Chapter IV
Plays of Gieve Patel: An Analysis of the Dramatic Art

4.1 Introduction:

Gieve Patel is regarded as one of the prominent Indian writers in English. Born in the Parsi community, Gieve Patel is a self instructed poet, artist and a playwright.


He has written three plays, which have been performed in Bombay and other places. A collection of his plays ‘Mister Behram and Other Plays’ was published by Seagull Books, Calcutta in 2007. He conducts an annual, ongoing poetry workshop for school students at Rishi Valley School, Chittor, and Andhra Pradesh since twenty years. He is a medical practitioner in Mumbai. He currently works as a general medical practitioner in Mumbai for poor and homeless.

4.1.1 Gieve Patel: A Life Sketch:

Gieve Patel was born on 18th August 1940 in Mumbai. His father was a dentist and mother too belonged to a doctor’s family. He was educated at St. Xavier’s High School and then at Bombay University qualified as a physician. Gieve Patel belongs to the Parsi community-the people, came as political refugees a thousand years ago and were to settle where allowed they landed, on the west coast of India.

Gieve Patel has spent part of his childhood in Sanjan. In an interview, Gieve Patel comments about his parentage as,

“My people came from Nargol. There’s a definite biological sensation about the place for me. Just getting into the bus and entering that part of the country makes me feel it. This feeling is important to my writing and thinking”. (Times of India, 3 May 1970).

About his Parsi community he comments in one of the interview as,
“The Parsi population is mainly concentrated in the west coast belt, in Gujarat and Maharashtra. The rest of the country does not know too much about them and does not care to either. They are not exposed to the Parsi very much. So I don’t think that the rest of the country spares much thought for the Parsees’. In Western India, they are known as people who started many industries very early in this country, the Tata’s etc. the big industrial giants, very wealthy. Then they are known to be philanthropic, they are believed to be honest. They are also supposed to be very humorous”. (Bombay 20, Jan. 1981).

Gieve Patel’s grandparents lived in a village called Nargol which is a west coast Parsi village in Gujarat. In his early life he visited Nargol very often and lived in both these houses—his maternal grandfather was a village doctor and his Parental grandfather was a landlord.

About himself Gieve Patel comments in one of the interviews taken by Eunice De Souza as;

“My father’s family owned about three hundred acres of land in the Warli belt. The Warlis worked on our land. There were rules made by my uncle, my father’s younger brother, who managed the estate. I was not to mix with the Warlis or go to their houses, partly for health reasons I might get leprosy or small-pox and partly for the sake of discipline among the workers. For years, because of these rules I had an image of my uncle as a monster figure whose rules were to be resisted, with the sly connivance of my grandfather who was amused by and tolerant of my interest in the Warlis. Well, I’d sneak off and talk with them, spend the whole day with them, in their homes, in the fields, I totally idealized their existence. I saw them as free, leading a beautiful open life, in contrast to the parsi life which I saw as cramped. It was a very polarized view. Only gradually did I begin to see the squalor and the misery. Around the age of thirteen, I began to have feelings of guilt because we were responsible for the poverty of their existence. At the same time I continued to idealize them. To this day I remember faces, bodies, qualities of the landscape there as ravishingly beautiful. I realized after my uncle’s death however that without him I would have never had these experiences. He was the last person in the family willing to look after the estate.
After him it was sold. There was never enough money to put into the estate and the contradictions of this way of life caught up with us. It was totally a feudal existence”. (An extract from an interview published in *Talking Poems: Conversations with Poets*).

4.1.2 **The Poet of the Body:**


The poetry of Gieve Patel is an inscape of violence, poverty and apathy-the apathy both of the poor and illiterate and that of the liberal conscience. That he is a doctor who heals and hammers the human body, becomes a self contained metaphor for the life within the poems. His poems are stethoscopes of pain, both physical and mental.

Pain, violence and death these have been the major themes of Gieve Patel’s Poetry till lately. Only now he began to write nature- poems though violent acts are more numerous and more horrible today.

As a doctor, Gieve Patel comes face to face with violence, pain, torture and death. The more he observed man’s violence done to man, the tortures he inflicts on others, the deeper became his mystery. Adil Jussalwalla says,

“The proper study of Gieve Patel, as perhaps befits a doctor, is man. Well, for that matter, the study of every poet today is man-man in nature, man in society, man the torturer or man the tortured. It is the way he looks at life that particularly distinguishes Patel from other creative writers”. (*Contemporary Indian English Poetry*, 161).

Patel’s study of violence and death is multidimensional. He describes relentlessly and pitilessly, the everyday incidents of violence taking place in every corner of the country. Patel’s poems “*Audience*”, “*How do you Withstand, Body*”, “*The Ambiguous Fate of Gieve Patel*”, “*Say Torture*” and ‘*University*’ is a picture of brutality. “*Nargol*” and “*Servants*” “*Naryal Purnima*” are his impactful poems.
The themes of his poems are universal enough, such as father-son conflict (“The Prince Wishes His father’s Death”), the generation gap (“Grand Parents at Family Get-together”), the condition of the deprived and oppressed in India (“Servants” “The Solution of Servants”), death (“Post Mortem Report”, “Catholic Mother”), Gieve Patel has also worked on translations of 17th century Gujarati poetry which he has not published yet.

Gieve Patel is considered to be the poet of the body since human body is a recurrent theme in a majority of his poems. In his poems, the body acts as a living metaphor. His sympathies are with the oppressed or downtrodden and anyone devoid of his basic right to live. In an appropriately titled poem, The Ambiguous Fate of Gieve Patel, being neither a part of Hinduism nor Islam in India, he grieves the isolation faced by the Parsis in the starting line of the short poem based on communal riots when he writes, “To be no part of this hate is deprivation.” As a Parsi observer, he cannot choose a part of either side, he poignantly remarks, “Planets focus their fires / in to a worm of destruction / Edging along the continent. Bodies / Turn ashen and shrivel. I only burn my tail”. Patel has recently edited a poetry collection and the same got published as a book in the year 2006.

4.1.3 A Playwright:

Gieve Patel has written three plays in English. The first play Princes was written for the Sultan Padamsee Award competition held in 1968 and was awarded a certificate of merit. The play was staged by Theatre Group in 1970, The second play Savaksa was written in 1982, a Theatre Group production of Savaksa was scheduled to be staged in November 1982. The third play Mister Behram was written in 1988, which was also staged by Theatre Group, Bombay (Now Mumbai), For writing the plays, Gieve Patel took inspiration from the playwright Racine. In one of the panel discussions chaired by Ms. Priya Adarkar, Gieve Patel and his wife Toni Patel (The director of the play) comments as,

Toni Patel: Actually, Racine was very much on my mind when I was directing the play, and I think it is very much on your mind, Gieve?
Gieve Patel: Racine is always on my mind right through, from the very first play, I may move away in every other direction, but I always come back to him. I mean that in a certain kind of way, to me, in the representation of pure human passions, no playwright comes anywhere near Racine. He is just the distillation of human passion. (Jan 31, 1989).

4.1.4 An Aspect of Spiritualism:

An aspect of spiritualism is observed in one of the interview of Gieve Patel taken by EDES as follows;

“I had severe back pains and was told I’d probably have to go in for an elaborate surgery which could keep me in bed for some months … I smiled and said, ‘Are you talking about God?’ He said, ‘Not necessarily, though you can use the word if you want to. I wish I could say this to you from behind a sort of screen, so it may not sound so unacceptable to you.’ Dr. Ralph Cloward, an American surgeon who specialized in the treatment for this particular disorder, operated on me free of charge. I was on my feet in a week! After this amazing occurrence … I had a series of dreams which were totally… I’ve been through extensive psychoanalysis and have learnt to observe my own dreams …I found them spiritual. Kersy Katrak had been speaking to me about Asishda. Asishda is an Englishman, Alexander Phipps, who came to India during the Second World War as an aeronautical engineer, and settled permanently in this country… Later he became the chief guiding spirit of the ashram. I went to see Asishda in 1985 after a crisis in my life, shortly after I had those strange dreams. I talked to him about these dreams and about other aspects of my life… He was fully aware of psychoanalytic dream analysis… His letters were intellectually vibrant and spiritually all there … During this period I read several spiritual texts like Upanishads and St.Teresa of Avila … I also met a few other living and practising seers”.

