Sexuality and Segregation
CHAPTER - II

SEXUALITY AND SEGREGATION

Gender identity is one of the prominent themes of contemporary Indian Writing in English. Though it is not a new feature in Indian Writing in English, as a number of writers have written their novels on the identity crisis of women, not many have experimented in the area of Indian English drama. Mahesh Dattani is one who explores the issue of identity crisis of women in his plays. In Indian Writing in English, until late 1990s, the marginality of the sexual minority remained an area unexplored. With the advent of Mahesh Dattani, this hidden Indian society that is controlled by the sexual majority and the politics of marginalization of the third sex, the hijras, stands exposed with its ugly faces of gender hegemony and discrimination. Certainly, he is a great experimenter transforming fictional styles into dramatic structures and weaving them into a multi-faceted fabric in the form of a unified plot.

Gender is a common issue, which Dattani handles very carefully with its associated factors like sexuality and gender discrimination. To the established mainstream social order, gender is either male or female. In Deconstructing Gender in Mahesh Dattani’s Tara and Dance Like a Man L. Saraswathi carefully draws a distinction between sex and gender:

While sex is biological, gender is entirely a construct of society, established firmly by discourses spanning through ages. All the trappings
that surround the construct of gender — the roles of a man and a woman in the domestic sphere and elsewhere, their responsibilities, the choices they make, the lives they lead, their career aspirations — are all conditioned and determined by the gender conceptions of society. (1-2)

The society responsible for the construction of the concept of gender is very much hypocritical in treating the third gender people as the lowest of the low. It feels no shame in using the *hijras* for sexual pleasures. Pushed to the margins of the society, they are forced to live as accursed nocturnal beings. The mainstream society is not ready to accept, and accommodate them in it. The trials and tribulations meted out to them, just because they happened to be the third gender human beings are beyond imagination. The source of trouble is nothing else than the social stereotypes as man and woman.

**Seven Steps Around the Fire** is a fine record of the wretched conditions of the third gender people, the *hijras* or the eunuchs. The very beginning of the play itself is an important occasion where it focuses on gender discrimination. Uma Rao, wife of the Superintendent of Police visits the male section of Bangalore Central Jail where a *hijra*, Anarkali is imprisoned for the murder of Kamla, another *hijra*. Uma, a Lecturer of Bangalore University, teaching Sociology, wants to meet Anarkali for her research paper on “class-and gender-related violence”. Munswamy, the constable uses the pronoun *it* for the *hijra* instead of he or she whereas Uma uses *she*. Constable Munswamy represents the majority mindset, which refuses to recognize the *hijra* as human beings. His preference to use the pronoun *it* is a reflection of the general social prejudice and
heartless discrimination of the society, which refuses to treat them as human beings. Munswamy tells Uma that it is useless and waste of time to meet Anarkali. He warns, “It will only tell you lies”(7). He, like others, is not ready to believe hijras who are considered liars. He asks the other inmates of the prison to “Beat it”! (9). They scream with joy and beat Anarkali. In another occasion when Anarkali addresses Munswamy as brother asking for a cigarette, Munswamy does not like being called ‘brother’ by the hijra. He warns her not to call him brother:

Anarkali . . . Oh, brother, give me a cigarette, na.

Munswamy. Shut up. And don’t call me brother. (11)

Back at home, Uma’s husband Suresh warns her, “Don’t believe a word of anything it says. They are all liars (9)”. “... don’t feel any compassion for them. They will take advantage ...” (10)

The police are not ready to believe any word uttered by the hijras. They look at them with prejudice. Suresh considers that the hijras do not have any relations. When Uma tells him, “I know she is arrested for the murder of her sister. . .” (10), he laughs at her telling that they do not have any relations. According to Suresh, the hijras are liars and despicable creatures. His contemptuous views are revealed when he speaks to Uma, “What’s that you said? Sister? . . . There is no such thing for them. More lies. They are all just castrated degenerate men. They fought like dogs every day, that Anarkali and . . . ”(10).

The mainstream society is very much apathetic in its attitude towards the third-gender people. There is no provision of separate cell for a hijra in prison.
Put in the male section, they are subjected to sexual abuse by the male prisoners along with the connivance of the police. Uma draws the attention of her husband to this fact. She asks him: “Why do they put her in a male prison? . . . She is being beaten up by all the male prisoners” (9). Suresh shows his indifference and has no answer. He does not bother to provide an explanation even.

Kamla, the *hijra* is murdered because of her love and marriage to Subbu, the son of an affluent minister Mr. Sharma. Instead of arousing sympathy and a feeling of compassion, she is looked down upon because of nature’s deprivation of her essential femininity. It is the choice of nature and not of Kamla what she is. This misfortune is considered freakish and hence the mainstream social order discriminates her. She is discriminated and murdered ultimately. Her murder arouses a sense of horror and injustice.

Anarkali on learning the love affair between Kamla and Subbu started fighting with Kamla and one day she even cut her face to make her ugly, hoping that Subbu would despise her. On the contrary, they got married. Mr. Sharma’s men caught her, killed her, burned her body and threw the corpse in a pond. Though Champa, the head *hijra*, knew the murderers of Kamla, she was helpless being aware of the plight of the *hijras* and the consequences if she preferred any complaint against the murderer. She knew it well that Anarkali had nothing to do with the murder of Kamla. Yet, Anarkali was arrested and put in jail. She voices her despair as she replies to Uma, “What difference does it make whether she did or no?” (24). Hence, Uma asks her to bail out Anarkali if she has not killed Kamla. She questions Champa, “She-she didn’t really kill Kamla, did she? (24).
Then Champa declares her that a *hijra* less in number does not matter at all to the humanity. All the *hijras* know who is the murderer of Kamla. Yet, they cannot say it out and can do nothing. Anarkali finds her plight awkward that she also would be killed by the murderers if she told the truth and would have to die in jail as well if she did not tell the truth. She expresses her desperation to Uma: “They will kill me also if I tell the truth. If I don’t tell the truth, I will die in jail” (14).

When Anarkali says to Uma, “One *hijra* less in this world does not matter to your husband” (35), she means much. She reveals the wretched plight of these third gender people, their sufferings, their longings, their aspirations and everything they have lost when compared to the other two genders. Their very identity, their aspirations, their longing, their desire, their dress code, their very words and even their movement in the open world are all suppressed by the heartless society, which shows its inhuman attitude towards the *hijra* considering them as heartless creatures. There is no census and there is no government record to register their birth and death and no authority to bother over their existence. The Blue Cross takes care of the animals whereas there are no such societies or any such organization to voice their concerns. This is suggestive of a hard reality that these people are treated as lesser beings than animals. There is no apostle to cry for the rights of these “human beings”. Hence, Anarkali’s statement reveals volumes of meaning, which does not reach the ears of the inhuman society.

In spite of Uma’s influential family background, she feels isolated and helpless to bring out the truth behind the murder of Kamla and suicide of Subbu to light. Utpal K. Banerjee writes in *World of Marginalized Gender*, “... in
resolving the crime, Uma meets her own marginalized self” (12). Though Uma could unearth the whole mystery behind the murder of Kamla, she is helpless against the dominating male gender. She has to swallow the fact and remain a meek, dumb woman. Jeremy Mortimer observes, “Mahesh’s plays often feature characters who are questioning their identity, and who feel isolated in some way. Uma certainly feels isolated in her marriage, and this sense of isolation makes her empathize with Anarkali, the hijra she befriends” (4). Uma’s concern for the hijras is revealed when she observes:

Nobody seems to know anything about them. Neither do they. Did they come to this country with Islam, or are they a part of our glorious Hindu tradition? Why are they so obsessed with weddings and ceremonies of childbirth? How do they come to know of these weddings? Why do they just show up without being invited? Are they just extortionists? And why do they not take singing lessons? (16)

The hijras are an utterly marginalized community, the entry of whom is acceptable just in two events of mainstream Hindu culture — marriage and childbirth, where they sing and dance. Ironically, man and nature deny the same privileges to them. But a sense of marginalization develops a fellow feeling and solidarity among the marginalized. Though Uma sympathises with Anarkali, she finds it difficult to win the confidence of the hijra, because the bitter realities of gender hegemony and consequent marginalization of the third sex stand between such friendships.
ANARKALI . . . If you were a hijra, I would have made you my sister.

UMA. Oh. Thank you.

ANARKALI. But you are not a hijra, no?

UMA. No.

ANARKALI. So you will not be my sister.

Pause.

UMA. Of course we can be sisters!

ANARKALI. Where are you and where am I? (13)

Kamla, for being a hijra, is murdered and the real murderer goes unpunished. Subbu only went after Kamla forcing her to marry and still Subbu’s father kills her with the help of his men. Anarkali who has nothing to do with the murder was put in jail and the actual murderers were let free. Kamla and Anarkali faced trouble just because they happened to be hijras, though they were innocent. At this juncture, naturally, a few questions arise in every one. Are these hijras not citizens of our democratic nation? Don’t they have any rights at all? Through this short play, Dattani has poignantly exposed the cruel face of the society. Pallavi Srivastava states: “For Dattani, the aim of the play is to bring out the prejudice against eunuchs in our country” (18). Class and gender based violence has become a common issue in the present day society. The upper class minister could cruelly kill a hijra, with the help of his men and go scot-free. The police protect him, those too high officials. Suresh, the superintendent, who is a witness to the suicide of Subbu, knows well that Mr. Sharma is the culprit behind
the murder of Kamla. Yet he helps and lets Mr. Sharma free by not arresting him or his men for the murder of Kamla and writing off the suicide case as an accident. Dattani exposes the gender-based violence in which a Government minister lets loose violence against a *hijra*. Uma reveals her helplessness:

They knew. Anarkali, Champa and all the hijra people knew who was behind the killing of Kamla. They have no voice. The case was hushed up and was not even reported in the newspapers. Champa was right. The police made no arrests. Subbu's suicide was written off as an accident. The photograph was destroyed. So were the lives of two young people . . . (42)

The truth behind the murder of Kamla as well as Subbu's suicide is hushed up because the gender hegemony is so strong and the politics of marginalization is so powerful. The *hijras* are the highly exploited and the most neglected lot who do not enjoy any of the privileges entitled to minorities. Therefore, they are forced to begging and prostitution for their livelihood. They have their own gods, myths and legends like other human beings.

