CHAPTER - V

SUMMATION

Literature in general and drama in particular holds a mirror to the realities of the contemporary world. Dramatists like Mahesh Dattani in addition to holding the mirror for the people to see the world in its own beauty and bestiality attempt to find out the ways in which marginalized, oppressed and voiceless people undergo untold miseries and the obligations of the writers to voice the grievances of such ‘voiceless others’.

Indian concept of ideal life is generally a model life of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses. It was a common practice of the elders to quote the relationship between Rama and Lakshmana as an example of ideal relationship that should be emulated between brothers, that of Dhasaratha and Rama as the ideal relationship between father and son. Rama never questioned his father and because of that unquestioning obedience, he went to forest where he underwent many ordeals. Yet, he never questioned his father. The relationship is out and out patriarchy oriented. It does not mean that the scriptures do not have questioning, revolutionary or radical figures. Lord Krishna, for example, argued, advised and questioned the evils of Kamsa, which were conveniently disregarded by the elders in their own interest. Ideal life styles portrayed in scriptures are the prescriptions of the elders. A son is expected to follow the heels of his father blindly. Is it possible at present? Gone are the days when sons married, without
questioning, the bride of their fathers' choice. Now, a father is lucky if he is informed and invited by his son to his marriage. Tradition is breaking in to give way for modernity.

Tradition and modernity often clash. Maya Pandit writes, "Notions of family and the place of men and women in it, the typical roles defined by tradition for male and female members, values associated with them, concepts of morality and sexuality—all these represent interesting contradictions as far as women are concerned" (100). Tradition is no more an accepted prescription but avoidance. India steeped in tradition, undergoes a tremendous transformation. Many reasons can be attributed to this transformation. Progressive nature of modern youth, the amount of influence they receive from science, technology, reasoning power, exposure and the influence of mass media are some of the factors that influence the transformation.

India is no more a country of saints and sages. In the present context, youngsters having been influenced by so many factors are forced to interrogate the established concepts of parentage, patriarchy, personal relationship and totally life itself. The present generation gradually moves away from the established norms of life. The deviation is formed as an articulation of their protest. The elders finding the youngsters embracing a new set of values demur and demonstrate their dissatisfaction against even the radical youth. Influence of the external world is so much. Moreover, these things are quite common in a developing country like India.
A kind of new freedom and conviction aspired for by the marginalized, voiceless people, hence, forms an irresistible undercurrent of all plays of Dattani. His plays try to evolve a harmony out of a tension between the archetypal experience and a living response to life and its values in the modern context. In order to bring out the unheard voices of ‘the other’ or ‘the marginalized’ to the limelight the protagonists of his plays invariably are the eunuchs, gays, handicapped, women and similarly discriminated people who dare to think and live differently breaking the established, so-called stereotypes. His interest is thus that his plays should be received ‘as metaphors for life’.

The study mainly focuses on the thematic aspects of the plays. Yet the style of the dramatist which seems to be unique is not left out by the researcher.

**STYLE**

Dattani’s style as an Indian English playwright is noteworthy. He highlights the strength and shortcomings of his characters without any reservation or bias. He recognizes the tragedies, extreme hardships and the horror to which the ‘other’ are put to. He makes an intimate and energetic portrayal of all these in his plays. He has given a new face and identity to Indian English Drama. He is the first Indian playwright writing in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi award. Ashis Sengupta writes:

"Mahesh Dattani became in 1998 the first Indian English-language playwright to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award, the highest recognition for a writer, for his brilliant treatment of, as the award citation reads, the
“tangled attitudes in contemporary India towards communal differences, consumerism and gender”. His plays have been published, translated, and staged in India and abroad including in England and North America” (81).

His plays bring Indian drama relevant to the present day in their themes — sexuality, religious tension, gender issues, prejudice, hypocrisy, patriarchy, child abuse, guilt and compromise — while still focussing on human relationships and personal and moral choices, which are the classic concerns of world drama. He is a writer of world stature, powerful and disturbing through his most contemporary plays. With playwrights like him, Modern Indian drama has served as a powerful genre for the representation of political, social, and cultural processes in post-independence India. To Bala Chauhan’s question, “Do artists have a social responsibility?”, Dattani answers, “Yes. Our responsibility is to show the conflict and the issue in its entire complexity” (IV). ‘A playwright with concern and conviction’ Dattani exposes the urban middle class psyche. Thus, he successfully unravels the hypocrisy by shaking the reader’s staunchly held views and beliefs of the urban middle class.

