Chapter-6

Miscellaneous Relationships

The canvass of Mahesh Dattani on human relationships is not limited to family ties alone, which have been dealt with in a subtle and penetrating manner. The playwright ventures to project the real life experiences within the families and shows the grim and disturbing vignettes of Indian family life while portraying familial relationships – husband-wife, parent-child and siblings. Whereas Dattani convincingly shows the queers’ moorings in family relationships, he also exposes the spurious, split existence of the homosexuals as they are also the members of Indian joint families, which withhold approval and respect from all men who are not heterosexuals or aggressively masculine. The playwright certainly acknowledges their bonds and life in their gay communes.

With the same dexterity and understanding, Dattani moves from the ‘micro’ world of family to the ‘macro’ of the outside world. The social world that he focuses on is broad and varied. Self and society constitute the balance of human existence as personal life has no context without social relations. Man interacts with the variables of social order, shares thoughts and feelings with others and the harmony between the two, that is the individual and society, is essential for a fulfilling human existence. Harmonious relations make life meaningful and have the potential to enrich people adding to their feelings of self-worth, enjoyment and growth. That is what is borne out by a number of socio-psychological studies also. For example, Berscheid (1985) observes that most of the people found that “…relationships make life beautiful, whether they’re good or bad.”\(^1\) Most of the respondents of his questionnaire declared that most important for their happiness was close satisfying relationship before anything else.

Among these social relationships, one of the most important is the one between the individual and his or her peer group. As one moves from childhood to
adolescence, one learns “…to discover the value of team work, develop a sense of commitment and loyalty… and learn a number of other important lessons.”

They can boost one another’s self esteem and help in coping stress, if the relationship is positive. It is seen that socially accepted children fare the best in peer group because of the sheer fact that they conform well to the norms of the teen culture. But those who feel to be different and face some sort of rejection from others may feel odd, dejected, depressed and alienated. Their experience may also generate in them, at times, feelings of resentment, anger and even revenge. This is what Dattani has depicted so powerfully and insightfully in his play, *Tara*, wherein we come across two physically challenged characters – Tara and Chandan – in a turbulent kind of relationship with their peers. Tara, an adolescent, without one leg, needs, like anybody else, company and friendship of the boys and girls of her age. When Tara’s family moves from Bangalore to Bombay, her mother is keen to ensure that her daughter develops friendship with girls like Roopa and Nalini in her new neighborhood. She bribes Roopa to tempt her to visit their home frequently by offering her to watch TV as much as she pleases, delicious dishes, cosmetics etc. Roopa gladly accepts and often comes to their home and takes advantage of the circumstances. She understands her importance in the Patel house, but soon Roopa realizes that she is academically weaker than Tara and Chandan and her knowledge of English is poorer. She feels embarrassed when she fails to differentiate between ‘concoction’ and ‘decoction’, ‘oglers’ and ‘ogers’ and wrongly understands ‘Two peas in a pot’ as ‘peas in a pot’. She constantly feels that she is in some sort of a competition with Tara and starts looking for opportunities to humiliate her. When Tara enthusiastically informs Roopa that Chandan is a creative writer who is going to write a story “About me. Strong. Healthy. Beautiful” (p. 329), Roopa at once objects to this and says, “That’s not you! That’s me” (p. 329). The negativity in her views about physically challenged twins becomes clearly evident when she says that only physically fit people are strong and beautiful. She tries to run down Tara by telling her that she is ugly, one-legged creature. She behaves like an aggressive and domineering bully who has a positive view of violence and lacks empathy with Tara and Chandan. It is revealed from the incident when she arouses Chandan sexually. When he makes
some advances, she creates an ugly scene and brazenly abuses him by calling him a ‘real monster and creepy thing.’ She very sadistically hurts and humiliates Chandan taunting: “…if you really want someone… meet Freini Narangiwala. I think you get along fine. She is mentally retarded” (p. 367).

Thus Roopa represents the callous attitude of peers towards handicapped people which can cause feelings of misery in the victims. Psychological studies, too, suggest that such “…experiences can be stressful for children, and, if persistent, can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression and loneliness.” This is exactly what happens in Chandan’s case who never forgets the insults flung on him. Roopa’s words, “what is the matter with you, freak?” (p. 377), always resound in his ears and the sight of the poster placed by Roopa prominently against a wall saying, “we don’t want freaks” (p. 378), continues to haunt and torment his mind. But Tara proves strong and even tries to help Chandan to overcome negativities stirred up by Roopa. She even retaliates and asserts her own superiorities of mind over Roopa’s stupidity and brainlessness. Here, the playwright subtly brings out a contrast between the responses of Tara and Chandan to the predicament and pressures they are confronted with. Chandan, though a boy, doesn’t appear to be as strong in his mind and spirits as Tara is. This is clear from the way he feels depressed and becomes self-deprecating. He even asks Tara to accept: “They are not ugly ones. We are. Horrible one-legged creatures” (p. 369). But Tara is too tough to lose her sense of self-worth due to her physical disability. She exhorts her brother, Chandan: “Yes, but you don’t have to say it” (p. 369).

