Chandan) over the girl(Tara)results in an emotional separation between the two conjoined twins.

Tara, a feisty girl who isn’t given enough opportunities given to her brother, eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister’s death. His sense of trauma and anguish is so intense that at the end of the play, we see Candan apologizing to Tara in the most moving of all the lines: “Forgive me, Tara. Forgive me, for making it my tragedy” (Ibid, pp. 380).
Dattani’s another play *Bravely Fought the Queen* is centred around an Indian family, in which two brothers, Jiten and Nitin, the co-owners of an advertising agency, have married two sisters, Dolly and Alka. The women remain at home much of the time, where they look after the men’s ageing mother Baa. Baa, white haired in a white sari, wandered constantly through this space, her presence undercutting the apparent naturalism and upsetting the fragile frictions which the characters had created. As Mahesh Dattani says in one of his interviews: “If you look at my plays you find that each character, every character has, you know, his or her place in the play, which an actor can develop”.¹

So, even if the play like *Tara* is about the twins, the parents have significant parts and also the doctor who did the surgery. In the same way Baa and Praful in *Bravely Fought the Queen* propel events as much as the characters on stage. This kind of genius could be achieved only by a writer like Mahesh Dattani as Michael Walling points out: “To Mahesh, a play is never really finished. Plays only really happen in the theatre, as ephemeral events. Painstakingly he worked with actors to recreate his text in a form which suited their approach to performance” (Dattani, Collected Plays: *Bravely Fought the Queen*, pp. 229).

It was this kind of skill that made the production of *Bravely Fought the Queen* a success not only in India but in England too. The whole play is beautifully presented in multi-layered levels which again is Dattani’s adroitness. The way he juxtaposes the past and the present, the imaginary level and the realistic level without breaking the flow of interest is simply marvellous.

Act 1, “Women”, is largely a comedy of manners played between the glacial elder sister Dolly, mischievous dipsomaniac Alka and their unexpected visitor the skittish, ill-at-ease Lalitha. Its final rhapsodic movement paves the way for the second act, in which Jiten, Dolly’s husband, is revealed as comprehensively unsympathetic—a violent lecher whose approach to business is a

¹. Interview by Anjum Katyal on August 1999.
combination of brainless obstinacy and clumsy scams. Jiten’s character is somewhat similar to Osborne’s character Jimmy in *Look Back in Anger*. Jimmy has been portrayed as a savage and brutal man who inflicts pain on his wife Alison. Both Jimmy and Jiten have been portrayed as unfaithful husbands because Jimmy has an affair with Helena and Jiten gets prostitutes to fulfill his sexual libido. Both the characters have been portrayed as sadists who do not hesitate in hurting the other characters present around them. Jiten epitomizes male chauvinism and reveals it when he says: “Men would want their women dressed up like that. And they have the buying power.

Yes! so there’s no point asking a group of screwed up woman what they think of it” (Ibid, pp. 276).

Jiten represents the conventional male who treats women as sex objects and also gets whores to his office. Baa while describing Jiten says: “Jitu is just like his father. Just like him” (Ibid, pp. 284).

Jiten and Nitin’s father was a cruel and a dark man who harassed their mother. The kind of cruelty perpetrated on Baa by her husband is brought to light every now and then in the play when she feels jittery even after so many years of his death: “I have married such a villager! Aah! you slapped me? Never, never slap me. Nobody has hit me. The men in our family are decent” (Ibid, pp. 288)

Baa sees the picture of her husband in her elder son, Jiten and thus automatically develops an inclination towards her younger son, Nitin who resembles her a lot. Nitin is a more subdued and sympathetic character. The mother-son intimacy comes out in the following lines:

*Baa: Nitin! you don’t like your father, no? he’s not nice!.......Tell me you hate him! He hate me! Nitin tell me you hate him! say it!*
Nitin: Yes! I hate him! (Ibid, pp. 302). This shows Baa who as suffered under the hands of her husband, tried to fight back with the support of her son (for further reference please refer to my thesis, pp. 174-175, under the Chapter “Violence in Dattani’s Plays”).

Baa’s story is somewhat similar to that of her daughter-in-law, Dolly and Alka. So here we have two generations sharing the same experiences at the hand of their chauvinistic husbands and a yet to come third generation, Daksha who also experiences the maltreatment of her father even before her birth and is born as a disabled child. Dolly exposes Jiten’s cruelty when he says: “And you hit me! Jitu you beat me up! I was carrying Daksha and you beat me up! (Ibid, pp. 311).

The result of all this was the premature delivery of Daksha, the disabled daughter of Dolly and Jiten. Then we have Alka, an alcoholic, a boozer who did not prove to be an ideal wife of Nitin but then she raises her voice to question her husband: “I know I haven’t been an ideal housewife......And you haven’t been......well, a competent husband. But who’s complaining. Nobody’s perfect?” (Ibid, pp. 300).

Then there was Kanhaiya, a suspected character who represents the world of sexuality whether heterosexuality or homosexuality. He might be the alluring cook who might not be Krishna of Dolly and Alka; or the dark auto driver who embodies Nitin’s sexual guilt. Nitin at the end of the play exposes his homosexual relations to Alka who is fast asleep after getting drunk: “How can you love your brother after what he did to you....? Don’t answer. Just sleep. You always were a heavy sleeper. At times when I used to spend the night at your place.....I would go back to praful’s room...and kneel....Close enough for my breath to fall gently on his face. And he would open his eyes......I loved him too. He is ....was attractive......He told me to get married ....He told me that you knew. That he had told you...about me.” (Ibid, pp. 314), so these lines shows Alka suffers because of
her own husband and brother’s same sex relationships. Here, though homosexuality may be considered as breaking the stereotype of Heterosexuality, but the same homosexuality is the main cause for the suffering of Alka (for further reference please refer to my thesis, pp. 174-175, under the Chapter “Violence in Dattani’s Plays”).

Just like Girish Karnad’s play *Hayavadana*, Dattani’s play *Bravely Fought Queen* questions the patriarchal moral code which demands the faithfulness of a man to his wife.