Today, he is hailed as one of India’s best playwrights writing in English. Anjana Rajan writes in Directing Right: “Today he’s a famous theatre and film director and playwright, whose plays and films have left a lasting impression on audiences” (3). Society’s many hidden revelations of the reality turned him cathartic and his presentation of these realities make the readers hypnotic. His is a manifestly matured work treating sex not as a taboo but as a biological and natural need of human beings. His characters are not stage characters of
performance but live human beings. Their pains, sufferings, repressions, frustrations are all those of the predicaments of real persons. He exposes the social reality of his time as opposed to what is considered ideal. He writes in his preface to his Collected Plays: “I am certain that my plays are a true reflection of my time, place and socio-economic background. I am hugely excited and curious to know what the future holds for me and my art in the new millennium in a country that has a myriad challenges to face politically, socially, artistically and culturally” (XV).

The themes of his plays are contemporary social issues. “I see myself as a part of contemporary society and therefore I see myself as a contemporary theatre artist” (1), says Dattani in Contemporary Indian Theatre and its Relevance. His plays stand out exceptionally as they deal with certain unique social issues of contemporary India, the world too, which the former playwrights dared not touch. Adya Rangacharya suggests, “Any theatre gains vitality if it is rooted in the life of the people” (146). That is the secret of Dattani’s success as a contemporary playwright. He deals with a variety of themes. His interest in contemporary issues agrees with the views of Marjorie Boulton: “All drama has to be contemporary in its immediate appeal . . . . a dramatist cannot choose to write for posterity, because his work must be produced on a stage and he cannot know what the theatre will be like, physically or spiritually, after a few generations” (164). His plays speak across linguistic and cultural barriers.

Nand Kumar says, “Drama, being an audio visual medium of expression, has been a very effective genre in world literature” (7). Dattani uses drama as a
powerful medium to express his views on the so-called controversies of the society. His plays voice the angst of the people who are considered misfits or freaks and marginalized in a society where stereotypical attitudes and notions reign supreme. His characters are not extraordinary celluloid heroes and heroines. Instead, they are ordinary middle class individuals one meets everyday and everywhere. “They are not allowed to put up a false front; their prejudice, hypocrisy, jealousy and feelings of deep guilt stand exposed” (8) in his plays, writes C.K. Meena.

LANGUAGE

Dattani’s life-like sketches of the middle class men and women with all their foibles breathe life through his language. He is a serious writer who exposes the contemporary Indian society in his own unique style, language and humour. Though his mother tongue is Gujarati, he feels at home, convenient and natural to write in English. His language is the language of the middle class Indians — another important and influential characteristic that appeals a wide audience. Vasanti Sankaranarayanan says, “His language is very accessible as it is closer to the speaking rather than the literary language” (www.narthaki.com). His unfailing humour, which is mild, sharp and unique never interrupts the seriousness of the plays, makes the audience think and laugh irresistibly.

Regarding his characterization and language Ashwin Ahmed and Anubha Sawhney write: “... his play, ‘Dance Like A Man’ worked because audiences identified with the characters and with the English they spoke” (V).
LATA. Do you or do you not want some coffee?

VISWAS. Filtered?

LATA. Instant

VISWAS. You have tea?

LATA. We don’t make tea in this house.

VISWAS. Well, you better get used to making it. Me marrying a Southie my father will tolerate, but accepting a daughter-in-law who doesn’t make tea is asking too much of him. (391)

When Viswas, Lata’s fiancé visits her, he answers the telephone: “Hello? ... Yes, this is the residence of Jairaj Parekh ... I’m butler, saar. Saar and amma going out. I taking message ... When they coming? They not telling ... One nimit (sic). I asking missy amma” (395).

He uses the language suitable to a character. In On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, the guard speaks in Hindi and Kamlesh speaks to him in Hindi and English. (The dialogue in Hindi spoken by the guard has been translated into English and placed in parentheses)

KAMLESH. Tum, kya ... yeh sab ... paise ke liye karte ho?

(are you doing all these for money)

GUARD ... Hahn! Hahn, main paise ke liye hi to karta hoon sab kuch!

(yes! yes, only for money I am doing all these)

KAMLESH. You do enjoy it. What you do to me, what I do to you. Don’t you?
GUARD. Ab main jaon? (Shall I go now?)

KAMLESH. But we will have to pretend you do it only for the money!

GUARD. Duty chalu hai, saab. Secretary daantenga mujhe. (51)

(Duty is going on, Sir. Secretary will scold me).

Similarly, in *Do the Needful*, the servant boy Mali uses Tamil words.

MALI (calling). Akka! Latakka! (To Alpesh.) Why is she crying?

