Chapter-2

Relationship between Husband and Wife

The renowned English writer and philosopher D. H. Lawrence believes: “The great relationship for humanity will always be the relationship between man and woman.”¹ In a family structure, marriage binds man and woman and the relationship acquires great complexity. Husband-wife relationship is a universal issue and it has attracted the attention of writers and readers world-wide. The roles of husband and wife in a marriage are complementary, because it is only with the support and help from each other that they can fulfil the duties and obligations of married life. David Knox says, “Marriage is a social relationship in which two adults of the opposite sex make an emotional and legal commitment to live together.”²

Historically, marriage is not just a mutual contract between two individuals but a social contract and a moral expediency in which husband and wife agree to live together and share their lives, doing their respective duties and keep the social and religious order intact.

In ancient India, i.e. the Vedic period, same rights and privileges were provided to man and woman. Sapatpadi,³ the most important rite of Vedic wedding ceremony, puts that perfect halves to make a perfect whole, is the final word of Hinduism on the relationship between husband and wife. Neither was man supposed to be superior to woman, nor was woman considered superior to man. In ancient times, by doing their duties, the couple shared a sense of basic security and partnership. While in Vedic period, women were by and large treated as equal to men, the restrictions on woman regulating her personality and sexuality got strengthened in the Post-Vedic period. Laws of Manu⁴ insisted that “Women should never be made independent, as a daughter she should be under the surveillance of her father, as a wife of her husband and as a widow of her son.”⁵

Due to the increasing focus on social and religious roles of these marriages, they often tended to fail in fulfilling deeper emotional and sexual needs of the
individuals involved and were thus mainly reduced to the marriages of duty and obligation. It turned women subordinate to their spouses and most of the marriages continued to be rather inequitable in the sharing of power. It even sanctioned to the man the right to use physical punishment on woman:

The north court held that the wife must be subject to husband. Everyman must govern his household, and if by reason of an unruly temper …the wife persistently treats her husband with disrespect, and he submits to it, he not only loses all sense of self-respect, but loses the respect of the other members of his family, without which he cannot expect to govern them… (Joyner v Joyner 1862)… it follows that law gives the husband power to use such a degree of force as is necessary to make the wife behave herself and know her place.⁶

The traditional view that curbs the rights and independence of woman ascribes it to biological differences between man and woman. This view was supported and strengthened by the arguments of such psychologists as Sigmund Freud who stated that “…anatomy is destiny and it is woman’s biology which primarily determines their psychology and hence their ability and roles.”⁷

The obvious biological difference between man and woman has been used as a justification for forcing women into roles which limit and shape their attitude and behaviour. This led to the oppression of women and assigned to them negative stereotypes. This is what L. Lindsey emphasizes when she says:

When normative behaviour becomes too rigidly defined, our freedom of action is often compromised. These rigid definitions are associated with the development of stereotypes – oversimplified conception that people who occupy the same status groups share traits in common. Although stereotypes can include positive traits, they most often consist of negative ones that are used to justify discrimination against members of the given group.⁸

Most socio-psychologists reject predominantly biological explanations of patriarchy and contend that social and cultural conditioning is primarily responsible for establishing gender roles. According to Standard Sociological Theory,⁹ patriarchy
is the result of sociological constructions that are passed down from generation to generation. The woman philosopher, novelist and social activist, Simone de Beauvoir in her extensive study *The Second Sex* boldly declares: “One is not born but rather becomes a woman.”

Gender roles all over the world, especially in more traditional societies, are based on role-models that show man as a bread winner who works outside and woman as a nurturer at home. In the institution of marriage, these roles were to be followed and often women were reduced to sacrificial and shadowy creatures. Jessie Bernard in *The Future of Marriage* (1972) observes: “…each marriage has two components, ‘his’ marriage and ‘her’ marriage. And ‘her’ marriage was vastly less satisfying and more demeaning than ‘his’ marriage. Women were forced to answer to their husbands, keep the house, raise the children, and not to have aspirations of their own.”

But over the last few years, under the circumstances of changing social and economic scene, the old fixed roles of man and woman in marriage have been de-emphasized. What counts now is the togetherness between husband and wife, the degree to which they can create a mutually satisfying emotional and sexual relationship. The theories of male-supremacy on biological grounds have been challenged by the feminists as they lack scientific evidence.

Educational and economic conditions have also changed the attitudes and thinking of woman who now expects a measure of satisfaction and respect. Promilla Kapur, a sociologist comments: “With a change in women’s personal status and social status has come a change in her way of thinking and feeling and the past half century has witnessed great changes in attitudes towards sex, love and marriage.”

Not only biologists and sociologists but the creative writers have also tried to sensitize people by emphasizing that gender-differences are man-made and the individual must not suffer for this. The theme of unhappy and strained husband-wife relationships has been recurrent in literature. Many writers have explored how conflict originates within individual consciousness as a result of shifting social ideas and domestic situations like marriage and family life. Writers like Thomas Hardy in
Jude the Obscure,¹³ D.H. Lawrence in Women in Love¹⁴ and Nathaniel Hawthorne in The Scarlet Letter¹⁵ have handled this motif very incisively. Henry James, who also deals with the conflict between husband and wife, views the lack of mutual trust, love and understanding as the root causes of failure of marriages. Henry James’ writings are based on “…the theme of unhappy and uncompleted marriages – marriages avoided, abortive marriages, misalliances and marriages cursed.”¹⁶

The primary aim of these writers seems to redefine the patriarchal version of marriage and develop new definitions of the status of women. Their general claim has been that intellectual and sexual freedom for woman is also essential; lack of this may result in failure of marriages. In this context, Simone de Beauvoir’s comments are worth considering: “Marriages have always been a very different thing for man and for woman. The two sexes are necessary to each other, but this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them.”¹⁷

Indian writers, novelists as well as dramatists have also dealt with this theme in depth and detail in the context of Indian society and culture. Famous dramatist, Mohan Rakesh, reflects the problems of ego-clashes and conflict between man and woman in Lahron Ke Rajhans.¹⁸ Girish Karnad in his famous play Nagamandala¹⁹ focuses on the failure of man to treat woman as a person and to provide her space for self-fulfilment. The play is about Rani’s endeavours to discover her identity as a woman through fulfillment of her physical, emotional, spiritual and social needs in marriage. In Hayavadana,²⁰ incomplete human beings’ cry for wholeness has been revealed through Padmini’s insatiable desire for both brain and brawn. Vijay Tendulkar has also raised several questions on love, sex and violence in his plays. Silence! The Court is in Session²¹ is about the pathetic position of woman in a male-dominated society which asks her to conform to the yardsticks of decorum and propriety set by it while freeing man from mental responsibilities and constraints.

