-: Chapter III:-

SOCIAL REALISM IN MAHESH DATTANI’S SELECTED PLAYS
3.0. Religious Harmony:

3.0.1. Final Solutions

*Final Solutions* counters the frequently trumped up charge that Indian drama in English is ‘shallow’ and ‘superficial’, and that it is disconnected with Indian realities. Indeed, the play deals with the powerful and deeply disturbing theme of communal discord and frenzy as it has obtained and continues to obtain in post-independence India: and its pervasive realism is obviously anchored in its familiar Indian urban milieu, its recognizable characters and its strong flavor of the variety of English spoken in India. What is more, the enactment of events and experiences of communal tension and worse as also their recall over decades and generations transmutes these concerns into an enriched sense of the recent history of Indian nation. The closure of the play tacitly confronts us with the disconcerting fact that we have yet to arrive at any final solutions to this problem. It strongly implies that despite the numerous homilies and sermonizings we distribute to each other day in and day out, in actual real terms most of us give little recognition and less regard to the faith and beliefs of the ‘other’.

*Final Solutions* is one of Dattani’s early plays and as the playwright often acknowledges, the ‘turning point’ in his career. The title of the play on communal violence and tensions in contemporary urban India itself calls to attention the apparent insolvency of this situation. Dattani interestingly sticks to the plural – ‘Solutions’ which implicitly undermines the possibility of the meaning of the first word – ‘Final’. Are there any solutions possible for a cycle of violence, which has continued in some form or the other ever since most of us can remember? Is any Final Solution possible at all, when each community,
section, class of our society has its own solution to the crisis? It is indeed, this very search for a final solution, which in many ways perpetuates the cycle of violence and hatred. The other interesting thing about the plurality of the title is the idea that there are as many solutions as there are realities to choose from. Each one, however turns out to be temporary.

*Final Solutions* was actually commissioned before the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992, but was performed only the following year, in 1993. Written and performed in a period of high tension and violence in urban India, we look back at this text more than 20 years later in 2013. Reeling from the aftermath of the Gujarat carnage, and the smaller ripples of violence since, all one can ask is ‘What has changed in more than two decades?’ Has anything changed at all? And the text itself answers our question in the very first scene – ‘things have not changed that much’. (CP 167) says Hardika, reading her diary written 40 years before, thinking back on the riots that exploded in 1947, when her father was killed.

Dattani places history as an active character in his play. Opening with the main figure of Hardika as a young girl – then known as Daksha, the first scene shows us the writing of history. Past and present are fused on stage through the figures of Daksha and Hardika. The play opens, in fact with the young Daksha writing in her diary. This simple act, of a young girl creating a diary in order to use the fountain pen discarded by her father-in-law operates at various levels of representation, unveiling the construction of history, the manipulation that all written texts including allegedly ‘personal’ ones go through.

DAKSHA (*reads from her diary*). ‘Dear Diary, today is the first time I have dared to put my thoughts on your pages. (*Thinks for a while.*) Today? How will people know when “today” was a hundred years from now? (*Picks up a pen and scribbles.*) 31 March 1948. (*Reads out.*) 31 March 1948. Dear Diary, today is the first time I have dared to put my thoughts on your pages . . . (*Again thinks.*) Well, the real reason is today is the first time I am using a
fountain pen and I have to write something with it. But I don’t think the world has to know that. *(Again reads.*)* I am sharing my innermost thoughts with you. Nobody else knows what I think or how I feel, except now—you. *(Squints to read the next line.)* I am sure that my . . . handwriting will improve with some practice. Also I am not used to this fountain pen. It is old and discarded by my father-in-law. The ink comes out too thickly. And so far I have written only with a copy pencil. *(Picks up her pen and strikes off that line. Mutters to herself.)* There is no need to be that honest . . . *(CP 165-166)*

Daksha’s diary establishes the history of division – the sense of ‘us and them’, the link between personal experience and political belief/social hatred. A communal riot is invoked in the very first scene of the play, a riot in which Daksha’s father was killed, a riot which firmly creates for Daksha, the ‘them’: ‘that night in Hussainabad, in our ancestral house—when I heard them outside—I knew that they were thinking the same of us.’ *(CP 167)*

History is present throughout the action of the play, sometimes repeating itself directly, through statements made by Daksha/Hardika, sometimes indirectly, through situations of violence which have been enacted before, and all are too frighteningly familiar. History is also evoked and used by almost every character on stage, as a justification may be overtly political, overtly personal or thinly disguised between the two.

Dattani’s characters also have their own justification, their own rationale for their actions. Daksha (now the grandmother) hates Muslims because her father was killed in a communal riot, and because her overtures of friendship to Zarine, a young Muslim girl, were rejected after other communal riots that razed Zarine’s father’s shop, and which incidentally, was bought by Daksha’s father-in-law. Javed, the young Muslim fundamentalist and member of a ‘gang’ has long nursed a resentment against the world because of the ‘otherness’ and the demonization of his community and religious identity by the dominant community. Ramnik Gandhi, Daksha/Hardika’s son is trying to atone for the
sins committed by his father and grandfather, and therefore is a conscious ‘secularist’. His wife, Aruna is an ‘ordinary devout Hindu woman/wife/mother/daughter-in-law’, implacably sure of her place in the home, in society, secure in her unquestioning faith and sense of right and wrong. There are also two other characters – Bobby (Babban) and Smita (Ramnik and Aruna’s daughter) who are oppressed by their own senses of history, and seem desperate to escape from its clutches, to leave behind the baggage of social, religious and communal identities that seem to dog them in all their relationships and actions.

As each character invokes history as an ‘objective witness’ to justify their own sense of oppression and victimization, it is this very sense of an ‘objective’ past that Dattani undermines. As has already been stated, in the act of re-writing her diary Daksha proves that history is constructed, and that the present is implicated in the ways in which we imagine our past.

Reading from the diary written 40 years ago, Daksha/Hardika tells us about the riots in which her father was killed, how she and her mother took refuge from the flying stones in the pooja room, and how her faith in God, represented by the idol of Krishna was suddenly gone, never to return as stone thrown by the mob smashed all her gramophone records, which she ‘loved most’. It was Daksha’s youth, her culture, represented through the records of Noor Jehan, Suraiya and Shamsad Begum that was smashed that night. And as Hardika remembers, we realize that 40 years on, indeed, things have not changed that much, as the play has opened in the midst of another riot, and a curfew is on in the small town of Amargaon where the Gandhis live.

As the play opens, and the riot is established, the two young men sought by the mob are revealed as members of the ‘other community’. ‘Naturally’ this immediately makes them a threat, as the aggression of the mob heightens to a dangerous pitch. In times of tension, even ordinary objects take on meaning, become symbols of a religious identity and markers of ‘otherness’, as Bobby and Javed are ‘revealed’ through a handkerchief knotted over man’s head.
instead of a cap or other head covering. It can be argued that anyone may wear a handkerchief over his head – however, as the text establishes, once the poison of communalism is in the air, no rationalizing is possible.

Ramnik Gandhi, the ‘secularist’ tries to assert a commonality in a conversation with the father of his daughter’s friend:

RAMNIK. ...You must visit us when you are in Amargaon. Yes . . . Mr. Noor Ahmed, Mr. Noor Ahmed, I’m Ramnik Gandhi. I . . . (enunciates distinctly) Ramnik Gandhi. (Makes a joke of it). No relation to the Father of the Nation, of course. It is a common surname...Why, even in your own community ... Hello? . . . (CP 170)

In this phone conversation he also makes it clear that despite not being overtly linked to the ‘Mob’ outside, the idea of separation and difference is deeply internalized within most of us.

A door separates the Gandhi family from the Mob outside, and when Javed and Bobby, knock on the Gandhi door seeking refuge, Gandhi does save their lives and lets them in. Again, however, the action of the text undercuts the overt meanings of the secularist. As Ramnik lets the ‘outsiders’ in, his mother is thrown back into the past, and all the injustices ever done to her are re-invoked:

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! (CP 179)

Aruna, unable to effectively stand up to her husband, asserts her unquestioning belief in right/wrong – if the men were being chased to be killed, they must have done something wrong. This is a comfortable perspective from the centre of society, born of an assurance of security in being part of a dominant position.
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Ramnik clearly acts out of a personal motivation – his sense of guilt is the driving force behind his conscious and structured liberalism, which becomes apparent when he blurts out to Aruna, 'I have to protect them! I need to protect them!' (CP 182)

The subtext is clear – the home/family/society/nation are firmly Hindu, the two young men, literally and metaphorically outsiders, the transgressors. The daughter, Smita is immediately sent inside to her room by her father, the tolerant insider who alone has the power to save the two men from the intolerant outside. The construction of the other is emphasized also by the obvious image of sexual threat posed by the ‘other’ – when Smita comes out of her room and greets the two by name, her entire family is aghast.

Ramnik, despite his tolerant image is extremely uncomfortable with the idea of his daughter knowing the two socially, personally.

ARUNA. (to Smita) You...know them?
SMITA. I know who they are.
RAMNIK. Why didn’t you tell us?
SMITA. I was too confused.
HARDIKA. Where did you meet them? In college?
SMITA. (unsure). Well—yes.
RAMNIK. What does that mean?
ARUNA. Stop her studies! From now on she can stay at home!
RAMNIK. Where did you meet them?
SMITA. I...told you.
HARDIKA. But they are not from here. What were they doing in your college?
BOBBY. It’s alright. Let me tell you...
SMITA. (angrily). No!
RAMNIK. (sternly). For God’s sake! Tell us how you know these... boys! (CP 188-189)

Ramnik only calms down when Smita tells him that she knows the two because Javed is her friend, Tasneem’s brother, and that Bobby is Tasneem’s fiancé. As Smita says:

SMITA. Look, all I know is what I have seen. Bobby comes to college quite often...to meet Tasneem. She...They used to go out quite often...There’s no harm in that, they are getting married anyway.
RAMNIK. No, there’s no harm in that. (CP 189)

Ramnik is a progressive secularist – not only does he save Javed and Bobby from the mob, he also forces his wife Aruna to serve them water, a gesture she makes only when convinced that they wouldn’t actually drink it. After they do, the ‘contaminated’ glasses are picked up gingerly and kept separately from the other glasses in the kitchen. Ramnik also resents the alliance that Javed and Bobby build up in his home, against him:

RAMNIK. (suddenly, angrily). Don’t get so defensive.
BOOBY. (taken aback) I—I’m not being defensive.
All I said was we aren’t thirsty.
RAMNIK. How dare you suddenly join forces? In my house.
BOOBY. I—I don’t understand.
RAMNIK. You have finished college while your friend has dropped out of school. You made that distinction very clear.
BOOBY. Only because we were being clubbed together... (looks at Aruna and away) unreasonably.
But why do you feel I’m being . . . ?
RAMNIK. You resented being clubbed together.
BOOBY. Well, I’m not a college drop-out. (pause.) Well—yes, I resented it.
RAMNIK. Yet when you were uncertain . . . about the reception you would receive, you clubbed yourself together unreasonably. You said we are not thirsty.
You spoke for the two of you. (CP 180-181)

Actually, Ramnik also is conscious of the ‘difference’ as is his wife – the distinction between them however, is that Aruna articulates this clearly from her security of being part of the dominant group, while Ramnik tries to suppress his prejudice. It emerges, however, as it becomes clear that there is a very thin line between tolerance and prejudice, when one is conscious of a divide. When Ramnik speaks of ‘the trouble’ he immediately refers to the Muslim families that live in their galli, ‘They’ve never bothered us, until now.’ (CP 192) Later, when he is told that Javed is looking for a job, he offers him one in his shop – ‘You can handle those Bohra and Memen women who usually pass by our show room. You can stand outside and call them in.’ (CP
194) His guilt of the past surfaces directly when he blurts out—'It will be my pleasure to give you that job. That shop, it used to be...' (Pause.) Take the job, please.' (CP 194)

Ramnik’s actions and deed arise directly from the guilt he feels about the actions committed by his father and grandfather. It was his family that had caused Zarine’s father’s shop to be burnt in riots, after which they bought it at a fraction of its cost. The ‘emotive’ cause of those particular riots is thus clearly demonstrated to be at least partly economic.

Still not considering Javed as simply a young man, seeing him as representative of those wronged by his ancestors, Ramnik proves that he is as ‘communal’ in some ways as those on the other side of the door. And then he finds it only too easy to cross the line between ‘tolerance’ and fanaticism, resorting to the very same stereotypes that are circulated by those seeking to destroy.

When it is discovered that Javed is one of those who were brought to Amargaon to participate in the violence, in fact, to create the riots, Ramnik crosses that line between understanding and allocating blame:

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.) (CP 198)

Ramnik moves in a single sentence, a single thought, from blaming the individual to blaming the community – from seeing the problem of violence as something that could be solved by human understanding and compassion, to an indelible, inherent trait in a whole community - an insoluble problem.

Javed shows Ramnik that Ramnik is not as liberal as he would like to think of himself, as Daksha was shown by Zarine that Daksha was not as
innocent as she thought of herself. As long as we are silent, as long as we do not protest, as long as we accept that the majority does the minority a favour by tolerating them, we participate in violence.

Aruna tells the two men that they should be grateful that the Gandhis gave them shelter, and Daksha felt that Zarine should be grateful that she wanted to be Zarine’s friend. But friendship and tolerance cannot be bargained or asked for.

Javed has a strong belief in himself and his own faith - it is this belief that has led him on the paths of violence, it is his refusal to be apologetic for who or what he is that makes him demand acceptance, if it is not given to him. He does realize that his faith has taken advantage of by those who will profit by the riots, and he also realizes that when it comes to violence, we are all equally guilty.

RAMNIK. You mean they won’t arrest you?
JAVED. Arrest me? When they have been looking the other way all along. How do you think we got into the street? In their vans. They will arrest me. Don’t worry. To please people like you. And a few innocent Muslims to please everyone.

RAMNIK. Perhaps I should throw you to the mob.
JAVED. (sarcastically). Maybe they aren’t being paid overtime. (Laughs bitterly.) And they attacked us! They aren’t very systematic. Next time they should have a round of introductions so we don’t end up killing each other. At least not unintentionally. Ha! You want to throw me to the mob? I am a part of it. You have been protecting me from people like me. I’m no different from them! (CP 204)

An unexpected alliance in the play is that between Javed and Aruna - they are both individuals who have a strong belief in their faith, in the things that shape their identities and their ideas of their selves. Finally forced to realize the position of the other, they are also forced to articulate a respect and tolerance. When Smita declares her difference from her mother, and tells her that she does not share her beliefs or her faith, Aruna is shattered - even more so when Ramnik asks his daughter why she has not articulated her feelings
before and Smita tells him because it would have been a victory for him over Aruna. Suddenly, Aruna realizes the position of an outsider:

SMITA. How easy it would have been for us to join forces and make her feel she was in the wrong. How easy to just push her over because you will have me telling her exactly what you wanted to tell her yourself. (To Aruna.) What would you have done? Shut yourself from us? We wouldn’t let you off so easily. We would’ve hounded you. We wouldn’t’ve let you forget that the spirit of liberalism ran in our blood and you were the oddity – you were the outsider! What would happen to you then? How weak and frustrated would you feel? You do get what I mean, don’t you, Mummy? (CP 213-214)

It is this different perspective that makes Aruna actually change her stance on the ‘outsiders’. She remains silent when Smita asks her to help with the filling of the water, or else ‘they’ will help. In this tacit stretching of the taboos, Aruna is changed, but not crushed – she remains steadfast to her faith, but changes with the times – ‘they’ can help with the general water but ‘not God’s vessel’. (CP 214)

It is only Javed, the ‘other’ believer who is able to recognize and accept Aruna’s position. In fact, he tells her so:

JAVED. (to Aruna). You said the same thing. To her. What I told Babban, you told her . . . you said you wouldn’t listen to her criticism because she was not proud of her – what did you call it? – inheritance. I said religion. Same thing, I suppose. (Pause.) We are not very different. You and me. We both feel pride. (CP 214)

When Smita hands him the ‘God’s vessel’ to prove it wouldn’t fly off into the heaven when he touched it, Javed recoils and refuses to ‘fool around’ with it. Finally allowing the ‘other’ religion the respect they demanded for their own, Javed and Aruna make an unexpected alliance in this text, offering one possible ‘final solution’. But how thin is the line between respecting religion and denying another’s faith?
Bobby and Smita are another such pair – they are similar in that they both reject their communal identities – Smita because she feels stifled, and Bobby because he feels ashamed. This puts each of them in a weaker position vis-à-vis the ‘other’ – Javed and Aruna. This however, is another ‘final solution’ – to deny any context, to attempt to live on your own terms, to reject the past and any other social framework of identity and self-formation. How possible is this solution? Smita rejects the possibility of a relationship between her and Bobby – ‘It was just one evening. A conversation that got a little personal. Nothing more.’ (CP 217) When Bobby asks her if that was a ‘personal’ decision or one of convenience, Smita’s reply is that it was entirely personal. ‘It is wonderful to know that the choice is yours to make.’ (CP 218)

This may be a truly ‘humanist’ solution. But the entire text has consistently subverted the idea of a distinction between the personal and the public – any decision that is based on ‘personal’ considerations is shown to be at least partly motivated by ‘the political’, and vice versa. What then is the ‘final solution’? Is one even possible? Would it be better for us to stop trying to find the final answer, and just try to make our own peace with ourselves and those around us? Is it possible to atone for the past? Can the personal be separated from the public? Is Aruna’s and Javed’s faith the answer? Or does the solution lie in the rejection of the attitudes of Bobby and Smita?

In the last scene, Bobby picks up the idol of Krishna from the pooja room in the Gandhi home and holds it in his hand. He defies Aruna’s cries and the anger of the Mob and asserts his faith in ‘humanity’:

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 other human beings
believe. That is the strongest fragrance in the world!(CP 224)

Does this end constitute Dattani’s final solution? That we try and understand, and believe, and forget and tolerate? It might seem to be. But this final solution may remain just another possibility. The very last scene, after Bobby and Javed leave the Gandhi home, changed forever, is still a bleak one. Ramnik finally tells his mother of the crime committed by his father – how they burnt the shop in the name of communal hatred, because they wanted the shop.

3.1. Gender Equality:

Subordination of women to men is prevalent in large parts of the world. We come across experiences where women are not only treated as subordinate to men but are also subject to discriminations, humiliations, exploitations, oppressions, control and violence. Women experience discrimination and unequal treatment in terms of basic rights to food, health care, education, employment, control over productive resources, decision-making and livelihood not because of their biological differences or sex, which is natural but because of their gender differences which is a social construct. “Sex is considered a fact - one is born with either male or female genitalia. Gender is considered a social construction - it grants meaning to the fact of sex. Conversely, it could be said that only after specific meanings came to be attached to the sexes, did sex differences become pertinent” (Geetha, 10). Gender based discriminations and exploitations are widespread and the socio-culturally defined characteristics, aptitudes, abilities, desires, personality traits, roles, responsibilities and behavioural patterns of men and women contribute to the inequalities and hierarchies in society. Gender differences are man-made and they get legitimized in a patriarchal society. It is important to understand the theoretical dimensions of patriarchy with its empirical experiences. The patriarchy manifests itself in various forms of discriminations, inequalities, hierarchies, inferior status and position of women in society. Thus it is
important to understand patriarchy in terms of its multiplicity, complexities and dynamics.

- **What is Patriarchy?:**

Patriarchy literally means rule of the father in a male-dominated family. It is a social and ideological construct which considers men (who are the patriarchs) as superior to women. Sylvia Walby in *Theorising Patriarchy* calls it “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 175). Patriarchy is based on a system of power relations which are hierarchical and unequal where men control women’s production, reproduction and sexuality. It imposes masculinity and femininity character stereotypes in society which strengthen the iniquitous power relations between men and women. Patriarchy is not a constant and gender relations which are dynamic and complex have changed over the periods of history. The nature of control and subjugation of women varies from one society to the other as it differs due to the differences in class, caste, religion, region, ethnicity and the socio-cultural practices. Subordination of women may differ in terms of its nature, certain characteristics such as control over women’s sexuality and her reproductive power cuts across class, caste, ethnicity, religions and regions and is common to all patriarchies. This control has developed historically and is institutionalized and legitimized by several ideologies, social practices and institutions such as family, religion, caste, education, media, law, state and society.

Patriarchal societies propagate the ideology of motherhood which restrict women’s mobility and burdens them with the responsibilities to nurture and rear children. The biological factor to bear children is linked to the social position of women’s responsibilities of motherhood, nurturing, educating and raising children by devoting themselves to family. “Patriarchal ideas blur the distinction between sex and gender and assume that all socio-economic and political distinctions between men and women are rooted in biology or anatomy” (Heywood, 248).
• Feminism:

"Feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women's labour, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work and in society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation" (Bhasin and Khan, 3). It is a struggle to achieve equality, dignity, rights, freedom for women to control their lives and bodies both within home and outside. As a cross cutting ideology feminists have different political positions and therefore address a range of issues such as female suffrage, equal legal rights, right to education, access to productive resources, right to participate in decision-making, legalization of abortion, recognition of property rights and abolition of domestic violence. Thus feminism passed through several paradigms which are referred to as first wave and second wave of feminism.

Since the origin of patriarchy the establishment of male supremacy can be traced to different factors and forces. Feminists differ in their approach to understand patriarchy and adopt different strategies to abolish it. One way to understand the various dimensions of feminist theories and their theoretical approaches to understand patriarchy is to locate them within the broader philosophical and political perspectives that have been broadly classified as Liberal, Marxist, Socialist and Radical. However, despite the ideological differences between the feminist groups, they are united in their struggle against unequal and hierarchical relationships between men and women, which is no longer accepted as biological destiny.

Feminist theorists generally share four concerns (Jaggar and Rothenberg, 1984 in Mandell, 4) (i) They seek to understand the gendered nature of all social and institutional relations, which determines who does what for whom, what we are and what we might become. (ii) Gender relations are considered as problematic and as related to other inequalities and contradictions in social life. Family, education and welfare, worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure are socially structured through relations of gender,
power, class, race and sexuality. (iii) Gender relations are not viewed as either natural or immutable but as historical and socio-cultural productions, subject to reconstitution. A particular feminist analysis deconstructs errors and myths about women’s empirical realities, and constructs theories by and about women. (iv) Feminist theorists tend to be explicitly political about their advocacy about social change. They challenge the traditional race-class-sexuality-power arrangements which favour men over women, white over non-whites, adults over children and their struggle to embrace inclusivity continues.

- **Structures of Patriarchy:**

  The first lessons of patriarchy are learnt in the family where the head of the family is a man/father. Man is considered the head of the family and controls women’s sexuality, labour or production, reproduction and mobility. In a patriarchal family the birth of a male child is preferred to that of a female. The former is considered as the inheritor of the family while the later is considered as *paraya dhan*. The Indian joint family is the ‘patriarchal family’ and it was constituted by a group of persons related in the male line and subject to absolute power of the seniormost male member (Maine in Uberoi, 363). In the South Asian context, kinship systems are largely based on patrilineal descent which is the foundation of a pervasive patriarchal ideology that rationalizes the differential access of men and women to the material and symbolic resources of society.

  According to Gerda Lerner, family plays an important role in creating a hierarchical system as it not only mirrors the order in the state and educates its children but also creates and constantly reinforces that order (Lerner, 127). Family is therefore important for socializing the next generation in patriarchal values. The boys learn to be dominating and aggressive and girls learn to be caring, loving and submissive. These stereotypes of masculinity and femininity are not only social constructs but also have been internalized by both men and women. While the pressure to earn and look after the family is more on the man, the women are supposed to do the menial jobs and take care of their
children and even other members of the family. It is because of these gender stereotypes that women are at a disadvantage and are vulnerable to violence and other kinds of discriminations and injustices. Systemic deprivation and violence against women in forms of rape, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, female foeticide, infanticide, witch killing, sati, dowry deaths, wife-beating, high level of female illiteracy, malnutrition, undernourishment and continued sense of insecurity keeps women bound to home—economically exploited, socially suppressed and politically passive.

Patriarchal constructions of knowledge perpetuate patriarchal ideology and this is reflected in educational institutions, knowledge system and media which reinforce male dominance. More subtle expression of patriarchy was through symbolism giving messages of inferiority of women through legends highlighting the self-sacrificing, self-effacing pure image of women and through ritual practices which emphasized the dominant role of women as a faithful wife and devout mother (Desai and Krishnaraj, 299). Laws of Manu insist that since women by their very nature are disloyal they should be made dependent on men. The husband should be constantly worshipped as a god, which symbolized that man is a lord, master, owner, or provider and the shudras and women were the subordinates. It legitimized that a woman should never be made independent, as a daughter. She should be under the surveillance of her father, as a wife of her husband and as a widow of her son (Chakravarti, 75). While in ancient India (Vedic and Epic periods), women were by and large treated as equal to men, the restrictions on women and patriarchal values regulating women’s sexuality and mobility got strengthened in the post-vedic periods (Brahmanical and Medieval periods) with the rise of private property and establishment of class society.