Why did she run away? (151)

(Akka – elder sister, Latakka – Lata sister)

In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Dattani brings out the awkward plight of the hijra in Anarkali’s dialogue:

ANARKALI. Go away. After servicing all these sons of whores, my mouth is too tired to talk. (8)

In his plays the homosexuals make English their private code. The language gives them a sense of exclusivity and superiority over the heterosexuals outside. In a country like India, where homosexuals are a minority sidelined by mainstream society, it seems that English acts as a form of liberation from their discriminating and oppressive society. English is a language that has lost its colonial fetters long ago. It is a new language, born out of a new struggle for liberation within Indian society. Ed and Kamlesh in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* use English language as a tool to prove their superiority in order to overcome their shame. To quote Albinia and Tristram Stuart:
It is the language of the educated elite, and a tool of power. "Don’t you understand English?" screams Ed, Kamlesh's desperate-to-go-straight ex-lover, at an airline hostess. Trying to act like a 'man' in front of his new fiancee, Ed's question indicates his cultural superiority while pointing up his emotional insecurity. Kamlesh tries the opposite tack: he has sex with the apartment's security guard, a man he barely knows, and who can only speak Hindi. (4)

The desires and aspirations of the middle class people, which drive them to move upward, make them vulnerable as well as fallible. The struggle associated with this move has empowered them to break the fetters so far obstructing them in various forms. His women characters are the representations of ordinary middle class women who are marginalized and voiceless, suffering inexpressible pangs. He portrays them the way they actually are. He projects their aspirations, identity crisis, struggles and the challenges they face in contemporary society, neglecting the popular interest of showing women as objects of love and sex. His plays are influential enough to attract audience world wide because of their universal appeal, yet, they are set in the Indian backdrop. He is an artist in the true sense of the term and not a social reformer. He exposes the contemporary society as what it is without making any compromise. Besides the themes of his plays, what makes his plays highly enjoyable is his characterization. He knows the world he is talking about and therefore shows it just the way it is, sparing nothing.
MYTH

Dattani uses myth in Seven Steps Around the Fire. He traces the origin of the *hijra* with a myth. Similarly, he humorously brings in a belief that the ghosts live in tamarind trees. In Where There’s a Will, the tamarind tree in the courtyard of Hasmukh’s house has become his ghostly abode after his death.

SYMBOL

He uses symbols, especially, in Bravely Fought the Queen. The title itself is symbolic of women’s domestic fight to liberate themselves. Dolly’s mask is a symbol suggesting her domestic confinement. The bonsai is another important symbol, which is very much suggestive of the dwarfed, thwarted, grotesque nature of the various characters of the play. Dolly’s dance imitating her spastic daughter, Daksha and Alka’s dance in the rain are symbolic of their aspiration for liberation. The old beggar woman is symbolic of old Baa and the guilt and hatred associated with her. Jiten’s guilt associated with her is tormenting and hence, finally, to get rid of Baa, he kills the beggar woman. Similarly, Alka in order to set right her hatred, she repeatedly chases away the beggar woman from her compound. The roles preferred by Dolly and Alka to appear in the ball too are symbolic. Dolly’s preference for the role of a *tawaif* reveals her sexual cravings. Alka’s wish to do the role of Jhansi Rani suggests her desire to fight against Baa, Nitin and Jiten. Daksha’s birth with the umbilical cord around her neck is symbolic that a woman by birth is subjugated and is in chains in the male dominated world. Her being spastic suggests that women are deprived of their voices and muted by men. Rain is yet another important symbol, which is
associated with rebirth, fertility and stimulating sex. Rain reminds Baa of her marriage. Nitin is sexually aroused by the rain so that he goes to the auto rickshaw driver who has been waiting. Rain brings rebirth to Alka so that she goes out to dance in the rain. Lalitha brings in rain water to water the bonsai plant to give it life.

In **On a Muggy Night in Mumbai**, Ranjit is called a coconut suggesting his Indian brown colour and his homosexual inclination for which he goes to England and lives with his white gay lover. The Air Conditioner and the muggy weather are symbols used to suggest the inner, comfortable homosexuality of the characters and their shame and tension with the outside world. Similarly, the marriage is a symbol, which is meaningless to the homosexuals because it is a heterosexual affair. The sexual escapades of the Diamond merchant’s wife symbolically reveal that the heterosexual love is as stealthy as the homosexual love.

In **Do the Needful**, the cow Gouri and its calf are symbolic of Prema Gowda and her daughter Lata. Lata’s plan to run away to join her lover Salim is thwarted by her desire to see Gouri before her running away. The mother prevents her daughter from running away and bringing disgrace to the family.

