Culture and Stereotypes
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Culture implies a way of life — the customs, habits, social, religious and moral structure in which man lives. Indian culture is the Indian way of life. Culture is what one is and Civilization is what one has. Civilization or culture is the outcome of collective experiences, the collective wish and assumptions of the people. The collective wish expresses itself in the form of various traditions and patterns of life.

Labels like Indian, American, Brahmin, Hindu, Christian, Muslim and the like imposed on the human beings by birth fit them into certain ideals, customs, beliefs etc. An individual born in a society needs to conform and fit into its established social, ethical, religious and moral patterns of life. At the same time, an individual put into a different part of the world at a very young age acquires a different social morality, social ethics and behaviour patterns. As R. Padmini argues, "... the society in which we live is a replica and is the outward expression of what we are inwardly. So the society and the individual are not two separate entities. They are interrelated" (89).

The culture of a group is the accepted material and nonmaterial aspects of the day-to-day living of the group. These accepted patterns or constructs become stereotypes, violation of which invites contempt and isolation leading to ostracism.
Culture is manmade and takes a new shape in course of time because change is an order of nature. When the whole world undergoes a speedy change in all spheres of life due to the amazing influence that the mass media effects, culture too undergoes mutation. When the people accept certain life patterns and changes, they shape into a form of a culture. Hence, categorization like 'Spiritual East' and 'Material West' no longer holds good.

In this context the question of cultural acceptability rarely gets attention because of the impact it has on humanity. In fact, before the question is being answered there is every possibility of a new version of the culture getting shaped and the process goes on in tremendous speed. What is retained?, What is lost?, and What is gained?, from this change are questions that need contemplation. In this process of cultural change, the patterns of both cultural and social orders refashion. S.D. Kapoor observes: "The new values of life that have come to us along with the new system of economic growth and a new model of industry seem to have overwhelmed us and the trend is towards acceptance without caring to examine what is being discarded to make room for the new"(50-51).

All people have a culture — a way of life, which they follow. As culture is man-made cultural change is inevitable. Cultural change is a result of both social and natural factors. Cultural changes due to social factors come from man's own efforts and activities whereas cultural changes due to natural factors are not brought out by the efforts of man. Further, in the process of cultural change, some elements resist change more than others do. The acceptance of a
new cultural element, whether invented or borrowed, depends upon how it is evaluated by the group. If the new culture is useful and suitable, it is readily accepted, otherwise resisted and rejected. Tension comes in when the idea of usefulness and suitableness differ. One may reject what is useful and suitable for others. Thus, when the younger generation embraces certain new lifestyles and questions the established older lifestyles, the elders consider it as a violation. The elders are comfortable with the lifestyle, which they have lived for years and therefore, it is difficult for them to change to a new one. They fear that the new one may be unwieldy for them and as a result, they do not want to change but want the youngsters to follow the older one without questioning.

Culture shapes stereotypes. When the stereotypes are followed and reinforced, it is difficult for a change. Sex role stereotyping is a pervasive phenomenon, which refuses to change. There is a general agreement between male and female subjects about what typical men and women are like. The masculine traits are rated as more socially desirable than the feminine ones. A greater number of male traits are positively valued than are female traits. Sex-role stereotyping is so tightly embedded into the design of our culture. Michael Haralambos says, “... norms, values and roles are culturally determined and socially transmitted. From this perspective, gender roles are a product of culture rather than biology. Individuals learn their respective male and female roles” (373). Stereotypes can easily distort one’s perceptions about the nature of certain events. Consequently, cultural stereotypes can be so compelling that even women can be prejudiced against women.
Ultimately, our cultural notions will become irrelevant and a new culture will replace it — a culture based on technological advancement, an abstract relationship between man and the means of production. Culture and society dictate the roles of male, female, love, marriage, and parentage and want the people to follow them stereotypically. Thus, the discriminatory aspect of sexism flows from the traditional role expectations for women to serve as homemakers.

Sex, as a category of social inequality is the ubiquitous characteristic of human society. Sex inequality arises out of social, cultural and economic structure of the society rather than in biological difference between man and woman. Women, for generations, have been socialized to accept the male supremacy. Similarly, the social and cultural values have strictly defined the status and role of women in society. In Chris Barker’s words:

Sex is taken to be the biology of the body while gender refers to the cultural assumptions and practices which govern the social construction of men, women and their social relations. Subsequently, it is argued that it is the social, cultural and political discourses and practices of gender which lie at the root of women’s subordination. (235)

The social expectations of male-female sex roles, love, marriage and parentage are oppressive to the modern humanity. Similarly, imposition of patriarchal authority is a deep-rooted cultural stereotype which is no more relished. When these established social constructs are defied tension creeps in. Identification of oneself as male or female is the foundation stone of self-identity.
It is argued that sexual identity is not a reflection of a natural state of being but a matter of representation.

Stereotyping operates in a particular cultural context. Man, woman, love, marriage and parentage are stereotypes, which have become features choking the modern society. Patriarchy has also become a stereotype stultifying the younger generation. Dattani, through his plays, shows how people who question the established stereotypes or do not fit into the stereotypes are discriminated in the social set up. The problem arises when the real life situations are confronted by ideal situations. Culture and stereotypes, which are operative in the social set up, mistaken to be ideal, do not want to spare anyone who dares to question or violate them. Sex is a natural phenomenon whereas gender is a social construct. The so-called traits of masculinity and femininity, if found in the opposite sex are unacceptable to society. Gender roles are irrevocable in the middle class Indian society. The conceptions surrounding gender prejudices are destructive to a woman and a man if they defy the gender roles.

In Seven Steps Around the Fire, Dattani presents the pitiable plight of the third gender people — the hijras who do not fit into the gender stereotypes called man and woman. Hence they are suppressed, marginalized and looked down upon by the society. Uma Rao’s research on hijra brings into focus the hypocrisy and repression of people at helm of affairs because they are beyond the reach of law.
Uma's husband, the Police Officer refuses to subject himself to any medical examination to rule out the barrenness of his wife due to his impotency. It is a general bias to blame women and not men, because men should not be questioned of their manliness.

The male, female stereotypes with its completely soaked predetermined stereotypical roles are at conflict when it faces and has to adjust with the third gender, the eunuchs or the hijra in accepting them in the mainstream society. The reason behind the violence against the hijras is that the society is unable to come to terms with the fact that they are also human beings who, by nature, are both male and female unlike the other two gender divisions — either male or female. Consequently, due to this conflict the hijras are pushed to the margins of the society to live an accursed, pathetic life. For them their day dawns at dusk and ends at dawn. They are nocturnal beings who resort to prostitution. The very society, which drives them out during the day, goes to them for sexual pleasure at night. Siddharth Narain comments: "Sexual abuse and violence, apart from being the most systematic tool for dehumanising an individual, can be understood as a punishment for not conforming to the gender roles laid down by society"(99).

The society fails to understand or it is not ready to understand that hijras are human beings with the same blood and heart like other human beings. "What they are” is not their choice but nature’s deprivation. They are denied of everything that is due to them like the other two genders. They are denied of even transport facilities. Human beings, whether male or female, are insecure and
incomplete without the opposite sex, whereas the hijras are independent and complete. Dattani, in *The Eunuch in All of Us*, argues: "I think the world’s greatest lie is challenged when we are face to face with a person who is both male and female. The lie we were told since childhood was that as men or women we are complete. All we have to do is live up to the roles prescribed to our gender" (74).

Media, which ought to voice their grievances, sometimes fail to recognize them as human beings. As the hijra do not conform to male-female stereotypes the media exhibit a prejudiced view about them. Siddarth Narrain further observes:

The media have also reinforced stereotypes about hijras . . . Even a progressive and anti-establishment publication, in its story, described hijras as a race apart, freaks of the underworld, half-man half-woman, almost devilish in their customs and practices. This kind of gender stereotyping was seen in many local English newspapers as well. (99)

The heart-rending story about the murder of a *hijra* simply because she fell in love with Subbu, a young man having a status of importance in society, fills us with horror and a sense of injustice. Kamla and Anarkali face trouble just because they happened to be *hijras*, though they are innocent. It is a question of concern that how many people would readily help the *hijra* community and allow them a place of recognition in society and deal with them with compassion. In their case, people are silent spectators. Even in literature, they remain a neglected category. Dipendu Das makes a fitting observation in this regard:
... terribly marginalized community in Indian society has almost never found a sympathetic representation not only in Indian English writing, but also in Indian writing as well till the last decade of twentieth century. Even though they form a quiet visible group of Indian society, the hijras, the most isolated, subjugated, detested and dehumanized community along with other sexual minorities rarely found a place in Indian English writing. (79)

Gender is categorized either male or female. The hijras are part of the society which refuses to recognize them as human beings. Love and marriage are sanctioned between male and female, which the society considers ideal. Conflict arises when this idealised cultural construct is encountered by real life situations. Thus, love and marriage between male and male or female and female or with a hijra invites contempt and disapproval. Therefore, when Subbu marries his hijra lover, Kamla it is viewed as a violation of the ideal form of marriage. Consequently, Mr. Sharma being unable to digest his son marrying a hijra, arranges to murder Kamla. Homosexuals do exist in society but are scorned at. Homosexuals, like hijras, are another social category against the social stereotypes. Alka Tyagi’s observation about the play On a Muggy Night in Mumbai substantiates this suitably:

Dattani deals with a difficult subject with a bold pen and lays open the hypocrisies of social life which imposes stereotypical roles to men and women and acknowledges and legitimises only these roles. Male and
female — these are the only sexual categories which have secured social existence and society’s approbation. People who do not fit into these two classes either keep trying to fit into the rut and suffer throughout their lives a burden of living the big lie, or if any choose to live with the truth they have to bear social ostracism and contempt. (193)

The play shows how the society creates stereotypes and behavioural patterns. Any aberration from the expected format is contemptuous. Homosexuality is strongly forbidden by social custom and it is a sin and shame to the prevailing moral and social code. Hence, in the changed social scenario the validity of the unchanged gender roles dictated by the society invites serious criticism.

