Chapter Three discussed how Dattani has presented the taboo subject of homosexuality in two of his plays in a transparent manner. This chapter continues the thread of the third chapter and investigates Dattani’s Do the Needful and Bravely Fought the Queen which present homosexuality in the urban Indian family context. This chapter also discusses Seven Steps Around the Fire which deals with transgender issues.

Do the Needful

Do the Needful (1996) is Dattani’s first radio play, commissioned by the BBC. This is a romantic comedy set around the theme of the Indian system of arranged marriages. Dattani simultaneously explores the twin issues of gender and alternate sexuality in this play. A gay is forced into a heterosexual marriage with a feisty, independent girl who is in love with another man. This narrative which appears to be comical throws light on the behaviour of a young couple who are willing to pursue their pleasures independently outside marriage. Sally Avens in her “A Note on the Play” writes:

In 1996 Mahesh Dattani was commissioned to write his first radio play for the BBC; the result was the somewhat unconventional ‘romantic comedy’, Do The Needful. Like all the best love stories, the hero and heroine end up getting married,
but the road to marital bliss is full of the most unexpected twists and turns. For me, this was the joy of working on Mahesh’s script: his writing, whilst taking on a conventional form and being readily accessible to an audience, never fails to challenge and surprise. And whilst the play may be set in India within the conventions of ‘arranged marriages’, its wider themes are universal. A British audience found it easy to empathize with a gay man being forced to live his life within the norms of a heterosexual society or a young woman eager to prove her independence and break free from her parents. (115)

Two sets of families—the Patels and the Gowdas—are negotiating a matrimonial alliance to their offspring. Responding to a matrimonial advertisement, Mr. Chandrakant Patel and his wife come to Bangalore to see Lata Gowda, the daughter of Devraj Gowda and Prema Gowda with a marriage proposal for their son, Alpesh. Alpesh Patel is “thirty plus and divorced” and Lata Gowda is “twenty-four and notorious” (121). The Gowdas are desperate to marry off their daughter at the earliest. This is evident from their conversation:

PREMA GOWDA. Do you think it will work with these Patel people?

DEVRAJ GOWDA. Who knows?

PREMA GOWDA. They seem desperate.

DEVRAJ GOWDA. We are desperate.
PREMA GOWDA. He is thirty-plus and divorced.

DEVRAJ GOWDA. She is twenty-four and notorious. (121)

The prospective “bride” Lata is involved with a man called Salim, apparently a Muslim terrorist. Alpesh, the “groom-to-be” is a gay whose partner is Trilok. The audience/readers are let into the thoughts of Lata and Alpesh through which their yearnings for Salim and Trilok respectively are revealed. Their parents want to set them straight and that is the reason why they go for an inter-caste marriage—a rare phenomenon in the Indian milieu. Lata’s mother is apprehensive since it is an inter-caste affair. Moreover, Alpesh is a divorcee. Devraj knows the nature of his daughter and therefore, wants her to get married as soon as possible. The conversations between the Patels and the Gowdas reveal a good deal of things about the society at present.

Lata is not at all happy about the alliance because she wants to live with Salim. But her parents are completely against her wishes and in fact that is the reason why they thought of an alliance from a different community and that too from north India. The case of Alpesh is different. He is a gay who enjoys sex with Trilok who is working in a gym in Mumbai. Alpesh’s first marriage ended up in a divorce because he did not keep his wife happy. He told his father that he did not want to get married but his father threatened him by saying that he will commit suicide if he does not get married. At last Alpesh agrees to his father.
Chandrakant Patel and his family come to Bangalore to meet Devaraj Gowda and his daughter Lata. The Patels and the Gowdas talk about their families. While the parents are talking about culture, wealth, property, food and things like that, Lata and Alpesh talk to each other. Both of them openly express their displeasure in this alliance. Lata reveals that she is in love with Salim but Alpesh does not tell her that he is a gay. Lata asks Alpesh to tell his parents that he does not want this marriage, but he brushes that suggestion aside. He asks Lata to tell her parents about her relationship with Salim. She replies that they already know that and that is, in fact, the reason why they wanted to marry her off as soon as possible.

When all the attempts to disrupt the alliance fail, Lata tries to run away from her house at night. She takes some jewels and comes out of the house when everyone is asleep. She stops at the cowshed to pat her pet, Gauri. Then she hears a groaning sound as if somebody was in pain. The sound is from Alpesh’s room and she rushes there. She turns on the flashlight and opens his room. She is shocked to see Alpesh having sex with Mali, the servant boy. Mali confesses that Alpesh forced him to do it. She angrily remarks, “You filthy beast! How could you force him to do all that?” (153).

Her initial disgust gives way to a gleeful sense of freedom; she would not have to sleep with him if she marries him. Both of them will be able to give each other ample space and do what they like and keep their families and the society happy by “doing the needful”. They come to an understanding and get married with a view to satisfying their desires in their own way. Their mutual
agreement is couched in the form of a Hindi phrase that Alpesh offers: “Teri bhi chup, meri bhi chup” (142) which means “Your silence and mine as well”.

Dattani has used the technique of thought and voice-over in Do The Needful. What a particular character thinks and tells the audience is kept as a secret from the character spoken to. For instance, Alpesh, who has a homosexual relationship with Trilok, keeps it a secret from Lata and others. Similarly, Lata, who is in love with Salim, keeps it a secret from Alpesh and her parents. But it is through their thoughts presented in the form of voice-over that the audience comes to know about their relationships.

Alpesh, a gay, is not interested in marrying Lata. This is how the playwright presents his mind through his thought:

ALPESH (thought). What could I say, Trilok? How would I tell her to reject me?

ALPESH (thought). She was waiting for me to say something.

May be I should have told her about you. After all, she was decent enough to bring up her Salman or Salim or whatever. (149)

Alpesh agrees to the marriage only if Lata brings Mali as dowry. They get married and take Mali with them because Alpesh wants to have him in his home. He does not want to tell Trilok that Mali is there in his house because he does not want to make him unhappy. Both Alpesh and Lata are more concerned about their extra-marital relationship which is evident in their thoughts:
Queer theorists have been active in problematising heterosexuality in order to dissolve heteronormativity. The normative status of heterosexuality links intimacy with the institutions of personal life making sex a personal matter in the public world which makes heterosexual relations the privileged institution of social reproduction. This heteronormative understanding of intimacy blocks the construction of non-normative or explicit public sexual cultures.