Patriarchal constructions of social practices are legitimized by religion and religious institutions as most religious practices regard male authority as superior and the laws and norms regarding family, marriage, divorce and inheritance are linked to patriarchal control. A person’s legal identity with
regard to marriage, divorce and inheritance is determined by his or her religion, which laid down duties for men and women and their relationship. Most religions endorse patriarchal values and all major religions have been interpreted and controlled by men of upper caste and class. The imposition of *parda*, restrictions on leaving the domestic space, separation between public and private are all gender specific and men are not subject to similar constraints. Thus the mobility of women is controlled. They have no right to decide whether they want to be mothers, when they want to be, the number of children they want to have, whether they can use contraception or terminate a pregnancy and so on and so forth. Male dominated institutions like church and state also lay down rules regarding women’s reproductive capacity.

Similarly caste and gender are closely related and the sexuality of women is directly linked to the question of purity of race. The caste system and caste endogamy retained control over the labour and sexuality of women. *Anuloma* and *pratiloma* marriage by definition denigrate women. Caste not only determines social division of labour but also sexual division of labour. Ideologically concepts of caste purity of women to maintain patrilineal succession justified subordination of women. The prohibition of sacred thread ceremony for both women and *shudra*, similar punishment for killing a woman and *shudra*, denial of religious privileges are illustrations which indicate how caste and gender get entrenched (Desai and Krishnaraj, 303-304). Feminist writings as *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens* by Chakravarti illustrates how caste system upholds the patriarchal values and ideology which is used to justify the dominant, hegemonic, hierarchical and unequal patriarchal structures. Therefore it is important to emphasize the substantive question of sub-ordination of certain sections of society and the structures that make their sub-ordination. For feminist scholars the issue is no longer whether the status of women was low or high but the specific nature and basis of their subordination in society (Chakravarti, 25). Hence the historical developments of patriarchy/ies and how they have come to stay are important.
Uma Chakravarti argues that the establishment of private property and the need to have caste purity required subordination of women and strict control over their mobility and sexuality. Female sexuality was channeled into legitimate motherhood within a controlled structure of reproduction to ensure patrilineal succession (Chakravati, 69). According to her the mechanism of control operated through three different levels. The first device was when patriarchy was established as an ideology and women had internalized through stridharma or pativratadharma to live up to the ideal notion of womanhood constructed by the ideologies of the society. The second device was laws, customs and rituals prescribed by the brahmanical social code which reinforced the ideological control over women through the idealization of chastity and wife fidelity as highest duty of women. Like Gerda Lerner she believes that patriarchy has been a system of benevolent paternalism in which obedient women were accorded certain rights and privileges and security and this paternalism made the subordination invisible and led to their complicity in it. The relationship between women purity and caste purity was important and central to brahmanical patriarchy and women were carefully guarded and lower caste men were prevented from having sexual access to women of higher caste. The third was the state itself which supported the patriarchal control over women and thus patriarchy could be established firmly not as an ideology but as an actuality (Uma Chakravarti, in Mohanty, 285). Therefore gender relations are organized within the structural framework of family, religion, class, caste, community, tribe and state.

Thus feminist theories provide explanation for a wide range of particular issues and have been enriched by different approaches and perspectives. The feminist movements need to draw on the strength of all feminist theories as each one on its own is incomplete. In fact, feminism will survive as long as patriarchy persists and the challenge is to establish a viable and coherent third wave feminism, which will explain the changing nature of gender relations and
explore the 'myth of post-feminism' that society is no longer patriarchal as the most obvious forms of sexist oppression have been overcome.

3.1.1. Tara

*Tara* is the most touching three-act stage play by Dattani. It presents a tale of Siamese twins namely Tara and Chandan. The play oscillates between the past and the present events. Most of the plays of Dattani have family and home as the locale. So is the case with *Tara*. The play *Tara*, directed by Dattani himself, was first performed as *Twinkle Tara* at the Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore, on 23rd October, 1990 by Playpen Performing Arts Group, which is established by Dattani. It was performed under the directorship of Alyque Padamsee later on as *Tara* at Sophia Bhabha Hall, Bombay, on 9th November, 1991 by Theatre Group.

Multilevel sets, split scenes, flashback device, double roles, etc. are the noted theatrical techniques of Mahesh Dattani. In this play, the stage is consisted of multilevel sets. The lowest level occupies a major portion of the stage. It represents the house of the Patels. The next level represents the bedsitter of the older Chandan in a suburb of London. This is the only realistic level. At the higher level, Dr. Thakkar remains seated in the chair throughout the play. He is not watcher of the action of the play, but his association is shown by his sheer God like presence. Dan has a triangular task to perform. He is the narrator, organizer of the action and also participant character in the play. The action moves out from his memory. It can be said that it is the remix version of past events happened at Patel household. The play has a very constructive nature of narrative as usual in his plays, breaking and restarting action.

At the beginning of the play, the spot light picks up Dan (older Chandan) at his writing table. He is typing furiously. He stops and looks up and speaks directly to the audience.

DAN. Yes. I have my memories. Locking myself in a bedsitter in a seedy suburb of London, thousands of
miles from home hasn't put enough distance between us. *(Holds up his glass.)* My battery charger helps on some occasions. But now I want them to comeback. To masticate my memories in my mind and spit out the result to the world in anger. *(CP 323-24)*

Dan is writing a play in two acts- *Twinkle Tara,* but he can’t write except publication details. He wrote a short story entitled *Random Raj* dealing with the theme of British Raj. The publishers have turned it down as they didn’t find it worth publishing. The play begins without any music, but slowly music fades in and Chandan and Tara walk onto the stage level. They both have a limp, but on different legs. Bharati offers more milk to Tara as she has lost half a pound weight in one week.

The play *Tara* provides bitter commentary upon gender discrimination and forces of social apathy towards injustice done to even a girl baby under the cloak of gender dichotomy. So it is not just a story about gender identity nor is it a story of medical phenomenon. It presents how women are marginalized to the extent of distorting herself. The play is, in broader sense, a gruesome tale of injustice done to a woman by the patriarchal society. Despite the civilization and development in the human field, we are same at the root of our mind. The play shows how the devil of gender discrimination kills all other bond of familial relationship and how socio-cultural myths and conventions control and construct the course of human life. Bharati’s love for Tara is pure and unceasing, but her maternal love is marginalized as a woman and her subalternity compels her to sacrifice her maternal love to cope up with social expectations. The patriarchal code pushes mother-daughter relationship on the periphery. Adrienne Rich aptly observes:

> Though motherhood is the experience of women, the institution of motherhood is under male control and the physical situation of becoming a mother is disciplined by males. This glorious motherhood is imposed on women, conditions her entire life. *(Rich, 45)*
In this play, Dattani highlights the complex situation in which conjoined twins are trapped by Nature. The manipulation, made by the patriarchal society, creates the situation more complex and intricate. It brings forth the very unhappy and absurd situation for a girl, Tara. It is attributed:

Dattani establishes that mother and daughter relationship is ultimately subordinated to the directives of patriarchy. It makes obvious that women’s lives are organized and manipulated by the patriarchy in all ages, all cultures and all countries by establishing values, roles, gender perception and prescribe unequal means to achieve the ‘wholeness’ for women. (Agarwal, 89-90)

Tara is not just the story of the protagonist of the play Tara, but it is the story of every girl child born in the Indian family whether urban or rural. The situation is aggravated if the girl is physically challenged or there is any other physical or mental deformity in her. It is a bitter example of child abuse present in the Indian societies. Every girl child born in an Indian family does suffer some kind of exploitation and if there is a boy child in the family then the exploitation is very much visible as the privileges are consciously or unconsciously provided to the son. Sudhir Kakar makes a very fine point when he says:

in daughterhood, an Indian girl is a sojourn in her own family and with marriage she becomes less a wife than a daughter-in-law. It is only with motherhood that she comes into her own as a woman and she can make a place for herself in the family, in community and in her life circle (Kakar, 52)

Honesty is the hallmark of Dattani’s plays. He presented characters drawn from contemporary life and society as they are, but not as they should have been. Erin Mee rightly points out:

Tara centers on the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins following the discovery that their physical separation was manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favour the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara). Tara, a feisty girl who isn’t given the opportunities given to her brother (although she
may be smarter) eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan, and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister’s death by living without a personal history. Woven into the play are issues of class and community, and the clash between traditional and modern lifestyles and values. (CP 319)

The play Tara is basically related with the issue of gender bias. It is a pathetic representation of the suffering of two Siamese twins. It is observed:

Tara is about a boy and a girl, Siamese twins. I have taken medical liberty over here because Siamese twins are invariably of the same sex and they are surgically separated at birth. It was important for their survival and the play deals with their emotional separation. (Mohanty, 171)

While there may be many readings or entry points into Tara, one cannot deny that the primary theme that one sees is the way we Indians discriminate between male and female children. We are a country with a long history of female foeticide, and an equally long history of material discrimination against girl children, and women in general.

Tara gives us a glimpse into the modern society which claims to be liberal and advanced in its thought and action. It is therefore evident enough to confirm male chauvinism prevalent in the present society. In a society which claims that its members are educated today and have Devis like Durga, Kali, Saraswati, Lakshmi, etc. whom not only women but men also pay obeisance, differentiate between a male child and a female child. All the propagandas of equality between male and female, equal opportunities to women in all the fields are belied. Dattani has attempted an uphill task of pulling out all the taboo subjects from under the rug and putting them on the stage for public to review.

In Tara, Dattani depicts discrimination against woman (i.e. girl child). It is here that the mother prefers a son to a daughter and in the process causes the death of the girl. This play can be read profitably if we apply feminist and humanistic criticism to it. Ours has been a patriarchal society where men have
always enjoyed a privileged position. With two children (twin) born with three legs between them—two on the girl’s side with regular blood flow and one on the boy’s side. The family takes a decision to operate them giving two legs to the boy and one to the girl. The result is disastrous. Tara dies and Chandan is amputated.

Let us examine the positioning of the girl child in Indian society and then see what happens to Tara and that would give us the answer to the crucial question who is responsible for Tara’s tragedy. What happens to the girl child in the Indian society? She faces infanticide (now she undergoes foeticide, thanks to the evolved technology) and if by chance she is born, she is abandoned either to die, or to be picked up by an orphanage or by a compassionate couple (their number is woefully small) who just want a child. More often than not, the abandoned girl child dies. Ironically, this happens in a society, which has a mythology and with female goddesses being worshipped. Indian society which seeks to occupy high moral ground through its belief in the concept of vasudhev kutumbkam does not hesitate in exterminating its daughters by short term or long-term means. The effect of this type of treatment of girl child was visible in the last census. The number of girls in relation to boys per thousand has alarmingly reduced. India’s self-righteous, sanctimonious and ennobling social concepts do not lend security to the girl child.

It is an irony of fate that the person who was responsible for Tara’s plight is not her father but her own mother. The exchange between Tara’s father, Patel and mother, Bharati makes things clear.

PATEL. (grabs Tara). Look at her, Bharati. And tell her that you love her very much.
BHARATI. Tara knows it. Leave her alone!
TARA. Daddy…
PATEL. Tara, please believe me when I say that I love you very much and I have never in all my life loved you less or more than I have loved your brother. But your mother …. (CP 354)
Bharati’s excessive love and concern for Tara, her concern for her future, her empathy and sympathy for her, her desire to donate her kidney to Tara even when there is another donor, her desire for Tara’s love; everything is motivated by her realization that she has denied Tara a leg, that it was her decision that caused this particular disability in her daughter. It is this horrific knowledge that leads to her mental breakdown as also to the breakdown between her and her husband, Patel. Her anxiety regarding the future of Tara is governed by the realization of the apathy of society for a girl who is handicapped. The fear psychosis haunts her:

BHARATI. It’s all right while she is young. It’s all very cute and comfortable when she makes witty remarks. But let her grow up. Yes, Chandan. The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you—but not her! Oh! the pain is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable and what about forty and fifty! Oh God! (CP 348-349).

A patriarchal society is perfectly presented in Tara where the important decisions are taken by its male members. In a patriarchal society, a woman’s identity is defined by others in terms of her relationship with men. Patel, the representative of the patriarchal authority in the play, clearly differentiates the role of his son from that of his daughter. Certain gendered roles are accepted in the society as natural and hardly does anyone bother to go beyond those accepted norms. Thus it is intolerable for Patel to bear with the scene that Chandan is helping Bharati to sort out her mistake in her knitting.

PATEL. Let Tara do it.
CHANDAN. It’s okay.
PATEL. Give it to her.
CHANDAN. Why?
PATEL. Chandan, leave that damn thing alone!
PATEL. (to Bharati). How dare you do this to him? . . . you can think of turning him into a sissy— teaching him to knit! (CP 351)

The way Patel reacts angrily to Chandan’s helping his mother in knitting highlights how certain roles have been confirmed as female roles in the society
and how the representatives of the patriarchal society strongly oppose any sort of reversed role. Though Tara is no less intelligent than Chandan, Patel thinks only about Chandan’s career. When Chandan says that he will not go to college without Tara and that if Tara has to lose one year for kidney transplant, he too will lose one year, Patel is really unhappy. He repeatedly says that he has some future plans for Chandan, but he hardly shows any interest in Tara’s future.

In an interview Dattani was asked why the gender issue came up in his play as most important over class, caste, religion and science and he replied that the gender discrimination is the most visible form of discrimination in India. He feels that this is an artificial difference. Biologically, there are polarities between the genders, but there cannot be anything which is called cultural polarity. Hence, he draws our attention towards the fact that Tara is not to be treated as a girl who is physically handicapped, but as one who has been handicapped by the very fact that she has been born with gender she has. Besides Tara’s case Dattani also introduces other cases of gender discrimination in the play. Thus Chandan and Roopa talk on the film Sophie’s Choice in which the Polish immigrant Sophie faces the problem of choosing one from her two children, a boy and a girl. Though Roopa fails to follow him and makes fun of a serious topic, the issue is raised by Chandan who is much perplexed by the theme of gender discrimination.

CHANDAN. What would you do if you had to choose between a boy and a girl? Who would you choose?
ROOPA. A boy definitely!
CHANDAN. Definitely?
ROOPA. Yes. It’s bad enough studying in an all-girls’ school. I would definitely want a boyfriend.
CHANDAN. No, No. I didn’t mean that!
ROOPA. Then what did you mean?
CHANDAN. I meant a son and a daughter.
ROOPA. Oh, boy child and girl child. Say that!
CHANDAN. What would your choice be?
ROOPA. Mmm...I would be happy with either one.
CHANDAN. That’s not the point. In the film, I mean.
The Nazis will only allow her to keep one child.
The other one would be taken away to a concentration camp or something. (CP 364-65)

The issue of gender discrimination is thus introduced as casual discussion between a boy and a girl and such discussion supports the main theme of the play that there can actually be no discrimination other than the biological one.

Dattani's use of the mirror image for revealing the feminist attitude deserves special mention. Tara, Chandan and Roopa are discussing the film The Mirror Cracked after seeing it on the video in the living room of the Patels.


TARA. Imagine not being able to have children because somebody gave her German measles when she was pregnant.

ROOPA. How does the poem go?

CHANDAN. 'The curse has come upon me! Cried the Lady of Shallot.'

ROOPA. I feel sorry for the Lady of Shallot. Locked up. Not being able to see the world, you know. Just sitting and weaving a tapestry or something. And having a cracked mirror.

TARA. The mirror cracks later. (CP 346)

The image of the woman holding the mirror to her face is a typical feminine image. In the male dominated society a woman is valued for her beauty and sex appeal. She is always afraid if her beauty withers along with the passage of time and therefore she holds up a mirror which tells her if her youth, beauty and sexual attractiveness remains intact. In their feminist reading of the story Snow White Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest that the mirror, into which every woman looks, reflects not the woman's own image but the patriarchal simulacrum of that image. A woman's self evaluation is ruled by the patriarchal voice of judgement; the woman internalizes the male voice: his voice resides in her own mirror, her own mind. (Gilbert & Gubar, 38)

Intertextual reference to mirror introduced by Dattani, strengthens the issue of gender discrimination which is treated as the central theme of Tara.
Bharati's father further strengthened his indulgence for male grandchild by leaving his property after his demise to Chandan and not a single penny to Tara. He has been a consistent upholder of values pertaining to males.

Tara was more enthusiastic and full of zest and spark of life. She had high aspirations which she could not accomplish because of her handicapped state. Why was then Tara denied the privilege of the good 'leg'? It would have remained workable if attached to Tara's body. Its severance not only made Tara handicapped but also endangered her life and consequently she died an early death. Why? Is it because she was a girl? Is being a girl in this society a curse? But do not the upholders of society realize the fact that without girls, and consequently women, the society will ultimately come to a standstill. As it is, the ratio of women compared to men is much less in our country. Why so much partiality and differentiation is done to women in a country which has a rich heritage and where women are otherwise placed on a pedestal. This seems sheer mockery and nothing of substance.

It is not one individual who has killed Tara. It is the socio-cultural system which is responsible for her death. The beliefs, the attitudes, and the prejudices that are deep-rooted in the collective Indian cultural psyche become instrumental in taking Tara's life. Dattani dwells upon the fate of the girl child in a traditional set up. Roopa, a neighbor, narrates how Gujaratis would drown a baby girl in milk and later give out that the death was because the child choked with milk.

The play shows the good matured brother repenting for his sister's death. In retrospect, he thinks it a sin to deprive his sister of her right to live. He seeks the forgiveness of his sister and wants to be united with her. Chandan’s emotional appeal for union with his sister redeems the injustice done to her by their mother.

CHANDAN. 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. And will hug me. Once again. (CP 380).
This is thus a play about the injustices done in the name of construction of gender identities—this hierarchisation and demarcation of roles does as much harm to men as to women. Dan carries as much of the unfair burden this imposes as Tara. Both Patel and Bharati are complicit in the working of patriarchal norms, but though Bharati has changed because of her sense of guilt, Patel carries on merrily. Dan is the recipient of an ill-starred, unwanted tragic gift, and will carry forever the burden of having wasted Tara's leg and contributing to blighting her life—and this role being assigned to him simply because of his being born a male. He has to pay for the patriarchal sins of his parents (and grandfather). He has to apologize for being a male to Tara, to ask for her forgiveness, to demonstrate how much harm we create by marginalizing the feminine. This is where Dattani's concern for androgyny comes in—if we could learn to value both sides of ourselves, give equal importance to the feminine and the masculine, we would have a completely differently abled world, a world of real abilities and possibilities. That is why the play ends with both of them whole and complete, with two legs each, because they are finally, in his memory, beyond nature and society (and science, embodied in the greed and expertise of Dr. Thakkar).

This play also enlightens us that no matter how much a girl outshines a boy she will remain in the background and can never be given an advantageous position. It being a man's world and the reigns being in their hands, it is very difficult for the woman to fight out her way. Women should cling to each other and in consolidation fight out the stranglehold of the men. It becomes a source of pity when such characters as Tara's mother worsen the conditions. If she had not shown indulgence for the male-child and had done justice with her female-child then both children would have happily flourished and established themselves in the world. It is really shocking to read that Bharati, being an educated mother, showed such shortsightedness. Such incidents do much to hamper the mission of female-upliftment in a male-dominating society. Mahesh
Dattani has succeeded commendably to stir up the spirits of the readers to fortify themselves against any such biased measures in life.

There is an unprecedented development in the field of science and technology. It has blessed mankind with speed, pleasure and perfection. If we look at the other side of coin, we shall come to know that it is also used to cause suffering and pain in the lives of many people. After all, it is the man who operates the machine for his own motives and desires. The play *Tara* shows us how technologically enhanced equipments are used to subjugate the woman. Dattani establishes that it is not machine, but human motives that matter much. Dattani holds red torch against pitfalls of advancement of science and technology.

Mahesh Dattani shows how the women are gasping under the evil clutch of patriarchy and gender bias. To build premise of strong and unshakable nation, sound construction of family is very necessary as it is like the brick in the premise of the nation. Moreover, family is our first society. If this first community or society exists on falsehood of prejudice and conventions, the nation, the larger society, cannot survive longer, cannot flourish and progress.

It is observed:

> Mahesh Dattani frequently takes as his subject the complicated dynamics of the modern urban family. His characters struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, cultural constructions of gender, and repressed desire. His dramas are played out on multi-level sets where interior and exterior become one, and geographical locations are collapsed—in short, his settings are as fragmented as the families who inhabit them. (Mee, 319)

The play also indicates that the patriarchal social set up also deprives women from gaining economical stability. Along with the tragic tale of gender discrimination, an unpleasant document of material discrimination against the woman folk is also woven in the fabric of the text of the play. Since, Bharati was the only child of her father; he has bequeathed Tara and Chandan with
house in Bangalore. However, Tara is excluded from the bequest of money by the grandfather. Chandan inherits a lot of money.

Dattani wants to send the message that gender discrimination is artificial and as long as we continue to do this kind of differentiation, we live in a meaningless condition. Explaining the theme of *Tara* Dattani told in an interview;

The play is misread and people tend to focus on the medical details but that’s really not what the play is about? It’s a metaphor either for being born equal as male or female and sharing so much more and with the surgical separation comes a cultural distinction and prejudices as well, but on the other level, it could also deal with the individual having the male and female self and half the self (female) is, whether your gender is male or female, is definitely given the lower priority. (Uniyal, 182)

3.1.2. Bravely Fought the Queen

It is lively and provocative play which charters through the emotional, financial and sexual intricacies of a modern-day Indian family. A cry for the acceptance of shifting Indian values, this play portrays the clash between traditional and contemporary cultures that has created a new social landscape.

The play was written by Dattani in the year 1991 and was performed at the Sophia Bhabha Hall, Mumbai on 2 August 1991. The play was subsequently performed in 1996 at the Battersea Arts Centre, London, under the aegis of Michael Walling’s Border Crossings, U.K. Michael Walling, while commenting on the British production of *Bravely Fought the Queen* says:

Post-colonial India and multi-cultural Britain both have an urgent need for a cultural expression of the contemporary; they require public spaces in which the mingling of eastern and western influences can take place. (Walling, 229)

The play scrutinizes how far has the position of women really changed in modern times. As Mahesh Dattani states in an interview with Angelie Multani:

A writer always has a theme, a place, a character that proves to be a source of energy without which the
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writer will not have the creative, emotional or intellectual stamina to last through the process of writing. With me it happens to be marginal people among others. Women interest me a great deal. I draw a lot of energy from the women I know. (Multani, 166)

Dattani’s keen and astute insight into the position of women in a middle class domestic household as ‘marginal’ is worthy of appreciation. Dattani through his play, _Bravely Fought the Queen_ presents the ways in which exploitation is now couched in terms of culture and refinement. The playwright presents a classic example of the way in which the process of female silencing is at work in the polished ambience of the drawing room in an urban set up. The presence of women like Dolly and Alka is taken for granted. They are expected with their constant presence at home, to understand the requirements of the ones who are really in charge. This also holds true for Baa who is a representative of the Trivedi brothers and even without coming out of her bed, is able to condition and control the other women in the house. Dolly’s refusal to acquiesce in a conversation in which her assent is implicated shows how insidiously the women are absorbed into the system. Dolly says,

DOLLY. Okay, okay I was around. But I didn’t gather they were calling it off...Sorry, right—you were calling it off...No, I don’t recall. (Sighs.) What difference does it make whether I do or not? The fact is you didn’t tell me directly. (CP 250)

This is not merely an extract from a routine conversation in a middle class domestic household, but one that painfully reflects on the appropriation of women in a class and gender biased society. The patriarchal system with its subtle and devious manifestation in the Trivedi household tries to render Dolly and Alka passive. The women are expected to pick on the dregs of conversations and understand their job, keeping in mind the hectic work schedule of the ones in power. Dolly’s refusal to accept the cancellation of the programme is an act of resistance to accept her passive identity. The least that she is asking for is recognition of her status as a member in her own house. But in patriarchy the position of Jiten or Baa is always the overriding one.

A Ph.D. Thesis, S. R. T. M. University, Nanded (MS)
The narrative is centred around an Indian family, in which two brothers, Jiten and Nitin, the co-owners of an advertising agency, have married two sisters, Dolly and Alka. The women remain at home much of the time, where they look after the men’s ageing mother Baa. As Mahesh Dattani says in one of his interviews:

If you look at my plays you would find that each character, every character has, you know his or her place in the play, which an actor can develop. (Katyal, Web)

Baa and Praful propel events as much as the characters on stage. This kind of genius could be achieved only by a writer like Mahesh Dattani as it is observed:

To Mahesh, a play is never really finished. Plays only really happen in the theatre, as ephemeral events. Painstakingly he worked with actors to recreate his text in a form which suited their approach to performance. (Walling, 229)

It was this kind of skill that made the production of the play a success not only in India but in England too. The whole play is beautifully presented in multi-layered levels. The playwright juxtaposes the past and the present, the imaginary level and the realistic level without breaking the flow of interest.

Act I, ‘Women’, is largely a comedy of manners played between the elder sister Dolly, mischievous dipsomaniac Alka and their unexpected visitor the skittish, ill-at-ease Lalitha. Its final rhapsodic movement paves the way for the second act, in which Jiten, Dolly’s husband, is revealed as comprehensively unsympathetic—a violent lecher whose approach to business is a combination of brainless obstinacy and clumsy scams. Jiten has been portrayed as unfaithful husband as he gets prostitutes to fulfil his sexual libido. He is a sadist who doesn’t hesitate in hurting the other characters present around them. He epitomizes male chauvinism and represents the conventional male who treats women as sex objects and also gets whores to his office. Baa while describing Jiten says, ‘Jitu is just like his father. Just like him.’ (CP 284)
Jiten and Nitin’s father was a cruel and a dark man who harassed their mother. The kind of cruelty perpetrated on Baa by her husband is brought to light every now and then in the play when she feels jittery even after so many years of his death.

