Chapter - 5

Social Commitment Through Recreating Reality in the Writings of Mulk Raj Anand and Mahesh Dattani
Man's fate, today, is no longer in the hands of the gods, but is often in conflict with the evil in other men. Man makes himself, or thinks he can. The heart and mind of contemporary man is, therefore, moved by other casualties than salvation.'

- Mulk Raj Anand

Mulk Raj Anand, one of the triumvirate of the established Indian writers during the alien rule on native land draws in characters from everyday experiences and presents them as they are. Not many authors before him could realize the importance of these non-entities and sympathize with their private tears and cheers. The unjust social and political order debases the qualities of human heart in his early novels. But this is only a fragment in his fiction. His hero in each novel shows courage and resilience and emerges from darkness and disruption.

Anand tries to seek the causes of identity crisis in his characters. He is very close to Shelley who recognized man existing both as a social being and an imaginative individual. 'To exist' meant for Shelley a life lived in two worlds, the outer and the inner. Anand, like Shelley believes that every individual is an imaginative being and it's his imaginative mind that always seeks its identity with the universal system of things.

Anand's literary pilgrimage began with Untouchable (1935). The novel describes a day in the life of Bakha, a scavenger a well-built child of nature. His beautiful physical features have few takers. He becomes a victim of the prevailing caste-system during pre-independent India. The entire novel is the description of only one day when Bakha is slapped and for the only reason that he belonged to a low caste. The colony in which Bakha lives is dark and deep. When Bakha is slapped, he faces a crisis of identity. Critics may find the novel to be an attack on the caste-system but then it's also an individual's struggle against a sea of dogmas. Anand allows Bakha to confront with a reality that's stripped of all romantic illusions. The crisis of identity that Bakha faces characterizes and colours the personality of Bakha by his unquenchable wonder at life.

Bakha is a child of darkness, no doubt, but he derives his strength from the sun. His enormous capacity for work makes each muscle of his body shine forth like glass. He has his desires and dreams too. He, like every individual, longs for his identity. Anand describes the violent stirring in the soul of Bakha very candidly:1
The accumulated strength of his giant body glistened in him with the desire for revenge while horror, rage, indignation swept over his frame.

Dr. C.D. Narasimhaiah discovers in each novel of Anand "human centrality." He firmly affirms that Untouchable is not a propaganda piece because Bakha fights to seek his identity and steadfastness.

Bakha's bones are stiff. But it does not numb his private feeling. His burning flames give full, a sense of power. There are sores in his soul and his sense of segregation is corrosive. One can hear Bakha's self-cry in the following lines: But the crowd which passed round him, staring, pulling, grimacing, jeering and leering was without a shadow of pity for his remorse.²

D. Reimenschneider explores the problem of labour and fulfilment from a different angle. Since most of the Anand's heroes labour, it is viewed as air instrument of self-realization. If mail is alienated from the product of labour it's a moment of despair. Reimenschneider remarks:

If male is alienated from his own nature, he is also alienated from the human nature of his fellow beings a fact most obvious in the existence of antagonistic classes within a society.³

Perhaps the sugary tea which Bakha drank every morning, provided him with some fond experiences. More than the sweet tea and the sweet memory of his mother was his work, which gave him some triumph. Bakha's fight for his identity and survival get some consolation when the sister of Rairicharan creates for Bakha a new world full of wonder and enchantment. Bakha's feelings for that girl have been very graphically described in the novel:

There was something wistful about her, a soft light in tier eyes for which she had become endeared to him. She had grown up to be a tall girl with a face as brown as ripe wheat and hair as black as the rain clouds.⁴

Bakha is trapped and is a victim of a recalcitrant society and he needs neither Gandhi nor Christianity but the poet who gives him a new vision to liberate him from his sickening surroundings.

The other two novels of the first trilogy, Coolie and Two Leaves also run on the theme of exploitation and raise the question of identity crisis of their protagonists,
Munoo, the protagonist of Coolie moves from the village to the town, from the town to the city and there to the mountains broadening the canvas of the novel. More extensive in time and space than the first novel, Coolie has an edge over Untouchable. Munoo’s experiences in Bombay and Daulatpur emphasize his savage struggle for survival. He endures the foul smell and stink, damp and sticky sweat, dust and heat and dung. Munoo is a fragile boy in a hostile world. Life for him is a test of his vitality and impetuosity and his fundamental right to happiness is denied to him in a hostile climate. The cotton mills in Bombay where the boy has to work exposes him to the full force of the callous capitalistic order. He drifts into a more complicated and devious world-Munoo represents the labour class and suffers the infernal miseries of the helpless labourers who are morbidly fatalistic. His cry for his identity is silenced by the deafening roar of the machine.

It is not without irony that Munoo is not willing to tear himself away from the sandy margins where he ran to the tune of lavish beauty. It is also not without irony that he traces the outlines of Sheela’s figure with a delicate light on her regular mobile features. Munoo's impetuosity, the utter humanness of his impulses, the sheer wantonness of his unconscious life force reveal his natural vitality. Munoo dies and his death is a memorable and moving moment.

Munoo clutches at Mohan's hand, felt the warm blood in his veins like a tide reaching out to distance to which it had never gone before.’

The opening line of the novel Two Leaves and a Bud - "Life is a journey into the 'unknow'" hints at the crisis that it's packed with. The hero of the novel Gangu, an old and beaten man becomes a victim of colonial exploitation. The tragedy of the novel is unfolded against the dark backdrop of the tea plantation, which symbolizes the might and in-humanity of the British Empire. The coolies live in stifling surroundings and are part of the larger colonial experience. Gangu becomes a victim of man, god and civilization. He faces the storm, which ruins his harvest and shakes his identity. His wife dies in the lack of medical facilities and his world is broken. Even Gangu himself is killed while trying to save his daughter Leila from being defiled. His entire life is a saga of struggle and every moment he tries to safeguard his identity but fails. Much more than a scapegoat he sacrifices himself at the altar of the narrow racial prejudice. But he is not without zeal and zest for life. Anand writes:
He gripped the handle of his spade with a wavering faith and dug his foot into the sod made by a furrow and sensed the warm freshness of the earth that would yield fruit. Anand allows his characters to be more experienced in the second trilogy called Lalu-trilogy. The crisis of identity in this trilogy gains momentum and the claim for recognition becomes more extensive and existential. Where Bakha’s crisis is born out of personal cry, Lalu’s is for broad identity. He becomes more of a patriot than a personal being and advocates for the release of his motherland from the clutches of an alien rule. The author in Anand who allowed his character in the first trilogy an arrest of energy, makes them struggle for release which will pave the path to freedom and joy. We find his characters maturing and educating themselves in the process of struggle and self-discovery. Anand, who gives voice to the voiceless, is of the belief that years of depression and dejection have strengthened their bones and a revolution seems at hand. He instills a hope in them as they grow to a full stature; he makes them realize that the ceremony of innocence won’t always be drowned.

*The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1941), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) deal with Lalu’s despair. He is a young rebel bubbling with energy and vibrating with dreams and determined to reject all the prohibitions and prescription of the conservative Indian society. His haircut is considered as the worst kind of transgression. His crushed identity forces him to run away from his society and join the war as a professional soldier in the second novel. But his dreams are frustrated and his experiences strengthen his desire for introspection and exploration. The third novel, *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) concludes Lalu’s quest for self-actualization and self-realization on a note that is not rigidly ideological. When Lalu comes back to his country, he finds its furrowed face unrecognizable. Lalu reconciles himself to his fate. He’s imprisoned for his rebellion and from the jail he gives his countrymen the message of love, non-violence and togetherness. His despair is the result of the constant awareness of a split in his consciousness. He is shocked to realize that he is also a victim of the age-old inheritance. Lalu faces the fury of his father and his hair cut is viewed as the most terrible insult to his religion.