Fig. 4.2. A scene from *Dance Like a Man*, Production - Lillete Dubey
In *Dance Like a Man*, Dattani makes use of the ‘flash back’ technique and the split-scene device. The scene is arranged in a living room of a dimly lit room in an old-fashioned house in the heart of a city. Just behind the entrance the room, a modern-looking rear panel is arranged. When specified in the script the rear panel is slid to reveal a garden. The garden represents the past and all the events of the past life invariably take place in the garden. As opposed to this, the living room in the house represents the present. All events pertaining to the present take place here. Thus a split-scene is a convenient device to move the action between the present and the past.

Another dramatic device Dattani makes use of in the play is regarding the roles of the actors. The play requires four actors, and the roles that are played by each actor are arranged like this:

1. The young Man, in his early twenties, plays Viswas and the younger Jairaj.
2. The Young Woman, in her early twenties, plays Lata and the younger Ratna.
3. The Old Man, in his early sixties, plays the older Jairaj and his father, Amritlal Parekh.
4. The Old Woman, in her early sixties, plays the role of older Ratna Parekh.

Mahesh Dattani gives much importance to this role switching and expects that this is adhered to carefully as it is ‘vital to the structure’ of the play.

The play opens in the living room of an old-fashioned house. Viswas and Lata Parekh enter the room. The occasion is going to be a sort of assessment by the Parekhs of their future son-in-law. But, unfortunately, one of their musicians has met with an accident and both Jairjaj Paresh and Ratna Parekh have gone to the hospital. Meanwhile, Lata Parekh and Viswas are seen engaged in a conversation that gradually unfolds the details of the Parekhs. Lata’s parents, Jairaj Parekh and Ratna Parekh, are dancers like Lata. Lata tells Viswas that her
parents are of a 'different' type (Mahesh Dattani, *Final Solutions and Other Plays: Dance Like a Man*, pp. 113). The house in which they are living is forty to fifty years old. Being located in the centre of the city, there seems to be a lot of demand for the site of the house. But Jairaj is not willing to sell it because of certain sentimental reasons, according to Lata. Lata further tells Viswas that her parents learnt and danced together under the same guru in that house.

As a little girl Lata used to watch her parents practice dancing. It was 'magic' (Ibid, pp. 114) for her to do so. She tells Viswas that her father is a ‘bit more pliable than usual’ (Ibid, pp. 118) and her grandfather, who was a freedom fighter and social reformer who became busy later’ handling’ his son who was wanting to be a dancer. In spite of the old man’s resistance to (his son’s) dancing, according to Lata, Lata’s father had deep respect for the old man. While Lata was making coffee in the kitchen, Viswas looks around the room and finds a large omate cupboard. He opens the cupboard and removes a “splendid brocade shawl.” (Ibid, pp. 121). He tells Lata that he is going to ask for the ‘shawl’ as dowry. But Lata warns Viswas by informing him that her father will not like to part with the shawl because he is very fond of it, and it is his “most prized possession” (Ibid, pp. 121). After some time, Viswas once again takes out the ‘shawl,’ wears it and struts around without being noticed by Lata. He goes on limiting the old man in a mock fatherly voice. It is exactly thesis moment Jairaj Parekh and Ratna Parekh enter and stare at Viswas’s antics. Viswas is embarrassed to find them staring at him and offers some explanation. But Jairaj and Ratna are not in a position to pay attention to what Viswas is saying. They seriously discuss the problem of Lata’s dance performance. The indisposition of Mr. C.V.Srinivas, their mridangist, has thrown up an crisis as to who would be a suitable substitute in his absence. Especially Ratna Parekh is so worried that the attempts of Jairaj Parekh to calm her down backfire on him, and Ratna begins to blame Jairaj and his father, Amritlal Parekh, for their present lot. She accuses Jairaj for being a 'spineless boy'
who could not leave his father's house for more that forty-eight hours (Ibid, pp. 132). Jairaj complains that Ratna has been holding this against him for the last forty years. It is in this way that the past is brought to bear its mark on the present. The audiences gradually come to understand that the relationship between Jairaj and Ratna is not a smooth and healthy one. Fretting and fuming Ratna exits to her bedroom. Having watched all this, Viswas tries to leave the house. But Jairaj stops him and offers him drinks and also tells him about his father, Amritlal Parekh, "the Setji of the city" (Ibid, pp. 136). What the audiences understand from this is that there is a lot of dislike and disregard between the father and the son. This view is quite different from what Lata has explained to Viswas so far. Jairaj Parekh further tells Viswas that he was trying to 'remove all the memories' of his father, including his "gardening" (Ibid, pp. 138). Then Viswas asks about 'the shawl' and the reason for keeping it. Jairaj doesn't answer this question, but agrees to give it to Viswas after his marriage with Lata.

Ratna re-enters with the same proposal that was suggested by Jairaj that they could ask Chandra Kala to lend Mr. Seshadri. With this proposal, the solution to the present crisis has been found. But once again they dig up their past life. Now, it is Jairaj, who begins, and asks Ratna how they could have continued to live with her uncle especially after he had asked his niece Ratna to go to bed with him? (Ibid, pp. 143) He tries to clarify to Ratna that her uncle's behaviour was the reason behind Jairaj's returning to his father's house. Both of them agree that to leave Amritlal Parekh's house was an 'impulsive' (Ibid, pp. 144) decision. But with the mention of 'Shankar,' the chasm between them is once again revealed. Just before retiring to his bedroom, Jairaj notices the 'shawl.' He picks it up and tries to put it into the cupboard, but changes his mind and speaks to himself:

\[\text{'your last memory. Soon I'll be rid of you too. Then I won't see you wearing this shawl, walking about this room. . . . Walking about-wearing this shawl. (Ibid, pp. 146)}\]
Thus the entire present part of Act One shows the not-so-healthy kind of relationship between Jairaj and Ratna. At this stage, the audiences have no clue to either the name of 'Shankar,' or to the mystery of the 'shawl.'

The present part comes to an end with the living room portion changing into a lovely rose-garden. The spotlight picks up. The characters also change. Jairaj becomes the father Amritlal Parekh, Viswas becomes young Jairaj, Lata young Ratna. The time of the action is nineteen forties. The second section of this paper deals with this part, that is, 'the past' of the play.