BAA. I have married such a villager! Aah! You slapped me? Never, never slap me. Nobody has hit me. The men in our family are decent. (CP 288)

Baa sees the picture of her husband in her elder son, Jiten and thus automatically develops an inclination towards her younger son, Nitin who resembles her a lot. Nitin is a more subdued and sympathetic character. The mother-son intimacy comes out in the following lines.

BAA. Nitin! You don’t like your father, no? He’s not nice! . . . Tell me you hate him! He hits me! Nitin, tell me you hate him! Say it!
NITIN. Yes! I hate him! (CP 302)

Baa’s story is somewhat similar to that of her daughters-in-law, Dolly and Alka. So here we have two generations sharing the same experiences at the hand of their chauvinistic husbands and a yet to come third generation, Daksha who also experiences the maltreatment of her father even before her birth and is born as a disabled child. Dolly exposes Jiten’s cruelty when she says. ‘And you hit me! Jitu, you beat me up! I was carrying Daksha and you beat me up!’ (CP 311)

The result of all this was the premature delivery of Daksha, the disabled daughter of Dolly and Jiten. Then we have Alka, an alcoholic, who did not prove to be an ideal wife of Nitin but then she raises her voice to question her husband.

ALKA. I know I haven’t been an ideal housewife. And you haven’t been a . . . well, a competent husband. But who’s complaining? Nobody’s perfect? (CP 300)

Women in Mahesh Dattani’s plays are not victims. They are marginalized but they fight back. Dolly and Alka arm themselves at the end of the play to fight back. Alka very boldly questions the authority of her husband.
and asks for an explanation for his disloyalty. She also exposes the betrayal of her brother for not revealing the existence of homosexual relations between her husband and her brother. All the women characters in the play are examples of exploitation prevalent in educated urban families and also the examples that women will fight back if they are not heard or are suppressed for a very long time.

Mahesh Dattani portrays his women and their fantasies very candidly as he tells Lakshmi Subramanyam in an interview. ‘I believe I can forget my own gender . . . So those scenes between women didn’t come from an ‘outside’ viewpoint at all’ (Subramanyam, 130). Baa and Dolly’s exploitation is somewhat similar but it is Alka whose anguish and frustration is due to her husband’s homosexual libido and her brother Praful’s deceit of not revealing the reality of Nitin to her. She takes out her resentment in the end when she says;

ALKA. The saint gives his sister to the sinner and disappears! *(Makes a motion of wiping her hands).* Finished. Matter over. Or is it? The saint has another sister who is *(slaps her own face)* bad, bad, bad. He beats her till she gets better. And he has this friend. A best friend! The sinner’s brother turns out to be his best friend. Not such a coincidence. *(CP 300)*

Then there was Kanhaiya, who represents the world of sexuality whether heterosexuality or homosexuality. He might be the alluring cook who might or might not be Krishna of Dollya and Alka; or the dark auto driver who embodies Nitin’s sexual guilt. Nitin at the end of the play exposes his homosexual relations to Alka who is fast asleep after getting drunk.

NITIN. How can you still love your brother after what he did to you . . . ? That’s right. Don’t answer. Just sleep. *(Laughs.)* You always were a heavy sleeper. Thank God. Those times when I used to spend the night at your place, I used to sleep on his cot...And I would go back to Praful’s room...and kneel...Close enough for my breath to fall gently on his face. And he would open his eyes...I loved
him too. He is...was attractive. And he responded...He told me to get married...He told me that you know. That he had told you...about me. (CP 314)

Thus we see that women have not been presented as sinners but they suffer because of the men who are part of their lives. As Mahesh Dattani says in an interview to Lakshmi Subramanyam. ‘I am not sure I have portrayed the women as victims in Bravely Fought the Queen. I see men as victims of their own rage and repression. This has serious consequences on the lives of women’ (Subramanyam, 130). Mahesh Dattani has always been very particular about the correct portrayal of his women characters and he has no biases against them. He says to Lakshmi Subramanyam:

They are humans. They want something. They face obstacles. They will do anything in their power to get it. All I focus on is the powerlessness of these people....And I am not going to change my sensibilities for political correctness either. My only defence is to say that I am not biased against women (Subramanyam, 131).

This attitude of Dattani is clearly revealed in the liberating dance of Alka in the rain. This dance of Alka signifies the sense of freedom from the shackles of society. She seems to be getting ready to fight back, with an imaginary sword swinging in her hand, for all that she has suffered.

The play questions the patriarchal moral code which demands the faithfulness of a woman to her husband but not the faithfulness of a man to his wife. Alka is all armed to fight back and to question the norms set by men for women and this instantly reminds the readers of Dolly’s lines where she says. ‘And we can all go—bravely fought the queen! Bravely fought the queen! Full of many valour’ (CP 296).

Dattani’s use of the bonsai is an interesting trope in the play. On the one hand it reflects on the nurturing aspects of Lalitha. On the other it also unveils the attitude of a power-ridden society towards women. The women in the play are creations like Lalitha’s bonsais. Their shoots or their desires are constantly
trimmed and cut so that they spread only to a particular level. They are not allowed to attain the required height. Their roots are not given ample space to spread. The result of all this cutting and trimming is a bonsai that makes a pretty and expensive object. This is also the case with the women in this play. They too are trimmed in different ways to create the desired effect. Alka, Dolly and Lalitha are all bonsais each of a different kind, with one difference. Unlike the bonsai, their nurturing needs are also not taken care of. But like the bonsais, they too reflect on the beauty and class quotient of their male counterparts. Yet one must keep in mind that this is the only functional motif that is associated with the women in the play.

In the play the women are placed in different and contradictory but realistic positions with respect to the varied ramifications of power in society. The Trivedis consider Alka to be a corrupting force, unable to be a mother and completely lacking in the values of the family. She faces the brunt of domestic violence as she is thrown out and her sister has to plead to the decision makers in the house to take her back. This sheds light on the various aspects related to the position of women in an urban bourgeois set-up. In a so-called liberated set-up women are still judged according to parameters that are age-old but have now taken new form. As Dattani reveals, even in a fast developing society, the relationship between women and alcohol is seen as a taboo or at best, a social requirement. The two conflicting attitudes are reflected in the conversation between Alka and Lalitha:

ALKA. Oh. In that case...let me just add some in mine. *(Picks up the bottle of rum and brings it to where her glass is.)* I have an occasional one. It’s good for digestion. *(Pours a stiff one.)*

LALITHA. I have not-so-occasional ones at parties. It’s nice to get high once in a while.

ALKA. *(guardedly).* Your husband doesn’t mind?

LALITHA. No. I don’t think so. *(Drinks.)* As long as he’s around when it happens, he doesn’t mind. You must do a bit of social drinking too. *(CP 244)*
This exchange makes clear the hypocritical stance of a patriarchal society in the world of capitalism. It is obvious that like all other things, the women too belong to their men. There is a sense of ownership associated with the relationship between men and women within the family institution. Alka who seeks refuge in drinking speaks ‘guardedly’ about the issue. On the other hand, Lalitha lives under the illusion that she is truly a liberated woman. But is that really so? The idea that in the globalised world the women enjoy equal rights in big cities and particularly in the ‘cultured’ households is only a myth. The difference between Alka and Lalitha is only one of degree. They are both still positioned within an exploitative matrix. One of the ways in which it is expressed is that whereas Alka is not supposed to drink, Lalitha can only do so under the guardianship of her husband. The question that arises in Lalitha’s case, is how would Sridhar react if she were to do this on her own? Dattani reveals how under the garb of refinement and social pretence the coordinates of exploitation persist all the same.

The process of policing the actions of women and their behavioural pattern works itself in a devious manner into the lives of the characters in the Trivedi household. Violence is the norm with which the actions of the women are controlled. The quantity of violence generated exists in a direct relation to the acts of rebellion, or in an inverse relation to the level of obedience. Alka and Dolly are managed first by their brother, and then by their husbands. As a brother in a patriarchal society, Praful has the complete right to resort to violence if he feels his sister is going astray. The pain and the pathos of women living in a civilized society of a globalised world are evident in Alka’s words:

ALKA. I told him to drop me before our street came. He didn’t understand and dropped me right at our doorstep. Praful saw. He didn’t say a word to me. He just dragged me into the kitchen. He lit the stove and pushed my face in front of it! I thought he was going to burn my face! He burnt my hair. I can still smell my hair on fire. Nitin was right behind us. Watching! Just...Praful said, ‘Don’t you ever look at any man. Ever.’ (CP 257)
The question that immediately arises is that would Praful or the patriarch of the family have used precisely the same methodology to control a male adolescent in the house? The sexual policing of women is not uncommon in the urban metropolitan society. Women are given liberties according to the whims and fancies of their patriarchs. This scene underlines the transaction that later takes place in the Trivedi household. Alka is passed from the guardianship of Praful to that of Nitin, a trusted friend. She needs to be controlled as if she were a bundle of desires that were going to explode in the absence of any restraint. The Trivedi household considers Alka an amoral drunkard. But why is she still there? This is the result of the carefully guarded secret that Nitin and Praful share which liberates and fulfils the filial duties of Praful, but does not put an end to Alka’s miseries. As she is passed from Praful’s control to that of the Trivedi brothers, Alka’s oppression takes new form. In the new scenario too she does not have the right to feel free or to express herself. As Alka dances in the rain, she is regarded as a drunkard and an immoral and uncivilized woman.

JITEN. Ask her what she was doing outside in the rain.
ALKA. I don’t know! I don’t know what I was doing outside. Aren’t there times when you don’t know what you are doing? (To Nitin.) What’s the harm in that? Huh? (No response.) Tell me. What’s the harm?
NITIN. None. There’s no harm in that. (CP 299-300)

Nitin’s secret that he is a homosexual lies with Alka’s brother and thereby prevents him from exercising full control. Nowhere does he sympathize with her. The control manifests itself through Jiten. It is indeed ironic that the man who has just ‘had it’ with another woman is now making these sweeping claims on morality and is trying to police the actions of Alka.

Trapped in a social matrix that allows little respite, the women seek alternative ways of expression. This is interesting and suggests that despite years of conditioning at the hands of patriarchal impulses, women still have the potential to resist such degenerate social forces. Alka and Dolly have their moments of resistance that make them survive in the oppressive atmosphere of
the Trivedi house. Dolly listens to the *thumri* of Naina Devi who had the support of her husband and was able to flout convention. She defines her sexuality through a fantasy with the cook, Kanhaiya who satisfies her emotional and physical needs. This frames an imaginary sexuality for Dolly as she does not exist on this quotient with her husband. Alka creates her identity through acts of defiance – such as drinking alcohol and dancing in the rain. These give her opportunity to exercise control over her own life. All this manifests itself in her desire to dress up as the Rani of Jhansi, to be the brave queen in the costume party. However, women in this play possess the insight to realize that this too is a paradoxical term. These women identify bravery with the Rani of Jhansi but at the same time they find it difficult to relate to her, as she is the ‘manly queen’. Her bravery has been appropriated into a matrix of patriarchal power that recognizes only men as brave. Dattani subtly reveals how even in the course of history, the immense bravery of women has been grudgingly acknowledged, and appropriated as a male prerogative. This suggests that there is a need to locate areas for empowering female identity as a dynamic trope and not one that remains enveloped in the folds of patriarchy. Even though Alka and Dolly’s thoughts do not transform into reality, the two are able to formulate a resisting subtext to the dominant text of the patriarchal Trivedi household.

*Bravely Fought the Queen* is Dattani’s realistic and poignant presentation of the layers of exploitation in the advertising world and the way it seeps into the domestic scenario. At the end of the day what is important is the profit motive of the manufacturer, the owner of the means of production and the ad agency that thrives because of it. Selling has been glamourized and in the ad world women are used to sell women for men. Dattani’s choice of the advertising agency as a patriarchal construction, the sale of products for women, and most of all, women as targets for the male gaze is apt. It reveals the complete inadequacy of a capitalist economy to create a space for women as primary consumers. The women in this world are products subject to the
lewdd male gaze. Ad-campaigns satiate the perversities of the male gaze as women are expected to dress themselves and throw themselves at their male partners. It is not as if the likes of Jiten and Nitin are few, even as the directors and the consumer surveys resist their ideas. In fact they dominate our civilized society. They determine the way we think, our behavioural patterns and ideological inclinations. In a review of *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Sudeep Sen says,

Much of the play’s tension comes from the interaction between the enclosed, claustrophobic, female world of Act I and the male world of business in Act II. The fact that both sexes are living lives based on fantasy is cruelly exposed when the characters confront each other in Act III, and the realities of their lives emerge. The homosexuality of one of the brothers, the crippled daughter of the other marriage, Baa’s continued presence – all of these facts are concealed in the uneasy world which the characters inhabit. The play becomes a plea for humanity and for tolerance. It is equally a cry for the acceptance of Indian values that are shifting, where tradition and contemporary clash, confuse and create a new social landscape. (Sen, Web)

Jiten’s view represents the view of the dominant male-centric power structures in our society. According to him there is nothing wrong with his approach, as the consumer is not a woman but a man. He says,

JITEN. Yes! Men would want to buy it for their women! That’s our market. Men. Men would want their women dressed up like that. And they have the buying power. Yes! So there’s no point in asking a group of screwed-up women what they think of it. They’ll pretend to feel offended and say, ‘Oh, we are always being treated like sex objects.’ (CP 276)

Jiten’s view is not that of an individual in isolation. It is the view of the bourgeois in a society divided both at the level of class and gender. In it the upper class male has the prerogative of ownership. The system permeates the belief that the purchasing power rests with men alone and has nothing to do with women. Those women who do possess this purchasing power do not fit...
into the patriarchal schema. They can only exist within the system as ‘screwed-up women’ whose voices are aberrant. The only acceptable position for a woman in this scenario is that of a commodified body. To use the term commodity alone would be a misnomer in this case. This is because women are considered commodities primarily because of their body. As Jiten points out, ‘undies’ have nothing to do with women because it is the men alone who buy these products. Moreover, the ad-campaigns have to suit the desire and fantasy quotient of the male so as to enhance the desires of the male partner. It is ironic that a product meant to enhance the comfort level of a women’s basic requirement or a product that would suit her perception of her own sexuality, is viewed as having nothing to do with women.

In Baa’s role Dattani presents a history of the violence against women and the way in which it has taken a new form in Dolly and Alka. Culture has truly refined society as violence takes on more refined or rather more devious forms. Dattani presents patriarchy in its varied manifestations as he shows the insecure Baa taking over the reins of the family. She exercises patriarchal control over the affairs of the family. She is the legal inheritor of the family property. From having been disinherited earlier, as it was her husband who was in control, she has again regained control over her life. But this time it is with a difference. Baa is not merely a woman; she is the patriarch in the guise of a woman. She has become a repository of all the male values in the family. That is why she urges Jiten to beat up Dolly even though she is pregnant. Baa’s intervention is negative and destructive. In making Jiten beat up Dolly she vents her frustration of earlier times. She too has been subject to violence in domestic life. In her case the use of violence was direct, as she says,

BAA. You hit me? I only speak the truth and you hit me? Go on. Hit me again. The children should see what a demon you are. Aah! Jitu! Nitin! Are you watching? See your father! (jerks her face as if she’s been slapped.) No! No! Not on the face! What will the neighbours say? Not on the face. I beg you! Hit me but not on...aaaah! (CP 278)
In Dolly's case the result is a physically and mentally challenged child, Daksha. The future generation has to suffer because of the conflicts and frustrations of the elders. Baa repents as she leaves her property in the name of her granddaughter and makes Praful the trustee. As Nitin gets to know this he is disappointed at being disinherited. He emerges as corrupt and incapable of any sympathy as he realizes that Alka is of no use to him anymore. Jiten has been totally dehumanized at the hands of the system and violence has become an integral part of his life. He believes and enacts his perversities both in his profession and with other women. He carries on the legacy passed on to him by his father where he can only impart violence towards women.

In this play, one can see the figure of the father as a totally dehumanized one. To seek social mobility and to assume the role of the patriarch, he marries a woman in the upper rungs of society. Having usurped financial control, he relegates her to a non-entity in the house. This happened in Baa's case and repeats itself in the case of Alka and Dolly, even as they are not aware of the financial transaction between Praful and the Trivedi brothers. The pathetic condition of Baa in the family has only replicated itself in her daughters-in-law in a different form, whereas the sons have inherited the power perpetrated violence by associating with the figure of the father. It is indeed one of the contradictions in a patriarchal set-up that having been associated with the father figure, Jiten beats up Dolly at the behest of Baa.

This is a play which dives deep into advertising products and improving the prospect of business in a world of cut-throat competition and globalization of economy. Dattani makes things clear in the following dialogues.

SRIDHAR. I told you about the market survey. About a dozen women. A cross-section of upper-middle class, upper class and the stinking rich. We had given them a questionnaire each to fill up after seeing the AV. We needn't go through all of them. (Searches for them.) I had it all computed on one analysis chart. Where is it?

NITIN. Just tell us what they said.

SRIDHAR. I wanted to read out the detailed analysis. All my papers are mixed up!
JITEN. Sort them out tomorrow. Get on with it.
SRIDHAR. I can tell you what the bottom line was. They all said—in different words of course—but most of them used word to describe it—offensive. They all found it highly offensive.
JITEN. Bull.
SRIDHAR. I tried explaining to the directors today that women may not mean that they say, and in our experiences with various products, we’ve come across layers of complexities in consumer behaviour, and that this kind of survey had its limitations and may not work for all products. And this ad will appeal to latent subconscious desires and no overt, superficial, culturally-bound responses. (CP 274-75)

In Act III (Free for All), we find that Dattani seeks to bring a reconciliation between men and women. If Act I and Act II are to be taken as thesis, anti-thesis and then Act III brings, synthesis to the play. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri makes a pertinent point when she says:

When the two worlds converge violently in the last act, all the characters stand exposed, the sham and facade ripped apart. There are pointing fingers everywhere, the past and the future collapse into the present and the space of the stage is suddenly constricted and unable to accommodate the burden of the suddenly unloaded baggage. Dolly somehow emerges here as the strongest character, supporting a drunken Alka and roundly revealing the torturous truth about Daksha. Jiten, the aggressive oaf, is driven to guilty tears and he implicates Baa in his abuse of a pregnant wife before he finally drives off, crushing the old ragpicker in the driveway, to death. Sridhar, who has already revealed himself to be every bit as egotistical as Jiten seems now to don the mantle of the stereotypes as he prepares to leave with Lalitha. The play ends with Nitin finally revealing his ‘gay’ relationship with Praful, and the closing spotlight falls on the pitifully huddled figure of Alka in her drunken slumber before darkness envelopes the stage. (Chaudhuri, 56-57)

Men and women seem to think differently. If men lay emphasis on business, women seek a way out to enjoy their life. What makes matters worse between them is the gay relationship among men. Men and women fell apart. It
is another matter that they come to understanding with each other for the sake of family and children.

3.1.3. Where There's a Will

*Where There's a Will* was first performed by Playpen at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, on 23 September 1988, as part of the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival. It was subsequently translated into Hindi by Rajendra Mohan.

Sita Raina, a well-known actress and theatre director writes in a note on the play that Mahesh described the play as the exorcism of the patriarchal code. Women—be it daughter-in-law, wife or mistress—are dependent on men and this play shows what happens when they are pushed to the edge.

The play is divided into two acts and each act is subdivided into two scenes. The narrative of the play takes places in the lavish house of Hasmukh Mehta, a doyen businessman and staunch follower of patriarchal system. The dramatist has introduced the ghost of Hasmukh Mehta to make watcher of his own actions. The stage is divided into three spaces namely the fancy dinning cum-living room, the bed room belonging to Hasmukh and Sonal Mehta, and the hideously trendy bedroom of their son Ajit, and his wife, Preeti. Hasmukh strictly followed steps of his father in his life. He wants his own son Ajit follow his footsteps in real life. He exercises the patriarchal authority over all the members of his family. He believes in ‘absolute power’. The dramatist focuses on fractured interpersonal relationship within the range of familial relationship. Like all modern families, there is a lack of emotional attachment and understanding towards others’ views and opinions. Through the interpersonal relationships between members of the family, the playwright has presented the water tight patriarchal code.

The theatre attempts to articulate mores and manners of the society intending to cheer people by lifting them from physical, social and mental problems and afflictions and also offers a piece of advice for leading life in a healthier and happier way. Dattani’s plays have Gujarati family as the setting.
or locale. The present play *Where There's a Will* deals with the mechanics of middle class Gujarati family, showing how patriarchal canons control not only the lives of women of the family but also men of the family.

The traditional notion of marriage and having a son is one of the Indian social beliefs. The parents and grandparents in Hindu families do wish to have their children get married and have at least a son soon. This strengthens the patriarchal system in Hindu society even today after so many influences due to western education, liberalization and globalization. The birth of a girl child is an undesirable thing and even if they are born, they are supposed to go to their husbands' houses leaving their own homes and families after marriage. Hasmukh Mehta, the central character in the play echoes the same belief.

HASMUKH. Why does a man marry? 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 is 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. *(CP 474-475)*

The play focuses on emptiness and uselessness of strict adherence to patriarchal code. One of the major thematic threads that dissect from the play is the conflicting relationship between father and son. It depicts the clash between conservative notions and contemporary generation. Both father and son have their own viewpoints regarding life and business. The father strictly believes that he has right notions regarding son’s life, whereas son rejects the idea of complete command over his life. At the very beginning of the play, Ajit expresses his displeasure regarding his father’s idea. He is quite young and innovative. He wants to give touch of modernity to his plant. He needs five lakh rupees. Hasmukh doesn’t trust his son’s ways of world and his ability of dealing with business affairs. He considers him ‘zero’ in business and practical affairs, whereas Ajit feels that his father is hard-liner and stubborn fellow. He
doesn’t respect anybody’s say in decision making process. Hasmukh thinks that his son is very novice and silly in the world of business. He makes mockery of his son and shows his displeasure towards his attitude.

Hasmukh Mehta, forty five years old rich businessman is a self-made man who enjoys supreme authority at home and at his work place. His authority at home is somewhat disturbed by members in the family whereas he enjoys it unquestionably at his office. He dwells on his past and remembers how he was taught to work hard by his father. He never complained against his father and followed everything his father ordered him. He is very proud and egoist who derides his son whenever he finds opportunity.

HASMUKH. Today, I, Hasmukh Mehta, am one of the richest men in this city. All by my own efforts. Forty-five years old and I am a success in capital letters. Twenty-three years old and he is on the road to failure, in bold capital letters! At his age, I was a mature responsible man, not eating my father’s head nibbling at papads! (CP 464)

He thinks that his son Ajit must obey him and follow his orders. He doesn’t give him money to invest because he thinks that his son is a spendthrift and doesn’t have any plans for future. Ajit doesn’t have any right over anything which belongs to his father. Ajit thinks that he has innovative ideas in his mind which he wants to implement but his father thinks that his son is a failure.

AJIT. And then I can do all the things I’ve been wanting to do. All the changes I’ve been thinking of making ...(CP 457)

There is a generation gap of ideologies between father and son. Ajit tries to rebel against his father’s authority in his own way. We see in him individualistic bend of mind. He wants to do the things or express his opinion on his own.

AJIT. Nobody taught me anything! Why is it that everything I say or do has to be something that somebody has told me or taught me to do! (CP459)

Hasmukh Mehta exercises hegemonic power over the rest of his family members to perpetuate his own conception of ‘self’ which he has in turn
received from his father. He does not allow Ajit to speak to government officials or to discuss business matters with his friends. His absolute authority over his business, house and other articles is amazing and ridiculous. He challenges the identity of Ajit, ‘Hasmukh Mehta, has every right. It’s my phone you are using in my house, and it’s my business secrets you are leaking to government officers, and my typists your friend is flirting with’ (CP 458). In the presence of Hasmukh, Ajit survives as a subaltern who can’t even speak. He has a realization of his position but has no power to express his choice. He expresses his anguish, ‘Anything I do is wrong for you! Just because you are a self-made man and had a deprived childhood’ (CP 459). The over interference of Hasmukh in the life of Ajit manifests the horrors of patriarchy that aims to control freedom and selfhood of all those who come under its umbrella. Ajit inspite of being a simpleton is aware enough to ridicule the passion of his father. Hasmukh is confident that Ajit would not be able to make space for himself without his protection and guidance. He calls Ajit a ‘zero’:

Hasmukh’s consciousness of his authority, his contempt for the simplicity of his son, his mockery of the submissiveness of his wife prepares a very ridiculous image of patriarchal authority. For him Ajit is his investment and he seeks the return of his own investment, ‘I made him...happy. That is what I wanted my son to make me. But he failed! Miserably! He has not a single quality I look for in a son! He has made my entire life worthless!’ (CP 475).

