Chapter-1

Introduction

Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian playwright to be honoured with the prestigious Sahitya Academy award for his *Final Solutions* and *Other Plays* (1998). He is a well known theatre practitioner as well, who also writes plays for BBC Radio. A seasoned director and playwright, Mahesh Dattani is ranked among the most successful stage-directors and playwrights whose plays have been staged successfully in India and abroad and brought him instant recognition and acclamation. The total corpus of his plays includes stage plays, screen plays and radio plays. His significant plays include *Seven Steps Around the Fire* (1999), *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998), *Do the Needful* (1997), *Final Solutions* (1993), *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991), *Tara* (1990), *Dance Like a Man* (1989) and *Where There’s a Will* (1986). His plays have been included in the syllabi of various universities and are objects of study, research, academic articles and scholarly volumes. The playwright, with his innovative and experimental work of contemporary relevance, has given new directions to Indian Drama.

His handling of social realities and sensational issues like unusual love relationships, same-sex relationships, women’s exploitation, incest and child-sex abuse and communal disharmony has been favourite subjects of study for his critics. A look at the corpus of critical works on him, however, shows that inspite of the huge response his plays have evoked, there are certain significant aspects of his mind and art which have not yet been accorded the critical attention and appreciation they deserve. His treatment of the theme of human relationships can be cited as one of the examples of this limitation in the scholarship and criticism on him.

A survey of critical scholarship available on the plays of Mahesh Dattani shows that his work has generated considerable interest and critical response. The insights provided by the critics reveal many aspects of his plays but since contemporary drama is very complex and employs latest techniques and innovations
in themes, its critical evaluation leaves much to be explored. Moreover, one finds that barring a few full length studies, most of his critics have examined his works in the form of articles, providing thereby a scanty and fragmented view of his dramatic genius. The resulting gaps and imbalances emerge very clearly once one surveys the critical works on Dattani.

Pranav Joshipura’s book *A Critical Study of Mahesh Dattani’s Plays* is one of the very few full-length studies done on Dattani’s works so far. Almost all the important plays of Dattani come up for analysis in his attempt at giving an overall view of their general as well as unique features. According to him, Dattani’s plays:

…principally deal with humanism in general and injustice to marginalized section of society such as homosexuals, hijras and women, in particular. In all of them, he provokes our thinking, compels us to think afresh about the problems… and to change our conventional attitudes and assumptions about what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil.²

Pranav thinks that Dattani “…is not a preacher”³ and has “no new doctrine to propound.”⁴

It seems that the critic, instead of focusing on Dattani in an objective and critical manner, makes a very subjective reading of his plays reflecting his personal inclinations and point of view. In his own words, his effort is aimed at collecting “…what lies scattered in his plays, and construct from the material Dattani, the man and Dattani, the artist.”⁵ Because of his subjective interpretations of Dattani’s works, many of the other critics may raise their eye-brows on what he has asserted in his study.

Among Dattani’s critics, the study of gay-themes and alternate sexuality has been among the most noticeable areas of interest. But most of the writers on this theme have tried to project him as the champion of gay-movement in Indian theatre. For example, Santosh Chakrabarti in her article “Gray Areas: Dattani’s World of Drama” views that Dattani “…is remarkable not only for his wide spectrum of interest in contemporary socio-political problems, but for his bold treatment of taboo
subjects in his plays. Santosh Chakrabarti’s study is an example of how critics tend to ignore the complexity and depth in Dattani’s treatment of these issues. While discussing the gay-themes in Dattani’s plays, the writer has not given enough space as to how the relationships are screwed and affected in families due to the non-acceptance of gay relationships.

Like Chakrabarti, Chittaranjan Mishra also finds that Dattani challenges the heterosexual behavior normally considered as central to our culture. But, a critical look at these studies suggests that both Santosh Chakrabarti and Chittaranjan Mishra fail to provide real insights into the complexities and tensions of gay life, and their studies, at best, give to the reader critical summaries of his plays. The lack of incisiveness is evident, for example, from their inability to explore the mental agony of Kamlesh and his sister, Kiran, and the pain of Anarkali and Uma. The essays, in fact, appear to deal rather simplistically with Dattani’s treatment of the life of the homosexuals.

In a similar manner, N. Sharda Iyer has discussed Dattani’s plays dealing with the same theme in his article “Mahesh Dattani and ‘The Gay’ Literature.” Confining his study only to the thematic concerns, he failed to provide any glimpse into the minds of the protagonists in these plays, their sufferings and predicaments. B.P. Sinha, too, in his article “Mahesh Dattani: Exploring Boundaries of Alternate Sexuality” provides only a thematic study of the plays of Dattani but the conflicts in interpersonal relationships have not been explored fully and a clear picture of the causes and impacts of conflict in human relationships does not emerge from these essays.

Another critic Sangeeta Das in her article “The Sensational Issues in the plays of Mahesh Dattani” gives us some glimpses into such hidden issues that exist in society and individuals accept them unconsciously. It seems that the article ignores the vital aspects of Dattani’s concern, his treatment of complex relationships of the homosexuals and the pain of the eunuchs.
Like Sangeeta Das, Beena Agrawal’s article “Taboo Relationship and Alternate Sexuality: On a Muggy Night in Mumbai and Do the Needful” deals with the theme of taboo relationships and homosexuality. Beena discusses this theme rather from socio-psychological point of view. She investigates “… how the human aspirations are insignificant in contrast of social faiths”\(^\text{11}\) and “… the fact that the invisible clutches of social forces can never permit an individual to carve his own designs beyond the patterns recommended and accepted by society.”\(^\text{12}\) The article provides insights into different dimensions of thought – biological, social, moral and psychological – that the concept of homosexuality involves. It seems that Beena has ignored Dattani’s deep and abiding concern in understanding and dramatizing the reality of such relationships amidst all conflict.

One can notice that Dattani has given considerable space to the eunuchs and highlighted their miseries, the physical and sexual abuse, violence and other discriminations which they have to face. Critics like Beena Agrawal and Miruna George have tried to analyse the playwright’s treatment of the eunuchs in their articles.

In “The Voice of Subalterns in Seven Steps Around the Fire,” Beena Agrawal discusses how “Dattani ventures to explore the misery of other marginalized sections of society struggling against the irresistible forces of social apathy.”\(^\text{13}\) She probes deep into the suffering of eunuchs like Anarkali and Kamala from the perspective of their subalternity in heterosexual society. Her assertions suggest that “Dattani has the potential to extract the innermost recesses of human psyche that compels an individual to make perpetual struggle against the forces that makes oddities of life difficult to bear.”\(^\text{14}\) But her preoccupation with the subaltern status of the ‘hijras’ and the insensitivity of people towards their predicament excludes from her view and vision the unique human bonds the hijras share amongst themselves.

A similar limitation is discernable in Miruna George’s study which projects Dattani as a radical thinker who endows the eunuchs with “self dignity, inner strength and the courage to endure their pains and struggles… intends to shatter the social
norms and challenge their assumptions.” She also highlights Uma’s genuine concern and interest in demanding justice for the suffering eunuchs.