Dattani, besides revealing the competitions, jealousies, rivalries in peer-group relationships through the examples of Roopa on the one hand and Tara and Chandan on the other, also depicts how boys and girls of this age tend to be curious and often indulge in gossiping and indirectly seek to convey the things which they can’t say directly. Eden and Sanford appear to be emphasizing exactly the same aspect of peer behaviour when they opine: “… peer influence is also likely to occur through subtle means such as gossip, teasing and humour. Gossiping about others, for example, is a means of clearly communicating unacceptable behaviour without direct confrontation.” This tendency, characteristic of peer behaviour, is exemplified in the play once again by the character of Roopa. She exhibits her curiosity and interest in
gossiping about others when she is seen trying to find out the family secrets of the Patels. When Tara tells her that her mother is from Bangalore and father is Gujarati, she feels curiously excited, eager to dig out something abnormal about them: “Oh, an intercaste marriage! Was it a love marriage? Tell. Tell… don’t stop now” (p. 338). After hearing what she was anxious for, she is seen hectically busy in churning out strange stories about Tara and her family: “I tell you that whole family is crazy. And I always knew that mother of hers was bonkers. They say she had a nervous breakdown. I think she has finally gone completely loony. Stark naked mad” (p. 358). This appears to be, in fact, an effort to establish her own superiority over Tara. Her delight in hurting Tara and her image leads her even to ridicule and attack the Gujarati community to which Tara belongs: “The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies – you know dowry and things like that – so they used to drown them in milk” (p. 349).

Thus we find in the whole play that she hurts Tara and Chandan a lot by her undesirable behaviour. Through this, Dattani seems to hint at the need of regulating the adverse peer behaviour through proper socialization. The play underlines through action on the stage what psychologists like Gary Ladd have argued in their studies when they say, “…children must be taught forgiveness and empathy, and must learn to be accepting of individual differences.”

In this way, his plays show that they are coloured with real life conditions and experiences. With his keen and acute insight into the psychology of human nature, the playwright portrays the relationship between physically challenged twins and their peers powerfully and sympathetically. Without romanticizing or idealizing, he presents the plight of the handicapped children in society in an unsparing manner. While depicting the negative peer influence, which enhances misery of Tara and Chandan, Dattani also reveals his concern about degradation of human values in contemporary urban middle-class where material considerations play a vital role in distorting relationships. This he does by bringing into critical focus the relationship between doctor and patient, something which is generally viewed in idealistic terms. With a special knack to go beneath the surface and expose the inner truth, however ugly or shocking, he dramatizes how the life-savers can become the worshippers of
Mammon. This aspect appears to become especially significant in the context of modern-day realities wherein one hears so much about increasing incidents of female foeticide resulting in the disturbing trend of widening gap in sex ratio.

The doctor-patient relationship becomes very critical particularly in the case of vulnerable patients who have to rely only on the doctor’s professional skills and human qualities of head and heart. It is the doctor whose role and morality acquires “…centrality during life-altering and meaningful times in a person’s life, times of birth, death, severe illness, and healing.” Because of the God-like pedestal a doctor is placed on by people in society, his/her failure to live up to the expectations and trust of the patient is viewed with a sense of rude shock. All this is dramatized by Dattani in an unsparing manner through the conduct of Dr. Thakkar in the play, Tara. He betrays the ethics of his noble profession when for the sake of favours from Bharati’s father, he agrees to play havoc with the lives of the innocent twins. He becomes an accomplice in carrying out the surgery in Chandan’s favour by severing the leg from Tara’s body and giving it to her brother. Doctors are supposed to make decisions with regard to the patients’ health and well-being and their actions should aim at the benefit of them, but in this case, Dr. Thakkar acts blatantly and outrageously against the very letter and spirit of his profession. And this he does in order to get “…three acres of land – in the heart of the city…” (p. 378) for which political influence of Chandan’s maternal grandfather was used. Though he gains material benefits for himself, he loses everything in human and ethical terms, leaving the children physically mutilated and emotionally traumatized. Even their parents are plunged into emotional, moral and spiritual turmoil; Bharati, their mother, suffers a nervous breakdown and Patel, their father, remains beleaguered with the whole matter. Asha Kuthari rightly sums up the whole situation when she observes: “All the involved parties are affected in some measure, and are unable to survive the strain. All but the surgeon in his God-like splendour sitting at the top of the stage levels, whose utterly unethical complicity in the affair has actually benefitted him in many ways.” Dr. Thakkar’s misuse of his expertise shows that “Advances in science and technology are of no import because they are tainted by their human associations – our own prejudices and desires will dictate how we use our scientific progress.
Dr. Thakkar’s covetousness and meanness in a way takes the life of Tara and leaves Chandan guilt-ridden. Chandan’s anguish and anger are well reflected in his words he speaks to the doctor at the end of the imaginary interview: “Thank you very much, Dr. Thakkar! It has been a real pleasure. Now go, just…go away. (Breaks Down) Get out of my mind, you horrible creature! You are ugly and I don’t want ugly people in my memories!” (p. 379). Thus, Dr. Thakkar has degraded himself in the eyes of Chandan who is now mature enough to see the meanness and ugliness of the doctor. Dattani has shown in the play that health of human relationships depends upon mutual respect for the well-being and interests of the persons involved. Human sympathy and empathy form the very basis of these relationships. He, time and again, underlines the bedeviling effects which excessive pursuit of money and material has on different areas of human ties.