He even tries to control the behaviour of his son after his death through his ‘will’. He makes every arrangement as regards his money, his business affairs and makes a trust by the name Hasmukh Mehta Trust and appoints
Kiran Jhaveri, his former mistress, the trustee of the trust. He has made an arrangement of not to give a single rupee to his son till he turns forty five and when his grandchild becomes twenty one then the trust will be dissolved and Ajit and his heirs can have right over money of his father. But there are many conditions laid down according to which he has to live his life till he turns forty five. If any of the members in the family tries to behave against the conditions in the ‘will’ then all the money and the house they live in will be donated to the various charitable trusts mentioned by Hasmukh Mehta in his ‘will’. As per the conditions in the ‘will’ Ajit has to go to office regularly at 9 am and work there till 6 pm. He has to have his lunch at his office itself. He can’t make any decisions there and his new projects will not be sanctioned and he will have to obey the orders of Kiran Jhaveri.

Hasmukh Mehta treats his son like a slave and doesn’t consider that he has his opinions, ideas, choices and individuality. He thinks that his son must step into his shoes and wants him to be his replica. Ajit is always aware of his own personality and wants to have his own identity and is struggling to find a way out. But his father expects his son to be a good boy who would listen to his father and wouldn’t allow him to use his ideas.

**AJIT.** Don’t I have any rights at all?
**HASMUKH.** You have the right to listen to my advice and obey my orders.
**AJIT.** Thank you. You are so generous I could kiss your feet.
**HASMUKH.** There’s no need to do that. Just polish my shoes every morning and I’ll be happy.
**AJIT.** You will never be happy. Not until all of us dance to your tune. And I will never do that.
**HASMUKH.** Don’t be so stubborn!
**AJIT.** You are stubborn too!
**HASMUKH.** I’m stubborn because I know I’m right. You’re stubborn because you are a nincompoop!

(CP 458)

In the patriarchal system the father acted more or less in a despotic manner. In his eyes the son never grew up. He thought that his experiences of life entitled him to have the last say in everything. So he considered the efforts
of his son for self-assertion as his own defiance. This is what happens in this play also. Hasmukh’s father was a typical patriarch. When his elder son ran away from home to join a group of hippies, he tightened his control over the other son, Hasmukh, who was taken out of school and put to hard work in the factory that his father had set up. Hasmukh is obliged to his father for the training that he gave him. He holds that if today at the age of forty-five he is a very successful industrialist and one of the richest men in the city, it is all because of the schooling that he had under his father. He is unhappy with his son, Ajit, because he would not follow in the footsteps of his father. He tells him that he needs ‘seasoning’ to make him fit to run the company when his father would be no longer there. Ajit reacts to this by saying that he wants his son to be merely an extension of him:

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 when 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.

HASMUKH. I should have prayed for a daughter. Yes, I want you to be me! What's wrong with being me?

AJIT. And what becomes of me? The real me, I mean, if I am you, then where am I? (CP 460-461)

This is basic conflict between father and son in this play. The father wants a typical submissive, hardworking and obedient son. He has no use for a son who is imaginative, individualistic and independent. The son, on the other hand, is not ready to be merely a prototype of his father. He believes in living his own life and thinking his own thoughts. For playwright, the real danger of the patriarchal code lies in denying an individual the opportunity for an independent growth. In the name of tradition and good manners and even duty, the son is expected to follow blindly, whatever, he is asked to do. This will deprive a man of his drive and initiative. Dattani calls the men who demand this kind of obedience as ‘weak men with false strength’. He also condemns those who submit to this type of subjugation.
Hasmukh is very particular about his son's name. He believes in the literal and symbolical meaning of name and insists in calling him 'Ajit'.

HASMUKH. You know, I always hated the way she called him 'Aju'. I never did complain. Maybe I should have. I gave him a strong forceful name, Ajit. It means 'the victorious'. A powerful name like that should be bellowed out. *(Bellows.)* Ajit! It didn't take her long to change 'the victorious' into *(mimics Sonaiy)* 'Aju'. *(CP 497)*

Marginalisation of women characters in a male dominated world is one of the recurrent themes Dattani handles in his plays. Through the microcosm of family he has succeeded in voicing the problems of fair sex. Women are victimized, exploited and are not given any space at home and at work place. The play has three women characters but all are victims of patriarchal code in some or the other way. The very statements made by Hasmukh Mehta regarding his wife shows how he thinks about his wife in particular and about women in general.

HASMUKH. 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? *(CP 472-73)*

He looks at his wife, Sonal as a disinterested and passive woman and regrets of marrying her. He looks at his married life as a tragedy and doesn't give any freedom to her. Hasmukh takes it as his right to display his dreams in which there is no space for the desires of others. Hasmukh's statement about his wife strikes a tone of sarcasm and sexual colonialism. For him a faithful wife is as good as a faithful dog. 'Then I should be a very happy man. I've got a loving wife who has been faithful to me like any dog would be' *(CP 475)*. He accuses
his wife for wasting money in preparing rich dishes. He acknowledges Sonal’s company as the greatest tragedy of his life:

HASMUKH. Then when I was twenty-one, the greatest tragedy of my life took place. I got married to my wife, Sonal. You will soon meet her. The following year Ajit was born. Tragedy after tragedy. (CP 464)

Irony is obvious, Sonal is a tragedy of his life but she is every time careful for his tablets, high blood pressure and heart attacks. Hasmukh’s passion for authority and Sonal’s extreme submissiveness produces sentimental humour. Sonal’s responses are also mechanical, ‘If anything happens to you, they’ll say, I neglected my duty’ (CP 471). He condemns his wife for her inability to realize the intricacy of business and her failure to provide him a good and healthy married life.

Sonal is meek and subservient and always dances to the tune of her husband. She doesn’t have her opinions in her life. We see that even in kitchen Sonal doesn’t have freedom to cook the dishes she likes and when she wants to have a cook at her home, she consults her sister. So, it is quite possible that her dominating husband would rule her. Hasmukh Mehta doesn’t remain faithful to his wife and keeps an affair with his secretary, Kiran Jhaveri. In his ‘will’ he doesn’t make any arrangement of giving anything to his wife except some allowance to run the house. Through his ‘will’ by making provision of his former mistress’s living at his home with his wife, he has compelled Sonal to have feeling of inferiority and inadequacy as a wife.

SONAL. I know why! This is his way of getting even with me! Your presence will keep reminding me of how . . . inadequate I was. Oh, he had planned it to the last detail! (CP 494)

Another woman, Preeti, Ajit’s wife also suffers badly due to the patriarchal code but her suffering is not as serious as her mother-in-law’s because her behaviour deserves it. She has married Ajit hoping that he would inherit his father’s property after his death. She was after her father-in-law’s money. Hasmukh Mehta has identified her nature and at the beginning itself
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says that she is sly like a snake. His later remarks regarding her help audience understand her true nature.

HASMUKH. There’s one more reason why I want Kiran here. To keep a check on my daughter-in-law. If there is anyone who has me worried, it’s her. She is a clever piece. Might find some loophole in the will. But Kiran is too clever for her.

(CP 496)

The thing becomes quite clear when she argues with Ajit that it was only because of him that she didn’t get anything from her father-in-law. The very language, curt replies and her behaviour with her mother-in-law and Ajit after Hasmukh Mehta’s death and revelation of ‘will’ itself is an indicative that she was after his money. She doesn’t have any attachment with other members in the family. For the sake of money, she goes to the extent of replacing the blood pressure tablets of Hasmukh Mehta with her vitamin tablets and causes his death. It is Kiran who finds it out but instead of disclosing it in front of other members of family, she points it out to Preeti and makes her realize and regret her mistake.

Kiran Jhaveri, Hasmukh Mehta’s mistress and one of the directors of Mehta Group of Industries and the trustee of the Hasmukh Mehta Trust is another victim of patriarchal set up but not at the hands of Hasmukh Mehta but from her husband. She keeps an affair with Hasmukh Mehta out of her necessity because her husband is jobless and daily he needs a bottle of whisky. She manages to get a company flat in a posh locality and also is on the directorial board of the company. She is an intelligent woman having sound judgement of her life, work and other problems which she faces and resolves successfully.

KIRAN. I managed. I managed my work, I managed my house, I managed my husband.

SONAL. And mine too.

KIRAN. Yes. Your husband. And your house too now. I suppose that is what he liked about me. I am an efficient manager. I guess I was . . . useful to him

(CP 505)
From the materialistic point of view she is a successful woman but she does it against her wish as her husband is a useless fellow. The relation had grown not out of her love for Hasmukh Mehta but out of pity and dependence on her:

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. Hasmukh didn’t really want a mistress. He wanted a father. He saw in me a woman who would father him! (CP 510)

The play *Where There's a Will* shows that there is no significant improvement in the plight of the women as though there is spread of education and progress of mankind in almost all the human sectors. It seems that male pride or ego is the root cause of the present plight of the women in our society. Earlier, it was strongly believed that empowerment of women can be done through imparting proper education and employment. The play seeks to present that education and economical empowerment has failed to improve the quality of women’s lives in our society. This is quite explicit through the conversation between Kiran and Sonal. Kiran is well educated and employed in the office of Hasmukh Mehta, who later on, raises her to the position of directorship. Sonal is not fortunate enough to have proper access to education. So, she considers Kiran a fortunate lady. Kiran falsifies Sonal’s notion by narrating her unhappy past. Neither education nor economic independence would help women in gaining their dues unless male ego undergoes complete transformation. The agony of being a woman in such a society is well expressed by Kiran when she recalls her past to Sonal, who thinks her lucky as she is educated.

KIRAN. 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...Yes, Mrs Mehta. My father, your
husband—they were weak men with false strength.  
(CP 508)

Hasmukh Mehta's parental authority was tension not only for Sonal and Preeti, but also for Kiran. She confesses that she managed her relationship with an old and erratic man like Hasmukh, only for the money. Preeti, a caring daughter-in-law also turns out to be a passionate desirous of money. Sonal discards the authority of Hasmukh with a very derogatory comment, 'He was like a village buffalo. What did he understand about other people's feelings?' (CP 507) The reactions of these three women led to a common conclusion that they are not so weak and subjugated as they seem to be. The confession of antagonism against male autonomy is a mockery of patriarchal tradition. Dattani’s vision has come close to the finding of Mody and Mhatre who assert that Indian women are capable of ‘speaking’. A ‘little encouragement is needed for Indian woman to shake off their imposed reticence and speak on her own behalf of her problems and their solutions’ (Mody and Mhatre, Web) Dattani’s efforts to let Kiran, Sonal and Preeti speak against the authority of Hasmukh, is not a sentimental defence of Indian feminism. Dattani’s women at the surface survive within the locale of the family but at mental level, they are capable to evaluate, analyze and reject the irrational patriarchal authority. Preeti and Sonal in spite of their silent acceptance are intelligent enough to detect the hidden motives of Hasmukh. Kiran sarcastically reveal that Hasmukh’s own identity was subordinated to her care and protest.

At last Hasmukh realizes that his attempts to control the family were in vain and also that whatever he has achieved in life was all his father’s aspirations and not his own but now it is too late as he is now only a ghost watching the whole thing:

HASMUKH. Is it . . . true? Have I merely been to my father what Ajit has been to me? Have all my achievements been my father’s aspirations for me? Have I been my father’s ghost? If that is true, then where was I? What became of me, the real me? (CP 511)
If *Thirty Days in September* is Dattani’s most serious play, *Where There’s a Will* can be called as the most hilarious one. He criticizes patriarchy but he is never didactic and his tone is comic throughout the play. It is rightly observed by Sita Raina, a theatre director, ‘Joy is the essence of life and I have always believed that theatre should exude delight. *Where There’s a Will* is such a play. It is not only thought-provoking and introspective but also provides an evening of pure entertainment’. (CP 451)

Thus *Where There’s a Will* makes a bold statement in favour of the individual’s right to live his or her life according to his or her own right. One may fail or come to grief but at least one would be daring to face life on one’s own.

3.1.4. Dance Like a Man

*Dance Like a Man* is a powerful human drama that provides an insight into the contemporary Indian social scene, reflecting aspirations of a middle class South Indian couple, who by their choice of profession as dancers, reflect the past and the present Indian culture, identities and gender roles. The play deals with a couple, Ratna and Jairaj, two Bharatnatyam dancers, past their prime age. They live in an antique mansion that once belonged to Jairaj’s father, Amritlal Parekh that is a stiff reminder of their authoritative past. Jairaj and Ratna, in their youth, are exposed to the ire of Jairaj’s father, who does not understand their devotion to dance. Amritlal Parekh is entrenched in his own tradition and believes that Bharatnatyam is a craft of prostitutes. He thus feels that no self-respecting person should perform such a dance, particularly a man. Two decades later, the couple are forced to confront their troubled past, when their daughter Lata, preparing for her debut as a dancer, brings her fiancé Viswas, into their home to meet her parents. Exposed to this alien environment of dancers, Viswas acts as a catalyst to reveal dark secrets of the family’s relationships and its generational conflicts that climaxed in the horrific death of
the son of Ratna and Jairaj. To the question: could you tell me more about your other plays? By Ranu Uniyal, Dattani replies;

Well, the other play which I think I could talk about is *Dance Like a Man* which is about my Bharatnatyam background. It is about Bharatnatyam dancers. Again in their old age, when they are in their 60s and they are looking back on to their struggling days, when they had their ideals and in the 50s where there was a stigma attached to the dance forms; that it is a dance form of the Devdasis. It’s a prostitute’s dance and people from respectable families didn’t perform or practice that dance form. It is doubly difficult for the man. You know, what business does a man has learning a prostitute’s dance. So it brings about gender roles, what is expected of gender as well. And also the tensions between the couple and how they solve, how they felt that they used their relationship to develop their careers, dances and how they reconcile to the fact that the time wasn’t right for them. (Dattani, 2005, 182-83)

It is a play about dance as a profession as well as vocation. The basic question that perturbs the minds of the audience is that can a man take to dance as a profession? And it is linked with another question—that is, should a man allow his wife to practice dance at the cost of the family life. Jairaj allows his wife Ratna to practice her dance much against his father’s (i.e. Amritlal’s) wishes. Ratna too encourages her daughter Lata to dance. Lata tells her lover Viswas about her grandfather who built the grand house and blamed his son Jairaj for being a dancer. But in spite of their differences, Jairaj always respected his father. Jairaj has a great attachment for that house built by his father and would not sell it under any circumstances. Lata makes this clear to Viswas who suggested that the house should be sold, for it would fetch a large amount. Lata replies ‘No. He would never do that’ (CP 388). They have spent all their dancing lives here. Male prejudice against dance is seen in Viswas’s very first observation, ‘Dancers stay at home till it’s show time’ (CP 387). Lata too is apprehensive about her future as a dancer, if Viswas would not allow her to dance, ‘Actually they couldn’t care less who or what you are. As long as you
let me dance' (CP 388). Lata has an innate passion for the instruments, sounds, vibrations, rhythm because she inherited the art of dance from her parents. She has insecurity that the responsibility of married life would ruin her art, her freedom and her individuality. She implores, ‘When we are married—you will let me come here to practice’ (CP 389). Even she denies to conceive children, ‘And we won’t have children’ (CP 389). The apprehension of Lata is an unconscious carriage of the burden of crisis of her own parents.

All the action of the play takes place in the present living room of Jairaj Parekh. Since the play oscillates between time past and time present, the present living room often changes into a rose garden, which denotes past events and presents, Amritlal Parekh, the father of Jairaj, as the head of the patriarchal family system. The living room is associated with present showing Jairaj and Ratna in their sixties and rose garden indicates past showing Jairaj and Ratna as a young couple. With the change of spot light, the scene keeps on changing. Dattani has managed economical arrangement of the actors. All the performers are assigned double role. In all, there are four performers. Out of the four, three perform the dual roles. Young boy performer plays the role of young Jairaj and Viswas, Lata’s fiancé and young lady performer plays the role of young Ratna as well as Lata. Only the old woman performer is assigned a single role i.e. role of older Ratna. The older Jairaj also plays role of his father. Dattani is quite aware of the dynamics of theatre and proper usage of available resources. Economy of actors imparts a rare touch to the play.

As the play proceeds, Ratna gets worried about her daughter’s dance performance scheduled to be held that evening. Since it is about her making a career as a dancer, Ratna takes extra precaution for it. She tells her husband with excitement that;

RATNA. Our daughter is giving a performance that will make her career and she is not going to have mirdangam playing for her. How do you expect her to give her best? How do you expect her to dance? What will we announce to the President of India?
There will be no dance tonight? Tell all those foreign diplomats to go home? (CP 401)

Ratna’s projection of her suppressed desires on the career of her daughter is a manifestation of the fact that she still fails to compromise with her choices. What she had lost in her life, she wanted to achieve through Lata. It was a desperate attempt to make a challenge to patriarchal authority. Getting frustrated with the failure to get a mirdangam player for Lata, Ratna recalls her father-in-law’s attitude to dance and quotes his views before her husband.

RATNA. Yes, your father was right. Dance has brought us nowhere. It’s his curse on us. Nothing seems worth it any more. Oh, it is all so...worthless. You should have listened to your father. He was right. We were never anything great, never will be, and nor will our daughter be anything but an average human being. (CP 402)

She blames her husband for not leaving her father-in-law’s house; ‘You stopped being a man for me the day you came back to this house...’ (CP 402) She tells him and holds him responsible for not getting recognition in life. However, Lata pacifies her by saying, ‘Mummy, whatever happens, I’m going to dance at the fest. For all those people and for you.’ (CP 402)

In a flashback, Jairaj recollects how he was stopped by his father to do rehearsal in his house and questioned why his guru was staying whole day in their house.

AMRITLAL. I want this din to stop. I want Guruji out, that’s what I want. I’m expecting some people and I want those musicians out before they arrive. (CP 413-414)

Amritlal believes in traditional notions of masculine and feminine gender. He associates masculinity with strong physique, short hair, and the style of walking which is ‘manly’. He can’t accept his son Jairaj’s association with the kind of man who doesn’t fulfil these traditional notions of masculinity.

AMRITLAL. I have no objection to your efforts in reviving the art, but I definitely do object to the people you are associating with. JAIRAJ. Who do you mean?
AMRITLAL. Your guru. What kind of a family is he from?
JAI~AJ. His mother was not a devdasi, if that’s what you wanted to know.
AMRITLAL. Why does he wear his hair so long?
JAI~AJ. Why do you ask?
AMRITLAL. I have never seen a man with long hair.
JAI~AJ. All sadhus have long hair.
AMRITLAL. I don’t mean them. I meant normal men.
JAI~AJ. What are you trying to say?
AMRITLAL. All I’m saying is that normal men don’t keep their hair so long.
JAI~AJ. Are you saying that he is not . . . (Realizes the implication.) Are you saying . . . ?
AMRITLAL. I’ve also noticed the way he walks.
JAI~AJ. (angrily) This is disgusting. You are insane! (CP 417)

Amritlal even doesn’t like the idea of his son growing long hair. When he comes to know about it, he very strongly objects it.

RATNA. Oh, he told you?
AMRITLAL. What?
RATNA. That he is planning to grow his hair long? It would enhance his abhinaya.
AMRITLAL. I see. And was that his idea, or maybe yours?
RATNA. Actually, it was Guruji’s suggestion.
AMRITLAL. Tell him that if he grows his hair even an inch longer, I will shave his head and throw him on the roads. (CP 418)

He recalls how his authoritative father curved down all his passions, warning him against the art of dancing that was socially neglected art and only permissible for the women like ‘Devadasi’, the temple dancer. He is discouraged by desperate comments, ‘Where will you go being a dancer? Nowhere! What will you get being a dancer? Nothing! People will point at you on the streets and laugh and ask, ‘Who is he?’ ‘He is a dancer.’ ‘What does he do?’ ‘He is a dan...’ (CP 397). On being challenged by his son Jairaj about the dignity of dance, Amritlal says, ‘I have no objection to your efforts in reviving the art but I definitely do object to the people you are associating with’ (CP 417). Amritlal was unhappy with his son, Jairaj because he looked odd as a dancer. That is
why he wanted his daughter-in-law to help him to look like a man. He tells Ratna, 'A woman in a man’s world may be considered being progressive. But a man in a woman’s world is pathetic' (CP 427). The playwright tells us how the autocratic father tries to check the movements and manners of his son and his daughter-in-law, although the father is considered as a man of progressive ideas and liberal views. The playwright dramatizes the conflict between the age and the youth through the characters of the old father and the young son. The family ties and marriage discord are highlighted through a series of conflicts among the members of a single family. Amritlal Parekh upholds the traditional values, whereas his son, Jairaj, seeks to overthrow it through his course of action.

JAIRAJ. I can’t even have a decent rehearsal in this house.

AMRITLAL. You can’t have a decent rehearsal in this house? I can’t have some peace and quiet in my house! It’s bad enough having had to convert the library into a practice hall for you.

JAIRAJ. Nobody’s forcing me.

AMRITLAL. She may be influencing you. May be it’s her, not you. That’s one thing I regret. Consenting to your marriage.

JAIRAJ. Don’t pretend. It suited your image—that of a liberal-minded person—to have a daughter-in-law from outside your community. (CP 414-415)

The conflict in the life of Jairaj with his father is a conflict of colonial sensibility and progressive ideology, social expectations and individual choices. The traditional bondages of Amritlal don’t permit Jairaj to exercise his own will. He challenges his father, ‘Reform! Don’t talk about reform. If you really wanted any kind of reform in our society, you would let them practice their art.’ (CP 416). Amritlal stood for social acceptability and for Jairaj it was a matter of his own identity. The gender defined roles are so strongly rooted that Amritlal even does not accept Guruji’s long hair and the way of walking. Ratna is assertive and more competent to fight for her identity, ‘You can’t stop me from learning an art!’ (CP 421) Ratna’s protests to make her spaces, to
defend her rights are all desperate strategies to obscure the grace and confidence of Jairaj. She has no hesitation in exploiting his ‘manhood’ and his creative talent to protest her own. She informs that Jairaj would soon learn another art form Kuchipudi, and triumphantly asserts, ‘In Kuchipudi the men dress up as women!’ (CP 422) and laughs triumphantly. The unnatural laughter of Ratna against the nervousness of Jairaj signifies that unconsciously she endeavours to empower his masculine self. Amritlal had an insight into the weakness of Ratna but Jairaj was too innocent to realize this fact.

In a flashback, Ratna recalls her father-in-law questioning her for going to Chenni Amma’s (a devdasi) house for learning the art of dancing. Despite being a social reformer, Amritlal doesn’t like his daughter-in-law Ratna’s association with a ‘devdasi’ and learning art of dance at her house as he fears of spoiling his family reputation.

AMRITLAL. And you feel what you are doing is right?
RATNA. Yes. My husband knows where I go and I have his permission.
AMRITLAL. Your husband happens to be my son. And you are both under my care. It is my permission that you should ask for.
RATNA. You would not have given it to me.
AMRITLAL. And I never will.
RATNA. If you don’t allow me to visit her, then . . . then I’ll have to ask her to come here!
AMRITLAL. Never, not to this house, ever.
RATNA. What objection do you have to a withered old lady coming to your house? It is my dancing in her courtyard that you mind.
AMRITLAL. You will not. That is all. I need not give you any reason for it.
RATNA. You can’t stop me from learning an art!
AMRITLAL. I don’t want you seeing that woman again, that’s final. And that is all I have to say. You may go. I’m sorry I’ve kept you from jingling your bells. My request is that you finish with your session as quickly as you can and see that your Guruji leaves before my visitors arrive. God forbid that they should bump into one another. (CP 420-421)
While pursuing a career for her daughter, Lata, Ratna gradually drifts away from her husband Jairaj. Gender construction is not a socially constructed phenomenon but it has its roots in human psyche. Amritlal plays a crucial role in making Ratna independent with an intention of putting Jairaj in his own place. He allows both the wife and the husband (his daughter-in-law and son) to do their dance practice and performance, knowing fully well that his daughter-in-law will beat his son hollow. In this clash, Jairaj lost his identity as 'man' and as 'artist'. He is reduced to a miserable figure—a man without any self identity, creativity and choice. Amritlal with his power of money exploits the womanhood of Ratna by depriving her from the association of a real man. Ratna asks, 'and once he stops dancing—what will you do with him then?' And Amritlal says, 'Make him worthy of you' (CP 428). Amritlal’s definition of happiness and manhood was absolutely a personal concept.

When Lata’s performance was widely reported in the newspapers and media, Viswas became happy but Jairaj and Ratna drifted apart. This is how the parents react to the reviews of Lata’s performance.

JAIJRAJ. Have you read the reviews?
RATNA. Not all of them. Not yet.
JAIJRAJ. Weren’t you interested in knowing what kind of reviews...?
RATNA. I know what kind of reviews she’s got...
JAIJRAJ. You haven’t even looked...
RATNA. (shouting) I heard. Rave reviews! The star of the festival! The dancer of the decade! And why shouldn’t she get reviews like these? I deserved it. Spending sleepless nights arranging things. Sweet-talking the critics. My hard work had paid off, hasn’t it? Hasn’t it? (CP II 438-39)

With the success of Lata, she strengthens herself but makes Jairaj more and more helpless. Ratna in whose life dance has been passion, encourages Lata for dance. In her personal life the passion for dance subsides in her craziness to discover masculinity in the personality of Jairaj. Jairaj, being dominated by his father, failed to realize his perfect stature as an individual and above that absolute perfection as a dancer.
Jairaj and Ratna leave the house as they protest against traditional notions and restrictions imposed upon them by Amritlal. Jairaj becomes highly excited and agitated. He doesn’t want to stay even a minute further and resolves to never set a foot in the house again. Ratna requests him to leave the next day so that they could take their belongings with them but Jairaj retorts:

JAIJRAJ. We don’t need anything fancy. (Turns around and speaks defiantly.) As from now we are no longer under your care. And will never be again. Never. (Exits, followed by a bewildered Ratna.)