Heterosexuality is more than the sexual acts associated with it. It is a variety of practices that underscores heterosexuality as a central index of social membership. It is embedded in social and economic discourses and institutions and practices that produce the heteronorm. Furthermore, the heterosexual culture has to exclude much of the things people know to be able to hold its normative status. People have to identify themselves with the heteronormative life narrative to be socially recognised and accepted. Queer culture on the contrary promotes a different understanding of intimacy.

Butler has shown how the heteronorm is integrated into social theory and philosophy and has also pointed out how well discourses have managed to convince us that sex, gender and desire are coherent categories that fit together only in predetermined ways. Queer theorists have produced exciting and fascinating analysis of heteronormativity and produced ways to problematise, denaturalize and denormatise heterosexuality, and change or dissolve heteronormativity. The heterosexual culture focuses on promoting and legitimizing a lifestyle that excludes and manipulates people. It makes people feel that they have to identify themselves with the heterosexual life to be
socially accepted and any failure to do so will lead to social ostracisation. In *Do The Needful*, Dattani has tried to problematise and analyse heteronormativity through Alpesh and Lata.

A traditional family endorses heteronormativity through heterosexual marriages. A subtle bias can be identified in the form of heterocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality. Heterocentrism is the lurking belief that heterosexuality is the norm by which all human experience is measured. It seems to have evolved out of the Eurocentric definition of sexuality. Since the nineteenth century there has been in Western culture a whole new discourse dividing the homosexuals and heterosexuals into sharply antagonistic binaries.

Heterosexuality is made to look natural by emphasizing the its reproductive function, which is thought of as the bedrock of social relations. Without that, society would not function nor exist. It promotes lifelong monogamous, cohabiting relationships, legally sanctioned through marriage and aiming at producing children as the only natural way of life.

Queer theorists view heterosexuality not only as an individual preference but also as a socially constructed institution. Adrienne Rich’s theory of compulsory heterosexuality is one of the important works in problematising heterosexuality and seeing it as something other than a natural phenomenon. Examining the institutionalisation of heterosexuality, Rich in her “Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence” suggests that it may not be preferences at all but rather something that “has had to be imposed, managed, organised, propagandised and maintained by force” (51).
Butler uses the concept of heterosexual matrix to describe heteronormativity. She uses the term “to designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalized” (*Gender Trouble* 151). She draws from her reading of Monique Witting’s “heterosexual contract” and Adrienne Rich’s “compulsory heterosexuality” as well as Foucault’s discourse theory. In Butler’s theory, heterosexuality and its normative status is a central issue. She argues that “the naturalization of both heterosexuality and masculine sexual agency are discursive constructions nowhere accounted for but everywhere assumed within the founding structuralist frame” (55).

Butler examines Levi-Strauss’s theory of exchange. The exchange of women in marriage, given as gifts from one patrilineal clan to another, is the form of exchange that structures all other exchanges. The structural system of kinship relations is seen as a universal logic or law that structures all other human relations (49-50). Butler proposes a rereading of this theory with Foucault’s theory of discourse in mind. The laws that are being described here are, in fact, part of the discourse and underscore the heterosexual matrix. Butler remarks that “for Levi-Strauss, the taboo against the act of heterosexual incest . . . as well as [the] incestuous fantasy is instated as universal truths of culture” (54) but are, in fact, socially constructed as such.

According to Butler, the discursive constructions of marriage have to be exposed in order to denaturalise and denormatise heteronormativity. In her theory, gender identity is a part of discourse. By considering gender and its construction as part of discourse she recognizes the possibility for interference and reconstruction.
Of late, the Western world has started accepting homosexuality and has legalized gay unions. Most educated Indians assume that homosexuality is a Western idea and practice. The irony is that homosexuality is not something that the West taught us; but it is the West that taught us to criminalize this concept. A law of the colonial era that successfully distorted the way Indians looked at alternate sexuality has been done away with in its country of origin but it still haunts the sexual minorities in India.

Dattani in *Do The Needful* points at the shared spaces between the lesbians and the gays, both under the hegemony of the mainstream society that forces them to conform and lead lives that are alien to their nature. Dattani here suggests a practical solution without disturbing the peace and status quo of a “straight society”. This play is about social problems and the contemporary society in which old prejudices and values make way for new theories and fresh insights.

Dattani is known for his acute psychological insight and the way he sets his principal characters on a process of self-discovery cutting through the web of circumstances, relationships and entrenched hypocrisies. *Do The Needful* presents an attempt to maintain peace and compromise with the heteronormative society. The compromise that Lata and Alpesh make in marrying is a clever and conscious choice to suit both their sexual orientations as well as the heteronormative social order. Even though the characters are forced by their families to get married they turn this forced harmony to their advantage. Eventually, Dattani arrives at an ingenious solution that finds liberation in the teaming up of two subversives (Lata/Alpesh) with different
agenda (Salim/Trilok) against the hegemony of a common oppressor, namely, the family/society.

Butler argues that the cultural construction of gender relies upon a sense of identification whereby individuals come to recognise their own gender identities by affiliating to a set of values and behavioural characteristics toward which they are socially conditioned. In order to feel a sense of belonging within their culture, they are under pressure to conform to the gendered modes of behaviour that are presented to them by that culture. If the demands themselves placed by patriarchy in the process of gender identification are unstable then it requires the individual to be able to adopt to a number of altering constructions so that “multiple and coexisting identifications produce conflicts, convergences, and innovative dissonances within gender configurations which contest the fixity of masculine and feminine placements” (*Bodies That Matter* 67). The need to become chameleon-like shifting the specifics of your own gender identity according to the cultural and social requirements of a given culture at a given time suggests the disruptive possibilities of crossing-over between identity constructs in a manner that disassociates them from the patriarchal order.

Butler argues that individuals find themselves unable to identify fully with the more formal gender constructions offered to them. This produces a sense of displacement and alienation, which may push the individual towards experimenting with variations, permitted or otherwise, that allow a greater sense of personal empowerment. The inevitable internal contradictions and tensions of any power system, patriarchy included, cannot help but create
spaces in which the determination of social discourses becomes frayed and dysfunctional.