Like Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani also questions the false norms prevalent in society which require women to be subservient to the standards set by the patriarchal society. Dattani deftly explores various psychological, moral and social causes generating conflict in marital relationships. He chooses his
characters from contemporary urban Indian society that has witnessed a shifting of paradigms in terms of social and ethical values which has brought a change in feminine sensibility also and enables woman to take place of pride in all walks of life. Dattani’s plays show how a large section of underprivileged and marginalized women now is desperate to come out from the dark and narrow bounds of their dreary experience. He hints at the psychological reasons of the patriarchal husbands’ inability to consider the wishes and aspirations of their wives in the changing cultural and social milieu resulting in marital clashes and conflict. His women characters try to discover their identity and reject what is patently unjust or unjustifiable, and in this way make a bid to liberate themselves from male-oppression by questioning their authority.

The strength of Dattani’s art lies in his ability to expose himself to diverse facets of human-life and relationships. While focusing on the husband-wife relationships, in many of his plays he presents before the reader new situations and different reasons for the failure of marriages.

In Bravely Fought the Queen, the playwright highlights the circumstances of women fighting bravely, till the end, against the odds that their husbands have piled against them. The play throws light on the impairment of husband-wife relationship within the family caused by lovelessness. A bleak situation is presented where wives are trapped in loveless marriages with insensitive and inconsiderate husbands, who are reluctant to change for the better. Incompatibility in marriage and violence against housewives has been highlighted in the play. How unhappy and abusive childhood affects social and sexual life of the individuals and leaves ugly scars on their psyche permanently have been clearly depicted. The play is also about play-acting and hypocrisy of modern woman who tries to hide her sorrows in vain, and is left to survive in the confined spaces of domesticity.

The condition of Alka and Dolly represents urban women’s predicament who are in conflict with inherited values and the values they like for themselves as an individual. Though outwardly, they bask in the afterglow of wealth, power, privilege
and prestige, their inner lives are tormented by a mosaic of agonizing emotional problem that serves as a firewall between them and happiness.

The play projects the image of two sisters – Dolly and Alka – married to Trivedi brothers, Jiten and Nitin respectively. As the play opens, we meet Dolly who “…is aimlessly filing her nails. She has a mud mask on and her hair is in clips.”

Both the sisters are preparing themselves to go out for a dinner with their husbands. The ‘mud mask’ of Dolly becomes a powerful symbol of the masked lives of both the sisters, who masquerade as happy wives of successful and prosperous husbands. The scene reminds us of Kamla Das’s poem “The Suicide”, where she protests against the mask that a woman is supposed to wear throughout her life:

I must pose
I must pretend
I must act the role of happy woman
Happy wife.

Marriage in the play is an institution fraught with role-playing which does not last for long. Soon a guest, Lalitha, enters and, while they are engaged in conversation, the mask begins to crack, though Dolly tries very hard to maintain it:

DOLLY. I’m sorry. I wanted to laugh but I was afraid.  
LALITHA. Afraid?  
DOLLY. Afraid. I would crack my mask. (p. 234)

The cracked mask reveals the ugly inward reality and tragedy of the married life of both the sisters. All their happiness and excitement about going out disappears as Lalitha announces that their programme of going out for dinner has been called off.

What is unusual about the whole situation is that it is Lalitha, an outsider, who announces this to them. They are not informed by their husbands about the cancellation of that plan to which they had been looking forward very eagerly and joyfully. An unhappy and unnerved Dolly talks to her husband on phone: “Hahn Jiten? Why aren’t we going? …No, I swear you didn’t tell me! … Well I might have been around when you spoke to them on the phone…Okay, okay, I was around. But I
didn’t gather they were calling it off…. No, I don’t recall. (Sighs.) What difference does it make whether I do or not? The fact is you didn’t tell me directly…” (pp. 249-50). Similar is the case with Alka who is also unaware of the whole plan: “No, nobody told me anything” (p. 241). This extract from a routine conversation painfully reflects the appropriation of women in a class and gender-based society where they “…are expected to pick on the dregs of conversation and understand their jobs, keeping in mind the hectic work schedule of the ones in power.”

Dolly and Alka both are very charming, fond of good living and aspire for a happy married life, but their insensitive husbands deny them all pleasures of companionship. They have to request them in a very subservient manner even for small things like going out with them. Alka pleads with Nitin: “Let us go somewhere. Just the two of us… just for a drive. Anywhere. There are so many things I want to discuss but we are never…” (p. 241). Same is the case with Dolly who craves deeply for her husband’s company: “Let’s just go somewhere. To that new restaurant” (p. 250). But their plea falls on deaf ears. The unhappy women are fated to endure perpetually an enclosed and claustrophobic existence, with no recreation and communication with their husbands. One of the causes of breakdown in any relationship is that of the absence of communication. Miruna George rightly observes, “Dattani has the knack of letting the audience know the unspoken, the communication gap which indicates marital discord.”

The play also deals with the emotional and sexual problems of wives, trapped in a family structure and controlled by their callous husbands who starve them of love. The sole duty of both the sisters in Trivedi house is to take care of their senile and delirious mother-in-law, who does not allow them a moment of peace. Their husbands have got alternate ways of satisfying their lusts. Jiten is a womanizer who betrays his wife. He entertains prostitutes in his office and is such a degenerate that he compels even his employee, Sridhar, to act as a pimp for him. Alka aptly sums up Dolly’s situation when she comments: “Dolly, I feel sorry for you. Having a lech for a husband” (p. 300). Jiten is a loud-mouthed fellow who uses abusive language, has no respect for woman-folk and treats them merely as sex objects. Dolly and Jiten are dissimilar and horribly mismatched. Her whole life has been wasted by him. Alka
rightly says: “Poor Dolly, sitting by herself, looking pretty and… wasted. With only a half-dead mother-in-law for her company” (p. 260). Jiten not only breaks the sanctity of marriage, he shatters the whole life of his wife when provoked by his mother, he hits Dolly when she is pregnant. This irresponsible and repulsive act of violence ruins their relations and happiness of married life forever. As Dolly gives birth to a premature baby who turns out to be a spastic, poor Dolly has to bear the pain of her crippled child throughout her life.