The basic question that gives a sharp focus to the whole gamut of Lalu’s experiences is the question about his identity and destiny, which cannot be separated from his despair and delight. Lalu is in a constant state of tension because he is determined to rebel against the unthinking, unfeeling hierarchy perpetuated by
vested interests in India. He is different from the ostracized Bakha or the pensive Munnoo or the aged and ineffective Gangu. If Anand underrates the conscious factor and presents the revolutionary hero in a sketchy manner, he is not willing to succumb to the facile victory that characterizes the Marxist literature. What is more important for Anand is the question of survival, which absorbs all the energy of his hero. The second trilogy is more epic containing the whole gamut of human experience with the dynamic hero at the centre. Moreover, the trilogy emphasizes forcefully the reassertion of faith in the struggle to live, to grow and to fight for survival. Lalu is able to re-organize his personality and the important part of his mission is that the individual has to be saved. Lalu tempers his youthful recalcitrance and the constant process of introspection has its share of despair and delight. Shepherd very perceptively remarks:

Lalu's dilemma is one of conflicting loyalties. He is torn between past errors, the present commitments and the future aspiration!

Lalu's attitude to Gandhi shows his despair because he does not share the superhuman qualities prescribed by Gandhi for the salvation of mankind. All the lofty notions of Gandhi like suffering, soul-force self-perfection and sublimation are alien to the exuberant and turbulent self of Lain. Terrorism is as disgusting to Lalu as self-righteousness. What gives Lalu real joy is love and understanding which is more important and more effective than any political or religious dogmas. He knows that only Maya could give him the pulsing warmth in a world vitiated by caution, fear and resentment. One finds in the given lines how the private and the public concerns create a tension in his character:

Perhaps he felt there was nothing concrete in the outside world to cling to. He had never really becomes master of himself, of his destiny and was susceptible to all the weaknesses in his nature.

The Big Heart (1945), The Road (1963) and The Death of a Hero are also dominated by the young protagonists who symbolize the spirit of joy. Though the characters in these novels also undergo sickness, morbidity and inertia but every moment of their life is strewed with despair. Anant in The Big Heart lives in a village which is a confusing jumble of the old and the new beliefs. He symbolizes the new upsurge in opposition to the old orthodoxy. The identity crisis in this novel gains a
wider scope and Ananta's revolutionary ideas are for the welfare of the whole and not of his own alone.

Ananta becomes the victim of Ralia's untamable fury and is killed. Ralia's vindictive passion and malice are the result of his ignorance. Ananta symbolizes each impulse of life and tries to master his destiny by battling with the despair and abolishing unnecessary suffering. There are cankers in his soul but he keeps a vigilant eye on them. He was determined to 'outflank' his destiny and his commitment to truth was absolute. His commitment was not only to himself but also to those who, like him suffered the crisis of identity. One can note the sores in his soul:

No God, he felt could make such a world and consign it to such suffering for if he did so, he was not a good God.  

The crisis of identity acquires cosmic proportion in this novel. What Ananta symbolizes in human and spiritual terms is more important than the way he is destroyed. Ananta's trust in the here and now, his faith and pity and compassion and recognition of the dignity of man delights the reader. The irrational desires of the people the fears, the prejudices and the suspicion are the real threats to the joy of the individual. Anand laments that the individual is in a mouse-trap. He allows the protagonist to express his crisis:

Caught in the mouse-traps where they are born, most of them arc encaged in the bigger cage of fate and the various indiscernable shadows that hang over their heads.  

Bhikhoo in The Road is a victim of casteism. More organized and articulate than Bakha, Bhikhoo too faces the crisis of identity. But he symbolizes a climate of new togetherness. It's a moment of joy and consolation to him that Rukmini, the landlord's daughter responds to his love even in the face of hostility from her society. She rages against her father and brother who bring the disaster to the untouchables. Bhikhoo's crisis gets some moment of relief in the silent steady gaze of Rukmini.

Death of a Hero (1964), dealing with the disruption and disorientation and the communal frenzy, shows its protagonist's idea of death because he knows that the blind orthodoxy will frustrate all his positive and humanistic ideas and idealism. The novel shows Maqbool's consciousness of his identity. He is self-willed and not "wrapped up in the symbols of religious negation." The agonizing awareness of fear
and hostility makes him passive and pensive. Maqbool fights the monsters and dies a glorious death. He symbolizes a new myth without which national resurgence cannot have any meaning. As a poet it is his mission to fire the imagination of the whole nation. His suffering is coloured with a longing of the welfare of humanity. He tells his sister:

It is a question of faith, of belief in ourselves and in the struggle. And then we can hope to be free. We shall have to suffer and suffer but that is how man grows.  

Maqbool's letter found from his pocket after his death records his dreams of the nation and the heroic deeds of the people. All this for him constitutes the heritage of struggle.

Dr. Balram Gupta describes Maqbool's death as the harbinger of real triumph. Maqbool can be viewed as a positive image because he has the radiance of an unrepresed joy in contrast to the inward darkness of Bakh, Munnoo and Gangu. He emphasizes the urge for freedom from the heritage of struggle and the love of life.

One finds echoes of identity crisis in the novel Private Life of an Indian Prince (1953) but in a different way. The hero of the novel Vicky brings crisis in his life because of his own infirmities. His despair is rooted in the various strains that remain unrecognized in his personality. He is a pathetic captive of the changing colours of enchantress Gangi's moods. The colours of her lust and passion give the prince unending thrill and excitement. The enchantress puts a new zest into the banal life of the prince. What brings crisis for the prince is his enormously enlarged ego, which remains unappeased in the newly emerging democratic climate of the country. The inner and outer disruption, the cancer of doubt, and the lack of stable temperament paralyze the prince. It's the thwarted love of the prince for the hill woman that gives him pangs and despair. It is not without irony that his emotion for the woman does not grow into a bright creative aura. The pull of carnal desire may be normal but what is abnormal is the ugly fact that Gangi's"coiled up in the entails of the prince."

The story of the prince illustrates that we have a large heritage of darkness in the subterranean caves of our nature. What gives despair to Anand is the lack of will and the lack of creative purpose in life. The madness of the prince may be a complex event but it is not positive. The prince is destroyed by the dark seething waves that well up from the within. Vicky's suffering according to Dr K.N. Sinha, is without delight because
it is not transformed into 'spiritual torment.' The prince brings for himself only despair because his madness is not lit up by "the glimmer of self-knowledge." Apart from Vicky's personal despair the novel is a study of man's dreams and desires as stated forcefully by Dr Shankar, his friend physician:

I believe in men. They have a great vitality, in spite of humiliation they have suffered. I do not believe that there is a soul distinct from the body. The soul is the body and the body is the soul and together they make a man. Mysticism is the approach of a dying man. Man is the final fact of the universe. There is nothing higher than human existence. I do not believe there is any power transcending man who decides things for him.8

Anand lived in an age that threatened the individual's sense of personal meaning. He wrote autobiographical novels to secure that sense of self. The problem of identity was for Herbert Read, 'an effective death protest against the permeating power of collective death-wish.' His autobiographical novel breaks the vice of reticence and overwhelms the readers with the expressive emotional honesty in all the four volumes—Seven Summers (1951), Morning Face (1968), Confessions of a Lover (1976) and The Bubble (1984). His confessions in these novels are secularized rather than sacramental. Individuation and not salvation is his central pre-occupation in these novels. Everything is subordinated to the act of self-exploration and self-actualization. Anand raises a cluster of awkward questions about authentic living, which divorces itself neither from pain nor from pleasure.

Anand is at his best in expressing the identity crisis in his autobiographical novels. It is in them that he puts joys and sorrows of his heart. His earlier novels may have their epical range but their framework hindered the novelist from unlocking the secret of his heart. His autobiographical novels enable the collective consciousness of India. Anand confesses candidly:

The connection between my life and writing is more intimate than in other novelists. I write as I live. My life is my message.9

Anand chooses Krshan as the protagonist of his autobiographical novels. Krshan's acquaintance with the world, which offers him attraction and distractions and also challenges gradually deepens his vision of life. The rose buds and the scratches of the thorns were the sweet and bitter experiences of the growing child. Death as a dark reality
hovers menacingly in the opening pages of the novel *Seven Summers* (1951). The outbursts of Krishan's feelings have the ample proof of an individual's crisis:

I closed the eyes against Prithvi's face that seemed to be coming towards me from a far land he had gone nearer and nearer, for I was sure that he would return. Darkness descended on me. Sleep. There was nothing more.  

