Chapter - 6

Human Concerns - Searching for Alternatives in Mulk Raj Anand’s and Mahesh Dattani’s Writings
A colossus in the Indian novel in English, Mulk Raj Anand occupies a pride of place among the Indian novelists by occupying himself historically the two worlds: one the colonial decades and the other post-colonial generations. A committed humanist believes in the amelioration of society on the socialist principles with which he thinks that heaven on earth is possible. Anand felt that imagination is infinite. It produces Hamlet, Lear and Othello as well as Heer and Ranjha. A writer according to Anand, has to see the relation of the concrete with the universal.

Mulk Raj Anand's love for humanity and his concern for the socially and economically oppressed came from his peasant mother and father who was a traditional copper smith. In consequence Anand acquired a status of being the advocate of the downtrodden and the underprivileged. His novels are explosive sometimes because he openly expressed in a vehement way certain social maladies in his writings.

The novel was the result of "the vanity of youth wanting recognition, the departure from absolute philosophical theories towards a search for philosophical insights based on the lives of the human beings whom one knew in the flesh and blood, the urge to express oneself at all costs in an absolutist manner so as to expose the ugliness of death in life by deliberately dramatising even through distortion, the non-human realities which impinged on one from all sides".

Anand's Untouchable is a focus on class distinctions between the rich and the poor, between the tea planters and labourers, between the high caste Hindus and the dregs of humanity, known as untouchables hamper the growth of individuals which ultimately result in social evils. He hated the social institution which cause the cleavage between the different strata in the social structure. He presents simple and noble human beings enmeshed in the net of poverty and injustice. Though they fight to come out of it they are helpless to shake off the coils of social evil.

The novel Untouchable covers the events of a single day in the life of a low caste boy Bakha, in the town of Bulashah. The eighteen-year-old boy is one of the sons of Lakha, the jemedar of the sweepers of the town. Bakha is the child of the 20th century. He comes under the influences of the modern world which cause stirrings within him. From a Tommy he has secured a pair of old breeches and from a sepoy a pair of old boots. At the dawn of every day he begins his work of latrine cleaning and he thinks that he is an efficient worker. His sister Sohini faces the onslaught of the upper
class people in the area when she approaches the well to get water. She tells her father "they think we are dirt because we clean their dirt." Similarly her brother faces the wrath of the upper class people when Bakha lifts the boy who is injured in a hockey game. The boy's mother yells at him saying that he has polluted her son by touching him and lifting him from the ground. Now Bakha understands twin problems of caste and poverty squalor and backwardness.

As suggested by Mahatma Gandhi, Anand had made certain changes in the novel Untouchable. Anand's life and experience in Sabarmati Ashram proved in realising the characters in the novel. The periods of meditation in the Ashram helped Anand to recollect the social structure of India where the downtrodden were made to suffer because of their birth and station in life. His recollection and Gandhiji's preachings to show devotion to the poor was a strong source of conversion for Anand. He began to realise in his mind to create an oppressed character caught in the villainy of the Indian social structure subjecting them to untold suffering and humiliation. The result was the creation Bakha in Untouchable. The intense and passionate feelings of Anand for the oppressed comes to the fore in the novel.

It is a sensitive subject which Anand has taken up to deal with in the novel. Though it has been more than half a century hence the social evil has not died down nor has it been completely wiped out in India. Anand is the harbinger to focus the social onslaught in absolute realistic terms in his novel Untouchable.

Anand is a committed writer to the social cause. His penetrating thought and humane attitude in understanding the grim social realities in India found their expression in his novel Untouchable is a revolutionary novel of protest against the pervading social evil in India. Anand's social awareness and objective impelled him to create the novel to focus the social evil and to rally for the removal of the social evil by inculcating in the minds of the Indian intellectuals to put their mite to end the social evils once for all. In a significant manner that Anand's novel Untouchable was published at a time when social reformers in India were engaged in an earnest way to remove casteism and untouchability.

The privileged caste Hindus in India has caused mental depression to the untouchables, we find this in Bakha's agonised interrogation "What have I done to deserve all this"? (Untouchable 133). Anand took it upon himself as a social critic and
wanted to bring the atrocities perpetuated upon the untouchables to light. He often uses irony as a form to expose the social evils. One of the well-known critics on the works of Anand, Saros Cowasjee's observations in *So Many Freedoms* is worth quoting here: "As irony is implicit in the theme, one finds it everywhere more pervasively than in any other Anand's novel. The novel unfolds with the child of modern India, shackled by age old tradition; the Hindus who pride themselves on their cleanliness gargle and the spit in the stream and pollute the water while a person incomparably cleaner than themselves is treated like dirt. The precise situation permeated the Indian social order with divisions based on communities and the work that each community takes up for the sake of food and survival in the late 19th century and in the subsequent century also without any change".3

Anand's commitment to reveal the deep-rooted social malice in the Indian society made him to create Bakha. He had wanted to show the youth's "unique sensitiveness as against the people of the upper caste who thought merely touching him is a degradation" (Conversations with Anand). He further narrated that "I meant symbolically to show that such small tenderness among people in private life or the catharsis of human existence."4

Bakha arrests the reader's attention in the entire novel. As E.M. Forster observes that "Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand, sometimes weak, and thoroughly Indian. Even his physique is distinctive, we can recognise broad intelligent face, graceful torso as he does is nasty job or stumps out in artillery boots, in the hope of a pleasant walk through the city with a paper of cheap sweets in his hands"5. Anand with his remarkable skill portrays Bakha's helplessness, frustration, anxiety and agony to the degree that he has become an embodiment of his own creation or in other words the creator and the creator co-mingle at one point.

Dr. Radhakrishnan observes that "The institution of caste illustrates the spirit of comprehensive synthesis characteristic of the Hindu mind with its faith in the collaboration of races and the co-operation of cultures. Paradoxically as it may seem, the system of caste is the outcome of tolerance and trust. Though it has now degenerated into an oppression and intolerance, though it tends to perpetuate inequality and develop the spirit of exclusiveness these unfortunate effects are not the central motives of the system"6. The casteism becomes a pivotal issue in the Indian society and it crosses the point of tolerance as evidenced in *Untouchable*. 