What the society considers natural is unnatural to the homosexuals. The society expects Deepali to be a ladylove of a man and hence, she should fall in love with a man. Similarly, Kamlesh should fall in love with a woman and not with a man. This is what the society considers natural. Nevertheless, for them their present self is natural. Ranjit feels quiet comfortable in Kamlesh’s flat. He hates the world outside. Neither he nor Bunny wants the flat to be contaminated by the outside world. To Ranjit, the children are dreadful, as well are, the people — “Oh, some dreadful children down the corridor . . . And there’s a whole mob downstairs for some shaadi” (65).

The wedding procession and the music and orgy connected with the wedding downstairs are disturbances to the gays in Kamlesh’s flat. Whenever the
door or the window of the flat is opened Ranjit feels disturbed and irritated by the
invasion of the sound from downstairs. He considers it as a threat to his privacy
and peace. Moreover, for him, it is highly intrusive. Being a complete
homosexual he hates heterosexuality and marriage. Hence, when a reference
about the wedding downstairs is made, he shows his displeasure with his remark:
“A wedding after all” (94). Similarly, Sharad expresses his hatred for
heterosexuality. He asks Deepali who observes the love making in the Diamond
merchant’s flat, “Don’t tell me they are still at it” (65).

Deepali being a lesbian, expresses her hatred for the male and
condemns what is male. She finds fault with her gay friends for their
attraction to the prick of men, which is their sexual inspiration and not the
feminine features. Being a lesbian, she is not aroused by the prick. Hence, she
says to Ranjit: “You know, I wish you didn’t think with your prick all the
time” (66).

On another occasion, she shows her pride for being a woman. She
cherishes her femininity. As a woman, she is supposed to be attracted to a man.
Nothing associated with a male quality has disturbed her femininity. On the
other hand, surprisingly, the femininity of her lesbian lover, Tina has disturbed
her to fall in love with Tina.

Homosexuality is viewed as a concept against Indian culture. Ranjith
being a homosexual feels like a fish out of water. Being homosexual, not only
Ranjit but also his gay friends feel alienated in their own society. As their culture
stands as a threatening force before them, these homosexuals gradually lose their selves as they cannot lose their sexuality as homosexuals. Their sexual inclination gives them happiness as and how a heterosexual feels happy and contented with his heterosexual inclination. It is their cultural moorings, which disarm their own selves, resulting in a feeling of alienation. Even when the progressive western culture finds it extremely difficult to accommodate homosexuals in its fold, there is nothing surprising for Indian homosexuals to feel alienated and isolated. As far as Ranjit is concerned, India is a nation steeped in tradition which has succeeded only in causing a feeling of guilt in the hearts of the Indian homosexuals, failing to give any sort of freedom they want like the heterosexuals. Hence, Ranjit has understood it well that in India one cannot be both Indian and gay.

If one wants to be a gay one should not be an Indian. If one wants to be an Indian one should not be a gay. It is all because in India one is ashamed to tell openly that one is a gay. For fear of social ostracism, gays have to confine themselves in closets. Ranjit says, "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" (88). A sense of shame grips the homosexuals to come out openly as gays. Bunny got married and Ed wants to marry only because they feel ashamed of their homosexuality. Hence, they consider marriage as a cloak to cover their shame, though they know well they cannot be happy with a woman instead of a man.
Deepali says, it is all because of fear that they will be pushed to the corner, branded and isolated, and not because of shame, they do not want to say it out openly. For fear of isolation, a homosexual pretends to the outside world that he is normal and not gay. Harshikaa Udasi’s appreciation of the film *Quest* will be a suitable observation here. The actor turned director Amol Palekar has handled the issue of gay relationship and its effect on family relationships in his latest film *Quest*. It is the story of Sai, a well-known lawyer, and Aditya, head chef of a luxury hotel, who leads a very happy life, and have an eight-year-old son. The movie deals with how the family reacts to Aditya’s confession about his gay relationship. Harshikaa Udasi quotes Sandhya Gokhale, Palekar’s wife, who wrote the story, screenplay and dialogue of *Quest*: “Usually we have a claustrophobic atmosphere in our family system. Even if someone has a minor cut everybody rushes to help. But when it is a grave issue like homosexuality, we choose to be oblivious. Let us, at least, empathise [with] if not endorse the behaviour” (66-67).

As far as India is concerned, sex is a taboo. In such a situation, one need not explain what can be the status of homosexuality. The gender hegemony of the mainstream heterosexual society is at threat if it allows its marriage stereotype to be trampled upon. Kiran wishes that gay people should be allowed to marry so that her brother Kamlesh can marry his lover and be happy. She says “I really wish they would allow gay people to marry” (98). Ranjit comments, “Oh, they do. Only not to the same sex” (98). Kiran shows compassion for the gay people. She did not know that the man to whom she was going to get married
is a homosexual and former lover of her brother. The revelation in the end comes as a shock to her.

Kiran, at last, learns that her fiancé Ed was Kamlesh's former lover. She could not imagine why Kamlesh hid this fact from her. However, she becomes considerate to Kamlesh when Kamlesh pleads with her that he had failed to tell her the fact just not to make her lose her happiness. She understands well that Ed wanted to marry her just to hide his shame of being a gay. To escape from the shame he had hurt Kamlesh. At the same time, he cannot forget Kamlesh completely. He wants to marry Kiran in order to live a happy gay life with Kamlesh free from the suspecting eyes of the society. Kiran longs to be loved by a man, which she failed to get from her first marriage. In that sense, she is a typical woman as Ed accuses her. Similarly, he has not changed to any better than a gay. To hide his shame he wants to show others that he is a heterosexual. Kiran, therefore, aptly says, "If there any stereotypes around here, they are you and me. Because we don’t know any better, do we? We just don’t know what else to be!" (107). Ed promises to Kiran "I will love you in whatever way you want me to love you" (108). However, she hates him. She tells him how the photograph of him, naked with Kamlesh, has come back to them in the flat. Many men and women down in the bridegroom's compound have seen the photograph. In future, wherever Ed goes, there may be someone to say 'you look familiar'. Kiran says he will have to hide away even from her if she happens to meet him in future. She goes to the bedroom, takes the framed photograph of herself with Ed and gives it to him asking him to replace the photograph in the
frame with the other one showing him and Kamlesh in naked tight embrace. He obliges.

In this play, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Dattani focuses how discrimination operates within class and gender constructs. In an interview to Lakshmi Subramanyam he reacts:

Discrimination certainly moves within class and gender constructs, in our culture at least. Sexuality is also viewed in the masculine/feminine and working class/middle class constructs in the play. The issue seems more of preferred masculinity and feminine role playing (between Ed and Kiran). Others are not marginalised because they are gays or lesbians. They are ostracised because they challenge these mainstream constructs. It’s the presence of the wedding which is a major threat to the characters in the play. The oppressive heat of mainstream life around them is suitably dealt with by the air conditioning, (Striving upper class status)...

Men and Women are the biggest stereotypes in the whole world. (131)

**Do the Needful** is a play about two upper class families each of which do not understand the desires of their children and want to marry them off against their wishes. Alpesh, a gay from North India and Lata from South India who is in love with a Muslim terrorist who is already married, arrive at a clever deal to satisfy the wishes of their parents without compromising their own self-interests. They fool the society as well as their parents who want to push them into the social traditions. They marry and under the cover of a traditional happily married
couple go their own ways. Alpesh could carry on his affairs with his gay partner Trilok and Lata could meet her lover Salim whenever she wants to. Both keep each other’s secret. They are forced to defy the social restraints against gays and against the social inhibition of inter-caste marriage.

When Devraj Gowda proceeds with the marriage proposal of his daughter Lata with Alpesh Patel, Prema Gowda shows her displeasure by yelling out “NO”! (120) to the proposal of a bridegroom out of their caste. She is not interested in an inter-caste alliance. She enquires her husband what happened to the four Gowdas who responded to their advertisement. Mr Gowda answers that even those four would not have responded had he given his name in that advertisement. Prema Gowda rebukes her daughter for bringing disgrace to their family. She feels that she is also responsible for that because she had not been a “proper housewife” (121). She is worried whether, at least, this alliance with the Patel’s will materialize. They know well that the Patels are very desperate in this alliance, but Prema Gowda is a little worried because the bridegroom “is thirty-plus and divorced” (121). Her cultural moorings disturb her to accept a son-in-law who is a little old, divorced and out of their caste. However, the Gowdas are also desperate. Hence, Mr Gowda says that he would confirm with the Patels regarding other details to proceed with the marriage arrangement.

Lata, at this time, requests her mother, “Please, Amma! Please don’t insist I agree to this! You are ruining my life” (122), because she wants to marry her lover Salim. Though the inter-caste alliance is unacceptable to Mrs. Gowda, she is helpless. Prema Gowda silences her: “You should have thought of our lives
before sleeping with that terrorist! . . . You have ruined our lives . . . She has to do it in his hostel! Couldn’t they go to a hill station or somewhere?” (122). Lata is very cool to reply her mother, “You wouldn’t have allowed me” (122). Mrs. Gowda is worried because the whole Gowda community has known about this affair. Had Lata gone to some far away hill station with her lover, the affair would not have come to the knowledge of the Gowda community. Lata blames her mother for this bad name. She tells that the Gowdas talk ill of her because of their hatred for her mother, Prema Gowda. Devraj Gowda is satisfied about the proposal with the Patels and is not worried even if the boy’s family comes to know about Lata’s affair. He thinks it will not matter much to the boy’s family because the boy is divorced.

Even after all the opposition from her parents and their strong determination in giving her married to the Patel boy, Alpesh, Lata is equally stubborn to marry Salim. The fact that Salim is already married does not matter to her much because Salim’s religion and culture allow him to have more than one wife. Thus, Salim marrying Lata as his second wife is not a cultural constraint for him. Yet, Lata is worried because of her parents’ determination in getting her married to Alpesh. She ruminates over, if it is possible for her to marry Salim as her second husband besides Alpesh, who is the choice of her parents. Her culture does not sanction such a chance. Therefore she decides to marry the bridegroom of her parent’s choice and to keep her lover Salim as her lover forever, even after her marriage.
However, at last, as every one feels helpless, the only way out was to proceed with the arrangement of the proposed marriage. Hence, the Patels from Mumbai plan to meet the Gowdas in Bangalore. Dattani presents one of the premarital customs of a stereotypical arranged marriage here — bride viewing. Here Alpesh and his parents are to visit Lata’s family to see Lata. Dattani deliberately presents this stereotypical custom in order to show how far it is meaningless as far as Alpesh is concerned. Alpesh does not fit into the traditional stereotype. He belongs to one of those new generations, which hates stereotypes. He is a homosexual to whom the traditional marriage itself is a stereotype to be despised. In such a situation, it is entirely meaningless for a boy and his family to visit the girl’s family in order to see the girl and get introduced. Some of the traditional customs are gradually losing value and their sanctity. The so-called custodians of the traditions and custom are at tension whereas the younger generation does not have time and patience to abide by the stereotypes. Dattani breaks the tradition of portraying a young girl as all-good. The modern girl is not ashamed of dreaming to have more than four lovers out of wedlock. She does not feel guilty to think of marrying one of her parents’ choices and continuing her affair with her lover even after her marriage. Nevertheless, the culture that is exposed to her and ascribed to her by her parents troubles her.