Dattani depicts this obsession with money as a malady afflicting modern man in a variety of ways and forms. If he brings out how a doctor can mercilessly betray the faith of the patient, the very core and basis of positive human relationships, he also reveals how a person like Hasmukh values all relationships only in terms of money and worldly success. For him, money becomes a means of buying the gratification of not only his ego but also his lust. He betrays his wife and keeps a mistress, Kiran Jhaveri, who has to accept this role due to the compulsion of her adverse circumstances. In Dattani’s plays, the situation his characters are placed in is no less important than the characters themselves. He, in fact, generates the effect of his plays through a cause-and-effect relationship between what his characters think and do on the one hand and the complex circumstances they have to encounter on the other. Kiran Jhaveri subscribes to extra-marital relationship with Hasmukh Mehta for mercenary and material concerns. But, unlike Dr. Thakkar, she does so under the pressure of her circumstances. She had suffered so much as a wife because of her husband’s alcoholism. Her father also used to come home with bottle of rum and beat her mother every evening. Her brothers too were no better and did all that their father had been doing. Kiran, an intelligent woman, found it too difficult to suffer silently and passively the miseries of poverty and mistreatment. This prompted her to wriggle out of this situation by becoming economically self-reliant. This drove her into the
lustful arms of Hasmukh Mehta. The pattern of cause-and-effect in the extra-marital relationship of Kiran Jhaveri serves to reveal that it is the situation that plays a large role in determining the choices and ways of life of a woman. Dattani suggests that mistresses play their role as such not because of any perverse reason or due to inborn feminine weakness caused by hormonal configurations. Infact, his attitude seems to be characterized by the scientific outlook of a psychologically and sociologically insightful writer. This is what is perceptible in his delineation of Hasmukh Mehta’s extra-marital relationship also. He has his own reasons to keep a mistress. Many psychologists have tried to trace the causes behind the extra-marital affairs. For example, Spence A. Rathus and Jeffrey S. Nevid in their studies find that “…some people have affairs for the sake of variety… some seek to break the routine of a confining marriage…. People who have affairs often report that they are not happy with their marital relationship…. “ The causes of extra-marital affairs may vary from one man to another. Some people have mistresses primarily to satisfy their unmet sexual desires while some others need mistresses for more psychological reasons. Sangeeta Das in her study, “The sensational issues in the plays of Mahesh Dattani,” traces the causes of men keeping mistresses: “Women have been looked down upon by men as object to meet their needs. They should be there to cook their food, smile cordially at their friends, run around attending to their needs and sexually satisfy them whenever they have the urge. If the wife is unable to satisfy the husband then there is always a mistress to do that.” Hasmukh keeps a mistress, as he finds his married life drab, uninteresting and ‘saltless’. But Kiran gives another reason for his keeping a mistress. She believes that he was essentially a weak man and a pitiable fellow who quested for a father-substitute: “Hasmukh didn’t want a mistress. He wanted a father. He saw in me a woman who would father him” (p. 510). Thus, Hasmukh and Kiran have their own reasons to tie themselves in a liaison. Hasmukh needed emotional support and sex while Kiran needed economic support. The relationship between Kiran and Hasmukh develops gradually in the play. Kiran not only fulfils the bodily desires of Hasmukh but she complements him in his business also. She wins his confidence through her professional skills and business abilities and becomes so trustworthy that Hasmukh appoints her as the trustee of his property. One can notice
in the play the growth of this relationship from a mere bodily relation to a much stronger and broader tie based on mutual trust and understanding.

