Introduction

The very activity of thinking, which lies at the basis of epistemological, ontological, and veridical comprehension, is the reduction of plurality to unity, alterity to sameness. The very task of philosophy, the very task of thinking is the reduction of otherness. In seeking to think the other, its otherness is reduced or appropriated to our understanding. To think philosophically is to comprehend … and master the other, thereby reducing its alterity (Critchley, 29).

The words above which have been written by Simon Critchley in his book The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas about a tendency in certain aspects of critical thinking towards attempts to restrict and control the Other, also critically points to the need for the presence of the Other. Despite philosophical efforts to appropriate ‘otherness’, the other is irreducible to any determination and exceeds any attempt to address its undecidability.

In the Encyclopedia of Social Theory the term ‘other’ has been defined in the following way:

Otherness or alterity, from the Latin alter, describes a condition of being different. As something can only be different with respect to something else, the term other (or otherness) is employed as an antonym of self, ego, subject or identity. (414)

In literary and cultural studies, the concept of the other has been used in various ways. Most such uses mean by “other” the racial, the gendered, or the ethnic other. “The word is used in literary and cultural studies inviduously”, writes J. Hillis Miller in his book Others, “to name the way a hegemonic culture … views different and subaltern ones as exotic or inferior or just plain alien. And therefore as something it would be a good idea to erase or assimilate by some form, overtly violent or not, of ethnic cleansing” (1). The genesis of the concept of the
‘Other’ can be traced back to Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of language as a system of signs arbitrarily assigned and intelligible only in terms of a particular system as a whole:

In all cases, … we discover not ideas given in advance but values emanating from the system. When we say that these values correspond to concepts, it is understood that these concepts are purely differential, not positively defined by their content but negatively defined by their relations with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is that they are what the others are not (Saussure 117).

In Saussurean linguistics, as also in structuralist criticism, the concept of ‘difference’ is fundamentally semantic and has its bearing on the concept of the ‘other’ in the sense that meaning or identity of one entity depends on its manifest difference from any other entity. Nevertheless, meaning or identity also depends on partial similarity or shared characteristics so that it becomes relational rather than absolute or intrinsic. But whereas Saussure posits that the difference between one element and others in the system generating meaning, Jacques Derrida’s apprehension was that difference works within as well as between elements: “Difference is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be ‘present’, appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hallowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element.”(Derrida 142-143). In one of his interviews, Derrida while answering to the question of language as reference and language as mutation referring to anything other than itself answered: “It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the “other” of language. … Deconstruction is not an enclosure in nothingness, but an openness towards an other.”(Kearney 123-24). According to Joseph Hillis Miller, in all his important uses of the word “autre” or the “other”, Derrida “clearly names … something that is completely other,
something that cannot be returned to the same by any form of dialectical sublation or
Aufhebung” (Hillis Miller 261).

The concept of the Other can also be found in the philosophical thought of G. W. F Hegel who in the section entitled “Lordship and Bondage” in his work Phenomenology of Spirit asserted that self-consciousness can only know itself through ‘another’, for the ‘Other’ that the ‘Self’ has to overcome is in fact a part of ‘itself’ (111). Hegel believed that it is only through recognizing and knowing ‘another’ that the ‘Self’ can know itself, so that the ‘desire’ that motivates the ‘spirit’ or ‘mind’ in his journey to know himself, is always the desire for something ‘Other’ which becomes a desire for the subject ‘itself’. In Phenomenology of Spirit two modes of desiring are presented: the desire for the ‘Other’, leading to the loss of the ‘self’, and the desire for ourselves (self-consciousness) which results in the loss of the world. The subject in the process of recognizing itself and constituting its own self-consciousness must overcome or annihilate the ‘Other’. At this stage of development, self-consciousness is spilt and self-opposed. Hegel characterized these two ‘halves’ of consciousness as “unequal and opposed … one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live to be for another. The former is lord, the other is bondsman.” (Hegel 115). In this ‘master/slave’ dialectic where master and slave stand for social actors working through the forms of society prior to modern civic society, Hegel paradoxically asserts that the lord is the self-contained consciousness in need of another consciousness as bondsman to retain its own independence. The lord’s confirmation of his own sense of the self requires the bondsman as the ‘Other’. The bondsman achieves ‘pure-being-for-self’ (117) by the merit of his labour recognizing in the process the independence of his own consciousness through the creation of an object which the lord intends to destroy in order to know himself (109). The Otherness that the self-consciousness tries to overcome is its ‘own’ Otherness which it perceives in the bondsman.
This Otherness has to be repeatedly destroyed by self-consciousness in order to know itself. In this way ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ are not only intimately related to each other; they ‘are’ each other and their coming into being is dependent on their mutual recognition. The reversal of their assumed role happens when the bondsman gains independence and freedom through his labor realizing that he can change the external world as a reflection of himself and the lord witnessing the way to gain knowledge tries to follow the role of the bondsman.

In the twentieth century, the Hegelian master-slave dialectic was appropriated by the philosopher Alexandre Kojève who claimed that “the subject’s desire for recognition is based on his/her desire of an other desire and, thus, of the desire of the other” (Routledge Encyclopedia of Social Theory 414, emphasis in original). In the sphere of psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan adopting this formula capitalised the term by referring to ‘the Other’ as the symbolic order of language and as well as the subject’s unconscious. In Lacan’s writings there is the ‘other’ and the ‘Other’: the former refers to that which is not really other but is a projection of the ego; the latter connotes an alterity with which no subjective identification, whether imaginary or real, is possible. When granted a capital letter the term reminds us the Lacanian theory of the way in which the subject seeks recognition of itself in the response of the Other. In “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud”, Lacan writes:

If I have said that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other (with a capital O), it is in order to indicate the beyond in which the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire for recognition.

In other words this other is the Other that even my lie invokes as a guarantor of the truth in which it subsists. (Lacan 172)
Another of Lacan’s comments -- in “On a Question Preliminary to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis” -- defines the Other as “the locus from which the question of [the subject’s] existence may be presented to him” (194). More to the point of the present study, it may be indicated that among the several complementary meanings of the term in Lacan’s writings, three meanings are particularly relevant. First, the Other is everything which we must learn to separate ourselves from so that we can grow-up like an individual. Second, it is an imaginary image of ourselves with which we tend to identify despite the required sense of its separation from the physical body. Third and the most important of all, it is the locus of language, laws and institutions normally representing patrocentric ideology. For Lacan each person becomes a person and enters human culture by internalising society’s communicative rules or the Symbolic Order. This happens through the formation of a separate and sexually specific (unconscious) self in the process of learning language. Individuals can only speak in the language of the Symbolic Order, which is viewed in psychoanalytic terms as the Law of the Father. In Lacanian thought culture is masculine. Femininity is viewed as negative in relation to the symbolic rules which regulate both individual and society. Femininity is unspeakable except in the terms of masculinity: there is no feminine outside the phallic order of language.

The Lacanian account of femininity’s status of ‘the other’ was appropriated in the strains of feminist criticism that examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women. In Women and Moral Identity, E. Porter for example explains two major ways in which women’s subordinate status is maintained in mainstream thought. The first view involves an account of women as partial helpmates, essential for fulfilling men’s needs regarding pleasure, household services, child-birth and so on. The second view involves an account of women as different but complementary to men. The French feminist Simone de Beauvoir in her book The Second Sex summed up the hierarchical relationship between men
and women in these terms: “He is the subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (de Beauvoir 16). Subsequent French feminists however even while accepting Beauvoir’s notion of woman as the second sex or the ‘Other’ but rejected the cultural assumption that women could only be seen in terms of men. They instead celebrated a form of writing (‘écriture feminine’) which claimed the greater and unique possibilities of femininity. Their stress on the positive benefits of the feminine as ‘other’ as a means of questioning that which was socially privileged and on the indeterminacy of the feminine was inspired by the poststructuralist thought of Jacques Derrida. Joan Brandt has offered a cogent explanation to Derrida’s notion ‘alterity’ thus:

When Derrida speaks of ‘radical alterity’, he does not assume a pure exteriority whereby heterogeneity as a hypostasised ‘Other’ would ultimately be subsumed under a notion of the Same; he points to an otherness that inhabits the self-identical, not as the result of some subversive or transgressive act but as an alterity that has been internal to any closed structure, be it linguistic or otherwise … By bringing the temporal deferral of presence and the spatial distinction that places it in relation to an other, difféance marks the impossibility for an identity to close in on itself. In this sense, spacing becomes indissociable from the concept of alterity (Brandt 120).

Women in most societies have been relegated to the position of the ‘Other’ and “feminist critics”, write Ashcroft, Griffins and Tiffin, “starting from potentially essentialist positions in the 1960s and 1970s have moved away from biologistic stances (often based on white, Anglo-Saxon norms) towards more complex subversive positions and towards increasing recognition that the principle of ‘difference’, lying as it does at the very heart of their construction as ‘Other’ is basic to any contemporary feminist theory”(Ashcroft et al 175).
The concerns of feminist theory have strong parallels with postcolonial theory (Ashcroft et al 175) in that feminist and postcolonial discourses both seek to reinstate the marginalized, the other. In colonialist ideology, the colonizers saw themselves at the centre of the world and conceived the colonized existing at the margins. Lois Tyson has summed up this process of ‘othering’ in these words: “The colonizers saw themselves as the embodiment of what a human being should be, the proper “self”; native people were considered “other”, different, and therefore different, and therefore inferior to the point of being fully human. This practice of judging all who are different as less than fully human is called othering” (Tyson 420). The concept of ‘Otherness’ in the context of postcolonial theory, sees the world as divided into mutually excluding opposites: the colonizer as ‘self’ is ordered, rational and good, the colonized as ‘the other’ is chaotic, irrational and evil. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, “the work of Marxist critics such as Louis Althusser, Michel Pe`cheux, and Fredric Jameson is of particular relevance … to the problem of constituting identity within the self-Other division” (Ashcroft et al 169) and the truth of post-colonial societies stems from “a construction of the self as subject in relation to the Other.” In postcolonial societies, “the participants are frozen into a hierarchical relationship in which the oppressed is locked into position by the assumed moral superiority of the dominant group” (Ashcroft et al 172). Obviously, the dialectic of self and Other forms the matrix of post-colonial literatures. Recent theorists of colonialist discourse like Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, Homi Bhabha have sought to offer explanations to colonialism’s signifying system and its strategies of silencing and oppressing the colonial other. In Orientalism Said’s proposal of orientalism as the “discourse which constituted the Orient in the consciousness of the west” (Ashcroft, et al 167), also analyses how the world was constructed as the ‘other’ in the European mind. The whole structure of colonialist discourse, according to Said, revolves round “the intention of colonialist power to possess the terrain of its Others” (The Post-Colonial Studies Reader:
Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak has in her writings pointed out various ways to render the colonized as the other by the imperialist power. ‘He (the European agent) is worlding their own world, which is far from mere uninscribed earth, anew, by obliging them to domesticate the alien as Master,’ a process generating the force ‘to make the “native” see himself as “other”’ (Spivak 1985a: 133). The native’s acceptance of the knowledge formulated by his master further consolidates his thinking of himself as the other. The native is denied the ground from which he can utter a reply to imperialism’s ideological aggression or create a different self: “No perspective critical of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self” (Spivak 1985c: 253, 254). As the construction of an English cultural identity was impossible without making the native the other, the imperialist discourse has always tried to domesticate him. In this discourse of Self and Other the maintenance of power by the colonizer over the colonized is always visible as noted by Jane M. Jacobs:

Social constructs of Self and Other provided the fundamental building blocks for the hierarchies of power which produced empires and the uneven relations among their citizenry. Under colonialism, negative constructions of the colonized Other established certain structures of domination through which the colonizer triumphed … The process by which notions of the Self and Other are defined, articulated and negotiated are a crucial part of what might be thought of as the cultural dimension of colonialism and postcolonialism … the nineteenth-century imperial project most clearly, but not exclusively, depended upon racialised notions of Self and Other. Imperialism operated within an ideal of the Manichean binary, which constructed a demonized Other against which flattering, and legitimating images of the metropolitan Self were defined. Such radicalised constructs were never stable and were always threatened not only by the
In these highly politicized accounts of the relation between the colonizer and the colonized as Self/Other the appropriation of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic is apparent. Yet the Self’s attempted total control of the Other is problematized by the estranging nature of the Other. It is illuminating in this context to turn to the writings of Levinas. The notion of the Other has great importance for Emmanuel Levinas whose theorization of the Other in his essay “The Trace of the Other” can be read along with the alternative reading of the Other given in Jacques Derrida’s essay titled “Psyche”. Clearly enough, two different concepts of otherness are to be found in their theorizations. Hillis Miller, in his book *Others* has noted this about their uses of the concept of the Other:

> On the one hand, the other may be another version of the same, in one way or another assimilable, comprehensible, able to be appropriated and understood. On the other hand, the other may be truly and radically other. In the latter case, the other cannot be turned into some version of the same. It cannot be made transparent to the understanding, thereby dominated and controlled. It remains, whatever efforts we make to deal with it, irreducibly other” (Hillis Miller 2).

Indeed, there is an intriguing status of the Other in Levinas’s reformulation of ethics as care for the Other. ‘Face’ is the term used by Levinas to describe the way in which the Other is presented to the Self. It is not visual, it does not take place within thought, but in an immediate relation, in which the Other exceeds “the idea of the other in me”. As Margaret Toye puts it in her book *Critical Ethics* in Levinas “Also there is the Other as a point of exteriority, outside the economy of the Same; then there is the singular Other, the ‘autrui’ – the other human being: and there is also the Other as a deity, which for Levinas is based on a
Jewish God” (Toye 209). Of the other human being, Levinas himself argues: “the Other as other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I myself am not” (Levinas 48).

Undeniably, throughout history the dominant ideologies have defined themselves in relation to a subordinated Other. Their discourses construct the self as masculine and ascribe femininity a position of Otherness. Of course within the sphere of gender politics there are various degrees and types of the otherness of a woman within a culture depending not only on her biological identity and gender position but also on her social class, education, profession, physical and psychological abilities and disabilities. The so-called marginal groups like homosexuals, gays and lesbians who cannot be bracketed in the homogenizing patriarchal and heterosexual social matrix have been given the place of alterity. This is exactly what Mahesh Dattani indicates in his plays and how this is indicated is explored and explained in the chapters to come.


Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1985a, 1985c


Patriarchy and the Creation of the ‘Other’: Where There’s a Will

“Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being … She is simply what man decrees … She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.” (1949/53: 18). Simone de Beauvoir

The notion of woman as the Other has come to be increasingly accommodated in literary practice and in criticism ever since Beauvoir wrote about this. The discourse of feminism holds that the concept of women as the Other to men came to be circulated in human consciousness in the interest of men who attribute factors of Otherness to women’s sexual bodies. As an indicative response puts it: “A key aspect of women’s ‘otherness’ from the perspective of masculine scientific discourse is our reproductive capacity … Once science and medicine had become established as masculine institutions and as masculine modes of knowledge, ever more sophisticated accounts of women’s ‘otherness’ were produced” (Jackson, Prince and Young 363-365). Constructed as Other women came to be relegated to the position of being mere objects of societal knowledge. Hence, their knowledge and expertise were consistently ignored. It is perhaps because of this that Mahesh Dattani, well aware of the existence of this gap in the representation of individual experiences of women in Indian drama, attempted to speak about women’s experiences and to represent women’s versions of reality in his plays. In the process he came to reveal that patriarchy is one of the chief causative behind the Othering of both men and women in Indian society.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that Dattani’s plays remind us that any account of social truth must also take into consideration the personal experiences of individuals who had previously been ignored or bypassed, forgotten or misrepresented and often ridiculed in
society. In his plays, Dattani thus makes us aware of the misleading tendency of viewing ‘otherness’ as a singular production of gender and of women as the only victims of gender hierarchy. What Dattani wants us to realize through his works is that there are several dimensions of power and powerlessness that confer ‘otherness’. Men have often been othered because of their sexual orientation, disability, age or disease. Thus, women do not have a monopoly on ‘otherness’. Men who are othered by their more privileged counterparts highlight dimensions of power and powerlessness. Acknowledgements of the many and diverse ways in which men experience oppression leads in Dattani to an awareness that women do not stand alone as oppressed Others under the rule of patriarchy, and that the experiences of individual men also expose the often non-homogenous nature of the advantages enjoyed by men in a patriarchal system. Rendering visible the diverse experiences of people of varied social status, Dattani decodes the ways in which the construction of ‘otherness’ takes place or otherwise happens in Indian society.

Though Dattani never attempts to construct a consistent discourse on ‘otherness’, his plays often speak for those who remain unrepresented in writings by Indian and non-Indian writers writing about Indian society. Without inventing a politically motivated discourse on ‘otherness’, what Dattani does in his plays is to depict the experiences of marginalised people and to demonstrate the uniqueness of the lived experiences of such people. In so doing, his plays expose hierarchies of knowledge and power. Simultaneously, his plays indicate that if dimensions of power and powerlessness are major factors in the production of the ‘other’ in a hegemonic patriarchal system, fissures across lines of class, sexual identity, age and disability must be equally taken into account to do justice to a representation of ‘otherness’. The fact remains that if patriarchy has a hegemonic presence then challenges and confrontation with this presence must be done by entering into this presence by the people who are othered in order to legitimise their existence.
One of the first plays that Mahesh Dattani wrote was a comedy entitled *Where There’s a Will*. This play examines the consequences of allowing an ideology, that is patriarchy, shape up the patterns of life. The plot of the play has in a central position the ‘will’ made by the deceased business tycoon Hasmukh Mehta. When alive, Hasmukh Mehta had insisted upon every member of his family following his will or volition unquestioningly. After his sudden demise he continued to exert his control over his family members through clauses in the ‘will’ which compelled his son Ajit, daughter-in-law Preeti, and his wife Sonal to remain subservient to his wishes through the supervision of his erstwhile mistress Kiran Jhaveri. As soon as his family members come to know about his ‘will’ their frantic attempt to forego his intentions makes the ghost of Hasmukh jubilant and he enjoys their discomfort, pain and angst. But in the course of the play a strong inter-personal bonding develops between the members of Mehta family and Kiran Jhaveri, and this development casts the ‘will’ of Hasmukh Mehta into insignificance. Comic though the incidents of the play are, they actually reflect on a serious issue in Indian society, patriarchy. Mahesh Dattani himself described the play as “the exorcism of patriarchal code” (“A Note On the Play”).

The concept of patriarchy itself has been much written about and debated in academic circles. In the book *Patriarchy and Economic Development: Women’s Positions at the End of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Valentine M. Moghadam, Sylvia Walby in the very first chapter entitled “The ‘Declining Significance’ or the ‘Changing Forms’ of Patriarchy” reminds us that we need to view ‘patriarchy’ as more than just a term. She stresses the importance of understanding ‘patriarchy’ as a ‘system’ because such an understanding helps us to reject not only the biological determinism which instructs us to ascribe the difference between man and woman to their biology but also the concept that every individual man is always in a dominant position and every woman is always in a subordinate position.
Patriarchy, which is a system in its own right according to Walby, is linked with the ideology that generates and perpetuates notions that men are superior to women, that women should be controlled by men, and that women are commodities and are part of men’s property. However, it is interesting to note that the nature of patriarchy is not fixed since historical periods, or different social systems throw up their own variations of patriarchy which function differently within the frames of divergent cultural and social practices. But clearly enough, while nature of patriarchy can be different even within different social classes in the same society, the basic principle of dominance remains the same.