The married life of Alka is no less hellish than her sister’s, and she, starved of conjugal joy, tries to drown her sorrows in liquor and becomes a dipsomaniac. Her husband, being a gay, cannot satiate her sexual desires. Her marriage remains unconsummated and deprived of the bliss of motherhood. She feels herself cursed: “I have been cursed because I have no children” (p. 284). Alka is also expelled from Trivedi house, when in a state of drunkenness, she dares pose a shocking question to her mother-in-law: “Your sons are so different from one-another. They are both pretty like you, but otherwise… Do they have different fathers?” (p. 256). She was accepted in the family only after Dolly and Praful’s repeated requests and pleadings. Nitin, her husband, is totally unconcerned about Alka. Instead of saving her honour, he declares shamelessly: “Alka can stay here or go away or drink herself to death. I don’t care. It doesn’t make any difference to me” (p. 290).

The play delineates life-situation of a family where wives are caught-up in a bleak situation. For them, love is a mere dream to be sought in a world of fantasy. Deprived of sexual pleasures, Dolly pulls on in her life by finding pleasures in imaginary situations, in fantasizing herself with Kanhaiya and her passion for music: “The thumri plays. And it ends. Another one plays. I forget when that ends and new one begins! All I’m aware of are two powerful black arms around me and the beautiful sound of a heart beat of a gentle soul. The voice of Naina Devi comes back. It is the most beautiful song I’ve ever heard in my life!” (p. 262).

Alka tries to seek relief and escape in alcohol, gossiping, singing and dancing. Her rain-dance is symbolic of her aspirations to get freedom and sexual fulfillment, but ironically, she breaks her heel and her ankle twists. Thus, we find that in loveless
and unhappy marriages, Alka and Dolly suffer a lot. Beena Agrawal comments about this play: “In the play Bravely Fought the Queen, the female protagonists are not sinners but the silent sufferers for the wrong doing of their companions.” But Beena Agrawal has not been able to recognize the fact that women in the play refuse to be silent for long. It hints at the drastic change in the role of woman as depicted in modern drama. No more a woman is considered weak, or falling at the feet of her husband, trying to please him always. Writers like Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani have tried to question the image of traditional woman synonymous with a doormat-type wife. Woman in their plays knows that it is the male who is responsible for her plight. Though he will not confess it, she is determined to make him accept and realize his mistakes and misdoings.

Dolly and Alka also exhibit a strong will to resist the forces hazardous to their existence. Dolly emerges as a very strong woman after a long suffering and suppression. She not only identifies her persecutor, but also fights for justice: “Jiten, you beat me up! I was carrying Daksha and you beat me up! …I will not let you get away so easily! Those were your hands hitting me! Your feet kicking me!” (pp. 311-12).

She makes Jiten realize his guilt of the ghastly act. Jiten is not able to stand the truth but Dolly is unforgiving and reveals the painful reality of her daughter to Lalitha who is present there:

DOLLY. You want to see her dance? …She will dance for you! Like this…

(She demonstrates a spastic’s uncoordinated arm and neck movements with her eyes dilated)

(To Jiten.) Right, Jitu? Isn’t that the way she dances? (p. 312)

Jiten proves to be a cowardly and weak bully. He is not able to stand the bitter accusations and tries to escape the scene, and while doing so, he devastates one more life. He runs the car over the beggar woman and kills her.

Alka’s disgust and abhorrence for her forced relationship with Nitin is also revealed. She fights her fears and asks herself angrily as to why she should be so cowardly and scared: “What have I done that I should feel scared?” (p. 298). She also
accuses Baa for creating a barrier between Nitin and herself: “You know why I can’t have children. You won’t let me. That’s why! …He needs your permission to have children and by God, you won’t give it to him!” (p. 284). Though Baa’s reminiscence suggests that she had incited Nitin into hating Alka out of her possessiveness for her son, but the play reveals that the real cause of her barren state is Nitin’s coldness due to his homosexual tendency.

We find Alka in a ravaging mood in the end, while she is preparing herself for masked-ball like the brave queen of Jhansí. She says: “Oh good. You make me a tin plate armour for me. And a sword. A cardboard sword, of course. And I will remove it and swish it about, like this… (Demonstrates)” (p. 296). She prepares herself for fighting battle, though a losing one. It was “reflective of Laxmi Bai’s fight against the British and it was a losing battle but she never gave up”27 says Mahesh Dattani conversing with Ranu Uniyal.

The play not only depicts the behaviour of Jiten and Nitin, abhorrent to their wives, but also traces the causes behind it. Their cases seem to be illustrative of Freud’s theory of repression. Freud theorized that “Repressed memory causes ‘neurosis’… it allegedly causes a myriad of psychological and physical problems….”28 Having experienced a bad childhood, Jiten turns into a demon, and a possessive mother spoils Nitin who becomes a homosexual. It is pertinent to note here that Mahesh Dattani does not seem to criticize homosexuality as much he condemns dishonesty and insincerity in relationships. Sexuality is identified as a way of realizing the self. It becomes a problem when not accepted by society. Homosexuals have to lead a concealed life because of social fear. A guilt-ridden Nitin accepts his homosexuality only before his drunken wife. It is his dishonesty that is largely responsible for the ruin of Alka’s happiness. Mahesh Dattani opines: “Bravely Fought the Queen is a bleak play depicting troubled relationships that dishonesty breeds.”29 The writer seems to call for relaxation of social taboos and beliefs.

Not only Dolly and Alka suffer in the play, their mother-in-law, Baa, presents even a more gloomy and bizarre picture of split consciousness and impaired reasoning, revealing the worst that an unhappy husband-wife relationship can do to an
individual. In a subtle way, through these characters, Dattani depicts how wives are shaped and reshaped by their husbands. The story of Baa is not much different from that of Alka and Dolly as she also shares the painful experience in her married life. Baa’s marriage is a trauma for her and she cannot forget for the whole of her life that she married a husband who was incompatible with her in terms of talent, decency and beauty. He usurped all her money and mistreated her. He used to beat her often in the presence of their small children. Baa’s soliloquy reflects her state of mental agony, haunted by past memories: “I have married such a villager! Aah! You slapped me? Never, never slap me. Nobody has hit me. The men in our family are decent…” (p. 288). Baa’s relations with her husband are based on hatred. She hated him because he was black and ugly. That is the reason she associates Jiten’s ugliness with his father and doesn’t like him. She dotes on Nitin as he is fair: “You are my wonderful baby! You are my prince!” (p. 302). She also makes Nitin hate his father.