Act Two opens with a telephone ringing in the living room. Ratna picks up the phone. She is seen receiving the calls from all the VIPs of the city. She is congratulated on the success of her daughter, Lata Parekh's dance performance. All the newspapers like Herald, The Times and The Express have published favourable, rave reviews about the dance performance. Jairaj and Viswas are very excited about the review. Lata Parekh is described as 'the star of the Festival,' 'A Shining Star in the sky of Bharatnatyam,' etc. Lata, Viswas and Jaira are reading the reviews. Lata says that these rave reviews are her mother's 'efforts' (Ibid, pp. 174). But Jairaj would not 'give her the credit entirely' (Ibid, pp. 174).

Viswas's ignorance about dance is exposed in the ensuing conversation. One of the reviewers comments on Lata's rendition of 'the ashtapadi' from Geet Govindam. The reviewer praises Lata's 'tearful expression,' (Ibid, pp. 175) and says that her 'heaving bosom conveyed all that was humanly possible.' (Ibid, pp. 175) But Lata clarifies that her bosom was heaving because 'She was breathless' from the 'varnam.' But Viswas does not like this comment saying that 'it was too erotic.' (Ibid, pp. 176) Lata understands that Viswas, like many people, has his own 'quirks' (Ibid, pp. 178) about dance. Thus, Dattani makes it clear that the misconceptions about Bharatnatyam continue till today. Later, a verbal duel takes place between Jairaj and Ratna, contesting the rave reviews. While Ratna-
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thinks that the reviews are because of her own 'efforts,' Jairaj refutes this opinion and asserts that Lata 'deserved' (Ibid, pp. 183) them. According to Jairaj, the reviewers were not doing Ratna 'any favour.' (Ibid, pp. 183) In this connection he tells Ratna that "at least [she] has a daughter to be jealous of" (Ibid, pp. 184).

With this comment the scene once again moves back to the past when Ratna just returned from a dance programme with a splendid Bharatnatyam costume, and a 'shawl' covering all this. Once again the living room changes into a rose-garden and the characters also change accordingly. Thus, the tension-ridden, distrustful and suspicious life of the artists is exposed in the present part. The audience is left in a suspense regarding the reasons for the suspicious, distrustful and anxiety-ridden life of these characters.

The second part of Act One of the play deals with the conflict between art and society, and it also focuses on the sense of competition and anxiety among the artists themselves. Young Jairaj and Ratna are practicing dance in the house of Amritlal Parekh, who is a representative of the society of the Nineteen thirties and the forties. He is a freedom fighter and a reformist, but curtails the freedom of his son, who wants to become a male Bharatnatyam dancer. Amritlal Parekh is an autocratic father for whom Bharatnatyam is the "craft of prostitute to show off her wares," (Ibid, pp. 137) hence a man has no business to learn such a craft, and anyone who "learnt such a craft could not be a man" (Ibid, pp. 137). Amritlal Parekh approves of the marriage between Jairaj and Ratna, according to Jairaj, because it "suited [his] image-that of a liberal minded person, to have a daughter-in-law from outside [his] community" (Ibid, pp. 150). But Amritlal never thought that the interest of his son in dance "would turn into an obsession" (Ibid, pp. 149). According to Jairaj, Amritlal Parekh "was as conservative and prudish" as the white rulers (Ibid, pp. 150).
In the earlier days Bharatnatyam was associated with temples and rituals. The art was preserved by 'Devadasis,' who were professional dancers in temples. They were, however, exploited by the priests and rulers, and eventually, out of economic necessity, turned to prostitution. Hence, a stigma came to be attached to the dance form itself. Till nineteen thirties and forties, the dance form was ignored and neglected. Added to this was the British prudish attitude, which dubbed Bharatnatyam as 'erotic.' Some of our 'brown sahibs' also endorsed such views and considered the art form as a 'debased and licentious remnant' of our barbaric past. The antinatch movement of the nineteen thirties further whipped public opinion up against this art form. But in spite of this, in the same decade, a few young dancers from well-to-do and respectable families came forward to learn the art form from the 'Devadasis.'

The play focuses on this conflict in the character like Amritlal Parekh who represents the attitudes of the older generation of the society during the Thirties and Forties. The younger generation, represented by Jairaj and Ratna, oppose such an attitude. Jairaj and Ratna challenge the old man who has no good opinion about the art form. Amritlal even suspects Ratna's attempts to learn 'the Mysore school of dance' from Chenniamma, who is a seventy-five years old living exponent of the art form. As a result of this tussle, Jairaj and Ratna leave the house in defiance. The first flashback of Act One ends with this defiance.

Act Two continues with the flashback of Act One focusing on the events of the forties. Jairaj and Ratna, out of sheer helplessness return to Amritlal Parekh's house within two days. Their helplessness is exploited by Amritlal Parekh who imposes certain restrictions on them. He tells Jairaj 'not to grow his hair any longer' (Ibid, pp. 164) and asks Ratna 'not to learn [any dance] from anyone else (Ibid, pp. 164). He further informs Ratna that man's happiness lies 'in being a man' (Ibid, pp. 164). He assures Ratna that she would be allowed to dance if she helps him, in making Jairaj 'an adult' (Ibid, pp. 166) who could be worthy of a woman.
After this kind of agreement with Ratna, the old man disappears from the scene. It appears as if he has handed over this responsibility to Ratna. Ratna, thus, buys her freedom to dance at the expense of Jairaj's desire to become a male Bharatnatyam dancer. Ambition overtakes Ratna. In order to prove herself to be a dancer, she 'destroys' Jairaj by undermining his 'self-esteem' (Ibid, pp. 188) as an artist.

In the second flashback of Act Two, the way in which this plan of 'destruction' has been executed is dramatized. Jairaj feels neglected and dismissed. He feels that he is used as a tool, as a stage prop, or as a choreographer to Ratna's dance-items, but seldom as a co-dancer. One day Ratna returns from a dance programme with a splendid Bharatnatyam costume, and a shawl covering all this. Jairaj follows her in a drunken condition. It is obvious that Ratna continues her dance practice and gives several performances, whereas Jairaj becomes only a stage prop. Thus, the 'shawl' stands as a symbol of Jairaj's unfulfilled desire to be recognized as a dancer. Ratna scolds Jairaj for his drunkenness and asks him to do 'something useful before it is too late' (Ibid, pp. 187), and 'stop the mockery.' But Jairaj holds Ratna responsible for his drunkenness because, he says, he is deprived of dancing. Ratna retorts Jairaj blaming him for his addiction to alcohol and for his 'mediocrity.' (Ibid, pp. 190) She also holds Amritlal Parekh responsible for Jairaj's downfall. According to Ratna, Jairaj's downfall begins from the day he returned to his father's house. She charges that he has always been "a spineless boy" who could not "leave his father's house for more than forty-eight hours" (Ibid, pp. 132). For her, Jairaj 'stopped being a man' from that fateful day onwards. For the past forty years Ratna has been holding this complaint against Jairaj. In fact, the audience gets to know about this mutual disagreement: and distrust between Jairaj and Ratna in their very first meeting with them in Act One. The play opens with this distrust between them and continues to show it till the end of the play.