4.1.5 As a Painter:

Gieve Patel is a multitalented, practicing physician, an artist, a poet and a playwright whose work engage with quotidian aspirations as well as a sharp/politically
engaged awareness of reality. Primarily a painter, he is known for his series on wells, skulls and clouds.

In his well paintings devoid of the self subject, Gieve Patel creates the metaphor for self observation using artistic devices of light, structure and reflections of sky and foliage in the wells. Patel has said, “From boyhood onwards, I have never been able to pass by a well without looking into it. But it was only at the age of 50 that I first attempted to make a painting of this experience. I believed at the time that one or two paintings would be sufficient to cover the ground. However I found that the subject was inexhaustible.” (www.artsome.co/Gieve Patel).

Patel often creates picture puzzles in his well series, with a large central circle, that can be taken to be the opening of the well with the viewer either looking down at the reflected surface or looking up at the world through its water. A similar approach can be seen in his skull and cloud drawings where endless possibilities and differences of potential are explored in the subject. In a way there is an intense psychological interrogation which is conveyed subtly through art.

Patel held his first show in Mumbai in 1966 that went on to have several major exhibitions in India and abroad. Patel participated in the Menton Biemale, France in 1976. India, Myth and Reality, Oxford in 1982, Contemporary Indian Art, Royal Academy, London 1982. Patel belongs to that avant-garde grouping of artists based in Bombay and Baroda. His paintings are in public and private collections of India and in other countries, including The National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, The Jehangir Nicholson Collection at the Prince of Wales Museum Massachusetts, USA, The Museum of Modern Art, Menton, France.

4.1.6 Honours and Awards:

The poet, painter, playwright got honours and awards. They are, in 2003 C.R. Parekh Writer in Residence, Nirman Foundation Grant, University of Pennsylvania. In 1992 Rockefeller Fellowship, University of Chicago. And in 1984 Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. The present chapter shall attempt to take an in-depth analysis of Gieve Patel’s full length plays to study why his plays could not become as successful as his poetry.
4.2 **Princes**

A collection of plays written by Gieve Patel entitled as *Mister Behram and Other Plays* was published by Seagull Books, Calcutta in 2007. The collection consists of the plays *Princes*, *Savaksa* and *Mister Behram*. *Princes* is the first play written by Gieve patel in 1968-69 for the Sultan Padamsee Award competition and was awarded a certificate of merit.

It is a play about a conflict between two families for the possession of a young male child of eleven years old. Gieve patel shows a period in an agriculture based Parsi family on the West Coast. The play *Princes* is about owners who owns what, who has a right to own what? The way human beings react to each other in a situation of wanting to possess something, the kinds of conflict that can explode around such a situation.

**4.2.1 Source of the Play Princes:**

As the source of the play *Princes* is concerned in one of the interviews taken by Eunice De Souza, Gieve Patel says:

“To start with I am a Parsi. Childhood onwards I’ve had a special and definite kind of relationship with a vast circle of relatives and Parsi people. This relationship has been lyrical in one sense and critical in another. One of the sources of the play is this feeling of a child’s combination of poetry and criticism towards the older people. I wanted something concrete around which to mould this feeling. The figure of a child in the play seemed natural, for the characters had to be seen partly through the child’s eye and partly through a critical sensibility.” *(Times of India, 1970)*.

In another interview taken by EDES, Gieve Patel comments about the source of the play as:

“I went along with both streams till I was about ten or eleven. would pray with my cousins before the kitchen fire, but not say all my prayers. I’d memorize only a few of the prayers from the tomes we were expected to memorize…Then at the age of ten or eleven, I went through the most traumatic experience of my life, the death of a cousin who was just
eighteen. He had a rheumatic heart, and I was around the last few days watching the death struggle. There were terrible family feuds around his deathbed…” (Talking Poems, 89).

4.2.2 An Outline of the Play Princes:

The play Princes is a five act play divided into 37 scenes. It focuses on the conflict between two families who are engaged in a savage struggle for the possession of a small boy, Noshir who is the son of a weak, degenerate man Navzar, whose wife died in childbirth. Navzar was out whoring at the time and so the wife’s family refuses to part with the child. But Navzar and his strong minded mother, Khorshedmai are determined to get the child. The conflict between the two families gets more intense as the play progresses. The little boy, Noshir has always been of fragile health, and he cannot cope with the demands made on him by both the families. He is often seriously ill. But nothing will stop the savage quarrels. Not even the death of the child makes the families relent, though both are grief-stricken.

The action of the play takes place in a west coast parsi village whose inhabitants have been landowners and liquor merchants since their arrival from Persia almost nine hundred years ago. The play starts shortly after independence, when both land and liquor begin to be threatened.

As the play opens, it is observed, the protagonist of the play Noshir is just only of two years. Mamma and Nergish they are dressing the child by singing a beautiful song.

Child, child, dress you in white,
Sweeten your mouth,
Darken your eyes,
A stick in your hand
To shoo away dragons,
A suitable frown
To frighten them off,
Give us a smile now,
Give us a smile (24).

Sorabji’s family and Navzar’s family is described in the play. Navzar was not present at Noshir’s birth time. When Navzar came to know about Noshir’s birth, his reaction is

‘This child! I refused him! I am waste!’ (26)

The play is dominated by female characters Homamai, Khorshedmai, Tehmi, Ratan, Shireen, Nergish. Dominating the play by the sheer intensity of her hatred for her dead daughter’s husband and her equally intense possessiveness in relation to the child is Homamai (Mamma). Not even when her daughter was dying did she allow the girl even a moment’s illusion about the nature of the husband who had been unfaithful to her and ill treated her for so long:

MAMMA: ‘… Two years since my daughter died. Died in childbirth. And daily I feel her life stamped out.

NERGIS: Think only of the birthday, Mamma.

MAMMA: She looked around to see her husband. I told her myself. My poor girl! she asked, and I said – He is in dung. He rolls there. (26)

NERGIS: (Soothing her) Mamma, Mamma.

MAMMA: Cattle dung. I opened all. She was not cheated. Then I saw her eyes. Hate. Hate … (26).

Two daughters of Homamai Ratan and Tehmi have gone to the city and one at least, has a husband, Kali who has done very well. The other one, Tehmi has an engine driver, Rumi as her husband. Neither of them has children. Homamai doesnot understand why and they don’t tell her (the husband of the wealthy one has a mistress who lives in the house with them). Nergish is unmarried daughter of Homamai who lives at home. She is thin and unattractive. She is devoted to Noshir and hence refuses to marry.
NERGISH: You don’t worry me. I sit in the kitchen. I work more than all your servants. I will eat what they eat, but I don’t marry.

KHUSHROW: Who wants to marry you then.

PAPPA: You are no servant, daughter. You don’t sit on our hands. (46)

Khushrow, the son is running the estate of Sorabji family. He has severe problems with labourers and incurs heavy losses but refuses to discuss anything with his father and anxious mother. Homamai’s only consolations are the possession of Noshir, the little boy, and the fact that Khushrow’s wife, Shireen is a buffalo wife who ‘works all day. With her head low …’ and bears well. Three nice girls. In no time.’ Noshir’s father has married again, hoping that he will be able to get back his son, and have someone in the home to look after him. Banoo, the step mother is a gentle woman, loving towards the little boy when the family doctor advises them about the little boy to let him spend some time with each family. But when Banoo first comes to Homamai’s house with Khorsheed (her husband’s mother) Homamai and Nergish behaves with her indifferently.

MAMMA: Show us their new buffalo!

NERGISH: (in a bush) Drained! (She laughs short and soft, unbelieving, then bolder).