Besides the theme of the life of homosexuals and eunuchs, some of the critics have also turned their attention to the theme of gender discrimination in Dattani’s plays. Beena Agrawal in her article “A Socio-Psychological Analysis of Gender Identity in Tara” discusses the issue of gender-bias in the play and establishes the view that “The social relevance of the play has been subordinated to psycho-philosophical issues integrated in gender bias.” Though her study is interesting, one feels that different dimensions and manifestations of gender-discrimination have not been fully analysed. For example, causes of change in gender attitudes between the older generation and the younger one indicated in the play receive no attention from her. Moreover, relationship between Bharati and Patel too has been discussed rather superficially. Another article by the same critic “Dynamics of Human Relationship in Mahesh Dattani’s Tara” is an investigation into the cause-and-effect pattern in the relationship between Tara and Chandan. In this context, she emphasizes the “… realization of the identity of distinctive selves working in union in the comprehensive scheme of things.” But here too the focus of the critic remains centered almost exclusively on Tara-Chandan relation, ignoring thereby other forms of family and social ties depicted by Dattani.

Santwana Halder in “Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani’s Tara: A Study of Prejudice in Patriarchal Society” brings out attitudes of discrimination against the girl child in a male-dominated society. She focuses particularly on the anguish of Tara caused not only by the social prejudices that have rendered her handicapped. According to her, “Tara is not to be treated as a girl who is physically handicapped by the very fact that she has been born with the gender she has.” She appears to be very much right when she highlights potentials, energies and intelligence of Tara greater than those of her brother, Chandan. But, Chandan’s predicament, his sensitivity, honest introspection and rebellion against the established patriarchal code do not get the appreciation they deserve from the critic.
Like Santwana Halder, Gajender Kumar in his article “The Elements of Alienation and Death in *Tara*: A Psychoanalytic Study” also focuses on the painful position of women in society. He also discusses the guilt of Chandan who turns into Dan. The critic argues that Chandan “… cannot be accountable for Tara’s demise but he bears the agony of his mother and grand-father.”19 Making passing references to psychoanalytic approach of Lacan, pleasure principle of Freud and Derridean forms of structuralist theories in his attempt to read the play *Tara*, Gajender Kumar concludes, “In critical ambit *Tara*, a play is neither a saga of Chandan’s alienation nor Tara’s death albeit, it is a tragic tale of the patriarchal society which is bruised by gender preference.”20

Almost similar views have been expressed by Sarika Srivastva in her article “Mahesh Dattani’s *Tara*: Gender Preferences in Indian Culture.” She draws attention to the sexual realities of society in which “… a woman is always subordinate to man, and, inspite of all claims at modernity, she is still a second grade citizen.”21 The article talks about the sufferings of Tara, taking no note of the pain and anguish of Chandan as well as those of their mother, Bharati.

This trend of focus and opinion on the play *Tara* marks the articles by Tanu Pant22, Sangeeta Das23, Subhash Chandra24, G. J. V Prasad25, Khobragade Grishma Manikro26, Vivekanand Jha27 and Mahesh B. Dholiya28. Their interpretations and commentaries appear to be rather repetitive and fail to go beyond the most obvious issue of discrimination against the girl child in Indian society. None of them, it appears, has spared critical attention for such issues as the role of the peer group in the life of a disabled child and the impact of commercialization on human relationships and ethics. It seems that deeper psychological and social insights elude their critical endeavours.

Besides the issue of deviant sexuality and gender discrimination, Indian family, particularly in urban middle classes, has also attracted considerable attention of Dattani’s readers. It is not infact surprising because family appears to occupy a place of paramount importance in the range of playwright’s concerns. Critically, family unit is the epicenter of his theatrical world where most shocks and jerks are
experienced. Arpa Ghosh in her article “Hypocrisy and Hollowness in the Indian Joint Family System: A study of Mahesh Dattani’s Plays” examines the depiction of the grim and disturbing picture of Indian family life with a special focus on *Bravely Fought the Queen, Tara, Dance Like a Man and Thirty Days in September*. She brings out the contrast between the glitz and glamour of public life with the emotional and moral bankruptcy of private life. Indian upper class hypocrisy within the precincts of the joint family, woman acting as betrayer of her own sex to facilitate male preeminence in Indian family, social prejudice against non-conforming professions like dance, girl-child’s molestation in the hands of trusted relatives, lack of family support and refusal to acknowledge the existence of the problem typical of Indian joint family system are the issues which Arpa has raised in her well-argued article. She sums up that “The picture that Dattani draws is overwhelmingly pessimistic. Yet by withholding easy solutions and facile denouements in his plays he does provoke the audience to sensitize itself to the stark reality of the Indian family.”29 As Arpa Ghosh has taken a range of issues and some vital aspects of Dattani’s concerns in a single article, a more detailed and indepth analysis has escaped her probing gaze.

Dr. Laxmi Sharma, Jai Shanker Jha, Mukesh Verma and Ashwini Kumar Vishnu are among the critics who have discussed the play *Where There’s a Will* in a family locale. Dr. Laxmi Sharma’s article “An exploration of Mahesh Dattani’s Play: *Where There’s a Will*” provides a critical summary of the play. Dr. Laxmi comments that “The play *Where There’s a Will* is a comic caricature with the family as a locale. The focus of the dramatist is on the issues like gender discrimination and the domination authority.”30 Dr. Laxmi Sharma does talk curiously about the domination of patriarchal authority but nowhere does she seems to make any serious attempt to explore, interpret and reveal the workings of Hasmukh’s mind, and fails to spotlight the forces and driving forces operative in the psyche of characters like Hasmukh Mehta. She also has nothing to say about the behaviour and psychology of women character, influences the entire gamut of their relationships.

This lopsidedness appears to characterize the study of *Where There’s a Will* by Jai Shankar Jha as well as. In his article “Death as Discovery in Dattani’s *Where...*
There’s a Will’ deals with the way Hasmukh retaliates, and prior to death executes a will to exercise his control over his family even after his death. The whole article is focussed on the events that happen after his death and the writer sums up that “Hasmukh’s death paves the way for an entry to the new zone of awareness for all including Hasmukh.”31 Since the whole focus of the article remains confined to Hasmukh Mehta, his patriarchal authority, his ego and will to control everyone in his family, some vital aspects of the causes and consequences of what he does and how it affects others, including his wife, son and daughter-in-law, escape the critics notice. As a result of this, some very useful insights which the play provides about the dynamics of human relationships elude his attention.

Where There’s a Will has also come up for study by critics such as Mukesh Ranjan Verma,32 Ashwini Kumar Vishnu,33 Daxa Thakor34 and Beena Agrawal.35 “Mahesh Dattani’s Where There’s a Will: Exorcising the Patriarchal Code” by Mukesh Ranjan Verma largely offers passing comments on different relationships which constitute the plot of the play. Hasmukh’s relationships with his wife, mistress, son and daughter-in-law have been described in this article without even taking into account the patriarchal system of values and outlook which the article foregrounds in its title. The essay, infact, seems to add nothing to what has already been said by critics discussed here.

One leaves the article “The Man, The Mistress, The Will: The Motifs in Mahesh Dattani’s Where There’s a Will” by Ashwini Kumar Vishnu with much the same feeling. Here, too, the main concern is with the theme of profligacy in marriage making little efforts to go beneath the surface and explore the complexity in the relationship which the play so subtly dramatizes. Indepth analysis of the real human aspects of the behavior of the characters, therefore, remains conspicuous by its absence, resulting in a failure to grasp the significant aspect of Dattani’s social consciousness.