Jairaj hopes that he would teach his son, little Shankar, the dance "of Shiva, the dance of man" (Ibid, pp. 185) He wishes that Shankar would dance the
"Tandavanrityam" (Ibid, pp. 185) right on the head of his grandfather, when he becomes a young man. But this desire of Jairaj also remains unfulfilled because the child dies in his childhood. It appears that the ayah, in an attempt to keep the child away from weeping for his mother, administers an overdose of opium and unknowingly kills the child. According to Jairaj, Ratna is more responsible for the death of the child. He alleges that Ratna was always after the name and fame as a dancer rather than discharging her duty as a mother and as a wife.

Thus there has been a mutual distrust and disagreement between Jairaj and Ratna. This distrust between them is born out of Ratna's ambition. They might have succeeded as dancers, but have failed as human beings, a wife and husband. The play ends with Jairaj's admission that they were only human and lacked the 'grace,' 'brilliance' and 'magic' to dance like God (Ibid, pp. 194). To be able to revise, protect and continue any art form, the artistes) should rise above the human weaknesses. Art can only be protected in the hands of such artists.

If the dancers in the play, said Dattani "seemed angry, cynical or cruel, it is because they were born into a society which has yet to find a place for them". The title "Dance Like a Man" is a question. It is an exclamation. It is the battle cry of the oppressed who are never allowed to be themselves-because there is already a dominant notion existing of what they should be. The play questions conventional male stereotypes.

Fig. 4.3. A scene from Where There is a Will
The play "Where there is a Will" is about Hasmukh Mehta, one of the top businessmen in the city. He is a gritty, gutsy and stubborn type of man. Having been a good boy to his father all through his life, he expects the same from his son Ajit and allows him not to intervene in his plans. In his view Ajit is an 'outright loss' and his schemes are 'crackpot schemes.' He regrets having fathered him.

Oh God! I regret it all. Please let him just drop dead. No, no. What a terrible thing to say about one's own son. I take it back. Dear. God, don't let him drop dead. Just turn him into a nice vegetable so he won't be in my way. Ever since he entered my factory, he has been in my way (Dattani, Collected Plays: Where there is a Will, Act I, Sc-i, pp. 445).

Hence the grudge between the two. Ajit is pining to secure a space of his own where he could be himself. He is in dire need of some money which he is denied. His words provide a sort of insight into his pain as well as into the real crisis of the play.

I mean, it's not as if I want the money for myself. It's for his factory. But he just won't listen to me. I don't think he has ever listened to me in his entire life (Ibid, Act I. Sc-i, pp. 455).

Hasmukh is suspicious of his daughter-in-law Preeti too, who, he thinks, is "pretty, charming, graceful and sly as a snake." (Ibid, Act I, Sc-i, 456) He is harsh on his wife Sonal also. He views her as nothing but mud - a woman sans savour, sans sweetness. It is she alone whom he holds responsible for each and every unbecoming thing in his life:

Sonal. My wife. My son's mother. Do you know what Sonal means? No? 'Gold.' When we were newly married, I used to joke with her and say she was as good as gold. But that was when we were newly married. I soon found out what a good-for-nothing she was. As good as mud. Ditto our sex life. Mud Twenty-five years of marriage and I don't think she has ever enjoyed sex. Twenty-five years of marriage and I haven't enjoyed sex with her. So what does a man do? You tell me. I started eating out. I Well, I had the money. I could afford to eat in fancy places. And what about my sex life? Well, I could afford that too. Those expensive ladies of the night in five star hotels! (Ibid, Act I, Sc-i, pp. 472-3).
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The only person who wins his free heart accolades is Kiranjhaveri, an executive in his office. She is a beauty with real brains. He invests his passions in her, makes her his mistress and also raises her status to the directorship. He has enough reasons for doing so:

*I mean, a man in my position has to be careful. I needed a safer relationship. Something between a wife and a pick-up. Yes. A mistress! It didn’t take me very long to find her. She was right there in my office. An unmarried lady. Not an ordinary typist or even a secretary. A shrewd hard-headed marketing executive. If there was anyone in my office who had brains to match mine, it was her. She is now one of the directors of the company. Not entirely due to her shrewd head. She lives now in a company flat in a posh locality. I won’t tell you where. Well, it’s walking with having a bit on the side? Especially since the main course is always without salt* (Ibid, Act I, Sc-i, pp. 473).

The secret becomes known to the members of the family only after Hasmukh’s sudden demise when Kiran Jhaveri hustles into Mehta household holding his Will. Sonal, Preeti, and Ajit, all are shocked. They wish to kick her out of their world but fail to do so she has been bequeathed trustseeship of Hasmuskh Mehta Charitable Trust. As a trustee she is authorized to run the Mehta groups of industries in accordance with Hasmukh's instructions. She wields full authority to disinherit them and to disperse the whole of the property among charitable institutions recommended by the founder in case any of the three members in the family showed resentment and displeasure at obeying her and went astray. The threat is enough to keep everyone well in order and discipline. None of them has any choice but to be good host to her and wait for the happier days to come.