Generally, people are not ready to believe *hijras* and somehow or other people have developed a general hatred towards them. The common view is that they are supposed to be despised as an object and not a human being. They are the lot to be laughed at. Most of the *hijras* have a lower middle-class background, which makes them susceptible to harassment by the police. The discrimination based on their class and gender makes the *hijra* community one of the most disempowered and utterly marginalized.
Owing to the general misconception and their gender identity, no one is ready to employ the *hijras*. Hence forced to commercial sex work, the *hijras* are the most vulnerable as they are placed right at the bottom of the hierarchy of sex workers. They are at risk of violence from both customers and the police. Very often, they are subjected to police harassment on the pretext of surveillance that extends into the privacy of their dwellings. Police stations, supposed to protect them, have become the place with the largest scope for abuse. Violating all the ethics of civilized behaviour, the *hijras* are subjected to physical, sexual and verbal abuses and humiliation. The Indian law also discriminates them by recognizing only two sexes whereby depriving them of the basic rights under the civil law. Hence, the *hijras* do not have the right to marry and own a ration card, a passport or a driving licence, or claim employment and health benefits. Until the 1996 parliamentary elections, they were denied the right to vote.

The *hijras* being the discriminated and marginalized lot do not have job opportunities either in Government or in private establishments. Left with little option to earn a living through any decent means they resort to begging in public places often with unseemly gestures and actions. They remain the most detested to the extent that till date the Human Rights Commission is indifferent to take any decisive steps to put an end to the mal-treatment of the *hijra* community. The fact that the Commission consists of male and female members; it easily turns down and ignores issues related to the third gender. The male and female majority being prejudiced over the third gender does not want to accommodate
them in the mainstream and hence their plight is often ignored or dismissed. Dipendu Das writes:

*Seven Steps Around the Fire* delves deep into the Indian society to uncover some of the hidden India and throws light on the marginality of a segregated, isolated, discriminated and even dehumanised community — the hijras of India and the politics of marginalization of the terribly marginal society. (82)

Dattani deals with an important social aspect prevalent in our society. Uma, the wife of a Superintendent of Police and daughter-in-law of a Deputy Commissioner of Police and daughter of a vice-chancellor of a university and herself a Lecturer does not have economic independence. When Uma meets Anarkali in the jail Anarkali promises to tell her who killed Kamla. Further, she pleads with Uma to bail her out. Therefore, in order to unearth the mystery behind Kamla's murder, Uma thinks to bail out Anarkali. Hence, on the pretext of purchasing a wedding gift to Subbu for whom Mr. Sharma has arranged another marriage, Uma requests her father to lend her fifty thousand rupees. For fifty thousand rupees, she has to depend upon her father.

The status of working women in India is nothing to be felt proud of. Most of these women have to give their entire earning, every month, to their husband or father-in-law or mother-in-law. They have to depend upon them for their day-to-day expenses. Women are generally a dependent class. Whatever be the social class, for women gender inequality is a common problem. Dattani focuses on
this very nicely. Both Suresh and his mother insist on Uma to have a check-up for impotency. However, neither Suresh nor his mother suspects impotency on him. He ignores Uma’s request to undergo a test of ‘sperm count’, as advised by the doctor.

Like Uma, Kiran, in On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, feels isolated and alienated when her first marriage ends in divorce. Her quest for identity shows up when she experiences a brutal and nightmarish life with her first husband. Until then her cultural background keeps her a meek silent woman. The same quest inevitably torments her when she escapes from becoming a victim as wife to her next fiancé, Ed who is a homosexual.

Like hijras, homosexuals are a marginalized, voiceless lot who isolate themselves because of the societal prejudice. They are forced to wallow in shame. Ed having a dual identity as Prakash is the former lover of Kiran’s brother Kamlesh who is unable to forget him. Though Ed cannot lead a happy heterosexual life, he wants to marry Kiran in order to cover his shame and to live a comfortable and unsuspected gay life with Kamlesh.

Sharad, another gay partner of Kamlesh hates heterosexuality. He watches the love making of a diamond merchant to his wife in a neighbouring flat through his binoculars. Immediately he shouts “Oh, my Gawd! Those heterosexuals are at it again!” (53).

The author here juxtaposes the narrow, little flat—the small world of the gays — with the vast world outside, with the sky only as its limit. He juxtaposes
the homosexuals with the heterosexuals. The occupants and visitors of Kamlesh’s flat are very familiar with the timings of the sexual escapades of the diamond merchant’s wife with her husband and with the *doodhwalla*. They used to see it through the binoculars. Yet, they remain gay. The heterosexuals discriminate the homosexuals and similarly, the homosexuals isolate and discriminate themselves from the heterosexuals. The homosexuals are looked at with suspicion and hatred. Their sexual inclination is different from what the society has accepted as straight or normal. As a mark of establishing their identity the gays have their own anthem “What Makes A Man A Man” (55) the English version of Charles Aznavour’s ‘Comme ils disent’.

Sharad lived with Kamlesh in his flat as his gay partner for a whole year. Actually, Kamlesh brought him in his life in order to forget his former lover Prakash and found it difficult to forget. The love among gay partners is as strong as that between a man and a woman. Sharad could understand it as he loved Kamlesh as strong as Kamlesh loved Prakash.

KAMLESH. I tried, Sharad, I . . .

SHARAD. You tried to love me, but . . .

KAMLESH. I wanted to love you, I tried for a whole year. (56)

The heart-broken Sharad replies that Kamlesh’s love for him is shallow and similar to the love the diamond merchant’s wife has to her husband or to her paramour, the *doodhwalla*. It is not love but simply sex. He adds that Kamlesh’s love is worse than that of the love of the diamond merchant’s wife to the
doodhwalla because she could not just throw the doodhwalla out as Kamlesh could throw out Sharad.

Kamlesh tried to forget Prakash by tearing up all the photographs of Prakash he had kept with him. However, he did keep one photograph of Prakash and him in a tight naked embrace. It is clear that Kamlesh still could not forget Prakash though he wants to forget him. After breaking off his relationship with Prakash, Kamlesh took Sharad to help him to forget Prakash. Sharad lived as a wife to Kamlesh. Even after a year, Kamlesh failed to forget Prakash. Sharad knows it well and he suspects that Kamlesh still keeps some photograph of Prakash. Sharad feels hurt because Kamlesh does not acknowledge him as his lover in front of others. He expresses his distress: “My problem is that in front of others you pretend as if we were never lovers” (61). He feels hurt because not only Kamlesh has broken off from him but also he has started using new men and even the guard of their flats for his sexual needs.

Though Kamlesh claims that he could not forget his love with Prakash he goes on changing men to satisfy his sex urge. The lesbian Deepali tells her sweet heart Tina, “Oh, nothing at all, just one of those things these boys do, you know—screwing anything that has a bulge in the pants . . .” (63). Kamlesh himself accepts, “I—I just couldn’t help it” (63). Donald Symons concludes, “The search for new sexual partners is a striking feature of the male homosexual world . . .” (293).
Deepali who lives with her lesbian partner Tina is proud of being a lesbian. She says, “You men! All you do is screw around like bunnies! ... I am all for the gay men’s cause. Men deserve only men!” (60). She cherishes her femininity and is proud of her feminine nature. When Sharad uses the term ‘bitch’ in his conversation, Deepali cannot take it that much easily and so warns him:

SHARAD. If I had a lover, would I be such a bitch?

DEEPALI. Don’t—don’t use that word. (Clenches her fist at him) You can call yourself a dog, call yourself a pig, but never never insult a female. (59)

On another occasion, she expresses her pride for being a woman:

DEEPALI (with great dignity). I thank God. Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am a woman. (66)

Similarly, she expresses her concern for Kamlesh. In spite of this, they cannot fall in love because Deepali is a lesbian and Kamlesh is a homosexual. They are not heterosexuals. In the absence of Sharad, Deepali and Kamlesh speak out their concern for each other:

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

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

DEEPALI. If we were heterosexual, we would be married. (65)
Deepali helps Kamlesh speak out agonies that torment him. He confesses that he loved Sharad only to forget the pain of separation from Prakash. He feels sorry for having caused the same pain and suffering to Sharad from which he himself wanted to get over. Sharad feels hurt again to hear from Kamlesh that he never really loved him but used him in order to forget Prakash. Kamlesh becomes emotional to say that he would have become compromised if at all Prakash had left him for another man, but it really hurt him the most that he left him because he was ashamed of their homosexual relationship.