MAMMA: Dry as an old well! (Pause) As old as his mother! (pause).


Later when Banoo brings the sick child, a shirt as a gift. Homamai calls for the tribal servant, and after sneering at the quality of the gift with the rest of the family, insists that Noshir give the servant the cloth with his own hands, despite the fact that Noshir likes Banoo and wants to keep the gift. Even when Noshir is dying Homamai refuses to let Banoo and the others to come near the boy to kiss him in farewell.
BANOO: Khorkhedmai, I will kiss my Noshir. Then you kiss him, then we go. We go, yes Navzar.

KHORSHED: Yes girl.

NAVZAR: I will see my son first. I will kiss him.

BANOO: And then we go.

RUMI: There is no breathing.

BANOO: Cruel woman, why do this? I am going, but once I will kiss him. God will remember. He will give you children and children. Homamai, do you hear? (110-111).

Noshir looks forward to visits his city aunts Ratan and Tehmi and Uncles Kali and Rumi and the presents they bring and he does not hesitate to tell them about gifts. Nergish and Homamai make him promise never to call Banoo ‘Mother’. But Banoo loves to him and tries to persuade him not to cry in front of his own mother’s people lest they should think badly of her. Navzar tries to woo him, and is badly hurt when the boy goes off to Homamai’s one day without telling him. He tells the boy he must choose between them. The boy says he wants to go back to Homamai’s. But when he is there he pines for the father who never comes to see him. He hears the quarrels that rage on his account. The doctor playfully tells him when he is ill that there was once a King called Noshirwan. The families call him their little prince. He is their hope for the future. Khorkhedmai has ‘pulled’ her degenerate son out of ‘rot’. She has tried new farming methods and they have become rich. She hopes Noshir will inherit everything. She knows the dead wife’s family is going steadily downhill and she knows the boy will have a chance in life only if he lives with them, so she tries to cope with Homamai.

Towards the end of the play when the boy is dying, and yet another quarrel is about to break out, one of the character says,

‘Mamma, it’s all a closed book:

To which Mamma replies:

‘No closed books with me!'
Open all books!

And a third character says:


In the last part of the play it is observed that Ratan, Kali, Rumi, Tehmi, Kumi, Piloo, Khushrow dressed for departure for Mumbai whereas Pappa, Mamma, Nergish sit aside. Thus the play Princes is a tragedy more mixing with comic events.

4.2.3 Dramatic Techniques in the Play Princes:

Dramatic techniques regarding the play consists of setting, characters, diction, humour, imagery, symbolism such type of elements.

4.2.3.1 Setting in the Play Princes:

The play is set in a West Coast Parsi village. The play starts shortly, after independence when both land and liquor begin to be threatened. The action of the play takes place in a West Coast Parsi village whose inhabitants have been landowners and liquor merchants since their arrival from Persia almost nine hundred years ago.

4.2.3.2 Characters in the Play Princes:

The characters of the play are seventeen in number excluding the tribal doctors and Parsi villagers. The major characters in the play are Mamma (Homamai), Ratan, Kali, Tehmi, Rumi, Nergish, Kushrow, Shireen, Noshir, Pillo, Kumi, Navzar, Khorsedmai, Banoo, Doctor. All the characters except Banoo, are complex.

4.2.3.3 Other Aspects in the Play:

4.2.3.3.1 Diction:

Eunice De Souza in one of his articles comments about Gieve Patel’s use of diction regarding his plays:

“The characters in Gieve Patel’s play come alive, the reason behind that they speak a credible language which Gieve Patel has fashioned for them with meticulous care. I hesitate to call this language Parsi English because as a result of
the kind of Parsi farces produced in the city by Adi Marzban and Homi Tavadia almost any line from Parsi English or Parsi Gujarati is regarded as funny.” (The Literary Criterion, 26).

Talking to Eunice De Souza in an interview Gieve Patel said,

“Quarrels among Parsis and Indians generally are shattering events, we’re not a reserved people, every thing is in the open. I wanted to be able to convey the violent poetry of these things. I’ve virtually had to create a sort of convention of artificiality in the language”.

For instance towards the end of the play when the boy is dying, yet another quarrel is about to break-out one of the character says,

‘Mamma, its all a closed book.’

To which Mamma replies:

‘No closed books with me!

Open all books!

And a third character says:


The first line is the only truly English line. The rest make strange use of this first line to convey both weight and violence. This violence erupts in the sheer biologicality of the insults that the characters hurl at one another, and their accusations of incontinence or impotence; or their sterility or ability to bear like ‘buffaloes’.

The language used in the play by the playwright is a mixing of Gujarati and English language but it would be moulded in various ways for the various characters.

Some characters especially Mamma, use expressions that are violent in their imagery; they’re certainly not polite. For instance, expressions or curses like, ‘He is in dung’, ‘Swine’, ‘But when he growls I show my teeth,’ expressions of Khorshedmai as ‘You want a man to sit on your mouth,’ these references to parts of the body, animals are known as cusses (laughs) and it comes in Surti Gujarati language. (‘The dialect of
Gujarati which is spoken along the West Coast villages is broadly speaking Surti Gujarati, which means coming from Surat a city along the West Coast. The people in this belt including the Parsi, speak a kind of Surti Gujarati, and Surti Gujarati is known for its cusses-’Gieve Patel interviewed by Karen Smith, 4).

4.2.3.3.2 Music:

As the production of the play *Princes* is of Pearl Padamsee and hence it is naturalistic. In an interview by Karen Smith, Gieve Patel comments about the music of the play.

“I think that when I wrote the play at least because after seeing Pearl’s production a new dimension comes even in to my way of looking at my own play-the music of it, as you put it, this was very much on my mind. I often thought of the characters as instruments almost. Individual struments and the way they spoke with each other, to each other, across each other, like notes and pauses sudden solo moments and symphonic moments things like that.” (Bombay, 20 January 1981).

Gieve Patel makes use of music in his play *Princes* Small musical interlude is observed in Act I, Scene 1, blackout music is observed in Act IV Scene 10.

4.2.3.3.3 Performance of the Play:

The play *Princes* was first performed by Theatre Group at the Bhulabai Desai Auditorium, Bombay, in March 1970 with the following cast.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Actor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pappa (Sorabji)</td>
<td>Alyque Padamsee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamma (Homamai)</td>
<td>Yasmin Richmond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratan, 1st daughter</td>
<td>Gizi Gidwaney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kali, 1st son-in-law</td>
<td>Cyrus Vesavevala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tehmi, 2nd daughter</td>
<td>Roshani Oomrigar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumi, 2nd son-in-law</td>
<td>Noshir Surti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nergish, 3rd daughter (Unmarried) - Kamal Lavangia
Khushrow, only son - Hosi Vasunia
Shireen, daughter-in-law - Erna Vatchaghandy
Noshir, grandson - Adil Toddywalla
Khushrow’s daughters Piloo, Kumi - Farida Pedder, Jeroo Mulla
Navzar, Noshir’s father - Dara Acidwalla
Khorsheedmai, Navzar’s Mother - Pearl Padamsee
Banoo, Navzar’s second wife - Gool Mistri
Doctor - Minoo Chhoi
Schoolmaster - Dinoo Kotwal
Sheroo, pauper - Amy Billimoria
Lahnu, servant - Nick Wadia
Tribal doctors - Naval Mody, Prakash Gidwani
Parsi villagers - Farid Currim
Ashok Daryarani
Nazar Anik
Sunil Kapur
Dalip Tahlil
Direction - Pearl Padamsee
Set and Lighting Design - Alyque Padamsee
Music - Sunil Kapur
Humour:

The use of Surti Gujarati language in the dialogues of various characters creates humorous atmosphere. Because Surti Gujarati language is known for its cusses which creates humour. For instance.

RATAN (To Rumi): Rumi, where’s my big-mouth brother, where’s he?
(Act I, Sc.2,27).

MAMMA: You would let him enter? If he tries, huh? I have teeth and nails. (29).