Hasmukh, in fact, is the pivot about which the whole action in the play revolves. He typifies the general outlook and behaviour of the business tycoons who gesture no hesitation in busting up relations which are not in furtherance of their self interest and who miss no chance of using others as means to their ends. He is very possessive of his property and is extremely cautious of persons who demand even a fraction of it. He shuns his wife as she is good-for-nothing -
physically and mentally. Ajit and Preeti are 'dead-loss' for him as they lack guts and brains required for reigning supreme in industry. Kiran Jhaveri, unlike them, is his favourite as she is enticing, commanding and headstrong. There is always an air of amour and authority about her, so characteristic of the upcoming career-woman of our times. For a businessman like Hasmukh, she is a worthy match. Her nomination as the trustee of Hasmukh Mehta Charitable Group merely evidences instinctively Hasmukh's trust on her and the prominent place she occupied in the whole set up of his life. Other characters also grow well into a perfect relationship. It is in their friction and reaction that the play gains definite impression.

As regards male dominance, the play reflects on the intricacies of patriarchal code where women are destined to be in peripheral position. Neither education nor economic independence would help them in gaining their dues unless male ego undergoes complete change and transformation. The agony of being a woman in such a society is well expressed by Kiran when she recalls her past to Sonal, who thinks her 'lucky' as she is 'educated':

Wrong. I meant my lessons from being so close to life. I learnt my lessons from watching my mother tolerating my father when he came home everyday with bottles of rum wrapped up in newspapers. As I watched him beating her up and calling her names! I learnt what life was when my mother pretended she was happily in front of me and my brothers, so that we wouldn't hate my father...Yes, Mrs Mehta. My father, your husband--they were weak men with false strength (Ibid, Act II, Sc-ii, pp. 508).

The more disappointing thing is that despite all forthrightness and assertiveness, women still seem struggling for the shelter wherein they could protect themselves from male onslaught. It seems as if the whole thing will continue down generations. Kiran puts it in a nutshell thus:

Isn't it strange how repetitive life is? My brothers. They have turned out to be like their father, going home with bottles of rum wrapped up in newspapers. Beating up their wives. And I - 'too am like my mother. I married a drunkard and I listened to his swearing. And I too have learnt to suffer silently. Oh! Where will all this end? Will the scars our parents lay on us remain forever? (Ibid, Act II, Sc-ii, pp. 508).
Kiran rues her experiences of eventlessness. She sympathizes with Sonal and tries to console her. She tells her that it was just to build up her financial status that she dallied with Hasmukh and nothing else. The relation had grown: not out of her love for him but out of pity and his dependence on her:

_He depended on me for everything. He thought he was the decision-maker. But I was. He wanted me to run his life. Like his father had. Hasmukh didn't really want a mistress. He wanted a father. He saw in me a woman who would father him!_ (Ibid, Act II, Sc-ii, pp. 510).

Though she believes that "men never really grow up", she thinks Ajit better a man than his father because he had the courage to challenge his authority and timidity:

_He may not be the greatest rebel on earth, but at least he is free of his father's beliefs. He resists. In a small way, but at least it's a start. That is enough to prove that Ajit has won and Hasmukh has lost._ (Ibid, Act II, Sc-ii, pp. 510).

Whereas Hasmukh tried all his life to be a good boy to his father, Ajit never risked his individuality. Preeti's words gall him when she accuses him for having "stepped into his late father's shoes without a peep" (Ibid, Act II, Sc-ii, pp. 500). Ajit firmly resents: "I didn't step in to my father's shoes without a peep." (Ibid, Act II, Sc-ii, pp. 500) He is proud of having protested against him:

_All right. I can't fight him now. He has won. He has won because he's dead. But when he was alive, I did protest. In my own way. Yes, I'm happy I did that. Yes. I did fight back. I did do 'peep peep' to him! That was my little victory!_ (Ibid, Act II, Sc-ii, pp. 501).

In the play "Where there is a Will" the Sonal - Hasmukh relationship presents the psychological repression created by a male supremacist ideology, which corrodes the possibility of mutual love and genuine concern for the family. The play aptly draws the unequal power structure operating within the institution of marriage. The Sonal - Hasmukh relationship is an example of failed marriage, the failure stemming from the patriarch's neglect of the women folk. Simone de
Beauvoir argues that in patriarchy, woman have been constructed as man's 'other' and denied the right to her own subjectivity:

She is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential.

He is the 'subject', he is the absolute - she is the other. 1

Hasmukh believes that women in general lack common sense and his wife is no different from the lot (Dattani, Collected Plays: Where there is a Will, Act II, Sc-ii, pp. 456). His attitude, as summed up in his own words "I, Hasmukh Mehta have every right" (Ibid, pp. 485), is also partly responsible for the yawning gap in the relationship. The mammoth male ego, which desires to own and control everything, destroys his marital bliss. Moreover, Hasmukh has been an ever-complaining husband who finds nothing but fault with whatever Sonal does:

Over here, he is forever complaining. I don't have enough brains for that, I can't cook like his mother used to' (Ibid, pp. 494).

Here is a patriarch who dismisses his wife as a disorganized housewife and an incompetent partner in bed, and as foolishly sentimental about their son's welfare. Feminists also consider the use of sexist language as the construct of patriarchal ideology. Hence, Hasmukh scornfully mocks at Sonal's addressing Ajit as Aju. He thinks, 'Aju! Sounds more like a parrot's name. If I wanted him to be called like a household pet, would have named him 'Mithu' or even Jimmy" (Ibid, pp. 498).

Sonal is, on the other hand, a devoted wife, concerned about the welfare of her husband. She tries to please Hasmukh in whatever ways possible.

Gradually, she realizes that Hasmukh has ways been dominating type, caring little about her needs and desires (Ibid, pp. 467). She rightly points out to

Preeti, 'He thinks he is king of all he surveys! And we are his subjects' (Ibid, pp. 472). Consciousness of her rights, Sonal wants to break free from the shackles of patriarchal domination. But, dependent that she is on her husband, she fails to challenge his authority outright. She can only support Ajit in a secret rebellion against the patriarch and gain the confidence of her son against Hasmukh.

Somewhat similar to the Sonal-Hasmukh conflict is the conflict between Aruna and Ramnik in Final Solutions. Ramnik Gandhi fails to respect Aruna as an equal human being with the precious right to think and believe differently from him. The mismatch of temperaments, stemming out of Ramnik's insistence on the patriarchal bias and his wife's opposition to it, makes the husband-wife relationship tense. Virginia Woolf argues that "patriarchal ideology emphasizes male superiority over female while considering the feminine attitude as inferior".