Krishan lives in a precarious, fragile world full of silences.

Turbulence and silence are the two poles showing his identity. The child always symbolizes terrific high spirits. The earth and the sky grew bigger and bigger for him during those days. His eyes were consumed by the dreads and fantasies. Even the dissolute fields overgrown with cactus and stubble fascinated him. Krishan is a growing child responding to the changing situations of life with uncommon courage and candour. He dismisses disdainfully his father as a patched-up compromise of the mechanistic Europe and feudalist Asia. The father could not analyze the feelings of his son because the struggle for existence had ruined his sensitivity. Krishan hated his mother in her sacred mood of worship because she looked distant and detached.

Anand dispenses with the third person narrative method in his autobiographical novels and adopts confessional method to capture the colour and texture of the protagonist's emotions and thoughts. There is a definite process of development in his fiction. The growth of self-awareness takes a more definite shape in *Morning Face* (1968). The protagonist enacts the drama of existence in its love-hate relationship in the phenomenal world. The panoramic background of struggling India adds to the pattern of identity crisis a new dimension. The focus in the novel is, however, fixed on the protagonist and his evolution to higher consciousness. The clash of faiths in the home of protagonist shakes his identity. He does not respect the same suggestions of his father, breaks the curfew and is punished for that. The merciless massacre at Jallianwallah Bagh completely alienates him from father. Anand describes his anguish in the following lines:

I now began to realize acutely the nature of difference between the two worlds in which I lived, the world of the compromise of my father and the world of the principles of the nationalist.  

This is symbolic of the clash between tradition and change. Krishan looks for an outlet for expressing the energy of volcano latent in his being. His aggressive egoism
expresses itself in his campaign against the elders, against the supreme God and against his father.

The death of Kaushalya is the first crack in the consciousness of the adolescent protagonist. The marriage of his elder brother is for him an institutionalized suppression. Krishan's despair is deepened by women in this novel. Devaki, Mumtaz and Shakuntala nourish the protagonist emotionally. Krishan loved Shakuntala for her courage and candour in a climate of sycophancy and hypocrisy. She gave sustenance to his emotional life. Krishan's quest for love gradually transforms itself into his quest for truth. His struggle for achieving a new identity continues in his confession of a lover with greater force and unrelenting tenacity. He is determined to resurrect his self. He has to distill all his experiences into a metaphysical pattern. What Iqbal says in his Secret of the Self stirs up the consciousness of Krishan in a profound way. Anand takes Iqbal's admonition with all sincerity and seriousness:

Read, read everything that comes your way. You can grow, everyone can. Only life and more life. Taste it and see it. It is bitter sweet.12

Self-awareness is, for Krishan, not an escape but a way of grappling with the world. It is his experience of love, its despair and delight that widen his consciousness. The love between a Hindu boy and a married Muslim woman has various ramifications. When Krishan loves Yashmin, he finds in her all the beauty and moisture of the earth and water.

Anand shows his exuberance and zest for life fully in his internationally acclaimed novel The Bubble (1984) wherein Krishan's consciousness is wafted into new areas. Krishan's identity as an Indian, who is not prepared to annihilate his root, is shaken. His encounters with a number of situations and personalities give him the best kind of education in England. What gave him dread and despair is the split existence in England. He is determined to gather the new sensations in England for his self-discovery. Krishan shows his full faith in Iqbal's mysticism when he says:

So to exist is to be. And to be is to become aware. Matter cannot become. Every new experience makes me. I can choose to be. Nature cannot. I have the freedom of choice. I can create myself through my consciousness.13

Anand records in his masterpiece The Bubble various events and situations, which help his characters, undergo the process of self-discovery. The self in
contemporary society is fragmentary. Krishan tries to find his hidden selves through expiation and re-examination. He is able to achieve some kind of a structured whole. His ability to find larger frames of meaning gives his sense of significance as an individual. He does not lose his grip on life because he does not lack the structure of meaning. He does experience boredom and depression, but they do not weaken his will to live. Man is a teleological animal and his pure survival does satisfy his need for significance. Krishan is full of despair when Prof. Dicks dismisses India as a mumbo-jumbo. He remembers gratefully the phrases of Dayal Singh to counter the feeling of Prof. Dicks:

Man is on a journey to the unknown sun. But he has no shelter. He seems uprooted. He has to find a home in ecstasy. (p.72)

Krishan does not appreciate Gautam's stress on the effacement of the self and his Nirvana is, for Krishan, the state of nothingness. Love, hate, adversity and death are the facts of existence and they have much to do with the evolutionary process of life. Krishan writes in his letter to his friend, Noor:

The wish to move forward filled me with a warmth, that urged me on. I wanted to live, to breathe, to expand my soul, to run wild. (p.18)

Krishan's encounter with women paves the path to his progress. Women bring a transformation in his character. Evelyn reveals the platonic aspect of love, whereas Lucy symbolizes innocence and purity. She is part of negation and emptiness symbolized by Buddha whose philosophy is for Anand bereft of drama and magic. It's Irene who like Clara gives Krishan the desired ecstasy and fulfilment. Irene liberates him from all the fear and terror into an ocean of light. He feels lighter when there is a physical union between the two. Yashmin had given his some warm glimmering and her frail body gives him despair while the changing hues and the varying moods of Irene's face give him the joy of self-discovery. Life, for Krishan, is not only the rhythmic flow of nerves but also the renewal of vibrations within.

Anand may be criticized for emphasizing much on body in The Bubble. But he does not like to call body a prison house and an isolated lump of flesh and bone. The body is a living link with the world and it is more a liberator than a fetter. If love is an outflow of surplus energy it has something to do with the self of the vital needs of the body. Krishan shows that a life of ideal harmony is not possible without an awareness
of the body. It is body, which gives him the sense of his identity and harmony with the universe. This creates in him the feeling of wholeness.

Anand's women characters, too, share the equal identity crisis. They are soft, sober, suppressed and subjected to persecution yet they are sublime. It's in *The Old Woman and The Cow* that one finds Gauri struggling against all odds to secure her identity. Her silent suffering climaxes into the delightful moment of her complete liberation. She slants the door against her husband and explodes the old myth of the suffering and enduring Sita devoured by the earth. Gauri's life is a pilgrimage of hope and faith. Her inner transformation is a moment of triumph that gives no delight. She is not like Noor who succumbs to despair. She organizes her emotions to bring substance and significance. She does not allow her cultural conditioning to deform her into an image of self-surrender and despair. Likewise, Gangu's daughter, Leila in *Two Leaves* radiates with a new light. Anand shows his greater admiration for women in general and Gangu's wife in particular when he says:

There is something of water about a woman. Flowing, always flowing one way or another, restless like the waves, sometimes overwhelmingly moody, fickle and capricious as a river in a storm, sometimes bright and smiling, sometimes soft and sad but always tender and kind.14

Thus one finds that the individual's search for identity is the central preoccupation of Anand in most of his novels. To A.V. Krishna Rao, this is a stage of synthesis in which the private and the public components of life are integrated. The loss of identity in his novels is a moment of despair for the hero but when he regains his identity after a prolonged struggle, it is a moment of delight for him. The fact that Anand's hero is not without grit and guts gives the readers delight. The quest theme which is found in every novel has its share of despair and delight. Anand's hero in each novel grows and becomes progressively more sure of himself passing from a low level of consciousness to a more happy adulthood. The turbulent moment born out of his encounter with other points of view is a creative crisis full of despair and delight. The critical juncture in each novel tests resources and resilience of the hero. The fact that the opposing images of the individual and society are fused, emphasizes the primacy of delight. The evolution of a new self for each hero through strain and tension towards hope and fulfilment is a familiar pattern.
Anand believes that man can emerge from the breakdown, the disruption and the decay. Poverty and hunger inspire courage. Man can contend with the disruptive forces and can conquer them. If there's discord in life it is a stage and not a terminus. Life is a pattern of despair and delight and it is not without its dynamic thrust. Man has to make and re-make himself for an authentic living. The nightmare of living in a hostile world brings fear and disquiet for men but the solitary contemplative sinks again into the quiet of self-communion. Man has in him not only the noises of the earth but also the silence of the seas and music of the year.