(CP 424)

In this way, Jairaj and Ratna go away from their house. The clash between the father and the son symbolizes the clash between tradition and modernity. It is a battle between traditional and conservative father and a son with modern outlook. He goes away throwing old restrictions to the wind. His determination and tenacity to adhere to what he wishes to do compel him to leave the house? He makes himself free from the clutches of autocratic father and also from the unwritten laws of family conduct. This is the climax of the play. But the spectators witness their retreat and feel a sense of pity and sympathy for them, as they come back after two days. So, Ratna humiliates him, ‘You, you are nothing but a spineless boy who couldn’t leave his father’s house for more than forty eight hours’ (CP 402). They might have realized that the house of their autocratic father is better than the world that exists outside. This suggests that they have been exposed to the hostile surroundings that make them feel frustrated and exhausted. Actually, the hostile surrounding is the very root cause of the frustration. It seems that, traditionalism or conservatism is winning over modernity.

Modernity tastes the fruit of defeat. The youthful rebellion started against the adamant age is subdued. Jairaj compromises with his revolutionary and rebellious spirit and yields to his old father’s whims and fancy. There is a notable change in Jairaj’s mind. Highly spirited and rebellious Jairaj turns into a very submissive and polite person.

AMRITLAL. Have I made myself clear?
JAIRAJ. Yes, very clear. (*Moves to the stairs.*)  
AMRITLAL. And Jairaj. (*Jairaj stops.*) Don’t grow your hair any longer. (*Jairaj exits. To Ratna.*) And you need not learn from anyone else. You understand? (CP 425)

In a flashback, Jairaj recalls how he and his wife moved in different directions. In the present situation he looks after his son, Shankar and Ratna keeps herself busy with her programmes. Ratna advises Jairaj to do something else. Dattani brings out the misunderstanding between the wife and husband in the following conversations:

RATNA. Do something. Do anything, but stop this mockery.  
JAIRAJ. Do anything except be a dancer. Do something useful like choreographing items for you, or playing the flute.  
RATNA. You are not even good at that any more.  
JAIRAJ. Whose fault is that only you get invitations to dance?  
RATNA. Surely not mine.  
JAIRAJ. For one full year. For one full year I refused to dance—turning down offers because I didn’t want to dance alone.  
RATNA. I didn’t ask for such a sacrifice. Tell me what you want in return. I’ll do anything except sacrifice a year of my life in return.  
JAIRAJ. I want you to give me back my self-esteem!  
RATNA. When did I ever take it?  
JAIRAJ. Bit by bit. You took it when you insisted on top billing in all our programmes. You took it when you made me dance my weakest items. You took it when you arranged the lighting so that I was literally dancing in your shadow. And when you called me names in front of other people. Names I feel ashamed to repeat even in private. And you call me disgusting.  
RATNA. You just don’t want to face it. It is me they want to see dancing.  
JAIRAJ. A young beautiful woman, yes.  
RATNA. A young beautiful woman! And you are jealous of me for that? What kind of a man are you? (CP 443)
Jairaj is nervous and isolated both as a victim of social prejudice and parental authority. The irony in the life of Jairaj is that his life is shaped and reshaped according to the desires and dreams of others. Ratna carves out her own method to give a shape to the manhood of Jairaj and Amritlal shapes him into whatever shape he thinks, a man should be. This anguish is heart rendering and makes his tragedy, a tragedy of soul. The following outburst of Jairaj provides a specific vehemence to the expression corresponding with the consciousness of Jairaj. Dattani captures the internal turmoil of the characters at a crucial stage where it is difficult to control the pace of emotions. He is helpless but not weak. He bursts out:

JAIKAJ. You really have style. Not to mention brains. You destroy me first, then give the impression that there wasn’t much to destroy in the first place, then blame it all on my father, then suggest I make myself useful by being your stage prop, then use words like ‘regret’ and expect me to shrug my shoulders, resign myself and believe that my calling in life is to serve you. (CP 444)

In the play, there is fine juxtaposition between past and present, individual self and collective self. Here the dramatist appears to be attempting midway between theatrical and narrative device. The play depicts man’s desire and perpetual conflict resulting from man’s longing and ways of destiny. What constitutes the theatrical structure of the play is constant conflict between the individual self with society, conventions and traditions of the family. The shifts and movements of the play are very corresponding with the technique of stream of consciousness. This device helps the dramatist to present the grotesque and fragmental pictures of life. Lillete Dubey observes in the following way:

It is beautifully crafted. The way it moves back and forth in time, its use of one actor to play more than one role which really tests the actor’s talent, and how seamlessly all this is done, and strong characterisation. (Summanaspati, 2002)

Literature suggests; it doesn’t state. A good work of art has rich suggestive feature. The play Dance Like a Man has psycho-philosophical

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implications and suggestions. The message is encoded in the page by the
dramatist, but it is decoded by the stage production of the play. The vivacity of
dialogues and performance enables the dramatist unfold his story in an
effective and appealing manner. It is observed:

The play *Dance Like a Man* begins with a socio
cultural spectrum, passes through psycho-cultural
dynamics and culminates in psycho-philosophical
suggestiveness and here lies the strength and
distinction of Dattani's art. (Agarwal, 104)

The internal and external self of Jairaj is divided. In his external self, he
is in conflict with Ratna. The consciousness of Ratna and Jairaj move in two
opposite poles. In case of Ratna it moves in the direction of culmination of
success of Lata and in the case of Jairaj, it only brings a greater sense of loss.
Jairaj regrets that his father and wife have joined hands to ruin him as a dancer.
Finally, Ratna realizes that her son was badly nourished by the *ayah*. Ratna
moves to the library and imagines her younger days dancing with Jairaj. The
play ends with Ratna’s thought, ‘We lacked the grace. We lacked the brilliance.
We lacked the magic to dance like God.’ (CP II 447) This is a very significant
statement. It means that gods have perfected dance as an art form and Lord
Shiva is the perfect dancer. The message of the play is loud and clear.

3.2. Sexual Abuse of Children:

The sexual abuse of children is a horrible reality, and many are unaware
of its extent. Research has shown that as many as 53 per cent, or one in every
two children in India, are victims of child sexual abuse. Contrary to popular
belief, the home is often not the safest place for a child, as many abusers are
trusted by the family. In addition to educating children and empowering them
to say *No* to abuse, parents themselves need to be sensitive to their children’s
signals. Moreover, a robust and specific law against child sexual abuse must be
put in place to protect the child and vigorously punish the abuser.

The birth of a child is the beginning of a new era for the parents. Their
life begins to revolve around the child, their concerns for his or her well-being

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and safety become paramount in their mind. Childhood is the epitome of innocence; the pure joy in a child's laughter, the wonder of seeing something for the very first time, the adventure of growing up. And yet, children are the target of such heinous atrocities as sexual abuse. Sexual abuse of children is more prevalent than most people realise, and often is carried out in the confines of the home, by someone the family knows and trusts.

Any use of a child or young person to meet the sexual needs of another person in a position of power, authority and trust and who has an ongoing emotional bonding with that child is sexual abuse of the child. This person can be an adult, or another child who is older or bigger, within the family or outside. The abuse can begin in infancy, childhood or adolescence. It can be a one-time experience, something that happens more than once or repeatedly. Severe forms of sexual abuse include: assault, including rape and sodomy, touching or fondling a child, exhibitionism - forcing a child to exhibit his/her private body parts, photographing a child in the nude. Other forms of sexual abuse include: forcible kissing, sexual advances towards a child during travel, marriage situations, exhibitionism - exhibiting before a child, exposing a child to pornographic materials. Perhaps the worst kind of assault on a human body is sexual assault; in addition to being an act of violence, it is also an attack on the very dignity of a person, at the most intimate level.

Sexual abuse snatches all that away in the most brutal ways. Making it even worse is the fact that this brutality is often concealed under the guise of helpfulness, kindness or guidance, so that it is hard to recognise and to catch. Sexual abuse of children is a crime that is camouflaged by a conspiracy of silence, secrecy, ignorance and denial, by families and society together. The absence of a proper law has helped this crime to prosper without deterrence. Today the Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences Bill is in the Parliament, but is still far from coming into force. But the onus still remains on society to keep the world safe for children.
The Women and Child Development Ministry Study on Child Abuse, 2007, revealed that of the respondents, 53 percent reported having faced one or more forms of sexual abuse. In other words, every other child is a victim of sexual abuse.

The facts in India: Some important statistics from the 2007 report on child abuse by the Ministry of Women and Child Development:
* 53.2% of children in India are sexually abused
* 52.94% boys are abused and 47.06% girls.
* 21.90% child respondents faced severe forms of sexual abuse and 50.76% other forms of sexual abuse
* 50% abusers are persons known to the child or in a position of trust and responsibility.
* 72.1% children do not report the matter to anyone.

The statistics clearly show that children are not as safe as we may think.

- Myths regarding child sexual abuse:
  Myth 1. CSA can never happen at home and only strangers sexually abuse children.
  Reality: Research evidence indicates that in up to 85% of cases the abuser is known to the child. A home is not necessarily a safe heaven.
  Myth 2. Boys cannot be sexually abused.
  Reality: Research indicates that 52.94% of those abused are boys while 47.06% are girls.
  Myth 3. Abusers are mentally sick or perverted.
  Reality: Prevalence of CSA ranges from 30-85% in a society. Mental illness accounts for not more than 15% of the total population. The abusers are often ordinary, respectable people holding positions of responsibility.
  Myth 4. CSA happens only in poor families.
  Reality: CSA cuts across classes, caste, religion and education. In fact it is the middle class and above where the prevalence of CSA is the highest.
  Myth 5. When children say they are abused, it’s a figment of their imagination.
Reality: Most times children aren’t able to disclose CSA, the times they do talk about it, it’s very real.

Myth 6. Children with disability (differently abled children) cannot be sexually abused as the abusers either find them sexually unattractive, or feel sorry for them.

Reality: All children are vulnerable to sexual abuse. Research has proven that differently abled children are in fact more likely to be abused because of their increased vulnerability.

Myth 7. We can tell if a child has been sexually abused.

Reality: Children are experts at hiding their pain. A traumatic experience in a child’s life is often expressed in indirect ways which may change their behavioural patterns much later in life.


Reality: Although an overwhelming majority of those who sexually abuse children are men, research suggests that women have been known to have abused children – also because they spend the maximum time with children.

Talking about sexual abuse is difficult, but parents must encourage their children to talk about anything that bothers them, and should also be receptive to non-verbal signals. Anuja Gupta a counsellor and founder of the organisation RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest) explains that children find it difficult to tell parents about sexual abuse, because adults themselves have made talking about sex a taboo area. She says that not only do children feel it is a forbidden area of discussion, but they are also not equipped with the terminology to articulate what is happening to them. Also, children are not believed, and are often made to feel that they are at fault for what is happening. This blame can be as bad as or worse than the assault itself. Moreover, the cloak of silence that the abuser draws around himself and the child is part of the abuse; the child is made to feel that either there is a secret pact of silence which he should not break, or is threatened that if he tells anyone, he or his family members will be hurt.
Nishit Kumar, who runs CHILDLINE, India’s first 24-hour toll-free helpline for children in distress, explains that the biggest hurdle in fighting sexual abuse of children is the fact that there is no specific law to protect children against sexual abuse. At present, child sexual abusers are prosecuted under the same law that applies to adults, and this puts children through an additional ordeal of enduring the same police procedures, medical examinations and court proceedings as adult victims. Citing the case of the Anchorage institution as an example, Nishit Kumar says that it took five years to get a conviction in the Sessions Court, and even then the perpetrators’ appeal in the High Court was upheld on the grounds that no actual penetration had occurred and hence it was not a sexual offence. In the case, two Britishers who had started the shelter for street children, Anchorage, were found to be sexually abusing the boys in their care. Eventually the Supreme Court upheld the conviction, but it took 10 years to bring the culprits to justice.

Psychiatrist Dr Rajat Mitra, who helps the Delhi police with sexual abuse cases, has studied sexual abusers in Tihar jail, and provides an insight into the mind of the abuser. He says that the abuser does not feel guilty about his actions. In fact abusers don’t see children as children, but treat them as adults and believe that the children enjoy what they are doing to them. Dr Mitra explains that the abuser does not act randomly, but chooses his target and plans his moves. Also, the abuser is usually so charming and confident that he wins the child over. In many cases neighbours of convicted child abusers have expressed astonishment, saying that he was such a nice person.

Sexual abuse occurs with boys as much as with girls, and can leave lifelong scars on the individual. While the effect of sexual abuse on boys and girls is equally bad, girls suffer an additional level of trauma, in case the abuse leads to pregnancy. This has immense social and mental implications on the girl’s life, as well as the physical trauma of the abuse and the pregnancy.

Abused children suffer throughout their lives. They can’t live happy family and social life. Some of the impacts on abused may include: physical
scars and emotional insecurity (these short-term effects are pretty obvious),
confused sexuality, promiscuous behaviour on part of the victim, problems in
family life, including emotional and sexual problems. Most destructive of all,
the abused may turn predator in the long run, and when the child grows up,
(s)he may end up abusing a child in turn. Anxiety, panic attacks, depression,
phobias are the other impacts that child has to face throughout his life. They
believe that they are worthless, bad and dirty; have low self-esteem, feel
undeserving of care and attention, hate themselves. Self-destructive behaviours
like self-mutilation or cutting, suicide attempts, alcohol, drug abuse can be seen
in order to cope up with the trauma. Obsessive compulsive disorders normally
related to cleanliness like washing hands, brushing teeth, having a bath,
sweeping, etc. are a part of the behaviour of the abused.

The Oxford dictionary defines incest as ‘sexual relations between people
classed as being too closely related to marry each other’. According to
Wikipedia, the encyclopedia, incest is sexual intercourse between
close relatives that is usually illegal in the jurisdiction where it takes place
and/or is conventionally considered a taboo. The term may apply to sexual
activities between: individuals of close ‘blood relationship’, members of the
same household; step relatives related by adoption or marriage; and members
of the same clan or lineage.

Incest between adults and those under the age of consent is considered a
form of child sexual abuse that has been shown to be one of the most extreme
forms of childhood abuse, often resulting in serious and long-
term psychological trauma, especially in the case of parental incest. Sexual
abuse of children is one of the contemporary issues that exist in our society and
which we don’t accept as reality. The Study on Child Abuse (2007) carried out
by the Ministry of Women and Child Development was alarming. According to
it, 53.2 per cent of our children are being sexually abused. They are being
violated, assaulted, and exploited by the adult population for pleasure. And we
are still not talking about it. We would rather believe it is all happening out
there—maybe in the West or maybe in the slums, but not in our families. Research has shown that perpetrators are generally known to the children—their fathers, stepfathers, uncles, grandfathers, cousins, cooks, drivers, neighbours, people who have easy access to our children.

3.2.1. Thirty Days in September

The play Thirty Days in September is focused on the issue of childh
sexual abuse. Mala, the protagonist, is the victim of this abuse but she maintains silence against injustice. As soon as she comes to the stage of adolescence, she finds that the world is hostile and human relationship is a betrayal. She bears the pain of humiliation of her body but is not permitted to reveal the truth before the society. Her anguish becomes more painful on the realization that even her mother maintains silence. The forced sexual molestation and the betrayal from mother generate a discontent in Mala. Her willful suppression becomes the cause of physical and mental disorder. Dattani unfolds the layers of the butchered psyche of Mala who suffers at two levels—her struggle with her own inner self and secondly her discontent with her mother who maintains oppressive silence to escape horrors of the reality. The dramatic tension develops through the fractured consciousness of Mala. She is hostile to her socio-cultural environment and finds herself alienated from her locations. The locale of the play is a middle class family. He selects this specific setting to project the reality existing behind these issues. He admits:

I would see the setting of Thirty Days as upper middle class. I choose this setting because I did not want them to dismiss sexual abuse as something that does not happen to people like them (Vardhan, Web).

The play was commissioned by RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest), a support group for women survivors of incest. RAHI was supported by John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The play was first performed at the Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai, on 31 May 2001. Lillete Dubey, a well known theatre personality and stage director writes in a note on the play, ‘sensitive and
powerful without ever offending sensibilities, it manages to bring home the horror and the pain within the framework of a very identifiable mother-daughter relationship.' (Dubey, 4) As she has written that many of the women have shared their traumatic experiences with the director and felt that at least their silent screams have been heard. (Dubey, 4) The play certainly sensitized the minds of the audience which can be put in Peter Brooks’ words that, ‘if a play did not provoke and disturb the audience, it wasn’t worth doing’. (CP II 4)

The plot of the play unfolds through the psychiatric sessions of Mala and through the dialogues between mother and daughter. It is a painful story of two women characters, their sexual exploitation at the hands of near kith and kin and their inability to develop a healthy relationship. For Mala life becomes intolerable both inside and outside the family. The silence of the mother works as a stimulus in her life and she gradually becomes hostile and aggressive. Mala behaves like a trapped animal that seems to have no possibility to escape. Mala’s self is fragmented and disordered. Therefore, Dattani makes use of incomptele sentences, monologues, recorded voice and other symbols. The doll’s symbol is very effective. It corresponds with the idea of numbness or silence which Shanta maintains against victimization of her daughter for sexual gratification. It also symbolizes that Mala is not permitted to express reality by society. Generally, Dattani takes up serious issues for the contemplation. As an abled artist, he fuses comic or funny scenes with the serious ones. Thirty Days in September is completely somber drama. The seriousness and horror is so powerful that doesn’t allow him to be funny. He admits:

I sometimes see the funny side of even the tragic events that I am conceived with. But in Thirty Days, I did not have that scope. There’s no way you can see the funny side. (Vardhan, Web)

In Thirty Days, all the three major characters—Mala, Shanta and her uncle suffer with their own uncompromising guilts. Dattani has a realization that the betrayal of human relationship is a greater sin and it induces a greater nothingness than incest. Mala has a greater resentment against the behaviour of
her mother. Her external erratic behaviour is a sign of the turmoil going on within her inner self. It is not a silence but a betrayal. Dattani categorically points out that the negligence in familial relationship is responsible for the growing discontent in children.

It is the silence and betrayal of the family that affects me the most. Like in this case, the mother knew that her daughter was being sexually abused by her uncle but still choose to keep quiet. It is the silence that makes the abused feel betrayed. (Santhanam, Web)

Action in the play moves through extensive use of monologues and incomplete sentences echoing the internal conflict of Mala. The play has no division in the form of sub-sections and such condensation in drama enhances the intensity of the emotional crisis of the characters. It has been a favourite dramatic device with modern dramatists to project the fragments of modern life. The central action in *Thirty Days in September* takes place in the living room of Shanta and Mala. In the background, there is a life sized doll of seven years old girl. Mala is sitting in the commentator’s desk. She is isolated from her surroundings and is more at peace with herself as, ‘She has taken a journey and has arrived somewhere, psychologically’ (CP II 8). It was a journey through her conscience, the suppressed sin born of guilt and sex, wrapped in perpetual silence. The disjointed images and telegraphic suggestions are quite forceful to drag audience to share the anguish of the fractured psyche of Mala. Her confession, ‘It is he who must avoid being recognized’ (CP II 8) and in the same breath, the consolation of the realization ‘because I know it wasn’t my fault’ (CP II 8), conveys the emotions that are difficult to communicate through traditional verbal order. She speaks in conjunctures, lost in her own thoughts. She accuses the molester but also feels, ‘It’s not anybody’s fault, except my own...’ (CP II 9). As a foil to her anguish, Shanta, the mother is lost in worship enchanting ‘Mere to Giridhar Gopal....’ (CP II 9). The religiosity of mother to hide her own guilt further intensifies the pain of Mala. Mother and daughter survive in distinctive mental spaces.
Like other plays, in *Thirty Days in September* also Dattani maintains balance of different events with the shift of memory in the past and the present. On the external surface, Shanta, the mother, is anxious for the marriage of Mala with Deepak. Beyond it, Shanta, Mala and uncle Vinay have their own guilts and they make desperate attempt to cope up with their present. Mala expresses her indignation for the marriage. She struggles to avoid the success of this relationship. Her nervousness assumes the proportion of revolt and contempt. Her withdrawal from her household seems to be a defence mechanism to avoid the guilt of betrayal in personal relationship that she had already suffered with her mother. In contrast of her anxiety, Shanta is impatient to settle this relationship because it seems to be the only possible remedy to bring Mala out of the shadows of sin and guilt. Shanta proceeds with the intention, ‘It is my fault only. I will feel easy once she settles down’ (CP II 15). Deepak is still unaware of the cause of havoc in the life of Mala and Shanta. He complains, ‘What is worrying you about your daughter? There is something you are not telling me’ (CP II 15). Both Shanta and Mala maintain silence, and try to protect their dignity in their isolated spaces. Dattani here notices the fragile thread of mother and daughter relationship. If the daughter is an extension of mother’s identity, the wrong doings towards the daughter is the worst loss of identity for a mother. Mala even avoids coming home and taking part in routine course. She persistently suffers with the horrible shadows of undesirable sex and subsequent self accusation. Dattani presents the whole issue with the presumption that undesirable sex being motivated by pleasure principle is bound to lead to guilt conscience and it adversely affects the normal responses of the sufferer. Mala’s conscience is torn between the awareness of moral commitments towards Deepak and the suppression of the sin. She is a victim of the betrayal of personal relationship and she does not want to thrust the identical treachery in the life of Deepak. She has a realization. ‘Deepak my fiancé, is only a few years older to me...I think I like it—I don’t know how to put it... I can’t explain it’ (CP II 18). In case of Mala it is to be accepted that
her fury is transferred to her mother. Like many other modern thinkers, Dattani is convinced that the betrayal of personal relationship is the worst horror of human life. The root of Mala's anguish lies in the silence of her mother towards whom she looks for consolation.

At the beginning of the play, we see Mala talking to the counselor and telling about herself. She is very confident and doesn't afraid to tell her name. She doesn't consider her past life anymore shameful. She has come to this state of mind after four years of continuous treatment.

MALA. Mala Khatri. February 2004 . . . (Listening to the counsellor.) Why not? . . . I do not hesitate to use my real name now. After all, it is he who must hide. He should change his name, not me. It is he who must avoid being recognized. (CP II 8)

If we compare the above dialogue with her state of mind before the treatment, we can understand what might have befallen with her. She was even afraid to disclose her identity and considered herself responsible for her pathetic condition. This happens in our society because talking about taboo issues is considered as impious. Even victims of rape, child sexual abuse, AIDS have been looked down on. There is a social stigma attached with these topics.

MALA. I-I don't know how to begin . . .Today is the 30th of September . . . 2001, and my name is . . . I don't think I want to say my name . . . I am sorry...I know it is all my fault really...It must be. I must have asked for it...It's not anybody's fault, except my own. Sometimes I wish that my mother... (CP II 9)

Throughout the play we see the strained relationship between mother and daughter. It can be seen from the very sharp and curt language used by Mala while conversing with her mother. Mala considers her mother, Shanta responsible for the stage she is in. she thinks that her mother could have avoided her tragedy. Her mother didn't listen to her complaints when she went to her. It was her maternal uncle, Vinay, who molested her right from the age of six. Her mother was always in prayer and fed her with food and told her that the pain would disappear but she failed to understand the psychology of the
child and that's why Mala feels that the pain wouldn't go away but will come back again and would not go away for forever. Mala has been molested by her uncle for many years. She considers that it destroyed her soul.

MALA. (to Shanta). Where were you when he locked the door to your bedroom while I was napping in there? Where were you during those fifteen minutes when he was destroying my soul? Fifteen minutes every day of my summer holidays, add them up. Fifteen minutes multiplied by thirty or thirty-one or whatever. That's how long or how little it took for you to send me to hell for the rest of my life! Surely, you must have known, Ma. (CP II 53)

It was not only her uncle who would molest her but her cousin also used to molest her. It was all past and now she is a changed girl who has learnt to live with the pain.

MALA. It doesn't matter now. I just have to learn to live with the pain. (CP II 27)

Mala has been affected badly by the treatment she received in her childhood and is mentally distorted. She now seeks pleasure in fulfilling her desire. She knows that she is going astray but can't control her behaviour as she says that it has more to do with her psyche than her body and that's why she indulges in such acts. Mala can't develop her love relationship with Deepak. She can't love him and is unable to love anybody else. She even doesn't want to marry because the past incidents in her life torture her. She can't forget the memory of her bitter experience. Deepak is very desperate to marry her. He is the person who tries to rescue her, who tries to bring her to normal life. It is he who takes her to the psychiatrist and we know the difference that it makes in her life. Deepak even goes to meet Shanta and tries to know the reasons for her behaviour. Mala tries to explain him as to why she can't marry him.

MALA. (looking at the Man). Because—because—
How can I even begin to explain to you? I see this man everywhere. I can never be free of him. I am not so sure I want to be free of him. Even if I was,
I am not sure whether I have the ability to love anyone . . . else. (CP II 54)

Shanta tries to console Deepak by saying that things would be all right and he need not worry about it. But she is not in a position to control her daughter. She has gone astray and what is more, she holds her mother responsible for this. Mala gives two reasons for her fall: one, the western values which extol permissiveness and two, her mother’s inability to control her.