In “How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality”, Halperin writes:

Homo- and heterosexuality have become more or less mutually exclusive forms of human subjectivity, different kinds of human sexuality, and any feeling or expression of heterosexual desire is thought to rule out any feeling or expression of homosexual desire on the part of the same individual. Sexual object choice attaches to a notion of sexual orientation, such that sexual behavior is seen to express an underlying and permanent psychosexual feature of the human subject. Hence people are routinely assigned to one or the other of two sexual species on the basis of their sexual object choice and orientation. In short, homosexuality is more than same-sex sexual object choice, more even than conscious erotic same-sex preference. Homosexuality is the specification of same-sex sexual object choice in and of itself as an overriding principle of sexual and social difference.

(112)

Do The Needful challenges the deeply-entrenched heterosexual gender order and devises new strategies to undo both binary gender categories and heteronormativity. The heterosexual order places marriage between a man and a woman to be the norm but in this play we have a homosexual who does not want to marry any woman. So the homosexual male and the heterosexual
female who is in another relationship join together to devise a strategy to undo heteronormativity.

In *Do The Needful*, Dattani uses the family unit as his locale and narrative enclosure. This play, among other issues, throws light on the growing helplessness of parents to stop their children from going their own ways. This is a typical family play in which parents show concern for their children’s marriage. Alpesh and Lata come to an understanding and get married only to gratify their own desires and needs in their own way. No sooner did Lata and Alpesh marry than they decide how to deceive their family and meet their respective lovers. The title *Do The Needful* is ironical but appropriate as Alpesh and Lata manage to go their own way notwithstanding their marriage.

**Bravely Fought the Queen**

*Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991) is a play that deals with alternate sexuality, although the approach is oblique and perhaps secondary to the theme of gender differences and the rupture between the world of men and that of women. Nitin, in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, is the first homosexual character in any modern Indian play who has been treated with sympathy.

In the conventional Indian social order, almost all gays are married for getting social acceptance. In public they act as heterosexuals but in private they continue with their homosexual relationships even after their marriage. Through this play, Dattani has brought out an invisible issue which is embarrassing to talk about and has presented it as a reality even without mentioning the word “homosexual”.
While this play looks closely at the politics of the Indian joint family as the setting, it constantly points at the gender divide and the dominance of the one over the other. This is clear in the titles that the playwright gives to the three acts of the play. Act I is called “The Women”, Act II is titled “The Men” and it is a “Free for All!” in the third Act. The play is set in Bangalore of the 1980s and 1990s and charts the emotional, financial and sexual issues in the lives of an urban Indian family of two brothers. The brothers are the co-owners of an advertising agency, married to two sisters—women who remain mostly at home and look after the men’s old mother, Baa.

The play starts with the mellifluous *thumri* by Naina Devi in the background and the focus is on Dolly who is getting ready to go out with her husband. Lalitha comes there to discuss with Dolly about organizing a masked ball to launch ReVaTee, a new range of night wear and underwear for women. Lalitha is the wife of Sridhar who works for Jiten and Nitin’s marketing firm. Alka, Dolly’s younger sister, enters and she is also dressed to go out. She straightaway goes to the bar and takes a gulp of rum. She calls her husband and understands that the plan to go out in the evening stands cancelled. She asks Lalitha not to tell Dolly about the change in the plan. She pours a drink for Lalitha and mixes some rum in it. Lalitha talks about growing bonsai which is her hobby. Meanwhile Baa rings the bell and calls out for Dolly. Alka tells Lalitha about the temporary cook Kanhaiya. Both of them drink while they discuss. By this time Dolly enters and starts putting make up. Dolly and Alka exchange hurtful words at times, each trying to score over the other and referring to Praful, their brother, who manipulated Alka into marrying Nitin,
and Daksha, Dolly’s daughter who turns out to be a spastic, and is a painful reminder of the violence wreaked by Jiten, Dolly’s husband.

Even as the bitterness in the sisters’ relationship stands exposed through their apparent drive to be one up on the other, Lalitha, the outsider, tries to discuss the masked ball that the men have arranged. Bonsai is the most important metaphor in the play. The stunted growth, the bizarre shape and the grotesque reality of the bonsai becomes resonant in the existence of all the characters in the play.

All the three women try to escape the confines of their claustrophobic world in various ways: Alka with alcohol, Dolly with her fantasizing about Kanhaiya, and Lalitha with her obsession with bonsais. After Dolly’s chagrined acceptance of Lalitha’s presence, the women discuss the masked ball. The connotations of the mask are also important: the introduction of the world of make-believe, of untruths, of paste-on realities and of the need to hide behind a façade to survive. Alka says that she wanted to be Jhansi Rani who fought braving all odds, but behind the garb of a man and so a “manly” queen.

Act 11 “The Men” takes place in Jiten and Nitin’s office with the common component of the bar and Baa, and Act I is re-enacted but from the perspective of the men. While Jiten dominates the scene with his overbearing and egotistical presence Nitin seems almost ineffectual and Sridhar tries to be assertive in various ways. Apart from the repeated motif of the cancelled party, Baa’s words provide a sense of movement back and forth in time. Meanwhile, the men discuss the psyche of the women and the ‘ReVaTee’ brand of lingerie
that they are to market. Even as Jiten argues for a male perspective on the item they are trying to sell, Sridhar tries to argue for the female standpoint. Jiten forces Sridhar to fetch him a prostitute and is forced to do it to save his job. Nitin remains neutral always. The reference that is made to Praful creates a matrix of significant suggestions that carries the play forward with increasing tension towards the third act titled “Free for All”.

In the last act when the two worlds converge, all the characters stand exposed, the sham and fafade ripped apart. The past and the future collapse into the present. Dolly here emerges as the strongest character, supporting a drunken Alka and roundly revealing the torturous truth about Daksha. Jiten is driven to guilty tears and implicates Baa as the reason for torturing his pregnant wife. He finally drives off, crushing the old rag picker to death.

Bravely Fought the Queen charts the emotional, financial and sexual intricacies of a modern day Indian family. The fragmentation of the family, the deceit, discord and power equations within the family are portrayed with sensitivity and psychological insight in this play.

The play ends with Nitin finally revealing his “gay” relationship with Praful, when he tells Alka who is asleep:

NITIN. Those times when I used to spend the night at your place, I used to sleep on a mattress on the floor, beside me.