Anand's characters suffer the crisis of identity no doubt, but on regaining their identity after a prolonged struggle it is a moment of delight for them.

Radhakrishnan, too, endorses what the protagonist of Anand's novel does: For the flower to develop the bud has to die, for the fruit the flower, for the seed the plant and for the plant the seed. Life is a process of eternal birth and death. All progress is sacrifice.¹⁵

Anand's novels look outward to institutions and systems involving groups of people, and inward to the psychology of the individual person and his interpersonal relations. If these views be labeled respectively Anand's socialist and his humanist views, then the inevitable third term arises: the relation between the two. For Anand the third term is bhakti, the relation of personal, effications love between the members of the units of society-family, community, nation, or world.

It is the maintenance of this relationship of loving service which constitutes the 'wholeness' of Anand's ideal man. It is, indeed, as clearly pointed out in The Big Heart, a new religion, i.e. a new value system supplanting 'superstitious' personal devotion to God by rational to man, which Anand proposes to his countrymen. The traditional religion of India, he maintains, made men indifferent to ills on this earth. The new religion of bhakti requires impassioned, practical effort to remove, not only external signs of ill - filth poverty, pain, disease, hunger, ignorance - but the roots of it in social, political, and economic institutions.

Most of Anand's novels contain a character whose role is to speak the 'wisdom' for which the novel is the vehicle. In order of appearance they are: the first Sarshar, the poet editor of Untouchable; Sauda, the professional revolutionary of Coolie; De la Havre, the poet physician of Two Leaves and a Bud, Azad, the poet
political reformer of *The Lament*, the second Sarshar, the hard core communist of *The Sword and the Sickle*, Purun Singh, the poet scholar of *The Big Heart*, Doctor Mahindra, the physician of *The Ole Woman and the Cow* and Doctor Shankar, the physician *The Private Life of an Indian Prince*. Four of the other novels have character who, though they exemplify the appropriate wisdom enunciate it in only a minor way. Hercules Long of *The Village*, Lachman Singh of *Across the Black Waters*, Dholi Singh of *The Road* and Maqbool Sherwain Kashmirian poet nationalist of *Death of a Hero*, *Seven Summers* has no character clearly related to the figures here represented.

Anand’s doctrine of bhakti, exemplified in Purun and Ananta, has a number of characteristics. It is related to the Sikh religion and associated with political activity. It is simultaneously convened with building on an ancient, still dynamic Indian tradition, at least as old as the Gita and carried forward by saints of medieval Indian and with replacing old forms with new. Besides substantial dedication of time and energy, it demands courage, heroic self sacrifice, freedom from self seeking and universal tolerance and compassion with special care for the poor.

The young peasant, too, may be a devoted one. *In the Sword and the Sickle*, Lal, schooled by deprivation, treachery, war, death, imprisonment, labor, and misunderstanding in love, risks all again for the workers’ Revolution. Dholi Singh, the enlightened landlord of *The Road*, becomes an outcaste, witns family, out of pity for the untouchables. Janki, Gauri, and Shankar, of the last three full-Length novels, review the futility of their past careers and seek redemption in dedicated, personal service to others - especially in the conquest of pain, in nursing and medical careers.

The best as well as the best executed of Anand’s bhakti characters is Ananta questioning, self recrimination, and self doubt provide a dimension to his suffering and to his service of others that is, for Anand, unusual. In what may be the best, because the most untouched by propaganda of the conversation scenes, Ananta has just rehearsed, she demands Are you really sure that you respect them as men or is it your inflated ego that desires pride and satisfaction and power through this bhakti and service?... I am rather skeptical of everyone’s sincerity including yours.

Ananta having died for his devotion Janki is herself invited to live wholly for others what a great thing it would be reflects the poet, if women like you who possess
such gifts of sincerity and grace give themselves to bhakti devotion, to working for others. Acknowledging the reality of her fears, he answers only one has to take risks in order to prepare for revolutionary life. That is the only way in which we shall learn to become new men and women. Here as elsewhere bhakti is for Purun as for Ananta, identified with the Socialist revolution, the movement in which they see the salvation of individual man.

It is significant that the passage occurs in *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942), written at the height of Anand’s Socialist fervor. Here there is no question, no doubt, no uncertainty. The time is dawn the hero, exultant in his suffering, renders the appropriately glowing canticle of faith in the Revolution. In this law eminently fulfills the description of the Positive hero of Socialist literature:

The qualities of the positive hero are ... ideological, conviction, audacity, intelligence strength of will, patriotism, respect for women, readiness to sacrifice himself... the most essential, of course, are the clearness and definiteness with which he sees the end and strives toward it, he knows unshakably what is good and what is bad, he is either for or against, and never mistakes black for white. Interior doubts, hesitations, insoluble questions or unfathomable secrets do not exist for him and in the most entangled problem he finds the solution quite easily, by going straight to the end.

In contract with *The Sword and the Sickle*, *The Big Heart*, in which no fewer than fifteen passages point up qualities of searching, waveriing, and doubt, ends at dusk. The evening crow has cawed his last message of doom, and darkness has obliterated the objects in Janki’s Room. To be sure, she lights a lamp, but no sun shines, not even a moon, and the poet only spread the shadow of his protective arm around her and groping in the dim light, led here away.

Anand here escapes for a moment his doctrinaire aesthetic humanism socialism, and Bhakti convincingly blend.

Asked for his estimate of Mulk Raj Anand’s achievement as a novelist, an unidentified research associate of C.D. Narasimhaiah, editor of Mysore University’s Literary Criterion, responded that much admiration was due Anand for ‘his sense of responsibility as an artist, his concern for the health and sanity of human beings, and his faith in man and his true dignity.’ Sidestepping the point at issue, however, he concluded: ‘The extent to which he has succeeded in harnessing [these qualities]... in
the interest of art should determine Anand's place in the history of Indian writing in English.' Not much effort has been made, in a scholarly way, to measure this success, despite the relative fame of the novels and their wide distribution across the world. This chapter seeks to fill the need. It will first consider available critiques of Anand's novels as they relate to his Socialist and humanist goals, and then offer the writer's own evaluation.

Certain difficulties arise in a consideration of the reviews and critiques of Anand's novels. Most are brief and unsatisfying; some are mere clippings from unidentified sources. Those of length and substance are at times the work of Leftists or of writers for Contemporary Indian Literature, of which Anand has for some years been editorial-board chairman. Examples are the laudatory 'When Translating Mulk Raj Anand' (1966) by the Russians E. Borovik and V. Makhotin; four articles in the winter, 1965, issue of Contemporary Indian Literature commemoration.

Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian playwright writing in English, to have been awarded the Sahitya Akademi award. His plays are remarkable in their themes - sexuality, religious tension and gender issues - while focusing on human relations and personal and moral choices which are the classics concern of world drama. He always takes up the complicated dynamics of the modern urban society. The plays of Dattani should be studied as cultural expression on some contemporary urban Indian realities rather than as dramatic literature to be enjoyed for aesthetic pleasure. He presents a stimulating and provoking platform for dissenting views, cultural tensions and relationships. They mirror in a very incisive manner a lot of issues, which are common urban problems. He has created a theatre of a kind with the synergy of Rasa. Daring and innovative, Dattani has made Indian Drama in English a major genre of social critique today.

The present study aims at exploring the 'visible' and the 'invisible' themes in Dattani's collected plays for exploring and Dattani's central themes, the family, alternate sexuality, other gender, morality and identity, while examining the dramatic innovations in his work pertaining to social reality.

Mahesh Dattani explores the fringe issues that are generally swept aside by 'mainstream' concerns of a society that prefers to believe that they do not exist at all. In the radio play, Seven Steps A round the Fire commissioned by BBC is a
"whodunit" in which he uses a scholarly sleuth to rip off the veneer over the hijra community. Juxtaposed with this community of neutral maturity the chapter deals with the dwarfed maturity in the stage play Bravely Fought the Queen where the highly civilized characters, men and women in urban society are, stunted by the external pressures of power and patriarchy, and Dattani symbolizes with bonsai.