In a patriarchal system, men control women’s productive or labour power, women’s reproductive capacity, women’s sexuality, mobility and property and other economic resources belonging to or produced by women. While women are forced to offer free service at home in household activities, their income from outside is appropriated by men. Women have no decision making power on such vital issues like when they would like to become mother and the number of times they would wish to conceive. Yet, the patriarchal system attaches great importance to motherhood as it creates feminine and masculine character types. A woman as wife is bound to become physically intimate even against her will and she is not allowed to express her sexual desires outside marriage. An entire moral and legal regimen is there to prosecute and convict a woman for doing so, though a blind eye is turned toward male promiscuity. Though a woman’s dress, behaviour and mobility are closely monitored either by her family members, or by the society she lives in, the trading in female sexuality is a reality everywhere. Walby cites six structures of patriarchy, namely, paid work, housework, culture, sexuality, violence, and the state, and states that these structures may either work in tandem or independently to oppress women, for the exact nature of the modality of working of patriarchy remains related to its setting.
However, it is not that patriarchy puts only women in disadvantaged position. It also controls men by pushing them into stereotypical roles that require them to function in a specific way. Men are expected to be bread-winners and protectors of their families and are expected to be strong, decisive, aggressive, brave and not emotionally vulnerable. If they happen to be gentle and timid they are mocked. If a man gives much attention to the views and opinions of his wife, he is called henpecked. Still, despite all these set-backs faced by non-conforming men in a patriarchal system, their problems are not so constricting and dehumanising as they are in the case of women. Added to this is the fact that the discrimination faced by women within a family or within society is more vicious in nature simply because such discrimination denies them their very individuality.

All of this is possible because in any society the working of patriarchy depends on its influence over institutions like family, religion, the legal set-up, political and economic systems, media and educational systems. The first lesson in discrimination is learnt in the family where a male child is told to be dominant and a female child is taught to be submissive. In the process of growing up, a girl child thus becomes accustomed to getting unequal treatment in every aspect of interaction and she soon learns about the hierarchical relationship existing between a male and a female child. Regarding the hierarchical relationships prevalent in an extended family in India, Sudhir Kakar in *The Indian Psyche* says that the ordering principles of this hierarchical system are ‘age’ and ‘sex’ and ‘men hav[ing] greater authority than women’. As Kakar indicates:

> The hierarchy of roles within an extended family is legitimated by the tradition and social sanction not of generations but of centuries, so that for an Indian, superior and subordinate relationships have the character of eternal verity and moral imperative. In other words, an Indian’s sense of his relative familial and social position -- which is superior to some and subordinate to others -- has been so internalised that he qualifies, in Dumont’s phrase, as
the original *homo hierarchicus*. Regardless of his personal talents or achievements, or of
changes in the circumstances of his own or others’ lives, an Indian’s relative position in
hierarchy of the extended family, his obligations to those ‘above’ him and his expectations
of those ‘below’ him are immutable, lifelong. Already in childhood he begins to learn that
he must look after the welfare of those subordinate to him in the family hierarchy so that
they do not suffer either through their own misjudgement or at the hands of outsiders, and
that he is reciprocally entitled to obedience and respectful compliance with his wishes.
(p.117)

Similar to the family, religion also implicitly reinforces the patriarchal order. As all major
religions are interpreted and controlled by upper class and upper caste men, it is the male
prerogative to define morality, ethics, behaviour and even the law without considering the
female point of view on these matters. Double standards are maintained with respect to
morality and behavioural codes. Religious laws often justify implicit and explicit use of
violence against women who do not conform to the strict behavioural code imposed on them,
and the use of violence also invokes concepts of ‘honour’ and ‘shame’. The legal system,
invariably headed by males, also shatters the confidence of women who became victims of
male lust. In fact, it may even be argued that underlying most of the so-called progressive
legislations there is the need to keep intact relations of domination and subordination between
the sexes. The Indian economy indeed fosters this unequal relationship between the sexes, for
according to Ritu Dewan, the methodology of the dominant ‘neoclassical’ paradigm in
economics remains silent about uncomfortable issues such as patriarchy which are ‘classified
as non-data and thus become invisible.’ She further elaborates on this matter of silence when
she says:

Abstractions reach such levels that talking about reality becomes an exception. Their
[economists] conceptual basis is the market functioning in a capitalist situation which
supposedly automatically brings about an efficient allocation of resources, with each individual seeking maximization of profits as a producer and of utility as a consumer. The central figure of all economic theory and activity is a ‘Homo Oeconomicus’ flattened to such a degree that all class and gender differences are erased from analysis. This class neutral (as well as caste, ethnic, race etc. neutral) model postulates a single rationality totally out of keeping with reality. Thus, economic analysis is gender-neutral, as are technology, development policies, market functioning; the list is endless. … What neoclassical economics ignores is: first, that every economy is characterised by two interdependent systems – the system of production of material goods and the system of reproduction of labour force; second, patriarchy is fully integrated both with production relations and productive forces. (313)

In order to provide empowerment to women in this economic condition the Government of India in its National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000 implemented a ‘Programme of Action’ keeping in parameters like i) building a positive self-image and self-confidence; ii) developing ability to think critically; iii) building up group cohesion and fostering decision making and action; iv) ensuring equal participation in the process and bringing about change in society; v) providing the where withal for economic independence. (p.76. Department of Women and Child, Delhi, 1988).

Walby too in her analysis agrees that patriarchy combined with capitalism is one of the factors responsible for gender inequality. As she puts it: “I do not think it is possible to explain concrete forms of gender equality by theorizing from macrosystems of patriarchy and capitalism. Further there are complex historically specific ways in which the structures and practices which make up those systems interact.” (p.45. Walby. Theorising Patriarchy. 1990). In her attempt to analyse the intensity of women’s oppression due to patriarchy she conceives of two main forms of patriarchy namely, private and public. In private patriarchy a
man’s position as either a father or a husband or as head of the family oppresses and derives benefits by subordinating women members of the family. In public patriarchy, a woman’s labour is appropriated by providing her with a low wage. However, Walby’s categorization of two forms of patriarchy cannot be accepted as universal, for as Nirmala Banerjee rightly points out in her essay “Analysing Women’s Work Under Patriarchy” in From Myths to Markets that Walby has not ‘gone into the question of the motivations behind patriarchy’ (p.326). However, despite finding Walby’s theorisation inappropriate in the Indian context Banerjee admits that Walby’s study is significant for its ‘historicity and the scope it provides for possibilities of variations in the experience of different groups.’ (p. 326). It may be indicated too that in India men’s unified attempt to appropriate women’s labour, assets and even knowledge and skill in both private and public spheres is linked with other socio-eco-religio factors. Being primarily a land based economy, the line of inheritance is along the male line. Though the Indian legal system offers an equal share to both a son and a daughter of the property of a father, it is hardly practised as everybody discourages a woman to claim her father’s property. Even religion and social practises view women as inherently low and somehow un-free. Sudhir Kakar’s view on this matter may be mentioned. In The Inner World Kakar says that the Hindu scriptures insist that in “childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband; when her lord is dead, to her sons; a woman must never be independent”(p. 118). In other words, in the Indian context, patriarchy gains legitimation from the legacy of past traditions.

All this indicates that there has been an on-going critical debate on the various perspectives of the concept of patriarchy. Many of these perspectives are anticipated, if not embodied, in Mahesh Dattani’s Where There’s a Will. For instance the play highlights how a patriarch like Hasmukh Mehta sacrifices familial peace in order to blindly follow patriarchal norms. His relation with the other members of his family is in a bad condition for his domineering
attitude which is the outcome of his patriarchal conditioning. As the play opens we find Hasmukh Mehta rueing his former decision of making his only son Ajit, the joint managing director of the Mehta Group of Industries. Indeed, having a son like Ajit makes Hasmukh regret the prayer he had offered to god for a son. He even wants Ajit to turn into an insensate ‘vegetable’ so that his son’s recalcitrance towards him can be more easily ignored. Ajit openly contradicts, confronts and even confutes his father, and this tendency of Ajit disturbs the patriarchal ego of Hasmukh. He thus begins to regard Ajit as being ‘dull-headed’ since his birth. Neither can he appreciate Ajit’s wife Preeti for as a dominating patriarchal figure of authority there is no way in which he can tolerate Preeti’s shrewdness. This is why he describes her as being ‘sly as a snake’. He knows that Preeti’s gestures of respect towards him are indeed no more than pretence, a ploy to get him to develop and nurture in him a favourite opinion about her so that she may be a future recipient of a significant share of his property after his demise. Holding both Ajit and Preeti responsible for his high blood pressure, high cholesterol and enlarged heart, Hasmukh accuses them of aggravating his mental tension to such a level that he became a victim of those problems. Hasmukh’s accusations are however not only levelled thus against his son and daughter-in-law. His wife is in a similar fashion at the receiving end of his censure. He even does not allow Ajit to talk to his friends lest he shares any information related to business with them and believes that a father like him, who when he fails to tolerate indiscipline any further in the behaviour of his son, has nothing to do except throw him out on the road. A staunch believer in his own patriarchal authority, Hasmukh Mehta believes that Ajit’s economic dependence and his subordinate status in his, Hasmukh’s, household do not give him the right to contradict his father. Accustomed to exert absolute power and command over his subordinates in the office with his ‘brief’ and ‘precise’ instructions, he wonders why Ajit wants to differ from his opinions. The problem that emerges from this treatment of Ajit by his father Hasmukh Mehta
is an arrested growth of the competence of Ajit in life equally as in business. Hasmukh’s repeated reminder to his son that the success he achieved in the garment business is largely due to his following of the guidance of his father, eventually precipitates as a threat to Ajit’s own individuality and freedom. Ajit summarises his father’s tendency to reduce him to being merely an extension of his own (Hasmukh’s) self in these words:

Ajit: I mean that you want to run the show, play Big Boss as long as you can. Or as long as God permits. And all of a sudden, you are ‘called to a better world’, you will still want to play Big Boss. And you can do it through me. In short, you want me to be you. (CP 460)

The ‘show’ that Ajit refers to in this dialogue is his father’s sprawling business where he is denied the opportunity of playing an independent role. However, it is not that Hasmukh wants to guide Ajit in the world of business only. Hasmukh in fact wants to appropriate Ajit’s whole life and existence. Ajit is dissatisfied with the way his father wants him to run his life and Ajit’s dissatisfaction is revealed in the following words:

Ajit: Ever since I was a little boy, you have been running my life. Do this, do that or don’t do that, do this. (CP 487)

Such intrusions in Ajit’s life create an identity crisis and a loss of selfhood in Ajit. Ajit therefore throws multiple questions before his father:

Ajit: And what becomes of me? The real me. I mean, if I am you, then where am I? (CP 461)

All this is in keeping with the norm of a patriarchal system in which the father thinks that the son has to be submissive, respectful and obedient to a father who is conventionally supposed to have knowledge of what is best for his son. In reality, the affirmation of the father’s experience can result in the erasure of the individuality of the son. An entry in the
International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities confirms this view and informs, “More recently, studies of masculinity … consider patriarchy as a power structure. … While patriarchy presents male dominance as historical, the idea of the father as a powerful cultural symbol and site of contestation has remained throughout historical and social conflicts and textual productions” (2007, 469). In the First Act of the present play Dattani unfolds how the father-son relationship is vitiated largely due to Hasmukh’s overbearing pride about his own superiority. If a family may be held to be a microcosm of society, then what Dattani presents in this play is largely universal. Indeed, though the action of the play is shown to happen in the family of Hasmukh Mehta who is a Gujarati, it shows the helpless condition of a son in any patriarchal system in general.

In Where There’s a Will, Hasmukh Mehta as a patriarch shows himself as being incapable of comprehending that it is wrong to guide his twenty-three years old son in every respect. When Hasmukh says, “Yes, I want you to be me! What’s wrong with being me?” (CP 460), his faith in his own righteousness is evident. Considering Ajit not only to be an irresponsible but also an incapable young man, who has been born to his father’s wealth merely to squander it, Hasmukh tries to exert his will over his son. Ajit’s admission in the latter half of the First Act of the play that he is ‘too fond of’ (CP 487) his father’s money which he does not want to lose in any way, actually reflect an aspect of the mental fabric of sons in a patriarchal society. As inheritance is believed to be patrilineal, the son thinks that he is entitled to have his father’s property by birthright without needing to possess any special quality like industriousness to gain the property. In the play, Ajit talks about his plan to modernize his father’s garment manufacturing unit with his father’s money, a plan that his father Hasmukh dismisses outright because he knows that the worth of his son is comparable to a zero:
Hasmukh: If you are you, then you are nowhere. You are nothing just a big zero. No matter what you do, you’ll remain a zero. Over the years you’ll just keep adding zeroes to your zero. Zero, zero, zero. On their own zeroes don’t mean a thing. But if there’s a number one standing before all those zeroes, then they really add up to a lot. (CP 461)

Evidently, Hasmukh believes that Ajit is such a blockhead that in the absence of his sustained guidance and supervision Ajit will surely ruin the Mehta Group of Industries. Kerry L. Marsh in the *Encyclopedia of Sociology* has explained the term ‘personal autonomy’ in the following way:

> Personal autonomy refers to a person’s sense of self determination, of being able to make choices regarding the direction of his or her own actions, including the freedom to pursue those choices. With personal autonomy, an individual is able to engage in effective self-regulation – successfully monitoring needs and values; responding adaptively to the environment, and initiating, organizing, and directing actions toward the achievement of needs. For some theorists, the psychological experience of autonomy has its origin in the organism’s natural tendency to organize both itself and its environment in the pursuit of goals. In this view, a sense of autonomy requires the absence of restraining forces that can limit the natural tendency. Importantly, feelings of are not only crucial for adequate intrapersonal functioning- competent action and adequate psychological health- but are also essential for the adequate functioning of a healthy society. (2003. 3, 2058)

In order to justify his insistence on having an absolute control over Ajit, Hasmukh refers back to his own following of his father’s wishes. He says that it had been his unquestioning acceptance of all the wishes of his father that had made him successful in life: “My father… He took great trouble to make sure I didn’t turn out like my brother. No more school. No more loafing for me. Hard work. And I am happy he did that! (CP 464).”
This shows that Hasmukh Mehta had not only submitted to the patriarchal regime of his own father, but also that he had subscribed completely to the notion of carrying out patriarchal authority by achieving absolute material success. Hence he now feels that the onus of carrying out patriarchal norms and values in his family entirely falls on him. Hasmukh Mehta’s acceptance of the prevalent patriarchal ideology can be best analysed with reference to Louis Althusser’s conclusions in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”. As Althusser shows that ideology may prove to be both a hindrance and a help, Dattani shows that Hasmukh fails to understand that his attitude to life is getting conditioned by his belief in the ideology of patriarchy and that he himself is constituted in and by this ideology (1971, 155-9). Patriarchy makes Hasmukh lose his ‘self’ in perpetuating an antagonist self to each one of his family members. Hasmukh’s presentation of himself as an overbearing father and a domineering husband with its roots in patriarchal ideology makes him unhappy with everyone around him – no one having lived to his expectations in the way he believed he had done to his father. In fact, Hasmukh Mehta’s loss of his ‘self’ while living life under the shadow of his father was not realized by him and in the play we find his mistress, Kiran Jhaveri, exposing Hasmukh Mehta’s ‘otherness’ to his ‘self’ thus:

    Kiran. Hasmukh Mehta was living his life in his father’s shadow.

    Kiran. He had no life of his own.

    Kiran. Where were his own dreams? His own thoughts? Whatever he did was planned for him by his father. (CP 509)

Schooled in a patriarchal set up, Hasmukh Mehta ever since he had been a child, had always aimed to please his father and sought his approval. Holding his father as an ideal Hasmukh Mehta gradually internalised his real position of ‘otherness’ as his true self. The truth of his marginal condition under the reign of his father never comes to his mind, and this indicates
the power of patriarchal ideology to restrict our comprehension of its negative impact in our lives. An individual’s misrecognition of his/her real conditions of existence and his/her participation in the patriarchal ideology are the outcome of the workings of ideological state apparatuses as proposed by Louis Althusser. By ‘apparatus’ Althusser referred to systems or institutions, such as the religion, the law, the family, educational institutions, the media and communication that produce certain types of discourses and discursive practices for individuals to participate in and uphold. In Althusser’s words: “Ideology is the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group … Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (1994, 122). In Where There’s Is a Will, Dattani’s exploration of this social conditioning by the dominant patriarchal ideology interestingly reveals the discomfort experienced by all who become an ‘other’ to his/her self. This may be seen too in Hasmukh’s long monologue on marriage in the play. “Why does a man marry?” muses Hasmukh to himself here, and he goes on to reflect:

So that he can have a woman all to himself? No. there’s more to it than that. What? Maybe he needs a faithful companion? No. If that was it, all men would keep dogs. No. No, I think the important reason anyone should marry at all to get a son. Why is it so important to get a son? Because the son will carry on the family name? (Pause.) Why did I marry? Yes, to get a son. So that when I grow old, I can live life again through my son. Why did my father marry? To get me. Why did I marry? To get Ajit … Then I should be a very happy man. I’ve got a loving wife who has been faithful to me like any dog would be. She has given me a son, which is what I wanted from her in the first place. I should be happy, right? I’ve got what I want. … Why do I have a mistress? Because I am unhappy. … Why am I unhappy? Because I don’t have a son. Who is Ajit? Isn’t he my son? No. He’s just a boy who spends my money and lives in my house. He doesn’t behave like my son. A son
should make me happy. Like I made my father … happy. I listened to him. I did what he
told me to do. I worked for him. I worked hard for him. I made him … happy. That is what
I wanted my son to make me. (CP 473, emphasis added.)