. . when all the lights were out, I would lie on the cot.

Waiting. For at least an hour ... I would get up and quietly walk to your room . . . yours, your sister’s and your
mother’s. To make sure . . . That’s right. Don’t wake up. Just sleep. And I would go back to Praful’s room . . . and kneel ... At times he would wake up immediately. At other times I would lean forwarded to look at him. Close enough for my breath to fall gently on his face. And he would open his eyes ... I loved him too. He is . . . was attractive. And he responded ... He told me that you knew. That he told you . . . about me. And that it didn’t matter to you. You only wanted the security of a marriage. (314)

The closing spotlight falls on the pitifully huddled figure of Alka in her drunken slumber. Nitin’s homosexuality becomes apparent in his revelations about Praful, the absent manipulator of the entire situation. Alka has been used by her own brother as a veil behind which surreptitious homosexual relationships may continue,

Nitin and Praful have had sexual relationships and we learn in the latter half of the play from Nitin’s conversation with his mother that Praful tricked him into marrying his sister Alka. Nitin being a homosexual is unable to satiate his wife’s desire. He has no attraction or concern for Alka which becomes obvious when he says that he did not care if Alka stayed there or left him or drank herself to death. He is over-awed by the lengthening impact of Praful over his life. He is portrayed as a man of weak will who neither wanted to disappoint his brother Jiten by refusing to divorce his wife nor Praful by divorcing his sister. To add to this turmoil, there was a piece of property which Baa was not ready to give him because he married Alka against her will.
In this play, there is a character named Kanhaiya, who represents the world of sexuality, whether heterosexuality or homosexuality. He might be the alluring cook who might or might not be the Krishna of Dolly and Alka, or the dark auto driver who embodies Nitin’s sexual guilt. Nitin at the end of the play reveals his homosexual relations to Alka who is drunk and is fast asleep.

In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Nitin’s homosexual orientation is presented as an invisible factor. Nitin is a closet homosexual who is afraid of the heteronormative social order. He does not want to reveal that he is a homosexual and that is why he keeps his marriage with Alka as a mask for his relationship with Praful. He does not reveal his orientation to anyone till the end of the play. Even at the end of the play he tells Alka that he has had homosexual relationship with Praful but she is not in her senses after getting drunk. In *Tendencies*, Sedgwick has discussed heterosexuality’s supposed invisibility. She writes:

To the degree that heterosexuality does not function as a sexuality... there are stubborn barriers to making it accountable, to making it so much as visible, in the framework of projects of historicizing and hence denaturalizing sexuality. Making heterosexuality historically visible is difficult because, under its institutional pseudonyms such as Inheritance, Marriage, Dynasty, Family, Domesticity, and Population, heterosexuality has been permitted to masquerade so fully as History itself—when it has not presented itself as the totality of Romance. (10-11)
In a similar vein, Halperin argues in *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*.

By constituting homosexuality as an object of knowledge, heterosexuality also constitutes itself as a privileged stance of subjectivity—as the very condition of knowledge—and thereby avoids becoming an object of knowledge itself, the target of a possible critique. . . . Heterosexuality, not homosexuality, then, is truly ‘the love that dare not speak its name’. (47)

In the heteronormative social order, a person can be only a (hetero)sexed being, or, as Butler puts it, “sex” is the norm by which the “one” becomes viable at all (*Bodies That Matter* 2). Homosexuality is rightly seen as disrupting conventional ideas about what it is to “be a man”. Yet because the existence of two *oppositional* sexes—male and female—is taken as given, this specifically *heterosexual* relationship, which grounds modern ideas about gender, is often overlooked. In emphasizing the significance of homosexuality for challenging hegemonic constructions of masculinity, the fundamental role of heterosexuality, although implicitly acknowledged, is not often brought into explicit focus.

The assumption of only two sexes implicitly subscribes to a heterosexualization of desire that, as Butler writes, “requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine,’ where these are understood as expressive attributes of ‘male’ and ‘female’” (*Gender Trouble* 17). It follows, then, that the internal coherence of
“man” or “woman” requires an enduring and oppositional notion of heterosexuality (22).

Scholars of sexuality have long documented the ways in which homosexual and heterosexual individuals draw from similar social roles available to them in a given historical period. In queer analysis, the development of homosexual identity is understood to emerge as an embedded social product bearing the mark of socialization processes. The violation of dominant social codes—as when homosexual men engage in practices deemed "unnatural" for their gender—is no more certainly indicative of subversion from a queer perspective. Such practices can have a multitude of causes and effects that do not lend themselves so readily to the subversion promised by queer theory. Indeed, the theoretical notion that connects subversion to sexual marginality, either as an intentional component of gay subjectivity or as an unintended effect, may represent a gross oversimplification of more complex social processes.

Bravely Fought the Queen explores the complexity and fluidity of sexuality through the character of Nitin who is acting against the heterosexual norm. Dattani presents Nitin as a character who is in a dilemma with regard to his sexual orientation. He is neither able to make his wife happy nor can he reveal his homosexual desires in public. In an important essay "English Literature" in The Encyclopedia of Gay Histories and Cultures, Barry Weller writes:
Gay or queer criticism has signaled, from the outset, that its project entails not the examination of a circumscribed canon of gay-centered or gay-identified texts but a rereading of the way in which the entire body of Anglo-American literature—and beyond—delineates among other things the boundaries of sexual identity, the norms of sexual behavior, the grotesque and classically desirable body, and the terms of social inclusion and exile. (279)

The belief that heterosexual behaviour is natural to human beings equates biological sex with the gender of human beings. The role of culture in the making of “women” and “men” out of female and male beings is hardly acknowledged. Gender socialisation which starts in infancy continues in all spheres of life and structures the lives of women and men to suit the roles society has carved out for them. The categories “men” and “women” are defined as excluding each other. Their “biologically” defined gender identities largely determine the expression of their sexualities. Women and men are allowed and encouraged to express heterosexual impulses only. Thus, among various cultures, the stronger the gender differentiation, the more the structures against homosexually will be. The rigid boundaries between masculinity and femininity are thus constantly constructed, maintained, naturalised and reinforced, and only heterosexuality comes to be considered the “normal” sexual behaviour.