This reckless behaviour of parents leaves many scars on the psyche of the boys. Consequently, they grow up as psychopaths. Jiten copies his father and becomes violent and cruel. Nitin, as a victim of abused childhood, becomes a gay. Strained relationships of husbands and wives spoil the life of their children also. Baa’s desires are repressed by her husband. She is not allowed singing, which was her passion. She painfully reminisces: “…so lovely was my voice” (p. 282). Her married life has a bleak past which leaves a debilitating effect on her. She loses her mental equilibrium. Suffering makes her bitter and she does not let go her anger and anguish throughout her life. Devastating effects of the unhappy married lives can be seen in the behaviour of these women with one-another also. Their frustrations drive them into playing destructive games on one-another through verbal attacks, revealing a state of tormenting conflicts in their relationships.

Another couple presented in the play is that of Lalitha and Sridhar. Their relationship presents a contrast to those of Baa, Dolly and Alka. Whereas Jiten and Nitin share no communication with their wives, there is no such gap in the relation between Sridhar and Lalitha. This is evident from the fact that Sridhar shares complete details of his profession with his wife: “All my husband does at home is talk about his work” (p. 235) Lalitha tells Dolly. They both plan their life with mutual
understanding, which is absent from other couples’ lives in the play. “We are saving for a flat of our own” (p. 243) Lalitha tells Alka. The comment of Alka on this – “How nice to plan your life like that” (p. 243) – reflects the pain of her own chaotic life. Sridhar’s professional success is achieved with the active co-operation of his wife. She supports him in his work and knows each and every detail of his projects. She visits Trivedi house to discuss the masked-ball arranged for the advertisement company of Re-Vaa-tee and she is proud of her husband’s skills: “Sridhar came up with his fabulous idea…. I guess I should be more modest about my husband’s work but, anyway – Sridhar had this fabulous idea of masked-ball to launch ReVaTee” (p. 237).

It seems that Lalitha has created a space for herself in her married life. While Dolly and Alka are confined in claustrophobic spaces, she moves out of domesticity and does a lot of things:

Oh, I keep myself occupied. I do a bit of writing. Freelance. I write occasional woman’s column for the *Times*. Sometimes I review cultural events. I am into meditation. And, oh yes, I grow bonsai plants – I’ve been growing them for years. I do a bit of creative writing as well. You know, poetry and stuff like that. Nothing great but…. (p. 243)

Bonsai becomes a central metaphor as we explore more about the husband-wife relationship in the play. It certainly reflects the nurturing aspect of Lalitha. She carefully nurtures her relations with Sridhar. She stays at Trivedi house for a long time where she is least welcomed in the beginning. It seems that she accepts everything what Sridhar says: “But we live in R.T. Nagar. The other end of the world. Sridhar thinks it is unsafe for woman to move about alone at night. I hate to admit it but he is right” (p. 235).

While talking about her drinking habits, Lalitha tells Alka: “As long as he’s around when it happens, he doesn’t mind. You must do a bit of social drinking too” (p. 244). From the speeches of Lalitha, it is clear that she can enjoy the liberties of drinking and going out only with the permission of her husband. It is he who appears
to exercise control over her. It suggests some kind of sense of ownership in their relationship. About women characters in the play, Pranav Joshipura comments: “All the women (except Lalitha) resemble bonsai in the play.” The interpretation seems to be a bit lopsided. What the play infact suggests is that Lalitha and Sridhar’s relations are very complex. She has perhaps trimmed and groomed herself like the bonsais according to the demands of her husband and patriarchal society. She too in a way doesn’t seem to enjoy complete freedom and growth like her bonsais, which are not allowed free growth. She says about her bonsais: “Here comes the best part. You can shape their branches into whatever shape you want – by pinching or wiring their shoots” (p. 246). To this Alka’s reaction reflects her temperament: “sounds very tedious” (p. 246).

The way she has chosen to live her life suits her well as she has been able to escape the frustration which other women characters suffer in their marriages. Theirs is a case of some mutual adjustment and acceptance. However, Payal Nagpal’s remarks don’t seem to be wholly off the mark when she observes: “Lalitha lives under illusion that she is a truly liberated woman. But is that really so? The idea that in a globalized world the woman enjoys equal rights in big cities and particularly in the cultured households is only a myth.”

The difference between her life and those of the other women is, at least partly, mainly due to the difference in attitude and outlook of her husband from those of the other men in the play. Lalitha’s husband is intelligent, studious and caring. He shows concern for his wife when Jiten talks angrily with her: “Be more polite! It’s my wife you are talking to!” (p. 306). He is worried about Lalitha’s safety. When Jiten turns aggressive, he advises her, “If he acts smart, break the bonsai on his head” (p. 307). Lalitha is perplexed when Dolly and Alka confront their husbands and there is a total chaos in the Trivedi house. She is not able to comprehend the mystery about the sisters and asks her husband, “Let’s get out of here. God! These women are sick.” To this, Sridhar’s reply shows his sympathy for the wretched women: “with husband like these, who blames them” (p. 306). This mutual understanding and respect in their relationship tends to make their marriage happier and more satisfying. In this way, their relationship offers at least some hope for a better future. If Lalitha has adjusted
herself according to the wishes of her husband, he, in turn, provides her liberties and love. It is their worldly wisdom and mutual understanding which gives them a feeling of security in times of fear and uncertainties. Their situation reminds one of Matthew Arnold’s lines in his famous poem “Dover Beach”32:

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! For the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light…

They prepare together to come out of the mess of Trivedi world. Sridhar says: “Come on! We have a long way ahead of us!” (p. 314). Thus, in their relationship, the husband-wife are considerate and they care for each other and are able to wade through the tumultuous zones of life, even if “…the roads [that are] flooded” (p. 314). Otherwise, it may lead only to devastation as is the case with other characters.

The play reveals the social, psychological and moral causes of conflict between the couples. Though the play mainly presents a gloomy picture of married life, the playwright doesn’t emerge as a pessimist. Subtly, his women characters suffer a lot but they never cease to fight. The play epitomizes the dilemma of Indian women, who suffer mainly due to lack of understanding and sympathy on the part of their male counterparts. They attempt to come out of the suffering and the stranglehold of their chauvinistic husbands. They strive to search for their identity against the role bondages sanctioned by traditional society. The writer appears to satirize and condemn immorality, dishonesty and hypocrisy in relations without sounding didactic. Dattani has successfully left a space for the readers to think about those higher values which can help sustain human relationships.

If Bravely Fought the Queen is centered around the emotional and sexual exploitation of women by their husbands, Dance Like a Man, another play by Dattani, presents a powerful human drama where the writer explores reasons of marital discord in the life of a couple who marry each other for mutual love and common
passion for dance. The play is the story of a wife’s ambitions and aspirations resulting in the disintegration and distortions of relations. It is a tragedy of Jairaj, whose economic dependence hinders his growth as an individual and makes him a failure as a man in his wife’s eyes. He leads a life of embitterment and frustration as he remains a failure in his profession and is therefore unable to command love and respect of his wife. It is Jairaj who suffers more in the play. Asha Kuthari Chaudhari rightly remarks that in *Dance Like a Man* there “...is the twist that the playwright gives to the stereotype associated with ‘gender’ issues that view solely women at the receiving end of the oppressive power structures of patriarchal society. The play dispels the motion and explores the nature of tyranny that even man might be subjected to within such structures.”