This is clearly an expression of a patriarchal mind set – the idea that men beget sons so that
the patriarchal lineage may be continued and consolidated. From his words comes to the
forefront what James Petergrew has termed as “the masculine intent to dominate through the
creation of law, the military, marriage, family, and other institutions” (Petergrew 2003:141).
Apparently, Hasmukh’s views are constructed on the line of dominant patriarchal ideologies
that insist on male superiority and repetition and replication of the male status quo. In his
essay “What Do Men Want?” in the book *Between Men and Feminism*, John Forrester quotes
Freud as having written: “The deepest of all the child’s yearnings is for the love and
protection that only a father can give” (1992, 114). Seen from this perspective, there can be
little doubt that Hasmukh Mehta has miserably failed in his role as a father to his son Ajit. As
Mukesh Ranjan Verma has rightly noted,

Indian society has been a very traditional society with strong patriarchal values. Here
fathers have desired to have sons because they are supposed to carry forward the name of
the family, and because in their sons fathers have hoped to live out their own dream and
aspirations. In the past this had led to a situation where a father demanded unquestioning
obedience from his son because he firmly believed that he alone knew what was best for
him. This denied the son any opportunity for independent growth. With changing times,
this has begun to change. (136)

In Hasmukh Mehta’s case, the consequence was his inevitable othering of his son as an object
unworthy of any serious notice.
Another aspect of the othering effected by Hasmukh Mehta is indicated by his subscription to the notion of sexual asymmetry, that is, “the assignment of tasks and roles to men and women which has been observed in all known human societies as evidence of its naturalness” (Lerner, 16). In fact, Hasmukh Mehta’s belief in male dominance and his emotional and intellectual neglect of his wife Sonal can be best understood by regarding Gerda Lerner’s investigation into the notion of sexual asymmetry and the subsequent subordination of women. As Lerner writes,

A corollary explanation of sexual asymmetry locates the causes of female subordination in biological factors affecting males. Men’s greater physical strength, his ability to run faster and lift heavier weights, and their greater aggressiveness cause them to become hunters. As such they become providers for food for their tribes and are more highly valued and honoured than women. …Finally, this biological deterministic explanation is extended from the Stone Age into the present by the assertion that the sexual division of labour based on man’s natural “superiority” is a given and therefore as valid today as it was in the primitive beginnings of human society. (17)

Dattani’s plays shows that even though human beings no longer live at the mercy of nature in the modern era after the establishment of civilization and culture, there are persons like Hamukh Mehta who still claim exclusive privileges by virtue of their gender by subscribing to ideology of patriarchy. Dattani’s attitude to such believes is extremely critical, for he shows that Hasmukh Mehta’s acceptance of patriarchal norms has turned him into an icon of an oppressive force to his family members. But Hasmukh Mehta’s status as the dominant male is seriously interrogated in Where There’s a Will. It has been rightly observed for instance, that the first part of this play is “the assertion of patriarchy, [the] second part is the mockery of patriarchy and second part of second act is the collapse of patriarchy” (Agarwal, 112). Yet it is important to note that though there is truth in this observation the play itself
begs further inspection as this conclusion does not indicate Hasmukh’s own position of Otherness within his own family. In fact, it is only after his death that he comes to realize his peripheral position in his family. Everybody in his family vents his or her anger against him after his death and their deep-rooted angst reveals how stifling life can be when it is lived following the principles of the patriarchal code. To his wife Hasmukh was just like a “village buffalo” (507); his daughter-in-law calls him “a slave driver” (501); Kiran conveys the message that he had ultimately lost and that his son had won (511).

Hasmukh had othered and had been othered from his wife through his mistaken perception that his wife had failed to live up to his expectations. Every word of protest from Ajit leads Hasmukh to think that his son must have been instigated by his mother. When Ajit uses words like “prejudiced” and “deprived childhood” against him, Hasmukh is very quick to put the blame for his son’s insolent behaviour to the tutoring of his wife Sonal:

Hasmukh. Where did you learn to say all that to your own father? ‘Deprived childhood’, ‘prejudiced’! Who taught you to say all that to me? Your mother? (459)

When alive Hasmukh used to make fun of his wife and their relationship with the following words:

Hasmukh. Sonal. My wife. My son’s mother. Do you know what Sonal means? No? ‘Gold.’ When we were newly married, I used to joke with her and say she was as good as gold. But that was when we were newly married. I soon found out what a good-for-nothing she was. As good as mud. Ditto our sex life. Mud. Twenty-five years of marriage and I don’t think she has ever enjoyed sex. Twenty-five years of marriage and I haven’t enjoyed sex with her. So what does a man do? You tell me. I started eating out. Well, I had the money. I could afford to eat in fancy places. And what about my sex life? Well, I could afford that too. Those expensive ladies of the night in five star hotels! (472-473)
Hasmukh’s instinct of Othering prompts him to try and keep his wife in distress even after his death. He explains his plans to the audience in the following words:

Hasmukh. You may ask – what kind of a fool would ask his mistress to live with his family? A fool who knows his family very well. Kiran may have been my mistress, but she has far more brains than my wife ever had. But you should see her now, my wife! Transformed. From stupid incapable housewife to clever incapable housewife. Every day is a lesson for her on husband-understanding. The more time she spends with Kiran, the more she learns about me. The more she learns about me, the more she’ll regret having been such a good-for-nothing wife. That will keep her from being a happy widow ever after. One thing I can’t stand is a happy widow. There should be a law against them. (496)

Though the words of Hasmukh may sound funny, they actually point to the insignificance attributed by patriarchal men to the role of a wife in any patriarchal set up. Several conclusions about the evils of patriarchal ideology can be derived from the above two speeches of Hasmukh: in patriarchal ideology a man cannot be held accountable for profligacy though it demands absolute devotion from a wife; a wife has to fulfil every expectation (sexual, emotional, domestic and familial) of her husband; economic dependence often leads women to provide their bodies for the pleasure of men. It is not that due to the supposed inadequacies of Sonal that Hasmukh turned to Kiran. He knew very well his wife had no other option but to tolerate his oppression just as Kiran, a woman married to an unemployed alcoholic, had no alternative to withstand his sexual exploitation. Being well aware of his exalted position in society as a successful industrialist, Hasmukh finds an easy solution to satisfy his sexual desires in the person of his marketing executive, Kiran, in his office. Dattani, through the character of Kiran Jhaveri, shows the vulnerable condition of women in a patriarchal society when he makes her disclose her condition to Sonal in the following words:
Kiran. Mrs. Mehta, no woman has an affair with an older man, especially a married man, for a little bit of respect and trust. It was mainly for the money. (506)

In its own way Kiran’s miserable condition is a reflection of women’s status as the Other in a male dominated society. The *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities* has summed up various opinions regarding this issue. “McDowell (2000) argues that as the role of women in society has changed, younger generations of men and boys do not easily fit into so-called traditional gender power relations. However, Bourdieu (2001) notes that the increase of women in the workplace does not necessarily herald a redress of power imbalances. He claims that new occupational fields and subfields differentiate but nevertheless reproduce and continue old structures of patriarchy” (*International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities, 2007: 500-1*). Dattani appears to subscribe, even if partially, to the former view as he shows that it was Kiran who successfully used Hasmukh’s weakness to work in her favour. As she explains to Sonal:

Kiran. He depended on me for everything. He thought he was the decision maker. But I was. He wanted me to run his life. Like his father had. (*Pause.*) Hasmukh didn’t really want a mistress. He wanted a father. He saw in me a woman who would father him! (Laugh. Hasmukh cringes at her laughter.) Men never really grow up! (510)

It is precisely here that the movement of Kiran from the peripheral position of the Other to a more central place can be discerned. Hasmukh’s absolute dependence on her not only reflects his psychological longing for an absent father figure but also motivates his intention of making Kiran his alter ego after his death. Kiran’s promotion from a marketing executive to a company director and the governing trustee of the Hasmukh Mehta Charitable Trust (485) indicates her powerful position in the public front. She is elevated to that position by Hasmukh Mehta so that she can exercise her authority even on the members of the Mehta
family. But Dattani shows that despite being accorded a position of centrality from where she can dominate, she shapes her authoritarial presence in the Mehta family with a deep sense of understanding so that nobody feels ‘othered’ due to her. As Kiran has had her own taste of the treatment meted out to those who live on the margins in a patriarchal set up, she does not want anybody to suffer that experience. The pain that she had felt in being a woman in a patriarchal society is clearly expressed by her when she recalls her past in Sonal’s presence. Disagreeing with Sonal’s contention that her education had made her perspicacious enough to understand and judge persons like Hasmukh, Kiran says:

Wrong. I learnt my lessons from being so close to life. I learnt my lessons from watching my mother tolerating my father when he came home every day with bottles of rum wrapped up in newspapers. As I watched him beating her up and calling her names! I learnt what life was when my mother pretended she was happy in front of me and my brothers, so that we wouldn’t hate my father. And I learnt when I kept my mother away from my father, so that in return he would remain silent for those three hours when he came home, and before he fell asleep on the dining table, too drunk to harm us anymore. I served him those drinks, waiting for that moment when he would become unconscious and I would say a prayer … Thank God he was too drunk to impose himself on us! Yes, Mrs. Mehta. My father, your husband – they were weak men with false strength. (508)

And the physical trauma that accompanies the othering of women is stressed again by Kiran a little later in the play too:

Kiran. Isn’t it strange how repetitive life is? My brothers. They have turned out to be like their father, going home with bottles of rum wrapped up in newspapers. Beating up their wives. And I – I too am like my mother. I married a drunkard and I listened to his
swearing. And I too have learnt to suffer silently. Oh! Where will all this end? Will the scars of our parents lay on us remain forever? (508)

The scars that Kiran talks about are the marks of Othering on the bodies and souls of women. Just this perception would have enough to make Where There's a Will an extremely powerful play. But as the above discussion has tried to show, there is more in Dattani’s first play than an simple indictment of patriarchy and male violence inflicted on women. Dattani’s dramaturgy clearly shows how women are Othered not only in societies but also within their own families. But beyond this, on a far more acute psychological level of realization, the play shows that the Othering of women in patriarchy results in a corresponding Othering of men. Hasmukh Mehta as a dominating husband and a tyrannical father ultimately shows himself to be a weak man with a ‘false strength’. Dattani’s point here is unambiguous. He indicates that by Othering others, those who wish to dominate over others end up by splitting their own personal egos, in a sense Othering themselves. It is this bitter truth that Hasmukh Mehta learns at the end of the play. Disregarded and forgotten by his own family members, dismissed as insignificant to the concerns of everyone present around the dinner table, he is truly Othered in that even his last resting place, the tamarind tree, in the backyard of his house is going to be chopped down. In reality, this is a tragicomic conclusion as Dattani projects his understanding that the Othering of other human beings is unproductive to the point of being farcical.
Works Cited


… Theorising Patriarchy. 1990
Gender Stereotypes and the Creation of the ‘Other’: Tara and Seven Steps Around the Fire

The introduction of the term ‘gender’ into the vocabularies of critical and cultural theory was motivated primarily by the necessity of surpassing reductionist account of femininity and masculinity as coterminous with an individual’s biological sex, and of stressing their socio-political determination. As Raja Ben Slama and Nadia Tazi note, “Though gender has always been a part of societal realities everywhere, its emergence as a concept and a discursive tool is a recent modern phenomenon” (136). It is tempting to take the term gender for granted as so much has been written about ‘what gender is’. Still, as the term means different things when used by different writers in different contexts and times, it is necessary to say a few preliminary words about how it is been used in this thesis. Recent interpretive trends often regard gender as different from sex by describing people according to two paradigms based on the social sciences and biological science respectively. While sex is interpreted to be about belonging to a particular biological category of either male and female and the possession of certain specific reproductive organs, gender refers to the typical social roles and behaviours attributed to or expected to be performed by members of the two sexes. According to Judith Butler identity is not a stable entity, and gender – one of the axes of identity, along with race, age, disability, class, sexuality, -- is “performed” and “performed repeatedly”: “There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender … identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to its results”(1990:25).

Mahesh Dattani’s play Tara presents Chandan Patel as the narrator of the script of his projected play Twinkle Tara which is about the injustices done to his sister Tara. In his endeavour to recollect certain crucial events that had occurred in his life in the past, Chandan only found faults in the prevalent gender system that instructs people to favour a physically normal male child over a female one. The plot of this two-act play centres round the
separation of the Siamese twins, Chandan and Tara Patel, and on the favoured bias that the male child got during the surgical separation. However, the play according to Dattani, also deals with the sense of emotional separation suffered by Chandan and Tara “when they come to know that they were born with three legs. The third leg actually belonged to the girl, but there was a good possibility that the leg would survive on the boy, so the grandparents manipulated the operation in such a way that the boy would get both legs. And the leg wasted away, it didn’t survive on the boy either, so they’re both with one leg, and that’s the part of the revelation in the end, and how they just cannot carry on their relationship any further, because he feels far too guilty about it, and moves away from the family – he runs away to London and tries to start his own life. And Tara the girl child, wastes away and dies after coming to know she wasn’t really loved the way thought she was.” So to Dattani the play is about “the male denying the female, and how the cultural construct of gender favours the male.” (Collected Plays159). Thus in this play we find that the limb of the girl twin is attached through surgery to the boy to make him physically complete without bothering about the consequent deprivation of the girl child.

In his radio play Steven Steps Around the Fire Dattani somewhat similarly explores how the prevalent notion of gender does not accept the existence of hijras and how a woman who is keen to assign a voice to them is fated to be marginalised even in her own family. As Jeremy Mortimer indicates, the story of the play centres around “Uma, daughter of the vice chancellor of Bangalore University, [who] is married to Chief Superintendent Suresh Rao, who has high expectations of succeeding his father as Police Commissioner. But it is Uma, a postgraduate student of Sociology, who is the sleuth in this relationship, and using rather unconventional means, she uncovers the truth behind a murder in the city’s hijra communities”(A Note on the Play). But beneath its ‘whodunit’ story-line, the play is much more than a murder mystery. The gruesome murder of Kamla, a beautiful hijra eunuch in
love with Subbu, the son of an influential government minister, is a reflection of the antipathy of society towards the third sex, and the suppression of Uma’s research paper represents the wilful denial by society of the existence of the members of the third sex. Uma’s efforts to crack the mystery of the death of the hijra Kamla also results in her own alienation even within her own family circle.

It will be clear from this that in both the plays Tara and Seven Steps Around the Fire, gender is shown as playing a vital role in the shaping of the lives of people. It is important to note in this context Diane Kravetz and Jeanne Marecek’s definition of gender in the Encyclopaedia of Women and Gender as: “(1) the socially mediated definition between men and women. (2) The meaning system by which the relationship between men and women is constituted. (3) A system for the distribution of power and resources that favours men over women.” (1:) Dattani’s representation of the problem of gender favouritism in his plays is well illuminated by the above definitions, but Dattani’s projection assumes a further unique dimension in Tara when we realise through the existential angst of the older Chandan (Dan) that society is not ready to accommodate even a deformed male just as it is not prepared to place a female in a favourable position. In Indian society a sustained belief in male superiority runs parallel with the notion of a strong and complete male body which cannot only sustain a family independently but can also confront the challenges of life and protect the family. If a woman is regarded as inferior to a man, then a physically challenged man with impaired mobility is similarly given the position of an ‘other’ in society. But since any marginal position may only be defined with respect to the position of the centre, it is interesting to see how ‘normal’ they are who label both Chandan and Tara as ‘others’. As a matter of fact, Dattani in his play indicates that even the entire Patel family is viewed by many as somehow different. In fact, this is how Roopa who is given an almost choric role in the play, regards the Patel family. As
she says about Tara “She is a real freak of nature all right, but wait till you see her mother! Oh God! I can’t tell you – she is really … wandh tarah” (342).

Dattani’s gender consciousness and concerns are however not restricted solely to the spoken, dialogic expressions embodied in the play Tara. It is also significantly present in the technical functions of the dramatic embodiment itself. The fluidic movement of the action of the play amalgamates time past and time present and as the play opens we find Dan (the present day, older, Chandan) speedily typing out his experiences in life as the script of a play he is writing. The entire drama is thus, is a manifestation of Chandan’s stream of consciousness where the flow of memory does not maintain a linear narrative. That the present felt pain of the physically disabled Chandan, whom his parents desperately wanted to make a complete human being, is significantly lower in intensity than it was when his sister died leaving him to suffer from a guilty conscience, is evident from Dan’s speech as the play scene opens in London:

… Tonight I drop everything I’ve desperately wanted to be in my years in England. (Mimes removing a mask and throwing it away.) The handicapped intellectual’s mask. (Mimes removing another mask.) The desperate immigrant. (Mimes removing yet another.) The mysterious brown with the phoney accent. The last being the hardest to drop having spent two whole years in acquiring it. And what remains is what I intend making capital of. My freakishness. I am a freak. (Pause.) Now, a freak doesn’t have to look very far for inspiration. (Moves to his table.) But what is hard is to let go. Allow the memories to flood in. (Winds another sheet on the typewriter and then stops.) To tell you the truth, I had even forgotten I had a twin sister. (Music fades in slowly.) Until I thought of her as subject matter of my new literary attempt. Or maybe I didn’t forget her. She was lying deep inside, out of reach. … (CP 324)
Chandan’s apparently contradictory assertions about the memory of his twin sister can be explained in the context of the highly polarised gendered roles prevalent during the initial phase of the 1990s when “Gender bec[a]me a way of denoting ‘cultural constructions’ – the entirely social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for women and men.” Indeed, as Joan Scott put it in 1988, gender at this time became “a way of referring to the exclusively social origins of the subjective identities of men and women” (144). The imposition of a social category on a sexed body subsequently resulted in the creation of asymmetrical spheres of masculine and feminine gender roles masking inequality and forced segregation based on sex. For being a male Dan in the present play has to be a passive recipient of the leg, the owner of which was his sister, and so he was ultimately burdened with the guilt of depriving his sister whom he had loved dearly. Dan’s masculine pride and sense of self-reliance as a promising migrant writer in London gets a severe jolt when he is compelled to turn to his memory for a suitable plot for his next literary endeavour because this quite ironically reminds him of not only his appropriation of a limb of his sister, but also of her life itself. It is noticeable that his awareness of his own freakishness produces an ungracious tone of banter in his speech as when he says that a freak does not have to look far outside for inspiration. What he means, of course, is that the social neglect that had always confronted him had made him introspective, as he had perpetually failed to get any external assurance of assimilation from the larger society that had surrounded him. In fact, in the foreign soil and milieu of London he finds himself as doubly ‘othered’ both as an immigrant inhabiting and perhaps usurping a foreign space, and existing as a deformed male with a wooden leg, as a travesty of the normal norm of a complete male body. Chandan’s remarks indeed make real sense only if we appreciate that what Dattani has dramatized so powerfully in his play is not only the problem of woman in society but also a valid and pertinent critique of the notion of masculinity. It may be noted in passing that much contemporary criticism of Dattani’s play has not taken notice of this.
Bipinkumar Parmar in his book *Dramatic World of Mahesh Dattani*, for instance, says that, “Mahesh Dattani shows [in *Tara*] how the women are gasping under the evil clutch of patriarchy and gender bias” (74). Parmar’s reading is simplistic since it does not take any note of the pain felt by Dan. Gajendra Kumar in his essay “The Elements of Alienation and Death in ‘Tara’: A Psychoanalytic Study” too reads the play as a kind of discourse where “the dramatist through Tara talks about social antipathy from which women badly suffer. Tara is a case study of our male dominated society in which Dattani depicts what happens around us” (126). This reading completely ignores the dimension of the compromisation of Dan’s masculinity which is a consequence of societal perspectives cast on gender.

In *Tara*, Dattani once more plays a variation on the theme of the hidden underlying fissures that threaten the stability of upper middle class family life in India. The seemingly complacent family life of Patel and Bharati, the parents of the twins, is actually more fragile than either of them understands, as their financial security and social position is less productive for them than they believe. For though Patel asserts that theirs was a “happy marriage” (CP, 377) and that “all were overjoyed” (p.377) when they came to know that Bharati was pregnant with twins, their conscious decision not only to surgically separate the conjoined twins but also to attach the third leg shared by the twins to Chandan, resulted in making the twins (both Chandan and Tara) one-legged for life. This indicates that right after their birth the twins were viewed differently, in ways determined by prevalent ideological imperatives which prescribed set norms of inequality based on biological difference. In this regard, the notion of gender as an attribute inscribed upon a neutral body comes to the foreground and the human body thereby both becomes a receiver of social meanings and a significant medium through which meanings are inscribed.

Dattani’s play also makes it clear that the difference between Chandan and Tara was first recognised to be a biological one and the treatments they received individually were the result
of perceptions of inequality, an issue which is socio-political in nature. The play attempts to alter the terms on which difference has been conceptualised by going beyond the fact of biological sexual difference and by focussing on the factors which sustain the hierarchical stratification between male and female. For Chandan’s father Mr. Patel, Chandan’s activities at home had always remained a matter of concern. He thinks that without proper conditioning, Chandan’s identity as a male person can never be established and that this requires his own guidance without relying on his wife Bharati. When Chandan informs him that he was actually helping his mother in sorting out her mistakes in knitting, Mr. Patel becomes furious and we are given his reaction in the following words:

   Patel: Let Tara do it.