*Bravely Fought the Queen* addresses a situation in which a person with homosexual orientation constructed by the rigid boundaries constructed by the heteronormative social order is deconstructed. The taboo against any form of
sexuality which is outside the limits of heterosexuality prevents writers from addressing these issues. But Dattani has taken a bold step to bring out the latent realities in the Indian society and presents sexual behaviours that breach the heteronormative social or symbolic boundaries.

Queer theory questions, even defies, notions of objectivity and the essentiality of fact. It opens more “texts” for study, and more bodies of knowledge to compile, compare, and evaluate. What matters is the process, rather than the product, in part because the product of queer theory more often is the ^inquiry rather than the declaration. In “Is there a queer pedagogy? Or, stop reading straight” Britzman states:

Queer Theory signifies improper subjects and improper theories, even as it questions the very grounds of identity and theory. Queer Theory occupies a difficult space between the signifier and the signified, where something queer happens to the signified—to history and to bodies—and something queer happens to the signifier—to language and to representation.

(153)

Britzman observes that queer theory assumes a position that if not within the marginalized then at least outside of the margins of “normality” (155). Queer theory, writes Seidman, represents a change from how and why the experiences of non-heterosexual people are studied, a “shifting theory away from its present grounding in identity concepts to a cultural or epistemological centering” (130). Indeed, Seidman argues:
Queer theory is less a matter of explaining the repression or expression of a homosexual minority than an analysis of the hetero/homosexual figure as a power/knowledge regime that shapes the ordering of desires, behaviors, and social institutions, and social relations—in a word, the constitution of the self and society. (128)

Dattani’s *Bravely Fought the Queen* discusses homosexual relationships in the Indian family context. Nitin, has been presented in multiple roles: as that of a husband to Alka, a son to Baa and a brother to Jitin, all part of a heteronormative social order. Nitin’s relationship with Praful alone is set outside the normal construction of heteronormativity. Reading Dattani’s texts as queer, however, force a discussion of sexuality that goes beyond the conventions of the unconventional and into less stable interpretations of his plays. Queer readings of Dattani’s plays initiate a discussion which leads to unsettlement rather than a systematization. His plays gains importance as sites for queer analysis because there are very few texts in the Indian context to be read as queer texts and moreover his explicit presentation of sexuality opens up ample space for an elaborate discussion of queer issues in the Indian situation.

In recent years there has been an increased volume of discussion on same-sex desire and homosexuality produced in Indian cultural/academic/literary contexts. In their Introduction to *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economics of Modern India*, India-based feminists Mary John and Janaki Nair have cautioned that:
A focus on the conspiracy of silence regarding sexuality in India, whether within political and social movements or in scholarship, must not blind us to the multiple sites where 'sexuality' has long been embedded. In the spheres of the law, demography or medicine, for instance, sexuality enjoys a massive and indisputable presence that is far from prohibited. (1)

*Bravely Fought the Queen* carries the ironic line: “The best part about the ball is everyone will be in costume! And we will have masks on!” (237). Praful acts as a strict heterosexual going by the heteronormative social order and threatens to burn his sister when she is seen with a boyfriend. He also acts like a responsible brother who arranges for his sister to marry Nitin but the only problem here is that Nitin is his homosexual partner. Praful burns his lover with guilt and shame because they are not heterosexual.

Dattani’s plays help the audience to cue into experiences of resistance, opening windows on how separate worlds come to be constructed. He seems to work on the assumption that his audience may be willing to go with him. In the distancing that underscores much of the parody in his plays, he seems to encourage his audience to invoke events and characters that exist off-stage. In Dattani, contemporary audiences recognize the magic of individuation. Instead of recognizing the private person behind the actor's masks, the audience glimpses the separate men and women behind the mask of the middle-class audience. The preoccupation with identity continues. In riding the wave of
redefinition, identities come to territorialize or deterritorialize or renegotiate or altogether reinvent environments.

*Bravely Fought the Queen* enacts a highly differentiated structure of sexual orientation that deconstructs the prevailing gender and sexual definitions. While heteronormativity forms the foundational basis for this structure, Dattani deploys a varied attempt to disclose this non-normative sexual orientation. This attempt allows us to examine the ways in which gender and sexual stereotypes are perceived and constructed. The social order that has been constructed reveals itself to be heterosexist in its dominant sexual ideology.

Dattani’s exposition of the trauma that an Indian gay goes through in the prevailing social order is enacted powerfully in Act III (314-15), during which scene Nitin talks about his relationship with Praful to Alka who is totally drunk. Nitin is not ready to reveal his sexual orientation openly and that is evident when he says, “Don’t wake up. Stay drunk. You mustn’t watch” (315). The conventional ideas about public and private space presuppose a structural split between these two spaces.

Nitin performs the role of a husband to Alka in public and the role of a lover to Praful in private. This is a deconstruction of the heteronormative social structure and can be analysed in terms of Butler’s contentions regarding the performativity of gender. Butler explores the potential for deconstructing and subverting the gender script. She argues in *Gender Trouble*: 
Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality*. (140-141)

*Bravely Fought the Queen* endorses Butler’s call for a contestation of the gender script through a multitude of gender performances which are outside heteronormativity. The uncoupling of sexual and gender identity is reiterated in the character of Nitin who plays multiple roles in his life.

*Bravely Fought the Queen* takes the homosexual milieu and the homosexual way of life in the Indian setting and uses it to critique the human experience in a heteronormative social order. Even though Nitin is presented as an invisible homosexual, he offers a new visibility of the queer community present in the Indian society. The power of the play lies in the way it remorselessly peels away the pretensions of the gay character and reveals pessimism with regard to the acceptance that a homosexual can receive in this society.
*Bravely Fought the Queen* illuminates the contemporary Indian literature’s symbolization of suffering homosexuals as an embodiment of queer discourse in the Indian context. Moreover, this play also problematises, even as it makes visible, the distress that homosexuals have to undergo in India where homosexuality is a forbidden subject. Through the play, Dattani leads the reader/audience to realize how we are all trapped in the complications and contradictions of our values and assumptions.

**Seven Steps Around the Fire**

*Seven Steps Around the Fire* explores a theme that focuses on the invisible zones of social behaviour. *Seven Steps Around the Fire* was first broadcast as *Seven Circles Around the Fire* by BBC Radio 4 on 9 January 1999. The storyline of this play is unusual in the Indian context. The play revolves around the third gender—the community of eunuchs and their existence on the fringes of the Indian milieu.