Dattani has depicted all these shades of this relationship very realistically in the play. He not only portrays the relations of Hasmukh and Kiran, but also throws light on the relation of Kiran with Hasmukh’s wife, Sonal. As Sonal is also the part of this love triangle, so she, as a wife, suffers much when she learns about her husband’s affair with Kiran Jhaveri. The traditional view holds that the relationship between a person’s wife and his mistress is generally fraught with feelings of rivalry and jealousy. This relationship is troublesome and unpleasant as the two persons involved are deeply distrustful of each other. Sonal also feels shattered at the discovery of her husband’s affair. Spencer A. Rathus and Jeffrey S. Nevid hold the view that “The discovery of infidelity can evoke strong emotional responses. The spouse (or co-inhabitant) may be filled with anger, jealousy, even shame. Feelings of inadequacy and doubts about one’s attractiveness and desirability may surface. Infidelity may be seen by the betrayed individual as serious breach of trust and intimacy.” Sonal also experiences all such feelings and finds it very insulting that her husband made his mistress trustee of his company and she has come to stay with them in accordance with his will. She says: “I know why! This is the way of getting even with me! Your presence will keep reminding me how… inadequate I was” (p. 94). But with her positive attitude and wisdom, Kiran is able to make her place in the house. Gradually, Sonal comes to feel that cultivation of good relations with Kiran will be supportive to her. So, she compromises with her situation and accepts Kiran in her life. She shares her room with Kiran as she discovers that she and Kiran “have a lot to discuss” (p. 495). Kiran too appears to transcend all narrow selfish concerns and takes keen interest in helping the family. She appears to be determined to ensure that the family lives a peaceful and respectable life. Through her own example of a strong, independent and humane woman, she becomes a kind of a tutor for Sonal. Sonal learns a lesson of behavioural independence as Kiran provides her necessary emotional support and attachment. While providing her the much-needed support, Kiran also makes Sonal understand why the latter’s husband had turned against her. She has been a victim of low self-esteem, powerlessness and helplessness who found
herself entangled in the petty domestic problems. She was a listless wife who could not provide her husband a healthy marital experience. She had always been dependent on her sister and the cook to run her house for her. Kiran helps her to understand how change in her behaviour can enable her to develop self-confidence. Sonal’s self-appraisal of her worth helps her to deal with the feelings and experiences more positively. Kiran also helps her come out of her sister’s shadow. She teaches Sonal useful lessons that life has taught her: “It’s no use being useful to other people unless they are useful in return” (p. 505).

She also discloses her reasons for keeping affair with Hasmukh: “Mrs. Mehta, no woman has an affair with an older man especially a married man for a little bit of respect, trust. It was mainly for money” (p. 506). Asha Kuthari comments on her situation: “She becomes a part of Hasmukh’s life with her eyes wide open, and aware of the benefits she will derive from the relationship.” Kiran shares the secrets and sufferings of her life with Sonal. She tells her about how she has to support a worthless husband and father. This sharing of suffering establishes a new equation of friendship between the two ladies. Their friendly relations not only ease each others’ lives and the family with the understanding required to live together happily, but also as Beena Agrawal observes: “The union of Kiran and Sonal, a collective force born out of the long annals of exploitation and suffering, is an effort to abolish sexual colonialism. Their collective voice is a declaration of woman emancipation against the ‘will’ of Hasmukh.” That’s why, when both the ladies turn towards each other, everything becomes different and they become friends “Not for twenty-one years. Forever” (p. 515).

Kiran not only transforms her relationship with Sonal from the one characterized by distrust and jealousies into a bonding of mutually trusting friends, but also gives a new shape, meaning and strength to her relationship with other members of Hasmukh’s family. Ajit, Hasmukh’s son, and Preeti, his daughter-in-law, initially see in her the one who has usurped their right to inherit Hasmukh’s property and business. But Kiran with her prudence and constructive authority wins over their confidence and becomes a trusted and respectable guide and manager of their life and business. The development in this relationship is visible once one observes how Ajit
and his wife react when she first comes to live in their house. Kiran’s authority brings a mental torture to Ajit who feels suffocated to feel that his father has won by ruling over him even after his death through his mistress. He feels extremely angered and upset when he grumbles: “Everything she tells me to do is exactly what he would have wanted me to do. We are all living out a dead man’s dream” (p. 501). But gradually, Kiran’s compassionate and humanistic approach ingratiates her with all the members of Hasmukh’s family. She disciplines Ajit’s chaotic life with her positive influence and provides it a desirable shape by giving him the freedom he needed. She appreciates him for his maturity and sense of identity, free from all the whims his father had been a victim of. Kiran’s affectionate and sympathetic understanding wins over Ajit and he stops complaining and thus adjusts with the new situation.