   Chandan: It’s okay.

   Patel: Give it to her.

   Chandan: Why?

   Bharati: It is all right, I’ll manage. Leave it.

   Chandan: I will just roll all this and …

   Patel: Leave that damn thing alone!

   Bharati (frantically): Go! Chandan, just go!

   Patel (to Bharati): How dare you do this to him? (CP 351)

Mr. Patel worries lest his son becomes a “sissy” (p. 351). His angry outburst is a reflection of commonplace notions of maleness and femaleness, which are societal. Mr. Patel’s attempt to make Chandan an alpha male (“big and sturdy” 333) despite his physical incompleteness reminds us of the imperatives which compel us to orient ourselves according to the
expectations of society. It is interesting to see how one’s identity is defined, constructed, structured and experienced along the contours of cultural expectations working on and through the human body. Both biology and ideology have their bearings on the notion of the body as a site at once lived and situated and the dichotomy between constructed and lived aspects of identity sometimes becomes too heavy to bear for those who do not display the balance or internalize the compatibility expected of them by society. In the present play, Chandan being a biological male is expected by his father who has internalized the prevalent social discourse, to exhibit characteristics associated with maleness. Mr. Patel wants to groom Chandan in such a way as to enable him to become successful. His desire in this respect is conditioned by social role playing which prescribes that in a patriarchal society a man has to become strong and good provider to his family. As Ronald F. Levant has indicated:

Raised to like their fathers they [men] were mandated to become good provider for their families and to be strong and silent. They were discouraged from expressing both vulnerable and caring emotions, and they were required to put a sharp edge around their masculinity and by avoiding anything that hinted of femininity. Unlike their sisters, they received little, if any, training in nurturing other and in being sensitive to their needs and emphatic with their voice. On the other hand, they received lots of training in logical thinking, problem solving, staying calm in the face of danger, risk taking, and assertion and aggression. Finally, they were required at an early age to renounce their dependence on their mothers and accept the pale substitute of their psychologically, if not physically, absent fathers. (718)

However, Chandan in the play appears to be rather shy in facing the world. He does not make any friends in Bombay where the Patels have moved for a surgery on Tara, and instead retreats into his own personal world of literary creativity.
Len Barton has pointed out that the tendency in human culture throughout recorded history to marginalise the disabled as the ‘other’ is the result of a consistent bias against disabled people. Such biases, Barton argues, are the outcome of “the myth of the ‘body perfect’”. (123) Barton refers to western society, but his observation is equally relevant in the Indian context where disabled people are very often referred to as ‘freaks’, hence in *Tara*, Roopa in describing Tara to her imagined friends Prema and Nalini, says, “She is a real freak of nature …” (342). Elsewhere she flatly labels “mobility impaired” people (358) as “creeps” (371), and even more negatively describes them as “Horrible …”, that is as specimen of a sub-human species (“Horrible one-legged creatures.” 369). Reactions to the disabled inevitably encompass one or the other of the following feelings as listed by Len Barton – ‘horror, fear, anxiety, hostility, distrust, pity, over-protection and patronising behaviour’ (1996:8). A disabled person always faces discrimination, disempowerment, oppression and abuse and often disabled persons are encouraged to group themselves together so that they can be all the more easily bracketed as the ‘other’. In Dattani’s play, we thus find Mrs Patel saying that the world will not ‘tolerate’ Tara though it may accept Chandan. The fallibility in her understanding stems from her belief that in a patriarchal society even handicapped males are always entitled to enjoy privileges over females. In reality though, the term ‘disability’ cannot, like other terms, be as easily described as having universal features. Idealizations of a perfect body and the hype surrounding the ‘beauty myth’ prove that there has not been an adequate understanding of disability and the needs of disabled persons. This lack of understanding and consequent discrimination produces a sense of inferiority in Chandan who always suffers from a sense of fear that is the result of his awareness of being different from or of being an ‘other’ to the people around him. This is illustrated in Dattani’s play in a key situation:
Tara (shouts after her). Get lost! And please ask Nalini and Prema to come here. I have something to say to them – about you! Oh, wait till they hear this! They will love it. They are going to look at your tits the same way they looked at my leg! Let me see how you can face them ogling at you! You won’t be able to come out of your house, you horrible creature! You are ugly and I don’t want ugly people in my house! So get lost! (Moves to the sofa gasping.)

Chandan. They are not the ugly ones. We are. Horrible one-legged creatures. (CP 369)

What is revealed here is the symbolic psychic longing of discriminated-against people who always want integration with the larger section. Yet, the social discrimination that a disabled person is subjected to also often generates a psychic bonding, similar to what Tara feels about the destitute. We hear of her intention of serving “thousands of poor sick people on the roads” (370) so that she can have a meaningful existence as shown by Mother Teresa. But the inhuman treatment meted out to her twin and herself in general makes her a rebel in the sense that she cares little about the world that does not “give her a feeling to begin with” (371).

Interestingly, in the play Chandan is presented as less intelligent, less bold, less assertive and more immature than his sister Tara, even though there is no dearth of love and bonding between the two. This can be explained by the fact that the world’s rejection of both of them has brought them closer to each other. That Chandan is the weaker of the two twins is made evident on several occasions. In one of these, Chandan declares that he is not going to join a college without his sister:

Chandan. I don’t want to go college! (Fighting his tears.) Not without Tara! If she is going in for surgery, I’ll miss a year too! (CP 351)
The above speech of Chandan can be interpreted as evidence of his inner weakness, the inverse of an attribute which is often associated with maleness. In India, as elsewhere, woman has traditionally been regarded as everything which man is not supposed to be, and man as everything which woman is not able to be. Despite being described as “self-contained” (CP 340) by his mother Chandan frequently falls short of the masculine roles that are expected from him by his father and by society in general.

Dattani’s critique of modern medical science and technology as a tool to exert patriarchal domination in *Tara* highlights the fact that the notion of neutrality of medical science and technology is a myth and that what matters is who controls and uses these apparently neutral functions. Two groups of people, those who have property, power and privilege to control resources and those who control ways of thinking affect and transform not only the symbiotic relationship between Chandan and Tara but also make their lives more complicated by enforcing imprints of gender role expectations on their individual inclinations. That science and technology as ideology can be highly authoritarian and oppressive in contrast to its claim of unbiased enlightenment was pointed out by Jurgen Habermass in *Science and Technology as Ideology*, as early as in 1968. What Dattani emphasises in his play is technology’s specific liaison with patriarchy, in creating fixed notions about gender. In *Tara*, Chandan’s father expresses his helplessness due to his comparatively weak economic condition when it was decided by his wife and father-in-law, who was an MLA and a wealthy person, that the male twin should get the priority during the operation. Dr. Thakkar, the medical expert, too is complicit in this plan since he succumbs to the temptation of setting up a private nursing home right in the heart of Bangalore with the money received from the MLA. The secret collusion between money and power on the one hand which is represented by Mrs.Patel’s father, and knowledge represented by Dr. Thakkar on the other decides the
fate of the two innocent children. In an interaction with Laxmi Subramanyam, Mahesh Dattani is on record as having said:

I see *Tara* as a play about the male self and female self. The male self is being preferred in all cultures. The play is about the separation of self and resultant angst. (71)

Behind these words is a hint towards Dattani’s concern for androgyny. Dattani’s somewhat ironical treatment of Mr. Patel’s efforts to develop traits of aggression and self-confidence in Chandan indicates that he does not subscribe to notions of strict gender roles. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* observes:

If it is possible to speak of a “man” with a masculine attribute and to understand that attribute as a happy but accidental feature of that man, then it is also possible to speak of a “man” with a feminine attribute, whatever that is, but still to maintain the integrity of the gender. But once we dispense with the priority of “man” and “woman” as abiding substances, then it is no longer possible to subordinate dissonant gendered features as so many secondary and accidental characteristics of a gender ontology that is fundamentally intact. (24)

Chandan’s sense of his difference from the rest of the world (“We are horrible one-legged creatures.” 369) and the instances in the play of his immaturity, for example, his failure to retort to Roopa’s accusation of taking sexual advance, and shyness, as is visible from his reluctance to go to college alone point to the fact that a biological male does not always necessarily develop and display expected gender roles and traits. In *Tara* this is made evident in the final voice over of Chandan which shows that he continually suffers from the feeling of guilt at depriving his sister of her due. Dan thus longs to run away beyond the reach of a society that does not allow anybody to live according to one’s own nature:
Dan: (Voice-over.) Someday after I die, a stranger will find this recording and play it. The voice is all that will remain. No writing. No masterpiece. Only a voice – that once belonged to an object. An object like another objects in a cosmos, whose orbits are determined by those around. Moving in a forced harmony. Those who survive are those who do not defy the gravity of others. And those who desire even a moment of freedom, find themselves hurled into space, doomed to crash with some unknown force. (Pause.) I no longer desire that freedom. I move, just move. Without meaning. I forget Tara. I forget that I had a sister – with whom I had shared a body. In one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out … and separated.

_A spot fades in – empty_

But somewhere, sometime, I look up at a shooting star … and wish. I wish that a long-forgotten person would forgive me. Wherever she is.

_Tara walks into the spot without limping. Dan also appears without the limp._

And will hug me. Once again.

_They kneel, face to face._

Forgive me Tara. Forgive me for making it my tragedy.

_Tara embraces Dan as music starts. The explosive opening of Brahms’ First Concerto._

_They hug each other tightly._

_Slow fade out._(CP, 380)

We may understand Dattani’s position better if we remember what Virginia Woolf wrote of Coleridge’s idea of androgyny: “He [Coleridge]meant, perhaps, that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally
creative, incandescent and undivided” (1945: 81). Dattani’s idea of androgyny has a close similarity with Coleridge’s idea, if we are to believe Woolf. In Tara both Chandan and Tara are keenly sensitive, creative and spontaneous, and they cling to each other as if they are inseparable. They not only support each other but also supplement by this their individual selves. Even though society tries to form their distinct selves, they remain mentally bonded together for their entire life. The final image in the play of Chandan and Tara walking without their limp is symbolic of the fact that when they are outside the clutches of society, they are without any deformity. Indeed, the idea is that the society that made them deformed through its attempts at imposing gender specific roles on them. In reality however, whenever society tries to deny negotiations with persons like Chandan and Tara by marking them as the ‘other’ the legitimacy of the notion of ‘normal’ is interrogated. Chandan and Tara’s plight in fact indicates what Ellis Havelock said in The Psychology of Sex about the mutability of sex. Havelock maintains, “There are many stages between a complete male and complete female.” (85). The gender bias that always favours a male within India’s patriarchal social set up makes the individual existence of Tara and Chandan fortuitously horrific and ephemeral as they are the ‘other’. Dattani shows that the societal biases run deep also within the Patel family. When Bharati says that the world would “tolerate” (CP,349) Chandan with his deformity but not Tara as she advances in age, the hypocrisy in her speech is made apparent because before the world rejects Tara as the ‘other’ she was ‘othered’ within her own family. She had been victimized by her own mother Bharati and her wealthy and influential MLA grandfather only because she happened to be a female child. Subsequently, when Bharati realises her fault she can neither disclose the truth before her children nor conceive atonement for her sin.
Mahesh Dattani’s second radio play *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, first broadcast as *Seven Circles Around the Fire* by the BBC Radio on 9th January 1999, traces the estrangement of Uma Rao from both her family and all those around her in her attempt to discover the truth behind the murder of Kamala, an eunuch married to the son of a minister. Apparently, Uma’s predicament and the composition of her subject of sociological study, that is, the third sex, reveal how stereotypical gender roles are devoid of flexibility and how they conceive of anybody ignoring the specificities of these roles as the ‘other’. Indeed while Uma undertakes investigating the mysterious murder of Kamla for her Sociology thesis, she in fact reflects on her own marginalised condition within her family, equating this with the marginalization of the hijras. Thus her situation shows the condition of women in Indian society in general. For as Karin Kapadia writes while speaking about the contradiction in the issues concerning the development of women in India:

Many researchers and analysts argue that women’s position is improving in India. They point to three key development indicators: first, women’s access to education and second, their access to paid employment. Both show a rise for women. Third, they point to demographic data which reveals a remarkable fertility decline in some Indian states, especially in South India. … The positive indicators … are rather misleading because improvement in the relative access of women to education and jobs – compared to men – has been very limited. Comparing female and male indicators reveals that huge sex-based disparities remain. (1-2)

Similar sentiments were expressed by Padmini Swaminathan in her essay “The Violence of Gender Biased Development: Going Beyond Social and Demographic Indicators”:

Another shibboleth of women and development policy that needs to be confronted is the notion that education is the key to changing women’s status and behaviour. … Precisely
how education supposedly enhances women’s autonomy is rarely specified. Nevertheless, a casual between female schooling, female autonomy and low fertility is universally assumed. Both at national and international levels, policies to foster women’s education and employment opportunities often have the ulterior goal of controlling population growth through reducing fertility. In the 1991 *World Development Report*, the World Bank lists the benefits of educating women as: reducing the need for community health programmes; lowering infant mortality thus compensating for the absence of medical facilities; increasing the use of contraception. Clearly, economic and demographic objectives are the overriding concerns, rather than women’s own self-improvement and life chances. (70)

There are several points of contact between Swaminathan’s conclusion regarding the scenario of women’s education and Dattani’s projection of the situation of Uma Rao in *Seven Steps Around the Fire*. Swaminathan’s doubts about exactly how ‘education enhances women’s autonomy’, is actually anticipated in Dattani’s radio play. In fact, as Dattani shows in his play, the benefit of education for Uma has been that she has become more conscious of her position in her family, as well as in the society as the ‘other’.

When Uma deliberately selects the case of Kamla, Constable Munswamy tries his best to dissuade her:

Munswamy: … … Madam, if you don’t mind me saying, why 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 death cases. Shall I ask the peon to dust all these files? (CP 7)
In passing, it can be said that the cases mentioned by Munswamy indicate that violence against women is much more frequent than those against men. It is shown in the play too that the injustice committed against the hijras by not punishing the real responsible is strategically hushed up so that their voices can never be heard. When Uma returns home after her first meeting with Anarkali, a hijra who has been arrested for the murder of Kamla, Suresh, Uma’s husband, asserts his control over her by saying:

Suresh: Look, it is one thing that I am allowing you to go through these cases for your thesis, but don’t feel any compassion for them. They will take advantage … Keep your soft heart for me. (CP, 10)

From the words of Suresh at least two issues are visible: the first is his implicit control over the actions of his wife and the second is his contempt of the hijras. Additionally, Suresh’s desire to control the activities of his wife amounts to a form of psychological violence. For as Shoma A. Chatterjee has indicated, psychological violence includes “tactics designed to undermine a woman’s self-confidence. This can take any form like taunts, jeers, insults, swearing, abusive language, threats of physical violence or isolation.” The words of Indu Prakash Singh may further help us to understand the relationship between Suresh and Uma. In Singh’s words:

By virtue of their sex and their control of traditional sex role definitions men are able to manipulate women’s behaviour by ignoring, misrepresenting, devaluing, and discrediting women or their accomplishments, especially when women deviate from traditional roles.

(23)

Suresh’s diatribe against the so-called opportunist nature of the hijras reflects bias against them. Bhaswati Chakravorty in her essay “Rights For the Third Gender: Problems of Identity
and Recognition” has elaborated upon the condition of this community in India in the following words:

The hijra community in India traditionally inhabits the margins of society … In spite of their presence on the borders of society, popular perceptions about the realities of hijra existence are of the vaguest. In general consciousness, hijras are ‘outsiders’, to be shunned feared or propitiated for the special powers they are supposed to possess or the embarrassing, often abusive, din they create and the revealing gestures they recourse to when antagonized. Alternatively, they are feared as child-lifters and extortionists, for it is only a step from unconventional ways of life to crime. At the root of this mutual alienation lies the hijras’ ambiguous sexual status. (370)

In their reading of Seven Steps Around the Fire, critics have rightly identified Dattani’s concern with the ambiguous social status of the Hijras in Indian society. Jaspal Singh, for instance, is certainly right in his opinion that “Dattani by dedicating the whole play to the hijra cause has brought the margin to the centre; the underdogs to the forefront. He has granted them an audience who never thinks or has no concern regarding the hijras. He is not only advocating their cause but also underlying the fact that what they need is not pity or sympathy but understanding and concern. The traditional rules and norms are challenged and the hypocritical social setup is exposed” This may be seen too in the way Dattani shows that it is only Uma, adopted as a child, who feels sympathy for the hijras as she too knew all about the pain of remaining alone and the agony of insecurity from a very early age. During her conversation over the telephone with her research guide regarding the difficulty of gaining the confidence of the hijras, Uma’s expresses her hesitations about continuing her thesis:

Uma: Professor, this is Uma Rao! Do you have some time to discuss my paper? … Well, I will be brief. I am wondering whether I could leave out the case study on the hijras …
Well, it all seems a little too sordid and I find it more and more difficult to do through research … I know there is very little written about them, and now I understand why … But there is no way I can win their trust! May be there is, but I don’t know … How important is it? … Oh … I guess I will have to … If my family throws me out, I hope that doctorate will come in handy. (CP 28-29).

The possible reason behind Uma’s fear that she may be thrown out of her in-laws’ family is her understanding that her excavation of the truth may land not only Mr. Sharma (at whose behest Kamla was murdered and Subbu’s suicide was presented as an accident) in trouble but also may force society to accept, acknowledge and attribute an important place in the social structure to the hijras whose voices are unacknowledged, denied recognition and deliberately made invisible by the same society. At the end of the play, the suppression of Uma’s research paper points to the relationship between power and knowledge. This is in line with Foucault’s revelation that:

… Truth is not outside power … Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its régime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true. (131)

Consonant with this ‘régime of truth’, in Dattani’s play it is shown how the male control of media, religion, and the educational system influences public opinion and practice. Using the normative power of ‘truth’, males use public socialization institutions to nurture traditional role and value systems both in females and males, thereby reducing the chance of females to aspire to success by moving beyond the traditional roles assigned to them. Uma’s research paper is suppressed since it implicates Mr. Sharma who in order to make Subbu, his only son, conform to heterosexual norms had ensured the murder of the beautiful young hijra, Kamla,
his son had fallen in love with. It needs to be indicated at this point that the hijra Kamla’s desire to marry Subbu is not unusual. Marriage is often a symbolic fulfilment of latent expectations of the hijras who consider themselves as women. As Serena Nanda in her book *Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India* has written:

Having a husband is an important source of hijra self esteem. Because marriage is the part of the normal expectation and main source of prestige for women in India (although it is originally connected with the anticipation of motherhood), this relationship plays a particularly significant role in the self-concept of those hijras, … who view themselves as women. Indeed, it may be that the most important factor in the evolution of a feminine gender identity among hijras is connected to the marital relationship. (122)

In the end it can be said that in both of these two plays namely, *Tara* and *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Dattani projects a vision of men and women as people and not as gender-bound entities. He clearly advocates the dismantling of oppressive social structures that regard men and women as binary opposites and result in an essentialistic othering.


Slama, Raja Ben, and Nadia Tazi. *Keywords: Gender*. New Delhi: Vistaar Publisher, 2004. Print.