The marriage between Alpesh, from North India and Lata, from South India symbolically suggests a North-South union. Though India is one, one cannot deny the existence of a perennial North-South discrimination. Prema Gowda’s suggestion of a music, “Why don’t you play M.S. Subbulakshmi?
Meera bhajans! North-South fusion. That will be cute” (131) expresses the North-South union.

Tara is a symbol used in the play Tara, as the title of the play as well as the name of one of the protagonists. Tara which means a bright star is suitable of woman as in the case of Tara, the protagonist. Unfortunately, the bright star is eclipsed by the male chauvinism. Hence, women in general are bright stars who are eclipsed by male domination and male preference.

SET

Stage management is a noteworthy aspect of Dattani’s dramatic technique. As one who has lectured on drama, directed plays and acted in them, he knows theatre intimately. He takes pains to make his stage look as close to the real thing as possible. He successfully manages the limited space of the stage by splitting it into different levels to achieve the maximum effect out of it. His stage-settings are more complex. He uses multi-level sets to accommodate both the interior and exterior of the locale. In On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, the stage is divided into three acting areas. The first is a small flat, beautifully done up in ‘ethnic chic’ fashion. The second area is a completely non-realistic black and expansive space where the characters meet their inner selves. The realistic bedroom of Kamlesh below is hidden behind a gauze wall, giving it some mystery and secrecy. Hence, he accommodates the living room, the bedroom and the black expansive space within the limited stage space. Further, he brings in the Mumbai skyline as the backdrop of these three levels.
In *Final Solutions*, a crescent-shaped ramp is kept as the space for the Mob or Chorus. The living room of the Gandhis with an elevation to accommodate the kitchen and the pooja room finds place on the stage space. In another level there is a desk and oil lamp converted to an electric lamp, which suggests the time of 1940s.

In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, much of the action takes place in the living room of Dolly and Jiten. A higher level accommodates Baa's bedroom. Similarly, the advertising agency of the Trivedi brothers, a well-stocked bar are other areas of the stage set. He gives much importance to stage direction. As he started his theatre career as a back-stage artist, he is well versed with the nuances of stagecraft. In *Tara, Dance Like a Man* and *Where There's a Will* he uses multi-level sets. With his technical craftsmanship, he brings in past, present, future, interior and exterior effectively on stage. By lighting different spaces at different times, the multi-level set becomes realistic. Kasthuri Kanthan writes:

He uses space very skillfully, sometimes as confining and sometimes as widening. He moves from one part of the stage to another, from one level of the stage to another, and he lights up different areas of the stage at different times. As he does this, his characters move in time. Age becomes youth, 1990s become 1947 and past, present and future come together. (33)
DIALOGUE

Another characteristic of Dattani is that questions asked between two characters at one point are answered by the conversation between two other characters in another part of the stage. In Bravely Fought the Queen, Sridhar, Nitin and Jiten are together in the office and their queries are answered by the remarks made by Baa, Dolly and Lalitha in the house. Jiten’s plan to sell the family house and Baa’s refusal are brought in the following dialogue:

NITIN. That’s where we grew up.

BAA. Why should I not? It is my money!

NITIN. Too many memories.

JITEN. Sentimental fool.

BAA. Mine! Every paisa is mine! Mine from my father!

NITIN. It— it belongs to Daksha. May be we should do it up and all live there.

BAA. This is my house! My house! (277-78)

FLASHBACK

Dattani uses flashback as an effective tool in his plays. In Tara, he uses it very effectively. The play progresses in a series of flashbacks. In other plays too this technique is used.
MUSIC

Dattani gives importance to music. Almost in all the plays, music in some form or other plays a vital role. In Bravely Fought the Queen Naina Devi’s thumri is repeatedly played. In Do the Needful Alpesh is sexually aroused by the beating of the drum.

HUMOUR

Munswamy in Seven Steps Around the Fire is a comic character. Humour is abundant in Where There’s a Will. Sonal’s innocence is a source of humour in the play. Similarly, Hasmukh as a ghost hanging upside down on the dining table to demonstrate how he rests on the branches of the tamarind tree and telling to one of the first row audiences that his shoes need polishing are occasions bringing irresistible laughter.

Dattani’s plays are fine portrayals of the deplorable state of the marginalized people from close quarters. Utpal K Banerjee quotes Dattani in Interactive Theatre: “I think my constant theme is the individual’s struggle over societal demands or inflictions” (8). Thus, his plays are the voices of the weak and the exploited. His strength lies on the characterization of these marginalized people who struggle through a hard life aspiring for a certain kind of freedom.

It is highly pathetic that in an age of rapid, radical changes and amazing developments people are still discriminated based on sexuality, religion, culture and stereotypes. Discrimination based on sexuality is an obviously seen cruelty, rendering people voiceless. Hijras, gays, lesbians, and women in general have
become marginalized categories whose rights are very often denied. Though they have equal rights, very often the rights they enjoy are curtailed. Dattani presents such characters in his plays.