Transgender’s identity does not match the usual notions of male or female gender roles but combines or moves between these. The transgender do not have any specific sexual orientation; they may identify themselves as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or asexual. They may have characteristics that are usually related to a particular gender but are classified elsewhere on the conventional gender continuum or live outside of it as “other” or “third gender”.

*Seven Steps Around the Fire* is one of Dattani’s explorations of fringe issues that are generally swept aside by the mainstream concerns of a society
that would prefer to believe that they do not exist at all. Jeremy Mortimer in his Introduction to the play writes:

For the story he [Dattani] chooses to tell is no ordinary story. The murder victim Kamla, a beautiful hijra eunuch, had, it turns out, been secretly married to Subbu, the son of a wealthy government minister. The minister had the young hijra burned to death, and hastily arranged for his son to marry an acceptable girl. But at the wedding—attended of course by the hijras who sing and dance at weddings and births—Subbu produces a gun and kills himself. The truth behind the suicide is hushed up, but Uma has been keeping full notes for her thesis on the hijra community. (3)

Dattani explains the term *hijra* through the words of Uma Rao, a research scholar in Sociology, by taking recourse to the *Ramayana*:

A brief note on the popular myths on the origin of the hijras will be in order, before looking at the class-gender-based power implications. The term hijra, of course, is of Urdu origin, a combination of Hindi, Persian and Arabic, literally meaning ‘neither male nor female’. Another legend traces their ancestry to the *Ramayana*. The legend has it that god Rama was going to cross the river and go into exile in the forest. All the people of the city wanted to follow him. He said, ‘Men and women turn back’. Some of his male followers did not know what to do.
They could not disobey him. So they sacrificed their masculinity, to become neither men nor women, and followed him to the forest. Rama was pleased with their devotion and blessed them . . . Perceived as the lowest of the low, they yearn for family and love. The two events in mainstream Hindu culture where their presence is acceptable—marriage and birth—ironically are the very same privileges denied to them by man and nature. (10-11)

Uma is researching the community of eunuchs and is following up the murder of Kamla, a beautiful eunuch. Uma, daughter of the Vice Chancellor of Bangalore University, is married to Suresh Rao, the Superintendent of Police, who nurses high ambitions of succeeding his father as the Police Commissioner. Suresh Rao is the investigating police officer who looks into the murder of Kamla. But it is his wife Uma who is the sleuth here.

Uma emerges as the most powerful character of the play, the mouthpiece of the playwright, and fights to establish the identity of a eunuch. Using rather unconventional methods, she uncovers the truth behind the murder of Kamla. As an unwilling accomplice in her detective exploits, constable Munswamy, set to the task by his boss in order that he may keep her out of trouble, provides an excellent comic foil.

The play opens with the chanting of Sanskrit mantras, recited during Hindu weddings. That fades out to the sound of the rustle and hiss of a fire drowning the mantras. This, in turn, is pushed to the background by a piercing
scream. The sound of the fire resumes and engulfs the scream. The action begins here. Uma is at the police station to visit the cell of Anarkali, a hijra and an accused, who she is to interview. Right from the second line of the play Dattani has entered into questions of gender assignations. Constable Munswamy is highly amused at Uma’s reference to Anarkali as ‘she’. He prefers the neuter ‘it’ to address Anarkali. He piously declares that a lady with antecedents like Uma should perhaps look at more acceptable cases. He says:

MUNSWAMY. Madam, if you don’t mind me saying, why is a lady from a respectable family like yourself...?

There are so many other cases. All murder cases. Man killing wife, wife killing man’s lover, brother killing brother. And that shelf is full of dowry deathcases. Shall I ask the peon to dust all these files? (7)

Marginalised even in crime, the community Uma tries to investigate has grown around itself thick and impenetrable walls of incomprehensible myths and superstition so that it may survive in its isolation. As Munswamy points out it would be simpler and more honorable for Uma to study the mainstream crime.

Munswamy informs Anarkali and her cellmates that Uma is “the daughter-in-law of the Deputy Commissioner and the wife of our Superintendent” (17). Through this statement Dattani is problematising the components of identity for a woman in a patriarchal set-up. Dattani puts this against Anarkali’s reaction whose own neutral ground has taught her to be
wary of these very components. She is immediately on her guard and inaccessible-spitting venom and abuse, and in the process laying bare a number of unpalatable truths. After verifying the identity of Uma as a researcher in Sociology at Bangalore University and wife of Suresh Rao, the Superintendent of Police, Anarkali goes on to answer Uma’s queries. She says, “What is there to tell? I sing with other hijras at weddings and when a child is born. People give us money, otherwise, I will put a curse on them. As if God is on our side” (12). Then she changes her tactics and decides to use the operating power situation to her own benefit by manipulating Uma to obtain her freedom and even cigarettes. The conversations that Uma has with Anarkali reveal many truths about hijras that lie shrouded within the multiple layers of myths and cultural beliefs, and at the same time problematise relationships within accepted norms.

While Uma was describing her meeting with Anarkali to her husband, he laughs at the idea of a sisterhood of eunuchs and says “they are all castrated degenerate men . . .” (10). He does not trust the hijras and calls them liars and looks down upon them.

Uma actually offers her own sisterhood to Anarkali, who pounces upon the idea of manipulating her way to freedom. Anarkali asks Uma to meet Champa, the head hijra, and give her money to release her. Uma gets some money from her father and meets Champa. Champa snickers at Uma’s reference to her as ‘madam’, at the same time declaring that she was the mother/father of Kamla, the beautiful eunuch who was burnt alive. While they were talking, Minister Sharma’s bodyguard comes there in search of a
photograph. Uma gets the details about Salim from Champa and goes to the minister’s house to meet him. There she meets the Minister and his son Subbu whose marriage is fixed.

Uma understands that there is some importance to the photograph which Salim is searching for. She goes to meet Champa and Anarkali was also there. Anarkali was tortured by the police. She asks Uma whether she will be there for the minister’s son’s wedding and she replies in the affirmative. Uma is now sure that something fishy is happening.