174
The temple episode in *Untouchable* throws light on the sad plight of the outcastes. They were not allowed to enter the portals of temples because their contact would defile the house of God, the creator of all. Lakha, Bakha's father, wanted to keep himself at home under the pretext of sickness and entrusted the work of cleaning the roads and the temples in the town to Bakha. After they excruciating experience of touching in the market, Bakha went to sweep the temple courtyard. He was filled with the fear of some unknown and mysterious effect on him as he entered the courtyard of the temple.

Bakha surveyed the heap of dust and leaves which he had come to clear. He threw the basket and the broom on the ground and was ready to begin his job. He saw a 'miniature temple' with the beautifully polished image of a snake enclosed. He was slightly afraid of the snake but his fear ceased when he saw the devotees worshipping it. He shouted his call of caution to avoid the repetition of 'the disaster of the morning.' The orthodox crowd of worshippers was conscious of his evil presence. He was in a fix and did not know what those people worshipped there. He heard the worshippers chanting "Ram, Ram, Sri, Hari, Narayan, Sri Krishna, Hey Hanuman Jodha, Kali Mai." He had faint idea about some of them and did not know anything about the rest. He was obsessed with the desire of seeing the images of gods and goddesses. But he had not courage to go up. He knew that "an untouchable going into a temple polluted it past purification."

As his curiosity became more and more acute, he dismissed his conflicting thoughts and moved towards the stairs. Looking here and there he climbed up a few stairs but soon fear returned and he came back to the place from which he had started. Describing his condition Dr Anand writes, "He became the humble oppressed underdog that he was by birth, afraid of everything creeping slowly up, in a curiously hesitant, cringing movement." With his broom he began to collect the litter. It was a slow business but not so wearying and unpleasant as that of working at the latrines.

Again his curiosity propelled him to go up the stairs. He strengthened himself and climbed up a few more stairs and from a safe distance he saw the spectacle of the worshippers, priests and the sanctuary which had so far been a secret, a hidden mystery to him. He was wonderstruck at the sight of beautiful brass images. Bakha saw that the morning service had begun. Devout worshippers stood singing Arti in a chorus, Bakha
was profoundly moved by the song. He unconsciously joined his hands in the worship of the unknown god.

All of a sudden he heard a loud cry "polluted, polluted, polluted." He was perplexed. He knew what is meant. He saw a little man—a priest of the temple, stumbling, falling and crying, "polluted, polluted, polluted." He also saw the figure of a woman Sohini, behind the shouting priest. The crowd of devotees began to run helter-skelter. All of them were in a terrible orgy of excitement. One of them angrily shouted at Bakha and charged him of defiling their whole service. Bakha ran down the steps and went to his sister Sohini. The little priest was angrily shrieking, "You people have only been polluted from a distance. I have been defiled by contact." The crowd felt that the priest had suffered terribly. All worshippers sympathized with him but they did not ask about the way he had been polluted.

Anand concludes the novel Untouchable with a note of faith and idealism. As Bakha returns home his mind is nised with the hope that soon the flush system would come then the sweepers "can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society" (173). The manifest plea in the novel is for the total abolition of untouchability. Bakha fervently hopes for the dawn to his nature of his work and his relevance in the society without the label of 'untouchable.'

The novel Untouchable acquires human significance and social relevance when Anand meticulously brings out the inner life of Bakha. It was a growing concern for metaphoric untouchables in all cultures and walks of life. Anand also brings to focus Bakha's smouldering rage. His feelings are compared to "spurts of smoke from a self smothered fire." His unspoken words are described "as the soundless speech of cells receiving and transmitting the emotions," which one day would spit fire that is what Anand felt probably when he wrote the novel. The novelist wants humane gestures towards the underprivileged like Bakha. The novel's 'cleaness' of structure celebrates un-cleanness not so much of Bakha's work as of the minds and sensibilities of those among whom he lives. The cheap minded temple priest and the cruel townspeople and the malicious gossiping women with their assumed superior upper castedness are in striking contrast to Bakha. It is not Bakha who pollutes them so much as it is their own fear of being polluted, a fear that destroys to see the realities. The fear also dehumanises them.
The inhuman treatment meted out to Bakha in *Untouchable* could have really happened to a social outcaste during the colonial days in India, perhaps such cruelties are being perpetuated in many parts of villages even today which the objective newspapers publish. Undoubtedly, Anand had drawn upon what he had himself witnessed and heard as a boy, he brings into print in the form of a novel. As a novelist addressing himself to the task of exposing social evils, Anand has been an effective writer and he can be compared to Dickens in this respect. The novel evokes in the mind of the objective reader, the horrifying social malady that existed in the colonial days and in the subsequent decades makes a tale of socially created woe to the downtrodden in the Indian society. Perverted orthodoxy in the name of religion and the deadness of human feeling become the twin evils which systematically destroy any effort made by the government and the social organisations to eradicate the untouchability in the society.

Anand's down-to-earth portrayal of the naked realities of our social evils which are dismal and harrowing, makes *Untouchable* a social document besides being a novel first of its kind in the colonial Indian social context. Despite the legal protection offered to the untouchables in the Indian society, even now when such inhuman incidents are reported in the Indian dailies we are compelled to think the past social maladies still continue in some parts of our nation. Hence Anand’s *Untouchable* is relevant even today and if social evils are not eradicated completely in India, probably this novel all the more would become significant to the present and posterity, as a pathetic social document.

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the prominent figures in the colonial and the post-colonial Indian writing in English. His novels reveal a blend of idealism, socialism and a keen perception of the contemporary social issues. His characters long for a meaning in their living and a search for their identity. *The Two Leaves and a Bud* may be said to be essentially, a dramatic novel. It culminates in a tragic clash of interest and destinies. This novel may be said to be an extension of Coolie. Gangu, the hero of the novel is an improved version of Munoo.

The story is set in north-western part of India. He crosses India from a village near Hoshiarpur in the Punjab to the Macpherson Tea estate in distant Assam. He takes with him his wife Sajani and his children Leila and Buddhu. The tea plantation is a world within a world. The coolie Narayan tells Gangu: "I suppose it was in our kismet. But at home it was like a prison, and here it is slightly worse [ ]. First water,
afterwards mire! This prison has no bars but it nevertheless an unbreakable jail. The chowkidars keep guard over the plantation, and they bring you back if you should run [...]." The foreign investors exploit the masses. Still worse is the Indian sardars also equally exploit the masses here. But there are good Britishers like Dr John who wants to show human consideration and fellow feeling. He used to remark often "it is the country we have no right to do it." There is Croft-Cooke the boss of the plantation and his wife is highly reasonable with regard to the plantation labourers. The villain of the novel is Reggie Hunt, the assistant manager who is known for his cruelty and lust. Gangu has unwittingly walked into his trap. With all his innocence he thought that Hunt would be an honest manager. Gangu thinks that he has played into the hands of the unscrupulous people. He wanted to do hard work at the same time remain honest.