Marginalization leads to identify human beings as animal beings or materials. In Seven Steps Around the Fire, the hijra is identified as it. Similarly, in Do the Needful, Alpesh who is a marginalized category of the society due to his homosexuality equates Mali, the servant boy to a material and wants him to be given as dowry to marry Lata. Lata calls Alpesh that lout and that thing: “Would it make sense to get married to that lout . . . And satisfy that thing in bed?” (151).

Through his play Seven Steps Around the Fire, Dattani successfully exposes the cruel face of the society and the class-based violence in which the upper class lets loose violence against the lower class. Class and gender based violence has become a common issue in the present day society. The upper class powerful Minister could cruelly murder a hijra considered the lowest among the low. The hijra community inhabits certain secluded areas of Indian cities that are generally ignored as the margins of society.

The play realistically mirrors the naked horror to which the hijras are put to by the ruthless society in which the people at the helm of affairs commit murders with impunity. It is also a poignant picture of the hijras in India. In Scene Stealers at Work: Dattani Plays with Murder, Meenakshi Kumar opines that the “. . . play looks at the marginalised voice of eunuchs” (16). The hijras are
considered to be people who should suppress their voices and their views. Inferior and insignificant, they are deprived of their rights by the society, which ought to protect them.

Men or women have sex, live together and yearn for being understood by the opposite gender because the real need of a union between a man and a woman is not for procreation but seeking completeness in the union. The hijras, indeed, have the potential of feeling self-contained. Yet, they are discriminated and denied recognition by the society. Dattani feels that in the race of gender superiority the first, second or third place will change over time and place. He further asserts it humorously and yet emphatically in The Eunuch in All of Us: “As of now, first place is reserved for the truly handicapped — the gender that is most privileged socially” (74). Hence, if the hijras are considered incomplete then they are handicapped and the first place is reserved for them. Thus, there is no point in discriminating them. They are human beings distinctively identified as the third gender people like the other two genders. Hence, they have every right to live on this universe on par with the other two genders.

Like hijras, women are also marginalized. The women characters of Dattani in all the plays taken for this study are marginalized in some way or other. The story of Adam and Eve has led humanity to subjugate women. Eve is considered to be the root cause of Adam’s / man’s fall, because she tempted Adam. Hence, woman is equated to a temptress and treated as evil-incarnate. Therefore, the world views that women must be kept in fetters. The women
characters of Dattani’s plays are victims of discrimination in some way or other. They aspire for establishing an identity. Gauri Shankar Jha writes:

Kiran, the mistress of Hasmukh in *Where There’s a Will*, Ratna the wife of Jairaj in *Dance Like a Man*, Tara the protagonist in the play *Tara*, Old Baa, Dolly and Alka in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Deepali in *A Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Gowda and Lata in *Do the Needful* and Uma in *Seven Steps Around the Fire* are faced with the feminine question of identity and dilemma of feminine sensibility to an extent that it brings forth the colonial perspectives of society. (150-51)

Rousseau’s view of the ‘right of man’ is that man is superior to woman and women are secondary and subservient to men. Women should serve men. Rousseau emphasised for the freedom and education of men. He recommended a different sort of education and freedom for women. They need only the basic education of reading, writing and arithmetic and must be well-versed with domestic roles. She is a domestic servant.

In the views of man, woman is a doll, a plaything fondled when the man wants. Otherwise, she is left uncared, isolated and ignored as a doll thrown in the corners. Virginia Woolf describes woman, ‘The Angel in the House’ as:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily . . . in short she was so constituted that she never
had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathise always with
the minds and wishes of others. (2215)

Sexual domination is the natural obsession of men and submission, the
expected role of women. The child is hardly be able to think of himself or herself
as sexually differentiated. When both the girl and boy are young, the little girl is
as strong as the boy, and shows the same mental power. But people consider man
as superior; and he is himself swollen with pride in his manhood and the girl
envies him and feels frustrated. He projects himself as a symbol of autonomy,
whereas girls are projected as an object, a doll. As Ronald J. Fisher writes: "... Sexism is a combination of prejudice and discrimination based in the belief that
sexual differences produce an inherent superiority of one sex over the other —
most typically, male superiority over females" (435). Man takes pride of his sex,
and projects his own manhood. Contrary to that, woman being the other is taught
to please men and to renounce her autonomy. They are to be a passive prey of
men, struggling in their cages rather than trying to get out of them. They have
always been convinced of male superiority. The sphere to which they belong is
everywhere enclosed, limited, and dominated by the male universe.