All the factors leading to mutual discord and disharmony causing irreparable damage to their lives have been presented powerfully in the play. The play opens in a lively and humorous atmosphere of a family house where Lata brings Viswas, her fiancé, to meet her parents. While her parents are away, they converse together. Lata tells him many things about her parents. The reality of the fragmented lives of Jairaj and Ratna soon comes out to the surface. Their world is not as it appears to be. Actually, it has neither joy nor love or peace but a chasm between them which can not be filled. Everything is finished for them as Ratna says in a state of repentance: “Finished! Just like me. Yes, your father was right. Dance has brought us nowhere. It’s his curse on us. Nothing seems worth it anymore. Oh, it is all so... worthless. You should have listened to your father” (p. 402).

Reasons for the ‘finished’ and ‘worthless’ lives of this couple can be traced to socio-cultural and familial context which determines gender roles. Jairaj’s father, Amritlal Parekh, is an autocrat, having a strong aversion to male dancers. Gender-discrimination rooted in the psyche of Amritlal is mainly responsible for the disastrous lives of Jairaj and Ratna. He cannot bear the idea of a prostitute dancer, a dancer man, a guruji with long hair and feminine walk. This just bewilders him. He cannot allow his daughter-in-law to learn dance compositions from ‘Chenni Amma’ as it spoils his family honour. But Ratna, at this juncture, represents a modern urban
woman with desires, resilience and strength. She makes her voice clear: “You cannot stop me from dancing” (p. 421).

A headstrong Amritlal tells them categorically that they cannot live under his care if Jairaj doesn't grow-up as a man and Ratna doesn’t stop going to the old Amma. This throws Jairaj into a strong identity crisis. Dance is his passion and he defiantly leaves his father’s house. Ratna also follows him bewildered, but only to come back after forty-eight hours, most hurt and tormented as the outside world is more hostile to them. The behaviour of the family members is full of contempt for them, as shown by Ratna’s uncle, who wants to seduce her for giving food and shelter: “Do you think your uncle made such interesting proposals to all his nieces? No! That would be a great sin. But you are different. You were meant for entertainment” (p. 410). A clever and shrewd Amritlal now takes advantage of this situation. He connives with Ratna to bring Jairaj out of his obsession for dance. He knows Ratna’s weakness for dance and is successful in extracting a confession from her that she married Jairaj more for the reason that he would let her dance than her love for him. Like a manipulator, he throws his trap: “Help me make him an adult. Help me to help him grow up…. Help me and I’ll never prevent you from dancing” (p. 427) and Ratna agrees: “I’ll try” (p. 427).

Thus, they both decide the fate of Jairaj. Sadly enough, his own wife becomes a party with his father against him and both collude to destroy the much-coveted and cherished passion of Jairaj. Here, a wife behaves in an individualistic, selfish and self-centered manner. She is over-ambitious and she runs after her name and fame. Busy in her dance programmes, Ratna is governed by sensual desires. She is so much swayed by her irresistible passion for success that she forgets her role of a wife. Her ambition overpowers her and it takes a heavy toll on her relations with her husband. On the role played by Ratna, Pranav Joshipura comments and asks, “Is she not a very moderate version of Lady Macbeth?” But the way Dattani has delineated her gives us insights into some of the reasons behind the selfish behaviour of Ratna. To some extent, Ratna’s submission to Amritlal’s proposal is the result of her helplessness and economic dependence. At this stage, she had no food and shelter. Jairaj has not been capable of providing her a respectable life. She calls Jairaj a ‘spineless boy’ and gives
vent to her bitter feelings: “I am not going to let you off so easily. You can’t blame me for your state and get away with it. What do you want? Ask yourself. Do you want freedom? You had it and you came back to your prison” (p. 444). In such a despairing situation, Ratna chooses that suits her the most. Though in doing so, she forgets the duties of a wife.

In the beginning, Jairaj is unaware of the plan of his father and Ratna, but with the passage of time, he realizes the shrewdness and betrayal of his wife. Their relations become very much strained and agonizing. They spare no chance of insulting and blaming each other. In this clash of egos, Jairaj suffers intensely. Insulted and humiliated by his father, cheated and eclipsed by his wife, failed as a dancer, he is reduced to a pathetic figure. Ratna’s desperate strategies to obscure his grace as a dancer seem to him her endeavours to undermine his masculine self. Risman’s comments in this context are very significant. She says: “Power corrupts is not a gender distinction. Women in power position can be as vindictive, ruthless, and unfair as men.”

Jairaj implores her “to give [him] back [his] self-esteem!” (p. 443) which she has snatched away from him:

JAIJRAJ. Bit by bit. You took it when you insisted on top billing in all over programmes. You took it when you made me dance my weakest items. You took it when you arranged the lighting so that I was literally dancing in your shadow. And when you called me names in front of other people. Names I feel ashamed to repeat even in private…. (p. 443)

Completely devastated, he is left with no identity, creativity and choice. Alienated, he turns to alcohol and becomes very bitter and satirical. Frustrated, he teases his wife: “What a beauty you are! Is that way you like to dance? To have men admire your assets?” (p. 442). Jairaj seems to be a victim of professional jealousy when he utters such words. Bijay Kumar Das rightly remarks:

Professional jealousy breaks off all relationships – be it between friends, or couples. When one runs after fame and fortune, love takes a back seat. No wonder, wife and husband become rivals and the ‘green-eyed monster’ (i.e.
jealously) eats up the marital bond. Ratna and Jairaj are classical examples of the victims of professional jealousy and rivalry.\textsuperscript{36}

In turn, Ratna also spares no chance of humiliating Jairaj. She tells him clearly that people want to see her dance: “It is me they want to see dancing…. And you are jealous of me for that?” (p. 443). She even exposes Jairaj’s ‘mediocrity’ in dance on his face in a ruthless manner:

\begin{quote}
RATNA. …Do you want to dance? Why didn’t you accept those invitations when they came? Was it because of me or were you too afraid that if you danced alone, your mediocrity would be exposed? Yes, ask yourself your true worth and you will get your answer. Yes, I did cut you off but then you deserved it! (pp. 444–45)
\end{quote}

Both Jairaj and Ratna are not ready to look at their faults leading to marital discord and conflicts. The tragedy of Jairaj is that he has made a career-choice against the set codes of contemporary society, and he is bound to fail. Ratna seems to be happy and successful, but she too cannot escape its painful consequences. She realizes her fault in her heart of hearts and feels guilty for the plight of Jairaj. She repents her perversity in agreeing to Amritlal: “Agreeing with your father letting you off so that he could shape you into whatever shape he thinks a man should have. I should have guessed the results. When I say I regret it, I really mean that, Jai” (p. 444).