Among these articles on the play, however, Beena Agrawal’s essay “Where There’s a Will – A Comic Caricature of Patriarchal Authority,” stands out as an interesting and useful piece of study. She evinces how “Dattani efficiently
manipulates the incidents for self-enlightenment to explore the illusion of false authority.” 36 Going deep into the workings of the mind of a dominating and self-assertive patriarch, she makes insightful psychological analysis. She suggests that the passion for power and domination, in fact, conceals the feelings of insecurity and lack of self-confidence of an individual. Though insightful, the essay doesn’t adequately explore the socio-psychological aspects of the behaviour of Kiran and Sonal. Factors responsible for Kiran becoming a mistress and Sonal, Hasmulh’s wife, being so surveille to her husband and dependent upon her sister find little space in this study. The growth of these characters, signifying hope and potentials for positive development, therefore, does not get the attention of Dattani’s view of human situations.

If Where There’s a Will mainly draws the attention of the critics on issue of the domination of patriarchal authority, Dance Like a Man generates a lot of discussion and controversy on the theme of politics of gender. In Dance Like a Man, Dattani’s dramatic art unveils the painful tale of individuals trapped in convention-bound family which hampers the flourishing of art and dance. Beena Agrawal’s article “Gender Issues in Dance Like a Man: A Socio-Psychological Analysis” provides insights into the issue of gender roles which is not only a socio-cultural phenomenon but is integrated in human consciousness and is closely associated with individual choices and self-identity. She observes that “The social convention of gender binary spoiling the grace of life both for male and female is the focal point of the play Dance Like a Man.” 37 The critic also traces the reasons of conflict in the father-son relationships in the play and reveals that it “…is a conflict of colonial sensibility and progressive ideology, social expectations and individual choices.” 38 Since her article does not explore the changing attitudes and patterns of relationships in successive generations due to constantly evolving social realities and values, it fails to give a holistic idea of the playwright’s vision of life.

Like Beena Agrawal, critics like Bipin R. Parmar, 39 Shilpi Rishi Srivastva 40 and Tejwant Singh Gill, 41 too, have tried to depict generational and cultural conflict in the play. Bipin R. Parmar in his article “Tradition versus Modernity in Mahesh Dattani’s Dance Like a Man” tries to present his dictum that the play encapsulates its
characters’ “… present tension and past struggle as well as their present efforts and past discontentment” 42 and without substantiating his argument with a detailed analysis of textual illustrations, he concludes that the play “… ends with a compromising tone…. Jairaj and Ratna realized the futility and limitations as human beings. They understand that they lack the grace and brilliance… realizes their past mistakes… dance together with a remarkable change of heart and develop better understanding.” 43 Though the title of the essay foregrounds ‘Tradition and Modernity,’ its focus remains blurred and gets restricted to a discussion of conflict between the father and the son. Moreover, the modern generation of Lata and Viswas doesn’t find much space in the whole discussion. The study, therefore, fails to say anything significant about the issue it sets out to deal with.

Similar limitations characterize the article by Shipli Rishi Srivastva, where she attempts to define cultural fissures in the play. In “Mahesh Dattani’s Dance Like a Man: An Intimate Portrayal of Cultural Fissures,” she simply narrates the story of Jairaj and Ratna, two Bharatnatyam dancers who keep on “… oscillating between the present and time gone by.” 44 Instead of depicting the ‘cultural fissures’ as the title of the article promises, she grapples more with the husband-wife discord and the role of Amritlal in ruining the life of his son. She concludes her essay commenting that “Dattani’s Dance Like a Man is an appreciating effort at giving a new life to languishing craft of dance form that has a history of oppression and renaissance.” 45 But a close look at the essay, however, leaves the reader a bit disappointed due to its preoccupation mainly with the story of Ratna and Jairaj. The real cultural clash in varying forms and dimensions through the changing tastes, interests, perceptions and values of the three generations of Amritlal, Jairaj, and Ratna has not been explored incisively by the critic.

This tendency of talking about what is most obvious about the play and not exploring its depths appears to characterize the studies of Thirty Days in September also. The question of incest in close family relations is the apparent theme of this play. But how and why it often happens and in what different ways it is usually dealt with by the victims and those to whom the sufferer can turn for help have not been studied with the cause-and-effect analysis. This is what one finds in most of the
articles, including the ones by such notable critics as Asha Kuthari Chaudhari, Santosh Kumar Sonker, Smita R. Nagori and Beena Agrawal.

Asha Kuthari Chaudhari in her article “Numbness is all: Thirty Days in September” discerningly comments: “Child sexual abuse spans a range of problems, but it is this complicity of the family through silence and a lack of protest that it is the ultimate betrayal for the abused.” 46 Dattani sets his plays in the upper middle class family which rather sweeps such issues under the carpet and happily imagines that it does not exist. Asha Kuthari sums up her article commenting that “This is exactly how Dattani would penetrate below the surface, subvert the complacent beliefs that everyday reality is constructed with, and make visible the invisible issues that haunt so many of his plays.” 47

Asha Kuthari has touched upon many significant aspects of the problem of incest in her small-sized review and has thus hinted at the depths and complexities of the problem necessitating further indepth study of this tabooed topic. Due to the preoccupation of the critic with the question of child-sex abuse in general, the article does not examine in any detail Dattani’s treatment of this theme. This is, perhaps, because of the very limited space of the article which doesn’t accommodate a detailed analysis of different types of relationships, essential for a proper appreciation of the play.

Unlike Asha Kuthari, Santosh Kumar Sonker’s approach is characterized by a focus on analyzing and criticizing “…such social stigma as the practice of incestuous relationship, the social taboos which define women as pain bearers, and the effects of child-sex abuse on an individual’s psyche.” 48 He substantiates his study with analysis of the text of the play and concludes that “Thirty Days in September is essentially a family play.” 49 According to him, “Dattani has raised his voice against child-sex abuse, especially in the case of incest which ruins the lives of the victims breeding not only the physical anguish but also the mental distortion, and has challenged the social customs which define women as a silent receiver of pain by presenting the clash between mother and daughter.” 50 Sonker’s attempt, of course, does shed light on the mother-daughter relationship with a special focus on the importance of the need of
communication and mutual understanding between the two. But what his critical mind fails to take account of is the role of Deepak who appears as a sympathetic, understanding and broad-minded young man, a fact that introduces some element of hope and optimism in the plot of play.

Like most of the other critics of the play, Smita R. Nagori in her article “Emotionally Strangulated Relationships in Dattani’s Thirty Days in September” brings home “… the horrors and pains of a very identifiable mother-daughter relationship who are victims of incest and child sexual abuse.” After throwing considerable light on the causes and effects responsible for spoiling the mother-daughter relationship, the critic, after telling the story of the play, reaches her conclusion about the mother-daughter relationships that is “… entirely metamorphosed” towards the end of the play. But Smita Nagori has not taken due cognizance of certain unnerving situations dramatized in the play like the alienation of Mala and her chaotic state of mind. None of the above critics pay attention to the ray of hope that Dattani has shown in the end of the play. Though lack of communication strangulates the relations and incest threatens to break family, love helps to keep it intact. The critics overlook that the mother-daughter union in the end shows the triumph of love over depression, and that is what Dattani wants to convey.