Behind the mask of liberal mindedness lies the patriarch's masculine scorn for and dismissal of feminine opposition. The likes of Ramnik find no sense in Aruna's praying all day long. He says, 'Nobody is asking you to pray all day' (Dattani, Collected Plays: Final Solution, pp. 193). He imposes the male supremacist ideology on Aruna and thereby represses her individuality.

Aruna, on the other hand, understands the sexual politics played by Ramnik. She does not fail to perceive that the patriarch intends to transfer his ideology, his beliefs and ideas to his daughter. Aruna strongly objects to such an attempt made by the patriarch. She asks her daughter to follow her footsteps. She wants Smita to help her in 'pooja-paath' and advises her with the words, 'Remember. Always be pure. Pure in your mind, in your deeds' (Ibid, pp. 173). She even asks her daughter to follow the path of truth, which lies in preserving the age-old 'sanskar'. She explains things in her own way:

'For so many generations we have preserved our sanskar because we believe it is the truth! It is the way shown to us by our saints. We must know no other path. And I will not have it all perish to accommodate someone else's faith. I have enough faith and pride to see that it doesn't happen. I shall uphold what I believe is the truth' (Ibid, pp. 210).

Aruna wants Smita to follow her ideology and faith; she wants her daughter to be her own rather than her father's protege. To undermine the intentions of the patriarch, Aruna wields the weapon of the age-old faith of her ancestors.

Besides presenting on stage the tradition-bound women's approach to patriarchy, Dattani has also created women characters who are not always noble or endearing in their efforts to subvert the father figures. To achieve their goals, these apparently acquiescent but in fact rebellious women do not hesitate to resort to any possible means. They appear submissive but their submission is aimed at victimizing the male, never mind whether the male is the husband or the father-in-law. Speaking about the women characters of Dattani, C. K. Meena points out,

'... he has drawn his women with great sympathy, but they are by no means saintly victims. They are strong, egoistic, greedy, spunky, stupid, diffident, sly, cruel' 1

Dattani's women are not larger than individuals are in real life. They appear before us as they exist in the modern Indian family, constantly trying to unseat the father figures from the throne of patriarchy.

In Where There's a Will, Preeti plays an interesting role within the family unit to sabotage. Her anti-patriarchal domain is confined to Hasmukh Mehta. Clever and intelligent, she turns out to be a crafty and scheming daughter-in-law. Even Hasmukh describes her as, 'charming, graceful and sly as a snake' (Dattani, Collected Plays: Where there is a Will, pp. 456). Hasmukh knows that Preeti has her eyes on his wealth and it is for this reason that she married Ajit, a fool (Ibid, pp. 456). Nevertheless, he manages to control Preeti to some extent and dictate terms to her.

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Preeti, on the other hand, considers Hasmukh to be slave driver who drives her mad by his ‘bossy’ nature (Ibid, pp. 501). As the action develops, she gains confidence and begins to believe that she has been able to manage her father-in-law. She explains to Ajit the key to her success:

‘How did I manage? Simple, I gave in, I simply listened to him and didn’t “protest” like you! I knew he didn’t have long to live. I thought, why not humour him for a few days? After he’s gone, we can have all the freedom to do what we want, and also all the money. I almost succeeded’ (Ibid, pp. 405).

She is indeed a sly and a scheming daughter-in-law. To meet her ends, she resorts to duplicity in behaviour. By the end of the play, it becomes evident that it was Preeti who had replaced Hasmukh’s blood pressure tablets with vitamins. She does not kill Hasmukh; she merely helps nature to take its own course. She succeeds in subverting the father figure through devious means.

Dattani’s presentation of Ratna in Dance Like a Man is no less interesting than the presentation of Preeti. Ratna agrees to marry Jairaj not because she loves him, not because Jairaj shares with her the common passion for dance, but because she realizes that Jairaj will never interfere with the passion of a woman who wants to take up dancing as her career. Her intention is to assert her individuality and earn social recognition. On entering the household of Amritlal Parekh, she immediately realizes that the father figure will try to mould her way of life. When she is denied her rights, Ratna challenges the patriarch, ‘You can’t stop me from learning an art’ (Dattani, Collected Plays: Dance like a Man, pp. 421). Amritlal realizes that Ratna is clever and cannot be controlled easily. Even Ratna is aware of it, and she confides to her husband, ‘He realized he couldn’t stop me’ (Ibid, pp. 444). Armitlal, therefore, offers her an attractive proposal. He asks her to help him make Jairaj a ‘man’ - ‘Help me make him an adult. Help me to help him grow up’ (Ibid, pp. 427), so that he can safely transfer his patriarchal values to his son. In return, he assures Ratna the freedom of an individual to follow the dictates of the
self. Opportunistic that she is, Ratna accepts the lucrative proposal and colludes with her father-in-law to undermine her husband's aspirations. In the end, she manages to sustain her artistic career and also to make her daughter a successful performer. Thus, Ratna liberates herself from the patriarchal authority of Amritlal through silent rebellion and ambitious calculation.

Besides the two categories of women discussed above, Dattani depicts yet another category of women encountering patriarchal suppression. The independent and constructive women characters seemingly submit to father figures' clout but in reality they throw out challenges in more positive ways. They have the means to lift the family from the clutches of patriarchy. In Where There is a Will, Kiran-Javeri acts as a knowledgeable problem-solver. She stands out as model of anti-patriarchial logic, slowly but gradually undermining the patriarchal values of Hasmukh Mehta. She is the trustee of Hasmukh's will and has been asked to play the role of guardian to the family members. She is no doubt an efficient mistress who manages her work, her house, her husband, and also Hasmukh and his house. She enters the scene as a protector of patriarchal values but by the end of the play, she eliminates all forms of patriarchal oppression. Once Kiran enters the family unit of Hasmukh, she utilizes her power to improve relationships among the family members. Kiran herself has suffered under the patriarchal system and she is acquainted with its vicious cycle:

*Isn't it strange how repetitive life is? My brothers. They have turned out to be like their father ... And I - I too am like my mother ... Oh! Where will all this end* (Dattani, Collected Plays: Where there is a Will, pp. 508)

It is Kiran who exposes the patriarch's hollowness: 'My father, your husband - they were weak men with false strength' (Ibid, pp. 508). She rightly estimates the character of the father figure. Kiran realizes that Hasmukh was intoxicated with power and considered himself to be invincible - 'That he could rule from his grave by making the will' (Ibid, pp. 508). However, Hasmukh's attempt, as she interprets, deserves nothing but pity: 'The only reason he wanted to
do that is because his father had ruled over the family' and 'he was merely being a
good boy to his father' (Ibid, pp. 510).