An important aspect of homosexuality Dattani brings out is that being homosexual is natural. For fear of shame and isolation, they hide the fact of their sexuality as a secret. The problem is, the society comprises a majority of heterosexuals and only a minority of homosexuals. Hence, the majority does not approve of the sexuality of the minority. Kamlesh hoped to overcome his depression caused because of his inability to forget Prakash. Nevertheless, he could not. He approached a psychiatrist to get over his depression, anxiety and fear. The psychiatrist advised him that he “... would never be happy as a gay man. It is impossible to change the society, he said, but it may be possible for you to reorient yourself” (69). Kamlesh reacts to his friends: “... I needed his help to overcome my anxiety and fears, not to be something I am not” (69). By this he makes it clear that his homosexuality is as distinct as the heterosexuality of others.

Kamlesh tried to forget Prakash by picking up strange men to his flat to have homosexual pleasure. However, he finds himself unable to forget Prakash.
Bunny, the TV actor and a homosexual who pretends to be straight by having married a girl, advises Kamlesh to get married so that he can forget Prakash. Ranjit does not approve this. He opines that in India one cannot find a gay lover. Therefore, he has gone to England to find a gay lover.

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

When the window of the flat is opened, a faint Shehnai music is heard from a wedding procession. Ranjit immediately reacts to it scornfully: “God! You are letting in all that filthy hot air!” (73). As far as Ranjit is concerned a marriage between a man and a woman is silly. Therefore, he cannot feel at ease when the air conditioner fails to work because of insufficient power supply. As the wedding consumes much of the electricity to light up the wedding lights there is an insufficient power supply, which has rendered their air conditioner fail to function. Ranjit not only says that the heterosexual wedding is silly but also he echoes his concern that the heterosexuals are taking away more than what that is due to them. He says that they have an equal right as others. Nevertheless, their right is rationed out and the heterosexuals enjoy much. For the homosexuals their place is their sweet, comfortable haven whereas the outside world is uncomfortable and filthy. They do not want to mix up with the outside world because it discriminates them and looks down upon them.
Kamlesh’s flat is situated in one of more privileged posh areas of Mumbai at Marine Drive, well furnished and very much a part of the chaos of the city as well as at a conveniently safer height free from intrusions. Yet, there is always the fear of the outside world, which oppressively intrudes in. The marriage down their flat, the “dreadful children down the corridor”, those children following Bunny the TV star, the discovery of the incriminating photograph by the children and their parents, the heat inside, the muggy atmosphere are feared oppressive and contaminating. Hence, “Don’t want all this lovely cool air contaminated by all that muck outside” (65-66), says Ranjit. The homosexuals are in Kamlesh’s flat, on the top floor, looking down at the wedding frenzy on the outside from a height that gives them a sense of safety.

A sense of shame, which torments them now-and-then, drives them isolated from the mainstream heterosexual social order. For fear of ostracism and shame, the homosexuals take asylum in a loveless but more acceptable, stereotyped marriage relationship like the one Bunny, the happily married TV star is in and want to indulge covertly in gay relationships as Bunny does behind the facade of his popular public image. Bunny, the homosexual playing the role of an ideal husband and father in the TV serials is highly ironical. Family, for him, is an ideal stage where he enacts his drama of a hypocrite. He has married a girl and in reality, he is a gay. Kiran expresses her surprise when she learns that Bunny is a homosexual:

KIRAN. I just wouldn’t have guessed.

BUNNY. Guessed what?

KIRAN (now unsure). That you are... well, like my brother. (76)
Bunny hastily refutes that he is not one like the other friends present there. Deepali questions Bunny whether he could love his wife with the same intensity with which he loves a man. Others too feel, Prakash being a homosexual, cannot love Kiran. Kiran loves Prakash much. She feels very happy because she finds a new life before her as her first marriage broke off.

Initially, Kamlesh and Prakash were ardent lovers. In order to escape his nagging shame Prakash changes his identity into Ed, falls head over heels in love with Kiran, Kamlesh’s sister. Kamlesh who does not want to disappoint his sister withdraws himself from Prakash without complaining. He gets his sexual needs fulfilled by Sharad, his new lover whom he could not love as much as he loved Prakash. Prakash who has now changed to Ed suddenly emerges into Kamlesh’s flat. He is ashamed of being a homosexual and tries to leave the flat with Kiran as soon as possible, to escape the cynical eyes of others who know his homosexual relationship with Kamlesh.

Poor Kiran does not know that the sufferings of her brother, Kamlesh are all because of her fiancé Ed, Kamlesh’s former lover whom he is unable to forget. Sharad, having decided to be straight, no more likes to be Kamlesh’s sexual partner, says Deepali. Now, Ed the hypocrite suggests that it would be good for Kamlesh, at least now, to come out from his tiny world, and see the real world out and live like a real man.
ED. Look around you. Look outside. \textit{(Goes to the window and flings it open).} Look at that wedding crowd! There are real men and women out there! You have to see them to know what I mean. But you don’t want to. You don’t want to look at the world outside this... this den of yours. All of you want to live in your own little bubble. (99)

Kiran, worried about Kamlesh and not satisfied with all the explanations, goes on requesting Sharad to be Kamlesh’s lover. She advises Sharad that he will not be happy if he tries to become a heterosexual and he will have to live a lonely life without any companion. If he marries a woman just to cover up his shame and to claim that he is a heterosexual, the woman will have to suffer because he will not love her, as he cannot love a woman.

KIRAN. He loves you, Sharad. What more do you want? You will never be happier than this. You will end up being lonelier if you tried to be anything else other than who you are. And think of the poor woman you may end up marrying just as a cover up for your shame. I know how it feels to be unloved. God knows I have suffered enough in my marriage. The scars are never going to leave me. But I am thankful now that I have Ed. And I wish the same happiness for my brother and you. (102)

Kiran has experienced the pain of being unloved. Every human being wishes to love and to be loved. Love is a basic craving irrespective of age and sex. When one fails to get it, feels hurt and is in despair. Kiran expected love
from her husband and all that she got was torture and suffering. She found meaning to her existence only when Ed showed his love for her. Ironically, Kiran advises Sharad to consider the plight of the poor woman, if he married one, without knowing that she is also a similar one. Kiran, longing for love and life from a heterosexual husband, is unaware that her lover Ed is a homosexual who cannot love her completely.

Sharad loved Kamlesh and Kamlesh loved Prakash. Their love was not equally reciprocated. Kamlesh could realize Sharad's love only when he could understand that his love was directed towards an illusion, which never reciprocated. Feeling sorry, he admits that he has been chasing an illusion. He tries to forget that illusion telling that the man he loved does not exist at all.

KAMLESH. No. It's true. It took me this moment to realise it (Looks at Ed.) I know now that I have been chasing an illusion. Perhaps the man I loved does not exist. (To Sharad) But you do. And I love you. (102)

Kiran becomes suspicious, that whom Kamlesh means by "the man I loved does not exist". Bunny too admits for the first time that the man whom his wife loves does not exist. People have seen in him a model of an Indian middle class husband. His homosexuality which he nourishes is a secret, and is known to the few friends around him. These few friends only know his hypocrisy. He leads a dual life. He admits, "I lied—to myself first. And I continue to lie to
Kiran is surprised to know that Bunny is a gay. All her doubts behind Kamlesh’s dull look now makes her suspect if Kamlesh loved a hypocrite like Bunny.

KIRAN. I would never have imagined—Bunny Singh! Kamlesh, were you... are you in love with such a person? Is that what it is?

KAMLESH. It doesn't matter now. I love Sharad and hope that he loves me. (103)

On hearing this, Ed becomes upset. He claims to have a headache and asks Kamlesh for some medicine. Kamlesh moves in to the bedroom searching for medicine. Ed follows him closely, observes him, and asks him if he loves Sharad. Kamlesh replies in the positive and adds that he can lead a happy life with Sharad because there need not be any lie between them. Being unable to digest this Ed starts pacifying Kamlesh to accept him telling that they can still be lovers and he can meet him without any suspicion, once he is married to Kiran. He tries hard to make Kamlesh accept that he still loves Ed and not Sharad. He begins to caress him telling, “I’ll take care of Kiran. And you take care of me” (105). Bunny and Ed are homosexuals who want to be bisexuals in order to cover up their homosexual identity. On the other hand, Kamlesh, Sharad and Ranjit are homosexuals who love to be gays. Similarly, Deepali is one who enjoys and loves being a lesbian.
Alpesh in *Do the Needful* is also a homosexual like Kamlesh, Sharad and Ranjit. He cannot be happy and make a woman happy if he marries. His first marriage ended in divorce due to his inability to find pleasure in being a heterosexual. However, his parents are in search of a bride for him failing to understand his hatred for marriage. Alpesh’s parents, Chandrakant Patel and Kusumber Patel, being unaware of Alpesh’s homosexuality force him to marry. He is least interested in marriage. However, Alpesh accepts when his mother, as many Indian mothers do, threatens to end her life. Yet he asks her, “Is it... is it very important for me to get married? ... What if ... I don’t want to get married?” (125).

When the talk of marriage arises, Alpesh thinks of his homosexual lover Trilok: “Yes, touch me... hold me... that feels good, Trilok” (125). In order to avoid marriage he tries to confuse his mother by recalling the failure of his first marriage. He tells her that it should not happen again. However, she threatens him “... I might as well take poison and die if it happens again ... We will see what this Gowda girl is like ... If they have something to hide, then ... (Pause) If not, we will find some poor Patel girl— who will be grateful to enter our household ... Who will not expect too much from you” (126).