Anand brings in the pathetic condition of labourers working in the plantation. The dreadful malaria breaks out and Gangu's wife Sajani dies. Discontent gathers volume like a boil and chance collision makes it burst. When two women quarrel in the plantation Hunt behaves like a brute and some coolies are injured. An appeal is made to Croft who disregards their appeal. The coolies decide to demonstrate but division arises between the coolies. One group wants to demonstrate and the other group does not want to participate. Dr John who has sympathy for the plantation workers is summarily dismissed and leaves the scene for good. Hunt is hated by coolies and to an extent by the white community also. He approaches Leila with an ulterior motive when she is alone and she runs away. Urged by the mad lust and maddened by frustration and fear he shoots, in which Gangu is killed. A trail follows and in the judgment Hunt is declared not guilty.

The painful truth of the living condition of the labourers in the plantation is told in a gripping manner. According to Goronwyree "great skill and without insistence the Indian Coolies, exploited starving cheated dirty diseased as a true heirs of the world's great civilizations". There were angry protests between The Spectator and Mulk Raj Anand Encouraged by Ree's Review, Anand wrote in The Spectator, June 11, 1937 that he had exposed the prevailing conditions of the labourers working in the tea plantation. However Mr. Godwin, owner of a tea estate in Assam challenged Anand's view in the 20th August 1937 issue of the story in The Spectator.

Strangely Whitley who chaired the Royal Commission of Labourers had recommended the British Planters for their human treatment of labourers, working in
the plantations. Again Anand gave a rejoinder in the magazine on are September 1937 stating that Whitley report was far from the truth. But somehow the Britishers had the impression that the Indian labourers were lazy, liars and sub-human creatures. The sordid picture of the life of the labourers in the plantation somehow did not catch the attention of the rulers. To add to their woe, the Indian capitalist were also equally responsible for the sorry plight of the labourers. They were orphaned by the Indian society itself.

Anand is reported to have the facts on the spot after a meeting with Gandhi at Sabarmatt. He attacks social snobbery and social prejudice. For him the novel should change the life of the masses. He felt that the true creative ability if it put into reality should transform the society. People should strive for a change to better their living condition. His idea is that subservient mind of the masses is responsible for their own degradation. Anand displays a mature sense of writing with an objective to bring in transformation in the sleepy Indian society. He does not want meek submission to unwanted authoritarianism. The capitalist forces would take advantage of the social disintegration of the masses. That is what precisely happens in *Two Leaves and a Bud.* The injustice having been perpetuated systematically and legally by the British rulers when Gangu was killed was due to the mass disarray in the society. For a daylight murder the culprit escapes casually without even reprimand with the blessings of the judges.

The Britisher in the novel John is an ideal character which Anand has created in order to infuse some sense in the British rulers. When Gangu requests him to make recommendation to the English boss for land he tells Gangu "Yes I will do that. Certainly you ought to get land; it is in the contract of every labourer that you will have land to grow rice on when he comes here. I will see that the contract is enforced" (133). No one will believe that the Britisher would speak such a plain and honest language to an insignificant coolie. It is obvious that Anand had created the Britisher with the sole aim of exposing the crime against the labourers committed by the foreign capitalist. Gangu, being innocent takes for granted that he would get automatically one day a piece of land for himself. But to his rude shock he comes to know from Narain that the labourers can get land if only they send their daughters or wives to the estate owners. Through Narain the author shows what kind of life the labourers lead in the plantation.
Anand’s *Two Leaves and a Bud* is the result of his first-hand knowledge of the living condition of the labourers. According to H.C. Harrex that "Anand’s characterisations within the proletarian campus are strong varied and impassioned 1...1 his social criticism is usually spirited and challenging." His humanitarian protest and his desire to uplift the life of downtrodden from their degradation, he felt that it was his mission in life. He has risen above sectarian or communal outlook and consistently wrote and spoke against capitalists and pleaded for the cause of the downtrodden. Anand’s objective is humanistic but sometimes his approach is vehement and passionate. He does not believe in harrowing conditions with which the labourers live as their fate. He is rational in his approach. He believes that one day the suffering would come to an end but to make the process they have to rise.

This novel is a record of his concern for the oppressed coolies on the Tea Estates managed by the British. Poetic in style, this novel presents the pathetic life of the coolies of Assam Tea Estates. A fierce denunciation of man’s cruelty to man, *Two Leaves and a Bud* projects Anand’s humanism, his rejection of his theories of Karma and God and the destructive effects of poverty and fatalism. Anand was almost blind with rage at the cruelty inflicted on the coolies by the English capitalists and their Indian jockeys. The events in the novel are narrated in a well structured manner. The coolies are over worked and underpaid. Their living condition is inhuman. Sajani catches malaria and dies. Gangu approaches Mr. Croft for a loan to perform the last rites. He kicks out Gangu. The disappointed Gangu seeks the help of Buta, who is equally helpless.

The calm atmosphere of the estate is rudely disturbed by the quarrel between two coolie-women. Ruggie rushes to the spot and beats up the labourers. The labourers rush to house of Dr. Harve who is totally taken aback by the reaction of the labourers. He attends to them, and advises them to see the Burya Shaib and seek his help in getting justice. The mentally and physically broken coolies are too weak to protest. During their gathering at Narain’s house they learn about the futility of their attempt.

The coolies learn that those who attempted to run away from the estate in the past were to put to death. The Royal Air Force planes are summoned to instill a sense of fear in the minds of coolies. Dr. Harve is also dismissed. Miss Barbara deserts the doctor and is pleased to remain with her parents. The tiger shoot is a stage managed one. Reggie who is always with a list wants to have Leila. He approaches her when she is
alone plucking tea. Being threatened she runs for her safety. Frustrated he shoots in the melee Gangu is fatally wounded.