But the cracks between them are too big to be repaired and the fissures in their relationship begin to widen. Embittered and ironical, Jairaj is in no mood to forgive his wife: “You destroyed me first, then give the impression that there wasn’t much to destroy in the first place, then blame it all on my father…” (p. 444). Ratna too refuses to accept the blame completely. She retorts: “…don’t come to me saying I destroyed you. I didn’t have to. You did it all by yourself…” (p. 445).

In this way, Dattani expresses his concern for rigid gender-roles. Due to restrictions of gender-roles, not only women but men also have to suffer when they tend to be different in their interests. \textit{In Dance Like a Man} and \textit{Bravely Fought the Queen}, he projects female images that are not weak, but confident as they retaliate against those whom they see as wrong-doers. They do not seem to suffer always in
silence. One phenomenon that is prevalent in Dattani’s plays is that in the complex reality and clashes of married life, husband and wife both suffer as they are indispensable to each other.

The biggest tragedy of Jairaj and Ratna’s life happens when their baby son Shanker dies. When Ratna has gone to a dance show and Amritlal has gone to receive award for service to the nation, the Aaya administers overdoses of opium to him. Jairaj satirizes and ridicules the whole situation: “The seth of the house is not in! He’s away receiving awards for serving the nation while his Lakshmi-of-the-house has been away receiving (claps) acclaim for her…talents” (p440).

In the autumn of their lives, both Jairaj and Ratna have great vacuum. Ratna dies ‘out of boredom’ as Jairaj thinks. He is also ready to welcome death and at the last hour, he finds Ratna with him. He is reminiscent of his happy youth when he danced with Ratna: “We danced perfectly. In unison. Not missing a step or a beat. We talk and laugh at all our mistakes we made in our previous dances” (p. 447). In this state of reminiscence, he imagines they have realized that they were “…only human. We lacked the grace. We lacked the brilliance. We lacked the magic to dance like God” (p. 447). And “for this realization, they have to examine their whole past, what embittered them against each other and how they tried to wreck vengeance.”

The play appears to convey the message that the state of elevation and bliss can be achieved only when man and woman merge into one and correspond to the rhythm of life in unison.

While Jairaj and Ratna are doomed to live a life of unhappiness caused by ambitions and distrust, their daughter Lata and her husband Viswas’ life is full of fun and happiness. That Lata and Viswas are frank and open in their relationship is clear from their meeting when Lata brings him first time to her home. Lata makes it clear that dance is in her blood and the centre of life of her parents: “Actually they couldn’t care less who or what you are. As long as you let me dance…” (p. 388). The only demand of Lata’s parents from their son-in-law is that he should allow her to dance. Baffled by the disclosures and details made by Lata about her parents, Viswas asks:
“What kind of parents they are?” (p. 388). Lata also extracts a promise from Viswas: “When we are married – you will let me come here to practice, won’t you?” (p. 389), and he agrees readily. Though Viswas doesn’t know much about dance yet he regards the art and the dancers. He is a man of adjustment and nurtures no false ego of any kind. It is clear from the conversation of family members over a dance item performed by Lata:

LATA. What was it that you didn’t like?
VISWAS. It was too erotic.
JAIRAJ. My wife danced the item thirty years ago.
VISWAS. I admire her courage.
LATA. So you feel it shouldn’t be done?
VISWAS. I really can’t say. I don’t know much about these things. (p. 434)

He gives Lata freedom in her choice of doing the erotic numbers if she wants: “If that’s what you want. Nobody’s stopping you” (p. 435).

As the older generation fades away, we meet the young couple enjoying life together. Jairaj’s speech clearly reveals that Lata and Viswas are enjoying conjugal bliss: “…Lata has called…to say that her baby spoke her first word today. It sounded like jalebi” (p. 447). Lata and Viswas’s relationship depicts the trends truly evolving. Here the husband is more supportive than the man in previous generation. Jairaj’s flat now belongs to Ratna. The play ends at a positive note for the new generation as it is free from frustrations and ego-problems which their predecessors nurtured and suffered consequently.

When we explore the main causes of the failure of their married life, it appears that Jairaj’s economic dependence on his father and Ratna’s self-centredness and over-ambition take them towards ruin. Jairaj, living on his father’s mercy, is unable to achieve his desires and Ratna’s ambitions leave no space for love between them. She forgets that she too fails in the failure of her husband. Both of them accuse each other without realizing their mistakes and suffer greatly. It is only towards the end of their lives that they reach self-discovery and realize their previous mistakes. The writer has subtly suggested that happiness in married life cannot be achieved in isolation.
While *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *Dance like a Man* are starkly serious plays, *Where There's a Will* by Dattani explores the undercover reality of the society in a comic manner where husband wants to command and earn the respect and love of his wife by the power of money. Hasmukh Mehta is full of complaints and grumblings against his wife and holds her responsible for lack of emotional harmony and sexual satisfaction in his life. For his sexual and emotional fulfillment, he keeps a mistress. But how this domineering husband is gradually diminished to the point of insignificance is very well depicted in the play.

Money is the sole consideration for Hasmukh Mehta, a middle-class successful and self-made industrialist. He is the dominating patriarch who is present in the play dead or alive. He is unhappy with all his family members as all of them fall short of his expectations. Sonal Mehta, his wife, is an appropriate foil to her dictator husband. She is a submissive house-wife dedicated to her husband’s choices. She is confined to household management, spending most of her time in kitchen and pooja-room. To provide him blood-pressure tablets on time is the important ritual in her life. Sonal’s extreme submissiveness produces a kind of sentimental humour. She is worried all the time: “If anything happens to you, they’ll say I neglected my duty” (p. 471).