Uma goes to the wedding along with Suresh. Hijras come there in a group to sing and dance and bless the couple. When the minister stops them, Uma tells him that it is bad luck to turn them away and he relents. Champa requests the minister to bring the young couple. At this time Subbu grabs Suresh’s gun and points it at himself. All of them try to persuade him not to do that. Anarkali now takes out a photograph that Subbu and Kamla had taken soon after their private wedding in some remote temple. It is a picture of Kamla as a beautiful bride smiling at Subbu with the wedding garland around him. Subbu gets that photograph from Anarkali and looking at it begins to cry. Then he kills himself.

Later Uma visits Champa and Anarkali was there. She is now the head hijra for Champa has retired and was going to spend the rest of her days at her sister’s house in Bombay. Anarkali tells her about Subbu and Kamla’s wedding and how she was murdered. Then she gives a locket to Uma which Champa had given her. She asks her to wear it and she will be blessed with
children. Then she asks Uma to leave the place and requests her not to come there with any sisterly affection.

The truth behind the suicide of Subbu is hushed up, but Uma has been keeping complete observations for her thesis on the hijra community. Uma moves from pillar to post to find out the man behind Kamala’s murder and in the process meets other hijras like Anarkali and Champa and interrogates them. She thinks aloud about the hijra community.

UMA (thought): Nobody seems to know anything about them. Neither do they. Did they come to this country with Islam, or are they a part of our glorious Hindu tradition? Why are they so obsessed with weddings and ceremonies of child birth? How do they come to know of these weddings? Why do they just show up without being invited? Are they just extortionists? And why do they not take singing lessons?

(16-17)

But Uma gradually realizes the futility of her search with regard to the murder of Kamla. She tells herself:

UMA. They knew. Anarkali, Champa and all the hijra people knew who was behind the killing of Kamla. They have no voice. The case was hushed up and was not even reported in the newspapers, Champa was right. The police made no arrests. Subbu’s suicide was written off as an accident. The photograph was destroyed. So were the lives of two young, people ...(42)
In what seems to be a recurrent pattern, Dattani creates a bipolar world in *Seven Steps Around the Fire*. The point of reference is marriage. The world of the hijras, the freak community who cannot procreate, and the normal heterosexual community, who necessarily must procreate, form this bipolarity.

*Seven Steps Around the Fire* has all the makings of a thriller. The murder of Kamala, a hijra, unravels as an act of homophobia. It is an execution carried out by a father to protect his son. The case is closed. Two factors seem to account for the silencing: one, that the father carries political clout; two, that homophobia comes to the fore. This incident ultimately represents the homophobic Indian society that keeps its blinders on to naturalize straight relationships as the norm, even if this should lead to a tragic end. Sharma has Kamla, his son’s bride murdered because he cannot stomach the fact that his son is marrying a hijra. Later he forces his son into a heterosexual wedding, in which as per the Hindu ceremony, the groom holds his bride by the hand and takes the ritualistic seven steps around the fire.

Uma Rao, who does research on the hijras, sees herself as a sociologist-turned-sleuth. She meets with the hijras. Her intentions are good. The community wishes her well, gives her a charmed locket that assures her motherhood, but pleads that she leave them alone. There can be no interaction between the two worlds. To the fanatic, “one hijra less in this world does not matter” (35); the refrain goes, “Back! Beat it! Kick the hijra” (7). For the hijras life goes on unnoticed by the other world. Uma explains:
The invisible minority. Behind Russel Market, everyone knew where to find them, although I couldn't see any *hijras* on the streets. They only come out in groups and make their presence felt by their peculiar loud hand clap. (21-2)

The only instance when the groups accord mutual visibility is at marriage and birth, when the majority group sanctions the minority group the power to bless through their singing and dancing and clapping. In the event of infertility, the *hijra* becomes the scapegoat: a lack of blessing is cited. Uma comments on the irony:

The two events in mainstream Hindu culture where their presence is acceptable—marriage and birth—ironically are the very same privileges denied to them by man and nature. Not for them the seven rounds witnessed by the fire god, eternally binding man and woman in matrimony, or the blessings of ‘May you be the mother of a hundred sons’. (11)

The word transsexual, unlike the word transgender, has a precise medical definition. The American Psychiatric Association has defined transsexuality as a psychiatrically defined state of being that assumes the preexistence of two sexes between which one may transition (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* 131). For instance, the Cross dressers, Drag queens and transvestites would fall under this category. It is to be noted that many transsexuals go through one of those self-identifications before realizing that they are, in fact, transsexual.
The term "transgender" is used to designate the lives and experiences of a diverse group of people who live outside normative sex/gender relations (i.e., where the biology of one’s body is taken to determine how one will live and interact in the social world). The transgender community is made up of transsexuals, transvestites, drag queens, passing women, hermaphrodites and gender outlaws who defy regulatory sex/gender taxonomies. The term includes people who are at different stages of gender transformation: physically, emotionally and temporally. Contemporary transgender politics is informed by postmodern conceptions of subjectivity, queer understandings of sexuality and gender, radical politics of transgression, and the poststructuralist deconstruction of binaries (such as man/woman and mind/body).

While lesbian and gay theory focus primarily on lesbians and gays, queer theory is interested in how the “homo/heterosexual definition” shapes the lives of people “across the spectrum of sexualities” (1). Queer theory takes, what Sedgwick calls, a “universalizing view,” which sees the defining binary of “homo/heterosexual” as potentially relevant to anyone, in contrast to a “minoritizing view” (1) that sees the binary as relevant only to a fixed minority (gays). In heteronormative societies, if one is to exist it all, then it seems that one must be either a “man” or a “woman,” “male” or “female.” Transgendered people are wrestling with a complex array of differences and similarities that complicates the building of alliances, and few canons exist to help define the specific subjectivities of transgendered people.

Transgendered people are on the border between recognized and seemingly "legitimate" identities: gay and lesbian, male and female. Identity
politics does not work well with such "in-between identities" primarily because these identities question the stability, naturalness and inevitability of the fixed identities upon which an identity politics rests. Many queer theorists suggest that identity politics is too limited and limiting as a cultural and political strategy since it replicates the identity categories created by the heteronormative regime.