KHORSHEH: Why doesnot Sorabji talk? He wants to speak, but his wife and children sit on his tongue. (34).

MAMMA: Don’t marry and sit on your parents hands (Act II, Sc 2, 45)

PAPPA: Drunk on your money now! (46).

KHOSHEH: You dung! All you! (Act V, Sc2, 103).

For instance, expressions or curses like, ‘He is in dung, swine. But when he growls I show my teeth’ Khorsheh says to Nergish ‘You want a man to sit on your mouth’. These references to parts of the body animals, scatological remarks known as Surti Gujarati cusses.

Dramatic Structure of the Play:

Regarding the structure of the play in one of the interview taken by Karen Smith, Gieve Patel comments:

“…as a criticism of the play, that it is cinematic. I don’t know. I asked a friend of mine who is a filmmaker what he thought, did he agree that this is a valid criticism,…The play relies heavily on the spoken word and that makes for theatre
not cinema. … I must tell you that the example for cutting up the action in to small scenes comes from Racine. I am strongly influenced by his work… His plays are extremely musical. In Princes I just read and reread Phedre, Andromache, Britannicus of Racine. I read Chekhov repeatedly when I was working on Princes, to handle large numbers of people on the stage in the same scene … Finally a strong influence was the Book of Job. For the last act I read job very closely for the ranting and lamentations … depth of passion.” (Gieve Patel interviewed by Karen Smith, 5-6).

The play is dramatically structured in five acts which is divided in to 37 scenes. Conflict is introduced in the play in the very outset by bringing out in the opening scene in Act I, when Noshir’s mother’s death happens. Then onwards the ‘Initial Action’ follows. Rising Action is observed in Act III, Scene 2 when Noshir for the first time goes to his father’s house. Falling Action also described as Climax or turning point is observed in Act V Scene 2 when Noshir is about to die.

4.3 Savaksa:

The play Savaksa is the second play written by Gieve Patel which appeared on the stage for the first time in 1982.

The play is about the use of power between human beings, in intimate human relationships, in society and in politics. Power masked as love, affection, bribe, blackmail, power as perversity of emotion, used as sadistic emotion in every possible way. In a word the play is about the perverting of emotion between human beings. Savaksa was first published in 1989 in the Bombay Literary Review of Bombay University, edited by Vilas Sarang.

4.3.1 Source of the Play Savaksa:

About the source of the play Savaksa, the playwright Gieve Patel in an interview taken by Meher Pestonji comments as:

“The original idea was a comic one. I heard this story in Nargol, which is the village I come from, about this custom that used to be there for the bride and groom to lead a procession through the village with their marriage bed
carried behind them… and when I heard that story I was told about a very elderly man who married a very young girl and how their marriage bed was carried behind them, and what an extraordinary sight that was … But then at some point, the story got linked up with my own experiences in Bulsar district where I was working as a medical officer in 1968… The life of a lower class impoverished Bombay family came up in a series of images which I was very happy to incorporate in to the play.” (Eve’s Weekly, Nov. 1982).

4.3.2 An Outline of the Play Savaksa:

Savaksa, the protagonist, is a sixty four year old landlord and a widower. He is a member of the traditional rural elite a powerful patron and head of the village Panchayat. His unmarried thirty six year old daughter Kermina and his eldest son’s pregnant wife, Jer support him wholeheartedly. His own forty year old son, Dorab becomes a source of concern Dorab’s inward ambition is to hold a Panchayat seat and thereby gain power and prestige.

“Always promises! And then the excuses! (pause) This year next year (pause) ‘You are not ready for it!’ (pause) the whole village asks me ‘When will we elect you’, when ? We are all waiting, our votes are waiting! for you!” (141).

Savaksa’s influence and power to his son, Dorab openly rebukes his father. Dorab’s wife Jer is thirty four years old and her child will be the first grandchild. And so a male heir is desperately desired, and all references to the unborn child assume it will be a boy:

JER: No embrace him, Pappa. I want to see it before my eyes. Your grandchild is inside me, and he will be happy when you embrace. (140).

Jer feels threatened by the arrival of Perin a twenty year old beautiful girl from Bombay whom Savaksa intends to marry. It is also Savaksa’s plan to install Perin in a vacant Panchayat seat. This inevitably makes Perin the enemy of Dorab:
SAVAKSA: For women there is a special seat. (Pause) It does not look good at all to have my own son in the gram panchayat. So I will keep that seat for her. (pause) In the taluka Panchayat all the seats are full of men from my party … Tell him to stop plotting. I know he is plotting. Some fools are encouraging him. (149).

Meanwhile Savaksa’s influence is being challenged by communist group who have been politicizing village workers and Savaksa’s own parents. A politically active village tailor becomes a threat to Savaksa’s hegemony whereas the most challenging and disrupting threat comes from a young city woman of the lower middle classes who refuses to fit into her mother’s role as a model client clinging to Savaksa’s influence. This woman from a lower middle class family is Hutoxi. Hutoxi is Perin’s thirty four year old unmarried sister. Savaksa’s personality has dominated the play until the arrival of Hutoxi. She has come to attend the funeral of her mother Khorshed, who has died suspiciously of a heart attack in the first act (water was forced down her throat by Savaksa’s second son, Adeser).

Hutoxi manipulates Perin emotionally as Savaksa possesses and controls his children economically. She turns the tables on Savaksa by using the traditional weapon of shame, commonly challenged by the powerful on the powerless. She does this by demanding Savaksa’s retarded thirty year old son in exchange for Perin. This has the effect of splitting the landlords family and exposing the vulnerability of authority based upon patron-client relationship in a time of rapid social change.

Savaksa’s patronizing behaviour, however, has ruined his relationship with his own sons. On the first of every month, Savaksa gives them a salary in a humiliating little ritual which confirms their economic dependence upon him.

SAVAKSA: Of Course. (claps) Today is the twenty-ninth. Not the first. But open the safe. Bring my keys. (Monthly ritual pay day) I’m doing this before you, Khorshedmai, to show you that we are open in this house. You and Your daughter will see everything! There is no shame in receiving money from a father. Come Dorab. (Gives money) Two hundred and thirty for you. But really what can I give you, my son? what? If an old man is
not allowed to give you two hundred and thirty rupees, what will he do with his affection? Now, Adeser! one hundred and twenty. At least your brother works for me but you get your pay without any work. (Laughs) Did you not say there was an elder daughter? You did not bring her? To watch her sister’s happiness? You were ashamed! (128).

The son, Dorab, senses vast changes in the social landscape and much less confidence in the paternalistic methods of his father. He also has little patience with his father’s family images and ideology. This is partly because of post independence. Social and legal changes and partly due to the son’s inability to become an effective patron. When father and son talk about the estate and their positions, the difference between the two generations is manifest. Through the relationship between father and son, Patel suggests that the traditional system is failing.

SAVAKSA: How nicely they listened to you! our workers are good, we owe everything to them. Ah, Khorshedmai! Dorab convinced the workers. I did not say one word. Why were you so worried, my son?

DORAB: They listen only when you are there.

SAVAKSA: No, no. I saw them respecting you.

JER: Now It shouldn’t matter, father or son, who they listen to.

SAVAKSA: Dorab knows how to handle them. He is first angry, then friendly, then concerned. Yes, yes, that’s the way, don’t laugh Jermai, learn carefully and through your blood your baby will also learn. Make my grandchild an expert from now …

Why do you bring all problems to me, son? Every little thing. Every little piece of stick. When you can manage…

DORAB: I don’t want blame from you. Afterwards ..

SAVAKSA: And so you burden me!

DORAB: The whole farm, the whole crop, all threshing, storing selling, I do it. I must show how much I work.
SAVAKSA: But why show it? I know about it. I value all these things, Without you.

DORAB: You don’t know! you are busy with Panchayat, with clerks, with ministers. If you don’t come every meeting is cancelled, in the taluka, in the district. You don’t have time to see what I do. (Act I, Scii, 138-139).