However, Alpesh yields to his mother’s pressure. Hence, they visit the Gowda’s in Bangalore. On their way to the Gowdas, Alpesh thinks of the second marriage as “another mad window shopping spree” (127). He is happier with his gayness than marrying a girl. While staying in the farmhouse of the Gowdas
during night, Alpesh goes out in the farm to smoke a cigarette. His future bride Lata sees him and joins him. He hears a low drum beat which grows intensely and slowly. Lata explains that it is Mariappa, a tender coconut vendor and his gang of men, who beat the drum during nights after getting drunk. The intensity of the drumbeat kindles his sexual mood and he thinks of his lover, Trilok. He listens to it intensely and cries in an orgasmic mood, “Love me, Trilok! Yes! Kiss me. Oh! Oh! Oh! Ooooh!” (143).

The drumbeat arouses him to an orgasmic mood to make him dream of his homosexual lover and not the future bride who is standing right in front of him. Neither the drumbeat nor the dark night attracts him towards Lata. He identifies himself with homosexuals like him and not with girls. The quest for a homosexual identity in him isolates and segregates him from the rest of the society.

The next day, after lunch Lata takes Alpesh to show the cow and its calf in the cowshed. On their way, both of them confess to each other about their unwillingness in this marriage. Alpesh wants Lata to tell her parents about her love and stop the marriage. She answers that they know it well and they want her to be married off to someone. Hence, she requests him to stop the marriage. He says that he is helpless.

LATA. One of us has to do it! It will have to be you.

ALPESH. I don’t know. I don’t care.

LATA. Oh! This is no use. If we do get married, I will give you hell!

That’s a promise! . . . (151)
Finding no other way, Lata decides to run away to her lover Salim that night. However, her plan is foiled when she stops to see her favourite cow Gauri, once finally, before leaving. Everything changes when she hears a continuous groan while stroking Gauri. The sound comes from Alpesh’s room. She is instantly frightened that somebody is killing him. On entering his room, Lata, to her surprise, sees Alpesh having sex with their servant boy Mali. Mali, taken aback, cries “Aiyo!” (153) expressing his shock. Alpesh is not disturbed so that he asks Lata “What are you doing here?” (153). Lata repeats the question to him and adds, “You are a homo!”(153). Alpesh is least bothered and hence he asks her, “Will you turn off that flashlight? No, just point it someplace else . . .”(153).

Mali being frightened begins to cry. He confesses to Lata, “I didn’t want to do it. He made me do it . . . Please don’t tell appa. He forced me to do it” (153). Lata consoles Mali who in turn asks her to marry Alpesh. Lata tells Alpesh and Mali about her plan to run away to Salim. Mali requests her not to bring disgrace to her family. He thinks, Alpesh is a good man and will make her happy if she marries him. Mali says to her, “Your happiness is at his feet” (155). This makes her to reconsider her plan to run away. She calculates things cleverly. She concludes that though Alpesh cannot make her happy, she is sure that he cannot make her unhappy. She understands very well that Alpesh, being a homo, will not like to sleep with her. When Alpesh does not want to sleep with her and enjoys sleeping with his male lover, he may not mind her sleeping with her lover Salim. She hints her intention by telling him, “My Salim lives in Bombay” (155). Alpesh mistakes it as her request to him to help her to run away to Bombay.
ALPESH. Oh, great! So you are going to run away! Thank you. Mali and I will help you get on a bus . . .

LATA. Why should I run away? Mali has made me see sense . . . What was that Hindi expression you’d used? Something about your silence and mine as well . . .

ALPESH (weakly). No.

LATA. Think about it . . . If we do the needful . . .

ALPESH. No. I mean, No, I can’t marry you.

LATA. Are you going to say no to your parents then?

ALPESH. No. (Pause). Will you bring Mali as your dowry? (155-156)

Hence, Lata and Alpesh reach out a secret, undeclared, agreement to ‘do the needful’ to each other without bothering each other. They enter into wedlock in order to satisfy their parents and to satisfy their own sexual inclinations. To the society, they will be husband and wife, but in their sexual relationship, Alpesh will continue to live with Trilok as a homo and Lata will continue to sleep with Salim extramaritally without any fear. Though the sanctity of marriage is in question, Lata and Alpesh are forced to use marriage for their personal convenience. The traditional reverence and veneration associated with marriage become meaningless when it is forced upon. Alpesh’s sexual inclination is deep rooted that he desires to be a homosexual and goes to the extent of asking Lata for Mali as her dowry.
Lata's parents, husband, lover and society marginalize Lata. She is a prey to the Patels who are badly in search of a wife to their homosexual, divorced son Alpesh. Her parents do not accept her love. Instead, they force her marry Alpesh who is a homosexual. Alpesh as well as Lata marry just to satisfy their parents. Her lover Salim, being a terrorist, is uncertain about his own life. His love to her is actually an encroachment of her chastity. She lost her to him in his hostel room itself. However, he married another one leaving her to live with his obsessive memories. To him she is a sexual object to quench his lust. Similarly, the society branded her as a lustful, immoral flirt, denying her a husband from her own community. It chases her away to Bombay to the Patel family where she is unknown. Hence, it is her quest for identity, which arouses her and makes her one who does not want to be sheepish. As a result, she enters into wedlock on a secret unspoken agreement with Alpesh by which he remains a homosexual and she lives an extramarital life with her lover Salim. Lata's parents do not approve of her love and force her to accept a husband of their choice. They cannot accept a son-in-law out of their caste when the son-in-law is the choice of their daughter. However, they accept one out of their caste when the one is their own choice.

Daksha represents helplessness in the play Final Solutions. She writes in her diary, "I am just a young girl who does not matter to anyone outside her home" (166). Her father-in-law, Wagh, and mother-in-law, Gaju, restrict her even humming a love song in her house. Her dreams of becoming a singer got shattered when she was married to Hari at her tender age of fifteen. She expresses her helplessness: "All my dreams have been shattered . . . I can never
be a singer, like Noor Jehan. Hari’s family is against my singing film songs. His parents heard me humming a love song to Hari last night. In addition, this morning they told him to tell me . . . (166). She has to be a silent observer even in her own house and says, “I have learnt how to look at Hari, Gaju and Wagh slyly through the corner of my eyes so they wouldn’t know they are being observed. If I ever go squint-eyed, it will be from observing Gaju and Wagh who never sit together” (215). The Hindu culture does not allow a daughter-in-law to sit in front of her husband and other elders of the house, relegating her to a subordinate position. Smita, Daksha’s granddaughter, feels stifled at the all-strict religious sense of her mother Aruna. She feels, “Maybe we should all run away from home like Javed. For five minutes everyday. So we can quickly gulp in some fresh air and go back in” (219). Aruna’s social, cultural and religious notions in bringing up a girl child are no longer endurable even to her own daughter, Smita.

Women relegated to a subordinate status are not on par with men and are subjected to exploitation. The life of an ordinary middle class Indian housewife, is a refined sort of confinement. Dattani projects such characters in his play Bravely Fought the Queen. Alka Tyagi in her review of the play observers that the play is “. . . about sinners and their secret guilts, it is about violence against women, about exploitation of the weaker, about the mean, squalid corporate world” (194).

Dolly and Alka are sisters married to the Trivedi brothers Jiten and Nitin, sons of Baa, living in adjacent houses. They remain at home with their ailing
mother-in-law, Baa. Micheal Walling writes about her as “... the living embodiment of the past with its attendant guilt and shame” (230). The sisters are at the mercy of their husbands, living lonely lives as their husbands spend most of their times in their office. Baa considers the mother of these sisters a whore because she had married a man who was already married with children. Alka is uncertain about her life. Her dance in the rain and Dolly’s dance as her daughter Daksha would dance — disjointedly and wildly — are occasions revealing the liberation of their selves. Dolly’s husband is a drunkard who picks up prostitutes to his office and Alka’s husband is a homosexual. They are least bothered about the sexual desires of their wives. Consequently, Dolly gets her sexual urge satisfied with the young cook Kanhaiya and Alka suppresses it by becoming alcoholic.

When the play starts, Dolly with a mud mask, seated on a sofa, lost in Naina Devi’s thumri, files her nails aimlessly. The doorbell rings. Dolly gets up and opens the door. An unexpected guest Lalitha, wife of Sridhar one of the employees of Jiten and Niten, enters the house. Dolly is a little confused. Therefore, Lalitha introduces herself and informs that it was on Dolly’s husband Jiten’s instruction she has visited her. Lalitha’s husband has dropped her there and has gone to meet Jiten in the Advertising Agency of the Trivedi brothers. Dolly is expecting Jiten at any time to take her and her sister Alka along with her husband to the Kapoors.

When Lalitha cracks a Joke, Dolly cannot laugh for she fears that her mask would crack. The mask symbolizes a fence and a fetter, which suggests the
domestic confinement of Dolly, a woman without freedom even to laugh. With the mask on her, Dolly is docile and doll-like enduring the violence of her husband and ill-treatment of her mother-in-law. She is also mud-like without life, having suppressed her aspirations, desires and feelings. However, when the mask cracks finally, she is no longer the docile and doll-like woman but one who is determined to fight against the injustice meted out to her by her husband and her mother-in-law. She breaks open the fence of her insipid life to satisfy her sexual urge with the young cook and to pour out her agonies before her husband and to challenge him “You can’t throw me out...” (309).