If Thirty Days in September deals with the problem of child-incest, Final Solutions foregrounds the most talked about problem of India, the communal disharmony between Hindu and Muslims. Dattani’s handling of communal violence and tensions in the play has attracted the attention of many critics. Bijay Kumar Das in his study “Themes in Mahesh Dattani’s Plays” sheds light on the nature and causes of violence dramatized in the play. But what, in fact, the critic gives is a brief and critical summary of the play without any discernable analysis of the element of mistrust in the heart of the people of two communities. Bijay Kumar Das concludes that “…the play appears to be a little didactic …and the solutions hinted at in the end… seem to be too simplistic.” The main objection of the critic is that “In a communal situation, only the liberal section of one religion speaks about reconciliation and criticize their own religion but people of another faith never find fault with the lacunae in their religion.” Perhaps the critic fails to read the
complexity and complications of the matrix of violence in the play and the various reasons working behind it. Dattani only hints at the possible solutions and if one community can criticize itself “…that should be seen as a virtue than a failing” 55 as Dattani himself writes to B. K. Das. S. S. Sharma in “The Thematic Trust of Dattani’s _Final Solutions,_” is sharply divided in his opinion with Bijay Kumar Das. He finds that “The diagnosis offered (by Dattani) is sound enough” 56 and he touches upon the malady of communal disharmony to certain elements within both the communities but he fails to understand fully and render realistically the range and complexity of these issues.

Amar Nath Prasad,57 Pramod Kumar Singh,58 Dr. S.S.Gill,59 Gouri Nilakantah,60 Satish Barbuddhe,61 Angelie Multani,62 Swati Pal,63 Deepali Agrawal and Abin Chakraborty65 are some of the other critics who have analyzed the play _Final Solutions_ from different perspectives. Dr. S.S.Gill’s “Critique of Violence: Mahesh Dattani’s _Final Solutions_” is a perceptive study where the author finds that Dattani has very objectively taken the issue “in different contexts and situations.” 66 The writer focuses upon the reasons for communal hatred and finds that “…the apparently friendly relations between Muslims and Hindus have simmering currents of hatred beneath.” 67 A close study of the article reveals that it is mainly based on character analysis. He sums up his article with the observations that the play “…is not overtly didactic but does make a forceful appeal for love and broader understanding.”68 His article, though quite illuminating in some ways, tends to ignore the complex socio-psychological factors responsible for tensions between the two communities.

Amar Nath Prasad and Pramod Kumar Singh in their article “Mahesh Dattani’s _Final Solutions:_ A Drama of Social Maladies” show how the older and the younger generations in the play think on the same issue differently and find that Dattani “…not only gives solution but also shows the reality behind the riots.” 69 Like Dr. S. S. Gill, these scholars also comment upon the reasons as well as the consequences of communal riots depicted in the play. They find that Dattani’s primary concern “is to expose the various maladies of society and whenever necessary to give proper solutions.” 70 But like most of the other studies, their
attempt, too, speaks of the issues visible on the surface. It doesn’t satisfy the curiosity of the reader to learn why and how men and women turn communal-minded and how misunderstandings between the communities play havoc not only with the social harmony but also with the peace and equipoise of the individual. The conflict between one’s human conscience on the one hand and the behaviour of the same person as a hardened criminal on the other has been conveniently overlooked by almost all the critics on the play. As a result of this, the real hope which lies within the authentic and honest human self and which has moments of awakening even in the ruthless rioters like Javed escapes the attention of even the most appreciative of Dattani’s critics.

Apart from reading Dattani’s plays from socio-psychological angle, some critics on Dattani have also approached his plays using postcolonial perspective. Gauri Shankar Jha is one of those few writers who have studied many of Dattani’s plays in postcolonial context. In his well-argued essay “Dattani’s Exercise in Post colonialism,” he discusses that Indian writing in English is a genuine expression of our profound post-colonial civilizational crisis, signifying the disparity between the publicity it attracts and its ability to reflect our social lives. He comments that “Mahesh Dattani emerges as a compelling playwright who rearranges the social fabrication and projects the postcolonial dichotomy operating at different levels.”

Jha estimates Dattani on two counts: first, his concern for women and secondly, his depiction of the world of homosexuals and eunuchs. The critic compares Dattani to Kofka and Camus, Sartre and Saul Bellow, Elison and Malamud, whose characters are products of colonial consciousness and they are in search of their identities.

Jha has raised several questions which haunt Dattani in concern with the homosexuals, and he says that “I feel, most of the questions remain unanswered. And so is Dattani who proves inconclusive in his drive towards settlement of such controversies…rather it is the failure of postcolonial claims to resolve all complications in a unique way.” The statement appears to be very limited and lopsided, failing to underline Dattani’s faith in the possibility of a change for the better. A close study of his plays reveals Dattani’s concern for the homosexuals with the hidden agenda for getting the social approval for taboo relationships. In order to
revamp the system of social thinking, Dattani always focuses on the possibility of change in people’s attitudes and calls for a relaxation in the rigidity of social taboos, beliefs and value systems.

Gouri Nilakantan Mehta, in her article “Dismembering Traditions within Postcolonial Context: A Retrospective Look into Dance Like a Man” places another play Dance Like a Man in postcolonial context “…which maintains both cultural assimilation as well as cultural alienation”73 as a hallmark of postcolonial literature. The critic studies Dattani’s writings as a literary process that indicates ‘metonymy of presence’ that places his plays amid power relations of tradition within cultural frameworks. Gouri finds that Dattani has transgressed the traditional orthodox boundaries that exist in literary circles in India. The writer reveals that Dattani reflects a postcolonial condition and his play Dance Like a Man “…is representative of a postcolonial condition, of ambivalent cultural moods, forms, transitions and translations in Indian society.” 74 The whole article tends to emphasize the cultural clashes and dismembering of tradition, completely ignoring the effect of these clashes and crises on the nature of human relationships in the play.

Beena Agrawal’s “Breaking the Margins and Making the Spaces: A Post Colonial Analysis of Bravely Fought the Queen” is an interesting and illuminating attempt at analyzing Dattani’s efforts to expose the position of women in conventional society and how “…he takes a radical and rational vision against sentimental and conventional vision popular in Indian society.” 75 She examines the clash between traditional ideology and contemporary culture when inspite of their preoccupation in the periphery of family, women are capable to turn back to their oppressors. Because of her exclusive concern with postcolonial aspects, multi-dimensional element of conflict in the play goes unappreciated by the critic.

It is evident from this brief survey of critical works on Dattani’s plays that most of the studies are in the forms of articles and papers, as a result of which they fail to provide a comprehensive and consistent view of his mind and art. The narrowing of focus only on some of the themes and concern of the playwright tends to give a limited and lopsided view of the range of issues he has dealt with. The
resultant gaps and imbalances make it difficult for the reader to arrive at a fair appreciation of Dattani’s perspective and vision of life. Limitations in the existing criticism make it necessary, therefore, to approach his works afresh and analyze the hitherto ignored or inadequately examined areas of his concerns. The theme of human relationships, forming the very warp and woof of his art of drama, is one of the areas which have not yet been analyzed in their depths and details in any of the full-length studies. A focus on this theme can enable us to remove gaps and imbalances in the scholarship extant on the dramatist. It is with this objective in mind that an attempt is made here to investigate the wide spectrum of human relationships in his representative plays. But before an attempt is made to analyze Dattani’s treatment of this theme, it appears to be appropriate here to explain, in brief, the nature and types of relationships to be dealt with in this study.