Kiran knows quite well that Hasmukh has always been dependent on her.
Though the patriarch always considered himself to be the decision maker within
the family unit, it was Kiran-Javeri who actually played the leading role:

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

Kiran-Javeri establishes her individuality and underplays the authoritarian
dictates of Hasmukh. And as the play ends, the family members join forces with
Kiran and decide to remain friends forever. The patriarch ultimately concludes;

'No. I don't think I can enter this house. It isn't mine any more. I will rest
permanently on the tamarind tree. They are not my family any more.' (Ibid,
pp. 515).

But the family members decide to fell down the tamarind tree, which has
been the abode of the ghost of Hasmukh Mehta. The act symbolizes the uprooting
of the patriarchal system and the subversion of the father figure.

Like Preeti in Where There's a Will, Smita, the daughter of Ramnik Gandhi,
in Final Solutions tries to weaken the patriarchal control in her own way. Ramnik
wants her to imbibe the policy of liberalism, while Aruna, her mother, asks her to
follow the age long 'sanskar'. Smita is aware of her mother's prejudices. She
accuses Aruna of stifling her:

'How can you expect me to be proud of something, which stifles everything
else around it? It stifles me! Yes! Maybe I am prejudiced because I do not
belong. But not belonging makes things so clear. I can see so clearly how
wrong you are ...' (Dattani, Collected Plays: Final Solution, pp. 211).

Smita even asks her mother not to impose her beliefs on her. She pleads
with Aruna not to burden her any more:
'Don't! Please, mummy, don't try so hard! You are breaking me. Ever since I was small, ... I tolerated your prejudices ... Maybe I should have told you earlier, but I'm telling you now, I can't bear it! Please don't burden me anymore! I can't take it' (Ibid, pp. 213).

Until this outburst, Smita had successfully suppressed her feelings. She knows that things would be easier for her if she joined forces with Ramnik to prove that Aruna is wrong: 'How easy it would have been for us to join forces and make her feel she was wrong' (Ibid, pp. 213). But she is also aware of the fact that such an attempt would only benefit her father: 'How easy to just push her over because you will have me telling her exactly what you wanted to tell her yourself' (Ibid, pp. 213). Smita comprehends that it would be a patriarchal victory for Ramnik over her mother: '...... it would have been a triumph for you - over mummy. And I couldn't do that to her (Ibid, pp. 213). By the end of the play, Smita has dismissed Aruna's religious beliefs but not before foiling Ramnik's attempt' to reinstate the patriarch's position and ideology through her. Hence, she plays a vital role in destabilizing the patriarchal system.

However, it is Bharati (in Tara) who stands as a singular presence among Dattani's women. Her excessive love and concern for Tara, her desire to donate a kidney even when there is a professional donor, and her sympathy for the unfortunate girl- everything is motivated by a genuine desire to redress the inhuman act of depriving Tara of a leg. This self-realization leads to deterioration of her relationship with her husband and we see the couple squabbling after the death of Bharati' father (Dattani, Collected Plays: Tara, pp. 353):

*Patel oh! How deviously clever you are! I'm the liar and I'm the liar and I'm the one who is feeding them with lies when they're at an impressionable age? I am the violent one and you are the 'victim' of my wrath. You don't go out because I don't let you. Go on, say it.*

*Bharati. Stop it! Stop this madness and let me live in peace!*

*Patel. How can I? Not now, when you are turning my own children against me.*
Bharati. You said it! *(laughs)* I knew you would say it! Say it again.
I don't care -after all these lies you've said about me!

Patel. Yes, call me a liar, a wife-beater, a child abuser. It's what you
want me to be! And you. You want them very much.

Bharati. Yes!

Bharati tries to compensate with maternal love: 'Yes. I plan for her
happiness. I mean to give her all the love and affection which I can give. It's what
she ... deserves' *(Ibid, pp. 349).* And in doing so, she goes against Patel who
continues to subscribe to the patriarchal values. At an interesting point in the play,
she audaciously declares, 'I don't need your help' *(Ibid, pp. 353).* Bharati decides to
donate a kidney to Tara much against her husband's wishes. She makes it clear to
Patel, 'You can't stop me from doing what I want!' *(Ibid, 343)* When Patel tells her
to calm down and obey his decision, Bharati strongly reacts, 'How dare you run
my life!' *(Ibid, pp. 343)* 'She moves a step further than Kiran or Smita and utters,
'Who are you to stop me? Just who do you think you are?' *(Ibid, pp. 345)* In the
end, it is Bharati's decision that prevails over the dictate of Patel. She successfully
destabilizes the patriarch who is economically dependent on her father. As Patel
remarks, 'Your father's wealth has always been your strength against me' *(Ibid,
pp. 344).* In this play, it is a woman who exploits a patriarch's (Bharati's father)
wealth and power to subvert the will of another patriarch (Patel). At the same time,
she also uses her love for Tara as a weapon against Patel. She is confident in her
belief - 'Love can make up for a lot' *(Ibid, pp. 349).*

Dattani's women characters, with the exception of Bharati, attempt silently
to dent the authority of the father figures. They do not voice their protest with
absolute authority; they do not lead an independent life but remain within the
family unit and suffer. Economically they are dependent on the father figures.
They fight against the system by remaining within it. Hence, the nature of their
revolt is somewhat similar to that of the sons who raise their voice of protest by remaining within the system. Sons like Ajit, Jairaj and others do not move out from the family unit but they refuse to be the power generators of patriarchy. They attempt to defy the patriarchs but the compulsive patterns in which they have been reared make them accept the arbitrary decisions taken by the patriarchs. As the playwright himself states,

'It's all about confronting. You can't survive unless you fit in into a social stereotype ... So, it's all about keeping the rebel in oneself alive and at the same time move in that forced harmony. That's where the struggle lies.'