The trial of Reggie lasts for three days, and jury acquit him of all charges. Pertinently K.R. Srinivasa lyengar comments: "Two Leaves And A Bud may be said to be essentially a 'dramatic' novel, and certainly it culminates in a tragic clash of interests and destinies and what is fine is put out, and what is dark is triumphant".

The labourers are treated with contempt. There is no union among the labourers to expose their cause. The labourers are kept almost in a quarantine. They are prevented from conversing with each other. They were forced to live in filth. The impact of western culture interfered with the traditional patterns of living. Deprived of their roots the labourers had to suffer. The Coolies were trapped and brought here. They came with a fond hope of getting something for their survival. Srinivasa lyengar says: "Superficially, the foreign exploiters and the masses of the exploited" (the coolies) make the main pattern of tension in the novel. But quite a few of the Indians-the sardars, the mistris, the babus the warders-are exploiters too, and between them create 'an atmosphere of twisting and turning' for the coolies. On the other hand, there are also the good idealistic Britshers.'"

Mrs Croft brands the natives as "Lie-Box." The poor coolies under the stress of penury are silent. Poverty paralyses them. It is ironical to note that while the poor labour class are toiling hard, their masters waste their time over a cup of tea discussing the weather condition oblivious of the living condition of the poor. The Britshers maintain their superiority over the Coolies by their lavish dress and they sent shock and fear to the coolies. They carefully guarded their polo grounds and houses while black coolies were left to fend for themselves. The privileged class violated the human rights of the poor.

This novel brought to light the inhuman cruelty perpetrated by the whites. Anand felt so outraged at this inhuman treatment that he painted the exploiters in the darkest hue and in consequence the British Government had banned this book.

Anand inaugurated a new era in the Indo-Anglican literature by choosing to depict the pathetic plight of the poor and underdogs. He rejects fate and points out that all these are man made and the result of the meekness of the masses. This novel is a more powerful diatribe than Untouchable and Coolie. It exposes the ways by which the
Britishers exploited the ignorant labourers. The trains to Assam serve as traps to transport the innocent coolies. This novel highlights the problems that the humble face in the society. The poor though virtuous are unable to outdo the social oppression and suppression. Their life is a tale of continuous suffering and struggle with no end in sight. The author lays emphasis on the human dignity and humanity. His uniqueness lies in his contribution to literature in his choice of the meek as the protagonist of his fictions.

Mulk Raj Anand's Coolie, a novel of deep social anger against the plight of the poor in India was published in 1936. In her Introduction to the 1985 Indian Reprint Saros Cowasjee observed that India's predicament after twenty-five years of freedom was a vindication of Anand's painful assertion of the meaninglessness of political freedom without change of heart (7). sixty-three years into Independence, one must with considerable shame admit that very little has changed in the lives of the poor in India, and Coolie, a novel of yesteryears written during the British Raj, could well be a socio-literary representation of India's struggling millions today.

Coolie, an international best seller, is Anand's most popular novel next to Untouchable. While the latter gave form and life to the evils of caste discrimination in society, the former details the rigours of child labour, the exploitation, cruelty and abuse of children that has taken stubborn root in the socio-economic soil of our land. The novel highlights the loss of precious childhood, the hardships and privations experienced at the hands of adults motivated by greed for gain, selfishness, heartlessness, and callousness in destroying irrevocably that tender shoot of humanity that ought to find protection and nurture from the adult world.

The story of Munoo finds all too familiar replays in the present. Drought, debt and bad harvests have led to deprivation of the family's five acres. He has watched his father die a slow death and his widowed mother succumb to her struggle against grinding poverty. At fourteen, he is farmed out of his village in the hills, to work for a family in the town-losing his friends, playmates and dreams of betterment through education, to embark on a drudging routine of household chores and errands accompanied by generous insults and heaped humiliations.

While Child Labour laws exist, and the Indian Constitution bars the employment of children below the age of fourteen, it is well-known that the daily plight
of millions of children is no different today than that of Anand's Munoo in 1936. NGO, World Vision of India's fundraiser pamphlet depicting the faces of needy children against the backdrop of the national flag appeals: "They too need their Independence," and describes the life of Mini that closely parallels that of Munoo, only younger: eight years old, orphaned, working as a domestic servant, beaten, never paid—a real life character who lives out the life of Anand's fictional Munoo. So, while many films today assert that their characters are purely fictitious and do not bear resemblance to real persons living or dead, Anand's protagonist Munoo could be any one of millions of India's children trapped early in an unending and vicious cycle of bondage and debt, finding release only in premature death.

Thus arises the question of the relevance of literature to life and to society. Social writers like Mulk Raj Anand, who finds kinship with Charles Dickens, are expected to effect social change. In their hands, literature is propagandist and meant to stir society's conscience against the terrible hurts and pain they depict. Anand's Untouchable (1935) won acclaim in India and abroad for its treatment of the caste problem. Yet caste is still a burning issue in India today. Likewise, Coolie is clearly anti-child labour in its stance, yet child labour is rampant and appears to be well on its way into twenty-first century Indian society. Literature or legislation? Which will it be to ultimately change society? Can we depend on literature to awaken social conscience and the voluntary forsaking of undesirable attitudes and practices in society; or does it take legislation to enforce the change? Then again, when legislation fails, is it the artist who must appeal to the emotions for a change of heart?

If the success of the social novel is judged by its effectiveness in achieving social change, Mulk Raj Anand's two best novels Untouchable and Coolie must be considered failures. As tools of societal change they have accomplished little. To what then does Anand's work owe its reputation and worldwide acclaim having been translated into thirty-eight languages and attracted prestigious awards? Does the story of the child Munoo create a sentimental picture of Indian life, with exotic and maudlin imagery that appeals to Western readers distanced by variance of culture? Is the recognition merely one that is awarded to an Indian writer for his excellent style and usage of the language of the British masters? One must not fail to consider the complex vocation of the artist in seeking to resolve these questions.
Does the artist work solely with a purpose towards a social cause, or does his work display a personality that is especially endowed with heightened sensibilities—sensitivity to his surroundings, to the social milieu, to other human beings, so that he feels their pain, speaks their heartaches and becomes a voice of the voiceless? How do Anand's novels rate as works of Art? How does Coolie rate as a work of art? Is it valuable as an artistic masterpiece? Does it speak to one as a great painting speaks to one?