The relationship between Savaksa and Dorab itself is by no means an easy one. It is observed that Dorab had been sent by his father to college in the big city. He did not do well, and returned to the village a failure. However, a bigger problem in their relationship is that Savaksa’s patronizing benevolence has come to temper his relationship with his own sons. On the first of every month, Savaksa gives his own sons a salary in a humiliating little ritual which confirms their economic dependence upon him. He is also able to use Dorab’s ambition as a means of controlling his son’s behaviour;

SAVAKSA: I called you to say. Make your election papers ready!
And give them to me. (Pause. Dorab sits in a chair)

DORAB: Why? (Pause)

Why are you offering it suddenly, like this?

SAVAKSA: Then how to offer it? with garlands? (Pause).

I am telling you.. this is not final. I only say. ‘Keepready’. There are many things to consider. Others in the Panchayat, I have to speak to them first.

DORAB: (Shakes his head) If you decide clearly yourself, You don’t need to speak to anyone. (Pause).

So why don’t you decide?

SAVAKSA: You don’t know how to take things happily. Without bickerings?

DORAB: Taking things from you is not so easy.

SAVAKSA: No? But in the end you always do take.
DORAB: It is not my right to take?

SAVAKSA: It is always your right to take. You are my son.

DORAB: But you don’t give it like that.

SAVAKSA: Then how do I give it?

DORAB: Like a punishment (Act II, Sci, 161).

Savaksa has also used Dorab’s ambition to gain a Panchayat seat as a means of controlling the behaviour of Dorab. When Savaksa offer his seat to Perin he loses his most effective tool in controlling Dorab. However Hutoxi reacts violently to every aspect of the patronage system. She rejects Savaksa’s platitudes and notions of respect, honour and love knowing them for what they are. She is quite willing to deflate his rhetoric, veracity and prestige. She literally “burns with a sense of outrage at the patent immortality and injustice of society towards persons like himself.” (Toni Patel, quoted in a letter to Karen Smith from Gieve Patel, 15 Nov. 1981).

HUTOXI: If a woman has even a small room in a city … and works in an office … and earns just six hundred rupees, then she has no need for you! (pause) You can do nothing to her! … You cannot force her to be kind to you, sir! (168).

Hutoxi has the potential for violence. Her bitterness is so deep and her desire for revenge is so dear that she is willing to humiliate herself and her family to win back Perin and shame Savaksa. The only thing Hutoxi loves is Perin whom she loses. The reason behind it is she is isolated and alone.

HUTOXI: Savaksa Open your doors. I am leaving your village. My train will be towards Bombay. When I pass through your village streets I will say nothing! But I am going with such Joy! Your son Dorab will torture you even more than I could! But my life? Without Perin?... (199-200).

By the end of the play Savaksa’s childrens are refusing to obey and play their appointed roles.
JER: Don’t be angry with him Pappa. I don’t agree with his plans at all. Pappa. (Pause) But he insists so I will tell you… (Pause) … he says if you do not give him his seat this time, he will leave your house and open a shop … to sell buttons, and pins and pencils outside your window, in the bazaar. (194).

Thus, the play essentially suggests that traditional authority is based on quite unequal relationships. Furthermore, it is an increasingly vulnerable state. The play Savaksa suggests that dissatisfaction with traditional figures of authority both within the family and without has considerably increased in the intervening years, particularly so in the past two decades.

4.3.3 Dramatic Techniques in the Play:

Dramatic techniques regarding the play consist of setting, characters, diction, imagery and structure. Dramatic techniques in the play Savaksa consists of following elements.

4.3.3.1 Setting of the Play Savaksa:

The setting of the play Savaksa is Southern Gujarat in a large village working its way to becoming a small town in the late 1960s.

The action of the play takes place in the rooms of Savaksa’s manorial house. The house is a collection of offices. The house is a commercial and political establishment.

4.3.3.2 Characters in the Play Savaksa:

As far as the characters of the play concerns, they are eight in number excluding the Warli villagers. The major characters in the play are Savaksa, Dorab, Jer, Hutoxi, KhorshedmaI and Perin. The characters of Adeser, Kermina are of minor importance.

In one of the interview taken by Meher Pestonji Gieve patel comments about the characters as Perin and Hutoxi both the characters are multifaceted and multidimensional.
4.3.3.3 Other Aspects in the Play *Savaksa*:

4.3.3.3.1 Diction:

The characters in the play *Savaksa* would naturally speak Parsi Gujarati. The playwright has carefully projected the flavour of this language into an English which is approximately inflected and idiomatic. Jer, for instance, uses the present participle endings for past conditional action in Indian usage.

But you must be going out after that for taking a walk, or seeing a picture. (Act II, Scene i, 157).

Gieve Patel structures his dialogue to evoke the more subtle nuances of human thought. This talent is at present quite rare in Indian drama in English. One of the better examples in *Savaksa* occurs when the landlord and Perin stand at the window, gazing at the street.

SAVAKSA: Come here. Look. (Perin Joins him, at the window)

Do You see?

PERIN: What?

SAVAKSA: (Points at something in the distance) There.

PERIN: Those children?

SAVAKSA: Two of them. Near the bazaar.

PERIN: Rubbing their eyes. They are full of flies. (Pause) They are sleepy.

SAVAKSA: No Hungry

(Pause)

When they starve like this they look sleepy.
(Pause)

Village after village moves through our bazaar. They leave their homes, looking for food. For work.

(Pause)

Those two children are doing something. Can you see?

PERIN: Playing with stones and leaves, Making chapaties from mud. She is wrapping them in leaves and puts them in the boys pocket. (She laughs). He is going to work?

SAVAKSA: (Nods vigorously). See how great Nature is! These children are starving and yet they know they will make families … one day! And we, Perin? We are not starving. So must we lag? (Act I, Scene iii, 146-147).

4.3.3.2 Imagery:

Gieve Patel uses various imageries in the play Savaksa.

In this play, Savaksa, is the archetypal landlord. His speech is replete with family images as a testament to how much he believes in the image or myth which justifies his own privileged position. He refers his house guests as “honourable mother” or “honourable sister” while referring to himself as “father” and “mother” and to his tenants, workers and other villagers as his “children”, subscribing to these family images as an ideology which sanctions his own position:

When Hutoxi and Dorab challenge Savaksa’s position, Savaksa talks of battle fields:

SAVAKSA: Kermina (he glances out of the window). All our fields of rice… they were fiery battle grounds once, for Moghuls! for Marathas! They were marching on them, crushing up everything. (Pause).
And before the battles.. before any war …The great Moghul emperors … made their elephants … mad!! By throwing opium in their food! To make their blood … hot! Then the elephants would not care! They would not care! For anything! cans, spears! Nothing!

They would stamping! On crops of rice, on villagers’
huts, looking out from small red eyes, and hitting all enemies, hitting all enemies, hitting all enemies (Act II,Scene ii,172-173).

Turned! yes! Blindly! on their own army!

Crushing their own soldiers! Not caring! O who can stop elephants! (covers his face).

Stamping on soldiers heads! Breaking them like grapes!

(Pause)

O Kermina! My mind is gone. (172-173).

The above image is evocative. The rhythm of Savaksa’s words befit his thought and mood as he becomes increasingly desperate.

There are many instances of animal imagery throughout the play. Significantly, its use grows more common when people grow more desperate. Dogs are often referred to. In a moment of anger, Savaksa likens Dorab’s fear to that of a frightened street dog. At one point he feels he can tame Hutoxi in the way he would turn a stray dog in to a pet.

SAVAKSA: You know Kermina, a stray dog growls at you in the street, very fiercely. But he also looks at you sideways, pretends to do something else, and quietly follows you! He follows you … right into your home! He wants to become your pet! He wants it! (Pause)

Now if Hutoximai could be convinced … to follow us into our home … as my wife’s good.. and beloved sister we will make her our pet… and tie her up nicely. (Act III, Scene I, 185).
Hutoxi, too, uses the image of a tame, chained dog in referring to Adeser.