At last, when the Patels have come to see Lata, she insists her mother on her stand of marrying Salim. Her mother starts shedding tears and tells, “All right. If you don’t want to get married, I can’t (breaks down into soft sobs) force ... you! You ... can ... remain a spinster!”(132). Mrs. Gowda knows it well
how to make her daughter accept the proposal. She uses tears as her weapon to silence her.

The author, with the help of this marriage proposal, shows how the tradition breaks away paving way for modernity. In the Indian cultural context, an inter-caste marriage is still beyond imagination. However, interestingly here it is an inter-caste arranged marriage that too between the north and the south — another unique feature. Though India is one, it is a hard truth that there exists a north-south discrimination and distinction because of the two different cultures within the one Indian culture. Consequently, the author makes use of a unique inter-caste and inter-cultural arranged marriage to project the idea that how far these stereotypes have become meaningless in the contemporary society.

In the middle of their journey to the farmhouse of the Gowdas, they stop the car on seeing a tender coconut vendor. Showing Alpesh the vendor asks, “Is this the boy for our Latamma?” (139). Devraj Gowda asks him to shut up. However, the tender coconut vendor comes out with his opinion about Alpesh, “He looks a little old for our Latamma” (140). He wants Lata’s parents to find a nice Gowda boy for her. To the tender coconut vendor an inter-caste alliance is unacceptable.

During the night of their stay in the farmhouse, Lata sees Alpesh standing in the backyard smoking a cigarette. Alpesh asks her not to tell it to his dad. However, he is taken aback when she asks for a cigarette. Both of them smoke cigarettes. Alpesh, therefore says,” “Teri bhi chup meri bhi chup” (142) which
means “... you don’t tell about me smoking and I won’t tell about you smoking” (142). Both of them vow not to mention about smoking to their parents. By this, they enter into a secret unspoken pact before their marriage that both should keep quite on what the other does. A little later, while they are still talking, they hear a drumbeat. From Lata he comes to know it is Marriappa, the coconut vendor and his gang of people beating the drum when they get drunk. Marriappa is dejected over his daughter who has run to Bombay to join the movies. As cultural background does not sanction girls appearing on movies or running away from the family when his daughter has run away to Bombay to act in films he considers it as a cultural violation and resorts to drinking and beating drum to ease his tension. This becomes a habit in his life.

After the marriage, Alpesh and Lata live their life as per their mutual agreement. They go out together in a taxi and Alpesh gets down somewhere away from their flat so that the liftman does not suspect them. Alpesh instructs her to call him over his cell phone when she returns from Salim. He gives his credit card for her expenses. He instructs her not to go to the temple because the temple priest may tell his father that she was alone. Lata answers that she will not have time to go to temple, as she has to spend more time with Salim. She thinks of Salim and he thinks of Trilok his gay lover. Lata’s parents are comfortable and happy that Lata is married to a boy from a descent family and not to Salim. Lata is comfortable and happy that there is no trouble to her now in sleeping with Salim, her lover. Similarly, Alpesh’s parents are happy that Alpesh is married at last. Alpesh is comfortable with his homosexuality. The Younger generation is
happy that they could extricate themselves from the traditional stereotypes. The elder generation is happy that their wish is satisfied and they do not want to hear of anything they do not desire. They prefer to lead a life in oblivion.

The sanctity of marriage is in question. The foolish attitudes of the parents are exposed here. Lata's parents oppose her love. When they find it a bit difficult to get a boy for her from their own community they readily accept an inter-caste marriage. They want to oppose their daughter's love, and want to thrust their own decision and are satisfied when their idea is thrust upon the daughter. Lata's parents do not approve of her love and thrust a husband of their choice upon her.

The play unveils the hypocrisy and the power game played by the sexual majority, which compels the sexual minority to adopt and follow the norms and biases constructed by it to meet its own desired end. It records the pangs of Alpesh and Lata who are forced to marry and live a life within the norms of a heterosexual stereotypical society. Alpesh is a homosexual who hates femininity and cannot be a heterosexual in the least possibility because of which his first marriage ended in divorce. Lata is a young girl who wants to prove her independence and break free from her parents to marry Salim, a man of her choice.

Lata's plan to run away from her parents to marry a boy of her choice is thwarted by her cultural stigma. Mali the servant boy, requests her not to bring disgrace to her family. He cannot imagine Lata running away leaving her parents live in shame. Hence, he is determined: "I will not let the family honour die like
this” (154). He feels, it is a shame to the whole of Gowda community. He stops Lata: “A daughter of a Gowda cannot do this!” (154).

Similarly, Alpesh’s parents fail to understand their son’s happiness. They want to see that Alpesh has a wife. They cannot imagine their son remaining single. It is a cultural demand to expand one’s family by giving birth to offsprings. Hence, attaining parenthood is a basic cultural obligation.

Lata and Alpesh by entering into an incompatible marriage reduce marriage, a social institution revered with great sanctity, to the status of a simple agreement of convenience. Both Lata and Alpesh seeing no way out of the marriage arranged by their desperate parents and not ready to give up their love, strike upon a deal suitable to both of them. The deal gives them a sense of freedom which they wanted. The freedom comes to them mutually when they ‘do the needful’ to each other because their parents and the society are not ready to ‘do the needful’ to them. Though it is unacceptable to a society like India steeped in tradition, one cannot deny that such characters do exist. As an observer of the society, the author has brought to light this burning issue.

Alpesh and Lata are the microcosmic middle class society who feel no guilt to cheat their parents pretending to be an ideal couple. The institution of marriage to them is a matter of convenience and nothing beyond it. The hypocrisy of arranged marriages stands exposed by the marriage of Alpesh and Lata. Social restraints against gays and the social inhibition of inter-caste
marriage have forced Alpesh and Lata to accept the marriage choice of their parents and live a life of their choice.

Lata’s money-minded parents neglect her as and how the money-minded Jiten and Nitin neglect Dolly and Alka in Bravely Fought the Queen. Consequently, Lata falls in love with Salim and beds with him. Dolly finds a let out in the young cook and Alka finds solace in boozing.

Daksha in Final Solutions feels that all her dreams of becoming a singer like Noor Jehan got shattered because her in-laws do not approve of her singing film-songs. They showed their disapproval when she, as a newly married bride, sang love songs to her husband. When she was not allowed to sing even inside the house how could she become a singer like Noor Jehan. An orthodox Hindu family does not encourage girls singing film songs. Hence, culture operates as a tool of oppression rather than emancipation in Daksha’s case.

Religion, opium and addiction, hardly allows anything new. Deep rooted in the human conscience, it refuses to allow it to be invaded by a new religion. When Babban and Javed, the outsiders, knock the door of Ramnik for asylum they gain entry only after a severe resistance from within. Ramnik who wants to harbour them faces severe opposition from Aruna, his wife and Hardika, his mother. Aruna’s cultural moorings do not permit her to admit the two Muslim newcomers inside her house. She is very much reluctant to give them water to drink. Hardika has a general hatred for the Muslims because of her friend Zarine whose anger was mistaken for arrogance and pride. The shop they own belonged
to Zarine’s father, which Hardika’s husband and father-in-law bought at half its value after it was burnt down in the name of communal riots. Ramnik has been living with this shame all these years. Hardika was made believe that Zarine’s family asked for a price much higher than what it deserved. Because of her resentment, Hardika spends all her life hating Zarine and her community. She does not appreciate Ramnik’s liberal attitude towards the two Muslims. Hence, to make up for the wrong committed by his father, Ramnik offers Javed a job in his shop. Thus, he is a hypocrite wearing the mask of a liberal-minded person. The two men leave the house after tearing the mask of the hypocrite.

Baa in Bravely Fought the Queen, manages to control both of her sons, Nitin and Jiten. The play questions male and female roles in society. When Baa made some unpleasant remarks about the family of the sisters Alka and Dolly, the inebriated Alka asks Baa, “‘Your sons are so different from one another. They are both petty like you, but otherwise. . . .’ ‘Do they have different fathers?’” (256). The unquestioning obedience expected of a daughter-in-law is absent in Alka. As a result, Nitin sent her out. Her brother, Praful had to beg for pardon. Dolly too had to beg and plead with Jiten to ask his brother to accept her back. After three months, Alka was pardoned.

Dolly could quench her sexual urge with the family cook and though her sister Alka too wanted, she could not. She considers it a bad deed, not to be dared by a ‘good’ woman. She is afraid of Praful who punished her once by pushing her face in front of a burning stove for coming home from school with the neighbour’s son on his scooter. Hence, once when she makes a move to see
the cook as suggested by Dolly and Lalitha, immediately she gets back staggering and crying, "No-o! I can’t! (Sits on the sofa, crying) Praful, your sister is good. She’s good" (263).

Dattani exposes sexual longings of the sisters, their escapades, and the habit of drinking of middle class women. Alka accepts openly of her addiction to alcohol while Lalitha keeps it as a secret. As Dattani exposed the sexual adventures of the diamond merchant’s wife in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, he has brought out another sexual affair in this play too. As the husbands are always running after money, ignoring the aspirations of their wives, the forced-cum-accepted domestic confinement of the wives, make them venture to satisfy their sexual desires at the available opportunity. At the same time the culture restricts some to keep back.

Consuming liquor has become part of the middle class affair. In the first act itself, the author exposed Alka’s addiction to liquor. Lalitha too drinks. The culture of a traditional woman does not allow her to drink whereas the culture of a modern woman allows her to drink. The heavy weight of patriarchy has made Alka an alcoholic.