Most difficult task for Kiran is to tackle the scheming and cunning Preeti who is as “Sly as a snake” (p. 456). An obdurate Preeti assumes that Kiran must have instigated Hasmukh to make the obnoxious will. Preeti is extremely unhappy at Kiran’s arrival as she realizes that the most coveted millions are far away from her. For that money, she had planned an early death for Hasmukh by substituting his blood pressure medicine with vitamin pills. Kiran becomes aware of this evil deed of Preeti, but she, instead of exposing the criminal act of Preeti to the family, gives her an opportunity to improve.

Her relationship with all the members of Hasmukh’s family reveals how she grows from a mere mistress to the high pedestal of a mentor of the whole family by virtue of her qualities of maturity, sagacity and intelligence. Through these relationships of a mistress with her master and members of his family, Dattani questions the stereotype image of a mistress traditionally seen as selfish, exploitative, immoral and a threat to society. He, on the other hand, suggests that mistress is also a human being, capable of sterling qualities of head and heart who can also contribute to the stability and strength of the social institutions like family. Infact, the delineation of Kiran and her relationships with others reminds one of Hester Prynne in The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne who, inspite of being an adulteress, becomes an angel for those who hated her.
Through Kiran and her relationships, Dattani underlines the fact that proper communication, understanding and mutual trust form the binding basis of any relationship to sustain and grow. In the absence of these features, relationships may become conflict and tension-ridden. Dattani does not stick to the ties of family, friends and peers alone, his dramatic world also includes human relationships between different social and economic segments to present a true and authentic representation of society. Work-place is an important social arena which has great impact on the lives of people involved in it. They form their social networks and interact with co-workers forming different types of relationships – friendships as well as oppositions. The relationships in this area of life too are characterized by hierarchies and inequalities. Among such relationships, the one between the employer and the employee is always very important as it pervasively influences not only one’s life as an individual but also his/her family. Workplace relationships can be rewarding if they are based upon mutual respect for the interests, sensibilities and values of each other. But these relationships appear to be rarely free from the clash of interests and ideas, aims and attitudes. This is what has often been the subject of treatment in the plays dealing with this theme. Dattani also does not leave this reality of one’s working life unexplored, and in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, he reveals to the audience a socio-economic system “…that rests in the hands of those who have property and capital” ¹⁵ and “derogates the ones that are located in a position subservient to the ones in power.”¹⁶ Dattani hints how power plays an important role in deciding the nature of human relationships. He suggests that those in power tend to be not only indifferent but also at times hurtful to their subordinates. This is what comes out very strikingly through the relationship between Jiten and Nitin on the one hand and Sridhar on the other.

The two brothers are the owners of an advertising agency and the play shows them trying to launch a new product. Sridhar, with his sharp sense of business, gives them a fabulous idea of holding a masked ball to launch ReVaTee, “…a new range of colour-coordinated nightwear and underwear for women” (p. 237). He appears to be intelligent and committed to promote the business interests of Jiten and Nitin in the play. But Jiten and Nitin are so much obsessed with their own interests and motives
that they appear not only callous but even hurtful to Sridhar’s sense of self. There are certain situations in the play where Sridhar finds himself uncomfortable as he is not treated with respect which he deserves by his employers. Jiten’s behaviour not only interferes with productivity and profit but is also demoralizing to Sridhar. He uses foul language and abusive words like ‘bugger,’ ‘crazy bastard’ and ‘asshole’ for Sridhar. Sridhar is a hard-working and loyal employee, but Jiten has no respect for his hard work, loyalty and expertise. He refuses to follow Sridhar’s reason and rather threatens him with dismissal if he does not work in the way he wants: “Listen you asshole. Tomorrow I want you to go back and tell them we are sticking to our original campaign” (p. 279).

Sridhar becomes the victim of his master’s whims and is compelled to stay in this unhealthy relationship as he has no job at present and he has his plans to buy a flat. He knows that if he does not obey Jiten, he will be “…fired …sacked” (p. 280). Jiten knows Sridhar’s helplessness and leaves no chance to exploit him: “So since you know which side your buns are buttered, you will go to them tomorrow and sell it them” (p. 280).

He is such a brute that he even asks Sridhar to arrange a prostitute for him. Sridhar is shocked to hear this: “You want me to get a whore” and Jiten makes clear that “You call yourself advertising professional and you don’t want to pimp?” (p. 287). Jiten treats him like a slave and he demands complete servitude from Sridhar. He presses Sridhar into agreeing with him against the latter’s wishes. Jiten and Nitin’s behaviour with Sridhar reminds one of Judith M. Bardwick, who in his study, One Foot Out of The Door, observes: “Relationships between bosses and subordinates should involve reciprocal trust and respect …it …doesn’t mean it is okay to humiliate a subordinate or manage through fears. Humiliation and fear are excellent breeding grounds for subversion and sabotage.”