In terms of sexual orientation, the heteronormative regime creates a divide between gay and straight, allowing both identities to think of the other as "other". Identity politics buys into this system, claiming that the gays are a distinct minority deserving protection, but the end result is that the minority identities (LGBT) have to plead for toleration and legitimation from the majority—not a particularly empowering position to be in. Queer is opposed to such thinking claiming that such divisions do more harm than good and that we need a more sustained critique of identity as a whole in order to break out of such limited and limiting conceptualizations.

Michael Warner, in his Introduction to the ground-breaking collection of queer theoretical essays, *Fear of a Queer Planet*, explains that queer “rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal” (xxvi). For instance, if we problematize the “normal” division of the species into homo and hetero, then we trouble the thinking—and the identities—that sustain our marginalization under the heteronormative. Or, as Jagose argues in *Queer Theory; An Introduction*, “queer is less an identity than a critique of identity” (131).
Foucault concentrated on examining sexuality as a discourse of knowledge and power through which sexual orientation and identities have been fashioned. These identities, according to his *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, originated in the late nineteenth century, largely due to the work of scientists, sexologists, and proto-social workers who classified people based on their preferred or pursued sexual activities. The original intention of such classification was to normalize heteroerotic sexual activity, pathologize homoerotic and fetishistic practices, and thus to exert some semblance of control over the sexual, intimate, and reproductive activities of the rapidly growing populations of the industrialized nations. And the categories stuck. Over a short period of time, one's behaviour became one's identity, ultimately becoming codified in the seemingly natural categorical division between homosexuals and heterosexuals.

Uncovering this “genealogy,” as Foucault puts it, is vitally important for it shows that sexual orientation and categories are political and social formations, and that one category (heterosexuality) is no more natural or inevitable than another. Understanding this history meant that we could potentially change it or become more conscious participants of the forces that shape and subject us. This, in a nutshell, is the queer theoretical project.

Butler reminds us that it is not quite possible to simply cast off or shed the identity/identities that one has been subjected to. In *Gender Trouble*, she “takes her cue from Foucault” to “*denaturalize* what she calls the ‘heterosexual matrix’” (Bristow 213). To do this, she introduces the supple concept of “performativity,” which allows us to consider how sexual
orientation and even gender are “performances”. Joseph Bristow in *Sexuality* explains this critique of gender and, by extension, the heteronormative regime thus:

Butler uses the word performative to describe how the body provides a surface upon which various acts and gestures accrue gendered meanings. What she calls ‘corporeal signification’ reveals that gender does not appeal to an ontological essence granted by nature. Rather, the widespread belief that there is indeed a core gender identity actually depends on performative acts that give the illusion of naturalness . . . Through performative acts, each of us learns to become a woman or a man, feminine or masculine. (214-15)

In the course of discussing her concerns about the political deployment of queer, Butler challenges the promotion of “outness”. Here, “outness” means being “out as [an identity label]” (*Bodies That Matter* 227). Since the evolution of transsexual and transgender politics has been concurrent with queer critiques of identity, using transsexual/transgender terms as identity labels is necessarily problematic. Transgender people cannot easily be divided into meaningful identity categories. Nor does it make sense to depict transsexual or transgender as categories, for these terms are far too broad and mobile. Butler discusses aspects of this problem with reference to identity politics in general. She acknowledges that it is important to use identity categories for political purposes but also to remember that we cannot always control how the meanings of those labels and categories will change over time. Therefore, it is
important to be aware of the risks associated with identity categories. Butler writes:

Although identity terms must be used as much as ‘outness’ is to be affirmed, these same notions must become subject to a critique of the exclusionary operations of their own production: For whom is outness a historically available and affordable option? Is there an unmarked class character to the term, and who is excluded? For whom does the term present an impossible conflict between racial, ethnic, or religious affiliation and sexual politics? ... In this sense, the genealogical critique of the queer subject will be central to queer politics to the extent that it constitutes a self-critical dimension within activism, a persistent reminder to take the time to consider the exclusionary force of one of activism's most treasured contemporary premises. (227)

The ability to subvert conventional modes of gender representation through imaginative transformations is accessible to either gender and performs the same liberating function. Butler argues that the collapse of traditional gender stereotypes is an inevitable consequence of the restrictions that they set and the resulting problems of identification.

An emphasis on identification enables the articulation of a variety of sexual and gender identities: transsexuals, bisexuals, drag queens, fetishists, lesbians, gays, queers and heterosexuals. The stress on the multiplicity of identity expands contemporary sexual politics beyond a stagnant hetero/homo
opposition. It provides people with more choices in how they define themselves and insists on the diversity within communities of the sexually marginalized. By unsettling much of the lesbian and gay response to heterosexism, and by suggesting that many non-heterosexual positions are available, such activism focuses its attention on displacing heterosexuality, homosexuality, and the relations between the two. If heterosexuality is something which is taken for granted, and if the adoption of a homosexual identity only serves to bolster the strength of heterosexuality, then perhaps the most effective sites of resistance are those created by people who refuse both options.

The hijras may be born intersex or apparently male and generally see themselves as neither men nor women. They are known throughout South Asia as a third gender because they identify themselves as female, wear women's clothing and live in closed societies. They are treated as outcasts, forced to beg on street corners or rely on prostitution to survive. A Mumbai-based community health organisation “The Humsafar Trust” estimates there are more than five million hijras in India. In different areas they are known as Aravani/Aruvani, Kothis or Jogappa and eunuchs in English. Despite the fact that more than five million hijras live in India, Tamil Nadu is the only state which provides for a transgendered option in voters’ registration applications and ration cards. In 2005, Indian passport application forms were updated with three gender options: M, F, and E (for male, female, and eunuch respectively).

According to With Respect to Sex, a book on sexual and social differences in India written by Gayatri Reddy, hijras are believed to “be
endowed with the power to confer fertility on newlyweds or newborn children” (26). This is the reason why they are allowed to sing and dance at weddings and births. People are also afraid that if they are not given money and treated properly, they will curse and that may bring unhappiness into their lives.

Uma writes about the hijras: “Not for them the seven rounds witnessed by the fire god, eternally binding man and woman in matrimony, or the blessings of ‘May you be the mother of a hundred sons’” (10-11). The title of the play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* gains significance here. Even though they are present at all the marriage ceremonies, they are denied the right to get married. In this play, Kamla, the hijra who walked the seven rounds around the fire, was not fortunate enough to lead a happy life with the person who married her.