MALA. I don’t know why. I just don’t understand...Please don’t ask me why I do it. It’s just a game...not a game. No...it’s...I know it’s wrong. What I am doing is terribly wrong! But it means a lot to me. I like it. That is why I am a bad person. I have no character...I suppose it’s these Western values, I wish I were more traditional then I wouldn’t behave like this...no, no, that’s stupid, I know, that’s very easy to put the blame elsewhere... (Listening to the counsellor.) It has to end in a month’s time. In fact I like it best when I can time it so it lasts for thirty days. I even mark it on my calendar. After that, I have to—move on, if you know what I mean...Well it means that it is no longer satisfying to me, and I don’t mean the physical part of it, although that is usually the main attraction for me...not that I actually enjoy it when they are doing it to me...sometimes I do, with the right kind of people...the right kind of people are, let me see...usually older men thought not necessarily so, Deepak my fiancé, is only a few years older to me...I think I like it—I don’t know how to put it...when they—sort of—you know—use me... (Listening to the counsellor.) I don’t know. I can’t explain it. The only person who can, who could have prevented all this is my mother. Sometimes I wish she would just tell me to stop. She could have prevented a lot from happening...Here are all the names of people whom I have been with. And the outline...well I just wanted a line that would put them all together. But if you ask me, whose face I think it is—it must be my mother’s. (CP II 18)
Mala is not interested in marriage but wants to mix with many men to gratify her desire. She goes to a party and dances with a man (Ravi) who came with his fiancé, Radhika. Mala encourages the man to take liberty with her. Then Mala tells him ‘Do whatever you want with me, but take me with you now’ (CP II 21). When Mala returns home, Shanta pleads her to marry Deepak which she turns down in a second. When Shanta insists on knowing why her daughter is angry with her, Mala reveals the past with anger and hatred for her mother.

MALA. I am not talking about a bad dream! I am talking about the time when uncle Vinay would molest me. When I was seven. Then eight. Nine. Ten. Every vacation when we went to visit him or when he came to stay with us. You were busy in either the pooja room or the kitchen. I would go to papa and cry. Before I could even tell him why I was crying he would tell me to go to you. You always fed me and—and you never said it but I knew what you were saying to me without words. That I should eat well and go to sleep and the pain will go away. And, and—Oh God! It did go away. But it comes back. It didn’t go away forever! (CP II 25-26)

Deepak even goes to the extent of speaking in very inquisitive tone in order to find out whether Vinay, Mala’s uncle has molested her. He, in a frenzy calls bad names to Vinay; ‘How could you be such a sick bastard?’ (CP II 53)

When we discuss Shanta’s role in Mala’s tragedy, we come to know that it is Shanta’s silence which caused pain to Mala. She didn’t try to understand the real reason behind her daughter’s disappointment and pain. She made her daughter’s life painful with her silence.

MALA. By staying silent doesn’t mean I can forget! This is my hell. This hell is where I belong! It is your creation, Ma! You created it for me. With your silence!! You didn’t forget anything, you only remained silent! (CP II 54)

Shanta remained silent because she is a religious woman. She believes in God. She thinks that Lord Krishna will come and will make the things right.
for her and for her daughter. She is very much devoted to God so much so that
even when her daughter went to tell her about the pain she felt, she didn’t listen
to her. She thinks that her prayer and her God will solve Mala’s problems.

SHANTA. That is why I forget. I went to the kitchen
to vomit. Then I prayed. I prayed for you Mala.
(\textit{Pointing to the portrait.}) That is what I was
praying to. To our God, so He could send his
Sudarshan Chakra to defend you, to defend us from
the demon inside you, not outside you. But you
wouldn’t let me. You don’t let me. (CP II 28)

Shanta herself is a victim of her brother’s lust. When she was a teenager
her brother molested her many times and now also he comes occasionally to
her home and uses her. The flat they live in is also owned by him and at the end
Vinay by giving that flat to Shanta makes his permanent arrangement to go
there as often as he pleases. This invites a very sinister but true comment from
Mala: ‘Yes you did. He didn’t just buy a flat. He bought you!’ (CP II 52)
Shanta tells her daughter that she couldn’t save her from her brother and even
argues that the pain in her eyes was not seen by anybody.

SHANTA. How could I save her when I could not save
myself? \ldots (To Mala.) You say I did not help you?
I could not help you. Same as you could not help
me. Did you ever see the pain in my eyes? No.
Nobody saw anything. Nobody said anything. (CP
II 55)

Her confession to her daughter itself explains why she remained silent in
case of her daughter.

SHANTA. I was six, Mala. I was six. And he was
thirteen. \ldots and it wasn’t only summer holidays. For
ten years! For ten years!! (CP II 55)

She was not bold enough to go against his brother’s wish and also she
was dependent on her brother’s help to run the family as her husband has left
her and she didn’t have any means of livelihood. When we know that she has
been through the traumatic experiences of sexual exploitation it has been her
duty to prevent her daughter from falling to the same man’s lust but remaining
silent she caused the non-erasable scars on the psyche of her daughter. She

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wants to make it up by marrying her into a good family and when Deepak comes home and tells about his intention to marry Mala, she is overjoyed and even presses his brother to look into the matter and persuade Mala to marry.

The last phase of the play is important as there is some resolution to the strained relationship between mother and daughter. Mala admits that both of them were struggling to come out from the same state of mind but she couldn’t understand her mother’s pain.

MALA. It’s not your fault, mother. Just as it wasn’t my fault. Please, tell me that you’ve forgiven me for blaming you. Please tell me that. (CP II 58)

The play depicts the raw emotion of the characters and the naked realities covered beneath the cloaks of hypocrisy, shamness of behaviour, social or familial relationship, silence or numbness of the people, etc. Shanta observed silence against the molestation of her daughter, Mala by her brother Vinay. She puts on cloak of silence for avoiding the protest for the injustice. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri rightly observes in this connection:

Child sexual abuse spans a range of problems, but it is this complicity of the family through silence and lack of protest that is the ultimate betrayal for the abused.

(Chaudhuri, 73)

In a vain attempt of defending herself, Shanta holds Mala responsible for the tragedy arguing that she has willingly participated in the molestation for deriving carnal pleasure. In fact, Shanta fails to perceive Mala’s ignorance and immaturity for understanding such things. Her seeming pleasure is not real pleasure, but it is her ignorance. She wasn’t old enough to understand horror of the things. So when she grows and understands the stark reality, her bliss becomes perpetual damnation of her soul and identity. Her pleasure becomes the protest against the betrayal especially towards her mother who betrays her by maintaining silence. The result is uprising and aggression. It is attributed:

Aggression and violence are unquestionably male while submission and vulnerability are traditionally female. But of late women writers are not only exploring the issues of female autonomy and female

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vulnerability but are showing how in the face of male violence, women do respond by committing it against others, though after enduring all kinds of hardship and always as the last resort. (Bande, 137)

The fragmented utterances, violent images, coarse dialogues, self blaming, haunted images, etc. shows tension and turmoil in the mind of Mala. It also shows how the evil of sexual colonialism turns the woman’s life into a hell of sin and suffering and forces her into a perennial pain and self accusation. Such crime damages the woman’s psyche and becomes the permanent part of her consciousness.

Thus, in writing such a play Dattani has made his point clear that incest is a social problem that do exist in the society whether we accept it or not and it affects the normal life of victims. Though the play is not didactic it certainly makes us to think about the evil present around us and do whatever we can to prevent it. In Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri’s words it can be rightly put that ‘he (Dattani) has recurrently used subjects that touch upon the zones of experience that the ‘normal’ middle class society rather sweep under the carpet and happily imagine did not exist. This is exactly how he would penetrate below the surface, subvert the complacent beliefs that everyday reality is constructed with, and make visible the invisible issues that haunt so many of his plays’. (Chaudhuri, 74)

3.3. GLBT Issues:

It has to be noted that homosexuality finds a mention in the various precolonial laws. Homosexuality is seen as an offence in *Manusmrithi*, which however can be expiated. Lesbianism by contrast merits more serious punishment. Islamic *Shariat* law treats homosexual conduct as a serious offence, though it is being argued by some recently formed gay Muslim organizations that Islamic law can be interpreted in a nonhomophobic fashion. It was with the enactment of uniform criminal laws in India, in 1860 that there was a uniform proscription of homosexual behaviour.
Gay, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals (GLBT) are generally referred to as sexual minorities due to their less number as compared to heterosexual population. Though sexuality minorities have always existed in India sometimes in forms, which are culturally sanctioned (such as the hijra) and at other times in invisibility and silence, their issues have never seriously been articulated. It is only recently that the rights of sexuality minorities as an issue have been taken seriously in India by various civil society organizations. With the founding of India’s first gay magazine Bombay Dost in the late 1980’s and the starting of a lesbian collective in Delhi called Sakhi, lesbian, gay and bisexual issues were first articulated on a public forum. Since those early beginnings, the fledgling sexuality minority rights movement has grown increasingly vocal and articulate. Today there are organizations, helplines, publications/newsletters, health resources, social spaces and drop-in centers in most of the major cities in India like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune, Chennai, Patna and Lucknow. There has also been a branching out into smaller cities and towns like Akola, Trichi and Gulbarga. In spite of this, the support structures provided are painfully inadequate with few or no such organizations for lesbians, bisexuals and hijras. What is more, many of the newly emerging organizations die out silently while even the more established ones have been able to reach out in concrete terms only to a small section of the sexuality minority population due to lack of resources, personnel, government support and extreme societal/state discrimination. All sexuality minorities, i.e. gays, bisexuals, lesbians, transgender, transvestites, hijras and other homosexual men and women, suffer in different degrees—social and political marginalization—due to their sexuality and/or gender.

Society looks at sexuality minorities with disgust and hatred and values them as less than human beings. It is felt quite acceptable to violate the human rights of people who the majority has never really considered as human beings worthy of the same respect as ‘normal individuals’. Due to the law, societal values and mainstream culture being unfavourable towards sexuality
minorities, very few can afford to be open about their 'illicit' sexual orientations. Societal violence against sexuality minorities is inflicted through the various sites like the family, workspaces, public spaces and popular culture.

Many people deny the existence of sexuality minorities in India, dismissing same-sex behaviour as a western, upper-class phenomenon. Many others label it as a disease to be cured, an abnormality to be set right or a crime to be punished. Often, sexuality minorities themselves don't want to admit the fact of persecution because it intensifies their fear, guilt and shame. Social stigma casts a pall of invisibility over the life of sexuality minorities, which makes them frequent targets of harassment, violence, extortion, and often, sexual abuse from relations, acquaintances, hustlers and the police. All this denial and rejection by society under various pretenses backed by an enforced invisibility exposes sexuality minorities to constant abuse and discrimination.

Social discrimination against sexuality minorities manifests itself in the production of the ideology of heterosexism which establishes the male-female sexual relationship as the only valid/possible lifestyle and renders invalid the lives and culture of those who do not fit in. The ideology of heterosexism pervades all dominant societal institutions such as the family, the medical establishment, popular culture, public spaces, workspaces and household spaces. We will examine each of these sites through which sexuality minorities are silenced and oppressed individually.

Most Indian families socialize children into the inevitability of heterosexual marriage and the pressure to marry begins to be applied slowly but inexorably. Both men and women experience the pressure, but undoubtedly the pressure is greater on women, who in the Indian context have far less independence. There is no space within the family to express a non-heterosexual alternative. In this conservative context some sexuality minorities have chosen to express to their families as having an alternative sexual orientation. The reaction to this particular disclosure has ranged from acceptance to violent rejection. The family may completely disown their son or
daughter and refuse to accept that he or she is homosexual and forces the child to undergo psychiatric treatment in a vain attempt to convert them into heterosexuality or to push them into an unhappy marriage where the wife suffers equally, bearing the burden of an unworkable marriage, and her sexual freedom is curbed.

Popular culture today - comprising organs of mass media such as the press (regional and national), television and films - does not offer any positive role models for relationships between sexuality minorities. As in other societal institutions, there is a resounding silence on the issue of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender relationships, lives and culture. Sexuality minorities figure in popular culture, if at all, only as objects of fun and derision replaying stereotypes of gay men as effeminate and lesbians as manly. The last decade has seen a spurt of films on issues relating to sexuality minorities, such as 'Fire' and 'Bombay' and the recent documentary by the young Delhi-based film maker, Nishit Saran on coming out to his mother, called ‘Summer in my veins’.

As for writing about sexuality minorities, some prominent studies are Shakuntala Devi’s *The World of Homosexuals* (1977); the path breaking survey, *Less than Gay* (1991); Arvind Kala’s somewhat sensational and prejudiced account, *Invisible Minority* (1992); Giti Thadani’s important study of lesbianism in the Indian tradition, *Sakhhiyani* (1996); and Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai’s *Same Sex Love in India* (2000). Suniti Namjoshi, Shyam Selvadurai, and Firdaus Kanga are some of the noted fiction writers exploring issues of different sexualities. In 1999, Penguin published *Yaarana*, an anthology of gay writing in India edited by Hoshang Merchant and *Facing the Mirror*, an anthology of lesbian writing in India edited by Ashwini Sukthankar, which had a good reception, on the whole.

The portrayal of sexuality minorities in the English language press has become more and more positive in the last decade, especially after the publication of *Bombay Dost*, the first gay magazine in India, which started in
June 1990, and major media coverage given to the marriage of two policewomen Leela and Urmila in 1988. A typical article of English language press is Parvati Nair’s *Gay... and happy* which gives a sympathetic account of gay men, one of whom is quoted as saying, “The two most common misconceptions about gay men seem to be that they are either impotent and are therefore a failure with women or that they are sex-crazed and casually rape every young boy they come across. This is a ridiculous generalization; it’s like believing that every ‘straight’ single male is celibate or that all married women are unhappy. Nobody is perfect and there are decent gays and perverts just as there are among straight people” (‘Trends’, Indian Express, 23 October, 1997).

Newspapers and news magazines such as Times of India, India Today, The Week, Bangalore Monthly (now Weekly) and Asian Age have been carrying articles with a positive slant. Some newspapers such as Asian Age and Times of India support gay rights more than others.

However, many articles still play on stereotypes and spread misinformation. One common stereotype sees homosexuality as a form of sex work and gays are pushed into homosexuality for economic reasons. A typical article is Gautam Machaiah’s piece titled ‘The Gay Kingdom’ with a box item “They made me a gay” (Indian Express, 20 February 1994). S. Seetalakshmi also plays on the same stereotype. ‘Though many people deny the existence of homosexuality in India, a large number of young boys and girls are lured into it for various reasons including money and jobs’. (Times of India, 25 October 1997) Another article titled, ‘Students take to the gay way to make money’ replays the same stereotypes and notes that young students pick up elderly men to make money (Times of India, 2 June 2000). Often the stark illustrations accompanying these articles are quite revealing of how the dominant culture constructs gays—depressed, lonely, fragmented and dwelling in the depths of a gloomy and perverse underworld. The suggestion is that gays have created their own private little hells and have put themselves out of reach of humanity.
Apart from books and newspapers, other forms of media construct dominant images of sexuality minorities. English satellite channels provide considerable news and information on sexuality minorities and show many films about them. Star TV, for example, has given a lot of visibility to the issue. The internet has become the easiest medium to get information on issues relating to same sex relationships; e-mail groups link hundreds of Indian lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Here again regional media (such as TV and film) stand out in contributing to the stereotypical portraits of homosexuals as effeminate and abnormal. Some examples are Daayra (Amol Palekar), Darmiyan (Kalpana Lajmi) and Tamanna on hijras. However, there are exceptions too: a popular Sun TV serial in Tamil is reported to have portrayed gay characters very positively.

On the whole the portrayal of sexuality minorities outside the metropolitan context is not only very minimal but also generally negative. Sexuality minorities from non-English backgrounds have no role models to look up to which is one of the reasons why gay men from non-English speaking backgrounds are less able to resist the pressure to get married, to see the possibilities of same-sex love/relationships and to take on a gay identity.

In such a context where our main cultural institutions construct an environment wherein homosexuality is a perversion, or refuse to talk about homosexuality and there is little space for positive and affirming constructions of homosexuality, it is inevitable that we create mindsets in which sexuality minorities feel lonely, desperate, and even suicidal. The kind of oppression that a dominant culture of heterosexuality can foster in those who see themselves differently needs to be studied more seriously. The combined operation of the various societal institutions and mechanisms which bear down upon the affected person constructs a mindset wherein the person begins to think of himself as dirty, worthless, unclean and vulgar. The invisibility and silence which surrounds the existence of sexuality minority lives and worlds produces its own order of oppression, creating in many the impression that they are the
only ones ‘cursed’ with such desires in the world. There is an enormous erosion of self-esteem, which is perpetuated by the way dominant society operates, what it believes in and what it says. It is a process of self abuse wherein the person believes that what society says about sexuality minorities is true for him/her. This process of self-abuse in some people leads to cycles of depression and self rejection, leading to attempts of suicide and sometimes-actual suicide. This is especially true for an adolescent gay/lesbian/bisexual for whom there is confusion about one’s sexuality and sexual identity.

Even more than gay/bisexual men, lesbians are a largely silent and invisible people and often said to be (sometimes even by women’s organizations) non-existent in India. For this reason, they rarely face police harassment through Section 377. But this hidden, invisible space forces them to live an anonymous and secretive life, in shame and guilt. There are a number of reasons for this closet existence. The most important reason has to do with Indian society, which is constructed on the norms of heterosexuality, monogamous marriage, and the control/denial of women’s sexuality. These norms stigmatize lesbian and bisexual women just as they perpetrate violence against heterosexual women and keep them in a subordinate position in the family. Thus gender discrimination and discrimination against lesbians and bisexual women go together. Another reason is that public space in Indian society is predominantly male; unlike gay/bisexual men who are able to find public places (parks, toilets, etc.), albeit risky and restricted, lesbians and bisexual women have no such spaces. Often they are confined to the home, which though defined as the woman’s space, is hardly the place where woman’s sexuality, least of all lesbian and bisexual woman’s sexuality, can find expression. Patriarchy forces all women, heterosexual or lesbian, into marriage, and pushes them into obligatory roles of mother and wife. This is one of the reasons why even the various organizations which have been formed by sexuality minorities have had limited lesbian participation.
Bisexuals are people who are attracted to persons of both genders. Bisexuality decentres our binary notions about homosexual/heterosexual. For many bisexuals, the gender of their partner is not very important.

_Hijras_ as a community express a feminine gender identity, coming closest experientially to what would be called in the West a transsexual that is ‘a female trapped in a male body’. It is a socio-religious construct marked by extreme gender nonconformity in the sense that there is no correlation between their anatomical sex and gender identity. For most heterosexuals and many homosexuals, if their anatomical sex is male, their gender identity is male. For hijras, though their anatomical sex is male, their gender identity is female. The hijra role attracts persons with a wide range of cross gender characteristics and accommodates different personalities, sexual preferences, needs and behaviours. Many of them undergo sex reassignment surgery, while some of the hijras are born hermaphrodites. While hijras are despised, punished and pushed beyond the mainstream culture in most societies, they are supposed to have a sanctioned place in Hindu society (especially in weddings, births and festivals) as a viable and recognized ‘third gender’, accommodating gender variation, ambiguity and contradictions. It could also be argued that hijras are generally visible, ‘out’ and part of an organized community unlike other sexuality minorities who still remain closeted. But this presumed cultural status can barely conceal the stark reality of the hijra existence in Indian cities where their transgressive sexuality - which is violative of heterosexist norms of society - is circumscribed by experiences of shame, dishonor and violence.

### 3.3.1. Seven Steps Around the Fire

Dattani in the process of engineering the current of Indian drama by bringing it closer to the real life experiences tried to articulate the voice of the oppressed sections of society whose identity is shrouded in the cover of myths and social prejudices. They have been dragged in darkness, doomed to survive in perpetual silence bearing the oppressive burden of hegemony of the elitist

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class. Dattani within the framework of dramatic structure tries to investigate the identities of those who occupy no space in social order. With this radical effort, he contributes to the matrix of the process that Erin Mee refers to as ‘a way of decolonizing of theatre without any preconceived ideal of a politically driven search for an indigenous aesthetic and dramaturgy’ (Mee, 14). The social awareness, the awareness for the silence of the colonized subjects, social discrimination in the name of religion, humiliation of humanity in the aroma of social pride, irrational acceptance of prejudices, sacrificing the ethical code based on human love are brought to the stage through the dramatic vision of Dattani. The social conventions often hamper the growth of individual and does not acknowledge the call of human love. The perpetual clash of the commitments of an individual for social order and the force of personal drives makes life intolerable. Dattani with the fine balance of stage and performance imparts an exceptional treatment to such situations. The play *Seven Steps around the Fire* represents the voice of eunuch community who are not even allowed to show their faces in public. They are not permitted to mingle with other human beings, prohibited to express their concern for human relationship. Dattani takes up an issue that is beyond the visible zones of social behaviour. He ventures to explore the misery of other marginalized sections of society struggling against the irresistible forces of social apathy. In Indian society eunuch-community can distinctively be identified with their specific pattern of behaviour involving their mode of speaking, clapping, dancing and singing. Dattani tries to represent the emotional crisis of eunuch community whose suffering is not confined to social neglect but it also includes the multiple layers of power domination. The storyline of this play is unusual in the Indian context. As Jeremy Mortimer puts it:

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

The plot of the play is focused around the incident of murder of Kamala, a eunuch. The absence of Kamala becomes a presence and controls the action in the play. Uma, wife of Superintendent of Police, Suresh, is the daughter of a vice-chancellor. She is a Ph.D. scholar in Sociology. She is motivated to investigate the real condition of ‘hijara’ community in Indian society. With this mission, she becomes curious to unveil the mystery of the murder of Kamala. The eunuch community usually occupy no honourable spaces in society and they are often pushed back to live on the margins of the society. Uma Rao, swayed by the human sympathy gets emotionally involved in the whole affair and identifies herself with their suffering. The play begins with the chanting of marriage mantras that fade out to the sound of the rustle and hiss of fire.

Uma visits the central jail to interview with Anarkali, the chief accused in the case. The bias and discrimination towards the neuter gender makes Dattani to explore the emotional crisis and human aspect of them. Munuswamy exercises his absolute authority over Anarkali and does not recognize her identity as a person. Uma asks her husband, Suresh, the reason for putting her in male prison. Suresh makes a very casual and contemptuous remark, “They are as strong as horses”. (CP II 237) Moreover, he directs Uma not to believe them for, “they are all liars”. (CP II 237) Suresh has no sympathy for Anarkali and admits, “They are all just castrated degenerate men” (CP II 238). Uma in her helplessness shares the anguish of the dramatist to establish that human identity is far above sex-determined social identities. Dattani takes care to explain the term ‘hijra’ by digging up the Indian myth from the Ramayana through the mouth of Uma:

UMA. A brief note on the popular myths on the origin of hijras will be in order, before looking at the class-gender-based power implications. The term
hijra, of course, is of Urdu origin, a combination of Hindi, Persian and Arabic, literally meaning 'neither male nor female.' Another legend traces their ancestry to the Ramayana. The legend has it that God Rama was in the forest to cross the river and go into exile. All the people of the city wanted to follow him. He said, 'Men and Women, turn back'. Some of his male followers did not know what to do. They could not disobey him. So they sacrificed their masculinity, to become neither men nor women and followed him to the forest. Rama was pleased with their devotion and blessed them. There are transsexuals all over the world, and India is no exception. The purpose of this case study is to show their position in society. Perceived as the lowest of the low, they yearn for family and love. The two events in mainstream Hindu culture where their presence is acceptable—marriage and birth—ironically, are the very same privileges denied to them by man and nature. Not for them the seven rounds witnessed by the Fire God, eternally binding man and woman in matrimony, or the blessings of 'May you be the mother of hundred sons'. (CP II 239-240).

Dattani in *Seven Steps around the Fire* takes two sides of argument (a) the apathy of Nature—their inability to fulfill sex assigned roles, (b) their misfortune to develop the bonds of human relationship. Anarkali’s yearning for various relationships like brother, sister, mother and father suggest that they have equal desire for the protection of personal relationships. Her intense pain to have the pleasure of relationship is pathetic, "If you were a hijra, I would have made you my sister" (CP II 242). Here lies the distinction of Dattani’s art. He makes representation of subalterns, defends their cause and stirs awareness in them through the bonds of relationship. Uma and Anarkali represent the dichotomy of margin and centre.

In this play Dattani represents various facets of subalternity. If Anarkali is a gendered subaltern, Uma is also a subaltern in comparison of her husband. She has no money to invest for the redressal of Anarkali. Her confession, "My husband won’t let me" (CP II 244) makes the entire situation more pathetic.
She has no freedom to spend money according to her own choices, “Even if I wanted to I couldn’t explain to my husband why I am paying for your bail” (CP II 244).