It is considered a solemn duty of a middle class Indian girl’s family to satisfy her husband and in-laws whenever they need help, particularly economic help. Nitin, a gay, is duped by his own best friend, Praful and suffers a guilt-ridden relationship with his wife Alka. Nitin is not in talking terms with his brother-in-law Praful yet, he wants money from him for his business needs. Jiten
forces the initially reluctant Nitin to concede to borrow money from Praful on a condition that Alka should not know about it.

JITEN . . . And this is Praful’s way of showing that he is a better human being than us. We insult him and treat him like a piece of shit but he, when his turn comes, actually helps us out. Right? (No response.) Sentimental fool. (Drinks.) I can take his money and still treat him like crap. He is nothing . . . (267)

Praful is sheepish just because of his concern for his sisters, though he is at the giving end and not at the receiving end. It is a cruel face of patriarchal dominance. Though his two brothers-in-law treat him so mean, he readily helps them when they need money. However, Nitin’s contempt for Praful is still in him so that he calls him a ‘bastard’ who tricked him to marry his sister Alka, by responding to his attraction to live a homosexual life for some time. Though Nitin enjoyed Praful’s company, he blames him. He speaks out his agonies to his sleeping wife Alka:

. . . I would go back to Praful’s room . . . and kneel . . . At times he would wake up immediately. At other times I would lean forward to look at him. Close enough for my breath to fall gently on his face. And he would open his eyes . . . I loved him too. He is . . . was attractive. And he responded. Oh! But how ashamed he made me feel after! He made me cry each time! That was a game he played. And I—I was caught in it . . . He told me to get married . . . How could I? And to whom? . . . He told me that you knew. That he had told you . . . about me. And that it didn’t matter to you.
You only wanted the security of a marriage. He...he told me everything would work out fine...But you didn't know! He tricked you! I—I am sorry. It wasn't my fault. (314-15)

Baa always hates Alka. A cordial relationship between them never existed. She wants Nitin not to marry her. She tells him, "Nitin! Don't marry her! Your friend Praful is fooling you! The older one is good for Jitu, but beware of the younger one! She is like her mother! (285). On another occasion too she warns him, "Don't marry his sister, Nitin! (301). She considers the mother of the sisters a whore because she had married a man who was already married with children. Baa, the physically and emotionally abused woman, is instinctively led to reject the son who resembles her husband, to possess the one who looks like herself, and to alienate him from his father. The Oedipal instinct developed thus drives Nitin into the arms of men who are father figures to him—like Praful or the auto-rickshaw driver with his black, powerful arms. Baa is the living embodiment of the past carrying her own burden of guilt. Once a wrong is done, it has to be borne all along. The guilt of provoking her son Jiten to beat his wife Dolly and her giving birth to a spastic child Daksha hangs heavily on her. She tries to atone for it by giving away her house to Daksha and making Praful the trustee.

Jiten asks Nitin to get rid of Alka so that Baa would forgive him. Jiten plans to get the family house sold. He is not bothered about the well-being of his own daughter Daksha, a spastic child. Baa has given the family house to Daksha by way of a will. Jiten wants to sell the property by hook or crook. Therefore, he
advises Nitin to get rid of Alka, hoping that Baa will be pleased and the property can be sold. Jiten is mad after money and he is ready to do anything for that. His patriarchal behaviour leads him to dismiss his brother’s wife for his own personal gains.

JITEN. Throw her out of the house. This time, for good. Damn Praful’s money! The property is more important. You want to get even with Praful? This is your chance. Say damn to his money and damn to his sister! Your marriage never worked. She is a drunkard. An alcoholic. Your wife is a boozer and you still keep her? What kind of a man are you? (290)

On another occasion, Alka wants to know whether Lalitha knows everything about Dolly and Kanhaiya. Lalitha asks whether it is a game and Daksha is a part of the game. Dolly does not like Lalitha relating Daksha with Kanhaiya. Lalitha feels sorry and is in doubt what sort of women are the two sisters and what social values they keep up.

LALITHA. I’m sorry. I wasn’t too sure what values you’d retained and what you’d given up. (294)

Dolly expresses her displeasure to Lalitha for her connecting Daksha, just fourteen years old, to Kanhaiya and telling it to her own mother. Meanwhile, it has started raining. Dolly observes, it is the perfect weather to listen to ghazals. Alka wants to listen to the thumri. Dolly plays the thumri and enjoys it. She explains how Naina Devi became the queen of thumri. Naina Devi was married
into a royal family. She had a fascination for thumri, which was used to be sung by tawaifs, the whores. Though a royal lady, she sang the love songs sung by whores with the support of her husband. At times, she was mistaken for a tawaif. She could break the cultural stigma attached to thumri that it should be sung by prostitutes.

Jiten develops a quarrel with Sridhar and his wife Lalitha in his drunken mood. He wants them go out of his house immediately. As it was raining, they waited for the rain to stop. Hence, when he comes out of the kitchen he is enraged to see Lalitha still there. He rudely asks her to get out immediately. His rudeness is unbearable to Dolly. She pleads with him not to be so rude to Lalitha and to be “civilized and courteous” (308). But Jiten tells her, “I’m not throwing you out” (308).

Dolly who has been patient so far gives a fitting reply that he cannot and he will not send her out. Further, to stop his cruelty, she starts talking about the injustice he has caused to her and her daughter. The heavy weight of patriarchy heaps defeat after defeat on Dolly. She becomes a capable fighter confronting and humbling her wicked husband who wants to run her life denying her the slightest liberty and love that is her due as a woman, wife and mother. Subir Dhar concludes: “. . . Dolly Trivedi is a woman who has to fight a battle against a violent and unfaithful husband, and against a tyrannical mother-in-law who rules over her sons and daughters-in-law with the weapon of her wealth even from her paralytic bed” (84). She starts pouring out her agonies related to their
daughter Daksha. She asks him "When have I ever won? Once yes, I did when I became a mother" (309).

The women characters of the play are examples of exploitation proving that they are capable of fighting back to breathe freedom and to free themselves if they are not heeded to and suppressed for a long time. Dolly proves that women endure male atrocities to a certain extent, only because of their innate capability, unlike men, to be patient and remain cool even in odd situations. They can fight back when men exploit their limit of endurance. Dolly's fighting back stripped off Jiten's male superiority. He proves himself a defenceless coward putting the blame on his mother Baa. Suppression thus, leads to revolt. Like Ibsen's Nora, Dolly and Alka are victims of incompatible marriage. Nora could break out of the clutches of domestic fetters. On the other hand, Dolly and Alka could not break out openly because of their cultural constraints.

In Mario Relich's view, **Bravely Fought the Queen** "... questions the male and female roles in society" (80). The Queen in the title refers to the famous Rani of Jhansi. In the play, Dattani depicts the plight of helpless women victims of male tyranny and throws light on the problems arising out of the mother-son relationship. Baa, the mother of Jiten and Nitin is an invalid who was tyrannized by her husband. Embittered by her husband, she sets up her sons against their wives. As Gertrude Morel in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* sets her sons against her husband Walter Morel, because her husband has denied her the love she craves, Baa sets her sons against her husband, keeping them in her control. This possessiveness in Baa does not allow her to let her sons love
their wives. The sons being unable to free themselves from their mother are at conflict with their wives. Consequently, they are at loss of their familial happiness.

Lalitha’s translation of the poem on Rani of Jhansi as ‘bravely fought the manly queen’ implies that a woman has to be ‘manly’ if she wants to fight. To be brave one has to conform to the construction of manliness propagated by patriarchy. The deceptive identity in Dolly’s name, Nitin’s ‘feminine’ qualities of love, sympathy, understanding and tenderness are challenges of the male-female stereotypes. The story of Naina Devi, the queen of thumri, is an earlier challenge of the societal stereotype. Though Naina Devi was a royal lady she was attracted to thumri, the song of tawaifs and had her husband’s encouragement to learn it. She became queen of thumri. At many times she was mistaken to be a tawaif. This suggests that woman motivated and encouraged to do what she wanted to do, even in the face of patriarchal opposition that would brand her a tawaif, can challenge the social constrictions to emerge out successfully.

Lalitha represents the educated Indian married woman without a full-time profession or office job. She enjoys a free relationship with her husband who has the decency to listen to his wife. She is liberated enough to enjoy a ‘not-so-occasional’ drink and write occasional woman’s column for The Times. She is childless by choice, as she and her husband want to save money to buy a flat first. Her passion for growing bonsai is suggestive of her mindset. As she controls and restricts her life, she wires and trims her plants, which become quaint and
attractive unlike the ugly and grotesque bonsai, kept on Sridhar’s office table, which symbolizes the deformed relationship the Trivedi brothers have with their wives.

In **Tara**, Chandan and Tara as conjoined twins before separation and with one-legged after separation do not fit into the stereotypes. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri writes: “The play looks at the battles, the victories and the defeats of an Indian family coping with the trauma of freak children and their survival, while also exposing the existing patriarchal stereotypes of the Indian mindset, which has always preferred a boy child to a girl child” (37).

Chandan and Tara were Siamese twins separated when they were just three months old. To Dan, it is something against the nature’s wish: “May be God never wanted us to be separated” (330). Hence his agonizing conflict gets revealed when he asks Dr. Thakkar, “Was the surgery really necessary”? (331). Tension erupts in human beings when something different from the established social constructs happen. Siamese twins may be unusual natural phenomenon, which the society considers unnatural. Nature destined them to be a single entity with a single self. Society around them is at tension ultimately causing tension in the twins by separating their single self into two and single entity into two.

The neighbouring girls Prema, Nalini, and Roopa represent the society when they laugh at the Jaipur legs of Chandan and Tara. Normally Siamese twins will be identical, but the Patel twins are not identical which again is against the twin stereotype.
The play exposes the attitudinal difference of the society in treating two children who shared the same womb. The injustice done to Tara is initiated by Tara’s own mother along with her father who are supposedly belong to a more liberal community than her father Mr. Patel, who belongs to a more rigid patriarchal community. After all the hypocrisies, prejudices, and injustice Tara is put to face, she survives as a spirited and shrewd person with a sense of humour. Even medical ethics kowtows before the all-powerful social stereotypes in Tara’s case. It sweeps away Dr. Umakant Thakkar, the god-like, internationally reputed expert in separating Siamese twins and reduces him to the status of an easy prey to money and power.