The conditions and the circumstances have made the human being deformed. With all the deformed personality, man is dehumanized. They have constructed this world of culture and civilisation to compensated for their inadequacies, and to overcome their feeling of inferiority. As a result they have become fragmented. This deformity will be operated in various ways. They are gender deformity, social deformity, political deformity, mental deformity and spiritual deformity.

It's a potent combination, which shocks and disturbs through its accuracy, and its ability to approach a subject from multiple perspectives. Post-colonial India and multi-cultural Britain both have an urgent need for a cultural expression of the contemporary; public spaces in which the Eastern and Western influences can Through his fusion of forms and influences, Mahesh take place meet creates such a space. This is in itself as political and social statement of astonishing force.

The characters in the play Bravely Fought the Queen are highly civilized and are influenced by the urban society and are the residents of the cosmopolitan city. Though they are influenced by the Western culture, Indian culture dominates.

Indian culture considers marriage to be the supreme bond for a woman because it offers her salvation through her service to her husband. For her chastity is superior and preferable to life. This reduces her to a non-living commodity her father offers her as a gift to a man in marriage. She is denied love, enjoyment and education, which are indispensable to the growth of the personality.

This statement aptly describes the condition of women today. Human beings, who are not living a full-blooded life, but only existing, seem to play various roles which are culturally assigned of them. In playing various roles a person transforms his personality to fit into that particular role.

While playing their roles men and women are acting according to their psychology and according to the conditions around them. The world of culture and civilisation influences a man in his personality development. Our personality is a
complex product of the interaction of various roles that one has to play. People are trained on playing this culturally programmed role from their birth. They grow deformed and dehumanized as they learn playing their roles.

The plight of women’s role is peculiar in the dramas of life. Sudhir Kakar, a psychoanalyst, points four. “the mother-mother-whore-partner in ritual tracheotomy is crucial for understanding the culture’s public and official attitude towards women and wives. “Hindu wife is honored as mother to bear progeny for a husband and as a partner to him in performing religious rites. So Manu himself says, “Where women are honored there Gods are pleased.” But this type of treatment is rarely found in one’s patriarchal society.

It is only a “woman”, a female sexual being, that the particular culture’s horror and scorn are heaped upon a helpless wife, it is clear from its context that the coated verse, “Her father protects her in childhood her husband protects her in youth and her son protects her in old age. A woman is never fit for independence. It refers to a protection not from the external danger but from the woman’s inner sexual proclivities”.16

Dattani takes the cue from the title Bravely Fought the Queen. “the manly queen”, Rani of Jansi. Lalita, wife of Sridhar who works in Trivedi’s office comes to Mrs. Trivedi’s house with her bonsai plants to discuss the “masked ball.” Its is the fabulous idea of Sridhar to launch Revatee ranged. For the ball they invite all the big shots and the press and at midnight they reveal the model for their ad campaign. “The best part about the ball is everyone will be in costumes And will have masks on” (237). This is the ironical sentence das it explains, that in the play every character will have a mask on.

In the masked ball all the characters have to hide their real selves by wearing the desirous costumes; they have to come as something as they are not. In the beginning of the play Dolly is wither face pack (mask on). She is afraid if her mask would crack, it will reveal her real self. When Lalitha talks about the replacement of the cook Kanhiya, she says “my mask is all cracked”. Dolly is guilty about her attraction towards Kanhiya, who is nineteen and matured fast. “Kanhiya looks really...ripple” (261). This episode lays the foundation for the unclean and extramarital relationships.
Jandhyala Kameswari points out: "With woman's sexuality so closely bound with marriage and role as wife and mother, there was no possibility of considering her sexual needs and desires." The essence of Hindu culture tacitly conveys: "No sex in marriage please, we are Indians." as Kakar states. So this pleasure was to be sought by men in various ways. Thus, women are sexually oppressed. It is reflected in the concept of chastity, a patriarchal value. It is one of the most powerful yet invisible culture fetters that have enslaved women for the ages. Any other expression which transgresses this norm is perceived as vile and wanton.  

Socialising a bit of their personality is essential in the urban civilization, says Lalitha. They have to acquire the skill of chatting and bragging about one's own self. The trick is to talk about things you know a lot about.

For the masked ball Dolly wants to go as a travails by wearing a beautiful murk. Dolly always loves the melody of Nainu Devis Thumris. They are the love songs sung by whores. Dolly has the taste of gentle music and and soft heart to love and go be loved. Alka, her younger sister, wants to be in the costumes of Rani of Jansi. They remember her bravery  "so bravely fought the Rani of Jansi. They remember her bravery "so bravely fought the Rani of Jansi, so bravely fought the manly queen" (296). She is a brave queen. Bravery is enough to qualify as a man.

Alka. Oh good. You make a tin plate arm our for me. And a sword. A cardboard sword, of course. And I will remove it and swish it about like this. (Demonstrates.)

Doll. And we can all go - bravely fought the queen Bravely fought the queen (Alka stops swishing he imaginary sword.) Full of manly velour. (296)

Alka wants to be brave; she wants to annihilate all the evils with the sword. In reality she is not brave. She wants to be masculine like "manly queen". According to Manchi Sarat Bahu: "Masculine and feminine qualities are acquired by suppressing some and buy developing some. Man become masculine by suppressing their potential for nurturing and intuition while women become feminine by suppressing their potential for controlling and rationality".  

When Lalitha asks about Daksha, Dolly says that she can wear a splendid dance costume with lost and lots of temple jewellery, as she once bragged about
Dakshs, learning dance. Her dancing is not the real dancing, it is only physiotherapy. This is another dark secret.

Dolly. (Picks up the bonsai) What beautiful fruit!

Lalitha. Yes! So tiny! (297)

The offspring of Dolly is not beautiful to look at she is responsible for that. He hits Dolly when she is pregnant. He resembles his father, violent and harsh. Haa's life has been ruled by her dark husband with many bitter experiences. He is like a demon. The sons are very sympathetic towards their mother. After her husband, she takes the controlling power of the family. She always nags her daughter-in-law for being born to a mistress, a keep. They do not know about the survival of their father. She alls them “the daughters of a whore” Praful, their brother, hides the family secret before marriage. Baa imposes violent ideas over her sons. She instigates to hit Dolly on the face, the same way her husband hit her. But he hits her on the stomach; the result is Daksha's deformity. In spite of democracy, patriarchal culture still remains in our society. Ambedkar points out, “A woman under the laws of Manu is subject to corporal punishment and Manu allows the husband the right to beat his wife.”

Indian society which has accepted the laws of Manu also approves corporal punishment in addition to humiliating, vituperative, verbal attacks on them. Men take it as their right. Even in the modern era the educated women are also yielded to the domination of patriarchal society. That is how women are suppressed. Some times people become mad when their rationality, feelings and intuitions are maimed. Jiten and his father are under this madness.

Daksha and Haa have physical disability but the other characters have mental disability. Daksha is being given physiotherapy but no therapy works on others. Their thoughts are ugly, grotesque, with matured dwarfism like Bonsai'. It happens when the shoots and roots not properly bound on right time.,

Lalitha. Oh no. It's completely resigned to its new shape. I suppose something happens inside it and....it decades to change its size. (258)

In the same manner human nature changes completely and takes a new deformed shape. Bonsai symbolizes the growth of human values. They are stunted. Their organic growth is restricted. Culture, surroundings and environment influence the mind of a man. Depending on it the personalities acquire either good or bad shape.
Lalitha and Sridhar are the clever couple. They are not saintly but they maintain their relationship harmoniously. They know which way the buns are to be buttered. Dolly and Alka give a picture to Lalitha that they are ideal couples. Lalitha comes to know that their relationships and plans are all muddled up.

Jiten and Nitin are doing a speculative campaigning. It’s a new range of colour coordinated nightwear and underwear for women, launches Revatee range. Sridhar opposes the idea of ad, where the model lies with Revatee underwear’s to light the fire in their husbands. The dad is degrading the women. Despite its Westernized treatment is upholding the silliest of all Indian notions that the existence of women is only to please man. Indian notions that the existence of women is only ot please man. Indian notions “The ad fails to enter the woman’s world”, says Sridhar.