Because man is a social being, human relationships have always been a source of interest for thinkers, researchers and also the common man. The pivotal significance of human relationships which one develops from birth to death in course of life is underlined by the fact that a person’s success or failure is measured by the kind of relationship he has with others around. According to Allen J. Boone, “The most effective way to achieve right relations with any living thing is to look for the best in it and then help that best into the fullest expression.” 76 But it is also true that striking the right chord in a relationship often proves a hard nut to crack. Irrespective of their age, gender, language, region, religion, race and nationality, all human beings crave for and certainly need relations. A relationship “…involves a series of interactions between two individuals known to each other. Relationships involve behavioural, cognitive and affective (emotional) aspects.” 77 People have a pervasive, nearly universal need to belong. A research suggests that people “…are eager to form new bonds… devote considerable cognitive processing to interpersonal interactions and relationships.” 78 They are a key to well being of individuals. A plethora of evidences shows that “…close relationships are indeed vital to various indications of well being, including happiness, mental health, physical health and even longevity….” 79 Infact, one can say that without relationships and social groups,
humans would not be able to survive as “… they provide an individual with a sense of safety and security. They can relieve distress and anxiety in times of need.” 80

They are a fundamental source of learning and act as a secure base from which one can explore and develop one’s identity as “…they incorporate the qualities that best promote competence and well being – individualized responsiveness, mutual action-and-interaction and an emotional connection to another human being, be it a parent, peer, grandparent, spouse,… or any other person.” 81

Relationships affect virtually all aspects of an individual’s development – intellectual, social, emotional, physical, behavioural and moral. The quality and stability of relationships lay the foundation for a wide range of later developmental outcomes that really matter – self-confidence, sound mental health, motivation to learn, ability to control aggressive impulses and resolve conflicts. Psychologists find that strong relationships “…seem to buffer people from the pathogenic effects of stress. In the face of stressful life, people who have intimate relationships have fewer stress related symptoms….” 82

Positive relationship supports development and learning, “…increases physical health and psychological well being…offers opportunities for self-disclosure, companionship and enjoyable interactions.” 83 They contribute to the growth of a broad range of competencies of emotions, commitment, morality and other aspects of human relationships. Relationships, though rewarding in many ways, can sometimes become problematic as “… people involved in close relationships experience stress because of circumstances that occur outside of their relationships as well as the events inside…that they themselves instigate.” 84 Conflict arises when one is not able to cope with the expectations such as affection, trust and cohesiveness necessary for sustaining relations. In the absence of such necessary ingredients, relationships deteriorate and tend to show the signs of boredom, resentment, dissatisfaction and aggression. Poor adjustments can lead to the risk of distress, feeling of emptiness and leave a person “…isolated, ignored and depressed. Those caught in poor relationships tend to develop and maintain negative perceptions of self, find life less satisfying…. ”85 For positive growth and development of an individual on the one hand and creating congenial environment around on the other, it is suggested that
relationships should be nurtured carefully. Acitelli comments that “…relationships can be maintained simply by thinking about them and attending to them…” 86 Proper communication is one of the most necessary components for healthy relations, as its absence may prove injurious to any human tie. A. Sillars finds that communication “…is seen as the means by which people construct and maintain relationships… it is the central process giving shape to relationships.” 87

If mutual trust, intimacy, self-disclosure, commitment and consistency appear to be integrally associated with satisfaction and stability in relationships, it is love and forgiveness that provide depth to human relations and make people think expansively about others. For creating harmony in relations, one has to consider that every individual has his or her own way of understanding and formulating relationships. That is why, it is necessary to accept and respect differences. Wilmot also opines that “…two ways to rejuvenate relationships are to accept and forgive and to reassess the importance of relationships.” 88

The expansion of human relationships results in a wide variety of forms. They can be personal, impersonal, close or distant. An individual experiences his first emotional bonding with his family and as he grows up he has a whole web of relationships around him. Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships and these affect virtually all aspects of their development. “The initial bond between a family and the child is comparable to the strength and foundation of the Ancient Egypt Pyramids – without that foundation, there is nothing and it’s hard to build up…. A family’s guidance, patience and support… cannot be replaced… it is priceless….” 89 Family is an important support group that creates a sense of belongingness, as it provides assistance in helping one interact with the wider social world. Whereas supportive and nurturing family ties contribute to an individual’s well being, tension, distress and misery are the natural outcomes if the family members are disunited.

Familial relations include a range of ties like those between husband and wife, siblings, different generations and many more. Relations are also formed in the context of social, cultural and other influences. The context can vary from family or kinship ties to social relations like bonding with peers, friends, neighbours and
business associates etc. Some of such ties have a deep and long lasting impact on an individual’s life while others are casual, having fleeting nature.

It appears, therefore, that human life cannot be conceived in the absence of relationships. As they have a wide variety, they often serve as the central focus in the works of literature. In particular, most of writers explore and highlight the dynamics of relationships in their works. This theme is, in fact, central to the very nature of drama. Mahesh Dattani has also dramatized the whole gamut of relationships and his plays offer an excellent study on human relationships where he penetratively, thoughtprovokingly and skillfully handles the intricacies and workings of human bonding in modern times. Most of his plays focus on the decaying face of human relationships without trying to falsify, romanticize, philosophize or metaphysicalize them. His range and understanding of this phenomenon of human life is so comprehensive that he seems to have left no aspect of it uncovered. He writes about relationships – supportive and non-supportive, friendly and hostile and those between the exploiter and the exploited. They have been depicted so powerfully and authentically that they tend to touch chords in every human heart and appeal to the audience as realistic and convincing. One of the secrets of his success as a major dramatist of Indian life seems to lie in his ability to treat this theme with a perspective characterized by a holistic approach to its constantly changing meanings, dimensions and directions. The roots of this feature of his art and mind can easily be traced to his social, cultural and educational background. Since a writer’s perspective serves as a principle of selection and organization of content and form and infuses them with meaning and aesthetic effect, an investigation into the writer’s view and vision of life, his understanding of human nature and contemporary realities also acquire importance. A brief critical look, therefore, at his milieu and readings which shaped his mind and art appears to be useful here.

Mahesh Dattani was born on 7th Aug., 1958 in Bangalore where his parents had moved to from Gujarat. It was the time which marked the beginning of rapid changes in Indian society. The rapid social, economic and cultural growth brought a tremendous change in human thinking and sensibility: “Increasing material prosperity, a desire to
acquire cultural capital, a confident, almost aggressive pursuit of individual goal [can be] seen as necessary attributes of modern life.”