Even secular writers tended to see communalism as a conflict between Hindus and Muslims. That is the case only so far as communal riots are concerned. Politically, the conflict was not between Hindus and Muslims—which is what communal ideologues asserted—but between Hindu and Muslim communalism on one side and the secular nationalist force on the other (Bipan Chandra, 1996: ix).

Communalism has been defined variously by the academic industry as “above all an ideology”, “a false consciousness”, “a struggle for scarce resources”, “competition for jobs”, “an instrument of ruling class politics” and so on (see K.N. Panikkar’s essay “What is Communalism Today” in *Selected Writings on Communalism*, 1994, p.66). A working definition can be found in *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis*, (1979 Reprint, New Delhi p.187) where Wilfred Cantwell Smith has defined communalism as “that ideology which has emphasised as the social, political and economic unit the group of adherents of each religion, and has emphasised the distinction, even the antagonism, between such groups”. As the operational field of communalism ranges from, according to K.N.Pannikkar, “individual relations and interests to the local, institutional and national politics and to communal riots” (66), the spread of communalism involves two inter-related central issues, namely, the “state of consciousness in society” and “communalism as an instrument of power, not purely for capturing state power, but operating in political, social and economic domains and at all levels of social organisation”(67). In the Preface to his book *Communalism in Modern India* Bipan Chandra while trying to understand, interpret and expose communalism does not view communalism merely “as a conflict between Hindus and Muslims” (ix). Rather, he sees the Hindu-Muslim conflict as a potent force behind communal riots in India. Communalism, according to Bipan Chandra is the “belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion they have, as a result, common social, political and
economic interests” (1). As religion becomes the basis of the followers’ social identity and relationships, these followers of any religion often perceive themselves as separate and distinct from other groups. Consequently, the concept of nationhood in India receives a severe blow because of the conceived homogeneous nature of each community based on religion, and ultimately this tendency of forming a distinct society results in the creation of an image of India as a mere “confederation of religious communities” (2). In the Introduction to the book *Sociology of Religion in India* Rowena Robinson opines that in India religion had always had a significant role to play in the “cohesion and operation of identities on a global scale” (18). Religion, in South Asia, more than any other identity markers like caste or language, has the potentiality to either divide or unite a people. Romila Thapar, in her essay “Communalism and the Writing of Ancient Indian History” has also rightly indicated that “the ideology of modern communalism … seeks its intellectual justification from the historical past” and thus, “Hindu communalists try and project an ideal Hindu society in the ancient period and attribute the ills of India to the coming of the ‘Muslims’. Equally, Muslim communalists try and prove the roots of the medieval periods onwards, ie, from the 11th or 13th century A.D.” (Thapar,1). In Thapar’s view it was James Mill with his *History of British India* was the first historian “to develop the thesis of dividing Indian history into three periods which he called Hindu civilisation, Muslim civilisation and British civilisation (interestingly enough, not Christian civilisation)” (3). Thapar, in her study, finds that the “biggest weakness of the nationalist historians was that they did not challenge Mill’s periodization” partly because the “continuing study of political and dynastic history” had excluded the study of “social and economic history” (5). “The establishment of Muslim separatism in the political life of India from the 1920’s intensified this division” (5) and the subsequent collapse of Hindu power was explained as a result of the Muslim presence. It was argued that “the Muslim period saw the evolution of the two ‘nations’ – Hindu and Muslim –
whose logical outcome in terms of modern national states could only be the partition of the
subcontinent into a Hindu-dominated and Muslim-dominated state” (5). In Thapar’s words,
“the creation of Pakistan did not however solve the problem for the communal historian. The
Hindu communalist still has to contend with the reality of Muslim culture. Hence the attempt
to either belittle its importance or to emphasise its foreignness” (5). Gradually, therefore
religion begins to occupy an important part in Indian society and our Indian social
consciousness. A belief in commonality by those who follow the same religion came to be
used for political purposes, and it is a truism that the “mobilisation of sections of society on
the basis of religious beliefs for purpose of power is central to the intensification of
communalism today” (Panikkar 67). In short, the genesis of communalism can be found in
politics where it germinates even as it draws its sustenance from religion and it continues to
grow in an uneven capitalist situation.

Having glossed the meanings and the implications of the term ‘communalism’ it will now be
relevant to study Mahesh Dattani’s play Final Solutions. Though the play was commissioned
before the destruction of the Babri masjid in 1992, it saw its first performance only in 1993.
Regarding the genesis of the play Dattani writes in the Introduction to Me and My Plays that
in the initial years of 1990s when he was asked to write a play on the Hindu-Muslim divide
by Alyque Padamsee he was hesitant. Dattani was also asked by Padamsee whether he was
aware of the motion moved in Parliament by the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) about
building a temple in Ayodhya in place of the existing mosque. In Padamsee’s question
Dattani sensed his concern at the rise of religious fundamentalism and understood that
Padamsee was fearful about a ‘pogrom brewing that would destroy the cultural harmony of
the country’ (30). Padamsee even arranged for an improvisation with Padamsee’s students at
the J.B. Petit school to alleviate Dattani’s initial hesitation about writing a play on the theme
of the Hindu-Muslim divide. The improvisation showed how two Muslim boys running away
from an angry mob eager to kill the duo, had sought shelter in a Hindu household. The
dramatic possibility of this improvisation impressed Dattani and he took two years to write
his play *Final Solutions*. “But” Dattani continues, “a week before the scheduled performance
at the theatre festival, the Babri Masjid was destroyed. Although I had based my play on the
Tazia riots in Ahmedabad in the 1980s, the play now took on a different shade. The festival
[Deccan Herald Theatre Festival in Bangalore] organisers pulled the play out of the festival at
the last minute. It took another two years before it could be staged” (30-31). Evidently, both
communal riots and the backdrop of religious intolerance played a vital role in the genesis
and the subsequent acceptance of this play. On 6th December 1992 Babri Masjid in Ayodha
was demolished by the supporters of Hindu Right on the pretext that the sixteenth century
mosque built on the order of Mughal Emperor Babur was developed by destroying a Hindu
temple at the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram. But on the cover page of the book *Ayodhya:
The Dark Night*, written by Krishna Jha and Dhirendra K. Jha it is noted that the appearance
of the idol of Rama inside the mosque was a conspiracy that was started back in 1949, a year
after when Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated. Following the demolition of the mosque there
was an eruption of communal violence that saw thousands of people either dead or injured,
and public and private property either destroyed or ransacked. One month after the
demolition the Bharatiya Janata Party leader Atal Behari Vajpaye said, “If the sentiments of
majority community are not respected, this is what happens.” (17). Nevertheless, the truth is
that the seed of communalism had been sown at the time when India gained Independence
from the fetters of the British in 1947. As Paul R. Brass, while explaining communal violence
in *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, writes:

Hindu-Muslim riots in India obviously did not begin only with the Ayodhya movement.
They have been recurring feature of modern Indian politics for nearly a century.
Moreover, there have periods during which Hindu-Muslim rioting has occurred in what
are commonly referred to as great “waves” or “chains.” These periods include especially the years 1923-27, after the collapse of the non-cooperation/Khilafat movement against the British rule in India in which Hindu and Muslim political and religious organisations and groups worked together; 1946-48, when massive waves of rioting and massacres preceded, accompanied, and followed the partition of India and the consequent formation of the two successor states to the British Raj of India and Pakistan; and the succession of riots that occurred between 1989 and 1993 during the Ayodhya movement. (8)

The partition of the sub-continent into two separate nations – India, the Hindu homeland and Pakistan, the Muslim homeland forced mass migration and massacres across borders. About “six million people” migrated between the two countries and the bloodbath that followed claimed ‘over two million lives’ (Agravat, 82).

After Independence, Hindu-Muslim communal violence continued to take the specific form of riots and on the prevalence of riots in post-Independence India, the historian Paul R. Brass has observed that political mobilizations around religious symbols preceding elections and the apprehension of functional usefulness of riots to individuals, groups, parties and even to state authorities are two major reasons behind their outbreak. The third reason behind riots, to quote Brass, is: “There exist[s] in India a discourse of Hindu-Muslim communalism that has corrupted history, penetrated memory, and contributed to production and perpetuation of communal violence in the country” (34). The origin of this discourse can be found, taking the continuum of history into consideration, at the time of establishment of Islam and Muslim rulership following upon the classical Hindu period. While the first period, the classical Hindu period, is described and often popularly imagined as the glorious age of Hindu achievement in politics and culture, the second period, despite its own glories of art, architecture and sculpture that are acknowledged, is portrayed and thought of as a period of conquest, destruction, and the consequent decay of the Hindu civilization. The Hindu
practices, customs, and superstitions that exist today are presented in terms of this discourse as reflections of the process of decay. The discourse also propagates the idea that to “revivify India and build a great, new, modern nation-state, it is necessary to revive the true ideals of the past” (35). Significantly, this process of “historical rectification” has been accompanied by a “demonization of the Muslim as a separate people, a foreign body implanted in the heart of Hindu India, perpetually warlike, who believe it is their religious duty to kill infidels” (35). This discourse often gets a place in text books even at the college level texts covering the colonial rule, and it unfolds the history of Muslim communalism, the foundation of the Muslim league, the Pakistan resolution, etc. while remaining almost silent on the foundation of the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS and their role during the freedom struggle. Equally, it should be indicated that the practice of distorting history by Muslim communalists is also present. Gargi Chakravarty in her essay “BJP-RSS and Distortion of History” cites evidence from the Report of the National Steering Committee on Text Books Evaluation to validate her observation that “textbooks in Muslim minority community schools are equally unscientific, communal and bigoted”(1994:178).

That Final Solutions is a play based on the issue of religious communalism has been noted by many critics of the play. Tribhuwan Kumar, for instance, has noted that Dattani in this play highlights “communal hatred caused by lack of understanding” (V.1, I 1, P. 3, 2012). As Kumar writes, the play: “addresses an issue of utmost concern to our society i.e. the issue of communalism. However, the play comprises the issues of class and communities, identity, terrible human suffering, loss of faith, perpetual hatred, aggressiveness and nothingness within the larger socio-political context. Dattani gives the message that the final solutions comprise in the words like tolerance, generosity and respect for other human beings, which are the strength of Indian culture” (P.3). Rather similarly, Sohini Pillai finds that Final Solutions is a play that explores “religious communalism in a multi-layered fashion” (P.3).
The multi-layered dimension of the play is defined by Pillai as constituted by “three spaces: the realm of the Mob/Chorus, the home of the Gandhi family, and the memory of Daksha.” And she further elaborates on how these “three separate worlds interact and overlap with each other” (P. 37). Yet what is noticeable from the observation of these critics is that neither has dwelt on how religion can lead to the othering of human beings. In Final Solutions, the two Muslim boys Javed and Bobby are repeatedly made to realize their position of otherness. When for the first time the Chorus/Mob first caught them, Javed and Bobby’s affiliation to a particular religion was determined with the help of a knotted handkerchief usually worn during ‘namaaz’ by the men of the Muslim community in the absence of a prayer cap. When the Chorus/Mob feels that Javed is not prepared to hide his Muslim identity, they begin to belittle the entire Muslim community by specifying, “You pray to a god you do not know! You pray to a nothing. You do not know his form. And you seek to destroy our gods!” (178). As they belong to a minority group, it was quite easy for the Chorus/Mob to specify the danger they pose to Ramnik Gandhi who has sheltered them. “They’ll stab you in the back! They’ll rape your daughter” (186), they warn him. Hardika breaks down at the determination of Ramnik offering protection to Bobby and Javed, and she says: “I know their wretched pride! It had destroyed me before and I was afraid it would destroy my family again! (Pause.) They don’t want equality. They want to be superior” (172). As Ramnik allows the boys to step inside the house his mother recollects the wrongs done to her family forty years earlier and the action of the play projects the views of older Hardika and younger Daksha in the following manner:

Hardika. Why did he do it?

Daksha. Oh God! Why do I have to suffer?

Hardika. Didn’t he have any feelings for me?
Daksha. I just wanted them to be my friends!

Hardika. How could he let these people into my house?

Daksha. Oh! I hate this world!

Hardika. They killed his grandfather. (179)

Hardika later in the play relates to Bobby and Javed the same event of her father’s death at the hands of a Muslim mob during the Partition only to be responded to sarcastically by Javed: “You blame us for what happened fifty years ago. Today, if something happens to my sister, can I blame you?” (223). Hardika is so prejudiced that Javed’s sincere apology for being offensive toward Ramnik seems false to her: “He wasn’t speaking from his heart! He did not feel what he said” (190). A few lines later, we find Hardika chiding her son for offering a job to Javed: “How did he know they were innocent? Couldn’t he see there was more violence in that boy’s eyes than those stone throwers’ threats?” (191). Though it is meaningless to paint the entire Muslim community as intolerant and violent for the actions of only a few individuals, it is equally unjustified to transfer one’s resentment towards a community to a few individual members of that community. But it is not only Hardika who is conscious of the otherness of the Muslim boys. Ramnik is also somewhat concerned about Smita when he comes to know that she knows the two boys. He even begins to suspect Smita: “There’s something you are not telling me” (189). And when Ramnik learns from Javed that even though he has left his home and his parents, he still feels concerned about the safety of his sister Tasneem, Ramnik fails to see any reason behind Javed’s protective attitude about his sister. Javed then replies to him with a touch of sarcasm: “We do love our own blood. Unlike you who treat your own like shit which can’t be touched” (190). This air of mutual animosity soon takes us towards a debate on the majority-minority issue where each community is the ‘other’ to the other. It is Ramnik playing the role of a civilised host raises
the issue before the boys: “I have always maintained that if you want peace … that is, if you treat peace as a commodity and you go looking for it – you will find it hidden in the armpits of the majority” (191). Following upon this, Javed analyses Ramnik’s playing the role of a ‘civilized host’ from the point of view of a member of the minority community who has been given protection, food and shelter from the safety of the position that belongs to the majority only. Smita’s reaction to her father’s offer of a job to Javed is very significant here because from her we come to know that the story of pursuit that Bobby and Javed had told before the Gandhi family is false and that Javed’s activities in the past did not merit the award of a job for him in her father’s cloth shop.

Following Smita’s disclosure of Javed’s past there starts another round of attempts in the play to make Javed appear less guilty. Javed calls Smita a traitor because she did not keep the secret of having left his family to herself as she was supposed to do. Javed soon becomes so much depressed that he realises that it is very difficult to bypass one’s own history. It was Hardika, as is evident from Ramnik’s words that he does not want her telling his daughter that ‘those people are all demons!’ (173), who was eager to create a prejudice against the Muslim community in the mind of her granddaughter Smita by narrating her personal experience to Smita. Even there is direct assertion from Hardika at the end of the play that Bobby and Javed should go to Pakistan and settle there: “There you can live the way you want. Without blaming other people for your failures” (221).

In Final Solutions there are direct and indirect references to the events and riots that followed the Partition. In the opening scene, we come to know from the young Daksha’s diary entry in the year 1948 that her father had been killed in a riot in Hussainabad, her ancestral place. The riots left a huge impact on Daksha; for she had not only lost her father but the riot also created in her consciousness a sense of the rioters being ‘others’. In the vandalism, that was a part of the communal violence, Dakhsha’s favourite collection of
records of the songs of Shamshad Begum, Noor Jehan, and Suraiya was destroyed. Daksha believed that her loss of the records was the result of her loss of faith in the protective power of their family god, represented by the idol of Krishna. Their’s being a Hindu family, Daksha had thought of the rioters as exclusively the Muslims. This kind of imagining of the minority community as the ‘other’ of Indians is a common feature, for as Paul R. Brass has indicated, ‘Despite the fact that probably 95 percent of the Muslim population of the [Indian] subcontinent is of indigenous origin, descendants of converts to Islam, Islam is considered in the history of the Hindu nation as a foreign element’(35). We may make better sense of this by referring to an entry in the Encyclopedia of Nationalism: Leaders, Movements, and Concepts where it is noted that:

[F]or communities to arise, communal identities must be constructed and lines of demarcation between “insiders” and “outsiders” must be imbued with meaning. A sense of belonging must be instilled in members of the group; people must see themselves as part of the “family.” History can be mined and interpreted to provide a sense of permanence and naturalness to distinctions. Reference can be made to a “golden age;” myths and memories may become part of the collective conscience. (2:95)

The opening of the play Final Solutions proves the truth of the above observation. As the play opens we see Hindu and Muslim masks being used and history being narrated with the help of Daksha’s diary entry. Daksha’s writing in her diary is of course indicative of her selected, constructed and personalized record of one of the many riots that preceded the Partition. Reading from her diary, Daksha/Hardika asserts the perpetual validity of her hatred towards the Muslim community. The frenzied violence of the rioters that had not only resulted in the shattering of her precious collection of gramophone records created a permanent hatred in the mind of Daksha. Neither could Hardika, the grown up Daksha, ever forgive any Muslim. It is interesting to note too that Hardika/Daksha equates Indianess with
Hinduism. This brings in a new issue into *Final Solutions*, an issue that may be better understood by referring to Romila Thapar’s remark in her essay “Syndicated Moksha”, *Seminar* (No 313, September 1985), that the ‘Hindu’ is an ‘imagined community’. ‘The word hindu’, according to Panikkar, ‘itself came into vogue only after the advent of Islam. Before that nobody identified himself as a hindu. … Even today, what is being termed hindu is brahmanic…. There is and was nothing like a homogeneous hindu religion with one set of ritual practices or one religious code for all to follow. Despite the absence of homogeneity either in the past or in the present a homogeneity is now being imparted to create one single hindu community on the basis of an argument that such a community existed from the ancient past.’ (70-71) According to Paul R. Brass, the difference between Hindu and Muslim communities is the creation of a discourse, and he elaborates on the issue thus:

In the course of the struggles for power that developed during British rule, intensified in the late nineteenth century, and culminated in the division of India in 1947, a discourse of Hindu-Muslim difference was created that has struck deep roots in both communities and acquired a partly self-sustaining momentum that at the same time continues to be fed by political competition. In the construction of this discourse, competing historiographies and historians have themselves played and continue to play substantial contesting roles. (2003,26)

If we consider speeches of some of the characters in *Final Solutions*, and if we take note of the utterances of the Mob/Chorus in the light of the above observation, we will see the link between the discourse of antagonism between the Hindu and the Muslim communities and the practice of Hindu-Muslim riots. The play centres round the Gandhis, a middle class Gujarati family consisting of Ramnik, his religiously inclined wife Aruna, his mother Hardika, who is a survivor of the Partition and is referred to as Daksha too, and his daughter Smita, a college student. The family lands into a crisis of sorts when two Muslim boys,
Babban aka Bobby and Javed, seek protection from a Hindu mob during a time of a communal riot. The presence of the two outsiders in the Gandhi household creates a tension and conflict which mirrors the tension outside as it is evoked by the exchange of the dialogues spoken by the Mob/Chorus donning either Hindu or Muslim masks. If Daksha’s diary entry records the impact of a communal riot on her family and on her psyche, forty years later the play opens with a reference to another riot in the small town of Amargaon where the Gandhis live. This riot was brought on because of a disruption in a Rath Yatra procession that was passing through a Muslim neighbourhood:

[Hindu] Chorus 1. The procession has passed through these lanes

Every year,

For forty years!

[Hindu] Chorus 2,3. How dare they?