Perhaps Sridhar takes his revenge when after acting as a ‘pimp’ for his employer, he first uses the girl for himself, whom he has brought for Jiten: “She’s young and fresh! (Under his breath) And she is great. I had her on the back seat. You can have my leftovers” (p. 291).
There comes a point beyond which an employee cannot tolerate the master’s arrogance. The employer drunk with authority sometimes can even venture to take liberties with the wives of the employee, treating them as their rightful objects to gratify their personal whims and desires. When Jiten misbehaves with Lalitha, Sridhar’s wife, and insults her, and uses indecent and insulting words for her, Sridhar’s patience gives way and he “…takes his glass and throws its contents on Jiten’s face. Jiten gets up and grabs Sridhar by the throat. Sridhar kicks about and beats him…” (p. 306).

This episode in the relationship between Jiten and Sridhar eloquently underlines the vital fact that mutual respect for each other’s interests, dignity and identity is essential for a happy relationship even if it is between the master and his employee. In the absence of sensitivity to each other’s sense of self, all human relationships tend to lose their soul and even the body of ties disintegrates and ultimately collapses. Dattani, time and again, and very subtly brings out how power plays a very important and defining role in human relationships and in structures of social and economic hierarchies.

He underlines the working of power not only in relationships within the family matrix, but also probes into the way it determines and affects relationships in the larger social, cultural and political domains. Its insidious influence manifests itself very often in the form of distrusts, suspicions and fears between individuals, groups and communities competing to obtain, perpetuate or defend positions of power. Conflicts between different ethnic, religious and linguistic groups offer illuminating studies in how hostilities and even violent conflicts are triggered by fears about the motives of others. This phenomenon, though a very old one, has assumed new dimensions in the fast changing and complex modern societies. The partition of India with a history of rivalries and mutual distrust and fear between the Hindus and Muslims is a painful reminder of what it can do to human relationships. Dattani’s social consciousness and concerns have been so acute, comprehensive and critical that this theme finds a very analytical and insightful treatment in one of his most talked about plays, Final Solutions.
The treatment of relations between and among different communities, particularly the challenges and threats from divisive and disruptive forces, gives to this play a special relevance in the context of our social and national life. Besides the socio-historical dimensions, the play also bears a psychological significance as the dramatist seems to convey that communal hatred is mainly the result of prejudices and suspicions that people develop in their minds for the members of other community. In *Final Solutions*, Dattani dramatizes the conflicting and complex relationship between Hindus and Muslims through the members of Gandhi family who epitomize general Indian sensibility. Through the character of Hardika, a member of the older generation who has suffered consequences of partition, Dattani depicts that prejudices of most of the people are based on their painful past and they remain trapped in their unhappy experiences. Hardika has borne the brunt of communal violence and is not ready to accept any solution to this problem. The sad and dismal memories of past haunt her and injustices done to her are re-invoked in her mind when her son, Ramnik, lets the Muslim boys come in their house to save their lives from a frenzied Hindu mob. Hardika feels so annoyed and baffled that she can’t understand as to “…why did he do it? Oh God why do I have to suffer? Didn’t he have any feelings for me? I just wanted them to be my friends! How could he let these people into my house? Oh I hate this world! They killed his grandfather!” (p. 179). The murder of her father during riots, following the partition, has obviously contributed to her hatred against all Muslims. Another traumatic moment was the destruction of her gramophone records, which she loved the most, at the hands of the mob: “A stone hit our gramophone first. Krishna chose to destroy what I loved most. My entire collection of records broken. Lying about like pieces of glass. Shamshad Begum, Noor Jehan, Suraiya. The songs of love that I had learned to sing with…. Those beautiful voices. Cracked…” (p167). Cracking of the records symbolizes the cracking of her world of dreams and culture. Hardika has become so prejudiced because of these traumatizing events that she not only despises the Muslim community but even asks her son to shut the door against Javed and Bobby so that they may be slaughtered.

Through the behaviour and working of Hardika’s mind, readers come to understand as to how such events and experiences can vitiate human psyche and
relationships. The demon of these nightmarish experiences possesses their minds so strongly that they become almost fixed in their hatred, distrust and anger against the whole community of people whom they see as their enemies. She impetuously impresses upon her daughter-in-law to be careful, repeating the words her father had said: “The dogs have been let loose” (p174.). She is highly suspicious of the motives and loyalty of the Muslims towards India and wants Javed and Bobby to leave India for good and go to Pakistan.