All these factors changed not only the life style of people including their sense of morality but also brought about a shift in human relationships as well. This generation has, in a sense, rejected the very premise on which Indian society had survived for a long time. “What we call a modern India is really a negation of real India” says Dattani in one of his interviews. Its effects could easily be perceived, among other things, on the nature and quality of human ties. Increasing migration to urban areas tended to weaken relationships with the relatives living in the rural places and thus the sanctity and stability of family bonding came under a lot of pressure. The demands of survival in cities and the struggle for improvement in economic status encouraged the growth of individualism and money-centric ethics. The sense of greater freedom and exposure to new opportunities and facilities, accompanied by the impact of western attitude towards sex, contributed much to the transformation of the sexual attitudes of the younger Indian generation. Its consequences in the form of conflicts between the older generation and the younger one are easily understandable.

Though India had won freedom in 1947, the attitudinal and psychological freedom from the hold of the west still eluded the Indian mind. This was reflected, as it can be seen even today, in the tendency to take pride in providing children education in convents or in public schools. This is exactly what happened in the case of Dattani, too, who was sent to Baldwins, where the medium of communication was strictly English, and he was trained to see Indian life through the lens of the western culture. It was only in his late teens, when he got the opportunity to watch Gujarati and Kannad plays, that he realized how ignorant he was of the world at his door step. He regrets and confesses, “I realized I had to unlearn a lot that I learnt in school. That is when my true education really began.”

It threw him into a lot of confusion and turbulence but it also marked a beginning of his discovery of things about himself: “I began to discover things about myself… of how caught up I was in imitating the west. How Eurocentric my world view was….”
This exposure of Baldwins to the western mind as well as to the realities of Indian society and culture proved, in a way, a blessing for the Indian theatre. His Gujarati family background and his close observation of the Indian society, its institutions, values, manners and morals provided him with a fertile ground to cultivate his talent and reap its rich rewards in the form of his plays. But its unique and distinctive power owes much to his English education which had equipped him to look at things with searching and questioning eyes in order to discover and reveal truth behind the appearance in a bold but captivating and exciting manner. The very life style he chose as a man for himself indicated the artist to come. He, instead of joining his father’s business and leading an ordinary married life, devoted himself to theatre completely, and started unfolding the layers of hypocrisies which surround the Indian sensibility and spoil the grace of human relationships. He writes about the society in which he lives and his dramatic art is a faithful and authentic expression of his experience and knowledge of his socio-cultural environment. Dattani himself justifies his devotion to depicting contemporary urban milieu where he sees “… the clashes of the old and new in our society and especially on a familial level, on a societal level.” 94 He depicts how established norms in society suppress an individual’s urge and passion causing mental agony to the individual concerned.

Dattani believes “…there are so many things, tensions, and conflicts that we’re dealing with, that’s what my inspiration is…. I’m writing because these issues are inspiring to me…. The individual versus society, I guess, is a theme that’s in all my plays.”95 While juxtaposing individual with society, Dattani’s plays throw light on the complex relationships which a person shares with his family members as well as with society. Dattani not only writes about people in society but also about those who live on the fringes of gender and sexuality, not much spoken about in our culture. To create a greater understanding of humanity, Dattani writes about invisible issues which need to be brought out and addressed. After reading his plays, one finds that the main reason of the pain in people’s lives is their unhappy relationships with their families and society.

Once again it is his western education and exposure to the works of great writers like Ibsen, Shaw, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams that provided
sharpness, depth and courage to the dramatist in him committed to bring the odds out. Arthur Miller’s influence is obvious in his writings which is reflected particularly in the inter-generational conflicts presented by him. For example, the older generation represented by Joe and Kate in *All My Sons* and Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* immediately reminds us of the fathers like Hasmukh Mehta and Amritlal in *Where There's a Will* and *Dance Like a Man* by Dattani. He, like Miller, powerfully brings out the huge gap between the aspirations, values and world views of the two generations. Like Miller, Dattani, too, assails the excessive materialism, middle class values and hypocrisies of the older generation.

Like Miller, Tennessee Williams, with his interest in the so called abnormal, maladjusted and marginalized section of society, also had a deep influence on Dattani’s mind. Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Blanche’s husband in *A Street Car Named Desire* bring to mind the homosexuals and the lesbians in Dattani’s *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* and *Do the Needful*. Both of these playwrights display a special interest and knack in laying bare the tensions, anxieties, frustrations and fears of those who are discarded and scorned by the majority of heterosexuals. Tennessee Williams’ insights into this conflict between the natural propensities of an individual and the rigid social norms and values, it seems, have added significantly to Dattani’s perspectives on such issues.

Like Miller and Tennessee Williams, Ibsen and Shaw, with their novelty of approach, clarity of perception and strength of conviction, have further encouraged Dattani to explore and dramatize the hitherto forbidden territories of social and personal life with courage. Like Ibsen, he withholds the audience from cathartic moment when negative passions are purged on the stage, consequently compelling them to carry the frustration of their theatrical experiences with them and think hard about their own unhappy and unsatisfactory circumstances. Dattani, swayed by Bernard Shaw and Ibsen, weds his dramatic credo with stark reality of life. Like them, he, too, unsparingly exposes the unweeded garden of Indian social life and forces the audience to confront the truth about themselves and their world with a view to enlighten and transform their outlook. The influence of all these playwrights combined with Dattani’s education and socio-cultural milieu deepened his interest in
human relationships, a subject matter which has always provoked and fascinated the minds of both the creative and the critical writers.

Infact, human relationships have been at the heart of Dattani’s dramatic representation where he scrutinizes the crisis and consciences of characters trapped in the web of relationships. The social group that Dattani focuses on is broad, highly varied and differentiated. He deals not only with the primary relations of an individual within the family but lays his focus on the social relations as well. One of the important relationships existing within family is the one between husband and wife. This relationship often appears to be characterized by unhappiness in his plays. Most of the unhappiness is traceable to the nature of the arranged marriages. The emotional and intellectual incompatibilities between husband and wife also emerge as one of the causes of discord in marital ties. Dattani also brings out the debilitating consequences of gender consciousness on this important family relationship. The effects of traditional patriarchal attitudes and behaviour conditioning the conduct of men also come under a sharp scrutiny.

For instance, in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Dattani throws light on the impairment of husband-wife relationship within the joint family. Dolly and Alka represent the predicament of urban Indian women who are trapped in their claustrophobic spaces of domesticity. Jiten has no hesitation in beating his pregnant wife and thus causing permanent harm to her child Nitin, because of his homosexual inclinations, is responsible for the barren state of Alka whose sufferings lead her to drown herself in alcohol. Both the women try to find some relief in their fantasies as realities of their existences are too painful to bear. The play not only highlights the decaying effects of incompatibility in marriages but also traces the social, psychological and moral causes of conflict between the couples, imparting to the treatment of this theme an element of diagnostic and analytical depth.

If *Bravely Fought the Queen* revolves around the emotional and sexual exploitation of wives, *Dance Like a Man* centres on the story of a wife’s ambitions and aspirations resulting in the distortions of husband-wife relationship. While exploring the reasons of the failure of marriage in the play, Dattani hints that Jairaj’s economic dependence on his father and his wife Ratna’s self-centeredness take them
towards ruin. The writer suggests that happiness in married life depends upon mutual respect, trust and understanding. The play contrasts the unhappy relationships between Jairaj and Ratna with the happy ones between Lata and Viswas, representatives of the more liberated younger generation allowing greater space to each other.