Even a single reading of Coolie gives the reader new eyes to see and opens up a whole new world. One cannot look at a rag picker, a rickshaw puller, or a domestic child servant, in the same way again. The writer suffers with his protagonist. In Anand we glimpse the writer as conscience, as he marches to a different drummer. He is not as others, ordinary, accepting. He does not see superficially but ahead of his time. Writing at a time when the underdog was not a persona for celebration or even representation, Anand looked upon the poor, the downtrodden, the outcaste with rare eyes of compassion. In a society that not only accepted but, in fact, thrived on inequality and injustice, Anand saw people as people and recognized the human soul in the lowliest individual. The inevitability of servitude in Pre-Independence India was a given. Nobody, neither the British, nor better placed Indians, could conceive of a social fabric bereft of servants, bonded labourers, slaves if truth be told. That daily life would grind to a halt without their services did not merit them just wages.

Religious sanction backed caste-based inequities and the colonial set up did not require moral questioning of attitudes and treatment toward the servitor. Into such a society, Mulk Raj Anand focuses the searchlight of his perception, bringing into perspective the possibility of a renewed vision of the poor, the helpless and hopeless. His work follows in the tradition of pro-Black writers awakening the conscience of white America, smug in the complacency of the slave run economy of the South, where the Black was not recognized as human.

The question of morality, Christian or otherwise, did not therefore operate with regard to their treatment. Mulk Raj Anand as a literary does artist this for India, inspiring a rethink of social values and attitudes toward the poor and needy, when no thought of the problems of the poor was considered necessary. S.J. Patel in a study of agricultural labourers in modern India and Pakistan traces the evolution of landless labour in British India. He provides the social background and valuable insights into
the period of Anand's *Coolie* which help one better appreciate Anand's achievement as a social writer and also to empathize more fully with his fictional characters. Patel asserts that Pre-British India was a self-sufficient, inter-Independent agrarian society in which landless labourers, as a class did not exist. Census returns for the first four decades of the twentieth century, however, reflect drastic changes in Indian rural society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Census returns for 1931, prior to the period of publication of *Coolie* show that "by then agricultural labourers came to form close to two-fifths of the agricultural population of India; their proportion virtually tripled from nearly thirteen per cent in the late nineteenth century to thirty-eight per cent in 1931, thus indicating that they had become numerically the largest group, a remarkable increase that reflects the most dramatic social transformation in the entire history of Indian rural society."

This disintegration of the traditional agrarian society and the increase in the size of the newly born class of landless agricultural labourers is attributed to the land policies pursued by the British in India from late eighteenth centur, onward. The British introduced the zamin'darl settlement, which created large individual landlords in the eastern region in 1793; the raiyatwari settlement, which dealt with individual small peasant landlords in the Southern Triangle; and the mahalwari settlement, which dealt with the village elders in their capacity as landlords in the North. They completely sidetracked the traditional institution of village community in all these settlements and overhauled the manner and mode of revenue payment.

The Act of 1793 declared former tax-gathers (zamindars) who were no more than agents of the former governments for the collection of land revenue, full proprietors of the area over which their rights of revenue collection extended. Thus, millions of landholders and cultivators were rudely dispossessed and turned overnight from proprietors to tenants at will. Patel attributes this to British greed: "In the whole history of mankind, ancient or modern, one would look in vain for a parallel to this classic example wherein so many were sacrificed in such a short time so that a few may prosper or rule."

In the raiyatwari system, the individual cultivator was expected to pay a fixed sum of cash to the government twice a year-crop or no crop. Failure to pay the revenue in time resulted in forfeiture of land. Cultivators had never handled coin in their lives

185
since circulation of money in the countryside had barely developed, and were poor in pecuniary terms, unable to convert superfluity of grain into money for taxes. Land hitherto unsaleable in Pre-British India, and valueless until cultivated, was made transferable by law under the British, with legal machinery to enforce the transfers. Land thus became a security against monetary advances and eligible for foreclosure. As cultivators sank deeper into debt during years of famine, sickness and natural calamities, their property easily passed out of their hands. Thus the dispossession of the peasantry swelled the ranks of landless labour in British India.

Indistinguishable in status from the landless labourers, but not categorized as such, were the large group of "dwarf-holding labourers." These were petty cultivators who held less than five acres of land but were in fact no better off than their landless counterparts. They were exploited by middlemen and absentee landlords who gained a greater margin of profit by sharecropping their land rather than through employment of landless labour. On an average, more than half the farmers in the country cultivated small patches of less than five acres as dwarf-holders, maintaining a very precarious hold on their land and, being prey to circumstances, were likely to lose it at anytime.

Given this background, it is not difficult to contextualize the life story of Anand's Munoo who, at the opening of the novel, recalls the circumstances in which his father is divested of his five acres by the landlord to whom he owed rent money and interest on his mortgage. The loss of the land leads the family to rack and ruin and catapults the orphaned boy into his own interminable struggle as a child labourer.

Coolie has a very simple linear plot structure. The action begins when fourteen-year-old orphan, Munoo, has to leave his village home to earn his livelihood in the town. The novel follows a picaresque tradition as Munoo goes from misadventure to misadventure to untimely death. First, he is placed as a domestic servant with a family in the town of Sham Nagar. This turns out to be a painful experience, He runs away and is taken by Seth Prabha Dyal whom he meets on the train, to his home at Daulatpur, where he earns his keep working in his benefactor's jam and pickle enterprise.

When the business fails and his master goes bankrupt, Munoo is left to fend for himself as a coolie in the vegetable market and the railway station. Next, he moves
to Bombay, where he joins the great masses struggling to eke out a living in the great city. Finally, an accident brings him back to the hills, to Simla, where he works for an Anglo-Indian lady, as her rickshaw puller. Munoo is only sixteen when he dies of tuberculosis. In his death Anand evokes a reader response similar to Dickens' evocation, at the death of little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. It is a sadness that comes at the prolonged suffering and needless death of the young and the innocent.

In Munoo, Anand describes a boy who is reluctant to leave home, giving up his childhood, pleasant days of companionship, and his education: "For in spite of the fact that his aunt was always abusing him, in spite of the fact that she ordered him about [...I in spite of the fact that she beat him more than he beat his cattle, he really did not want to go to the town. At least not yet" (*Coolie*, 19).