Sridhar.. women may not mean what they say, and in our experience with various products, we’ve come across layers of complexities in consumer behavior, and that this kind of survey had it’s limitations and may not work for all products, And this ad will appeal to latent subconscious desires and not overt superficial, culturally-bound responses. (275)

Jiten does not like to take the opinion of the questionnaire. He had his own opinion. He fails to understand women. He has no regard towards them. He says, they are pretending to feel offended as if they are treated as sex objects.

Jiten is violent. Doing bad is his nature. At the end of the play he drives his car on the tarpaulin by killing the old shriveled beggar woman. The old beggar always shuttles between the two houses; she is covered under the waterproof tarpaulin. Dattani has created this character to explain how hypocrisy is covered under the tarpaulin. The ugly and grotesque nature of Jiten is killed with his repentance as he sobs about his responsibility for Daksha’s deformity. Kusum Haider points out, “Veils obscuring the past are lifted, culminating in the exposure of an ugly family secret whose deep infection is not to be cleansed.”

Prafal is not the saintly brother but is the sinner. Indirectly he is responsible for Daksha’s deformity. He hides their family secret before their marriage. That is the reason for Baa’s wrath. Prafal loves Daksha. Baa loves Nitin yet she keeps Prafal as the trustee for Daksha’s property. Nition does not want his life to be run by Prafal.
The play ends with the revelation of Nitin's homosexuality. He was attracted towards Praful. But he makes him feel ashamed and plays a game with him. Praful tricks Alka by giving her in marriage to Nitin for his convenience. Nitin's dark secret is safe in "those powerful arms" of the auto driver, and his guilt is assuaged somewhat in his soliloquy. Nitin covers her face with the blanket, as she must not wake up to see the unpleasant realities. Kasturi Kathan points out:

That these plays deal with the unit of family and the changing, evolving and disintegrating relationships within the family. The earlier, idealized, Indian view of family harmony, domestic comfort, supportive relationships or nurturing intimacy is somewhat jeopardized in Dattani's plays. The enemies of familial happiness in these plays are not poverty or illness. Dattani's talks of minor discontents, persistent unhappiness, the anguish and pain of family life, destructive, stultifying relationships and patterns of behavior which are embedded in the fabric of life. Drunken husbands, dominating fathers, wife battering – these are common in his plays.20

Dattani mirrors the realities of human life. Dolly and Lalitha are sick in their behavior, one with violence and the other with homosexuality. "with husbands like these, who blames them? " (306). The wives are not ideal and the husbands are not competent. Nobody is perfect. No moral values are retained in the urban society. Lalitha asks Dolly, "Does Daksha also hit it off with kanhiya?" (293). It is a heinous question to ask a mother about a fourteen-year-old daughter. Brings Dattani at illegal, immoral and gay activities in the society. The society is covered by the water proof tarpaulin to hide all the evils. People are developing the hobby of growing "Bonsai".

Claude M. Steiner in his brilliant book, Scripts People Live, (New York, Bantam, 1980, p. 182) discusses six basic maladies of one's culture: Sex role Scripting, Inequality, powerlessness, Joylessness, Mindlessness and Lovelessness. These observations of Stiffener facilitated the derivation of a paradigm to study the cultural milieu of Indian society. These maladies cause different kinds of deformities. The network of deformities forms the cultural labyrinth where people get lost. They hardly perceive the real cause of their various problems. In their strife, they become exhausted and accept the oppressive lifestyle.
Along with this dwarfed maturity Dattani focuses on hijras to expose their conditions by calling eunuchs, third gender and their maturity is not dwarfed but it is neutered. Dattani uses an unusual genre that of a ‘whodunit’ to explore invisible themes in the play Seven Steps Around the Fire, another radio play commissioned by the BBC.

A brief note on the origin of the hijras will be in order, before looking at the class gender based power implications there are transsexuals all over the world and India is no exception. The purpose of this case study is to show their position in society. Perceived as the lowest of the low, they for family and love. The two events in mainstream Hindu culture where their presence is acceptable marriage and birth ironically are the very same privileges denied to them by man and nature. Not for them the seven rounds witnessed by the fire god, eternally binding man and woman in matrimony, or the blessings of many you be mother of a hundred sons.

Dattani was not afraid to work within a relatively conventional dramatic structure to tell a story that was bold and powerful without ever being melodramatic. In this play he uncovers some of the mysteries of the hidden Indian for listeners in a very different part of the world, eunuch community.

By introducing Uma Rao, the academic sleuth daughter of the Vice Chancellor of Bangalore university and wife of the Chief Superintendent, Suresh Rao, Dattani straddles many worlds, Uma a scholar in Sociology is researching the community of eunuchs. She is the sleuth and by using rather unconventional means, she uncovers the truth behind a murder of Kamla, a beautiful eunuch, in the city’s hijra community. Constable Munswamy assists her, set to the task by his boss in order that he may keep her out of trouble in her sleuthing.

The central concerns of the play are set on uncertain ground that hardly well documented given the stigmas attached to them hence making Uma’s academic exercise plausible while being sensitively humane. The eunuch community that inhabits tiny pockets of Indian cities treads areas that are generally brushed aside to the fringes, the margins of society, as it were. This is literally a no man’s land in many senses of the term, and no woman’s either. The correlative of these gray zones is, of course, another of Dattani’s pet concerns: homo-sexuality.
The murder victim Kamla, a beautiful hijra (eunuch), had, it turns out, been secretly married to Subbu, the son of a wealthy minister. The minister had the young hijra burned to death, and hastily arranged for his son to marry an acceptable girl. But at the wedding Subbu kills himself. The truth behind the secret is hushed up.

The tragedy is the minister cannot accept a hijra to be his daughter-in-law. They cannot have the bliss of marriage, as they are not fit for reproduction. They cannot be received like a fellow being. Nobody seems to know anything about them. “Are they a part of our glorious Hindu tradition? Why are they so obsessed with weddings and ceremonies of childbirth? Why do they just show up without being invited? Are they just show up without being invited? Are they just extortionists?” (16). These are the questions, which cannot be answered.

The custom of Hindu marriage is to take the blessings of hijras and they are supposed to dance for the auspicious occasion. There is a belief that if they are not invited for wedding they will curse to the couple to remain barren. The community which is very important for marriage is not fit to be in the mainstream of life.

Hijras’ maturity is not stunted maturity; it is neutral maturity. They are grown neither masculine nor feminine. No chromosomal sex is determined here. Before looking at the class-gender-based power implications a brief note on the popular myths on the origin of the hijras is essential.

Uma, The term hijras, of course, is of Urdu origin, a combination of Hindi, Persian and Arabic literally meaning ‘neither male nor female’. Another legend traces their ancestry to the Ramayana. The legends has it that god Rama was going to cross the river and go into exile in the forest. All the people of the city wanted to follow him. He said, 'Men and women, turn back. 'Some of his male followers did not know what to do. They could not disobey him. So they sacrificed their masculinity, to become neither men nor women, and follow him to the forest. Rama was pleased with their devotion and blessed them. There are transsexuals all over the world, and India is no exception. The purpose of this case study is to show their position in society. (10)

Through Uma’s case study on hijra community Dattani has shown their position in society and sympathises with them, perceived as the lowest of the low.
they yearn for a family and love. The events in mainstream Hindu culture where their presence is acceptable—marriage and birth—ironically are the very same privileges denied to them by man and nature. They are not fit for man bliss, they are not fit for motherhood, yet their blessings are essential for the couple to become parents. They will sign and dance at marriages and at childbirth.

Anarkali. What is there to tell? I sign with other hijras at weddings and when a child is born. People give us money otherwise I will put a curse on them. (Laughs.) As if God is on our side. (Smokes.) I did not do anything to Kamla. She was my sister.

Uma borrows money from her father to bail out Anarkali, she bribes Champa with it and pursues the minister’s bodyguard, Salim, for clues. When Anarkali came to know the truth of Kamla’s affair with Subbu she tried to stop her. She even scratched her face hoping she will become ugly and Subbu will forget her. But Subbu wants to marry her and gets married. She was cruelly burnt to death, by the men of the minister. Hijras knew about the politics behind the murder of Kamla.

Uma (voice-over). 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 accident. The photograph was destroyed. So were the lives of two young people.....