Like the mud mask, the bonsai presented by Lalitha to Dolly is also a significant symbol. The fruit bearing orange bonsai is suggestive of a childbearing mother what that is the status Lalitha is desirous of. Lalitha says, “I myself prefer fruit-bearing tree...” (246). Contrary to her wish, her husband postpones the idea of begetting baby in order to save money to buy a flat. Hence, her husband curbs her wish as the natural growth of the plant is stunted to make a bonsai. Similarly, almost all the characters of the play are the products of a stunted growth. The first generation character Baa had an unhappy married life with her violent husband. Dolly’s father, indeed, cheated Dolly’s mother. He was already married with children. The second-generation characters Jiten, Nitin, Dolly, Alka, Praful, Sridhar and Lalitha are grotesque like bonsai. The lecherous Jiten is a coward and an unscrupulous fool because of his violence. Nitin and Praful are homosexuals. Jiten is an immature idiot because his growth is incomplete due to his violence and unscrupulousness. Nitin and Praful too are stunted characters.
Similarly, their husbands and mother-in-law have muted Dolly and Alka. In a sense they are not wives but slaves accommodated in the Trivedi household to look after the ailing Baa. Dolly and Alka are two caged birds with clipped wings. Dolly expresses her dissatisfaction to Lalitha because they live in their isolated “Twin houses Right in the middle of nowhere” (238). The Trivedi brothers were adamant. “They wanted their huge beautiful houses. Twin houses. Side by side. One for each brother. And two sisters! One for each brother!” (238). Day and night make no difference to their domestic confinement. Both have suppressed desires. Dolly’s heterosexual husband has no concern for her sexual desires because he satisfies his sexual needs with prostitutes. Alka’s husband is a homosexual who is least bothered about her sexual desires. Due to Baa’s hatred for her husband, she forced Nitin to hate his father. She kept him away from men in her fold. Consequently he developed an attraction for his own sex and became a gay. Like the bonsai which is tied with wires to stunt its growth, Dolly’s daughter “Daksha was born — two months premature. With the cord around her neck!” (312). Sridhar is overpowered by his ego that he thinks he is an expert in his profession and his wife Lalitha is obsessed with her bonsai. As Lalitha says, “You stunt their growth, you keep trimming the roots and bind their branches with wire and . . . stunt them” (244), all the characters are stunted, not allowed to develop properly. Like the bonsai, the role and the position of women in a male-centred society are stunted. Lalitha further says how a bonsai is made: “. . . you plant the sapling in a shallow tray — you’ve got to make sure the roots don’t have enough space to spread. You still have to keep trimming them as they grow” (246). A. Sujatha considers, “Like the bonsai plant, women do not get a
chance to surface. Their own desires, like the roots of the bonsai, are trapped within the narrow set up of society” (270). Rather, they are not allowed to surface. The gender hegemony makes sure that the women are not allowed ‘enough space to spread’. Consequently, the women are shaped or moulded as and how the men want them to be. Lalitha adds, “You can shape their branches into whatever shape you want — by pinching or wiring the shoots” (246). Similarly, men shape women into whatever shape they want them to be by oppressing and denying them freedom.

When Dolly and Alka eagerly get ready for the evening visit to the Kapoors, their husbands disappoint them by cancelling the programme. Alka requests Nitin to take her out somewhere so that she can discuss many things she wanted to discuss with him. She pleads with him to forget Dolly and Jiten just for her sake. However, she fails in her effort as Nitin rejects her plea. He asks her to keep company with old Baa. Dolly on her part requests Jiten to take them out. She asks him to invite Sridhar and Lalitha to accompany. Jiten does not yield. Dolly being disappointed expresses the helplessness of women like her, when she tells her husband “Come whenever you feel like. We are all here. Where would we go?” (250). Dattani neatly portrays the pitiable plight of middle class Indian housewives. Their domestic life is a confinement. Just for an outing, they have to depend on their husband’s moods. Their requests are easily turned down.

Dattani brings in another interesting situation where the middle class Indian women are forced to develop interest in what their husbands are interested in. They have to show interest in their husbands’ work forgetting and suppressing
their own interests. Many middle class Indian men mix up their domestic life with their office work. Lalitha’s husband is one such a man who goes on talking everything about his office work at home to his wife whether she likes it or not. “That’s all he talks about at home. Even my bonsais know about ReVaTee. But I don’t really mind, . . .” (251), says Lalitha about her husband. He is engaged in making an advertisement for the nightwear of the ReVaTee Company. Lalitha is no exception and is pushed to the status of a slave living for the pleasures of her husband.

Baa who hates Alka finds pleasure in ill-treating her. She threatens to vomit if Alka failed to rub her back. Alka has to take care of Baa for Nitin who is ready to send her out at the slightest provocation. Baa is to stay with the two sons alternatively for a month so that it becomes the duty of that particular daughter-in-law to take care of her. From the next day, it is Alka’s turn to look after Baa. Alka knows well that Baa can defeat her easily because the two sons are on her side. The hatred between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law almost ruins the peace of family happiness. Baa, though ailing and bed-ridden still holds sway on her sons who are not ready to act according to ethics and justice but wait for the mother’s mood in every move. Like patriarchy, which holds its false notions against the younger generation, maternal influence is yet another feature, which ruins the family. Baa’s influence on her two sons, Jiten and Nitin has ruined their family.

Baa provokes Alka by telling that she has been blessed with two sons. It is an indirect attack on Alka as she does not have any children. She wants Nitin to
hate Alka so that, as Alka presumes, they are childless. Even otherwise, he is a homosexual attracted not by the beauty of Alka but attracted initially by Alka's brother Praful and later by the powerful black arms of the auto driver. Nitin was the friend of Praful, the brother of the sisters by whose charm he was attracted and led a gay life until Alka was married to him. Baa's hatred for Alka, added to the homosexuality of Nitin, rendered her childless. Alka blames Baa for her being childless. "You know why I can't have children. You won't let me. That's why! . . . You won't let us! You want him to hate me! . . . He needs your permission to have children and by God, you won't give it to him!" (284).

Praful exhibits a tinge of sadism in his character. One day, before marriage, when Alka "... came home from school with the neighbour's son on his scooter instead of walking ..." (257) he lit the stove and pushed her face in front of it and burnt her hair. Similarly, he is sadistic to make Nitin ashamed of himself after every act of sex with him. Further, he tricked both Alka and Nitin to get married while keeping them in the dark about each other's sexual orientation.

Women, who are treated as inferior beings even in their own houses where men are supposed to be the rulers always, consider giving birth to a baby is a great joy and an unparalleled victory. Dolly, giving birth to Daksh, feels it a victory. However, Jiten has not allowed her to enjoy this great pleasure properly. Though she could conceive a baby, Jiten did not allow the baby to grow properly.
Baa had received a letter when Dolly conceived. Before marriage Praful had told Baa a lie that his father was dead. Dolly and Alka did not know that Praful had told so. The letter which Baa had received from her cousin contained the complete family history of Dolly. Her father is alive with his wife and four children. Her mother did not know about his first wife and children at the time of her marriage to him. When the letter revealed that he is still alive with his first wife and children Baa shouted at Praful, “Your mother is a keep . . . a mistress! My sons have married the daughters of a whore!” (311). Baa failed to understand that Dolly and Alka had nothing to do with Praful’s lie. She failed to understand that Dolly’s mother was deceived by her husband. Baa became angry over Praful and turned all her anger against Dolly and Alka. She asked Jiten to beat and send out Dolly. Jiten beat her up when she was carrying Daksha. Consequently, Daksha was delivered as a premature child.

Dolly, who has been silently suffering all the cruelties of Jiten empowers herself when his torture is no more endurable. Therefore, she tells him that everyone loves Daksha because of the guilt in everyone. One who has more guilt loves her more:

DOLLY. At the hospital, you told them I fell down the stairs! Daksha was born—two months premature. With the cord around her neck! (Pause) I saw her and I knew! I knew instantly! Your mother loved her more than was natural! Praful loved her. More than was natural! You love her. You love her more than Baa or Praful! Because you feel the most guilt! (312)
The guilt in Jiten does not allow him to stand before Dolly any longer. He runs out hysterically. Jiten's father used to beat Baa. Like him, Jiten beat Dolly. Baa, Dolly and Alka are examples of the ill-treated Indian women. Similarly, Jiten, Nitin and Praful are examples of ill-treating men. Their family is the microcosm of the Indian middle class family.

Alka dressed in a nightie and wrapped with a blanket tells Dolly that she feels shivering and cold. Dolly embraces and rocks her to keep her warm. Dolly could understand Alka better. She knows well that she is addicted to alcohol because Nitin is a homosexual. Alka finds drinking a let out to suppress her sexual urges. Similarly, Jiten who cares little for his wife finds pleasure in ill-treating her. Jiten fails to consider Dolly as a normal human being. He spends much of his time in his office and comes home in the late nights. He satisfies his sexual urge by picking up prostitutes to his office. He says:

"It's the biggest advantage of having an office on Grant Road. It was pointed out to me by the bugger who sold this place to me. No checking into seedy hotels in City Market. Just drive down Lavelle Road and pick one up. Bring her here and pack her off in half an hour. You save a lot of time." (286)

He is least bothered about the sexual desires of his wife. Consequently, her circumstances force her to use the young cook as a means to quench her sexual urges. Dolly and Alka are the sufferers with Jiten and Nitin as their husbands. Their sufferings are the same, may be the degree of their suffering
different. Similarly, both of them have discovered outlets, may be in different ways. As they are two different individuals, they have found out two different means of outlets. Hence, Dolly cannot find fault with Alka, and therefore, she comforts her. Further, they are not certain about their lives. When Alka asks Dolly, “Do you mind if I sleep here tonight?” (312), Dolly answers, “I don’t know” (312). She does not know whether Jiten and Nitin will allow Alka to stay there or throw her out? It is a pathetic, sad reality that the lives of many Indian middle class women are uncertain and insecure. There are husbands who think that the fates of the wives are to be decided by the husbands and the wives have no right. Moreover, there may be always a mother-in-law behind the unscrupulous husband.