He has no inkling of what lies ahead and is surprised to see hill folk like himself in the town "as they carried weights on their backs. He could not realize the significance of this world" (19). His initial awe at the novelty of town life gives way to despair as he is unaccustomed to housework, is nagged and harassed by the woman of the house, and experiences first-hand the divide between servant and employer, between rich and poor. He is not allowed to play with the children of the family, to gawk at visitors, or to indulge his childhood curiosity to watch with fascination the gramophone being played. He embarrasses himself and earns the curses of his employers on the very first day when he relieves himself against the steps of their home.

What does Child Labour do to the heart of a child? Munoo's soul is slowly crushed. The happy child, curious wonderstruck, "tracing the colours, the shapes and sizes of all things, enquiring into their meanings" (44) yearns for love, is stung by insults and slowly settles into "the routine of domestic slavery," though not easily: "the wild bird of his heart fluttered every now and then with the desire for happiness." His identity is clarified for him: "It did not occur to him to ask himself what he was apart from being a servant." He promises himself that he would be a good servant, a perfect model of a servant, and soon learns to accept a lower status: "These people were superior [...I. What constituted their superiority, he did not know [...I thoroughly convinced of his inferiority, he accepted his position as a slave and tried to instill into his mind the notion of his brutishness that his mistress had so often nagged him about" (44-48).
Coolie highlights the causes and effects of migration through the predicament of Munoo. Poverty forces people from the villages to migrate to the towns and cities in search of a livelihood as Munoo is forced to Sham Nagar, then to Daulatabad and on to Bombay. Whether children take up employment to augment family income or to support themselves, adults exploit them and appropriate their earnings. Most often there is a relative collecting on their behalf: "How can I get you the you ou want, and shoes, if you spend all the pay money which I am keeping for you?" says his uncle Daya Ram, when Munoo ask for some money for food (61). They are never paid: "We need another boy to run errands and do odd jobs. And it seems, he will be glad enough to have the food, and we need not pay him," speculates Prabha's partner when he suggests taking the runaway Munoo home with them from the train (79).

Whatever the apprehensions and sadness at leaving home, migration provides hope - hope of freedom from starvation, and the prospect of a better life. As the train nears Daulatabad city, Munoo experiences "a curious flutter of excitement in his heart, like the thrill of fear and happiness which had filled him when he first laid eyes on Sham Nagar--the fear of the unknown in his bowels and the stirring of hope for a wonderful life in the new world he was entering" (81). It is the same excitement that calms his overwhelming fears on approaching Bombay, as "his heart lightened for a moment with the joy of seeing the sea for the first time in his life" (175). But disillusionment is inevitable: "The bigger the city, the more cruel it is to the sons of Adam" (177). Wherever he goes there is pain and struggle and hopelessness. In Sham Nagar, it did not take long for him to wake up to the rude reality of his true status and the menial life he was fated to in Babu Nathu Ram's household. in Bombay his heart sank: "Even here the coolies sleep in the street! lie suddenly realised, and the memory of the words of the coolie who had said money was strewn about the streets of Bombay sounded falsely hollow in his brain" (179).

The importance of money emphasized again and again in the novel must be seen against the background of bonded labour in the agrarian set up of the 1930s. The immediate cause of slavery and bondage in India was monetary. The relationship of debtor and creditor in rural India evolved into virtual slavery for the former and absolute dominance by the latter because of the need for advances of money, and the inability to repay. Systems of guaranteed subsistence broke down with the disintegration of the traditional systems, and menials had to accept bondage to avoid starvation. Absence
of means to livelihood meant the bondmen were freed only to starve. The prevalent situation ensured that nearly half of farm servants were monetary bonded labourers—a system that Patel notes could not have existed in the non monetary economy of the earlier century (63).

'Money is everything,' his uncle had said on the day of his journey to town. 'Money is, indeed everything,' Munoo thought [...]. No, caste does not matter [...]. All servants look alike: there must be only two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor.' (69)

In Bombay, again, the protestors recognized. There are only two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor [...]. And between the two there is no connection. The rich and the powerful, [...]. Whose opulence is built on robbery and theft [...]. I am honored and admired by the whole world [...]. You the poor and the humble [...]. I swindled out of your rights and broken in body and soul are respected by no one. (266-67)

Munoo's life comes full circle when he leaves Bombay and is brought to Simla. Again, it is to someone else's convenience: Mrs Mainwaring, like Prabha before him, sees in him a potentially good servant. The description of his illness and death by tuberculosis is oppressive. It is understandable only in the sociological and historical context: This was the fate of many like him at the time. Bringing the story up into the present—that seems justified considering legislation and time have brought little change—we think of Munoo's dreams for his future, as a young student in fifth class, an aspiring engineer: "He had dreamed, of course, of all the wonderful things which the village folk spoke about when they came back from the towns [...]. He was especially interested in machines such as he had read about in the science premier of the fourth class. But he had meant to go to town when he had passed all his examination here and was ready to learn to make machines himself" (11-12).

Viewed from a modern vantage point also, Munoo represents the typical victim of circumstances that push children into the work force. Helen Sekar and Noor Mohammed in their study Child Labour in Home Based Lock Industries of Ailgarh, make pertinent observations regarding child labour in a specific context, but which apply in general as well:14
Child labour is rampant in small manufacturing units, which employ labour intensive techniques. (35)

Extreme poverty is the cause of child labour. Working children migrate to the city due to poverty. Migrant households seek hope of a better employment. (57)

Child labourers are individual workers on a time-rate basis working five to ten hours daily. They are very low paid, have no social security and are unorganized. (131)

80% of child workers suffering chronic illness have occupational diseases, TB, Asthma, Cardiac problems, mental problems. (132)

A majority of children are positive about education. They like to go to school, but are pulled out by their parents due to financial hardship for earning. The drop out rate is highest in the fourth and fifth standard. (138)

Sekar and Mohammed perceive no major change in the wake of legislation. Implementation of Labour Legislation is ineffective. (120)

What hope then do the readers have to offer the Munos of today? President Abdul Kalam in INDIA 2020: A Vision for the New Millennium, envisions positive change in Indian society by the year 2020. He focuses on the Agricultural sector and suggests remedies for the plight of farmers; the Health sector especially health care provision to the poor, AIDS, tuberculosis and other major challenges to public health; Child Labour; and Education. He expresses a compassionate view in the dispensing of health care: "Health administrators should learn to treat health as people's pain and agony, not as files. Similarly politicians at all levels should learn to look at pain removal as a part of their duty" (240). Children hold a special place in his estimation: "I would not like to give any special message to young children because they themselves are born with the message. They are fresh. I would therefore appeal to parents and teachers not to pollute their fresh minds with our own frustrations. If we can instead convey to them the message about a bright future and encourage them, that will be a great service we will be doing to them and also to the country" (293). It is hoped this message will take root and spread so that his vision may become a reality for the deprived children of India to realize their dreams and fulfill their potential for the future.