Dattani’s depiction of Hardika’s suspicion and hatred against people of the other community evidences his grasp over the attitudes and behaviour of the victims of communalism, particularly the injustice and violence perpetrated in the wake of India’s partition. But, like a major dramatist, he doesn’t view and presents his characters and their behavioural patterns in simple and uni-dimensional terms. He, on the contrary, explores different layers of reality and reveals how individuals very often in their perceptions of others become victims of their own ignorance and misinformation. This is what exactly happens in Hardika’s case. When the reality about the fact that Zarine’s family business was destroyed by none other than her own husband and father-in-law is disclosed to her, all her deep-seated hatred and rage give way to feelings of repentance. The discovery of truth changes her mind and heart and she keenly seeks to exorcise her conscience of the feelings of guilt caused by her ill-conceived prejudice. She waits for the opportunity to receive the Muslim boys well if they ever come back: “Do you think… do you think those boys will ever come back?” (p. 226).

By dramatizing these transformations in Hardika’s attitude, Dattani unmistakably brings into focus his belief that human beings are basically capable of relationships based on tolerance and mutual respect. It is the fear and prejudice caused by ignorance, the black God-mother of sins, that distorts final human qualities and vitiates relationships. This is true not only of relations between individuals but also between communities and larger social and ethnic groups. He, in this way, highlights the crucial importance of proper understanding and knowledge about each other for healthier and happier relationships.
Dattani also brings into light the role of socialization in creating these human values in a child. The early experiences in life tend to go a long way in shaping one’s attitude towards the people of other communities. Sometimes, these experiences and the resultant attitudes become so deep-rooted that they turn into a kind of fanaticism. The effects of such unhappy and unhealthy socialization affecting human relationships are revealed by him through the life of Javed, a Muslim boy. The painful memories of the terrible childhood experiences haunt Javed’s mind throughout the play. He used to be a hero in the school, good in studies and cricket, ‘smart and cocksure’. But a minor incident involving the delivery of a letter to a Hindu neighbour imprints on his psyche a deep and indelible scar. His innocent mind had been jolted when he saw that the old Hindu man, to whom the letter had been addressed, refused to receive the letter from Javed’s hands. The man had ordered him to leave the letter on the wall: “He wiped the letter before picking it up, he then wiped the spot on the wall the letter was lying on and he wiped the gate!” (p. 200). The behaviour of this old ‘cracked’ Hindu, charged with communal contempt and prejudice, deeply hurt Javed’s sense of self-respect and planted in him feelings of retaliation and revenge. This is what had instigated him to throw pieces of cow meat in the backyard of that old Hindu man which created a gulf between him and friends resulting in their tendency to avoid and give him a cold shoulder. He thus lost the feelings of a hero of his neighborhood and became a victim of social isolation, vulnerable to nefarious designs of vested interests and trouble creators.

The play brings into critical scrutiny the role of political leaders who inflame and exploit communal sentiments by pitting one community against the other and thus damage the fabric of social and human relationships. The boys like Javed fall easily into their hands and become mere tools in fomenting communal tension: “They hire him! They hire such people! Those… parties! They hire him! That’s how he makes a living. They bring him and many more to the city to create riots. To… throw the first stone!” (p. 195).

Dattani, however, never appears to be a pessimist or a cynic. He seems to have an abiding faith in the resilience of final human sentiments and qualities, including human hunger for relationships as a social being. He depicts how Javed can not
remains forever in a state of alienation caused by his acts of violence and hatred against Hindus. He has moments of self-flagellation leading ultimately to freedom from guilt and communal hatred. The play shows that the problem of Hindu-Muslim relations is not inherently insoluble. Dattani instead of moralizing and raising hollow slogans for communal harmony, examines this relationship from the viewpoint of a sociologist and finds that “The demons of communal hatred are not on the street… they are lurking inside ourselves” (p. 161). He seeks to make an appeal for love and broader understanding to transcend the divisions between the two communities.

In the study of human relationships in the plays of Mahesh Dattani, one finds that he not only brings into sharper light important relations, but also has an eye for the peripheral or weaker ones which constitute a part of everyone’s life. In social interpersonal relationships, such ties or casual relations often far outnumber one’s close relations. If primary relationships are important for physiological or psychological well being of a person, peripheral relations also provide many of the same benefits. Such relations, if free of hassles, can also be satisfying as they provide desired space to the persons involved and demand no extra commitment. Moreover, these relationships are intended to endure so long as both the parties desire.