Alka being drunk lies on the sofa asleep. Nitin comes down the stairs and asks her, how it is that she still loves her brother Praful who has tricked her into marrying him. Before marriage, Nitin and Praful were friends. Nitin used to stay with Praful and had sexual relationship. Praful tricked him to marry his sister Alka. As Nitin says, he would wait on the cot for an hour after the lights were switched off. He would walk to the room of Dolly, Alka and their mother to make sure they were asleep. After that, he would have sex with Praful. Praful made use of the sexual act to ask him to marry Alka. He lied to him that Alka knows everything about him and all that she wanted was just a security of marriage. Actually, Praful had not told about Nitin’s homosexuality. There is no wonder that Nitin had no attraction towards or concern for Alka. It becomes obvious when he says that he did not care if Alka stayed there, left, or drank herself to
death. He is over-awed by the impact of Praful over his life. He tells that Alka was always a “heavy sleeper” (314). He wants her to sleep now. She must not wake up. He slowly covers her face with the blanket. He does not want to keep the auto driver waiting for a long time. The office is not a suitable place for his meeting the auto driver. To him the outhouse is a perfect place without disturbance. He moves towards the kitchen that leads to the outhouse. He speaks to the sleeping Alka:

NITIN. He tricked you! I—I am sorry. It wasn’t my fault. (Moves to her and slowly covers her face with the blanket.) But now, you will have to sleep. You mustn’t wake up, while I . . . while I . . . I mustn’t keep him waiting . . . (He moves towards the kitchen.) The office is not a good idea . . . too many people passing by . . . but here—the outhouse. Perfect. Yes. Don’t wake up. Stay drunk. You mustn’t watch . . . those powerful arms . . . (Exits to the kitchen.)

Like Alpesh in Do the Needful, Nitin is not attracted to Alka but he is attracted to her brother Praful and the Auto driver. Alpesh is attracted to his lover Trilok and to Lata’s servant boy Mali and not to Lata. Nitin is “. . . a man of weak will who neither wanted to disappoint his brother Jiten by refusing to divorce his wife nor Praful by divorcing his sister. To add to this turmoil there was the property which Baa was not ready to give him because of her annoyance on his marrying Alka against her will” (115), writes Sangeeta Das in The Sensational Issues in the Plays of Mahesh Dattani.
Jiten, on the other hand, is a cruel, imposing and most discourteous man who does not have the courtesy to be polite to a lady. He is violence-incarnate and embodiment of all vices without any scruples. He does not spare even Lalitha. He shouts at her violently using filthy language:

JITEN. If you open your trap once more, you will regret it.

SRIDHAR. Be more polite! It's my wife you are talking to!

JITEN. Screw your wife!

SRIDHAR (getting up, violently). Now listen you—I've had enough!

JITTEN. You want to protect your wife from whom? From me?

SRIDHAR. Just don’t talk to my wife, okay?

JITEN. I wouldn’t lay her even if she got me the ReVaTee account. (306)

Dolly is a victim of gender discrimination, destined to suffer silently under a violent brute of a husband Jiten and a cruel mother-in-law, Baa. She has spent a major portion of her conjugal life as an unhappy woman. A caged parrot, however, she becomes one like the historic Rani of Jhansi when she braves to fight with her unfaithful husband and her tyrannical mother-in-law. Her invalid mother-in-law even in her paralytic, diseased state holds on to the reins of domestic governance. She uses the family property as a snare to control her sons.
Dolly and Alka, the marginalized women, empower themselves at the end of the play to fight back. Alka boldly questions the authority of her husband and asks for an explanation for his disloyalty. She says to him, “Nobody’s perfect!”(300). She also exposes the betrayal of her brother for not revealing his homosexual relationship with her husband before marriage. She spits her anger calling him “A saint of a brother . . .” (300). Dolly and Alka are representatives of upper middle class families who enjoy recreating themselves with beautifying themselves and indulging in shopping sprees, parties, balls and the like. They are extremely disappointed and they try to find solace in such activities. Outwardly they appear to be contented human beings but inwardly they are victims of some sort or other. Dolly and Alka make untiring and useless efforts to drown their sorrows in sex and booze. They are preys to their heartless husbands who fail to acknowledge them as human beings but ignore them because of their craze for money. Jiten’s indifference to his wife Dolly and his violence, which he considers his male proprietary, leads her to break away the social ethics.

Alka who is a perfect alcoholic, pours out her venom towards her husband and brother-in-law in a drunken state. Her quest for freedom from constant domestic confinement finds expression when she goes out into the rain and dances in the mud forgetting everything around her.

Women like Dolly and Alka, discriminated, pushed to the corners and treated as subhuman beings, need to give vent to their emotions. Their emotions are suppressed rendering them voiceless. Consequently, they resort to various means, which can help them forget their emotions. Alka tries to forget her bitter
relationship with Nitin by consuming liquor. Liquor, for her is a means of escape, which ultimately makes her an alcoholic. For Dolly, who craves for the warmth of love which she could never receive from Jiten, Kanhaiya is her means of satisfaction.

Queen in the title of the play refers to the Rani of Jhansi, who fought like a man against her British enemies. Dolly as well as women who relentlessly fight against discrimination and injustice caused to them in a male chauvinistic society are queens. Alka is also a queen but for her alcoholism. She fights against Nitin’s injustice. Being a homosexual, he should not have married her. The marriage has given her only disappointment and she had to drown the dreams of a young bride in liquor. She does not spare anyone — Baa, Jiten, Nitin and Praful. She uses sharp words when she pours out her agonies. However, she fails to be a queen because her bravery is prompted by liquor.

When Lalitha suggests, “it may not be a bad idea if Dolly came as the Rani of Jhansi for the ball!” (296), Alka wants to take that role of Rani of Jhansi. Dolly wants to take the role of a tawaif, a whore. These are, indeed, the cravings of the sisters coming out as revelations. When Jiten and Nitin rebuke Alka for dancing inebriate in the mud, she blabbers that she did not know what she was doing. Prompted by liquor, she uses the occasion to stand against Nitin. She uses piercing words that disarm him.

ALKA. I don’t know! I don’t know what I was doing outside. Aren’t there times when you don’t know what you are doing? (To Nitin.)
What's the harm in that? Huh? *(No response)* Tell me. What's the harm? (300)

Through Alka the author observes that nobody is perfect. And as long as there is no complaint, there is no problem. Alka has understood Nitin and his family well. She knows Nitin is not a competent husband. He is a homosexual. She is an alcoholic. Hence she has come to the understanding:

... I know I haven't been an ideal housewife. And you haven't been a... well, a competent husband. But who's complaining? Nobody's perfect! *(Laughs)* Nobody's perfect! Look at me! Saying all the wrong things... (300)

As nobody is perfect, why should men subjugate women? They are equal to men and at times prove more sensible because of their patience. Baa is also a victim of male chauvinism who spent an unhappy life with her husband. Lalitha, though seen as a little liberated woman, is indeed a victim who has to suppress her desire of mothering a baby as her husband Sridhar goes after money.

To please Baa both Jiten and Nitin dance to her tunes. Baa, finds pleasure in ill-treating her daughters-in-law and instigates her sons to hate them. Ill-treating the daughter-in-law by mother-in-law is a social problem prevalent in our social system. Men are at the receiving ends who struggle to please both the mother and the wife. In many cases, sons and their wives are preys to the changing moods and ego of the mother. Here Jiten, Nitin, Dolly and Alka are preys to Baa's ego. Baa is the real hurdle in the domestic happiness of her own sons.
Jiten's father used to beat Baa. Like him, he beats Dolly. Baa, Dolly, and Alka are samples of the middle class women of our society. Similarly, Jiten, Nitin, and Praful are samples representing the middle class Indian men. Their family is the microcosm of the Indian middle class family.

All the women characters in the play are examples of exploitation prevalent in educated urban middle class families. Baa, Dolly and Alka are all victims of male anger. Dolly beaten by Jiten while she is pregnant delivers prematurely and consequently the child is a spastic. Alka who longs for her brother Praful’s acceptance, silently suffers a fruitless marriage with Nitin. The relationships of Baa, Dolly, Alka and even the mother of these sisters with their respective husbands are pathetic. All the wives, in some way or other, are tormented with some oppressive inner fear. Baa’s husband is always violent. Dolly’s husband is violent and lecherous. Alka’s husband is homosexual obsessed with black, powerful arms. The mother of the sisters is insecure because her husband has his first wife and children. None of them feels secured with their husbands. All these women are destined to live disharmonious marital life.

As Jiten, Baa, and Praful show extraordinary affection to Daksha, Bharati in Tara showers affection on Tara, because of her inner guilt. Gender bias is best presented in this play. “Although Tara was ostensibly the story of a pair of Siamese twins”, writes Angelie Multani in Off-Centre, “clearly the play goes beyond and comments on the perception and attitudes of society in general
towards women and other marginalised characters” (119). Tara and Chandan are Siamese twins, surgically separated. During separation, Chandan was unethically favoured just because he happened to be a male baby and Tara was unnaturally deprived of what is naturally due to her. Tara’s mother Bharati along with her father influenced the doctor to fit the third leg of the twins to Chandan. As the third leg was receiving blood supply from Tara, it suited naturally to Tara. However, Bharati and her father had separate coercive discussions with the doctor to perform the unethical surgery. Patel was silenced that the doctor had agreed to do the operation. As a result, the leg lost life after two days and had to be amputated rendering both Tara and Chandan one-legged. If the surgery was performed according to the medical ethics, Tara would have had two legs and Chandan would have had one leg.