The country is passing through an ugly phase of 'contrariness'. The recent emphatic win of India over Pakistan in the current edition of the ICC Cricket World
Cup 2011 vindicates this. The euphoria was definitely not an expression of unalloyed joy over India’s cricket victory but something beyond. On the one hand, fireworks lit up the night sky with sweets being distributed and announcements of awards and concessions to the players who were earlier cursed and denounced but now glorified and deified. On the other hand, violence was unleashed creating a free-for-all situation with deaths reported and the injured being rushed to hospitals and the clamping of curfew. Both forms of ventilation of feelings border on madness. All these point to the truth. “The demons of communal hatred are not out on the street …… they are lurking inside ourselves.” William Golding’s phrase in Lord of the Flies ‘the end of innocence, the darkness of man’s heart’ corroborate this further.

The well-known stage director Alyque Padamsee muses: “Can we shake off our prejudices or are they in our psyche like our genes? Will we ever be free or ever locked in combat …… Arabs against Jews, whites against blacks, Hindus against Muslims? Are there any final solutions?” this is exactly what Mahesh Dattani attempts to do in his Final Solutions. Final Solutions examines the so-called liberal attitude to communalism. We can discern, in this play, the repulsive, frenzied, perfidious power of the perpetrators of such crimes. Dattani highlights the deep sense of futility of such bloody acts of violence. This play was staged by Bombay Theatre group. Doubtless, there is a reference to issues drawn from the 1992 riots in Bombay.

Mahesh Dattani is one of the few leading Indian English dramatists. Other popular names in this genre are Gurcharan Das, Gieve Patel, Shashi Tharoor, Uma Parameswaran and Manjula Padmanabhan. The greatness of Dattani lies in the fact that he expresses himself easily and naturally in a voice loud and clear.

A reading of Mahesh Dattani’s plays brings to the fore many burning issues that beset the post – Independence Indian society. A patient review of some of these social concerns will greatly help in understanding and appreciating both the playwright and his predominately middle - class characters. It can be stated that every one of these central thematic issues stem from the opposition between tradition and modernity in perception of matters relating to core human relationships like love, sex, marriage and even faith.

Gay relations – homosexuality – is one of the issues that figures prominently in some of his plays. On a Muggy Night in Mumbai deals with this sensitive subject.
While the traditionalists consider such a relationship as something unnatural, obnoxious and even sacrilegious, the gays think otherwise. They are a happy and proud lot. They would even like to assert their true identity and sanctity. “The play presents a group of well-to-do homosexuals in Bombay, their changing mutual relationship, their revelations, their self – delusions and self – discoveries. Though they are all sailing in the same boat, each has his / her own oar to put in, his / her own flag to hoist. Kamlesh is weak and sensitive : Shared is his exact opposite, with his jaunty nonchalance. Ed assumes a double identity, with Prakash as his second avatar. Bunny is true to the ‘kindred point’ of home and the Homo Den; he is a good husband at home and a very competent one in his bedroom, while he enjoys himself as a gay soul in the company of the initiated. Ranjit solves his problem by going abroad where he feels he will be more readily accepted; and Deepali is a militant lesbian, who declares, ‘Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am a woman’. Totally free of guilt, she is strong and bold enough to strike Ed when he becomes violent. The wedding music heard constantly in the background in the final Act is an ironic commentary on the lives of these homosexuals for whom ‘marriage’ can only be a doubly dirty twice – four letter word.’ It must be noted that this is the least produced of Dattani’s plays. The reason is that directors flight shy of its unusual subject. But Dattani went ahead with courage to direct a film Mango Souffle based on this play.

In Do the Needful, Alpesh, a ‘thirty-plus and divorced’ gay Gujarati boy is forced to marrying a ‘twenty-four and notorious’ South Indian girl named Lata. Interestingly, Lata is in love with a married Muslim terrorist, Salim. But, both Alpesh and Lata hoodwink their parents (a microcosm of middle – class society) by pretending to put on a semblance of an ideal couple when the truth is that they choose to go their own ways. Naturally, the hypocrisy of such arranged hotchpotch marriages for ‘convenience’ stands exposed.

Discrimination against the girl child (a microcosm of the world of woman) is handled boldly by Dattani in his play, Tara. The play deals with the courage and strong will of a handicapped Siamese twin who could have survived but further mother’s unwise and preferential decision to give up the extra leg to her twin brother, Chandan. “Tara, a feisty girl who isn’t given the opportunities given to her brother (although she may smarter) eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to
London, changes his name to Dan, and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister's death by living without a personal history."

Gender identity is yet another theme that dominates the plays of Mahesh Dattani. Dance like a Man questions the priority of a man over stepping his jurisdiction by taking to dancing, Bharatnatyam. He is ostracized for he chooses to dance like a woman though his dancing is a way of expressing his identity. The social bias against the art of dance among men is highlighted in this play. Jairaj, the protagonist is shown the door because he goes against the expressed wishes of his father in choosing to dance his way through life. This lands him in great difficulty; he finds it hard to eke out a living. Naturally, after his father's death he destroys all things that are dear to his father. He does not even spare the rose garden.

Bravely Fought the Queen questions the male and female roles in society. The Queen in the title refers to the famous Rani of Jhansi. But in this play Dattani depicts the plight of helpless women victims of male tyranny. With the delineation of Baa, he handles the mother-son relationship. Baa is the mother of Jiten and Niten. She is an invalid who has been ditched by her husband. Embittered that she is, she sets up her sons against their wives. This act of being vindictive because of an angry and sad past is seen in other plays of Dattani as well. Jiten beats his wife Dolly when she is in an advanced stage of pregnancy. This results in her child being born deformed. Niten is a homosexual and so his wife Alkha has her own tale of woe to narrate. Dattani's treatment of this mother-son relationship takes on psychological overtones.