The happiness of the family ends when Bharati and her father decide to give two legs to the boy and one to the girl. Guilt and tension engulfs the family when the third leg, fitted to Chandan to make him a full boy with two legs, loses life resulting amputation. The unethical separation leaves both Tara and Chandan one-legged. Ultimately, both Chandan and Tara are physically mutilated and mentally traumatized, gaining notoriety as phenomenal freaks of science. Though both are freaks, the society represented by the little girl Roopa leaves Chandan as he is a boy and considers Tara “... a real freak of nature ...” (342). Angelie Multani writes in Off-Centre, “... Roopa, a neighbourhood friend (?) ... is representative of the cruelty that society displays towards those who are ‘different’ from the conventional and accepted” (119).
Mr. Patel on his part tries to push both Tara and Chandan into their respective stereotyped gender roles hoping that it would make them fit into the society. However, he fails to understand their individual interests. The preferences of both Chandan and Tara seem contradictory to his expectations. Chandan prefers to be a writer and Tara seems to be a suitable businesswoman. Failing to understand this Mr. Patel thinks of making Chandan a businessman.

As the play progresses, Bharati is seen more as a nervous, neurotic woman, instigating her husband into more meaningless arguments in order to show the children that she is victimized by her husband. Day by day her guilt grows immensely and unbearably, driving her more and more insane. When Tara faints in the middle of an argument between her parents, Bharati proves herself useless, stands rooted to the spot, unable to move or assist Patel who rushes Tara to hospital. She has become pathetic to live in a constant obsessive guilt and fear that Tara will discover her complicity in making her one-legged. Hence, in her struggle to assuage her guilt and fear she showers excessive love on Tara. Inadvertently, she drives Patel assume that he has nothing to do with Tara. Consequently, it has become a natural choice for Patel to turn to his son Chandan attempting to construct him into a traditional male role. Hence, one day, when Mr. Patel sees Chandan helping his mother in knitting a sweater, he gets irritated and blames Bharati for “... turning him into a ‘sissy’, — teaching him to knit!”(351). Patel instructs Chandan to accompany him to office from the next day until the college starts.
The society is replete with male-female stereotypical social roles and expects one to conduct oneself accordingly. Patel’s marriage to Bharati is also viewed as a violation of the stereotype of an orthodox Hindu marriage because his is an inter-caste marriage. Love is not permitted and marriage is to be decided by the parents and not by the children themselves. In an orthodox Hindu family, the bride for a boy has to be decided by the boy’s parents where the boy has no say and he cannot even see the girl before marriage. Other members of the boy’s family would see the girl and decide. Hence, in Patel’s case his orthodox parents did not approve of his marriage.

Bharati, worried over Tara’s future, appeals to Chandan to protect her. She tells him, “The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you — but not her! Oh, the pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable. And what about forty and fifty! Oh God!” (349). Bharati takes it for granted, and so does the world that pain is inevitable for Tara because she is twice handicapped. In addition, due to this double handicap marriage for Tara is ruled out. Unlike Tara, Chandan is sexually fit. He is still sexually attractive and is suitable for sexual experimentation by Roopa. His handicap does not render him sexually unfit.

Tara’s misery and her ultimate death cannot be assigned to any single individual, as it seems outwardly. Actually, the unsympathetic socio-cultural milieu around her 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 away Tara’s life. In Subhash Chandra’s observation,
Tara is killed by the social system, which controls the minds and actions of people. The trauma of coming to know the role her mother had played in her life, and the discrimination she faces at the hands of her father and grandfather become too much for her. And why is she killed? Tara is not wanted. Girls are not wanted. They are irrelevant from the point of view of religion and economics. They are dispensable. (67)

Economic, religious and cultural factors have been responsible for the antipathy against the girl child. In the patriarchal social set up a boy is supposed to be the bread winner and it is his responsibility to continue the family lineage. He is to carry the family name and caste name, which he has received from his father. Son is important to perform the last rites of a dead man so that the soul of the dead man will attain moksha. Thus, girls are considered a liability to the parents. Hence, unwanted, they are either aborted or abandoned. The medical and technological advances have made it possible to detect the sex of the foetus, making it easier than ever before to kill a female child before its birth, right in the womb. Patriarchy prefers a male child to a female child. It undermines the role of women creating false impression that women are insignificant and an unwanted burden in a family. Tara is no exception. Kanupriya writes:

Tara’s story is one of the physical and emotional struggles in a patriarchal system. There is the mother trying to reverse all ill-chosen decision; the father regretting his failure to intervene in the past; Chandan trying to
come to terms with his guilt and Tara who lashes out at the world, unable
to mask her anger and resentment at not being able to conform. (70)

Tara is not merely an individual character. She is the collective
conscience of women in general and handicapped women in particular. She is a
victim of both tradition and modernity. Though poor Chandan is in no way
responsible for Tara's present state, he too is obsessed with guilt. Therefore, he
hates any identity for him. At the end of the play Chandan says that he is not
going to leave behind any writing or any masterpiece as he wished once, but a
recording, which may be found out by somebody someday after his death. When
the recording is played it will be only a voice, which belonged to an object. Dan
refers himself as an object and not a person. This object moved like other objects
in a fixed orbit predetermined for it by others around it. It cannot desire for even
a moment of freedom. If it desires, it would be doomed to crash with some
unknown force. Dan feels that he is also responsible for the injustice caused to
Tara, an agonizing guilt in him from which there seems no escape. The damage
caued to Tara is irreparable and he feels: "This isn't fair to Tara. She deserves
something better. She never got a fair deal. Not even from nature" (330).

In a desolate mood, he expresses his pain that he no longer desires
freedom but simply moves without any meaning forgetting Tara with whom he
shared a body in one cozy womb. They were free and comfortable until they were
forced out of the womb and separated. He expresses his wish that the long
forgotten Tara would forgive him. In his heart of hearts, he visualizes both Tara
and himself without limping and Tara forgiving him by hugging him very close as they were before their separation. They hug each other tightly.

Kusum Haider is of the opinion that in Tara “The linking of boy and girl in one unit, only imperfectly separated from each other, poignantly blurs gender distinctions. In Dance Like a Man Jairaj’s determination to dance Bharatanatyam separates him from the normal world almost as completely as the twins’ deformity separates them” (25).

Dance Like a Man exposes the conflict between art and society and the sense of competition and anxiety among the artists themselves. Mario Relich states, “‘Dance Like a Man’ examines the prejudices about certain forms of traditional dance in India . . .” (80). Amritlal Parekh, a man of his time, is a freedom fighter and a reformist who curtails the freedom of his son, who wants to become a male Bharatanatyam dancer. To him Bharatanatyam is “The craft of a prostitute to show off her wares . . .” (406). Hence a man has no business to learn such a craft, and “. . . anyone who learnt such a craft could not be a man” (406). He was a hypocrite who allowed his son Jairaj to marry Ratna out of his caste to keep up his image of a liberal minded person. As Jairaj says, he was “. . . as conservative and prudish as the people who were ruling over us!” (416).

Bharatanatyam, actually was associated with temples and rituals. The art was preserved by ‘devadasis’, who were professional dancers in temples. In due course, the priests, rulers and the wealthy exploited the devadasis. Later on, out of poverty, they were forced into prostitution. Eventually, a stigma came to be
attached to the dance form itself. In Religion and Theatre M.L. Varadpande writes: "... the Devadasi system degenerated fast and all sort of immoralities set in. The brides of God became concubines of priests, feudal lords and kings" (72). Until nineteen thirties and forties, the dance form was ignored and neglected. The British prudish attitude viewed this art as erotic. Thus the art, which lost its reputation, was mistaken to be the profession of a prostitute.

Amritlal is of the opinion that Bharatanatyam, if practised by a male would render him effeminate. He cannot imagine his son dancing like a woman though the divine exponent of Bharatanatyam is none other than Lord Shiva himself. This art form is by misconception exclusively associated with women and hence does not befit a man to take it up as a profession. As a result, for fear of malfunction of his conception of the male stereotype, Jairaj’s passion for Bharatanatyam goes unappreciated and cruelly trampled down by his own father. According to Shonali Muthalaly, "... his father, a fussy, well-respected social reformer shudders every time his son jingle-jangles past mid-practice, all pouting lips and swaying hips" (12).

Dattani compares the views of two families on marriage and children. Viswas’s father is not happy about his son marrying Lata out of caste. Lata’s parents are not worried over the caste but are interested if the boy would allow her to dance after marriage. Viswas’s family is engaged in business and likes to have many children. Lata as well as her parents does not like begetting many children. Lata is not in a hurry to bear children. However, Viswas’s parents want to get grand children at the earliest. Viswas’s parents give importance to money,
business, family and children, whereas Lata’s parents give importance to
profession and not to family and children.

From Lata, Viswas comes to know about her grandfather who was a
dominating type of a man who did not like his son dancing Bharatanatyam. He
was a social reformer, freedom fighter and philanthropist. The furniture, the old-
fashioned house, a dummy old-fashioned telephone and many other things make
one think it an antique house, which is suggestive of his love for tradition against
modernity. Viswas notices a large ornate cupboard, which intrigues him much.
He opens it and finds a splendid brocade shawl — a present from Mysore
Maharajah to Amritlal during Dussehra. He cherished it like a coveted prize and
used to wrap it around whenever he met visitors. Lata says, “He was the first
among the educated elite class to shun western suits and wear kurtas and
shawls . . .” (394-395).

Viswas wants to see Lata making coffee. However, Lata does not allow
him, feeling nervous to make coffee when somebody looks over. Viswas asks her
to be prepared to make coffee in his mother’s presence. He tells her that “She’ll
even check to see how far up your legs are tanned so she’ll know whether you
wear mini skirts or not!” (395).