Some of Dattani’s plays deal with such casual relations, especially in the case of gay people, who engage themselves in casual-sex relations temporarily and in private only for fulfilling their biological needs. A considerable amount of instability in gay partnerships arises for the lack of family support and fear of society. It is often difficult for the gay people to search for sex-partners because homophobia and the harmful stereotypes which surround homosexuality keep them from coming out. Though most of the countries in the world have sanctioned such passions, Indian society doesn’t accommodate alternate sexuality.

The kind of relationships between the guard and Kamlesh in On a Muggy Night in Mumbai and Alpesh and the Mali in Do the Needful are examples of such casual intimacies. These relations are regulated by mutual agreements and shared through physical acquaintances. As the play On a Muggy Night in Mumbai opens, it is clearly suggested that Kamlesh and the security guard of the building had sex in his
Kamlesh is a confirmed homosexual who has no qualms or hesitation in establishing these relations, but the guard is reluctant and feels shy in accepting the truth that he was doing the act for sexual pleasure. When Kamlesh asks him:

KAMLESH. Tum, kya ... yeh sab ... paise ke liye karte ho?
GUARD (Shakes his head). Nahin (Realizes the implication of what he said. Hastily.) Hahn! Hahn, main paise ke liye hi to karta hoon sab kuch!
KAMLESH. You do enjoy it. What you do to me, what I do to you. Don’t you? … But will have to pretend you do it only for the money!

It is obvious from their conversation that the guard is not telling the truth. He was enjoying the act and was also paid for it. The upper class rich people often search gay partners from lower strata of society and pay them for sex. As these people are economically weaker, money is an incidental advantage for them as is in the case of the guard, though he feels more comfortable in pretending that money is the major attraction for him in making homosexual relations. He is also against doing it ‘khullam-khulla’ as he feels that deviant sexuality is something which must be kept closed.

The Mali in Do the Needful also behaves in a similar manner when he is caught involved with Alpesh. He immediately blames Alpesh for forcing him into the act and tells this lie to an enquiring Lata: “Akka! It was not my fault, Akka! …I did not want to do it. He made me do it” (p. 153). Alpesh knows that “He was enjoying every minute of it!”(p. 153), but is not ready to admit it. He pleads desperately to Lata not to tell this secret to anyone as he is afraid that “If the villagers come to know, I will not be able to go to the market. If appa doesn’t kill me, I will kill myself!” (p. 153).

The reasons for such behaviour of the Mali and the guard may be due to social fears and tradition-bound system which dub homosexuality as something obnoxious. But Kamlesh and Alpesh are more free and open in such activities. Kamlesh has no hesitation in making sex with the guard as he lives in his own den away from his family and is free to live such a life.

The relationship which Kamlesh and Guard, and Alpesh and Mali share is of a fleeting nature and it does not have its impact for a long time. The sex they enjoy is
also peripheral and their proximity and intimacy is limited to body only. Such casual relationships are beneficial to the people involved, as they help them in providing an outlet to their sexual passions and desires and quench their lust in a sly manner with the people who are unknown to their families. This also provides to them “… an escape from home life and an opportunity to have some quality private time. These men can satisfy their repressed sexual desires. It is no wonder that many of these affairs are with men outside their social circle and who are not a part of their cultural community.”

Besides such intimate casual relationships, Dattani also creates in his plays some minor characters who tend to provide glimpses into the realities of life outside the family and other important relationships. They tend to place these relationships in a clear context of social traditions and expectations and they also reveal how casual conversations and acquaintances impart to the theme a texture of average routine life. For example, the coconut seller in Do the Needful takes keen interest in knowing as to whom the Gowdas are thinking of giving their daughter, Lata, in marriage. His words like ‘Latamma’ reveal a sense of belongingness which he feels with the Gowdas, his people. The way he feels shocked when he learns that the boy is a Patel suggests a kind of tribal sensibility and attitude of a traditional ‘Kannad’ man. Giving a daughter in marriage to the Patels is for him no lesser a sin than watching one’s own mother being raped. Through the relationship of the vendor with the Patels, Dattani brings out the huge gulf between the values and attitudes of tradition-bound society on the one hand and the modern educated urban men and women on the other. This not only exposes the contradictions in Indian society but also makes its depiction in the play realistic and appealing.

Through a series of these miscellaneous relationships, Dattani enlarges the range of his subject and reveals a vast variety of human ties which one forges and lives through in life. They appear to be as essential a part of real human existence as the primary relationships. Through them, he tends to shed greater light on his major themes and characters. That is why, an understanding of these casual acquaintances and ties appears to be so important in appreciating various aspects of Dattani’s concerns and his skill as an artist to dramatize them in a realistic and critical manner.
Notes


12Asha Kuthari Chaudhari, *Contemporary Indian Writing in English: Mahesh Dattani*, p.31.


ibid.