SAVAKSA: What are you doing? You get out! You leave my son alone!

HUTOXI: Take him! You take him! Take him away! Are there ropes here, or chains? Have I tied him? Why is he waiting? Take him away? (Savaksa halts, takes stock).

SAVAKSA: Come, Adeser, we are waiting for you. What are you doing here? Come Kermina has made nice food for you.

HUTOXI: Yes go, Adeser. Let them chain you to their dinner table! Let the throw chicken bones in your plate. Or go and lick it from the floor! (Act III, Scene ii, p. 191).

The most interesting image in the play is Savaksa’s eczema. Inflamed or oozing, sensuous, exhibited or hidden, the playwright uses the large eczema on Savaksa’s arm to illustrate his fortunes and of his position as patron. Its prominent opening role provides directions for what follows in the play.

SAVAKSA: (displaying the large eczema on his arm). So many colours. Brown, red, blue. First it was wet and red, then it gets dry, and becomes brown. Then the dry place becomes wet again. The red hurts very much see, touch it. Ah! Hurts! the blue place touch, touch, blue! you cannot know I feel many things: I want to scratch, I want to cut this out, like meat, but it will come up again on another place. So I make it my friend, it won’t go away. Touch this edge-here. Do you feel? shock? God has given me many things electric shocks!

KHORSHED: It is a disease ? or what ?

SAVAKSA: A gift! I can know so many things! If I touch softly I feel one thing. Then I touch hard one more thing. All right now you touch hard here (Khorhsed does) third thing. Now take this feather. Put feather here (She caresses) fourth thing. All right, put feather here fifth thing. Now take this stone, rub it here six; rub here seven. I have a wonderful thing. (Act I, Scene i 126-127).
Khorshed, a member of older generation, is willing to accept the eczema. It represents the system she has learned to live within and which she has learned to exploit. Khorshedmai knows what is expected of her and Savaksa as her patron.

In the play, after Hutoxi’s arrival, Perin kisses the eczema implying that she accepts Savaksa and his love. Perhaps she is flattered at being offered a place beside Savaksa.

Hutoxi, unlike her mother and sister, sets Savaksa’s eczema and the old patronage ideology alight. When Hutoxi and Savaksa first meet, she spots the eczema on his arm.

HUTOXI:  Now what is that?

SAVAKSA: (hides his arm) Nothing

(Pause)

It will become better soon. (Act II, Sc. i, 159).

When the patron client relationship begins to misfunction for Savaksa, he compares people with recalcitrant animals or fruits. Savaksa expresses his ideology in terms of law of nature: the compliant are the good, who will therefore be cared for and loved, while the rebellions are bad, and therefore deserve to be punished. In this way, Savaksa works on people’s sense of guilt by making them feel ashamed of disturbing the law of beneficent nature. For instance, women are likened to two kinds of fruit: the chickoo and the mango. Women, Savaksa explains to Hutoxi, must be like chickoos, faithful and obliging to their gardeners by flourishing, even when they are neglected. Mangoes, on the other hand require constant attention and even then they may prove recalcitrant. Mangoes are capricious and do not produce as obligingly as chickoos. Be like the chickoo, he tells Hutoxi, and all will be well.

The last image of the play, a trapped bull, suggests that the old ideology that kept the patron-client relationship in operation has been reduced to a potential violence that does not augur well for the future.
4.3.3.3 Music:

As the production of the play Savaksa is concerned, the sound to the play is given by Sarosh Bhabha, the music is used only for some type of sounds for ex. wailing, screaming etc.

4.3.3.4 Performance of the Play:

The Play Savaksa by Gieve Patel was first performed at the Max Muller Bhavan, Bombay, on 6 November 1982 with the following cast.

Savaksa (A landlord in Southern Gujarat)  Roger C.B. Pereria
Dorab (his elder son)  Nosherwan Jehangir
Adeser (his younger son)  Vivek Vaswani
Kermina (his daughter)  Meher Jehangir
Jer (Dorab’s wife)  Jerry Kumana
Khorshedmai (From Bombay)  Pearl Padamsee
Mother of Perin, Hutoxi
Perin (his younger daughter)  Apsara Urs
Hutoxi (his elder daughter)  Sabira Merchant
Direction  Pearl Padamsee
Lights  Pesi Patel
Sound make -up  Sarosh Bhabha
Eczema Make up  Avaan Patel
Set Assistant  Urshila Kerkar
Production Assistant  Dinoo Kotwal
4.3.3.5 Dramatic Structure of the Play:

As the dramatic structure of the play Savaksa concerns, Act I of the play describes arrival of Perin and Khorshedmai from that point Exposition starts inward by however in Act II, after the arrival of Hutoxi, Perin’s sister, Exposition progresses afterwards Initial Action follows which comprises challenge of Hutoxi to Savaksa. Act III describes, Rising Action which is also called as Complication-Revenge of Hutoxi on Savaksa. From Act III, Scene iii, Falling Action, Climax or turning point starts actually it starts from the arrival of Hutoxi in Act II, but in Act III, Scene iii it comes to the utmost position when Perin runs away from Savaksa and Hutoxi. Though Savaksa is the protagonist of the play, he looses the battle, and gets defeated by Hutoxi.

4.4 Mister Behram

The play Mister Behram was written in 1987 which appeared on the stage in 1988 and 89.

The theme of power and colonization occurs in this play too. The problem discussed in the play is disintegration of Mr. Behram. There is other theme discussed in the play is the position of women, which is another important strand in the play complementary to the main theme, is of whether one human being can entirely be looked upon as a means to another human being.

The play has a universal appeal. Mr. Behram is a man fighting against himself and against the norms of society, by initiating social reform. Mister Behram confronts this inner conflict day in and day out. He puts on a brave front against social criticism and yet suffers his own doubts and inner conflicts.

4.4.1 Source of the Play Mister Behram:

In one of the interview by Deepa Gahlot, Gieve Patel comments on the birth and source of the play Mister Behram;
“I was talking to a woman who was telling me about some personal tragedy in her life which was quite excruciating. It suddenly crossed my mind. Can I think of a situation that is even more impossible than this one? It was a half whimsical thought: suppose a man were to conceive an obsession for his son in law? what would happen? It would involve him in an extraordinary conflict with people who would normally be close to him in this case his wife and daughter. So I took up the challenge of making this extraordinary theme credible.” (BOMBAY Magazine, Dec. 1987).

4.4.2 An Outline of the Play Mister Behram:

The play consists of 4 Acts Behram is aged 56, an influential landowner and a highly educated Indian lawyer and an intellectual one. He has raised a young boy Naval or Nahnu from a Warli tribe as a member of his own family. He has educated the lad in foreign country instead of giving education to his own daughter Dolly. About which Dolly always complains to her mother Rati that her father pays more attention towards the education of Naval instead of her.

DOLLY: You know how father has always wanted me to read. Each time he saw me with a book his face would become radiant. When I was ten or twelve, a strange thing happened … Though I was a child I made excuses for him. He was a great man, he was very busy. But then other things happened. He would take a book I was reading out of my hands and say, ‘Dolly, I think you should not read this book now. Perhaps a year or two from now’. I submitted. How could I oppose his wisdom? But then I would see with a shock the next day that he had given the book to Naval… But it did hurt, mother, oh it hurt very much that my father … Much later when Naval and I studied at Law, we both of us passed the first two years brilliantly. Then why was Naval allowed to go on… and … why had I to stop my studies forever? (266).
Behram married Nahnu to his own daughter Dolly though Rati his wife strongly opposes the marriage. She was not ready to give the permission for the marriage. As the play opens, Naval, the Warli youth, has had his first triumph in a court case, but this brings to a crisis various relationships within the Behram family.

BEHRAM: Do I need to tell you? Haven’t you been told so by everyone? (Pause) I was watching, carefully. Your opponents thought to trip you up with an argument on fallacy. The fools did not see how carefully you had laid your ground for this. It was breathtaking (pause) I think I will not say I am certain of it I think it may not have occurred to me, to handle the point quite the way you did. (215-216).