The Polaroid picture of Subbu and Kamla remains as a witness. The Minister has sent Salim to threaten Anarkali and Champa to get the pictures but his efforts are in vain. Knowing this Subbu commits suicide. Homosexuality of Subbu ends violently. Uma succeeds in finding the truth but fails to make it visible. The realities are pushed back to the margins and made invisible again. Anarkali asks Uma not to come back again to involve in this matter of hijras from the established world.

Anarkali. A special mantra is in the locket. Champa gave this to me for you. Wear it and you will be blessed with children. Sister! May you and your family be happy! Now go away, and do not come here again, please go, sister!

Their’s is the ‘invisible’ minority. They live in a corner of the city. Asha Kuthari calls it ‘No Man’s Land’. They come out in groups and make their presence felt by their peculiar loud hand clap, the way they walk, talk and sing. These
... unmistakable marks that the eunuchs assume are to formulate a distinctive identity. It all seems a little sordid. There is very little written on them. Dattani delicately touches the feelings of hijras. Anarkali and Champa are symbols of the ambiguous spaces they occupy in terms of their suspect sexuality. Uma’s involvement is not for any social reformation. Her machination is only for her ‘academic advancement’. Uma realizes that she cannot bring any changes in the society as the system and the tradition in ancient.

Dattani exposes the sham of the Indian urban society in these two plays. He explores the hijra community and describes how the neuter gender is neutralized in the civilized society but with stunted and dwarfed maturity.

Indian authors have started winning high awards and prizes all over the world. The novelists writing in English are coming to the limelight but Indian playwrights have been less conspicuous. Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes in his book, *Indian Writing in English*, “Modern Indian dramatic writing in English is neither rich in quantity, nor on the whole of quality. Enterprising Indians have for nearly a century occasionally attempted drama in English but seldom for actual production”. In these circumstances, Mahesh Dattani is a notable and original voice on the Indian stage and is one of the leading contemporary playwrights.

Mahesh Dattani is responsible for the revolutionary progress of Indian English drama. He is not only a playwright but also a drama teacher, stage director, actor, Bharatanatyam dancer and a socialist. He has a theatre-studio in Bangalore where he conducts workshops on acting, playwriting and directing.

Alka Tyagi comments on the plays of Dattani. “Verisimilitude is the expression that comes to mind when one reflects on the plays of this compact collection”. Dattani, himself points out, “The themes I address have all been done in different ways in Britain and America”.

Each and every play of Dattani raises some prominent issues concerning the various maladies contaminating the healthy tissues of the society. The issues he has raised in his plays are confined not only to India but have universal relevance. His plays reflect life and life head-on. Gay relations and the ordinary untouchcd, unsought conflicts between son – father, husband-wife, lovers and many such things are tackled
with masterly frankness in his plays. He handles issues pertaining to sexual abuse, religious intolerance, gender inequalities and social stereotyping quite deftly.

Each one of Dattani's plays deals with the unit of family and the changing, evolving and disintegrating relationships within the family. The earlier idealized Indian view of family harmony, domestic comfort, supportive relationships or nurturing intimacy is somewhat jeopardized in Dattani's plays. What endangers familial happiness in these plays are not poverty or illness. "Dattani talks of minor discontents, persistent unhappiness, the anguish and pain of family life - destructive, stultifying relationships and patterns of behavior which are embedded in the fabric of life".

Human beings in the world are generally divided on the basis of race, religion and nationality. Apart from these pre-existing categories, human beings are further classified on the basis of their sexual relationship such as heterosexuals, homosexuals and transgender homosexual is a general term and it is further divided into gay and lesbian. People believe that heterosexuality is the only normal and acceptable mode of sexual and social relations. So the society considers homosexuality as unnatural and abnormal relation. It is otherwise called deviant relationship because it is a deviation from the normal.

Dattani's latest plays reveal his preference for the virgin field, the sphere least discussed or not discussed at all such as that of homosexuals and eunuchs. In India writing, to some extent this kind of writing comes in the realm of taboo. Though some writers have written on this subject, Dattani's approach is certainly different: "Homosexuality is not the first subject matter chosen by Dattani as writer; it has been dealt by numerous creative talents who prefer to unearth the least explained field".

In Bravely fought the Queen, Dattani takes up the problem of homosexuality of a married man which ultimately mars his conjugal life. Gay theme occupies the central slot in the play A Muggy Night in Mumbai. Do the Needful also deals with a gay character Alpesh whose life is ruined by his homosexuality. In Do the Needful Alpesh's first marriage is a failure because he is a gay and he is unable to love his wife. But his mother Kusumben Patel does not know the actual reason and therefore she forces her son for a second marriage. But Alpesh does not want to marry again. Kusumben Patel thinks that there must be some good reason for Alpesh's refusal to
merry. But she wants to know the reason. Alpesh reminds her about his first marriage and tells her he does not want it to happen again. Kusumben thinks Alpesh is threatening but Alpesh warns her that she 'should be prepared' and should develop the courage to face the situation if it happens again. He also adds that his first wife only wanted separation and it was not he who insisted on that.

In the note on the play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, John McRae captures the themes thus:

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

The gay people face problems from their family and society. Moveover, there are a lot of problems among them. They further suffer from psychological insecurity and guilt. Most of them feel guilty about their relationship and they never openly speak about the relationship to their family. Invariably they want to hide it. Hence, the gays like Alpesh in *Do the Needful* and Nitin in *Bravely Fought the Queen* and their families face numerous problems. But in the play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Kamlesh openly talks to his sister Kiran about his relationship. As a new generation girl, she understands the relationship and supports her brother.

The homosexual people sometimes misuse the innocent people. Alpesh in *Do the Needful* exploits Mali, a worker in Lata's farm house. Lata accidentally comes to know that Alpesh is a gay and calls him a filthy beast and accuses him of using Mali for his own pleasure. Mali is guilty and ashamed of his action and he feels that he will not be able to go to the market. If Lata's father does not kill him, he wants to kill himself. Mali further feels if this shameful act is revealed, nobody will give their daughter in marriage to him. He pleads with Lata to marry Alpesh who will make her happy. Alpesh thinks, it is a ridiculous idea, for, he can never make Lata happy. At the same time, he doesn't want to tell his parents about his condition. Soon they find a solution: to keep his condition a secret so that he can proceed in their own ways even
after their marriage. But he wants to make sure that he will have Mali still. So, Alpesh asks Lata, "Will you bring Mali as your dowry?"

Similarly, Kamlesh in the play On a Muggy Night in Mumbai exploits the security guard of his apartment. In the first act, Kamlesh misuses the guard, [...] Kamlesh gets up [...] takes out his wallet and offers a few hundred rupees to the guard (MNMP, p.50) As the guard prepares to leave, Kamlesh stops him and he kneels before him to tie his shoelace, he grabs his foot and places it in his thigh and ties the laces. When his friends come to know about this, there is an argument between Kamlesh and Shard:

Shard : (throws the money at him.) And how dare you exploit that poor man?

Kamlesh : I didn't exploit him.

Shard : You used him as a sex object.

Shard : He will go back to his wife and two hundred children after he finishes his duty here. (MNMP, p.50)

The heterosexual society looks at such people as deviants. Shard often criticizes the people he sees through the windows. There is a couple in the neighbourhood. The lady’s husband is a diamond merchant and his is too fat and bald to be her husband. Kamlesh comments about the lady’s secret relationship with some other person. You Should come by some time at about eleven in the morning on a working day. That’s when she does it with the doodhwalla (MNMP, p.53). The fays hate the heterosexual relationship, and naturally hate marriage. To them it is unnatural relationship, and naturally hate marriage. To them it is unnatural relationship, and naturally hate marriage. To them it is unnatural relationship, and naturally hate marriage. To them it is unnatural:

Ranjit : It is so bloody unnatural

Ed : What do you mean?

Ranjit : Oh, we were talking about marriage.

Bunny : It is natural to the majority of the people!