Dattani shows how customs are related to Indian marriages. Before
marriage, the boy’s mother would see the girl to check whether the girl knows
cooking, singing etc. Similarly, they would check her eyesight, beauty, modesty
etc. Here Lata is to be checked by Viswas’s mother.
The politics of gender and stereotypes wrecks Jairaj and not Ratna as it seems outwardly. Jairaj is a failure as a dancer because of his father's notions in keeping him on a leash and his selfish wife Ratna eclipsing him. His father and wife, hence, colluded to achieve their own selfish ends, in order to perpetuate the old stereotypes and reinforce their own sense of security at his expense. The tragedy for Jairaj is that he has chosen to pursue a career that is considered right only for women. Therefore, Amritlal is willing to have Ratna as the dancer and not Jairaj. His speech reveals his attitude towards Jairaj's dancing career. He does not like Jairaj becoming a dancer. He discourages Jairaj asking him:

"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 dancer'. ‘Yes, but what does he do?’ ‘He is a dan... ’". (397)

Gender Stereotyping is no more a needy social role but an obstacle. In many cases one's originality and innate, unique talents are forcefully suppressed. L. Saraswathy points out in *Unmasking Societal Hypocrisy in the Plays of Mahesh Dattani*:

Gender construct is as oppressive to the male as to the female... Dance, particularly Bharatanatyam, is a very beautiful art form and like any art, if practised by committed exponents, is elevating and spiritual. But the middle class Indian society does not approve of a man being a practitioner of this form, as it is considered to render him effeminate. A man must act
like a man, be the provider to the family and if needs be, indulge in manly
sports that befit his ‘sex’. . . . Jairaj, the protagonist, becomes a pawn to
the gender conception of his father. (276-77)

Amritlal Parekh’s gender notions render his son Jairaj, a capable,
beautiful Bharatanatyam dancer; lose his career, his passion, his dreams and
consequently his purpose of life itself. Both Jairaj and his wife Ratna are dancers
living under the roof of Jairaj’s father, Amritlal. When dance becomes an
obsessive passion for Jairaj, Amritlal, a man of fixed notions and limited
perspective is at tension unable to digest the idea of his son putting on womanly
costumes and dancing like a woman. He cannot stomach his son growing his hair
long like his dance guru and is in fear that in future, his son may walk like a
woman, like his guru. To Amritlal, a freedom fighter and reformer, the costume
of a Bharatanatyam dancer is not an attire of convenience to a particular art form
but the attribute of a woman. Similarly, the long hair and tenderness in walk of a
Bharatanatyam dancer are not qualities adding aesthetics to an art but
characteristics of a woman. He cannot tolerate his son-practising dance all the
time, and not cricket and his daughter-in-law learning dance from a devadasi. He
exploits his son’s monetary dependence and Ratna’s thirst for fame in dance to
ensure his son’s professional death. “He convinces his daughter-in-law that her
husband is merely a drag on her” (12), writes Tejwant Singh Gill. Ratna, in order
to promote and safeguard her own interests, becomes a selfish woman of weak
will who schemes and conspires with her father-in-law to kill Jairaj’s very self.
Ambition overtakes Ratna and she buys her freedom to dance at the expense of
Jairaj's desire to become a male Bharatanatyam dancer. In order to establish and prove her a dancer, she destroys Jairaj by undermining his self-esteem as an artist. When she eventually stopped him dancing, he was in a pathetic condition. He has been choreographing items for her or playing the flute. He stopped dancing completely and started to drown himself in liquor. His addiction to dance has been replaced by his addiction to liquor. He feels even jealous of her. He is forced to give up dancing and choreographing items for her is thrust upon him. Dattani writes in Home-Cooked Love: "One cannot deny that any activity forced upon you can never be positive or healthy" (74). By choosing a career that is branded as a career of woman, defying the social stereotypes, Jairaj becomes a victim of societal prejudice. He feels neglected and lost. Indeed, he is used as a tool, as a stage prop, as a choreographer to Ratna's dance-items, but seldom as a co-dancer. Ratna is very clever to put an end to his performances. He is now a man without self-esteem, which he desperately needs. She deliberately and cleverly manipulated situations so that he, no more, gets invitations to perform.

JAIReceived. I want you to give me back my self-esteem!

RATNA. When did I ever take it?

JAIReceived. Bit by bit. You took it when you insisted on top billing in all my 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. (443)
To Amritlal, *devadasi* system, like dowry and untouchability, is a shame to the society. *Devadasi* is a girl dedicated to a temple to serve its deity in various ways. She can be a high priestess or a consort of the temple’s presiding deity and considered a female oracle. Since the dawn of civilization woman has been considered a symbol of nature’s creative force. Women were very closely associated with various cultic rituals and this, probably, gave birth to the *devadasi* system. Ancient Hindu culture gave importance to woman. Shiva-Shakti worship is a testimony to the importance of woman in Hindu culture. The dark, mysterious temple-chamber, the sanctum sanctorum in which the idol is installed is called *Garbhagriha*, which means womb. Therefore, the presence of *devadasis* in the temples to perform dance and sing in the early mornings and at nights gives them the place of a mother who wakes up and comforts her baby by singing. They are the custodians of art. However, this rich ancient meaningful Hindu culture became meaningless and shameful when the ‘custodians’ of the temples made use of the *devadasis* for their carnal pleasures. Besides, the British termed it as erotic. Hence, the stigma attached to *devadasi* system is indeed an invented culture.

To eradicate *devadasi* system, Amritlal says, “We are building ashrams for these unfortunate women! Educating them, reforming them . . .” (416). Jairaj becomes angry when Amritlal says of reforming *devadasis*. He requests his father to send the *devadasis* to temples and allow them to practise their art and to give awards for preserving the art if at all he really wants any reformation of *devadasis*. He says, “Give them their homes and give them their profession”
To Amritlal, allowing them to live in the temples is turning temples into brothels and encouraging open prostitution because “Most of them have given up their ‘art’ as you call it and have taken to selling their bodies” (416). Jairaj blames his father and people like him responsible for it. He does not want his art spoiled by a few people like his father: “... I will not have my art run down by a handful of stubborn, narrow-minded individuals with fancy pretentious ideals” (416).

Raffia visits Chenni amma, a seventy-five year old devadasi on the pretext of going to temple. She is the oldest living exponent of the Mysore School of Bharatanatyam who spends her time at the temple steps, selling flowers. Though poor and dying, she volunteered and pleaded with Ratna to learn the art of abhinaya from her, as she does not want her knowledge of the art to die with her. Further, she wanted to teach Ratna some old dance compositions, which she knew by memory. Ratna does not bother who she is. To her she is an artist who can dance the divine dance of Shiva and Parvati.

As far as Amritlal is concerned, Chenni amma is a devadasi — a prostitute. He cannot imagine his daughter-in-law dancing in the courtyard of a prostitute and people peeping over her. He is worried over his social status. He considers that the very visit of his daughter-in-law to the house of a prostitute degrades his social status. His notion of social reform has gone in the winds.

Raffia is obsessed with the desire of making her daughter Lata achieve distinction as a renowned dancer, which she could not accomplish because of the
repressive patriarchal dominance exercised by her father-in-law, Amritlal, who expected all the members of his family to prostrate themselves before him. He carries with him the notions of a stereotypical patriarch and tries to manipulate the next generation — his son Jairaj and daughter-in-law Ratna. Though opposed to his views, Jairaj and Ratna do the same with their own daughter and try to pass on their preferences to Lata. They try to transfer their own ambitions to Lata, who, however, proves to be very different. She is a talented dancer, who is quite happy to marry Viswas, the rich mithaiwala's son, who is comfortable with the complete ignorance of Bharatanatyam.

Bharatanatyam, as Amritlal views, is the art of a prostitute and a man dancing Bharatanatyam causes doubt on his own manliness. The society perceives man taking up dance as a career with some general inhibitions, because traditionally women perform Bharatanatyam. Jairaj, obsessed with dance, is all set to undo the stereotypes that his imperious father who claims to be a social reformer carries. Ratna taking dance lessons from Chenni amma further infuriates Amritlal. Hence contradictions like a man as a dancer that too his own son, the prostitute as an artiste, and a long-haired guru who walks like a woman are all violation of stereotypes which Amritlal cannot digest. He thinks of tackling all these tensions with his money. He makes a pact with Ratna by which she can proceed with her career in dance on the condition to help him pull Jairaj out of his obsession to make him 'a manly man'. If so, Jairaj and Ratna can enjoy his riches. In Ziya Us Salam's words the play "... is the story of a man who wears the liberal mask in public but is appalled that his own son, his own
flesh of flesh is learning to be a dancer, a craft supposedly reserved for women, that too *devadasis!*" (14). Gowri Ramnarayan in *Tickles and Traumas* shares a similar view: “The father is appalled by this changeling behaviour. His disgust grows, as the couple live off him and pursue the ‘immoral’ career. His stratagems finally destroy Jairaj . . .” (8).

The tension between the older generation and the younger generation is that the established social order is being challenged by the younger generation. They openly defy certain social norms. Amritlal tells Ratna decisively not to visit Chenni amma any more. He orders her to ask the *guruji* and the musicians to vacate his house immediately. He phones to his friend Patel to donate five hundred rupees to Chenni amma as a compensation for abandoning her only student Ratna. To Amritlal, the patriarch with stereotypical notions “. . . the man who takes up a ‘feminine’ vocation is a wimp, a woman who cares about her career is a bad wife, careless mother, and manipulative human being” (9), says Deepa Gahlot. He is a stereotype of a father who resists any change.

Hasmukh Mehta, in *Where There’s a Will*, destroys his son Ajit Mehta just as Amritlal Parekh, in *Dance Like a Man*, ruins his son Jairaj. Hasmukh is also a stereotypical father who wants his son Ajit to be a shadow of him. As Jairaj’s desire to dance remains unfulfilled, he wishes to make his son, Shankar a dancer when he grows up. Though Ratna was allowed to dance, she could not gain name and fame as a renowned dancer. She could achieve it through their daughter Lata. Similarly, Jairaj wishes to set right his failure through their son Shankar. He thinks, “. . . when he grows up, I’ll teach him how to dance — the
dance of Shiva. The dance of a man. And when he is ready, I'll bring him to his grandfather and make him dance on his head — the tandava nritya” (441). This desire also remains unfulfilled because the child died or rather was killed in his childhood. The ayah, in an attempt to keep the child away from weeping for his mother on the day of a performance, administered an overdose of opium. Unaware of this Ratna, on her part, too administered him a dose. Consequently, little Shankar was killed. According to Jairaj, Ratna is more responsible for the death of the child. He alleges that Ratna was always after the name and fame as a dancer rather than discharging her duty as a mother and as a wife. She could take care of Lata when she was a baby whereas she could not do so in the case of the son. Like Jairaj, Shankar too has no place in the house of a patriarch who adores stereotypes. Both Jairaj and Shankar are victims of cultural stereotypes. Amritlal was not cruel enough to kill Jairaj but turned him a drunkard, whereas Ratna killed Shankar who would not fit into the stereotype because his father wanted to teach him dance.