Women consider oppression a basic constraint that restricts their freedom
and development. They have been oppressed at various levels in the society for
many centuries. Patriarchy is the primary cause of the oppression acting as a
major constraint, affecting and afflicting women, at all levels. In patriarchy, male
domination is a reason for women losing their self. Women want to display their
power over the world and to protest against the inferior status to which they are
condemned. They assert their right to liberty even to the extent of undergoing pain and disgust. They try to take their future into their own hands instead of entrusting it to a man. All their eagerness for action, whether physical or intellectual, is instantly thwarted. The feminists view oppression in different contexts in different ways. Liberal feminists condemn the patriarchal oppression. Marxist feminists attack the material oppression. Radical feminists oppose the biological oppression. These oppressive measures subordinate and victimize women and curtail their freedom. Ismay Barwell considers, “Being oppressed is a condition which women share with other social groups and being oppressed involves economic and political powerlessness, marginalization and a vulnerability to violence” (100).

In every family, father is the boss of the house and he wields power. He keeps other members of the family under his control. As Teresa Brennan points it out, “Every male is assumed to be sufficiently rational, or ‘naturally’ to have the capacity, to govern a family” (195).

Next to parents, the very close blood relation to a girl is either a brother or a sister. As the brother is male he begins to dominate and oppress, considering her a weak sex. In patriarchy men expect women to be obedient to them and women are always dependent for money and permission for other needs. Men are not prepared to offer full freedom to women. In this social system, women happen to be dependent on men for all their personal and public affairs. Mary Wollstonecraft argues, “... as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavour to keep women in the
dark, because the former only wants slaves, and the latter a plaything” (174). The root cause of public exclusion of women lies in the male desire “to maintain women’s subordination in domestic life; because the generality of the male sex cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal” (181), says John Stuart Mill.

Sex is biologically fixed. Therefore, it is one’s destiny, one cannot avoid. Gender is culturally defined and socially constructed and hence, it can be altered. Difference between sex and gender should be understood before gender discrimination is made. Will Durant argues, “. . . the female is primary and basic, the male secondary and tributary, in the species . . . woman is far closer to the species than he, that the great current of life flows turbulently through her, that creation is the work of her flesh and blood; and he begins to understand why primitive peoples and great religions worshipped motherhood” (58).

In spite of all the positive qualities and indisputable role as homemakers, women are subjugated pathetically. Though she is the primary agent as the keeper of human race, it is ironic that she is rarely recognized. Sex is a basic component in man-woman relationship. Because of men’s conception of women as a weaker sex, men take undue advantage of women sometimes treating women as a ‘thing’. John Ruskin in his lecture, Of Queens’ Gardens declares:

We are foolish, and without excuse foolish, in speaking of the “superiority” of one sex to the other, as if they could be compared in similar things. Each has what the other has not: each completes the other, and is completed by the other: they are in nothing alike
and the happiness and perfection of both depends on each asking
and receiving from the other what the other only can give. (122)

Like women, Lesbians are marginalized. They are women who survive
without men financially and emotionally. They fight constantly to prove that
women are valid human beings who are not just appendages of men. They
struggle to free themselves from male domination. "There are two types of
lesbians often distinguished: the 'masculine', who wish to initiate the male, and
the 'feminine', who are afraid of the male. Certain women decline passivity,
whereas others choose feminine arms in which to abandon themselves passively"
(89) writes S. Vadivambika. Man today represents the positive and the neutral –
that is, the male and the human being – whereas woman is only the negative, the
female. Whenever she behaves as a human being, she is declared to be
identifying herself with the male. Her sexual desire for other woman is
interpreted as a masculine protest. She is as subject, making an inauthentic
choice. Their sexuality is in no way determined by any anatomical fate.

Black writers have proved that lesbianism is not based on sex alone. In
Toni Morrison's novel Sula, the blossoming maturity of Nel and Sula seems to
be of this kind. Nel and Sula experience total harmony when they are together.
They affirm their mutual strengths and recreate themselves as one, and thus, as
the narrator states, "in the safe harbor of each other's company they can afford to
abandon the ways of other people and concentrate on their own perception of
things" (55) Sula and Nel become friends. Initially they come close for the
identification of same sex attraction but later on they give importance to anatomy. Lack of mother-daughter relationship initiates them to turn into lesbians.