Ranjit : Animals don’t do it [...] (MNMP, p.95)
The events of the play take place on a muggy nights in Kamlesh’s apartment, where he invites his gay friends to discuss his psychological problem and fear. Kamlesh wants to discuss but he doesn’t know how to start and he doesn’t want to trouble them with his situation. But he adds that they are the only friends he has. He came to Bombay three years ago not with the intention to make big changes in fashion world, but to get over a relationship in Bangalore. As gay men and women, they suffer the pain of separation and some of them suffer it several times. To forget one such relationship with Prakash, Kamlesh did a cruel things by loving Sharad. Kamlesh confesses that he has hurt some one as wonderful as Sharad. He further adds, ‘I made Sharad go through the same pain and suffering that I was trying to get over’.

Kamlesh badly needs his friends help because he is very much afraid. Though he thinks that he doesn’t need anyone to live with him and he is content with his work, he feels the void, the same feeling he had when Prakash left him. He further adds that he may console himself, if Prakash left him for another man but Prakash was ashamed of their relationship. Kamlesh left his parents and his sister too came here because of Prakash. For the first time in his life, he wishes he were not a gay. Ranjit consoles him, “At some point or another we all wish to be something we are not. But Kamlesh knows from where the gets such feelings. It is from the psychiatrist, who is a straight homophobic. Kamlesh knows that he needs medication and the psychiatrist has told him about aversion therapy. For sometime he believes that the medication helps to cope with his depression, until he said he would never be happy as a gay man. The doctor advises that it is impossible to change the society but it may be possible for him to re-orient himself. Ranjit comments that it is a very primitive thought. Kamlesh explains why he went to the psychiatrist.

I tried explaining to him that I needed his help to be something I am not. Could he help me cope with my loneliness and fear the same way he would help a heterosexual cope with his? (pause.) I don’t go to him any more. I stopped taking his pills. The fear has come back. I am obsessed even more by the memory of Prakash, I feel I cannot live without him. I am capable of doing any thing.

Bunny Singh, a TV actor, is an Indian gay who is married but he never reveals his homosexuality. Bunny gives advice to Kamlesh that he is looking in the wrong
places to forget his Prakesh. Bunny advises Kamlesh to marry a nice woman. Shard also suggests that Kamlesh, also like Bunny., Should pretend to be straight.

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

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

Bunny : Camouflage! Even animals do it. Blend with the surroundings.

They can't find you. You politically correct gays, deny yourself the basic animal instinct of camouflage. (MNM, p.70)

But Kamlesh doesn't want to camouflage and glitter and he doesn't want to flaunt or hide anything from the society. Ranjit argues that this is the price one pays for living in India. There is virtually no gay scene in India. Homosexuality is illegal in India. S377 also criminalizes male to sex with upto ten years imprisonment But in foreign countries, it is more common and it dates back to World War II. In 1969, Lesbian and Gay Street people, Puerto Rican drag queens, and bar guys fought back against a routine police raid at the Stone Wall Tavern in New York City [...] The stone Wall Rebellion implies the prior history of male homosexual existence in the United States since the end of World War II.

Ranjit always regrets living in India. He and his English lover have been together for twelve years, and in India gay people cannot find a lover easily, Deepali interrupts him saying that she and tina are very stable pair. Ranjit agrees that they are exceptional, but in his opinion, the gays never succeed. Bunny tells him to go back to England if he is ashamed to live in India. He says, "you can leave the country, but you can never run away, from being brown. You are ashamed of being Indian (MNM, p.88) Ranjit accepts that he sometimes regrets being an Indian because he can't be both Indian and gay. But he points out that Bunny being a closet homosexual has no right to advise others.

When Kamlesh's sister Kiran enters, she is shocked to see Bunny with her brother and friends. Bunny in an attempt to manage the situation praises the others as very intelligent people who give him good company. Moreover he claims to be Avery
liberal-minded person. He adds, “As long as they understand that I am not interested in such things, I have no problem” (MNM, p.76). Kiran calls him ‘noble’ as he is friendly with Kamlesh and others. Deepali ironically says that they need more men like Bunny to make their world a better one.

Deepali and friends want to prevent the marriage of Kiran with Ed because he is the same Prakash who is the former lover of Kamlesh. They think that Kiran’s life will be spoiled by this. Kiran thinks that she is marrying someone who loves her very much. When Bunny questions Deepali why does she think that Ed does not love Kiran, she counters him by asking whether he really loves his wife:

Deepali : With the same intensity with which you can love a man?

Bunny : You know I would be lying if I said I could. But I give her so much more. More than any heterosexual man. I do look after her well.

She is content.

Ranut : Content!

Bunny : She boasts about my work to all her neighbors. Our children are popular in school. And they all love me. At least I am not depressed like Kamlesh. (MNM, p.84)

But after a while Bunny apologizes to Kiran and admits that he is none among them and the people who know the real Bunny is the people who are there in Kamlesh’s apartment and they all hate him because he is such a hypocrite. But they are liberal-minded and they accept him in spite of his pretense in public:

The people who know me are the people who hate me. That is not such a nice feeling. I have tried to survive. In both worlds. And seems Al do not exist in either. I am sorry, Kiran. I lied to you as I have lied to the rest of the world [..........]. They have accepted me in spite of my letting them down so badly. I deny them in public, but I want their love in private. I have never told anyone in so many words what I am telling you now - I am a gay man[...]. (MNM, P-102-3).

Kiran is a divorcee and in her first marriage she suffered a lot because of her husband. Now she is happy about Prakash. Kamlesh is thankful to Prakash for making
his sister happy again. "I don't think it ever occurred to her in her wildest dreams that we were lovers. She never even asked me whether Prakash was gay. She just assumed he wasn't" (MNM, p. 86). Deepali and friends want to expose the real character of Ed to Kiran. But Kamlesh did not agree for, Ed say she is heterosexual now. "He goes to church every week now. They put him on to a psychiatrist. He believes his love for me was the work of the devil. Now the devil has left him" (MNM, p. 85).

But Sharad thinks that the devil has put Ed to Kamlesh's sister. Kamlesh thinks that Kiran cannot live without Ed and he doesn't want his sister to suffer like him. At that time, Ed alias Prakash also comes there to see Kiran. Shared and Deepali try to get the truth from Ed himself. Shared reveals his wish to break his relationship with Kamlesh as he wants to be straight. While Kiran feels he cannot change his nature, he argues that if he is confident, he can do anything. Ed with great assurance points their incapability to change:

Look around you. Look outside. (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. (MNM, p. 99)

Dattani clearly explains the stage set-up for each act in his plays. In the play On a Muggy Night in Mumbai the stage is divided into three action areas:

The first stage is a small flat, beautifully done up in ethnic chic fashion[...].
The second area, a completely non-realistic set comprising three levels, is black and expensive[...]. Below this is Kamlesh's bedroom. The bedroom is realistic, but hidden behind a gauze wall, giving it some mystery and secrecy.

(p. 49)

The stage includes a shoonya where the characters are forced to confront their inner thoughts. The backdrop of these three acting areas is the Mumbai skyline, engulfing the created world of Kamlesh.

Dattani works within the 'well-made play' structure, he bends time and space to suit his will. Time sowings between past and present or simply stands still. Dattani is fond of distributing the action among different levels on stage, which not only makes his plays visually exciting but makes them move at a snappy place.
In *Bravely Fought the Queen* past and present exist simultaneously when Baa speaks from the past and her dialogues alternate with those spoken by Jiten and Nitin in the present. In *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Dattani gives three levels including a 'shoonya' where the characters' true selves are laid bare.

Dramas has wider reach to the masses. As it is a reformative art, it creates a greater impact in the minds of the people. Drama is performed in such a manner as to create an illusion of reality, the feeling that what you see on stage is really happening. It sustains the attention of the audience and they go home thinking about what they have just experienced. The written texts are only fully realized through the process performance.

Dattani breaks the curious silence which reigned so far on the matter of non-heterosexual relationship. In a country like India where heterosexuality is considered a norm, homosexuality or same-sex bonds have been treated as deviant, perversion or even criminal. Socially those who practice it are harassed, victimized and mocked at. Dattani boldly tackles the taboo-ridden subjects and captures the anguish and agony of these marginalized with delicate strokes. His plays on the queers are a call for understanding and empathy.
END NOTES


2. Ibid., P-22.


6. ibid., p-17.


17. Ibid., P-3.


20. Ibid., P-33.


22. Ibid., p-67.