[Hindu] Chorus 1,2,3. For forty years our chariot has moved through their mohallas. (168)

What lies underneath this description is a foregrounding of social frameworks of identity based on religion. Though the Chorus is yet to mention what exactly happened to the Chariot, a Hindu religious symbol here, something unthought-of is indicated and the space where the damage is said to have been done significantly said to belong to the ‘them’ or the ‘other’ community. Just as Daksha’s diary entry has a reference to ‘them’, the Chorus also evokes a division between ‘us’ and ‘them’. As notions of identity and alterity, of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are closely linked to a sense of place, that is, to notions of ‘here’ and ‘there’, the simple ‘here/there’ dichotomy also anticipates a discursive production of identity based on relationships of inclusion and/or exclusion, attraction and/or repulsion, acceptance and/or rejection. Indeed, even as the riots in the play work as objective correlatives for the
expression of communal violence, real riots amount to a ‘grisly form of dramatic production’ comprising of phases like ‘preparation/rehearsal, activation/enactment, and explanation/interpretation’ (Brass15). The political condition at the time of writing and the first production of the play certainly inspired Dattani to bring in the reference to the Rath in his play. In 1990, pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party leader L.K. Advani held a rath yatra from the Hindu temple of Somnath in the western state of Gujarat to the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya. This rath yatra was followed ‘by rioting in its wake at numerous sites through which it passed’ (Brass. 2003:13).

That the discourse of Hindu-Muslim antagonism in the form of mutual ‘Otherings’ has a great hold on the minds of people is evident in the dramatic enactment of the play. Ramnik from the beginning of the play tries to play a good host to Babban and Javed by saving them from the fury of the Mob, going to the extent of even putting his own life at risk in the process. He almost forces his reluctant wife Aruna to serve water to their Muslim guests but when his guests have drunk the water from the glasses, Aruna carefully keeps them apart from other glasses in the kitchen. Aruna’s attitude to two Muslim boys in fact proves true what Bipan Chandra has written: ‘… while religion does not lead to communalism, irrational attitudes and cults, religious narrow-mindedness, and obscurantism in the name of going to the fundamentals of a religion … and inordinate growth of religiosity (that is, intrusion of religion into areas other than that of personal belief) do create a certain receptivity or openings for communal ideology and politics’(327). Swati Pal, in her study of Final Solutions, speaks about the constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed nature of rituals. As she observes, ‘Dattani is spectacular in his exposure of how rituals can be both constructed, as well as deconstructed or reconstructed within a performance/dramatic text to provide both entertainment as well as instruction’ (2007:123). To carry her observation on a little further, it can be said that at the climactic moment towards the end of the play, the ritual
of worship is given an altogether distinct treatment by Dattani to highlight its crucial role in
the shaping of one’s social identity. For when Bobby lifts the image of Krishna from the puja
room and Aruna cries out at this gesture of sacrilege, Bobby’s subsequent action heralds a
new way of looking at the significance of ritual in religious practice. The events go as
follows:

Bobby (extends his hands and shows the image to everyone). See! See! I am touching
God!

… … …

Bobby. Your God! My flesh is holding Him! He does not cry out from the heavens saying
He has been contaminated!

… … …

Bobby. Look how He rests in my hands! He knows I cannot harm Him. He knows His
strength! I don’t believe in Him but He believes in me. He smiles! He smiles at our trivial
pride and our trivial shame.

… … …

Bobby. See, Javed! He doesn’t humiliate you. He doesn’t cringe from my touch. He
welcomes the warmth of my hand. He feels me. And He welcomes it! I hold Him who is
sacred to them, but I do not commit sacrilege. (To Aruna.) You can bathe Him day and
night, you can splash holy waters on Him but you cannot remove my touch from His form.
You cannot remove my smell with sandal paste and attars and fragrant flowers because it
belongs to a human being who believes, and tolerates, and respects what the other human
beings believe. That is the strongest fragrance in the world!(225)
Bobby’s theatrical gestures mimic the ritual of worship. But this is not all, for by entering the puja room he not only blurs the constructed notion of space being sacred or profane, but also deflates the idea that one can connect with the divine only with the help of the ritual of worship. Rituals, indeed, by resisting historical change, legitimise the ‘worldview’ of a society/community. ‘A religion’, writes Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, ‘is a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic’ (1973: 90). But even as the conservative nature of ritual action resists change, Bobby’s words and actions prompt us to question the practice and efficacy of holding religious concepts a hostage to create divisions among people. Javed’s aversion for the Hindu community is shown in the play to have its origin in the behaviour of a Hindu man whose perspective on the Muslim community as untouchable ‘others’ had led him to wipe the gate, the wall and the letter that Javed had brought over to him. This treatment of Javed as an untouchable created in the mind of the Muslim boy a prejudiced view towards the Hindu community. As a young boy Javed had no sense of untouchability and the division between people created by caste and creed. This incident, along with similar others which are referred to by Bobby’s words “There must have been others which Javed did not talk about.” (CP, 200), made Javed realize that his identity as a Muslim made him a virtual outcast to many in his own society. The critic Sohini Pillai states that Javed is a “misguided youth who has been driven to his violent career due to a traumatic childhood experience” and she describes Javed as an “Islamic nonfundamentalist” (Pillai 49). But even though this statement can be accepted, it needs to be noted that Pillai’s declaration that Javed is not an “Islamic fundamentalist” is a little too sweeping. Dattani in fact makes it clear in his play that Javed had a strong sense of attachment to his own faith developed through his repeated
humiliations. The irony of a young boy pushed into fundamentalism as a reflex action to his non-acceptance even in his own society is well communicated by Javed’s words:

Javed. I believe in myself. Yes! What else have I got to believe in? It’s people like you who drive me to a corner and I have to turn to myself and my faith. I have a lot to thank you for! At least now I am not ignorant of my history and my faith. (CP,198)

Javed’s sense of being an ‘other’ in society made him turn to a faith that he had never even in his life felt any need for. His demand of acceptance led him to a deed of retaliatory violence, and Bobby’s account of the events goes as follows:

The next day, the neighbour came out screaming on the streets. Yelling at our windows. We peeped out. He was furious, tears running down his face. We couldn’t understand a word he was saying. I found out later. Someone had dropped pieces of meats and bones into his backyard … I didn’t speak to Javed for many days after that. I was frightened of him. For months, whenever we played cricket and heard the bell, we remembered that incident and we avoided looking at Javed. And for Javed, he was – in his own eyes—no longer the neighbourhood hero. (CP, 201)

Bobby’s reaction to Javed proves that even within Javed’s own community, not every member feels as revengeful as Javed. The perceiving of a community as a homogenous entity is once again proved to be wrong. For If Javed cannot tolerate discrimination and retaliates, Bobby can suppress the pain of being discriminated against by concealing his religious identity. This is shown by the fact that he prefers to be called ‘Bobby’ instead of ‘Babban’ because the latter name reveals his Muslim identity a little too clearly. Indeed, as Bobby admits before Ramnik, it was only later that he realized that he had succeeded in ‘othering’ himself:
... I was ashamed of being myself.

... For being who I was. And pretending that I was not a part of my community ... thinking that I could become superior by not belonging. (201).

Social discrimination evidently had created an inferiority complex in Bobby and he had tried to overcome it hiding his religious identity. And though it can be argued that Bobby’s handling of the situation is entirely personal, it is interesting to note that through his behaviour Dattani has exposed, in the words of Pranav Joshipura, ‘the psychological mechanism working within minorities’ (2009:122). The same psychological mechanism may be seen in Javed’s recollection of how his initial retaliatory instinct was soon used by those who orchestrated the riots. Describing his fascination with the preaching of his communal leaders, Javed tells Ramnik:

It was different when I used to attend the meetings. I was swayed by what now appears to me as cheap sentiment. They always talked about motherland and fighting to save our faith and how we should get four of theirs for every one of ours. (205)

Incidentally, the emotional involvement experienced by Javed while attending communal meetings is quite the same in similar meetings arranged by the leaders of the Hindu community. As an example, we can take the RSS chief Bal Thackeray’s avowal in an interview in the Time magazine published in Communalism Combat in March 1995. In this interview, Bal Thackeray justified the Shiv Sena’s attacks on the Muslims after the demolition of the Babri masjid by saying that the Mulims had no right to stay in India as India happened to be a Hindu Rashtra. He claimed before the interviewer that if the Muslims in India felt like the Jews in Nazi Germany there were reasons behind this, and that the Hindu attacks on the Muslims was an appropriate act of retaliation. (Puniyani 27). In passing, it can be pointed out that the title of Dattani’s play has a direct reference to Adolf Hitler’s strategy
of exterminating the Jews in Nazi Germany. The secret official programme by which the Jews were exterminated in their thousands in gas chambers was euphemistically called Die Endlösung or ‘Final Solution’. Among Dattani’s early critics, Alyque Padamsee noted a connection between the ideologies of the Nazis and the Hindu Right, when he stated in his director’s note: “Who was responsible for the humiliating state in Germany after World War I? Blame it on the Jews! They had siphoned off all the money! Who is responsible for us becoming a third-rate nation? Get rid of the minorities and Ram Rajya will return!” (CP:162). Bipan Chandra in his book Communalism in Modern India is of the opinion that communalism in India has taken three main forms, namely communal nationalism, liberal nationalism and extreme communalism, and he believes that after 1937 ‘extreme communalism increasingly acquired a popular base and began to mobilize popular mass opinion. The basic change from liberal communalism occurred during 1937-38 when both Hindu and Muslim communalism, in the form of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), started becoming fascist and irrational in their ideology and politics. Communalism was now sought to be organised on a new popular basis and a mass movement around aggressive, extremist communal politics among the urban and lower middle classes, which could be done only on an extremist basis or around a fascist outlook’ (347). However, Chandra also noted that these three forms had their ‘mutual interaction, impact and continuity’ (356). In the present play, Javed’s reminiscence of the provocative speeches he heard undeniably illustrates that how communal leaders in India try to indoctrinate the masses turn them to violent communal activities by exploiting their faith in religion. As Bipan Chandra indicates: ‘the social, economic and political vested interests [of the Muslim League and the RSS] deliberately encouraged or unconsciously adopted communalism because of its capacity to distort popular struggles, to prevent the masses from understanding the social and economic factors responsible for their social
condition and to turn them away from their real national and socio-economic interests and
issues and mass movements around them’ (78). Chandra notes too that: ‘Communalism also
enabled them to disguise their own privileged sectional, economic and political interests in
the garb of communal ideology and religious identity and instead to secure for their interests
not only a moral and ideological cover but also popular mass support, inspired by religious
passion’ (78). This is significantly illustrated in Dattani’s play through the depiction of Javed
blinded by power of the discourse of ‘jehad’ and as a person motivated by its emotional
impact. As Javed tells Ramnik:

Anyone sitting at home, sipping tea and reading the newspapers, will say that it is obvious
that a minority would never start a riot, we are too afraid, that has to be politically
motivated. Try telling it to a thousand devotees swayed by their own religious fervour,
united by their fantasies of persecution, constantly reassuring themselves that this is their
land by taking out processions. … Anyone could tell. Not when he has his delusions as
well. Delusions of valour and heroism. Of finding a cause to give purpose to his existence.
‘The time has come’, somebody would say. ‘This is jehad – the holy war! It is written!
‘Yes!’ I would say. ‘I am ready. I am prepared! (205)

Fortunately for Javed, the power of the discourse began to fade first when he saw the would
be rioters getting drunk on country liquor the night before, and when he saw the helpless
figure of the ‘poojari’ on the rath begging for his life:

I moved to the chariot, pushing people away. And I saw him. I saw the poojari ringing a
bell! There was chaos all around. I saw the poojari’s frightened face as he turned away. …
He looked up at the knife in my hand as I lifted it above the heads around me. He begged
for mercy but I couldn’t hear him at all! There were screams all around, and I was
screaming too, but no longer with joy as fear came faster and faster confusing me! I got
nauseous and I cried. ‘Why am I here? What am I doing here? Get me off! I want to get off!’ I was so close to him I could … I could have … I could have … I let go the knife. …

And I watched someone pickup the knife and pierce the poojari. I watched while people removed a part of the chariot as planned. The poojari fell to the ground. The carnival continued. (208)

The liberal and secular stance taken by Ramnik turns sour when his repressed but indwelling prejudice against the Muslims comes to the surface. When it is discovered that Javed had come to Amargaon to initiate the violence that had started the riot, Ramnik directly accuses the entire Muslim community:

Ramnik. Why do you distrust us?

Javed. Do you trust us?

Ramnik. I don’t go about throwing stones!

Javed. But you do something more violent. You provoke! You make me throw stones!

Every time I look at you, my bile rises!

Ramnik (angrily). Now you are provoking me! How dare you blame your violence on other people? It is in you! You have violence in your mind. Your life is based on violence.

Your faith is based … (Stops, but it is too late.) (198)

To Ramnik a proclivity towards violence is inherent in the Muslim community. The blame game played out between Ramnik and Javed exposes how the two major communities in India regard each other. Being a member of the majority Hindu population, Ramnik had flattered himself for being secular till Javed’s provocation had jolted out the truth in him. Ramnik is therefore found to threaten Javed and Javed tells him: ‘You don’t hate me for what I do or who I am. You hate me because I showed you that you are not as liberal as you think
you are’ (199). Apparently, Javed sees a personal reason working behind Ramnik’s contempt towards Muslim community. Religion comes into the fray only superficially and religious difference, here is shown to be used as a mask to conceal non-religious personal needs, aspirations and conflicts.

Apart from projecting the Muslim community as the ‘other’, there is an attempt made by some of the characters in *Final Solutions* to present Hindu culture as superior. When Aruna is offered help by Javed to fill-up a bucket, she says that Javed’s touch will contaminate the water with which she bathes her God. Smita gets angry with her mother for her prejudice but Aruna accuses her daughter, telling her:

Aruna. What makes you think you have all the answers? Don’t you have any respect for who you are? … For so many generations we have preserved our sanskar because we believe it is the truth! It is the way shown to us by our saints. We must know no other path. And I will not have it all perish to accommodate someone else’s faith. I have enough faith and pride to see that it doesn’t happen. I shall uphold what I believe is the truth. (210)

Aruna’s ‘faith and pride’ in the preservation of the Hindu rituals makes her unaccomodative of even of the presence of ‘someone else’s faith’ (here Javed’s faith in Islam in particular) even though a little earlier in the play she declared that she respected the idea of the equality of all religions: ‘… we are all equal. There is no doubt. We respect your religion… .’ (209). Undeniably, she feels that her observance of Hindu rituals in her family will preserve their sanctity from being contaminated by the Muslim boys and that is why a little later in the play she forbids Javed and Bobby from helping Smita fill up the water meant for bathing their family god, Krishna. When Smita protests against her conservative mind-set and exhorts her to be liberal and reasonable in her outlook, Aruna bluntly replies her that she will not accept any of her explanations as she feels proud of her religious inheritance. The more Aruna
insists on the need of following the *sanskars*, or customs and practices of the Hindu faith, the more she makes Javed and Bobby realize how intrusive and disturbing their religion is to her sense of religious superiority. Aruna’s conviction about the sanctity of the rituals which she had learnt from her mother had come to be further fortified by her practice of reading religious books like the Gita. Aruna thus spending long hours in the puja-room together with her daughter Smita, and Smita’s acceptance of all the Hindu religious rituals without any question had made Aruna feel that she had been successful in implanting in her daughter a sense of pride in the Hindu religious *samskars*. However, she gets a jolt when Smita, in the presence of Bobby and Javed, tears off the mask of acceptance that she had worn since her childhood. Smita gives vent to her true sentiments thus:

Smita. How can you expect me to be proud of something [being marked as Hindu] which stifles everything else around it? It stifles me! Yes! Maybe I am prejudiced because I do not belong. But not belonging makes things so clear. I can see so clearly how wrong you are. You accuse me of running away from my religion’(211).

This revelation of Smita’s indicates her position as an ‘other’ in the Gandhi family in that she unlike any member of her family openly speaks out her unease with her religious identity. Later, she even tells that living with a person like her mother who always remains preoccupied with religious rituals alienates her from all dicta. Aruna ultimately senses that she cannot accept her daughter in the way she had been doing all along and she sums up the condition of her relationship with her daughter with the telling words:

Aruna. So this is the end. (212)

Ironically enough, Smita’s revelation not only strains the relationship between herself and her mother, but it also makes Aruna realize her own position of relative ‘otherness’ in her family as her devotion to rituals which had been opposed by her husband Ramnik, is now drawing
censure from her daughter Smita too. Without anybody to fall back on, Aruna transfers all her resentment to the Muslim boys and she thus holds them responsible for the rupture created between her daughter and herself. That she does not know her exact position in the family now is revealed by her question, ‘Where do I go from now?’ (213). Initially, in the play, Aruna had been reluctant to shelter Javed and Bobby because of her concern for the security of her family, and she had also begun to make them feel their position as the ‘other’ by her attitude. But now she is reduced to questioning her own place in the family. Through the predicament of Aruna, Dattani therefore illuminates the relative nature of the position of ‘otherness’ in human society.

When Javed is stunned at their treatment in the Gandhi family, Bobby, in order to show to both Javed and Aruna that the concept of God is actually above the narrow vision of a community, suddenly picks up the idol of Krishna from the puja room of the Gandhis and his words deserve to be quoted at length:

See! See! I am touching God!

… … …

He does not burn me to ashes! He does not cry out from the heavens saying He has been contaminated!

… … …

Look how he rests in my hands! He knows I cannot harm him. He knows His strength! I don’t believe in Him but He believes in me. He smiles! He smiles at our trivial pride and our trivial shame.

… … …
See Javed! He doesn’t humiliate you. He doesn’t cringe from my touch. He welcomes the warmth of my hand. He feels me. And he welcomes it! I hold Him who is sacred to them, but I do not commit sacrilege. (To Aruna.) You can bathe him day and night, you can splash holy waters on Him but you cannot remove my touch from His form. You cannot remove my smell with sandal paste and attars and fragrant flowers because it belongs to a human being who believes, and tolerates, and respects what other human beings believe. That is the strongest fragrance in the world! (224-25)

Writing about *Final Solutions*, Angelie Multani makes the pertinent observation that an “underlying sense of ‘otherness’ is etched into the psyche of almost every character in the play, whether it is expressed through violence or through secularism” (Multani 109). This is only partially true, for through the words of Bobby, Dattani in *Final Solutions* demonstrates a belief in assimilation and inclusiveness without marking anybody as the ‘other’ for his or her religious affiliation. He pleads for a concept of religion that has an integrative role to play in Indian society over disruptive forces of communalism. The unity of Indian societies must be sought not in the negation but in the mutual harmony and co-operation of the many. Indeed, as Pranav Joshipura has rightly observed, Dattani does not “appreciate the pseudo-secularist policy of appeasement of the minorities. Nor does he like aggressive postures of the Hindu orthodoxy who try to be fanatic like Muslims. It appears to him that both Hindus and Muslims must learn to think dispassionately and absorb the spirit of humanism. Muslims must get rid of their communalism and aggressiveness. Hindus must rid themselves of customary beliefs, conservatism, and caste psyche. Both must overcome irrational hate and learn to love each other as human beings” (Joshipura 96-97). Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind Deepali Agarwal’s warning that reading “*Final Solutions* as a play that preaches communal harmony would be reductive” (Agarwal 96). This is because the playwright’s plea for religious tolerance indirectly shows why India has become a veritable cauldron of warring
forces of sectarian and sectional demands. Religion with its bodies of beliefs, customs and rituals should not be taken as the only marker of one’s identity. A person’s individuality must be given due credit and in India where the Muslim happen to be the minority religion should be seen as a private affair.