From Morrison's portrayal of women characters associated with the idea of lesbianism, it is clear that lesbianism is not for sexual gratification. It is a coalition of women to assert their rights in a male dominated society. Lesbians are not despicable human beings and lesbianism is not completely a sexual alliance but a mental solace. The views of the American Vice-President Dick Cheney are relevant here. Dick Cheney, whose daughter Mary is a lesbian, spoke supportively about gay relationships. Charlie Neibergall of Associated press quotes Cheney: “... I have a gay daughter, so it's an issue our family is very familiar with. With the respect to the question of relationships, my general view is freedom means freedom for everyone... People ought to be free to enter into any kind of relationship they want to” (7A).

Homosexuals are the next category of marginalized people. Confusion and dishonesty about sexual orientation surface in On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Do the Needful and Bravely Fought the Queen. Closet homosexuals seek to hide their true nature by entering into marriages. Through his homosexual characters, Dattani brings out the psychological pressures and the real and imaginary fears the gays have to live with. They feel shame and voiceless. Yet, they try to assert their identity.

Why does the mainstream society discriminate the homosexuals? One is because they, like the hijras, are a minority compared with the mainstream social
order. Another reason is that they defy the established stereotypes. It is the social hypocrisy, the societal expectations and the stereotypes creating behavioural patterns oppress the homosexuals. They are denied self-expression. John McRae notes: "For the fault is not just the characters' — it is everyone's, in a society which not only condones but encourages hypocrisy, which demands deceit and negation, rather than allowing self expression, responsibility and dignity" (46). They are part of the society and should not be discriminated. "Every second person" writes Sangeeta Das, "may be a homosexual but fear of ostracism restrains him from exposing himself" (113). Through this play Dattani has tried to soften the attitude of the society towards the gay and tried to evoke compassion for this class. He throws light on the growing homosexuality and its non-acceptance by the Indian society. Homosexual and lesbian marriages are an upcoming contemporary issue, which the author has dealt with carefully.

Homosexuality, perceived as a sin and sickness, is the highest form of love and friendship for the homosexuals. Homosexuality, known in the past as sexual perversion is now known as sexual orientation. This change represents an evolutionary cultural change towards a more objective and scientific approach to homosexuality, in contrast to the highly moralistic and pejorative approach of the previous generation. There is no way in which the concepts of normal and deviant sexual behaviour can be divorced from the value systems of the society because such value systems are always in the process of evolution and change. Further, there is every possibility that some patterns currently considered deviant may not always be regarded so.
A developed country like America is still divided over gay rights and same-sex marriages, and gay phobia is not unheard of. In this circumstance in Indian society where sex has always been considered a social taboo, and things are being dealt in the typical Indian way, same sex marriage and gay right are issues that need much time for the society to accept. Here parents are more concerned about society's opinions than the happiness of their children. Hence, there is no doubt that homosexual relationships can be extremely difficult for parents in such a conservative society to accept and understand. After Deepa Mehta's film Fire, released in the mid-nineties, stray voices demanding the legitimization of same-sex love in India is heard occasionally. Newspaper and magazine write-ups in support of the gay demand have also started appearing. On same-sex marriage, Arnold Hamilton quotes the view of a gay: "I'd at least like to have the right... I'd like the choice to be mine and not theirs" (11A).

Whether homosexuality is right or wrong, homosexuals are human beings. They have every right to live like other human beings. Discrimination and isolation cannot be a solution whereas love and affection is what they need. In a country like India where friendship between a boy and girl is not easy and two girls and two boys can easily have contact can also be the reason for a gay relationship.

Marginalization based on religion is another issue of concern. In Final Solutions, apart from the Hindu-Muslim incompatibility, the mutual disagreements amongst the family members are brought to light. The play
exposes the roots of intolerance within a middle class Indian family. Due to lack of accommodation and acceptability between the two communities Hindu-Muslim fanaticism sets foot strongly resulting in terrorism and anarchy. This age-old enmity between the two communities make one wonder if there would ever be a final solution to this endemic problem. Even after half a century of Independence the enmity has not subsided, instead it has aggravated.

Dattani’s success as a committed playwright lies in arousing a deep sense of guilt in every one of the audience making one feel that in some way or other everyone has to share the guilt for discriminating or helping to discriminate the voiceless, marginalized people. Therefore, what is the way out of this problem of Hindu-Muslim conflict? It has become a perennial problem in India now spreading its wings beyond India — world over. Hindu-Muslim religious harmony seems to be an illusive one. Dattani gives a final solution to this problem. It can be as what Alka Tyagi writes: “The final solution seems to be a life proposed by the young Smita and Bobby who possess a consciousness that is liberated from stifling caves of religious cults and who meet their fellow beings at a secular plane” (195). Hindu–Muslim religious harmony can be achieved if people belonging to both the religions forget the past and think of a peaceful coexistence in the future. Both must be accommodating and tolerant. Both must have mutual belief and respect for the other’s faith. It would be the strongest tie that would bind people together instead of discriminating them and rendering them voiceless. Bobby’s words are suggestive of a final solution: “. . . if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate” (225). Everyone should come forward
to forget the past and tolerate the other religion. At the end of the play when Smita splashes water on Javed and Bobby calling, “Wake up! Wake up!” (218), it is not a call to Bobby and Javed only but for the whole of humanity to wake up from foolish ideas of religious discrimination. Religion teaches love for fellow human beings. Thus, it is a binding force and not a discriminating one.