This theme gets, once again, a central place in the play *Where There’s a Will*. Here Dattani explores the undercover reality of husband-wife relationship in a comic manner, where the husband finds his marriage ‘saltless’ and holds his wife, Sonal, responsible for lack of sexual and emotional harmony and fulfillment in his life. A wealthy and authoritarian husband as he is, Hasmukh conveniently seeks fulfillment in extra marital-relationships without any qualms.

In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Dattani provides glimpses into marital relations between Uma and Suresh and highlights the dependence of even an educated woman with great potential on her husband, who merely treats her as an object of sexual pleasure. Dattani seems to underscore that the couple, for a happy and meaningful relationship, must base their life on reciprocity, communication and respect for each other’s identities as individuals.

Another important relationship which appears in almost all of his major plays is the one between different generations. These relationships are often fraught with tensions and lack of understanding. The younger generation seems to be in revolt against the older one. The causes behind the conflicts include generation gap, educational differences and changes in socio-cultural milieu.

*Dance Like a Man* throws considerable light on various reasons causing a gulf between different generations. The play powerfully reveals the rigidity in the attitudes of the older generation, which seeks to impose its own will and values upon the younger ones, denying them freedom to live a life at their own terms. Jairaj in the play becomes a victim of his father’s tradition-bound instincts and values and succumbs to his will. The inter-generational conflict in the play is focused mainly on the choice of profession.
The effects of the domineering patriarch on sons also make an interesting study in *Where There’s a Will*. This play exposes the horrors of paternal authority that stifles the individuality and growth of a son. Hasmukh Mehta exercises his hegemonic powers on Ajit. In an attempt to live his own dreams through Ajit, he hampers his growth as an individual and makes him feel inferior, unworthy and incompetent.

While the younger generation in *Dance Like a Man* and *Where There’s a Will* suffers due to the oppressive fathers, in *Do the Needful*, a romantic comedy, Dattani gives a surprising twist to this trend. The younger people, Alpesh and Lata, are clever enough to discard the burden of traditions and social taboos. The study of generation gap in this play is focused on the practice of arranged marriages in traditional Indian society. The parents of both are unaware of the secret agreement between their wards to live a life according to their wishes, and thus to liberate themselves from the hold of tradition-bound society.

But the eponymous girt child in *Tara* becomes the victim of discriminatory decision of the older generation and suffers a lot for no fault of hers. The cruelty of parents not only takes away Tara’s life but also fills their son with strong feelings of guilt and dejection.

The role of Baa, an embodiment of older generation, in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, is also of disruptive kind. She fills the lives of her daughters-in-law, Alka and Dolly, with unending sufferings and constantly pours out her venom of bitterness on them. The playwright also traces the reasons behind the frustration of Baa who is unable to separate her trauma of unhappy marriage from her relations with Alka and Dolly. The tensions characterizing these relationships provide to his plays dramatic effects. His treatment of this theme clearly evidences his diagnostic understanding of the problems between generations, hinting at the ways of achieving healthier relations, based on the ethics of mutual recognition and respect for each other.

His plays are not about husband and wife, parents and children alone, but an important place and role is allotted to the siblings as well, something which is unique to his depiction of Indian family scene. He depicts a wide range of sibling–behavioral patterns. How relationships between brother and brother, brother and sister and sister
and sister get charged with shifting emotions and complex motives have been
dramatized probingly by the writer.

In *Tara*, Dattani lays bare the powerful psychological tensions and conflicts raging in the mind of Dan, the brother of Tara, whose leg was given to the former (her brother) by the doctor while separating the Siamese twins. Tara has in her brother an affectionate, caring, sensitive and companionable brother, and she herself passes through various moods and feelings during the course of the drama. Sibling rivalry is absent in their relationship. The death of Tara to Chandan is more than the loss of a sister. It is the loss of his own self which makes him a cripple in the real psychological sense. The memories of his dear sister haunt him throughout his life and he feels that he will be able to unite with Tara only after his death.

If in *Tara*, the siblings love each other greatly, the play *Bravely Fought the Queen* offers a study of intricate relationships of two brothers, Jiten and Nitin, married to two sisters, Alka and Dolly. It also examines the relationships of Praful with his sisters, Dolly and Alka. None of the siblings in the play provide supportive or healthy relation to one another. Jiten completely dominates Nitin who remains a weak character. Praful with his cunningness cheats his own sisters. He not only usurps their property but also beats Alka before her marriage and ruins her marital life as he himself keeps homosexual relations with her husband. Dolly and Alka’s relationships are also filled with bitterness, caused by the tension-ridden atmosphere of the house. Though sometimes they talk and converse in light moments, they never disclose their hearts to each other.

Dattani presents a remarkable study into the subtle intricacies of sibling relationships and provides interesting insights into the factors that play a vital role in determining their behaviour. It is evident when one examines the complicated relations between Sonal and Minal in *Where There’s a Will*. It is obvious in the play that Sonal has always been dominated by her sister Minal as she follows her blindly and bows to her authority. She has submitted her individuality so completely to Minal that she seems to have forfeited her own thinking. She depends on Minal like a cripple and rushes to her guidance even for the trivial matters of day-to-day life. It is only in the company of Kiran that her mental health improves and she becomes self-confident.
and self-dependent and finally succeeds in liberating herself from her sister’s shadow. Dattani in this play underlines the significance of childhood in shaping an individual’s personal, familial and social life.

In Th**irty Days in September**, Dattani places a sharp and critical focus on those unhappy and horrible childhood experiences that tend to go unnoticed or are deliberately ignored by the society. The play tells the story of a small girl of six years who is abused sexually by her brother and it depicts the incalculable harm done to a sister by her brother. Sibling abuse seriously hampered the positive growth of Shanta who suppressed her agony and remained a mute victim due to the feelings of shame, fear and guilt. She is deserted by her husband as she cannot form intimate relations with him. Thus, Dattani has offered a panoramic and insightful view of sibling relationships with multiple shades and nuances. He not only gives the glimpses of happy moments of sibling experiences but also presents the sour realities of this bonding.

Dattani has been bold enough to lend his pen to a relationship often not touched upon - the gay relationship. He has raised this sensational issue and lays open the hypocrisies of social life which only accepts and gives approval to the heterosexual relationships. This relationship has often been regarded as unnatural and perverted. Gays and lesbians are considered to be abnormal and are therefore stigmatized and ostracized. This leads to the suppression by the gays of their own authentic human desires. Their marginalization in society further adds to their woes. All this is dramatized boldly and powerfully in his plays like On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Do the Needful and Seven Steps Around the Fire.

On a Muggy Night in Mumbai deals with the sensitive gay relationships and homosexuality. The play presents a group of well-to-do homosexuals in Mumbai, their changing mutual relationships, their revelations, their self-delusions and self-discoveries. Through this play, Dattani has tried to soften the attitudes of society towards the gays and has subtly tried to arouse compassion for this class.

In Do the Needful, the dual problems of love and homosexuality are deftly handled. In Indian cultural milieu, the institution of marriage is treated as sacred and is thus held in great esteem. But the play depicts Alpesh, who is in a homosexual
relationship with Trilok, and Lata, who also has a pre-marital relationship with a Muslim terrorist, Salim. Though Lata and Alpesh are forced into a marriage by their parents, they deceive their families and go and meet their respective lovers.