The nature of revolt taken up by the sons and the women seems to be identical, though the ways in which they act show that the nature of oppression differs to a considerable extent. The sons raise their voice of discontent outright but the women cleverly submit to the patriarchal system only to render it ineffective. The latter either resorts to use tradition for their benefit or adopts devious means to sabotage the father figures, even to subvert the patriarchs in more positive ways. The nature of subversion differs because Dattani's women offer a more positive opposition to patriarchy than the male members in the family. Again, the male and the female characters differ in their degree of dependence on patriarchy. The sons fail completely and they eventually accept the hierarchical system but the women succeed partially in underplaying the patriarchal system.

It is also interesting to note that Dattani's women are united as women within the family unit. They support each other to weaken the patriarchal authority of the father figures. The theme of female bondage stands out as one of the major themes in Dattani's plays ("To know more about female bondage, please refer to "Lesbian Continnum" by Andrienne Rich", Rich, Andrienne, Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Identity, London: Only Women Press, 1987).

In *Final Solutions*, the playwright focuses on the relationship between the mother and the daughter. Smita never lets her mother down. She does not approve of her mother's way of living; yet, she suppresses her feelings and in a way helps Aruna to establish her rights. In *Dance Like a Man*, Lata, the daughter of Ratna and Jairaj appear to be her mother's rather than her father's protege. In *Where There's a Will*, Dattani highlights the relationship between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law.

Initially Sonal and Preeti differ in their opinions, and the opposition allows patriarchy to thrive. It is only when they stand together that they are able to weaken the patriarchal system. Besides, the play also focuses on the bond between the wife and the mistress of Hasmukh Mehta. Kiran-Javeri offers a helping hand to Sonal in order to disrupt patriarchal oppression. It is Kiran who exposes the dominating nature of Hasmukh to Sonal. And as the play ends, we find Sonal asking Kiran to stay in their house forever. All these female bonds develop and help to destabilize the patriarchal domination of the father figures.

In Mahesh Dattani's plays the subversion of the father figures, as worked through the silent rebellion of the women characters, emerges as one of the principal themes. It is obvious that his women characters are feminists, challenging the patriarchal rule of the father figures. The playwright remarks:

'... the feminine self seems to seek expression...... The feminine self is not a victim in my plays. It's subsumed, yes, it's marginalized, but it fights back.'

However, in dealing with Dattani's presentation of 'the feminine self' and with the concept of feminism itself, one should be aware of the fact that the term feminism can be applied to Dattani only in its broadest sense. His intense awareness and interest in women's problems makes him a feminist but he does not

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1. Mahesh Dattani and Anjum Katyal. 'Of Page and Stage', 32.

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hold the torch for women's rights and liberation. He depicts repressive forces working towards subjugation and marginalization of women. At the same time, he also portrays the increasing courage of women in questioning, subverting and resisting the forces that impede the development of personality. He examines the growing feminist consciousness through a period of intense questioning and deep inner turmoil.

The feminist consciousness in Dattani's plays is evident in his views on failed marital relationship as the inevitable consequence of the male desire to stamp its possession on the woman. Kusum Haider comments,

"Marital relationships in Dattani's plays tend to be arenas for endless, repetitive bickering. The partners knew each other's vulnerabilities and are constantly blaming and accusing the other...."\(^1\)

Mahesh Dattani vividly portrays the ways in which the institution of marriage becomes the site of a subliminal form of sexual politics. He examines the repressive frames working within private spaces of maladjusted marriages. Here, Karl Marx's idea, "Marriage is inconsistently a form of exclusive private property"\(^2\) becomes relevant. Marriage in the Indian context for the women is presented as the goal, the ultimate in life. What is not highlighted and discussed is the drudgery behind it. Women are conditioned to accept marriage, but never trained to leave it.

This concept is deeply rooted in the Indian tradition where women are regarded as 'paraya dhan'. Dattani's plays pose questions on the function of marriages within the patriarchal Indian family system. Women like Sonal and Aruna are entrapped in wedlocks with me who are never openly cruel. These men carry out their husbandly obligations but remain impervious to their wives'.

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emotional needs. None of them has any respect for the in individual self that resides within his wife. Dattani shows that a woman's suffering and her agony result from uneven distribution of power as inherent in the institution of marriage. An awareness of this inequality in marital relationships is a requisite for the development of feminist consciousness. And herein Dattani strikes the Indian note of feminism.

One could pause for a moment to consider Dass's observation on Indian feminism:

'The Indian woman caught in the flux of tradition and modernity bearing the burden of the past and aspirations of the future is the crux of feminism in Indian literature. A search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self-love become the prime feature of women in literature under the sway of feminism.'

The observation consolidates the analysis of Dattani's feminist explorations. In other words, Dattani's Indian wives and mothers are placed between their opposed selves: individual and familial. Sonal (Where There is a Will), Hardika (Final Solutions) and Aruna (Final Solutions) do not cherish the Sita-Savitri image. These women characters try to break loose from the traditional moorings of womanly roles. However, their economic dependence on the patriarchs pushes them into such a peculiar situation as may be taken to represent the typical dilemma of modern Indian women. They are neither for too much of Indian womanhood nor for feminist extremism. This in-betweenness compels them to make familiar adjustments, which ultimately entrap them so awkwardly that they can accept neither tradition nor transcend it. Kiran (In Where there is a Will), Smita (In Final Solution) and Ratna (In Dance like a Man) stand at the crossroads of culture, and they represent the Indian version of feminism.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Dattani reveals in his plays the variegated facets of women in modern India and as such reflects the fully awakened feminine sensibility. The class that Dattani presents is the Indian upper middle class where physical brutalisation is largely absent.

He depicts psychological repression foregrounded through the patriarchal ideologies of the father figures. His women are led to an awakening of their consciousness, which is at the core of feminism. They are awakened to their true nature and needs. Elaine Showalter observes, 'How much easier, how less lonely it is not to awaken ... yet we cannot will ourselves to go back to sleep'.

Dattani plays focus intensely and elaborately on a network of male repression and the politics of male power as organised by the father figures. At the same time, the plays also depict the condition of women under the patriarchal domination, and their growing consciousness, which leads in the end to the subversion of the chief agent of patriarchy.

Next chapter deals with Violence as depicted in the plays of Dattani. Different facets of Violence which takes place in Society, which Dattani deals with are discussed.