Discriminating people for violating culture and stereotypes is yet another social problem. In Dattani’s plays, one of the major themes is the dissatisfaction of the young people over the established stereotypes. The changing tastes of the younger generation are scorned at by the older generation. As we see Jimmy Porter, the ‘angry young man’, in John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*, younger generation has become dissatisfied with the meaningless prescriptions in the society. Man being a social being lives everywhere in groups. The group relationships partly determine the social characteristics, which develop as people live together for common purposes. “Human environment consists of organized groups of individuals—a society—and a particular way of life that has been developed by the society—a culture. The culture of a people is acquired, or man made; it is the sum total of both the material and the non-material aspects of the day-to-day living of the group” (43) writes Verne S. Sweedlun.

In contemporary Indian society, the status determines one’s level of acceptance. The characters who inhabit the plays of Dattani are *hijras*, homosexuals, women, *devadasis* and individuals who challenge stereotypes. *Hijras*, victims of gender discrimination and human beings deprived of social recognition, are alienated from the mainstream society. Homosexuals, lesbians,
women and devadasis equated with prostitutes are denied social status. They are deprived of their right and are isolated and alienated. The individuals who refuse to get trapped into the social stereotypes are denied of social status. They are heartlessly alienated from the mainstream social order. They are marginalized, branded as the other and rendered voiceless. As Raja Rao writes, "... the alienated individual is he who not only cannot relate to people and the surroundings, but who experiences a partial or total breakdown of communication, and leads a maladjusted and lonely life. Such an individual undoubtedly deserves our sympathy..." (83).

The social restraints against hijras, gays, lesbians, inter-caste marriage, and religion are issues that corrode the society hampering a holistic development. Rewathi Rau in Dattani Plays Along makes an apt observation that his plays have "... catapulted him into fame and established him as the new voice of contemporary Indian theatre" (22).

The study gives scope for further studies on subjects like hypocrisy, sexuality, prejudice and family relations in the post-independent India. Hypocrisy has become a way of life for many. All these plays expose hypocrisy that is prevalent in society. The traditional notions attached to sexuality no more hold veneration. What Dattani calls 'Metrosex' has become the sexual inclination of many modern men and women. Similarly, prejudice at family and social levels hampers familial as well as social relations.

Dattani's stagecraft is an interesting area. He makes use of the limited space of the stage effectively by splitting the stage space into different levels to
achieve the desired thematic effect. The changing family relations in the modern context are another interesting area to explore.

Discriminating hijras, homosexual, lesbians, physically challenged, devadasis and women are unhealthy practices of civilized society. Men are no exception if they do not fit into the social and cultural stereotypes. Similarly, religious discrimination and branding some as terrorists are irrational. These people for fear of ostracism remain silent. As Dattani writes in *Stigma of a Terrorist*, "No one deserves social ostracism. Even cold-blooded murderers have some human rights . . ." (74). Hence these marginalized people need our concern because they are human beings who have every right like the marginalizing majority. Mahesh Dattani tries to jolt us out of our complacency, to shed our hypocrisy to show concern for the marginalized, voiceless people and for this honesty in approach; his plays have won critical and public acclaim all over India and abroad as well. With his presence in the Indian literary scene, Indian English Drama has carved a niche for itself not only in Indian English Literature but also in the world literary scenario. Dattani’s plays are vibrant voices in Indian English theatre that contain exuberant originality.

In all the plays we see characters that are under some pressure yearning for freedom. They struggle and liberate themselves. In his conversation with Utpal K. Banerjee Dattani says: "... my protagonists are striving for their own space or freedom from an invisible, self-inflicted form of oppression" (166). His plays present the problems faced by the victimized and marginalized people. They love to break free from the stifling conservative gender notions, religious
false pride, irrational patriarchal perceptions and outdated, foolish stereotypical oppressions. Thus, Dattani's plays are the authentic voices of the voiceless other.

In the 21st century, while the society makes triumphant strides accelerated by medical innovations and inventions, people should not give way to retrogressive restrictions of religion. The society should come forward to accept the marginalized into its fold with due recognition and concern. Such a stance alone will alleviate the problems of the 'other'.