In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Dattani provides valuable insights into the life of the eunuchs. The play reveals that society categorically rejects any bond of relationship with them, and any effort in this direction only leads to devastation. Kamala’s murder and Subbu’s suicide are clear examples of the baseless hatred that society harbours against this community. But like other human beings, hijras, too, are social beings and crave for various types of relationships. The playwright depicts the kind of bonding they develop amongst themselves. Champa’s love for Anarkali and Kamla is no less than that of a mother. Through the character of Champa and Anarkali, the play also throws light on Guru-Chela relations.

Dattani’s emphasis on the treatment of queers and eunuchs has been aimed at exposing the psycho-pathetic conditions of those who struggle against fate and society. He exhibits an exceptional dexterity in unfolding the layers of consciousness on such issues as are buried under perpetual silence. The whole presentation is arranged in such a manner that queer relationship “…instead of being recognized as a taboo has become a natural human experience.”

Besides these taboo and familial relationships, Dattani has also dealt with miscellaneous social relationships like those between peers, boss and servant, doctor and patient, communities and even strangers. Through the negative peer relationship in *Tara*, Dattani throws searching and valuable light on the attitude of general public towards the handicapped. Dattani seems to hint at the necessity of regulating the negative peer behaviour through proper socialization in the play. In the same play, the doctor-patient relationship has been presented through Dr. Thakkar who betrays his noble medical profession and ruins the life of the innocent twins. Dattani underscores how the lust for money affects different areas of human relations. Dattani has also dramatized the extra-marital relations in his play, *Where There’s a Will*. He not only portrays the relations of Hasmukh and Kiran, but also throws considerable light on the relation of Kiran with Sonal and other members of Hasmukh’s family. Here Dattani
has given a twist to the stereotyped image of a mistress by showing her human aspect to the readers.

Dattani has also brought on stage the important social arena of workplace which influences the lives of a large number of people. They form their own important social groups where they maintain certain relationships with their co-workers and the boss. In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, the reader finds that in this area, life is characterized mainly by hierarchies and inequalities. The relationship between Jiten and Nitin and their employee Sridhar clearly depicts that they have no mutual respect for the interests, sensibility and values of hard working employee. The relationship in the play is full of conflicts as power rests in the hand of those who are snobs and worthless and take it as their right to use their employee to gratify their personal whims and desires and to humiliate him in the way they like. But towards the end of the play, Sridhar’s patience gives way and he snaps all ties with his employers and the relationship collapses.

Through the complex relations between the two major communities of India, the Hindus and the Muslims, Dattani has dealt with the issue of communal hatred and violence that periodically erupts in society, threatens national solidarity and destroys the grace of human relationships. The playwright has successfully captured the general Indian sensibility through the character of Hardika, who remains trapped in the painful memories of past. But Dattani does not present his characters and their behavioural pattern in simplistic terms. By exposing the undercover reality, he suggests that individuals are often victims of their own ignorance, misinformation and prejudice. The discovery of truth changes Hardika’s mind and she waits for the opportunity to absolve her mind from the feelings of guilt. Dattani also highlights the role of unhealthy socialization, the unscrupulous politicians and the baseless rituals that inflame fanaticism in society. The playwright shows that the problem of Hindu-Muslim relations is not insoluble and appeals for love and broader understanding in order to transcend the division between the two communities.

While studying human relationships in Dattani’s plays, we find that he also has eye for the peripheral ties which constitute a part of everyone’s life. Such casual relations often outnumber one’s close relationships. These relations are intended to
endure so long as both the parties need and desire. Some of Dattani’s plays deal with such casual relations especially in the case of gay people who sometimes buy homosexual partners for physical gratification. These relations are short-lived and have hardly any impact on the people involved. 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.

It seems that Dattani has not left any aspect of human relationships unveiled and unexamined. He has raised a number of questions related to modern urban society and gives a glimpse into even the aspects treated hitherto as tabooed. Dattani provides a platform for these issues so that people are aware of the fact that they’re a reality and not just the imagination of a playwright. Even this brief look at Dattani’s treatment of the theme of human relationships amply shows that he is a writer with courage and clarity of mind. Drama in his hand is not a means of enriching himself or feathering his cap with cheap popularity; his genius, on the other hand, seems to be motivated and inspired by his commitment to explore and lay bare the truth of life through a large spectrum of human relationships. His approach to various issues or problems clearly speaks of a mind endowed with endless curiosity, scientific outlook and commitment to the values of honesty, justice, equality, freedom and human dignity. The way he balances the modern emphasis on individual’s freedom with values for social responsibility testifies to a mature and holistic perspective he adopts while dramatizing even those aspects of the areas of human relationships which tend to shock and disturb the conventional audience. What, infact, impresses his thoughtful audience, in particular, is the way he forces them to analyze, understand and respond to the truths of human life and relationships with integrity and courage. The depth, richness and complexity of human relationships represented in the context of rapidly changing social, cultural and moral milieu in our society, therefore, calls for a detailed study of this, perhaps, most important feature of Dattani’s art and mind. It is with the view that it can yield new insights into different aspects of his theatre that this modest attempt has been undertaken.

This study aims at examining the themes of human relationships in the major plays of Mahesh Dattani analyzing all the full length plays drawing also on his other
screen, stage and radio plays wherever necessary and useful to substantiate and elaborate the argument.

The study falls into seven chapters. The first chapter of introduction provides a critical survey of works done on Dattani so far, and it also makes a statement on the topic, broad hints at working areas of the study and its objectives. An attempt has also been made to analyze briefly the influences on the playwright’s mind and art.

The second chapter is devoted to the study of variety and broad patterns of relationships between husband and wife. Relations between/among siblings have been discussed in chapter three with a special focus on the factors influencing this relationship and the consequences thereof. Inter-generational relationships constitute chapter four. An in-depth study of the relationships of the queers such as the homosexuals and eunuchs has been taken up in the fifth chapter. In chapter six, extra marital relationships, work place relationships, relations between peers, master and servant, strangers and communities have been examined. Due emphasis has been placed on socio-cultural and class issues affecting these relationships. The findings arrived at during the course of the study are summed up in the last chapter of conclusion.
Notes


2 ibid., p.1.

3 ibid.

4 ibid.

5 ibid., p.4.


12 ibid.

13 Beena Agrawal, “In the voice of Subalterns in *Seven Steps Around the Fire*,” *Mahesh Dattani’s Plays: A New Horizon in Indian Theatre*, p.36.

14 ibid., p.44.


20 ibid., p.126.


36 ibid., p.107.

37 Beena Agrawal, “Gender Issues in Dance Like a Man: A Socio-Psychological Analysis,” Mahesh Dattani’s Plays: A New Horizon in Indian Theatre, p.97.

38 ibid., p.101.


43 ibid., p.167.

44 Shilpi Rishi Srivastva, p.169.

45 ibid., p.177.


47 ibid., p.74.


66 S. S. Gill, p.2.

67 ibid.

68 ibid.

69 Amar Nath Prasad and Pramod Kumar Singh, p.92.

70 ibid.


72 ibid., p.153.


74 ibid., p.105.


78 ibid.

79 ibid.


Daniel Perlman, and Anita L. Vangelisti, p.4.


ibid., p.183.