The character of Tara exemplifies the Indian mindset that prefers a male baby to a female baby and the subaltern position of a woman or a girl child in the Indian society. Bharati’s recurrent guilt associated with her discrimination of Tara against Chandan makes her show excessive love for her. Tara is a victim of gender discrimination who fights till her last to establish her individuality and identity. The discriminatory decision taken by Bharati left her daughter, Tara crippled for life. Due to this, she is overpowered by guilt. Hence, she compensates her daughter with excessive concern. Her sense of guilt is so intense that she wants to donate one of her kidneys to her daughter so that she may survive for a few more years. She tells to Chandan: “I plan for her happiness. I mean to give her all the love and affection which I can give. It’s
what she . . . deserves. Love can make up for a lot”(349). Due to her tormenting guilt, she bribes Roopa, a neighbouring girl, to be her daughter’s best friend.

When Patel expresses his idea of taking Chandan to his office, Chandan suggests him to take Tara to office so that she would become a great businesswoman because she could cheat him at cards. Chandan’s male ego cannot digest Tara defeating him in the game of cards though both are the twins of a same egg. Even one of the twins, that too a Siamese twin has the male ego. Patel unwittingly discriminates Tara when he firmly insists on taking Chandan alone to office but not Tara.

Tara, though crippled, is not a girl who can be easily victimized. In spite of discrimination, she does not see herself as a victim; instead, she fights back until the end. She stays aloof and the only people she loves interacting with are her parents and her brother. She stands strong and does not get perturbed when people make fun of her physical disability.

Tara’s is a story presented in a series of recollections from the point of view of Dan, the grown-up Chandan who has escaped to London from the agonizing guilt of living in India where he lived with his twin sister Tara. In order to release himself from his inner guilt he changes his identity by acquiring a phoney English accent and boasting as a handicapped intellectual. However, his attempts to repress the guilt associated with his sister surfaces every now and then.
The more Chandan wants to forget Tara, the more he helplessly thinks of her. Hence, he shrieks “No! No!” as he does not relish the memories that haunt him. The unnatural injustice caused to Tara as she happened to be a female baby and the unethical favouritism shown to Chandan, just because he happened to be a male baby, have created a conflict, which grows into a colossus of guilt in his mind that keeps on pricking his conscience. He hates this and struggles to get rid of it. He reflects that even God did not wish them to be separated. Nevertheless, the desire of the destiny was something strange because of which they were separated by a surgical operation. The nature’s wish, as he says, was that they were meant to be a single entity destined to die and to be preserved in formaldehyde for future generations to study.

Both Chandan and Tara feel that God had ordained them to live together as a single entity rather than two. They were separated against the wish of the nature. When their family has moved to Bombay from Bangalore, Chandan reminds Tara that they were in Bombay already by which he means that the surgery was done in Bombay, when they were babies. Tara reacts to him that Chandan could have used the word separation instead. She emphasizes the word separated when she says, “You could say that we were ‘separated’ when we were babies in Bombay” (334).

She feels isolated and alienated from her wholesome real self against her present half self. The surgery, as far as the twins are concerned, is the separation of their selves into two halves. Hence, she reveals her helplessness to Chandan, “Oh, Chandu. What would I do without you?” (334). Similarly, Chandan does not
want to go to college, as Tara would not accompany him because she has to undergo another surgery. He tells Mr. Patel, “I don’t want to go to college! (Fighting his tears.) Not without Tara! If she is going in for surgery, I’ll miss a year too!” (351). Chandan even refuses to attend the physiotherapy session without Tara. He decisively says, “If she isn’t, I’m not going either” (359). Chandan as well as Tara feels that the separation has made them two halves of a single self. Erin Mee has a similar view:

... Tara and Chandan are two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities and that Dan, in trying to write the story of his own childhood, has to write Tara’s story. Dan writes Tara’s story to rediscover the neglected half of himself, as a means of becoming whole... we are socialized to accept certain gendered roles and to give preference to what is ‘male’. (320)

Dattani shows that it is unfair to prefer a male child to a female one. He reiterates that though such a preference is common, it is unfair and leads to problems. Dattani himself best substantiates the general contention that Tara is a play on gender discrimination. To Laksmi Subramanyam’s question, “Tara is interpreted as focussing on gender discrimination against the girl child. Is this how you envisaged the play?”, Dattani answers: “I see Tara as a play about the male self and female self. The male self being preferred, (if one is to subscribe to conventional categories of masculine traits and feminine traits), in all cultures. The play is about the separation of self and the resultant angst” (129).
The author shows his concern for a very shameful social issue — female infanticide. A girl faces discrimination right from the moment of her birth. If the newly born baby is a female baby, in many cases her death is decided then. Now, because of the scientific advancement, it is easier to detect the sex of a baby when it is in the mother's womb. Hence, in spite of the Government efforts female foeticide has replaced female infanticide. It is not only a practice among the Patels but prevalent in many parts of the country. Survival of female babies in certain pockets of our country is doubtful.

Patel makes it clear to Tara that he loves her not less or more but equally as he loves her brother Chandan. He adds that both he and her mother love her so. On the other hand, her mother, he adds, would like Tara to believe that she alone loves her much. Tara has always been led to believe that she is the one who has been discriminated against by her father, and always gained excess love and affection from her mother. Being helpless he tells her: “Tara, please believe me when I say that I love you very much and I have never in all my life loved you less or more than I have loved your brother...” (354).

Bharati’s love for Tara, of late, has become obsessive. Her excessive showering of love exemplifies how much she longs to make up for the injustice she had committed during the separation of the twins. Ignoring her conscience at the very crucial moment of surgical separation, she became a prey to an age-old prejudice prevalent in Indian society. She decided to favour Chandan with two legs neglecting Tara. Her effort proved foolish when Chandan’s system rejected
the leg. As a consequence of wasting a leg, nature takes revenge on her by making all her subsequent pleasing efforts a waste.

During one of her visits to the Patels, Roopa insists Chandan on viewing the film *Sophie’s Choice*. Chandan does not show much interest as he has seen it already. Hence, Roopa asks him about its story. She wanted to know what was *Sophie’s Choice*? Chandan answers, “She didn’t have a choice, you see” (364). To explain the story and the title of the film *Sophie’s Choice*, Chandan asks Roopa “What would you do if you had to choose between a boy and a girl? Who would you choose?” (364). Misunderstanding the question Roopa answers that she would like a boyfriend. In order to correct her, Chandan asks her again, what would be her choice between a son and a daughter. Roopa thinks for a moment and answers, “I would be happy with either one” (364).

Chandan explains the story of *Sophie’s Choice* to Roopa. In the film, the Nazis would allow Sophie to keep either a son or a daughter with her and the Nazis would take the other to a concentration camp. He asks Roopa if she would send her daughter to a concentration camp. She gives a strong negative answer: “Definitely not! I think it’s more civilized to drown her in milk, if you ask me . . .” (365). As a young girl, Roopa does not make any choice between a son and a daughter whereas a grown up woman and a mother, Bharati preferred a son to a daughter. This discrimination is all with grown up people and not with young ones. Both Roopa and Bharati are the two sides of the same coin showing two different faces at two different stages of life.
Tara is very often made to think that she is discriminated every now and then as she is a girl. Hence, she asks Chandan not to skip any physiotherapy sessions, as “Daddy wants you to be big and sturdy” (333). Tara reveals her displeasure over everybody for favouring Chandan as he is a boy. Nature, family and society — none failed to discriminate Tara. “Even nature gave her a raw deal” (356) providing her a weak body. At the family level, her mother and maternal grandfather conspired in giving her only one leg. Her father too could discriminate her by planning to send Chandan abroad for higher Education and not her. Society deprived her of peace showing its ugly face through her peers — Roopa, Prema, and Nalini. These little girls find pleasure in embarrassing her by showing her Jaipur leg and calling her ‘a real freak of nature’. They are the microcosmic society representing the macrocosmic one. In spite of all these, she is more intelligent, soft, sharp, shrewd, witty and capable of achieving goals if provided opportunities. Yet she stands discriminated because she is a female baby. Carmen Kagal opines, “Our concern for Tara reflects the central issue of the play — that of discrimination against the girl child” (39).