A study of alternative sexualities should begin with a detailed elucidation of the notion of ‘sexuality’ itself, taking due notice of its difference from the notion of ‘sex’. Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* warns us that ‘we must not make the mistake of thinking that sex is the autonomous agency which secondarily produces manifold effects of sexuality over the entire length of its surface of contact with power. On the contrary, sex is the most speculative, most ideal, and most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organised by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations, and pleasure’(1990:155). A little later on in the same work, Foucault writes that ‘sex is historically subordinate to sexuality. We must not place sex on the side of reality, and sexuality on that of confused ideas and illusions; sexuality is a very historical formation; it is what gives rise to the notion of sex, as a speculative element necessary to its operation’(157). Thus having noted the difference between ‘sex’ and ‘sexuality’ through the words of Foucault, it will now be pertinent to acknowledge the fact that ‘sexuality’ can be understood in various ways. Elizabeth Grosz in her 1994 book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* has given at least four working definitions of ‘sexuality’:

First, sexuality can be understood as a drive, an impulse or form of propulsion, directing a subject toward an object. Psychoanalysis is uncontestably the great science of sexuality as a drive. Second, sexuality can also be understood in terms of an act, a series of practices, and behaviours involving bodies, organs, and pleasures, usually but not always involving orgasm. Third, sexuality can also be understood in terms of an identity. … And fourth, sexuality commonly refers to a set of orientations, positions and desires, which implies that there are particular ways in which the desires, differences, and bodies of subjects can seek their pleasure. (viii)
Evidently, the way Grosz defines ‘sexuality’ is a circuitous path. However, more recently, Viviane K. Namaste in considering psychic (or internal), social (or external), and gender dependent dimensions of sexuality has written:

Sexuality … refers to the ways in which individuals organize their erotic and sexual lives. This is generally categorized into three separate areas: heterosexuals – individuals who have sexual relations with members of opposite sex; homosexuals – those who have sexual relations with members of the same sex; and bisexuals – people who relate erotically to both men and women. (588)

Namaste’s presentation of the concepts of A. Kinsey, W. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin in her book chapter “Genderbashing: Sexuality, Gender, and the Regulation of Public Space” published in The Transgender Studies Reader edited by Susan Stryker et al, shows how sexuality is perceived in society. Writing about Indian perceptions of sexuality, the editors of The Phobic and the Erotic write in the Introduction to their volume:

Any serious study of sexuality/sexualities and the politics perpetually at play in determining the complex, diverse connotations of these terms must necessarily start with a consideration of notions of identity and identity-formation, sexual or otherwise. … The attempts to locate what may be termed ‘Indian’ and thus to study the politics of sexualities becomes necessarily interdisciplinary, requiring both a critiquing of the construction of Indianness and the ways in which the ‘Indian’ notions of sexualities are similar or dissimilar to those in the rest of the world. (x-xi)

In fact, in India we live in such a society where we are repeatedly told that heterosexuality is the only one kind of acceptable desire, and that such desire has to remain within the confines of marriage. There are also social structures prevalent in Indian society that constantly demarcate, define and defend hetero-normative values, that is, fixed notions
regarding what it means to be a man or a woman, and how the two should relate or combine to form a family unit. Nevertheless, beyond the bounds of such prescribed norms of heterosexuality, many people even in India feel their desire rather differently. Yet most people find it indecent to talk about sexuality in the presence of such seemingly more important issues like political and religious violence, employment and poverty, literacy and skills acquisition etc. Sexuality in India is discussed openly only in crisis situations like rape, and even then, the intellectual and political interventions that are made in these problematic situations stem from an assumption of heterosexuality as a natural and normal form of behaviour. Nivedita Menon in her essay “How Natural is Normal? Feminism and Compulsory Heterosexuality” in Arvind Narain and Gautam Bhan edited Because I Have a Voice: Queer Politics in India, opines that the Indian women’s movement being homophobic in nature only craves respect for woman’s sexuality while recognising that the normalising of heterosexuality remains at the heart of the Indian patriarchal society. Menon believes that:

Patriarchy needs the institutions of compulsory heterosexuality to survive. But compulsory heterosexuality undergirds most other forms of identity too. Caste, race and community identity are produced through birth. So too is the quintessentially modern identity of citizenship. The purity of these identities and social formations and of the existing regime of property relations is protected by the strict policing and controlling of women’s sexuality. Thus, the family as it exist, the only form in which it is allowed to exist – the heterosexual patriarchal family – is key to maintaining both nation and community. (34-35)

It is true that the patriarchal set up of the society in India does not recognize people who display alternate sexualities or who share non-normative experiences and contest the embedded heterosexist nature of our society. This is rather curious, since representations of woman-woman bonding, transsexual or cross-dressing men or women, and characters and
stories showing lesbian passion abound in Hindu mythology and legends. Mention may be made of figures like Brihannala, Amba/Sikhandi and Mohini. It is mentionable too that Shiva is *Ardhanarishwara*, half man-half woman. In fact, as Sudhir Kakar writes, “In Hindu mythology, sexuality is a rampant flood of polymorphous pleasure and connection, disdaining the distinction between the heterosexual, genital imperatives of conventional sex and sweeping away incestual taboos” (1989 [1981]:23). People of alternative sexual orientations capture and validate the identities and desires of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people and provide an understanding of sexuality that goes beyond the binary categories of ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’. Brinda Bose and Subrata Bhattacharya in the Introduction to The Phobic and the Erotic: The Politics of Sexualities in Contemporary India offers a different perspective about the notion of alternative sexuality in India:

The range of issues surrounding sexuality span … heterosexual-homosexual-transsexual divides. They continuously interrogate moral, social and political stances – both personal and public/ ‘national’ – as established/accepted/ ‘traditional’ mores are challenged and changed by events and influences. A general impression that sexualities that are beleaguered belong to the ‘alternative’ category no longer holds completely true. If the heteronorm is maintained as the stable centre, then what is today identified pithily as ‘LGBT/Q/K’ [lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender/ queer/ kothi: while most of this formulation is universally acceptable, kothi, an Indian term for ‘men who have sex with men’ is culture specific] would qualify for what lies along the margins, but margins and centres are beginning to collapse and merge significantly. In reality, only an extremely narrow space within the heteronorm, that which is occupied by a heterosexual conjugality conducting itself according to certain tenets of behavioural decorum in both private and public, is wholly and unquestioningly accepted by ‘all’. Almost all else, whether it be an adult heterosexual couple kissing consensually in public or on screen … or lesbians and
gays fighting for recognition and rights would, in fact, be seen as ‘alternative’ and therefore condemnable in some context or other… (xii-xiii)

It may be seen from the above that those sexualities which challenge the heteronorm, also challenge the supremacy of the ‘normative’ notion and draw attention to events, acts, and people subverting constructed hierarchies of sexuality. The notion of ‘alternative’ sexuality indeed also seeks to redress “the balance in sexual studies in/on India by drawing attention to and by analysing to those sexual choices, preferences, identities and behaviours that are counter-heteronormative (and merely counter-heterosexual )” (Bose et al 2007. xiii).

Moreover, as Brinda Bose and Subhabrata Bhattacharya write:

Even as we acknowledge that our social and cultural lives are yet determined by a fairly universal heteronormative code that validates the heterosexual as the dominant signifier, it is imperative that we no longer delegate ‘alternative’ sexualities to a constant status of the also-ran, as forever scrambling to attain legitimacy against a monolithic heteronorm.(xiii)

Going along with the above argument, it is pertinent to mention here that the many and various complex forms of sexualities that constitute a large part of the lives of Indians today often defy exact categorization and labelling. Building on deconstruction’s insights into human subjectivity as fluid, the notions of alternative sexualities also consider an individual’s sexuality as dynamic. Indeed, as human sexuality may be different at different times over the course of life, it also has a psychological dimension. In fact, human sexuality is completely controlled neither by our biological sex (male or female) nor by the way culture translates biological sex into gender roles (masculine and feminine). While examining issues of alternative sexuality in contemporary India one has to remain aware of ‘the discursive production of sexual and gendered identities’ (The Phobic and Intro xiv). In India where Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code criminalizes homosexuality, “there is on-going debate
about the validity of ‘identity’ (often seen as a Western indulgence), against that of ‘behaviour’/”practice” (xx). Sexual ‘Others’ who do not conform to the norm of heterosexuality are legitimized as good citizens only when they are secured and rendered invisible in their private lives, especially within the bounds of heteronormative family structures. However, even internationally, there is even a limit to this legitimization, which is evident in the recent moral panic in the West associated with the potential legal recognition of same-sex “marriage in Australia and the reviewing of same-sex marriage laws in some states in the USA and Canada” (Sexualities vol. 15, numbers ¾, June 2012, ISSN 13634607, http://sex.sagepub.com).

Mahesh Dattani’s On a Muggy Night in Mumbai embodies, as Bina Agarwal rightly notes, “a powerful plea for the human rights of homosexuals” (23). The play had its genesis in Night Queen, a short play on the theme of ‘gay love, loss and betrayal’ (Me and My Plays, p. 36). When it was first staged however, according to its author, was received “with dismissal mostly” (p. 36). Even the lesbian and gay community disapproved of the play on the ground that it showed “gay men to be stereotypical” (p. 37). Later on Dattani rued that even in 2014 “they [the lesbian and gay community] refuse[d] to acknowledge it as the first Indian play with gay love as its central theme” (p. 37). In order to assert his stand Dattani wrote, “I must concede that my characters make too many political assertions, which may weaken the dramaturgy. But at that time, in the 1990s, any gay person who had the courage to be out had to be political, and I feel my characters were perfectly justified in standing up for their cause.”(37)

Evidently most of the characters in the play voice their dissatisfaction with the world and in the words of John McRae in his “Note on the Play”, this three-act play in which “each act builds to a climax of revelations and self-discoveries” shows “how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates”
(46-47). In the action of the play we see how Kamlesh, a gay man, who in the words of Pranav Joshipura “is under authorial microscope” (sic) (p.8), is exorcised of his ‘love’ for Prakash/Ed, who is also a gay. Kamlesh’s friends Sharad, Ranjit, Bunny and Deepali come forward to help him to forget Prakash/Ed so that the marriage of Kiran, Kamlesh’s divorced sister can take place with Ed. Except for Kiran and the Guard of the residential building in which Kamlesh has a flat, no character in the play is happy with his or her own sexuality for the simple reason that their personal sexual orientations do not allow society to the fix them within the binary of homo/hetero sexuality. John McRae’s comments on the sexual orientation of the characters in the play deserves to be mentioned here:

Of the characters, Sharad and Deepali are comfortable with their sexuality, and have different ways of being gay. Sharad is camp, flaunting; Deepali more restrained, perhaps more stable. Kamlesh is anguished, and Ed the most obvious victim of his own insecurities. Bunny, the TV actor, is a rather more traditional Indian gay man – married (he would say happily) while publicly denying his own nature, and Ranjit has taken an easy way out by moving to Europe where he can ‘be himself’ more openly.(45)

This predicament stems from the culture of concealment practised by people of alternative sexuality who always remain afraid that their social acceptance can be jeopardised by their coming out. As sexuality refers to an aspect of personhood, society allows a person to live only if s/he lives by social rules. The rule of society is that the agreement between our desires and our physical body should be made so that the status-quo of compulsory heterosexuality is maintained. But the idea of sexuality as an aspect of personhood had its origin in the emergence of the homosexual and heterosexual in Euro-American discourses of medicine and criminology. As Foucault wrote in *The History of Sexuality*: 
There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth century psychiatry, jurisprudence and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and “psychic hermaphrodism” made possible a strong advance of social control into this area of “perversity”; but it also made possible the formation of a “reverse” discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or “naturality” be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. (101)

To put Foucault’s argument in a simple way, it can be said that the idea of sexuality as an aspect of personhood arose in a context when bio-medical discourses began to categorize and hence began to separate the ‘normal’ from the ‘abnormal’, began to pen authoritative discourses and to propagate such lesser sciences as bio-medicine, psychiatry and criminology, and began a conditioning process for people who were not allowed to question the validity of such practices. In this way, heterosexuality came to be seen as normal and homosexuality as abnormal. In Dattani’s On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, when Kamlesh goes to a psychiatrist in order to get rid of his depression arising from his obsession with the memory of Prakash, the doctor instead of understanding his problem diagnoses his case as an example of “ego-distonic homosexuality” (100) and advises him to “reorient” his sexuality and be accepted in society as “it is impossible change society” (69). Thus, does the doctor remind Kamlesh of his difference from heterosexual men. Frustrated, Kamlesh turned to his friends for a solution and Bunny suggested to him that he take the cover of a conventional heterosexual marriage in order to continue his practice of seeing men. Dattani in this way alludes to the prevalent hypocrisy in society that does not allow self-expression. In the words of Bunny:

Bunny. Find yourself a nice woman. You can always have sex on the side.
Sharad. And pretend to be straight like you!

Bunny. What’s wrong with that? Huh? Do you think I will be accepted by millions if I screamed from the rooftops that I am a gay.

Ranjit. Yes, but you do scream from the rooftops that you are straight.

Bunny. Camouflage! Even animals do it. Blend with the surroundings. They can’t find you. You politically correct gays deny yourself the basic animal instinct of camouflage.

Sharad. Give me maquillage! Lots of rouge and glitters! Let the world know that you exist. Honey, if you flaunt it, you’ve got it.

Kamlesh. I don’t want camouflage and I don’t want glitters. I don’t want to flaunt or hide anything.

Ranjit. Well, this is the price one pays for living in India.(70)

Several inferences can be drawn from the above dialogue. It is noticeable, first, that though Indian society hesitates to accept a gay, it turns an almost blind eye to the practice of adultery behind a conventional marriage. Second, a gay, in order to survive in Indian society has to choose either self-effacement or self-assertion through exaggeration. Third, one’s understanding of one’s own alternative sexuality is to be retained within one’s self if rejection from society is to be avoided. In this context, it is instructive to take note of Jonathan Ned Katz’s observation in his essay “The Invention of Homosexuality”, “The transformation of the family from producer to consumer unit resulted in a change in family members’ relation to their own bodies; from being an instrument primarily of work, the human body was
This perception of the human body ‘as a means of consumption and pleasure’ finds articulation in the way all the gay characters in Dattani’s play (except Kiran) remain aware of the demands of their bodies, even though their concern with the body develops from the identity they have constructed for society to interpret. In their ‘object’ position in society which does not validate their understanding of their self, they take recourse to bonding among themselves while making fun and mockery of social institutions like heterosexual marriage. In any gay relation constancy and dedication are the two most sought after priorities, for as there is no single way of being gay/camp/drag it is very difficult to anticipate and attach identity markers to a sexual person. In the present play we see Sharad vent out his anger against heterosexual love making the moment he enters Kamlesh’s living room and sees with the help of Kamlesh’s binoculars the love making of a “fat and bald” (CP, 53) diamond merchant with his wife. Kamlesh believes that it is from compulsion that the wife is accepting her husband. He is, in fact, convinced that monogamous heterosexual marriages leave little room for satisfying one’s desire since one is forever afraid of social disapproval and marginalization. Thus, throughout the play we find Sharad not only mimicking the machismo of a masculine male but also exposing the vulnerability of his position ever since he had exited from Kamlesh’s life after having spent a year with him in his flat, discharging all the household chores traditionally performed by a wife. Sharad in the play is ‘camp’, and we can understand this better if we refer to Susan Sontag’s ‘Notes On “Camp”’, [http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Sontag-NotesOnCamp-1964.html] an essay which defines ‘camp’ as a sensibility which is not natural. In the words of Sontag, the essence of camp is “its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration”. Sontag’s delineation of the nuances of camp sensibility is expressed in the following words:
As a taste in person, Camp responds particularly to the markedly attenuated and to the strongly exaggerated. The androgyne is certainly one of the great images of Camp sensibility. Examples: the swooning, slim, sinuous figures of pre-Raphaelite painting and poetry; the thin, flowing, sexless bodies in Art Nouveau prints and posters, presented in relief on lamps and ashtrays; the haunting androgynous vacancy behind the perfect beauty of Greta Garbo. Here, Camp taste draws on a mostly unacknowledged truth of taste: the most refined form of sexual attractiveness (as well as the most refined form of sexual pleasure) consists in going against the grain of one’s sex. What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine. … Allied to the Camp taste for the androgynous is something that seems quite different but isn’t: a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms.

Sontag’s idea of camp sensibility can perhaps be better understood if we read what Jonathan Dollimore has to say about camp. In his essay “Post/Modern: On the Gay Sensibility, or the Pervert’s Revenge on Authenticity – Wilde, Genet, Orton, and Others”. Dollimore writes about ‘camp’ thus:

… Camp [is] considered by some to be the essence of the homosexual sensibility, by others, both within and without gay culture, as virtually the opposite; the quintessence of an alienated, inadequate sensibility … The definition of camp is as elusive as the sensibility itself, one reason being simply that there are different kinds of camp. I am concerned here with that mode of camp which undermines the categories which exclude it, and does so through parody and mimicry. But not from the outside: this kind of camp undermines the depth model of identity from inside, being a kind of parody and mimicry which hollows out from within, making depth recede into its surfaces. Rather than a direct repudiation of depth, there is a performance of it to excess: depth is undermined by being
taken to and beyond its own limits. The masquerade of camp becomes less a self-concealment than a kind of attack … . The hollowing-out of the deep self is pure pleasure, a release from the subjective correlatives of dominant morality (normality, authenticity, etc.) – one reason why camp also mocks the Angst-ridden spiritual emptiness which characterizes the existential lament. Camp thereby negotiates some of the lived contradictions of subordination, simultaneously refashioning as a weapon of attack an oppressive identity inherited as subordination, and hollowing out dominant formations responsible for that identity in the first instance. So it is misleading to say that camp is the gay sensibility; camp is an invasion and subversion of other sensibilities, and works via parody, pastiche, and exaggeration. (556)

To Dollimore, camp knows and takes pleasure in the fact that “desire is culturally relative, and never more so than when, in cathecting contemporary style, it mistakes itself, and the style, for the natural”(557). Somewhat similarly, Judith Butler in Gender Trouble also defends deviant sexualities as involving a process of denaturalising by parodic subversive repetitions the consolidation of heterosexual norms. To Butler “gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy” (31). In keeping with this, registering his protest and angst against society Sharad in Dattani’s play does not pass any chance to mock all the typical aspects of heterosexuality. But his idea of exorcising Kamlesh through the mimicry of heterosexual marriage rituals and his mockery of a heterosexual man, apart from stressing his being camp indicate his position as the ‘other’ in society. When Ranjit wants to know whether Sharad could ever change his identity as gay and become heterosexual, Sharad mentions the advantages of being heterosexual thus:

Sharad. … being a heterosexual man … I get everything. I get to be accepted – accepted by whom? – well, that marriage lot down there for instance. I can have a wife, I can have children who will adore me simply because I am a hetero – I beg your pardon – a real
man. Now why would I want to give it all up? So what if I have to change a little? If I can be a real man, I can be a king. Look at all the kings around you, look at all male power they enjoy, thrusting themselves on to the world, all that penis power! Power with sex, power with muscle, power with size. Firing rockets, exploding nuclear bombs, if you can do it five times, I can do it six times and all that stuff. (Thrusts his pelvis in an obscene macho fashion.) power, man! Power! (101)

Sharad here is ironically defining heterosexuality, for, despite his listing of the advantages of being a real heterosexual man, he does not want to change his sexuality. Sharad thus remains gay till the end, and unlike Ed/Prakash, or Bunny, he does not think it that it is important to don the mask of a heterosexual.