*Where There's a Will* is a play in which Dattani is seen exorcising the patriarchal code. Mukesh Ranjan Verma writes: “In the past . . . a father demanded unquestioning obedience from his son because he firmly believed that he alone knew what was best for him. This denied the son any opportunity for independent growth. . . . In *Where There's a Will*, Dattani exposes the hollowness of the patriarchal code” (213).

In the play traditional family values clash with unexpected twists, completely subverting the existing stereotypes. Hasmukh Mehta, the self-made
industrialist is a patriarch with the typical stereotypical notions. He thinks that his son Ajit is a spendthrift and good-for-nothing ‘nincompoop’. His daughter-in-law, Preeti is calculative and money-minded. His wife Sonal is “as good as mud” depends on her sister Minal for every advice.

Hasmukh’s expectations of Ajit as a son are shattered, because the son does not dance to his father’s tune. In his disappointment, he says “... when I was twenty-one, the greatest tragedy of my life took place. I got married . . . The following year Ajit was born. Tragedy after tragedy . . .” (464). Hasmukh is an autocratic father who regards his son Ajit as an incapable and irresponsible fool who defies all his attempts to take him under his grooming. Ajit, on the other hand, thinks of his father as one who is self-opinionated and not ready to change his views. He is very stubborn and wants everything under his control. Ajit being disgusted says, “You will never be happy. Not until all of us dance to your tune. And I will never do that” (458).

Hasmukh and Amritlal represent the patriarchal father figures who do not allow freedom to their sons. Amritlal, the patriarch does not allow his son Jairaj to grow as he intends. He thinks that his son does not grow up into a man when he dances. He asks Ratna: “Help me make him an adult. Help me to help him grow up” (427). Jairaj says, “My father is always asking me to grow up. Well, this is a perverse way of thrusting me into adulthood” (444). Consequently, Jairaj turned into a drunkard. Jairaj thinks, “... he would sooner watch me turn into a drunkard than see me dance?” (444).
The imposition of cultural stereotypes on Jairaj against him converts him into nobody to his wife. It has not only strained the father-son relationship but also the husband-wife relationship. Similarly, Hasmukh Mehta thrusts his ideas upon his son Ajit, expecting him to grow as he wants. Like Amritlal, he too thinks that his son never grows up. This is the general view of a patriarch that his son never grows up and is a baby always. He wants to control him even after his death by way of making a will. A patriarch never recognizes the individuality and capability of his son.

Ajit has his own whims and fancies. To Ajit, his father is old fashioned and wants to keep everybody under his control. Thus the father and the son always have contradictory views. Ajit says, “Anything I do is wrong for you! Just because you are a self-made man and had a deprived childhood, you feel that I am having it too easy. Nothing I do will ever seem intelligent to you. You are prejudiced” (459).

Hasmukh Mehta is an autocrat and a cynic who always criticizes his son and wife. He considers them as his enemies trying to squander away his hard-earned money. Being arrogant and tactless, he fails to find place in the hearts of his family members. On the other hand, his mistress Kiran could impress his wife, son and daughter-in-law.

The father in the patriarchal system is a despot in whose eyes the son never grows up. Hasmukh’s father, a typical patriarch, tightened his control over Hasmukh, stopped his schooling and put him to hard work in his factory when his elder son ran away from home to join a group of hippies. Thus Hasmukh holds a
strong notion that today, at the age of forty-five, he is a very successful industrialist and one of the richest men in the city; only because of the training he had had under his father. He says, "I had the good sense to learn from my father" (463). He expects the same from Ajit. He got Ajit married at the age of twenty-one as his father got him married at the age of twenty-one. Like his father, Hasmukh holds Ajit in leash. Hasmukh became the mould of his father and wants Ajit to be his own mould, which Ajit defies. In Nawaid Anjum’s observation, the play Where There’s a Will staged in August 2006 at Kamani Auditorium, New Delhi as Mad About Money, "... subtly tackles the underlying issues of identity and generation gap. These surface during the exchanges between the father and the son and the former’s desire to see his progeny tread the path that he followed all his life and not dare to dissent" (14).

Hasmukh being unhappy and disgusted says:

Why am I unhappy? Because I don’t have a son. Who is Ajit? Isn’t he my son? No. He’s just a boy who spends my money and lives in my house. He doesn’t behave like my son. A son should make me happy. Like I made my father... happy. I listened to him. I did what he told me to do. I worked for him. I worked hard for him. I made him... happy. That is what I wanted my son to make me. (Gets a little worked up). But he failed! Miserably! He has not a single quality I look for in a son! He has made my entire life worthless! He is going to destroy me! It won’t be long before everything I worked for and achieved will be destroyed!

Finished because of him! (475)
He is unhappy with Ajit because he would not follow his example. He thinks that Ajit needs ‘seasoning’ to make him fit to run the company when his father would be no longer there. Ajit reacts to this that his father wants him to be his mere extension:

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? (460-61)

Hasmukh considers his son Ajit a useless, spendthrift who at last will make him a bankrupt. In his view, Ajit is an insignificant idiot who becomes somebody only under his shade.

HASMUKH. Nowhere! That is just my point! If you are you, then you are nowhere. You are nothing just a big zero. No matter what you do, you’ll remain a zero. Over the years you’ll just keep adding zeroes to your zero. Zero, zero, zero. On their own, the zeroes don’t mean a thing. But if there’s a number one standing before all those zeroes, then they really add up to a lot.

AJIT. And I suppose you think you’re the number one in front of my zeroes. (461)

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, the father wants his son to follow blindly whatever he is asked to do.
Consequently, the individual is deprived of his initiative. Hence, Hasmukh is dismissed as a “weak man with false strength”, “a village buffalo”, “living his life in his father’s shadow”, and “merely being a good boy to his father”. Ajit could surface only because he is free of his father’s beliefs.

Hasmukh’s mistress Kiran too had a sorrowful life under her father and husband who were drunkards. Everyday, returning home completely drunk, her father used to abuse and beat her mother. However, she pretended before the children that everything was right and she was happy. Kiran and her brothers were terrified of their father and sighed with relief only when he fell asleep on the dining table. Her brothers too turned out like their father. They followed their father to come home with bottles of rum and abuse and beat their wives. She too suffered silently like her mother when her husband too followed the same. Hence, at last, she wonders pathetically: “Oh! where will all this end? Will the scars our parents lay on us remain forever?” (508). According to C.K. Meena:

The characters who inhabit Dattani’s world are fallible and often vulnerable. They suffer as a consequence of being bound by the dictates of an oppressive society. This oppression is in most cases embodied in autocratic father-figures: Hasmukh Mehta in Where There’s a Will, Dattani’s first play, tyrannises his family; Amritlal in Dance Like a Man thwarts his son Jairaj’s desire to be a dancer; Jiten in Bravely Fought the Queen shares his father’s violent nature; Bharati’s (unseen) father, in Tara, coerces her to favour the male baby when her Siamese twins are separated. (8)
The friction between the father and son has turned into hatred. This mutual hatred is revealed when both of them accidentally question simultaneously. Ajit likes *halwa* and he is not worried whether his father eats his salad or not. Similarly, Hasmukh has to eat salad for his health and cannot eat *halwa*, which he likes much. Hence, Ajit feels irritated when he hears about salad and do not want his mother to prepare it for his father. Hasmukh does not like his son enjoying *halwa*.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{AJIT.} & \quad \text{(together).} \\
\text{HASMUKH.} & \quad \text{Is she still making the salad?} \\
& \quad \text{Is she still making the halwa? (464)}
\end{align*}
\]

As their cook, Maharaj is on leave for a few days Sonal sends the gardener, Damodar to bring back Maharaj. When Hasmukh comes to know this, he is upset and worried much because the weeds will ruin his plants in the absence of Damodar. He is least bothered about the cook's absence, which will put his wife in difficulty. He wants his interests to be looked after and is least bothered about the interest of others.

Hasmukh expects implicit obedience to him from his son, as he practised it in his father's case. When things drift away from his control, he creates a trust and appoints his mistress Kiran Jhaveri its trustee. This move renders all the members of the family to the position of pensioners. Even after his death, he haunts his house as a ghost. He cannot digest his family enjoying his wealth on his deaths. The evils of patriarchy ruin the family.
Hasmukh has been controlling his family not through love and affection but through his money. Even after his death, he tries to rule over them through his will. Another interesting story of his wealth is that it is his father's. His father planned everything and Hasmukh worked hard with him to accumulate wealth. Hasmukh lacked individuality and the best thing he could do was to protect the hard-earned money in tact. He never grew out of his father's shadow and never really tried to understand his people. Therefore, finally he became a victim of his own machinations.

Hasmukh appears to be a powerful and successful business tycoon living in peace and content. But in reality he is a pathetic man who is a weak, insecure failure. His self-appraisal that he is the number one before Ajit's zeroes actually befits him because he is a zero made worthy of the addition of his father's number one before his zeroes. In fact, he lives on his father's money and not on his own. As Kiran says he is one of the "... weak men with false strength" (508) who "... never trusted anybody" (506).

Kiran, finally, enlightens Sonal who realizes that she had been a dependent on her sister Minal for everything. Even Sonal, Hasmukh's "good-for-nothing", "as good as mud" wife could come out of her sister's hold as an independent, free individual when she despises the cook of her sister's choice at the end. Mrs. Mehta who had lived and suffered so long under the dominance of her husband and her sister, comes into her own at the end when Kiran makes her introspect herself. She is a woman without any personal wishes and individuality.
She depended on her sister Minal to decide anything. Now she realizes how foolish she has been in all her life:

SONAL. . . . I have always lived in my sister's shadow. It was always Minal who decided what we should wear, what games we should play. She even decides which maharaj is suitable for our family. Even at my husband's funeral, she sat beside me and told me when to cry. (511)

The selfish and wily Preeti, scheming always to take all the family wealth, ultimately learns the lesson that "giving is more important than taking". Kiran Jhaveri manages successfully her role as the caretaker of Mehta's Will and feels liberated when all her oppressive patriarchal figures — her father, her husband and her boss — finally vanished from her life. When she becomes an inevitable member of the Mehta family, she breathes happiness that had so long eluded her in her past existence as a business-executive-cum-mistress to a rich man and as daughter to a drunkard and as wife to another drunkard.