Nature, family, friends and the society discriminated Tara in the name of gender and physical deformity. Through her death, Dattani demonstrates the unfortunate consequences of differentiation between children on grounds of gender. The pity of discriminating Tara is tragic to the core when Dan, the grown-up Chandan, writes the tragedy of his life, which is inevitably Tara’s in order to make capital out of the story of Tara.
Though both Tara and Chandan are equally handicapped, the society views Tara’s disability as a miserable one whereas Chandan’s is considered insignificant. Chandan’s all-powerful grandfather bequeaths him his entire property. His father wants to prepare him for life, teach him business, and does not want him to remain at home a ‘sissy’. “On the other hand Tara, a spirited, intelligent girl, is denied her limb, her rightful opportunities and consequently her rightful place in life for no other reason, but her gender” (276), points out L. Saraswathi in Unmasking Societal Hypocrisy in the Plays of Mahesh Dattani. Though she is much smarter than Chandan, she is denied opportunities and encouragement. While Patel’s indifference towards her is repulsive and disgusting, her mother’s compulsive acts of love are equally oppressive. Hence, Tara is the epitome of the talented, yet marginalized Indian womanhood. Subhash Chandra argues:

... all types of discrimination Tara faces at the hands of her family members (and the family needs to be considered as a microcosm of society) are the consequence of their being prisoners in the hands of collective unconscious that constitutes their psyche. The sources of this collective unconscious are the cultural/religious texts which determine Indian’s attitudes towards women. (64)

Indian social system places women as dependent and never independent. As a baby, she is dependent on her father; in her youth, she is dependent on her husband; and after her husband’s death she is dependent on her sons. When one is dependent, discrimination and inequality comes in quite naturally. If the
dependent is a woman, she becomes a marginalized category bound to be treated as a secondary human being. In Seema Malik’s opinion, woman “Being marginalized, her experiences, specially of stigmatized nature, are rarely foregrounded” (112). Tara is a fitting example of a helpless and marginalized woman in this society. She suffers due to the prevalent gender prejudices in the society. She is helpless and marginalized because she is doubly handicapped. One is her physical deformity and the other is her femininity and is consequently, denied the privileges of life. In spite of her handicap, she is a bright girl and a shining star, as her name rightfully suggests. While Chandan is more complacent with his handicapped life, Tara craves every moment for a complete normal life as others. Kanupriya gives a fitting observation in this regard:

Dattani has just made the effort to highlight one of the atrocities done towards a female and belie all the hue and cry for female emancipation and equality with men on all grounds. The way they’re treated by a society that values men and male qualities more than women and female traits gives a striking twist to Dattani’s Tara. (72)

The gender notions of Amritlal in Dance Like a Man foil his son’s desire of becoming a Bharatanatyam dancer. The play questions male stereotyping, examining prejudices about certain forms of traditional dances in India. Amritlal never thought that dancing would be the passion of Jairaj. According to him, it is the craft of a prostitute. “Hence anyone who learnt such a craft could not be a man” (406). To him one who dances Bharatanatyam is effeminate. Therefore, when Jairaj becomes passionate with dancing he cannot feel at ease. He becomes
suspicious that his son would lose his masculinity and would become a man with feminine qualities and passions. The long hair and the woman-like gait of Jairaj’s guru is good enough to pour oil into the burning flame of suspicion in Amritlal. He despises Bharatanatyam as a prostitute’s profession. Jairaj’s wife Ratna’s obsession to become a renowned dancer remains unfulfilled. In her frustration, she says to Jairaj, “Dance has brought us nowhere” (402). Being dejected, she aspires to establish her identity through her daughter. She endlessly schemes and plots to see her daughter, Lata achieve name and fame which she could not achieve in all her life.

As Amritlal was against his dancing Bharatanatyam, Jairaj went out of the house with his wife Ratna and settled in her uncle’s house. The pity is that her uncle asked her to go to bed with him as he was feeding them. He took advantage of their dependence to demand her company. He took it for granted that a Bharatanatyam dancer is no less or no greater than a devadasi and is meant for the pleasures of men. When Jairaj cannot endure this pathetic situation, he returned to his father’s house. Jairaj is in a pitiable state. His father considered him effeminate because he danced Bharatanatyam. Similarly, his own wife stopped to consider him a man, as he could not stand on his own legs than going back to his father. Ginnie Mahajan quotes Pamela Rooks who made this play into a film that it is, “... an exploration of human relationships against the backdrop of dance” (14). To walk out of Amritlal’s fold was a decision taken by both Jairaj and Ratna on a sudden impulse when Amritlal wanted them to give up dancing. The open invitation of Ratna’s uncle for her sexual company did not
matter much to Ratna whereas Jairaj could not take it that much easily. Being helpless, he returned to his father's house and hence Ratna accuses him a 'spineless boy' who could not leave his father's house for more than forty-eight hours. Jairaj complains that she has been holding this against him for the past forty years. Chitra Mahesh writes: "To Mahesh the core of the play is about gender construct. And the resultant tension is because of transgressions from expectations and conventions. Here there is trouble because Jairaj wants to dance and wants Ratna to be a mother first. Ratna wants Jairaj to be the provider and be a man" (8).

On their return Amritlal accepts them and shows a little leniency by allowing them to dance and the Guruji to visit twice a week. Amritlal exploited this situation to impose certain restrictions on the couple. Ratna is permitted to dance but should not learn dance from the devadasi, Chenni amma. To this favour, she has to stop Jairaj dancing. Ratna took this chance in her favour to satisfy her ego. The ego between the artists though they are husband and wife surfaced out and Ratna took this opportunity to subdue him — her rival in dance.

From Ratna, Amritlal comes to know that the idea of growing long hair is the suggestion of the Guruji. He gets angry and warns Ratna, "Tell him that if he grows his hair even an inch longer, I will shave his head and throw him on the roads" (418). Hence, he is determined that Jairaj should not grow his hair longer. In Dark Shadows Over Stage Success Revati Rau notes, "With no other means of livelihood, the couple were on the mercy of Jairaj's father who disapproved of his son's passion for dance . . . . To follow a passion is not easy in this country" (12).
Though he cannot stop both Jairaj and his wife Ratna from dancing, he succeeds in preventing Jairaj slowly with the help of Ratna by allowing her to proceed with her dancing.

According to Amritlal, a man’s happiness lies in being a man. To him Jairaj fails to be a man. Therefore, he asks Ratna how she feels dancing with Jairaj. Ratna replies that she had married him because he is a dancer. Amritlal makes it clear to her that she married Jairaj more because he would allow her to dance than his being a dancer. Further, he says, “A woman in a man’s world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman’s world is pathetic” (427). As Neha Mehta writes, “...the story explores the dynamics of a family in which a “pathetic” man enters a “woman’s world” and steadfastly sticks to it” (11). Amritlal stands as a traditional prude. Though he claims to be a liberal minded freedom fighter he cannot digest his son’s passion for dancing because his gender notions are so strong which do not give freedom even to his own son.

In Sumita Chatterjee’s views, “Dance and men are two things which ...” Amritlal “... cannot associate together. That’s true, people do find it a bit difficult to associate classical dance with men” (10).

Kiran Jhaveri in the play Where There’s a Will is also a societal victim. However, she is shrewd enough to change even awkward situations to her advantage, as she wanted. She is the fittest one who survives her odds. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri describes Kiran as:
Smart, shrewd, calculating and worldly wise, Kiran embodies qualities that Dattani staunchly holds as positive and strong, and necessary for a woman. Like most women who play gendered roles, Kiran is a victim too, but one who refuses to stay victimized. She becomes part of Hasmukh's life with her eyes wide open and aware of the benefits that she will drive from the relationship. (31)

The men of her early life—her father, her brothers, and her husband were all sources of trouble to her. Therefore, she could change her association with Hasmukh to her advantage. She is the one who had understood Hasmukh well. People thought that he was running the show, in reality it was Kiran who was running the show. Hasmukh depended on her for everything, and she was the decision maker and not he as others thought to be. He wanted a father in the form of a mistress.

Her mother suffered at the hands of her drunken father. Yet she never showed it up. Similarly, she was subjected to the same sort of sufferings under her alcoholic husband. Her brothers even did not spare her but put her to hardships. Ultimately, she fell into the arms of Hasmukh Mehta as his mistress. Hasmukh considers his wife Sonal as good for nothing and as good as mud. Sonal, Kiran and her mother are victims of gender discrimination and marginalized by the male chauvinism.

One cannot underestimate the crucial and essential role of women at home and outside. Unfortunately, their position is pushed to lower levels. 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. Patriarchy firmly asserts men’s superiority over women and is based not on mutuality but on oppression. Although women play a vital role in patriarchy, the patriarchy always relegates them to the margins. Thus, Mahesh Dattani’s plays show how people are marginalized based on sexuality.

_Hijras_, victims of nature, remain as an oppressed social category, devoid of freedom and voice. Confusion and dishonesty about sexual orientation surface in _On a Muggy Night in Mumbai_ and _Do and Needful_. Closet homosexuals seek to hide their true nature by entering into marriages of convenience — convenience for the men, and not for the unsuspecting women. Similarly, in _Bravely Fought the Queen_, Nitin who had a homosexual relationship with Praful ends up marrying his sister Alka. Dolly and Alka, pushed to a refined sort of domestic confinement, express their concerns in muffled voices. Dolly becomes the Rani Jhansi when she fights back Jiten to assert her position and make her voice heard. Baa, Dolly, Alka, Lalitha and Daksha are marginalized.

_Uma_ in _Seven Steps Around the Fire_ is a marginalized character because of her feminine gender. Marriage takes away the freedom of Kiran in _On a Muggy Night in Mumbai_ and Lata in _Do the Needful_ because they belong to the discriminated feminine gender. Daksha, Aruna and Smita in _Final Solutions_ too lost their freedom because they are women. Tara is marginalized because she is a girl and handicapped, Bharati is marginalized because she is a woman.
In *Dance Like a Man*, Jairaj is a marginalized character because he is a male dancer. Ratna and Chenni amma too are marginalized because they are Bharatanatyam dancers. In *Where There’s a Will*, Kiran, Sonal and Preeti are marginalized before Hasmukh’s money power and male chauvinism.

Thus, Dattani shows how discrimination based on sexuality operates in society. Biased assumptions on gays, *hijras* and women are shared by the privileged and passed on from generation to generation. The defenceless victims of man made discrimination suffer mutely and never surge against it. His plays are thus the voices of the people who are made voiceless because of discrimination based on sexuality and gender.

Religion, like sexuality, is also another important factor of discrimination that restricts humanity from free association with fellow human beings. The next chapter focuses its attention on how religion restricts human beings.