Hasmukh Mehta’s relations with his wife are incomplete and chaotic. All the time conscious of ‘my money’ and ‘my house’, he accuses his wife insultingly for small things and accuses her of wasting money in preparation of new dishes: “It is easy for her to forget that we were a middle class family once. She keeps cooking new foods like it’s new invention. Rich food wasting so much ghee and oil” (p. 465). Hasmukh’s passion for authority irks everyone in the family. Sonal sums him up rightly: “Proud? He thinks he is a king of all he surveys! And we are his subjects” (p. 472). Hasmukh has a very low opinion about his wife: “Do you know what Sonal means? No? ‘Gold’. When we were newly married, I used to joke with her and say she was as good as gold. But … I soon found out what a good-for-nothing she was. As good as mud” (p. 472). In this monologue, Hasmukh narrates his heart to the audience. He tries to justify his actions and addictions that he has fallen prey to. He gives his reasons for having a mistress as he finds his wife:
...mud. Twenty-five years of marriage and I haven’t enjoyed sex with her. So what does a man do? ...And what about my sex life? Well, I could afford that too. Those expensive ladies of the night in the five star hotels! …But I needed a safer relationship…. A mistress! All right, what’s wrong with having a bit on the side? Especially since the main-course is always without salt…. (p. 473)

Hasmukh’s statement about his wife strikes a tone of sarcasm and he acknowledges his marriage with Sonal as a tragedy: “Then when I was twenty-one, the greatest tragedy of my life took place. I got married to my wife, Sonal” (p. 464). He always condemns his wife for her inability to provide him good and healthy married life. For him, a faithful wife is as good as a faithful dog: “Then I should be a very happy man. I’ve got a loving wife who has been faithful to me like any dog would be” (p. 473). Here, he makes a mockery of his wife’s faithfulness and submissiveness.

The play subtly hints that women are also responsible to some extent for their plight. Despite her mildness and compassion, Sonal lacks essential vitality. She is a weak woman, who is totally subservient to her husband, is afraid of her daughter-in-law and is dependant on her sister, Minal, for all guidance. Sonal’s ignorance makes her blind to the selfish nature of her husband and the irresponsible behaviour of her son. She is yet to learn the lessons of life which a shrewd, hard-hearted lady like Kiran Jhaveri can teach. The company of Kiran, her husband’s mistress, opens the eyes of Sonal. Her simple mind is stunned when she knows: “He was going around with another woman! While I was busy making parathas for him, he was seeing other woman!” (p. 485). She gets disillusioned with her deceitful husband and expresses contempt for him on realizing that Hasmukh had a mistress. She gathers courage and challenges his authority: “If I had known, he had a mistress, I would have left him” (p. 481). Her awareness of the facts make Hasmukh realize: “I’ve misjudged the woman” (p. 481).

In the whole intricate man-woman relationships, Kiran emerges as a lady of intelligence, who has commendable understanding of life and people. She has learnt
lessons from her mother and also from her own experiences in life. Her mother also had suffered a lot in her life as she, in the words of Kiran:

KIRAN. Only gave. And so she suffered.
SONAL. And you?
KIRAN. I too have suffered from too much giving. (p. 507)

It seems that Kiran’s circumstances force her to challenge traditional values which she has acquired from her mother. She herself has learnt: “It’s no use being useful to other people unless they are useful in return” (p. 505).

She has been a victim of abused married life with a drunken husband, but she refused to be a victim for long. She learnt to do everything with open eyes. She rightly sums up the character of Hasmukh Mehta: “…Yes, Mrs Mehta. My father, your husband – they were weak men with false strength” (p. 508). With her positive attitude and manipulations, she managed the life of Hasmukh Mehta whatever he was – alive or dead: “He depended on me for everything. He thought he was the decision maker. But I was. He wanted me to run his life… Men never really grow up!” (p. 510). The company of Kiran makes Sonal also bold. She discards her husband’s authority with a derogatory comment: “He was like a village buffalo. What did he understand about other people’s feelings” (p. 507). The comments and reactions of Sonal and Kiran reveal the fact that these women are not as weak or subjugated as they seem to be. The union of Kiran and Sonal emerges as a collective force born out of their long history of exploitation and suffering. According to Asha Kuthari, “Dattani explores the dichotomy between the male/ female roles within the archetype of the family headed by a man and what happens when a woman turns over.” Kiran remains on the margins until Hasmukh dies. After his death, his will brings her right in to the centre of the action. The play depicts the efforts of the women to abolish sexual colonialism. They declare the liberation of women against the ‘will’ of Hasmukh Mehta.

It is also interesting to note that the presence of an outsider in husband-wife relationship is neither threatening nor damaging in the play. It rather helps a simple house-wife understand the complex realities of life. It breaks the myth and traditional
stereotype that the only duty of a wife is to submit to her husband’s wishes. This total submission and loyalty rather makes her blind to her husband’s vices. Love out of the family relationships helps Sonal, and a new truth in relationships of Kiran and Sonal creates a situation where a wife can share a positive space with her husband’s mistress.

Towards the end of the play, Dattani seems to give an important message that moving from self-assertion to self-realization is a must for growth of an individual. Hasmukh Mehta has to realize and learn that money can never earn loving relationships. All his follies confront him after his death and he realizes: “No. I don’t think I can enter this house. It isn’t mine…anymore…. They are not my family anymore. I wish I had never interfered with their lives…” (p. 515). Not only the husband, Sonal, the wife, also comes out of her confined spaces of kitchen and pooja-room and realizes: “And I never got because I never gave” (p. 507). The play suggests that both the extremes – too much giving and too much denying – tend to harm human relationships.

Thus these plays of Dattani depict the pangs of incoherent and fragmented matrimonial relationships, throwing at the same time light on the causes of such unhappy situations. Through the depiction of women characters, who refuse to be eternally in bondage to dead relationships, the playwright redefines the idea of marital morality, implicitly demanding the realignment of the parameters on which traditional marriage functions. His women characters are projected as rebels against established values of male-dominated orthodox society. The changing image of wives, from the suffering women to the asserting ones, redefining selves and defying traditional mores are incisively depicted in his plays. In another of his plays, Seven Steps Around the Fire, Dattani deftly problematizes the components of the identity of an educated woman in a patriarchal set-up. Though the play mainly focuses on the low status of the transgendered in society, it also provides glimpses into human relationships in the institution of marriage and gives thought-provoking moments to the readers regarding the traditional sanctity of marriage by laying bare the fault-lines in marital bonding.
It is the high position of her husband that places Uma higher in the social hierarchy more than her identity as an educated woman. It is Suresh’s position of authority as Superintendent of Police that helps Uma to carry out her investigations in Jail. The fact that Suresh remains firmly rooted in patriarchal tradition is evident when he enjoys his rights as a man with his wife in many ways. He does not fully understand and recognize the independent identity of his wife as an educated woman. That is why, he does not appreciate Uma’s humanistic approach to the eunuchs. His superior position is reinforced by the control he exercises over finances of the house. Uma cannot use his money to help Anarkali. Her remark that “My husband won’t let me” (p. 14) makes the situation amply clear.