After Hasmukh's death the Will has changed Preeti's attitude towards Ajit and Sonal. She calls Ajit, "You silly, stupid idiot!", "you lout", "You are a mistake! You are a big mistake in my life" (499) because he has become an invalid without money. She even fails to do the duties of a wife to her husband. When Ajit returns from office, she shows her indifference to him. Sonal being worried over this callous attitude reminds her that Ajit has come from office.

SONAL. Aju has come.
PREETI. What difference does it make? (Goes up to her room.)

SONAL. Look at the way she talks about her husband. Look at the way she talks to me. I talk to the servants with more respect. (498)

Kiran feels pity for Hasmukh because he had lived his life in his father's shadow. He was just like his bossy father. He neither did anything without consulting his father nor did he ever disagree with him. She says:

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

As a man without individuality and one who never really grew up, he imitated his father in running his family. His weakness as a man who cannot make decisions, first without his father and next without Kiran, has made him feel inferior which he never showed. In order to hide it and to prove his superiority as a man he made the will to rule over his family. Kiran says to Sonal: "Even his attempts at ruling over you after his death, through his will, are pathetic. The only reason he wanted to do that is because his father had ruled over his family. All his life he was merely being a good boy to his father" (510).

Preeti is one who defies to be the stereotypical daughter-in-law. She is not meek and silent, instead scheming. Kiran found out that it was Preeti who caused the untimely death of Hasmukh by mixing her vitamin tablets in the bottle of
Hasmukh’s tablets meant for blood pressure. As the tablets looked similar, it was easy for Preeti to see Hashmulth die earlier. She has the tactics to fool Hasmukh—pretend to be a slave to the passions of the “slave driver”. She is “Pretty, charming, graceful and sly as a snake” (456). She has her eye on the legacy of Hasmukh and to reach it without trouble she bows down before him but decides the number of days he should live by replacing his pills for pressure with her vitamin pills. She is a trouble-shooter in her own way. She changes her behaviour towards Sonal and Ajit when she learns that she cannot enjoy the family property. Sonal remarks, “She frightens me Sometimes I think she is capable of doing anything for money” (506). Kiran excused her by not mentioning about it to Ajit.

Dattani spotlights the impact of patriarchal authority in a joint family where the patriarch expects the rest of the family to fit themselves in the traditional stereotypes and kowtow before him unquestionably. Though it is a day of nuclear families, traces of joint family could still be found. The patriarchal dominance invariably puts daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, or mistress as dependents on men for financial and physical security. Man has always taken up woman as a burden and a source of requirement. She should cook his food, comfort him and satisfy him sexually whenever he needs. A mistress is readily taken to replace a wife if she is unable to satisfy her husband. The mistress, with no exception, has to kowtow before him.

The subordination of women to men is believed to be older than civilization itself. Sex is the creation of God and sexual differences are essential
for procreation, whereas gender is not God's creation. Certainly, it is the creation of patriarchal hegemony serving the male flair for domination. As Ranju Singh argues, "... gender is neither natural nor immutable because it is the creation of patriarchy" (73). A patriarchal social set up firmly asserts men's superiority over women and is based not on mutuality but on oppression. Although women have played vital roles in the creation of society and have been active agents, yet the patriarchal mindset has always tried to relegate them to margins.

Thus, Dattani's women characters Uma, Kiran, Lata, Daksha, Aruna, Smita, Baa, Dolly, Alka, Tara, Bharati, Ratna, Sonal and Preeti are victims of patriarchy. Traditionally the lives of women have been organised and manipulated by patriarchy in all ages, all cultures and all countries by establishing values, norms, roles, gender perceptions and idealism that prescribe unequal means, methods and routes to achieve what is called the 'wholeness' for women.

An important feature, which sets Dattani as a unique contemporary playwright, is his questioning of a sensitive stereotype "What Makes A Man A Man" (55). Almost all the plays resound questions like 'What is manliness?' and 'Who is man enough?'.

In Seven Steps Around the Fire, Mr. Sharma's expectations of Subbu as a man fall apart when he marries a hijra. Mr. Sharma's idea of 'being a man' or 'a full man' lies in Subbu marrying a woman and not a hijra. The society has imposed certain roles for men, which have become stereotypes and it expects
these roles to be played by men strictly. Siddharth Narrain maintains, “The main factor behind the violence is that society is not able to come to terms with the fact that hijras do not conform to the accepted gender divisions” (98). As a result, violence against hijras has become common. Mr. Sharma as a patriarchal father figure could not digest his son Subbu’s marriage to the hijra Kamla because his expectations upon Subbu falls crumbled.

In On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, the idea of manliness is at question. Sharad sings ‘What Makes A Man A Man’. Kamlesh, Sharad, Bunny, Ranjit and Ed are all homosexuals who challenge the idea of manliness. The social expectations of a man to fall in love with a woman and satisfy her and get satisfied sexually, and beget children are defied by the homosexuals. Ed who is a gay wants to get married just because he is afraid of the society that he will be isolated for being a gay. Though he knows well that he cannot love a woman better than he can love a man, he got Kiran as his prey to boast to the world that he is straight. Further, he feels inferior that he is not ‘man’ enough. Hence, he starts preaching the idea of a real man.

ED. It’s too bad for Kamlesh. I think it is better he comes to terms with it now that Sharad wants to be a man.

RANJIT. A man? Did you say he wants to be a man?

ED. Of course he is a man. I mean he wants to be a real man.

RANJIT. And what in tradition is that supposed to mean? (99)
The secret intention of Ed advising Sharad to live like a man is to separate him from Kamlesh in order to keep Kamlesh for himself. If he marries Kamlesh's sister Kiran he can safely live a homosexual life with Kamlesh. However, Sharad is one who is happy and contented with his homosexuality. Hence, he declares, "I am not bisexual, I am as gay as a goose" (100).

In *Do the Needful*, Alpesh is a homosexual who does not want to marry a woman. He was forced to marry and hence his first marriage was a failure. He does not want to marry again. His parents want him to marry and have children. Their view of a full man is that one should get married and father children. When Alpesh refuses to fulfil the role of a traditional man, his parents are in tension. They, therefore, force him to get married again. Though Alpesh does not want, he cannot tell the reason to his parents, because no parent would be happy to know their son is a gay. Similarly, his future wife Lata is also in a similar critical position. Her parents could not digest her marrying a man out of their caste that too one already married. Besides, she had premarital sex with her lover. To her parents, these are all violations of the traditional role of a girl. Having no other go, they arrange a boy out of their caste to Lata as no boy of their community is ready to marry he because she had a love and sex affair with one out of her caste.

Smita in *Final Solutions*, similarly, does not fulfil the expectations of her mother Aruna. Aruna wants Smita to be a girl strictly observing the religious codes whereas she feels it stifling.
Bravely Fought the Queen presents characters that do not fit into the stereotypes. All the characters are grotesque like Lalitha's bonsai. Jiten as well as his unseen father are violent. Jiten's violence caused his daughter Daksha a spastic. He is a drunkard and immoral, least bothered about his wife's needs. Nitin's homosexuality is a great disappointment to his wife. Baa, though bedridden and invalid still holds control over her sons against the daughters-in-law. She is cruel enough to keep Nitin away from his wife, Alka denying her the chance to bear a child. The mother of the sisters, Dolly and Alka is branded as a whore by Baa. Alka is dejected because she cannot become a complete woman by giving birth to a baby.

Tara and Chandan in Tara are freaks of nature. Though both are handicapped, Tara is considered twice handicapped, as she is a girl. Tara is not a complete woman with a Jaipur leg. In order to make Chandan a full man he was given two legs.

Jairaj in Dance Like a Man is a marginalized male who chooses to dance like a woman. His challenging the conventional male stereotypes causes his downfall. Anjali Multani writes in On Mahesh Dattani's Dance Like a Man: The Politics of Production and Performance:

If the play questions conventional male stereotypes and points out that male identity is a construction conditioned by social norms and expectations, it does so by involving those very same constructions for the female characters. Jairaj, despite his father's disappointment and his wife's accusations, is a man — his dancing is a way of expressing his own
identity, he is a man who defies social norms, who stands up to his father, who refused to allow his wife to be insulted and who is also a good father. (59)

Ratna, similarly, proves herself unfeminine because she colludes with her father-in-law causing her husband’s downfall. Her obsession for dance took away the life of her son Shankar to whom Jairaj wanted to teach the dance of Lord Shiva. She married Jairaj not out of their mutual love, or because he too had a passion for dance, but because he would not interfere with her dancing. She accepted Viswas as her daughter’s fiancé for the same reason that he would not interfere with her dancing.

Like Hasmukh, Amritlal wants to mould his son Jairaj according to his expectations. When Jairaj wants to become a Bharatanatyam dancer Amritlal puts an end to his dancing career with the help of Ratna. Hasmukh Mehta is disgusted with his son Ajit’s namby-pamby ways.

Hasmukh had lived his life under the shadow of his father because of which he never developed his own individuality. He consulted his father whenever he wanted to take a decision. As Kiran says, “He had no life of his own . . . where were his own dreams? His own thoughts? Whatever he did was planned for him by his father” (509). When his father died, he left behind him his business empire, already well established. But for this, Hasmukh would not have, in his capacity as one who cannot decide things for himself, achieved his present status. His father’s death indeed created a vacuum in his life, which he filled with Kiran. Her calculations of Hasmukh are completely true which
showcases her intellectual superiority. Hasmukh has been thus living a pretentious life, unable to do anything of his own. He lived his short span of life depending on his father and his mistress.

Culture and social stereotypes thus are rather restrictive forces than means of liberation. They take away the freedom of life making man feel as if he is in chains. Dattani’s plays, thus, show how cultural and stereotypical notions oppress human beings. In order to come out of these oppressive notions, human beings struggle a lot in their own ways.

Dattani’s plays chosen for the study delineate the shortcomings of the modern world which is falling apart on the basis of (i) Sexuality and Segregation, (ii) Religion and Restriction and (iii) Culture and Stereotypes. What measures should the modern world take to safeguard the voiceless victim of these aberrations and perversions are summed up in the concluding chapter that follows.