The dramatic action in the play moves in the form of investigation of the case. Uma decides to visit Shivajinagar to see Anarkali’s friend Champa. Uma offers the bail amount to Champa for the release of Anarkali. Champa exercises her absolute authority in her community but fears of any true revelation in the company of police officer. Her confession has come close to Spivak’s thesis of ‘silence’ and ‘speech’, “We cannot speak...When we want to speak nobody listens. When we cannot speak...” (CP II 259). Uma tries to stir the confidence in her to raise voice against the injustice done to them. Uma in order to poke at her conscience accuses Champa for the murder of Kamala. For her, it was difficult to tolerate and she bursts out, “she was my only daughter!” (CP II 262) She confessed that sexual handicapped is no barrier in their bonds of relationship. They have equal right for being involved in human relationship and their yearnings have equal intensity. Such irresistible craving for human relationship, the realization of the gravity of emotional ties in the character of Champa that eunuchs are not different from other human beings make Dattani to assert that bonds of human relationship are universal beyond the restrictions of myths and conventions.

Uma in her quest to unveil the mystery of Kamala’s murder sustains the grace of an essentially good human being. She does not care for the consequences of her obsession. Her venture does not remain only an academic pursuit and she herself develops emotional relationship with Champa and Anarkali. Uma decides to visit the place of Salim who was expected to marry Kamala. Uma enquires at Mr. Sharma’s place about the identity of Salim and the secret of his relationship with Kamala. The appearance of Subbu, the son of minister who for the first time appears almost by the end of the play, adds a complication in the play. Meanwhile, it is reported that Anarkali has been bailed out. All these events in the play contribute to the ultimate conclusion in
the play. At this juncture, the action in the play diverts in two directions—
Uma’s anguish of her married life and her anxiety about Kamala. The position
of Uma is no better than Kamala and Champa. They at least enjoy their
individuality and freedom in their specific domains but Uma has no freedom of
choice in her home. In the process of discovering their spaces in the social
milieu, she seems to lose her own space. Anarkali makes a fun of her,'n
“Ignorant woman. She thinks she knows her husband” (CP II 273).

The last scene of the play is praiseworthy for the emotional intensity
expressed in the texture of the play. Mr. Sharma all the time doubts about the
intentions and purposes of Uma. She has her own anxiety to investigate the
truth and Mr. Sharma is all the time apprehensive about the horrors implied in
revelation of truth, the atmosphere is auspicious but Mr. Sharma is in panic and
Subbu is nervous. Champa appears for dance with her trail. As soon as hijras
begin dancing and singing, Subbu comes forward looking at them. With the
dancing Anarkali, the vision of dead Kamala starts haunting his mind. In a state
of frenzy, he snatches the gun of Suresh. With the shift of consciousness into
past, he becomes restless to compromise with the restrictions imposed upon
him from outside. Self pity and self justice renders him blind to all myths and
conventions in which he was forced to live, “I-I am leaving you all! You can’t
keep me away from Kamala” (CP II 279). Subbu forgets everything and
becomes highly excited. He demands the photograph, the last memory of his
union with Kamala. Champa gives him the photograph with the sympathy,
“Give it to him. Take it my son” (CP II 279). As soon as Subbu looks at the
photograph, the living things suspend and the dead Kamala assumes the role
and significance of living entity governing and guiding the entire scene.

In a state of extreme depression, Subbu takes the gun, aims at his father,
and reveals the secret of the murder of Kamala. He cries out “You killed her!”
(CP II 280) Mr. Sharma who earlier killed Kamala in the snobbery of his status,
pathetically implores Champa to persuade his son to forget Kamala. Subbu
takes the gun and shoots himself. Anarkali who knew everything about Kamla’s life and death told Uma the truth. This is how Dattani puts it.

UMA. Why didn’t you tell me?

ANARKALI. Would you have believed me? Anyway, what is the use of all that? What does it matter who killed Kamala? She is dead...So many times I warned her. First I thought Salim was taking her for his own pleasure. When she told me about Subbu, Madam, I tried to stop her. I fought with her. I scratched her face, hoping she will become ugly and Subbu will forget her. He wanted to marry her...I was there at their wedding...She gave me that picture to show to Champa. I saw the men coming for her. I told her to run... (CP II 281).

The death of Subbu reveals the mystery of murder but makes Uma silent. The reality was so bitter that it was difficult to be exposed in public. The end is a bit depressing but it shows that the ‘voice’ against oppression is in itself a great challenge of life.

UMA. They have no voice. The case was hushed up and it was not even reported in the newspapers .... Subbu’s suicide was written off as an accident. The photograph was destroyed. So were the lives of two young people...But Anarkali’s blessings remain with me (Touching the locket.) I could not tell her I did not want her blessings for a child. All I want is what they want... To move on. To love. To live. (CP II 282)

Letting the subaltern speak Dattani deliberately foregrounds the underdog. He does not pity them neither does he present them in a demeaning fashion. He endows them with self-dignity, inner strength and the courage to endure their pains and struggle. By operating within the realistic context of a given culture, the artist wants to and intends to shatter the social norms and challenge their assumptions. This is done by using the ironies on hypocritical practices that operate as contradictions within the dominant culture or repressions. The postmodern art breaks through the stereotypes, questioning the refusal to recognize their differences and the unrepresented. Norms and rules are challenged, as irregularities are exposed. The anomaly with regard to what
is projected as ideal and the disruption in practice points at a fragmented cultural setup. This failure is addressed to foreground the subaltern to voice the suppressed facts and sidelined communities. It is rightly observed:

*Seven Steps Around the Fire* highlights the ridicule and discrimination against the transgendered in the society. The play captures the circumstances and contexts in which they are viewed with suspicion emphasizing their outcaste status. The dehumanized conditions of their existence and the humiliation of sexual abuse even within the prison premises point out how the guardians of law become the perpetrators of crime against the transgendered. It is made clear that what they long for is restitution of self-respect, understanding, identity and justice. (George, 149)

In the play different characters react differently towards the transgendered. The two extremes of love and contempt are characterized by Subbu who has illegally wedded Kamala, and his father Mr. Sharma who connives with Salim to kill Kamala. The brutal murder of Kamala raises the issue of an abandoned section of humanity without a legal system or a forum for redressal to protect the lives and dignity of the transgendered. What is alarming is the total lack of accountability on the part of the police and the legal machinery — the Repressive State Apparatuses. The play addresses the question of concern and possibility of support for the transgendered. Uma's repeated attempts and smart planning bypassing her husband, is due to her genuine concern and interest in establishing justice. By winning the confidence of Champa she is able to relate to them and bring out the truth. Dattani credits her with intelligence, sensitivity and determination enabling her to fulfil the task. Thus she becomes the agent of change. This social agent is characterized by an open mind, a consciousness that dares to think differently, reacting against social conditioning, questioning the existing social norms and their rationality and merit. Uma's social position as the daughter of the Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University and the daughter-in-law of the Deputy Commissioner of Police and the wife of the Superintendent of Police, places her higher in the social hierarchy. Yet her role as a wife has nothing to offer,
except to be fit for motherhood, a social appendage, and an object of sexual pleasure. As a wife loyalty, obedience and motherhood are the qualities expected of her. She is determined to finish her investigation in spite of the danger involved in it – 'If my family throws me out, I hope that doctorate will come in handy' (CP II 262) – revealing her limitations, and hoping to arrive at the truth.

The play, *Seven Steps around the Fire* looks at human relationships within the institution of marriage. It undermines the sanctity of marriage by laying bare the fault-lines in husband and wife bonding. The sacred image of marriage—that of the marital couple walking around the fire taking the seven steps signifying the sacred vows of marriage provides the background. Dattani questions the relevance and validity of this convention in contemporary society. He takes the play beyond the familiar track of family drama. There is a clear venture into the detective genre, sustaining the interest of the audience. Roles are reversed. Patriarchy is characterized by the presence of Suresh, Mr. Sharma, the invisible Vice-Chancellor, and the Deputy Commissioner. The shift takes place from attention to the centres of power onto the margin, to the details in the lives of the weak. As Uma walks through the lanes hidden behind the Russel Market, more light is thrown on the dark settlements of the transgenders, the *hijra* community, away from the prejudiced eyes of the public. Their low social status is revealed. Uma dares to venture deeper beneath the surface to know the truth. By befriending Anarkali and Champa, Uma moves into the inner circle of the transsexuals, bringing the margin to the centre. The issue of the transgendered is no more a marginal issue but becomes a mainstream concern. By deliberately bringing in the plight of the transgendered to the centerstage, Dattani hopes to have their voices heard, signaling the dawning of a new social awareness. There is more to be learnt, more to be reckoned with. By letting Anarkali and Champa speak of their woes, Dattani is granting an audience to them. Theatre space gives him the opportunity to let his audience face the transgendered, hearing them recount
their miseries, the physical abuse, sexual abuse, violence and other discriminations. The pathetic condition of their lives with nobody to advocate their cause is a poignant and significant statement made by Dattani. It is understood that more than pity, there is a need for understanding, for narrating the injustice meted out to them within the precincts of the judiciary and the police force.

Thus, the play *Seven Steps around the Fire* artistically unearths the shamefulness of our public thoughts and brutality of private thoughts. It does not delineate only the subalterns of the eunuch but also of women. The creator of this work gives vent to his anguish against the irresistible forces of social apathy and injustice towards realization of human identity of the eunuch community. Uma Rao is the mouthpiece of the dramatist and shares anguish with its creator.

The play gives the message that the eunuch is human being as man and woman can be. Their hearts are full of milk of human love and sympathy. It is a grave crime that they are denied human love and identity. Their hearts also throb for love and joy of life. Nature curses them with denial of sexual competency, but society curses them more cruelly with their social boycott. They are finished with social boycott and stigma. Human soul of the eunuch is bruised and bleeding. Longing for love and relationship is the keynote voice of this artistic work.

Mahesh Dattani projects the pathetic plight of the eunuch community without offering any suitable solution. The treatment meted out to the eunuch reflects the social and cultural notions. The attitude of the elitist towards the subaltern is very mean and disgusting. Mr. Suresh Rao looks at them with disgusting attitude. The play is set in Indian metropolitan environment and scenes move from posh area to peripheral parts of the city. These two localities symbolize the two concepts of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’. The play highlights the creator’s awareness of social hierarchical structure, scenario and changing perceptions.
The quest ‘to love and live’ is the voice of each subaltern. Uma appears as a defender to articulate the voice of weak. The articulation of the voice of subalterns like Champa, Kamala and Anarkali is possible through the confidence born out of the bonding of human relationship.

3.3.2. On a Muggy Night in Mumbai

Dattani has tried to explore new possibilities in Indian theatre where each and every human experience beyond the restraints of convention can afford strong dramatic situations. To break the taboos, to expose the misery of sexuality marginalized sections and to reflect man’s consistent struggle with his inner self, confronting with socio-ethical restrictions constitute a specific strain in his dramatic art. In the traditional society of India, the identity of gays, lesbians and homosexuals has not yet been recognized and they are left to lead a secluded life in their claustrophobic spaces. Dattani dramatizes the crisis of those relationships that are not rigidly demarcated in terms of socially accepted gender constructions. He admits, ‘I have found out that sexuality can’t be straitjacketed or compartmentalized. There are varying degrees of love and bonding one feels for another person irrespective of gender’. (Rao, Web)

Dattani in On a Muggy Night in Mumbai investigates how the human aspirations are insignificant in contrast of social faiths. History is a witness to the fact that the invisible clutches of social forces can never permit an individual to carve his own designs beyond the patterns recommended and accepted by society. For Dattani, realization of relationship and reliance on social norms are two distinctive facets of human experience. The radical changes in life conditions opened new possibilities of human experiences. In one of his interviews, he accepted, ‘It is to do with perceptions. I don’t mean to say that this is a definite view of life. But several of images that we carry around in our minds are politically generated images and we accept them to be true. However, I don’t think so and my characters are simply personifications of my perceptions’ (Nair, Web).
Sexual desires in spite of being related with instinctive behaviour are controlled by the canons of morality. It is often linked with procreation process and therefore, heterosexuality is the only possible mode of the acceptance of man and woman relationship. Heterosexuality has been treated as the 'norm' and homosexuality has been shunned as deviant perversion and even criminal. Politically the community of gay and lesbians is marginalized. Marginalization, victimization, self torture, guilt and resistance against the social traditions constitute the spectrum of the existence of gays. They suffer under the pressure of the loss of identity along with external sense of guilt. Judith Butler in her famous studies *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993) has interrogated on the question of identity. She has focused on the modes of representation of gay/lesbian identity and the identity of difference. Butler, the theorist of gays, suggests that the issue is not of avowing or disavowing the category of gays. She advises to specify the true determinant of the meaning of sexuality itself—whether it means anatomy, the actual act of sex, the fantasy structure or the gender. She asserts that gay/lesbian theory seeks to elucidate the specificity of lesbian experience and lesbian sexuality. She further argues that lesbian sexuality is a process that reinscribes the power domain it resists. (Butler, 310) Homosexuality is always present within the construction of heterosexuality itself and unless the notion of self is spelt out, there can be no 'heterosexual' at all. Homosexuality is a state of mind where individual asserts to protest against sex-binary existing in the social order. In heterosexual relations, on several occasions, there is a tendency towards the domination, torture and empowerment of 'other'. Adrienne Rich argues 'Compulsory heterosexuality is political institution that only ensures a women's continued subordination because it privileges man's needs and choices'. (Rich, 73)

The concept of homosexuality involves the four dimensions of thought—biological, social, moral and psychological. It has been explained, 'on a more personal level, however, the term 'gay' also brought with it an increasingly widespread reference to sexuality as a quality or property of the
‘self’. A person has sexuality, gay or otherwise, which can be reflexibly grasped, interrogated and developed’. (Giddens, 14) The basic idea of homosexuality is against the nature instinctive behaviour. It is deemed unethical. Homosexuality is guilt and heterosexuality is ideal. It results in terrible anguish and suffering. It represents conflict between internal creative principle and social compulsive forces and it subsequently results in the strong upheaval of human emotions, appropriate to move the theatre with extreme flow of human energy. To represent the idea of ‘gay culture’ in theatre according to traditional stage mechanism is not suitable. There is a quick succession of shifting in external and internal zones, between logical and illogical behaviour, between social taboo and psychological compulsions.

Dattani believes in the performance of his plays to make aware audience about the invisible issues. People need to know that these issues exist in society and need to be addressed. Reality is exhibited with utmost care of true representation of problems in the society. It is observed:

And the themes of On a Muggy Night deserve to touch the whole of society and to be touched by it. It is not simply the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal. It is a play about how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates. (McRae, 45)

Two questions come to our mind when we go through this play. One, is this play a true reflection of human behaviour in terms of same-sex relationship? Two, can ‘gay themes of love’ be a fit subject of contemporary drama? Dattani in course of his introduction to Collected Plays (2000) claims that his plays are the true reflection of the contemporary society. He writes:

I am certain that my plays are a true reflection of my time, place and socio-economic background. (CP XV)

Since love is more in the mind than in the body, the attitude to sex varies from person to person. No doubt, society imposes restrictions on individuals as to how to gratify their sex. But individuals are individuals—they find a way out
to fulfil their love and sex. Dattani knows this too well and hence his characters go in their own ways.

The play deals with the issue of homosexuality and the problems which gay and lesbian people face. It can be seen as a conflict between individual behaviour and the norms of society. It asserts societal norms over individual likings and dislikings. When there is a conflict between individual and society, it is individual who has to surrender before society. The play is a story of young men and women in their twenties and thirties living in metropolis. They are liberal minded, educated and are from affluent families. Nearly all the characters that appear in the play are either bisexual or gay or lesbian. Though they live in cosmopolitan culture they are afraid to assert their feelings publicly. So every now and then they come together and share their feelings, views and opinions. They don’t have courage to defy the societal norms and live happy life. As John McRae observes in a note on the play;

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. It would be banal to see these characters as in any way stereotypical. They are a carefully balanced range of individuals with a depth of experience that exceeds traditional expectations. They are brought together in such a way as to bring out the conflicts, repressions and past secrets which are assailing Kamlesh and Ed/Prakash in particular. The past relationship between Kamlesh and Prakash, and the new ‘romance’ between Ed and Kamlesh’s sister Kiran are beautifully counterpoised until the revelation at the climax of the first act that Ed and Prakash are the same person—which always draws a gasp of astonishment from audiences. (McRae, 45-46)
A. K. Chaudhuri observes here that Dattani has adventurously brought out the inhibited self of every man. In this sense she comments.

Much of ‘mainstream’ society, Dattani believes, lives in a state of ‘forced harmony’, out of sense of helplessness, or out of a lack of alternatives. Simply for lack of choice, they conform to stereotypes like ‘homosexuals’ that in some sense leads to a kind of ghettoisation within society, little spaces to which the marginalized are pushed. (Chaudhuri, 47)

The play opens with a scene at Kamlesh’s flat in Mumbai. Kamlesh has had sex with his guard and it can be clear from their appearance and conversation.

KAMLESH. Tum, kya...yeh sab...paise ke liye karte ho?
GUARD. Nahin. Hahn! Hahn, main paise ke liye hi to karta hoon sab kuch!
KAMLESH. You do enjoy it. What you do to me, what I do to you. Don’t you? (CP 51)

Kamlesh has invited his friends to share his feelings with them and in the very first act we see preparations on the part of Kamlesh to welcome them. His friends—Sharad, Ranjit, Bunny Singh and Deepali, all homosexuals, gather in the flat of Kamlesh in the meantime. Kamlesh is in despair and wants to open his heart with his friends. He has had an unsuccessful love-relationship with Prakash alias Ed at first and later on with Sharad. But now Prakash is engaged to Kiran, Kamlesh’s sister and doesn’t want to continue his love relationship with Kamlesh. Kamlesh can’t bear the idea of separation from Prakash. Sharad has been helping him to forget Prakash.

KAMLESH. You did try very hard to help me forget him. (CP 57)

Kamlesh still harbours the memory of their relationship and has kept a naked photograph of his and Prakash together in arms and enjoying sex. It is quite clear from their conversation.

SHARAD. That’s what you told me earlier. Tell me the truth now, did you tear up all his pictures? (CP 57)
When his friends gather, Kamlesh reveals his heart before them. He admits that he has come to Bombay to forget the memory of his relationship with Prakash. He feels the pain of separation.

KAMLESH. I came here to get over a relationship. A relationship...I suppose it was. In Bangalore. We have all been through the pain of separation...As gay men and women, we have all been through that, I suppose...some of us several times. (CP 68)

Prakash was afraid and ashamed of society and societal norms and wanted to live 'normal' life. Being a gay man Prakash had to pay heavy price that he had to leave his parents and sister but now he regrets upon his gay nature. Ranjit also expresses the same feelings.

KAMLESH. For the first time in my life, I wished I wasn't gay.
RANJIT. Oh, come, dear fellow. At some point or another we all wish to be something we are not. (CP 69)

Kamlesh went to the psychiatrist to overcome the depression but the doctor advised him to be heterosexual and at the same time told him that it was difficult to change society. Kamlesh can’t wipe out the memory of Prakash and thinks that he can’t live without Prakash. He has been trying to find satisfaction by having sex with strangers to avoid the memory of Prakash. Bunny Singh advises Kamlesh to marry to overcome this situation because marriage gives an opportunity to live double life—as a happy married man and as a gay. Marriage acts as a camouflage to cover up homosexual relationship because society doesn’t suspect married men.

BUNNY. Find yourself a nice woman. You can always have sex on the side.
SHARAD. And pretend to be straight like you! (CP 70)

Kamlesh is ready to do whatever his friends tell him to do to avoid the memory of Prakash. They all decide to tear up the photograph having a little ritual by chanting hymns but at the same time Kiran enters. She doesn’t know anything about the relationship between her brother, Kamlesh and her fiancé.
Prakash alias Ed. She feels that Kamlesh is hiding something from her. Kiran had an unsuccessful marriage and after break-up she has taken divorce. But now she is engaged to Prakash and soon is going to marry him. Deepali is about to tell Kiran about the relationship between Prakash and Kamlesh but Kamlesh restrains her.

Prakash doesn't have courage to accept the homosexual relationship and has decided to follow the majority and that's why he has decided to marry Kiran and have heterosexual identity. Forces in the society have won against the individuality of Prakash. It is clear from Kamlesh's confession.

Kamlesh. He has changed. He says he is heterosexual now.
Ranjit. That's a good deal of crap!
Kamlesh. He goes to church every week now. They put him on to a psychiatrist. He believes his love for me was the work of the devil. Now the devil has left him. (CP 85)

It is against his self that Prakash has decided to marry a woman because society doesn't approve of love between two same sexes. The society believes in the love between opposite sexes and in the conflict between individual and society, always individual has to follow the society.

Kamlesh. I have lost him forever! All because of the crap that has been filled in him that he has to love a woman! (CP 85)

Kamlesh doesn't care society and feels that the society should allow two men to love.

Kamlesh. Let them talk! If two men want to love one another, what's the harm? (CP 91)

There is no provision in the law which safeguards the rights of homosexuals and even society doesn't accept the relationship and such people are banished from the society. Even their family members neglect them. Kiran wants to keep this unnatural relationship between Prakash and Kamlesh secret.

Kiran. Kamlesh, take my advice. Don't let people know about you. You will spend your whole life defending yourself. If I had the choice, I would stay invisible too. (CP 91)
That's the reason Kamlesh has shifted to Bombay. A clear contrast can be seen in the nature of Prakash and Kamlesh. Both engage in homosexual relationship but under the pressure of society Prakash decides to break up the relationship and wants to live heterosexual life like majority of the people.

- ED. I am not happy with being who I am. And I want to try to be like the rest. (CP 92)

The decision taken by Ed is against his own wish and he'll have to suffer its consequences. He would not live happy life as a married man because he still loves Kamlesh.

KAMLESH. Prakash, I beg of you, don’t say that! You love me and you know it! It can work out fine between us if you had some pride in yourself! You are wrenching your soul from your body! (CP 93)

Ed thinks that once he marries Kiran, he will be free to carry on his love affair with Kamlesh because as a married man nobody would suspect him.

ED. Once we are married, I could see you more often without causing any...suspicion. (CP 104)

Prakash’s inner self still loves Kamlesh.

ED. I'll take care of Kiran. And you take care of me. (Begins to caress Kamlesh). (CP 105)

At this stage Kiran comes to know the relationship between her brother, Kamlesh and her would-be husband, Prakash alias Ed. She no more wants to marry Prakash and expresses her resentment.

KIRAN (to Kamlesh). How could you do this to me?
KAMLESH. I...didn’t know how to tell you. I am sorry...
KIRAN. I don’t...know what to do. I...I have lost the two people whom I love...(CP 106)

Kiran is a typical Indian woman who believes in heterosexual relationship and that too after marriage. Prakash wants Kiran to understand his situation but she can't bear the idea of her marrying a gay man.

ED. Sweetheart, that is such a...Pardon me, but you are behaving like a typical woman again.
KIRAN. Isn’t that what you want? (CP 107)
The play is a story not only of Kamlesh and Prakash, but also of the other characters in the play. Nobody is happy with his present status and has something to say about society, its customs and traditions, etc. They express freely their opinions on marriage, family institutions and norms of society. They represent the homosexual community in miniature. Of the female characters, Deepali is bolder than Kiran and doesn’t hesitate or feel shy while talking about rights of gay people.

DEEPALI. I am all for the gay men’s cause. Men deserve only men! (CP 60)

Deepali is proud of her lesbian identity.

DEEPALI. If you were a woman, we would be in love.

KAMLESH. If you were a man, we would be in live.

(CP 65)

Ranjit has left India and has settled in UK because Indian law doesn’t permit homosexual relationship whereas in western and European countries, the homosexual relationship is legal. He or she has to suffer badly for being gay or lesbian in India. Indian society and law wouldn’t approve of such relationship.

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

Ranjit has been carrying a homosexual relationship with English lover for the last twelve years and thinks that it is impossible in India.

RANJIT. Call me what you will. My English lover and I have been together for twelve years now. You lot will never be able to find a lover in this wretched country! (CP 71)

At another point in the play, Ranjit makes a very sarcastic comment on the Indian society as Indian society doesn’t allow the dual identity—Indian and gay.

RANJIT. That’s really rich coming from a closet homosexual like you! Yes, I am sometimes regretful of being an Indian, because I can’t seem to be both Indian and gay. But you are simply
ashamed. All this sham is to cover up your shame.
(CP 88)

One thing is crystal clear. All the characters are honest to themselves and bold enough to confess their sexual exploitations and preferences as well. They, in course of time, try to understand their problems and come out with astounding disclosures. Bunny Singh, a TV actor, is a middle-class married man having children and living happy family life but his basic instincts—that of homosexual relationship—can’t be accepted by society. So, stealthily, he keeps homosexual relationship going and in public behaves like everyone else. He performs an ideal husband and father in a TV serial. In the like-minded company of his friends he expresses his inner feelings:

BUNNY. I know. Just as the man whom my wife loves does not exist. I have denied a lot of things. The only people who know me—the real me—are present here in this room. And you all hate me for being such a hypocrite. The people who know me are the people who hate me. That is not such a nice feeling. I have tried to survive. In both worlds. And it seems I do not exist in either. I am sorry, Kiran, I lied to you as I have lied to the rest of the world. I said to you that I am a liberal-minded person. I am not them but I accept them. Actually, it is they who are liberal-minded. They have accepted me in spite of my letting them down so badly. I deny them in public, but I want their love in private. I have never told anyone in so many words what I am telling you now—I am a gay man. Everyone believes me to be the model middle-class Indian man. I was chosen for the part in the serial because I fit into common perceptions of what a family man ought to look like. I believed in it myself. I lied—to myself first. And I continue to lie to millions of people every week on Thursday nights. There’s no such person....(CP 102-103)

Bunny makes a very revolutionary statement about our mindset to categorize people on the basis of their sexual behaviour and about our tendency to attach tags. He advocates full freedom to men and women with respect to their
sexuality. This is against the orthodox thinking of majority of people in the society and in favour of a very few homosexuals.