However, a close scrutiny of Suresh’s personality reveals that he is a weak character, who becomes a party to the crimes of rich and powerful politicians, though inside the house, he controls everything. He even tries to dissuade his wife from doing her research on hijras and from entering their secret lives. Uma is fully conscious of her social roles and responsibilities as a woman in patriarchal set up. She is determined to finish her investigation even if there is a danger involved: “…if my family throws me out…” (p. 29). Her remark reveals her insecurities and limitations.

The playwright subtly hints at Suresh’s inadequacy as a man capable of fulfilling his reproductive role. That is why, he is not ready to go to the doctor for sperms count inspite of Uma’s requests. The dilemma of modern woman is depicted through Uma’s character. Though she is an educated woman with great potential, her role in society is only seen as a wife, an object of sexual pleasure. Her predicament is that she is childless but the husband does not own the stigma of his own weakness responsible for his wife’s barrenness. Miruna George comments rightly that Uma’s role in a patriarchal society “…as a wife has nothing to offer, except to be fit for motherhood, a social appendage, and an object of sexual pleasure. As a wife, loyalty, obedience and motherhood are the qualities expected of her.”39 Yet Uma proves the fact that she values her own inner self, independent of the imposed social roles. She works hard to prove Anarkali’s innocence and becomes an agent of positive change in society by expressing her emotional bond with the transsexuals. She even bypasses
her husband in her concern for establishing justice. This emphasizes the fact that women characters of Dattani dare to think independently of their male counterparts.

Failure of marriages due to the absence of mutual trust and understanding is a recurring motif in many of Dattani’s plays. The play, *Tara*, explores the deep-rooted causes which transform a loving husband-wife relation into the one characterized by unhappiness, discontent and dissatisfaction. In this play, Mr. Patel, a native of Gujarat, is married to Bharati, a Kannadiga. Patel says, “…Ours was a happy marriage. We were all overjoyed when we come to know Bharati would have twins. Until certain tests revealed the… complications” (p. 377). With the birth of Siamese twins, the conflict between husband and wife emerges. The bickering between Patel and Bharati reveals the hidden causes responsible for the failure of a happy married life. The angry and frustrated couple seems to be a victim of their own weaknesses and viciousness. Bharati has to bear the pain of guilt for her wrong decision and being a party with her father in giving the third leg to Chandan’s body which actually belonged to Tara. After the result of the twins’ surgery, Patel becomes aggressive. He leaves no chance to insult and hurt Bharati. When Bharati talks of giving her kidneys to Tara to avoid expenses, Patel sarcastically comments: “When have expenses ever bothered you? Your father’s wealth has always been your strength against me” (p. 344).

Violent and aggressive behaviour of Mr. Patel seems to be the result of his inner insecurity due to his desertion by his parents. It is pertinent to note here that cultural prejudices and the orthodoxy of the parents also mar the future happiness of their children. Mr. Patel had to break away from his parents as this marriage was not acceptable to them. He denies Bharati the consolation of confessing the truth about her decision in Tara’s surgery, “…I don’t want you to have the satisfaction of doing it” (p. 344). He is often rude and behaves in an authoritarian manner when it comes to dealing with his wife and taking decisions regarding the future of the children. When we study the causes of the sadistic behaviour of Patel, we find that he suffers from a sense of guilt. Though he was not a party to the unjust and wrong decision regarding Tara’s surgery, but it is also clear that he did not really try to stop Bharati and his father. He admits, “…May be I had protested more strongly!” (p. 378).
Harsh and testing circumstances create a lot of tension and conflict between the couple. They start deriving sadistic pleasure in inflicting pain upon each other. Bharati cannot come out of an uncompromising sense of guilt and starts making a show of her love to Tara in such a manner that she starts hating her father for being harsh to her mother. Patel does not permit this and declares, “It’s my turn now” (p. 344). He derives a sadistic pleasure and gratification in telling his children about his wife’s unjust role in the treatment of Tara. Both Bharati and Patel try to prove themselves good in their children’s eyes. Both of them are alienated in their suffering and don’t comfort and soothe each other at the time of dire need. Constant bickering between the husband and the wife proves devastating for the whole family.

After realizing the malicious intentions of his parents and grandfather for Tara, Chandan leaves India for good. Tara’s death has such a disturbing effect on him that he refuses to come back to India even when his mother dies. He rejects both his parents and even changes his identity.

The play depicts that both the husband and the wife are at fault-lines. Bharati becomes subjugated to the patriarchal whims when she becomes a party with her father and ruins her daughter’s life. Patel did assert his individuality when he married Bharati against his parents’ wishes, but he evades his responsibility as a parent when he does not protest against Bharati and her father. Even after the things go awry, they do not acknowledge their errors and failures and thus ruin not only their own life but of their children’s as well.

Thus, while dealing with husband-wife relationship, one can trace the socio-cultural causes responsible for marital conflicts hinted at by the playwright. The male and female dichotomy of being polar opposites with the former oppressing the later leads to strife, because the woman now rebels against the traditional roles and tries to move out of the claustrophobic existence of male-ordained families. Dattani’s plays underline that marriages fail if they lack mutual trust, love and understanding. Both husband and wife suffer if the mutual relations are strained. It is an anachronistic idea to think that only wives suffer in an unhappy marriage. The couple has to work in unison towards marital growth and happiness. In the contemporary context, there is a
need to change the institutionalized form of marriage into ‘pure relationship’ which is based on happiness of each partner and where “…marriage is seen as a choice, not an obligation, and only reason to marry would be to make partners happy.”

Dattani seems to underline the importance of equal rights for man and woman and asks for a social change where individuals can flourish without being exploited. In marriage as an institution and intimate relationship, the positive goal of making love and intimacy permanent must be involved. In the words of Knox: “The benefits of love, sex, companionship, emotional security can be enjoyed without marriage. But marriage provides the social approval and structure for experiencing these phenomena with the same person over time.”
Notes


20 *ibid.*


22 Mahesh Dattani, *Collected Plays: Mahesh Dattani* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000), p.233. All subsequent references to the play are from the same edition and page numbers have been given within parentheses.


25 *ibid.*, p.150.


38 Asha Kuthari Chaudhari, *Contemporary Indian Writing in English: Mahesh Dattani*, p.57.

39 Miruna George, “Constructing the Self and the Other: Seven Steps Around the Fire and Bravely Fought the Queen,” *Mahesh Dattani’s Plays: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Angelie Multani, p.80.