As the play develops, there is the drama of do goodism stripped of its appearances and shown to disguise deeper personal obsessions. Behram is sexually attracted to the youth Naval; he has already sacrificed his daughter’s hope of a law career in favour of Naval, and now his desire for the young man’s affections threatens her marriage. Due to this Behram had no time for his wife, Rati. Rati complains about not making love to her by Behram. But Behram never cares about her feelings.

RATI: …See what I have become, Behram, in just two years! Do you see at all? I don’t dress with care any more, because there is no one to see me. My hair has whitened. Do you see?

Behram rises from chair, in a cool rage. He grips her hair in his fist and very deliberately and firmly strikes her head against the table surface, once, twice, three times. Without a word ... she puts her hand to her injured forehead very slowly, without rising, her head bowed in misery and pain. (262).

Behram always want that Naval should response his affection which he feels for Naval. For his sexual attraction towards Naval he never cares about his own daughter Dolly, wife Rati, lawyers, friends even society too. His obsession leads him towards the destruction of his own reputation, as he is seduced by his protégé into a bad decision which loses community land to the British.
BEHRAM: For you only... to look at me! Everyday. That is all. Look at me and confirm... that there is this silent life between us (Desperate). But shared by no one else. (Pause) It cannot harm. It is too slight this wish, this request … (265).

Naval also responds indirectly to his affection which he expresses before his wife Dolly as

NAVAL: I am his dog. And very pleased to be so … I am thrilled when his hand touches me with affection. The muscles of my trunk go wild. My back arches, my hips wiggle with craven delight. (laughs) so… how should I complain? (Pause) I have always wanted this Dolly (268).

Mr. Watts, the District Collector an Englishman for several times visits Behram and Rati also. Dolly, Navals wife when came to know about his father’s sexual desire for her husband Nahnu, she strongly opposes Behram and Naval. But she and Rati becomes helpless.

Dolly: He is snatching my husband from me (Pause) He is taking him from me, for himself! (She embraces her mother.) Mother, I know that you know it. (Pause) Don’t feel ashamed. Talk with me. Tell me what should we do.

RATI: Understand this, Dolly. I have allowed you to say something. I will not hear from you again. I shall listen to nothing. From you or anyone else, that I would wrong spoken in his presence.(273).

In Act IV, it is observed that Behram gets paralyzed sitting in a sick chair as the stage directions shows;

(The lights fade rapidly. As the light come once again, Rati, Dolly and Naval are seen standing around a reclining sick chair on which Behram lies paralyzed. He is covered by a sheet except for his head and an arm peeping out. He makes no movement at all through the scene though his eyes are open and the anxious expression on his face tells us he can understand what is being said before him.)
Dolly and Naval are fully dressed for departure, with some luggage packed and ready on the side) (287).

It turns out that the father has an almost pathological obsession for the boy; love that is reciprocated by Nahnu himself.

Family dynamics play out against this strange backdrop - Dolly and her father competing for Nahnu’s affections, with Rati, Behram’s devoted wife, struggling to assuage emotions only when Dolly becomes pregnant, does Behram break.

A parallel trajectory to the central storyline has political overtones. The British District Collector, Mr. Watts wants the British to take over the neighbouring grasslands to set up an army cantonment, a move resisted by tribals. When Nahnu, a London educated barrister thanks to his godfather, excels in court, Mr. Behram, himself a celebrated barrister of the district feels upstaged. He has no compunction humiliating Nahnu in Mr. Watt’s presence by asking him to strip to his native tribal loincloth, ostensibly to show off his splendid body. Nahnu complies, breaks down and shocked Dolly leads him away.

In the end, Rati says that it is only of Behram’s wish that Naval and Dolly should leave and they can start a new life as Rati expresses it as …

RATI: You will provide for yourselves in time. I understand. But for a start you may find his arrangements useful. He must have had it in mind some time ago… that you should leave, since he appears to have worked it all out in full. (Pause) Dolly, I shall write to you at intervals to tell you of his state… if you would be interested to know. (288).

4.4.3 Dramatic Techniques in the Play Mister Behram:

Dramatic Techniques regarding the play consists of setting, characters, diction, imagery, symbolism. Dramatic techniques of the play consist of following elements.
4.4.3.1 Setting of the Play *Mister Behram*:

The play is set in the nineteenth century. It is set in Southern Gujarat. The action takes place in the rooms of Mr. Behram’s well appointed house.

4.4.3.2 Characters in the Play *Mister Behram*:

As far as the characters of the play concerned, they are Mr. Behram - age 56, influential landowner and advocate, Rati - age 52, his wife, Dolly - age 26, Behram and Rati’s daughter, Naval - age 27, a Warli youth married to Dolly, also a legal practitioner. His original Warli name is Nahnu. Mr. Watts – the District Collector, an Englishman Mr. Bharucha and Mr. Hegde – Senior advocates, Lawyers and Warli servant. Among them Mr. Behram, Rati, Dolly and Naval, Mr. Watts are major characters of the play. Whereas Mr. Bharucha, Mr. Hegde the senior advocates, the warli servant are minor characters. Except Dolly and Rati, the other are complex characters.

4.4.3.3 Other Aspects in the Play:

4.4.3.3.1 Diction:

In the panel discussion on Gieve Patel’s *Mister Behram*, R. Raj Rao comments about diction;

I would like to comment on certain aspects of the play:

“Homosexuality, for one. Apart from that the question of language. The play is set in the nineteenth century and the language is formal, classical even in the intimate scenes between Naval and Rati or Naval and Behram, the idiom is formal. If the play were set in the twentieth century, would the playwright try out a different idiom, something more colloquial, informal or would it be the same...”(31st Jan 1989).

4.4.3.3.2 Music:
As far as the music of the play is concerned the director of the play Toni patel, wife of Gieve Patel comments as:

“The music is simply a convention. In this case, music is always a problem. Any lyrical music poses such problems because, as it is, there is music in the language and I did not want anything to interfere with that. So, finally, we used Warli music simply as a means, a signal to the audience to indicate the beginning and the end of each act, so that it did not interfere with anything else.” (Panel discussion, 31st Jan 1989).

One of the students also comments on the music of the play in the panel discussion as follows;

…The music is used between acts and evokes the tribal ethos which is not actually depicted in the spectacle, except in the instance when Naval is made to wear Warli garments (Act I) and once when Naval speaks about his childhood and wishes to return his tribal life. Except for these two instances, there is no other indication of the tribal music. Hence the deliberate use of tribal music,… intelligently, indicates the tribal background.

Pushpa Bhave also comments on the music of the play and its music denoted the emotional patterns. The violent emotions around the small round table twine in the play which is denoted by the drum music. (31st Jan 1989).

4.4.3.3.3 Performance of the Play:

Mister Behram was first produced by Stage Two Theatre Society for the Bombay Arts Festival, 1987. It was performed at the Nehru Auditorium, Nehru Centre, Bombay on 17th November 1987. The play was also enacted at the Tilak Smarak Mandir, Pune on 30 Jan 1987.

MR. BEHRAM          Nosherwan Jehangir
RATI               Havovi Kolsawalla
DOLLY             Shernaz Patel
4.4.3.3.4 Imagery in the Play:

The playwright Gieve Patel significantly uses just a single image of a black goat. In Act I, at the starting of the play it is observed that in his fit Naval describes an incident about a black goat. In the panel discussion which happens after the performance of the play Gieve Patel comments on it as follows;
“Frankly, I’ve got a very pragmatic answer to this. I happened to see a kind goat being born in an identical situation, the kind of thing Naval describes. One evening, coming out of my grand father’s house in Dahanu district, I saw this happening and I said to myself that somewhere or other at sometime in my life I would use this bloody thing! (Laughter). And as soon as I started writing this play in fact even before the characters had clearly developed and the trend of the play had been worked out I remember that one of the first things that I had in mind was that I could begin the play with this image. So I put it in fact several times during the subsequent writing of the play over the next two years. I was very uncomfortable with it and wondered whether I was imposing something that does not really belong to the play. And then I thought that I would trick my way through and make it work anyway.” (Panel Discussion, 31st Jan 1989).