BUNNY. All I am saying is that we should all forget about categorizing people as gay or straight or bi or whatever, and let them do what they want to do! (CP 88)

Sharad’s relationship with Kamlesh is more candid and open. He knows real nature of Kamlesh and is always ready to help him. Initially Kamlesh doesn’t acknowledge Sharad’s co-operation and sympathy but at the end admits that he can love Sharad truly. Sharad’s approach is practical as regards his sexual identity. He boldly admits that he is a gay.

SHARAD. No, I am not bisexual, I am as gay as a goose. (CP 100)

Same-sex love could be as demanding as heterosexual love relationship. It also arouses jealousy. Take for instance, the following conversation between Sharad and Kamlesh:

SHARAD. You know I still love you.
KAMLESH. (in a matter-of-fact manner). Then why did you walk out on me?
SHARAD. You were relieved when I did.
KAMLESH. I am sorry....
SHARAD. I knew it within a month of moving in with you.....
KAMLESH. I tried, Sharad, I....
SHARAD. You tried to love me, but....
KAMLESH. I wanted to love you, I tried for a whole year.
SHARAD. But you couldn’t.
KAMLESH. I do love you.
SHARAD. Oh! Spare me the lies! You could never love anyone because you are still in love with Prakash! (CP 56)

Kamlesh admits that he really loves Sharad.

KAMLESH. Yes, I do love him. I can be honest with him. I don’t have to deal with lies. And he has the courage to live with me, we both do—to live openly as two men in love. (CP 104)
At the end of the play, Sharad thinks about his life till now, his identity and his future. It is indicative of all such people in India. Dattani appeals audience to think about these people, to look sympathetically towards them and to guarantee their basic rights.

SHARAD (singing as he goes offstage). I ask myself what have I got And what I am and what I’m not....(CP 111)

Dattani has made significant and revolutionary comments on the very sacred institution in India—marriage. He thinks that many people live together in marriage only to show the society that they are living a normal and happy life. Majority of the men and women don’t like their partners to be homosexual. He has presented a world of homosexuals on the background of marriage ceremony downstairs. The two opposite worlds are present in the society. The world downstairs is governed by societal norms and rituals.

SHARAD. Why not? The whole heterosexual world is run by rituals! That wedding downstairs will go on for days! (CP 72)

Dattani has questioned the very purpose of marriage. People think that marriage makes life happy and a woman who has got a good husband is content always. That’s why Kamlesh wants Kiran to get married though Kiran has bitter experience from her first marriage.

KAMLESH. I want her to be...content. Like Bunny’s wife......Kiran has had a troubled first marriage. I helped her fight for a divorce....I was thankful also for Prakash for making her happy again. (CP 85-86)

At the opening of Act III Ranjit wonders why people get married and thinks that it is not natural to get married for sexual gratification only because animals don’t marry though they have sex.

RANJIT. Why do people get married? (CP 95)

Our government doesn’t allow same sex people to marry and homosexuals have been fighting for the right to marry same sex partner. Through Kiran’s
comment regarding her brother’s pathetic situation, the plea has been made in favour of same sex marriage.

KIRAN. I really wish they would allow gay people to marry. (CP 98)

The characters presented in the play are pleasure seekers. Their sexuality is threatened by the norms of the society. They want to throw away the traditional and conventional pattern of seeking love through heterosexual relationship. Their nature is different from that of normal social human beings. There is a binary opposition between their nature and the culture of their society. This dichotomy between nature and culture obstructs their love and poisons their minds. The note of revolt against the society is unmistakable. In the age of globalization, nature triumphs over culture.

A number of questions are thrown up. On a Muggy Night in Mumbai lifts the veil of secrecy that shrouds the marginalized cultures, sexualities and lifestyles. Can homosexuality change to heterosexuality? Is homosexuality an ‘unnatural’ aberration of human society at all? Or is Dattani himself substituting one sexual stereotype with another? What, for example, happens to bisexuals? The play attempts to pose these questions, knowing that final answers are hardly possible.

The play is the first in Indian theatre to openly handle gay themes of love, affiliation, trust and betrayal, raising serious ‘closet’ issues that remain generally invisible. The primary audience comprised both gay and ‘straight’ people; mostly middle class. Curiously enough, a play as daring as this actually proved to be an enormous commercial success in Mumbai and later on everywhere that it was later performed.

Dattani obviously seems to have a point to make to his audience. But rather than directly preach, the playwright dramatizes and peoples the performance stage with characters one begins to identify with, facing genuine, real-life problems. The play, then, in a sense, is a plea for empathy and sensitivity to India’s ‘queer-culture’.
3.3.3. Do the Needful

*Do the Needful* is the earliest radio play of Dattani. The play depicts the theme of homosexuality but in a quite different way. This story though appears to be comical reminds us the abnormal behaviour of a young couple who are willing to pursue their pleasures independently outside marriage. The play was first broadcast on 14th August 1997 by BBC Radio 4.

In 1996 Mahesh Dattani was commissioned to write his first radio play for the BBC; the result was the somewhat unconventional ‘romantic comedy’ *Do the Needful*. Like all the best love stories, the hero and heroine end up getting married, but the road to marital bliss is full of the most unexpected twists and turns. For me, this was the joy of working on Mahesh’s script: his writing, whilst taking on a conventional form and being readily accessible to an audience, never fails to challenge and surprise. And whilst the play may be set in India within the conventions of ‘arranged marriages’, its wider themes are universal. (Avens, 115)

Homosexuality has remained one of the major motifs in the dramatic works of Mahesh Dattani. He has courage of conviction to discuss openly what he observes in the society whether it is communal prejudices or gender discrimination, gay relationship or romantic relationship, sexual colonialism or prostitution, consumerism or communal discrimination or apathy towards AIDS affected people. The play *Do the Needful* decodes the complexity of homosexual relationship in our Indian society which looks contemptuously at such relationship. The main characters of the play Alpesh and Lata are quite unconventional in their outlook and their parents are people of quite conventional bent of mind. Alpesh and Lata are romantic but in a different way. The play ends with a marriage between Alpesh and Lata. But it is a compromise against the burden of patriarchal social order.

Since it is a radio play the dramatist discards elaborate stage description. The narrative of the play occurs at two levels – exterior and interior. Dattani writes about the society he lives in. His plays depict the dynamics and
mechanism of modern urban families. Therefore, he gives way to old theatrical device to reveal the move and motives of the characters. He uses newer devices like ‘thought’, ‘mobile phone’ conversations for revealing the feelings and thoughts of the characters.

The plot of the play revolves around the theme of arranged marriage between Alpesh Patel, a young boy of Gujarati parents and Lata Gowda, a Kannadiga. The parents of both the persons look concerned regarding their marriage. The dramatic narrative shows the tension and unrest prevailing in the minds of all the characters. Alpesh Patel and Lata Gowda are the two main male-female characters of the play. Alpesh is thirty plus divorced and Lata is twenty four years old and a very notorious girl. However, she is well-read lady. Alpesh’s family is richer than Lata’s. Gowda family is very positive about Alpesh’s matrimonial proposal. Both are well to do families and claim to have good names in their respective communities, even though, they intend to get their children married outside their community. They are brought together through matrimonial correspondence and are keen to get their children married soon. Actually, the problem prevails beneath the surface level. Alpesh and Lata are unwilling to marry each other. Alpesh is a gay. He is in love with a man called Trilok, whereas Lata is quite romantic in her notion. She is in love with a man called Salim who is a terrorist. The conflicts and turmoil of their minds are brought on the surface through ‘thought’ technique. Both the families are worried about their children who have ruined their family name and honour. The whole Gowda community is condemning Lata’s affair with Salim. She has brought social disgrace to the family. So her family is highly eager to get Lata married as soon as possible. Lata’s helplessness and her parents’ wrath are well expressed in the following dialogues.

LATA. Please, Amma! Please don’t insist I agree to this! You are ruining my life.
PREMA GOWDA. You should have thought of our lives before sleeping with that terrorist! (CP 122)
On the other hand, the Patels are also anxious and eager to get Alpesh married as soon as possible. His first marriage didn’t work as the woman demanded divorce with Alpesh. It was not in his control to stop her. So, being inwardly reluctant about this marriage, he intends to stop his marriage. His inward is thrown out through his ‘thought’ during mother-son interaction over the issue of marriage.

ALPESH. Is it . . . is it very important for me to get married?
Pause.
KUSUMBEN PATEL. Hmm.
ALPESH. (thought). Trilok, you can’t say I didn’t try. (CP 125)

Both families are speculating on a suitable match between Alpesh and Lata. But the bride and the groom are wrapped in their own speculations. Lata contemplates only of her lover, Salim. Alpesh keeps on musing on his gay partner, Trilok. Both are distressed and disappointed. It is quite clear that their passions and urges are controlled by the power of patriarchy and parental expectations. As a result of this, their minds and consciousness are anguished and fractured. At the very beginning of the play, they lapse into thought which reveal the tide of their passion.

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 ask you that when we meet. You would want to make love first, of course. Which is just . . . fine . . . (Pause.) what a journey! (CP 119)

The feelings of Alpesh are expressed in his following utterances.

ALPESH. (Thought) Will you understand me? How much do you really care for me? How much do I really care for you? Do I understand? Is it any easier for you? (CP 120)

His mother insists him to marry as it is important to get married without knowing the real cause of failure of his first marriage. He knows well that his gay nature was the real reason for the separation with his first wife. Being
unable to tell his mother, he just warns her saying that his second marriage might fail.

ALPESH. What happened with my last marriage...
KUSUMBEN PATEL. Yes? What do you want to say?
ALPESH. You don’t want it to happen again, do you?
KUSUMBEN PATEL. Are you threatening me that it will happen again? (CP 126)

Alpesh is suggesting her that she should be prepared for the failure of his second marriage. He feels the pangs of separation with Trilok. He is haunted by his association with Trilok. He wants to do justice with his companion, Trilok. It is because of Trilok that Alpesh opposes his second marriage. In modern Indian society, homosexuality is still a taboo. However, it exists as any other social reality does. Alpesh’s mother is ignorant about her son’s relationship with Trilok. It is unthinkable for her. Therefore, she is trying desperately to get him married. If Lata is unsuitable, she would find another girl for him:

KUSUMBEN PATEL. If they have something to hide, then . . . (Pause.) If not, we will find some poor Patel girl—who will be grateful to enter our household . . . Who will not expect too much from you. (CP 126)

Dattani repeatedly employs code mixing technique in the narrative of his plays. At times, he uses words from Indian languages without translating them into English. After listening to Alpesh’s matrimonial prospects, the liftman sings hilariously.

LIFTMAN. (fading, away, drumming on the plywood wall of the lift and singing boisterously.) Le jayenge, le jayenge, dilwale dulhaniyan le jayenge! (CP 124)

The play also informs about certain customs and ceremonies to be undertaken at the time of starting something auspicious task. Gifting or donating money to others especially poor people and poojari, priest, etc. for seeking blessings upon the task is highlighted in the play. The Patels are going to visit the Gowda family at Bangalore. Mr. Patel first gives ten rupees to
In the dramatic structure of play, *Do the Needful*, Dattani tries to show the clash between the homosexuals’ sentiments and the established and accepted notions of the society which do not permit an individual to lead life according to the call of his/her conscience. The play is built up on the idea of pushing forward the institution of conventional marriage system. Being a master dramatist, Dattani interweaves the theme of homosexuality in the fabric of the play. He is very original in his art of adopting technique befitting to his purpose. In an attempt to depict the complex and conflicting mental spectrum, he resorts to ‘thought’ device for surfaced inside story before audience properly. This is how he lays bare inside working of Lata’s mind through ‘thought’ technique.

LATA. (thought). Salim, I know you are allowed four wives – what’s the point in thinking of 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. (CP 126-27)

After mutual matrimonial correspondence, Mr. and Mrs. Patel arrive at Gowda’s portico along with their son, Alpesh to negotiate the matrimonial alliance between Alpesh and Lata. At her farmhouse, Lata watches Alpesh smoking in a private place. Alpesh requests her not to reveal it before his father. To the much surprise of Alpesh, Lata expresses her desire to smoke. Alpesh is relaxed to know her smoking habit. He fishes out a cigarette and lights it for her. Lata joins him in smoking. She exhales loud and slow. So Alpesh says ‘Teri bhi chup, meri bhi chup.’ (CP 142) Lata doesn’t understand this Hindi expression. So Alpesh puts it into English that your silence and mine as well. Thereafter Lata and Alpesh go to see Gauri’s calf. On the way, both are
thinking with themselves. They are musing over the dilemma of how to present reality.

LATA. (thought). I had the chance! I couldn’t lose it. I had to tell him about you, then or never.
ALPESH. (thought). What could I say, Trilok? How would I tell her reject me? (CP 149)

The plays of Dattani represent the problems and angst of those whose voices were silenced under the pressure of social conventions and prejudices as well as oppressive force of patriarchy. Dattani, since the publication of his first play, has been constantly attempting to present such themes and issues under the hidden agenda of sensitizing the mass about the problems faced by the colonized class in our society. He focuses on the tension and turbulence of the characters resulting from demolition of human hopes and aspiration under the name of healthy socio-cultural practices. There is a constant conflict between an individual self with the collective self. In other words, the individual self is trying to acquire as much freedom as possible from the grip of collective or societal self. God has given us free will but the society doesn’t allow an individual to exercise his/her free will.

The dramatic narrative progresses through interior and exterior spaces. Actually, they are the two levels of the mental spectrum of parents and mental spectrum of the children. But the interior space dealing with individual’s free will and choice is hidden. It is yearning to express under the weight of exterior space dealing with the society/parental mindset. What parents think—good/proper is revealed through exterior mode. And what Alpesh/Lata thinks is revealed through interior channel. Exterior device can be deemed as the curtain to veil the internal reality of human mind and psyche.

Dattani takes this opportunity to highlight the evil effects of cosmopolitanism and urbanization of villages. All is done through the character of coconut vendor, Mariappa. His character provides both amusement and sarcasm. He is very outspoken and conventional person of the soil. His character represents the conventional spirit of the people who oppose any idea
that brings change in established norms of society. He is furious upon the modern people who allow their children to marry outside the caste and region.

COCONUT VENDOR. Yes, yes. You are all doctors. Modern big people. Giving so much freedom to your children. (CP 140)

This seems to be straight from the heart of a villager whose land has been usurped, unlawfully, under the name of urbanization and modernization. Lata informs Alpesh that Mariappa beats drum when he is very angry with the whole world. His daughter had run away to Bombay to join the movies. So he feels humiliated and hides his face from the villagers. Under the mask of modernization, the unethical nexus of politicians, government officials, and industrialists do everything. They talk about development, but their aim is maximum corruption. Devraj Gowda echoes similar sentiments:

DEVRAJ GOWDA. It is all because of those bloody illegal industrialists! They don’t even spare our halli! Siphoning the electricity from the poles! All crooks, I tell you! All, all of them are thieves! They should be thrown out of the state. Let them do all this in their own state. (CP 144-145)

The play highlights wrath and anger of the people against the industrialists for the excessive consumption of water and electricity polluting environment. The play also focuses on sandalwood smuggling going on in this part of the state. Smuggling is done by the local people. So both local and outsiders are thieves. Villagers consider city-life as ‘Adunik Yug’, i.e. modern time. It is clear from the comment by coconut vendor:

COCONUT VENDOR. Those sons of demons! Who asked them to come here? (Shouts after the car.) Go away! We don’t want your money! Go! (Spitting loudly in anger.) I am a son of this soil, this is my land! We don’t want you, you sons of whores! Born in the most inauspicious time! (To Devraj Gowda.) And you! You we have served for so long, you give your daughters to them. Aiyo! Big people! Modern people! (Fades out as he walks away with his cycle.) Kaliyuga! Kaliyuga! Our
mother is being raped and her own sons are watching . . . ! (CP 141)

This is the harsh reality. coconut vendor is against urbanization. He is the best example of the victim of the government’s developmental policy where an average villager’s requirements are overlooked or not considered. The rich and the powerful take the maximum benefit of development. At the same time, it is equally true that financial scenario can be improved only if the rich keep on spending more and more. Urbanization brings money in the centre of human existence. There are advantages and disadvantages of it.

When Devraj Gowda asks Alpesh to speak something about their press, Alpesh feels that nothing is worth sharing. The father being a snob and hypocrite, he insists Alpesh to present the glorious saga of his achievement. Alpesh is honest and unassuming. So he is not inclined to impress Gowda family by telling a lie. Alpesh thinks to himself.

ALPESH. (thought). What could I say to them? Daddy had his colleague approve the loan. We paid enough bribes to get the damn thing off. We hired the underworld to have Grandpa’s tenants evicted . . . I hate lying and liars. I have to do it so often. I feel every time I speak, I am lying. (Pause.) In case you think I am rich . . . I am just the caretaker. It’s all his. I can’t walk out on him without leaving it all. I wish it didn’t matter. I wish . . . (CP 136)

Over and over again lines like this one make readers’ conviction stronger that Alpesh is a transparent person. His tragedy is that he cannot speak out a peculiar form of his sexuality. He knows that the moment he speaks out he would be virtually excommunicated. He wants to be truthful. But the social attitudes being what they are, he is unable to come out as a homosexual. That is his predicament. He wants to ‘run into that darkness out there’. (CP 142) But what is that darkness? It means nothing. He can be happy only as long as he suppresses the truth about himself. The day-light of truth would be darkness to him. His character should be judged in this light. His peculiarity is harmful to none. Therefore, it is not a vice. There is no wickedness in his deviant
sexuality. There is no evidence in the play that he is bad as a friend, as an individual in relation to family and society, or as a citizen of the country. Alpesh tries to realize a sort of social adjustment in these circumstances. It appears that he has realized it in some positive measure.

When Kusumben Patel asks Lata what she can cook, she replies to herself something different.

LATA. (Thought.) Salim, you will like my lamb biryani. (CP 134-35)

The conflict between Alpesh and Lata represents the conflict of the gay persons and women against oppressive power of particular social setup. They are crushed under the burden of patriarchal forces. It is observed.

Dattani once again points at the shared spaces between women and gay men, both under the tremendous hegemony of 'mainstream' patriarchal society that forces them to conform and live lives that are alien to their nature. (Chaudhuri, 61)

The play focuses on the shared spaces between women and the gay in the society which predominantly promotes the patriarchal family set up and discourages any change that challenges established and existing structure of it. Alpesh and Lata are compelled to marry each other by their parents. Parents' idealism is confronted with children's individualism through the exterior and interior dramatic decoding devices. Lata is craving for Salim and Alpesh is pining for Trilok. It is practically impossible for both of them to fulfill their dreams and desires. Socio-cultural tradition prevents them from doing so.

Both, Alpesh and Lata are aching due to their strong passion. They are yearning to express their feelings. While moving towards cowshed, both look puzzled and perplexed due to their commitments elsewhere. But it is Lata who takes initiative of revealing truth. She tells Alpesh.

LATA. Look. I don’t want to marry you; I am in love with someone else.

ALPESH. (thought). That was good of her. (Pause. Speech.) Can we sit down somewhere? (CP 149)
Lata asks him to keep on walking. They are going to see Gauri’s calf. Alpesh is lost in thinking. He reacts upon Lata’s confession.

ALPESH. (Thought.) She was waiting for me to say something. May be I should have told her about you. After all, she was decent enough to bring up her Salman or Salim or whatever. At that moment very moment, I imagine, our parents were sort of clinching the deal. (CP 149)

Lata’s candid expression of her love for someone else facilitates private conversation regarding the fulfillment of their hidden motives.

ALPESH. Good, I am glad you don’t want to marry me. Because I don’t want to marry you either. (CP 149)

Lata is confused on hearing this response from Alpesh. She feels that she has hurt him. That is why he says so. But soon he explains;

ALPESH. Bullshit. I am glad you brought it up. If you hadn’t, I would have. (CP 150)

Lata warns Alpesh:

LATA. Oh! This is no use. If we do get married, I will give you hell! That’s a promise! (CP 151)

This shows her insolence. Lata, thus, is a portrayal of an independent girl who doesn’t like to be tied down by conventions. Her independence, however, assumes the proportions of absolute irresponsibility. She wants to break free from all restraints, reasonable or unreasonable. The subsequent scene reveals that Lata is more desperate in rejecting the tie. She loves Salim passionately. She is also skeptical about her future with Salim. However, she decides to run away, leaving her parents and the Patels behind. She decides to go to Mumbai to live with Salim. She thinks:

LATA. (thought). That night I really thought and thought about it. Would it make sense to get married to that lout and make everyone happy? And satisfy that thing in bed? What about me? I had to run away. (CP 151)

After making their intentions clear, both start discussing over how to avoid the marriage. They are contriving a scheme to discard their marriage for
having the persons of their own choices as the partners. Alpesh suggests her to tell her mother that she doesn’t like him. Lata feels that it won’t work.

   ALPESH. Oh no! Why don’t you just tell her you are in love with someone?
   LATA. Look. I don’t think you understand. They know. They just want me to get married to anyone. I have no say in the matter. (CP 151)

In this way, Alpesh and Lata are applying their brains for avoiding their marriage. They can’t derive out any workable solution. Lata also contemplates over the plan of running away and makes arrangement for this. However, she postpones the idea of running away. She moves towards the cowshed and hears the sound of someone groaning. She goes to Alpesh’s room to herself. She is shocked to see Alpesh being homo and exploiting Mali for sexual pleasure. But soon, she is consoled on his being a gay. Mali is highly frightened and beseeching her not to reveal it before anyone. Lata assures him that she will not do so. As Lata tells Mali ‘Oh, Mali I am so happy you are alive. I thought the land grabbers or smugglers had killed you’. (CP 154) There is a bond of affection between Lata and Mali, servant at the farmhouse. They played and ran here and there in their childhood period.

The play portrays the pain and suffering of the gay and the woman whose nature is not corresponding with the established pattern of behaviour of our patriarchal society. They do kowtow before the oppressive forces of socio-cultural practices and also do needful. It is observed:

   The possibility of the shared spaces common to women and homosexuals is put to active use here with the identities of its protagonists. The common oppressor is the patriarchal structure that refuses to allow any space for the growth of individual beyond a set pattern of gender determined roles. (Agarwal, 53)

Again Lata tries to run away. Mali stops her. He asks her not to dishonour family and requests her to marry Alpesh. After a little later, Lata changes her plan and says;

   LATA. Why should I run away? Mali has made me see sense. (CP 155)
She further tells Alpesh:

LATA. What was the Hindi expression you’d used?  
Something about your silence and mine as well . . .  
(CP 155)

In this way, Alpesh, being homosexual, appears to her as a safer.

LATA. Think about it. . . If we do the needful . . .  
Pause.  
ALPESH. No, I mean, no, I can’t marry you.  
LATA. Are you going to say no to your parents then?  
ALPESH. No. (Pause.) Will you bring Mali as your dowry? (CP 155-56).

They decide to marry each other as per their parents’ desires under the hidden agenda of teri bhi chup, meri bhi chup. Lata takes Mali with her after her marriage. She brings Mali as her dowry. They become ready to marry each other with twin aims of making their parents happy and hiding their relationship which society forbids. In this way, they decide to live under the same roof and sleep on same bed providing full space to individual’s free will. Even during the wedding function, Alpesh thinks of Trilok and Lata ponders on the possibilities of seeing Salim in Bombay. At the end of the play, Lata and Alpesh go out but to the different places. They discuss about their reunion after their business is over.

LATA. Where do we meet up?  
ALPESH. You’ve got my cell phone number, haven’t you? Give me a call (CP 158)

The play ends with Alpesh thinking of Trilok and Lata thinking of Salim.

LATA. (Thought.) Salim!  
ALPESH. (Thought.) Trilok! (CP 158)

Though Alpesh and Lata got married at the instance of their families, they never shared their bed. Lata is involved with a terrorist, Salim and Alpesh has homosexual relationship with Trilok. The title of the play is very brief and attractive. It is very ironical but appropriate as Alpesh and Lata managed to go in their own way notwithstanding their marriage. Under the pressure of circumstances, Lata and Alpesh are forced to marry each other. They don’t see
any way out of escaping from the compulsion of arranged marriage. So, they think out a midway by agreeing upon the norms of society outwardly and disagreeing inwardly. They are tied up with wedlock. But there is no lock to their hearts. The play alerts us about the excessive parental pressure for conforming to the tradition and conventions of society.

Despite everything, one thing is certain that Alpesh and Lata are in a way made for each other. This is not so in terms of having common qualities and virtues, likes and dislikes, etc. In usual sense they are not made for each other. The fact is that neither one nor the other needs to marry. Yet both need to be coupled for social requirement. In this sense, they are made for each other. That is, in this marriage, none is a loser, each gains what he/she needs, and both realize a facade behind which they could free themselves. They do not expect anything from each other and none of them is likely to come in the other’s way. They certainly will not make each other unhappy, for each has to realize by mutual contract his/her happiness independently.
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