Judith Butler begins her essay “Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality” by providing a reading of Michel Foucault’s idea of the politics of truth, that is, “a politics that pertains to those relations of power that circumscribe in advance what will and will not count as truth, that order the world in certain regular and regulatable ways, and that we come accept as the given field of knowledge”(183):

I would like to take my point of departure from a question of power, the power of regulation, a power that determines, more or less, what we are, what we can be, I am not speaking of power only in a juridical or positive sense, but I am referring to the workings of a certain regulatory regime, one that informs the law, and one that also exceeds the law. When we ask what the conditions of intelligibility are by which the human emerges, by which the human is recognised, by which some subject becomes the subject of human love, we are asking about conditions of intelligibility composed of norms, of practices, that have become presuppositional, without which we cannot think the human at all. So I propose to broach the relationship between variable orders of intelligibility and the genesis
and knowability of the human. And it is not just that there are laws that govern our intelligibility, but ways of knowing, modes of truth, that forcibly define intelligibility.

(183)

Butler’s observations on how human intelligence is governed by a regulatory power reminds us of her conviction that the hegemonic power of heteronormativity, a collection of punitive rules (social, familial and even legal) forces us to conform to dominant heterosexual standards for identity, produces all forms of body, sex, and gender. Today, however, gay identity has come to be seen as a ‘crossing over’, the preventing of the creation of an essentialist, unified or stable identity. In *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* each character is a cross-over, for each longs to have a partner compatible with his/her sexual orientation but their search often leads them nowhere. Kamlesh cannot have Prakash/Ed as his lover initially because his sister Kiran who was unaware of Prakash/Ed being gay, fell in love with him and later when Kamlesh came to know Prakash/Ed’s actual design on Kiran that he would use his marriage with Kiran as a mask to continue his gay relation with Kamlesh, he began to hate him. Sharad cannot get a place in Kamlesh’s life as he is apprehensive of the fact of Kamlesh’s obsession for Prakash/Ed. Kiran just cannot accept Ed as her husband when she comes to know from the tell-tale photograph of Kamlesh and Prakash/Ed, that the man supposed to be her life partner does not ‘exist’ at all. Bunny, idealised by millions of his fans and even by his wife, admits that the man whom his wife loves “do[es] not exist” (102). It was easy for Ed to assume that Kiran would never come to know of his exact ‘nature’ and it is quite revealing that after the discovery of his gay nature and his subsequent rejection by Kiran he wants to receive pity. In fact, he declares that he had not wanted to hurt Kiran but he only wanted “to live”(110). “The main focus of the play”, according to Santosh Chakrabarti in his essay “Gray Areas: Dattani’s World of Drama”, “is on the question of a gay man’s conversion to the ‘straight’ state, so that he can belong to ‘that world’ (as Deepali says), the
world where weddings take place in order to accentuate socially accepted stereotypical roles”(46). Though this observation is not invalid, it will perhaps be a better reading of the issue if we see the play not exactly as a conversion of one person but as a plea to reconsider issues like whether sexuality can be considered as an essential part of identity, that is, ‘the way we are’, whether sexual identity is a fixed notion determined at birth, and whether society, including our family and culture, has any bearing on the constructed notion of sexuality.

In his first radio play *Do the Needful* and in his stage play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* Mahesh Dattani has raised several pertinent questions like why a man should be perceived as different if he deviates from a ‘normal’ sexual orientation, and why the right to freedom of expression and speech of an individual should be restricted in the case of his sexuality, and why a man or woman should be judged by his or her sexual orientation only and not by his or her far more definitive qualities such as him or her being a good human being. In both of these plays, Dattani criticises the way society expects everybody to accept heterosexual marriages that permit aberrations like adultery to exist beneath a façade of normality and perfection. He also questions the logic of the safeguard of marriage to a gay. *Do the Needful*, first broadcast on 14 August 1997 by BBC Radio 4, shows Alpesh Patel, a “thirty-plus and divorced” (CP 121) gay being dragged to the path of heterosexual union in his marriage with Lata Gowda, a twenty-four year old Bangalorian. Fortunately for Alpesh, Lata herself confesses to her love for a Kashmiri terrorist living in Mumbai named Salim. As Alpesh hails from Mumbai, his marriage with Lata proves to be convenient for both of them: Alpesh can easily maintain his liaisons with Trilok or with the Mali, the caretaker of the cowshed in the farmhouse of Devraj Gowda, Lata’s father while his wife Lata can sleep with Salim. What Dattani shows here is the irony of the fact that the expedient marriage between Alpesh and Lata does not necessarily contribute to society’s expectations from a heterosexual union.
*Do the Needful* which several commentators agree is an “unconventional romantic comedy” (Chowbey 185, Iyer 61), opens with the voices of Alpesh Patel and his wife, Alpesh who is driving a car in the busy streets of Mumbai enquires about the availability of a man named Trilok in a massage parlour, called the Slim Gym, and his wife Lata Gowda who came to Mumbai from Bangalore to meet her lover named Salim, is shown enquiring about Salim from his neighbour over the phone. A little later, we come to know that Alpesh enjoys a body massage and that he is related both emotionally and physically with Trilok who still does not know about his marriage with Lata. The initial thoughts of both Lata and Alpesh need to be mentioned in detail:

Lata. (Thought) It is happening Salim. I do hope you will accept the situation. Will you? I couldn’t care less whether you do or don’t, but I will still ask you that when we meet. You would want to make love first, of course. Which is just … fine… .

… … … … … … … … … … … … … … … …


Both Lata and Alpesh are concerned about the reactions of their respective partners as they had decided to cover up their sexuality by agreeing to marry each other. Like Alpesh who is a closet homosexual and thus cannot come out in the open, Lata, who is ‘straight’, also cannot get any social acceptance for her love of Salim. The desperation of Alpesh and Lata’s parents, Chandrakant Patel and Kusumber Patel, and Lata, Devraj Gowda and Prema Gowda, to get their children married is a reflection of their desire to erase the ignominy that the son and the daughter had brought to their respective families. Alpesh had had to face a divorce suit from his wife, and Lata’s parents did not approve of her relationship with Salim. It has been argued by Pranav Joshipura in his book *A Critical Study of Mahesh Dattani’s Plays* that
“Dattani’s humanism and moral philosophy are not as evident here as in [other] plays” and that *Do the Needful* just a “passable radio play” (234). However, this seems to be a deficient reading as Joshipura has completely missed Dattani’s concern for people with alternative sexuality. The conflict in this radio play evolves from the mental spaces of Alpesh and Lata who cannot come out openly with their sexual inclinations without being afraid of social exclusion. Neither a homosexual like Alpesh nor a so-called ‘notorious’ woman like Lata has any voice in society. All they can do in order to do justice to their feelings is to hide their sexuality and pretend to conform social rules and expectations. This is all the more imperative in India, a nation where according to Jeremy Seabrook the idea of ‘men having sex with men’ is taboo since “in India and in many other cultures in Asia and Africa concepts of being gay, or bisexuals are not acceptable”(1). While speaking about the distinctive features of homosexuality Denis Altman in *Postcolonial Queer* writes:

To identify as homosexual without rejecting conventional assumptions about masculinity or femininity (as with today’s “macho” gay or “lipstick lesbian” styles) is one of the distinguishing features of modern homosexuality. This new freedom is both distinctively different from any premodern formations of sexuality and intimately related to other features of modern life. Modern homosexualities are characterized by the following characteristics: (1) a differentiation between sexual and gender transgression; (2) an emphasis on emotional as much as on sexual relationship; and (3) the development of public homosexual worlds. Homosexuality is no longer considered as an expression of “really” being a woman in a man’s body (or vice versa), but rather as physically desiring others of one’s gender without necessarily wishing to deny one’s masculinity/femininity.” (26)

Throughout the play, Alpesh never acknowledges that he is a homosexual and his parents are not aware of his homosexuality. At the insistence of his mother, Alpesh agrees to meet Lata
but not before he reminds his mother of the failure of his first marriage which might get a repetition in his second attempt at marriage:

        Kusumber Patel. Are you threatening me that it will happen again?

        Alpesh. It might.

        Kusumber Patel. Tell me why you feel it might happen again?

        Alpesh (thought). I wasn’t going to say it. She wanted me to.(126)

        Alpesh never had the courage to openly declare his sexuality and had always tried to hide behind the veneer of being a ‘straight’ man without letting anybody, except his partner Trilok, know about this. His ‘thought’ or internal monologue reveals that he had all along sought to excuse himself before Trilok, whose invisible presence everywhere in the play may indicate his importance in Alpesh’s life. In reality, however Alpesh, being without any other available option, has to remain satisfied with Trilok. His physical desire for Trilok does not necessarily involve any emotional bonding with him as is evident from his encounter with the Mali and his asking for the latter as a dowry from Lata. Neither is Lata’s predicament any different from that of Alpesh. If Alpesh hopes against the success of his prospective marriage with Lata, she thinks about the future of her sexual attachment with Salim in the following words:

        Lata (thought). Salim I know you are allowed four wives – what’s the point in thinking all that now? I will have to be content keeping you as a lover. How are we going to work this out? What if you have to go back to Kashmir? … I will have to find another lover. I can have more than four … Why do I think all this? I am a bad girl, I will rot in hell. Oh! Damn the Bangalore Catholic School, sending me on a guilt trip now. (126-27)
Interestingly enough, Lata here indulges in a reassessment of her sexual preferences from the moral point of view infused in her by the preaching she had been exposed to in a Catholic school which is a religious and patriarchal institution that links sexuality exclusively with the procreative process. That all heterosexual unions do not get social validation is made apparent by the way society labels Lata’s relation with the Muslim Salim as illicit. Had Salim’s identity been otherwise, that is had he been a non-Muslim and an educated man with a decent lineage, he might have been accepted. Further, that society is willing to turn a blind eye to premarital sexual relationships as long as such affairs are kept secret is indicated in Lata’s mother’s (Prema Gouda’s) reaction when Lata’s affair is revealed:

Prema Gowda. She has to do it in his hostel! Couldn’t they go to a hill station or somewhere? (122)

Lata, in her defence, quips that she would not have been allowed to go on a trip to an unknown place. Indeed it is clear that if her parents had failed to instil in her a sense of how to contain impulsive emotions, they are ready to rectify their failure by arranging for Lata’s ‘seemingly’ heterosexual marriage with Alpesh. Importantly, Dattani here shows how men and women are governed by society. In this radio play this equation between subjectivity (the society as a dominating subject shaping human life) and object formation (the idea that free will/choice is always influenced by the dominant discourses of biology, science, religion, morality etc.) is inverted in the way Alpesh and Lata hit upon their ingenious plan of using the institution of marriage to work for and to serve them.

Before her marriage with Alpesh, Lata was also pressurised to meet Alpesh and when she felt that their (Alpesh’s and her own) parents were very eager for her match with Alpesh, the words of her internal monologue reveal her utter helplessness:
Lata. … (Thought.) Salim I really wanted to cry, whine, do anything to stop it all from happening. Mummy was quicker.(132)

Ultimately, when the Patels and the Gowdas agree to the match, Lata confesses to Alpesh that she is in love with somebody else and her confession relaxes the stress in the mind of Alpesh who in his imaginative conversation with Trilok had acknowledged that he should have told her about him. What had restricted Alpesh from voicing the truth is his fear of the social denunciation of homosexuality. Afterwards, when both of them realize they cannot avoid the marriage, Lata warns Alpesh that she would give him “hell” (151) after marriage. Left with no other option Lata decides to flee and for the last time she goes to see Gauri, the cow in the cowshed late at night. Entering the cow-shed she discovers Alpesh making love to Mali. At this moment she reckons that her proposed marriage with Kamlesh would only expedite their respective interests in Salim and Trilok.

In both *Do the Needful* and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, sexuality is conceived of as radically contingent: it not only escapes from but disorientates all social attempts to define and regulate it. Dattani wants to show us in these two plays that if heterosexuality is taken as the norm, that is, most of us are heterosexual, then there are others who are *either* lesbian or gay. But if we recognise that this ‘normal’ heterosexuality is painfully constructed and kept in place by a range of cultural, bio-medical and economic controls, precisely in order to sustain existing hierarchies of class and caste and gender, then we would have to accept that all of us are – or have the potential to be—something other than heterosexual.
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Conclusion

The plays of Mahesh Dattani that have been studied in this thesis were written over the last few years of the 20th century. However, while they were written in India by an Indian playwright, they often enough found an international audience with some of the plays being broadcast over the British Broadcasting Corporation. As a matter of fact, Dattani’s understanding of the predicament of the Other- that is the neglected, the powerless, the marginalised or the silenced- was the product of an awareness that was not simply local but global. It would not be far wrong, indeed, to say that Dattani’s realizations have a western cast and colouring. In the thirty years before Dattani started writing his plays, a number of theoreticians in the west had given a great deal of importance to the concept of the Other. For instance, the concept of the Other primarily in relation to Woman was seen by Simone de Beauvoir and in relation to anthropological representations of race and ethnicity by theoreticians like James Clifford and George E. Marcus, Edward Said and Franz Fanon. In line with this, the present research work has attempted to negotiate with some of the issues involved in representing ‘Others’. These issues revolve round a set of vitally complex questions that include interrogations of who is the ‘Other’ and in what shifting lines of power and powerlessness is ‘Otherness’ constructed, and in what ways representations of the ‘Other’ may be conducive to the initiation of change in the process of ‘Othering’.

Early formulations of ‘Woman as Other’ with relation to a male norm rest on Simone de Beauvoir’s theorization. In her book The Second Sex, Beauvoir wrote:

Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as autonomous being … She is simply what man decrees … She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental,
the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other. (1949/53: 18)

In the introduction to *The Second Sex* Beauvoir characterized women’s category of the other as primordial (16) and she employed the Hegelian insight of a ‘master-slave’ dynamics for understanding the relations between social groups including men and women when she wrote that there is “in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility to every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed – he sets himself up as essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object” (17). According to Beauvoir, a woman accepts her position of Otherness and fails to claim the status of subject “because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the other” (21). This notion of regarding woman as Other came to be thoroughly absorbed into contemporary feminism, although Beauvoir’s conclusions were sometimes critiqued (e.g. Evans, 1983; Felstiner, 1980). The central claim of contemporary feminism is that Otherness is thrust on women by, and in the interest of, men. Contemporary feminists highlight such biological attributes as women’s menstruation, lactation, gestation and ability for reproduction as factors responsible for their status of Otherness. Stevi Jackson, Jane Prince and Pauline Young thus refer to what they call “the perspective of masculine scientific discourse” and write:

A key aspect of woman’s ‘otherness’ from the perspective of masculine scientific discourse is our reproductive capacity … Once science and medicine had become established as masculine institutions and masculine modes of knowledge, ever more sophisticated accounts of women’s ‘otherness’ were produced (Jackson et al., 1993: 363, 365).
Other feminists, while negotiating with the construction of women as the Other in the hegemonic patriarchal discourse, have found that women’s position of Otherness is reinforced and maintained through phallocentric discourses about menstruation, rape, media images and even about the notion of the ‘normal’. Phallocentric discourse further tends to associate women with female traits, and even more, to regard all women as homogeneous. Black feminists object to this tendency of foregrounding gender in the production of Otherness and so they speak for experiences of women of varied ethnic, sexual and class locations that reveal various dimensions of power and powerlessness. In doing so, Black feminists often draw upon the writings of those anthropologists who are critical of traditional anthropological theory and practice. One such anthropologist, Robert L Winzeler, for example, opines that the idea of savage Otherness has been used to “justify imperial expansion, warfare, Christian evangelism, colonial control … slavery and the appropriation of aboriginal lands, and genocide” (Winzeler, 1994: 82). As a matter of fact, anthropological critics like Winzeler mostly rely on Edward Said’s theorization in *Orientalism* (1978) in their conceptualization of the creation of Otherness in non-western countries. While formulating theories of colonial Othering, Said in his book *Orientalism* referred to India and wrote “the bulk of colonial writing in India focused on demonstrating the peculiarities of Hindu civilisation, and the barbaric practices pertaining to women” (Said, 1978: 34). This devaluation of Hindu civilisation and the correlation of Indian Otherness with dangerous (often female) sexuality actually denied the experience of Indians whose voices were silenced, experiences erased and cultures and traditions misrepresented. In order to resist the production of this knowledge about the orient, a counter discourse was conceived with a representational strategy that sought to refute this knowledge by documenting and celebrating the inner strengths and positive cultures and traditions of the Other. However, this practice of rendering visibility to experiences of the Other is also fraught with debates and critiques. As
there is very little possibility of evading the grasp of power while constructing the discourse of the Other, theorists often question this reinscription of power relations. Olson and Shopes, for example, point out the “temptation to exaggerate the exotic, the heroic, or the tragic aspect of the lives of people with little power” (1991:198).

Evidently enough, strategies for dealing with the problems of Othering not only deal with the nature and celebration of Otherness but also with the meaning of representation. Postcolonial critics have often indicated the need to shift the debate on representation from the terrain of ‘truth’ or transparency to a consideration of ‘regimes’ of representation, that is, “to a specification of the machineries and discourses that constitute both the possibility of representing an [O]ther and the criteria by which such representations function in the field of knowledge. (Ganguly, 1992: 71). According to Jean Carabine:

> Adopting the term ‘Other’ risks restricting our thinking to the boundaries of the Other/Same coupling and to the power relations arising out of that relationship. A focus on Other is problematic because it tends to shift the debate back to a preoccupation with binary oppositions and runs the risk of locking differences … up in the oppositional categories of oppressor and oppressed. (quoted in Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996: 25)

In the plays of Mahesh Dattani, namely *Where There’s a Will*, *Tara*, *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, *Final Solutions*, *Do the Needful* and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, the differences between the oppressor and the oppressed are clearly marked and from these plays we come to know about various aspects and forms of Otherness. As the foregoing pages of this thesis has indicated, Dattani in these plays neither forwards a vision of Otherness that has a romantic aura to it, nor celebrates Otherness. Instead, the characters in his plays who have been Othered due to their position of powerlessness are shown to always resist, undermine, subvert or at least question the dominant order. Through his plays Dattani clearly wanted to enable
the voices of Others to be heard and thereby to bring about a social and political change for making possible a congenial living condition for Others. However, Dattani has no ‘political’ aim as he believes that theatre ceases to be theatre the moment it subserves a purpose. What he projects instead is the realization that the essential qualities of flexibility and tolerance in human and social relationships should not remain confined to the questions of sameness and difference between Self and Other. Dattani indeed emphasizes through the action of his drama the importance of our recognizing that those who are othered may experience a positive change if we are willing to accommodate them in our consciousness and do not exclude them from our sympathy. Dattani’s exploration in his plays of the ways in which sameness and difference are constructed, the purposes they serve and the effects they produce in society actually stems from his recognition of the markers of identity are dynamic and fluid and not ideologically rigid or restrictive. Dattani is therefore clearly motivated by the conviction that those whom dominant ideology marks as the Other will continue to inhabit a perpetual peripheral position unless there is a realignment (if not a revolution) in perception.
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