4.4.3.5 Symbolism in the Play:

As far as the symbolism is concerned, in the play, Gieve Patel Naval’s fit is symbolically described as in the panel discussion Prashant Sinha comments about it as follows:

“We could say that Naval’s fit is symbolic of his denial of his presen rsonality. Let us also not forget that the dream contains a goat. In the western tradition certainly the goat embodies sexuality and I think we could trace that link let us not forget that Parsis are among the most westernized of the communities in India, so I guess we can’t overrule the western tradition infact, that tradition is inherent in the play.” (31 Jan 1989).

4.4.3.6 Dramatic Structure of the Play:

As far as the dramatic structure of the play Mister Behram concerns, Prashant Sinha comments on the beginning of the play as:

“It is effective… a mini play containing the entire action of the play.. then coming briefly certain aspects of form it is a naturalistic play. Some of the
dialogues are highly poetic. The drama text reminded me of Ibsen, the focus on two or three characters at a time— the Chekhovian mode involves a large number of characters on the stage. Gieve seem to have followed the unity of place and possible of time.” (31 Jan 1989).

Ashok Kelkar also comments on the construction of the play,

“This is a baffling play … look at the very cunning construction of the play … the play begins with a relaxed manner … there is a fair amount of comedy in the initial scenes: social comedy and so on… At the same time, there is this element of imagination. It is not easy to capture both Warli and Parsi… The play really moves at various levels. The moral and political dimensions of the play cannot be separated either. They are thoroughly integrated with the form of the play. One of the subtheme is added in the play and that is the transformation of Mr. Watts from the ineffectual man in the beginning to the scheming one at the end of the play. The point is that all of these subthemes add to the main theme: the psycho political dimensions of the relationships between human beings. Thus the play is both local and universal.” (Panel Discussion, 31st Jan 1989).

4.5 An Assessment of Gieve Patel's Dramatic Art:

Gieve Patel’s three plays, besides being very good, are about two communities, the Parsis and Warlis, and their relationships, not well known in the West, or indeed in India. Patel’s plays like those of Chaudharis writings on Calcutta or Oldenburgs Lucknow anthology, show that Indian history, culture and society are complex and always changing. Set among the Parsis along the West Coast of Gujarat, and covering a period for the late 19th Century to the coming of national independence, a portrait emerges of a land-lord society in which extended patriarchal families were collapsing under such challenges as the movement of the young, especially women, to Mumbai, and the new laws granting land from large estates to the peasants, in this case Warli tribals who were exploited by their landlords. Each play in some way concerns inheritance; Princes portrays a bitter fight between two halves of a family for possession of the last male heir; in Savaksa, the head of the family is so obsessed with a younger woman and
his wish to disinherit his son that he loses the estate; in *Mister Behram*, a reforming landlord is so infatuated with a young Warli man that he rejects his own family. These are plays of passion, of conflicts between duty and desire. Gieve Patel, a well known poet and painter has devised a strong theatre language that sounds both classical and as if it were translated from a regional language. The collection of three plays which had been published separately over two decades includes useful interviews explaining the social context and influences on Patel. (One knows of the internationally famous Parsi Industrialist, the many Parsi writers including Daruwalla and Jussawalla but little of the Parsi emergence from isolation to become leaders of Indian modernity.).

Gieve Patel has built a credible world of rural and urban characters. By focusing on the interrelationships of these various classes of people, he explores the nature of these relationships and reveals the ways in which local, social and political institutions, such as the family and the system of patronage, function. Patel dramatically reveals how revered images of the united family, of the nobility of poverty-serve as the foundation of an ideology which supports the interests of the ruling elite. The play essentially suggests that traditional authority is based on quite unideal and unequal relationships. Indirectly Gieve Patel through his plays dealt with post independence impacts on their own community, These impacts are indicative of broader social changes affecting other communities throughout India. (Karen Smith, 70).

The three tragedies- *Princes, Savaksa* and *Mr. Behram* - written by Patel between 1968 and early 1980 and directed and performed in quick succession by a generation of talented theatre persons including Pearl Padamsee, Nosherwan Jehangir, Roger Pereira, Shernaz Patel and Rajit Kapur to packed auditoria in South Mumbai are some of the most intelligently crafted theatrical writing in India.

Most remarkably, these are plays situated within the Parsi community of Mumbai as well as the rural landed gentry of South Gujarat, a region that Patel has had close family ties with. In a set of interviews accompanying the plays, Patel confesses it was very important for him to avoid these stereotypes. He succeeds in showing us a world and a way of life built around a single ethnic identity but by universalizing their triumphs and failures, makes them speak for all.
Finally the theatre of little traditions such as folk has been viewed too often as the sole and legitimate representative of Indian theatre. “The theatre scene in any country cannot grow without a familiarity with the great classical texts of any culture,” Patel says.

The three plays in his book are tragedies in the classical mould, with an irremediable and coiled stripped down inevitability about the path their characters take. Thus in Princes, a huge squabbling, fighting, and restive cast defeats every possibility of a resolution even as a fiercely coveted child by two sides of a bitterly feuding family pays the ultimate price.

In Savaksa, he explores the theme of the use of power in intimate human relationships through the device of an older, prosperous landowning parsi man who is enamoured by a young impoverished parsi girl from Mumbai.

In Mr. Behram, the most powerful and darkly disturbing of the three plays, he explores the improbable but compelling theme of a father in law obsessed with his son in law in a district town of Gujarat in the 19th century.

Love, ego, desire to humiliate, possess, subjugate are interwoven into the dark headed tapestry of this drama.

Pruthipal S. Vasudev calls Gieve Patel as the most effective playwright presently writing in English. The two plays of Gieve Patel however reveal a greater concern for the immediate local world. Patel has carefully chosen incidents which clearly reveal the attitudes behaviours and responses of contemporary Indians, particularly in times of stress. The playwright is able to project something of the life quality the country gives these people. His plays relate directly to the country and to the present. (Karen smith, 63).

About Gieve Patel’s language, Eunice de Souza comments Gieve Patel’s success in creating a language that his characters can speak without straining our credibility has important implications for the future of drama in English in India. It shows that we can explore our own kinds of English creatively (Princes, 27).

Bruce King in World Literature Today expresses his view about Gieve Patel’s plays as:
“Gieve Patel’s plays are distinguished by their powerful emotional content and the rich use of spoken language as a basic instrument of theatre.”

*Mister Behram* has a high formality of diction and abstraction of sentiment, suggestive of a dignified historical tableau, but there are rapid shifts in emotional levels, with works uncovering progressively deeper levels of feeling. The work is rich in themes, including self deception of liberals, the mistreatment of women, the cunning of the underdog and the sexual drives that find expression in social and political attitudes. (This work) suggests that the Indian English drama is likely to join the Indian English novel and poetry as worthy of international attention (10 Oct.2008).

Dhiren Bhagat in India Today expresses his view about the play *Savaksa* as,

“Quite possibly (Savaksa) the first great English play to be written by an Indian”. (10 Oct. 2008).

Lastly it is observed that Gieve Patel’s plays have been performed in Bombay, Pune and other larger cities quite successfully, but as he is a Parsi poet, he only focuses in his plays the Parsi and Warli community and their problems. As Parsi community is a minority in India and it is situated in only Surat,Gujarat, Mumbai etc. hence he couldnot attract the attention of the audience to his plays though they are of quality.

Perhaps his aloofness from the actual highs and lows of the cultural scene in India can be explained by the fact that Patel is also a poet and painter of repute and has also had a full career as a physician.

As Gieve Patel is famous as a painter and a poet his poetic genius and paintings overshadowed his playwright genius hence it is neglected.

Due to all these reasons Gieve Patel, poet of eminence failed to earn status as playwright.
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