Seven Steps Around the Fire deals with the suppression of the marginalized hijra community. Uma Rao's research on this ancient tribe brings into focus the hypocrisy and repression that 'the big shots' are capable of because they are beyond the reach of law. Again in this play one observes how the Police Officer refuses to subject himself to any medical examination to rule out the barrenness of his wife due to his impotency. This bias of squarely blaming the women for her barren state is another societal phenomenon that Dattani exposes.

In Where There's a Will, one meets characters drawn from two generations: the father and the mother in Hasmukh and Sonal Mehta, and Ajit their son and his wife Preeti. Hasmukh is not happy about the prodigal behavior of his son and also with the vainglorious attitude of his wife, Sonal. What he expects is implicit
obedience to him, as he practiced it in his father's case. When things drift away from his control he thinks of a checkmate. He creates a trust and appoints his mistress Kiran Jhaveri its trustee. This move renders all the members of the family to the position of pensioners. Even after his death, Hasmukh haunts his house as a ghost. The evils of patriarchy take centrestage in this play. Dattani covertly asserts that where there is a will there is a way.

The danger of HIV/AIDS, like terrorism, is of global concern. Fully comprehending the fatal implications of its spread, Dattani wrote out the script for the film Ek Alog Mausam (A Different Season). The film is about a woman who is HIV positive and the traumatic experiences she undergoes – some of the worst moments of her life. Dattani sees life in this deadly disease when he stresses the need to show love when it is most needed. He strongly feels it would augur well for us if AIDS does not have to be about inevitable death, but rather about life and a celebration of it. He remarks about the storyline of the film: "It moves away from just being a film about AIDS. It is about human dignity and pride, that as a civilized society we do not have the right to break. Thematically, it is about the triumph of the human spirit. It is a love story; after all, romance is an evergreen theme, but it's about love at a time when you need it most."

That Dattani is a talented Director could be substantiated by his first directional venture on the silver screen Mango Souffle. This film was released in Bangalore, Mumbai, Pune and New Delhi on February 28, 2003. "Screened at film festivals at Bangkok, Austin, and the Sydney Mardi Gras since August 2002, Mango Souffle is the official Indian selection of the London gay and lesbian film festival. It is slated to be shown at Turin, Toronto, San Francisco and Tokyo."

Thus, Mahesh Dattani through his plays focus on many contemporary social issues. "I write for my milieu, for my time and place – middle – class and urban India .... My dramatic tensions arise from people who aspire to freedom from society .... I am not looking for something sensational, which audiences have never seen before .... Some subjects, which are under – explored, deserve their space. It’s no use brushing them under the carpet. We have to understand the marginalized, including the gays. Each of us has a sense of isolation within given contexts. That’s what makes us individual." This playwright / film personality cannot be easily sidelined because
of his contemporaneity. The greatness of Dattan lies in the fact that he is one who believes that theatre is an art with a function.

After reading the plays included in the anthology Collected Plays by Mahesh Dattani filled with admiration for the man as he had the far sight of focusing on such issues which are sidled by the prominent writers of today. Mostly the writers are concentrated on the feministic issues of today - feminism being a hot topic of the century. Whereas Mahesh Dattani makes himself conspicuous by picking up such sensational issues of the society which we know and read now and then but refuse to acknowledge their existence amidst us.

Besides being the most controversial issues, their discussion at times becomes very embarrassing and is likely to be refuted by the society. But one personally feels that in order to critically judge and of course given an unprejudiced verdict, one has to face reality and look into one's face straight without hiding behind the false curtain of social dogmas. Mahesh Dattani's daredevil attitude towards society and its loopholes is surely commendable and has impressed one a lot. Such playwrights and their deep study of the false ego of the society will definitely do something to sieve the dirt out of the society and make it a better place for one and all. All the eight plays are different from each other in substance. Each of them deals with different hurdles in the path of a progressive society.

*Seven Steps Around the Fire* is all about marriage of a beautiful hijra Kamla to a son of a wealthy government minister named Subbu. This shocking revelation culminated into the murder of Kamla. The society accepts a hijra for gracing the ceremonies of marriage and births but would not allow them to partake of such ceremonies. The author has ironically portrayed this aspect which would not have been given any heed, for any matter related to them is of no importance to anyone. The heart - rending story about a hijra murdered simply because she fell in love with Subbu, a young man having a status of importance in society, fills us with horror and sense of injustice. But do you think we would do anything to help the hijra community and allow them a place of recognition in society and deal with them with compassion. No, that cannot be done. One would stand aside like mute spectators and look down our nose at them who are considered lower than the low.
On a Muggy Night in Mumbai is a tragicomedy which deals with homosexuals. In the play, Sharad and Deepali and though comfortable with each other have different ways of being gay. More stress is laid on the character of Kamlesh and Prakash who is also Ed and romances with Kamlesh’s sister Kiran. Initially Kamlesh and Prakash were ardent lovers when Prakash suddenly turncoats and changes into Ed, wearing the garb of a handsome guy, head over heels in love with Kiran, who unfortunately happens to be Kamlesh’s sister. Kamlesh playing the role of a humble lover resigns himself to the changed situation without complaining. Nevertheless, his sexual needs are fulfilled by Sharad, his friend. He shocks us a bit by stooping down to mating with a guard for which he is ashamed of himself. Prakash who had now changed to Ed suddenly emerges into the room and the scene to meet Kamlesh’s sister and bumping into Kamlesh is revived of his earlier crush on Kamlesh. Nonetheless Prakash / Ed is ashamed of being a homosexual and tries to leave the place with Kiran as soon as possible. To escape the cynical eyes of the others who knew about his relationship with Kamlesh. Kiran is shown to having all compassion for the gay people and wishes they could marry for happiness of her brother who she knew was a homosexual. The irony of the whole story is that the poor girl did not know that the man to whom she was going to get married was a homosexual and an ex-lover of her brother. The revelation in the end comes as a shock to her. The whole story throws light on the growing homosexuality and its non-acceptance by the Indian society. At one stage, Kiran innocently remarks : ‘I really wish they would allow gay people to marry’ to which Ranjit cynically replies ‘They do only not to the same sex’. This again is an upcoming burning issue of today which is dealt in an adept way by Mahesh Dattani. Every second person may be a homosexual but fear of ostracism restrains him from exposing himself. Through this play, Mahesh Dattani has tried to soften the society towards the gay and subtly tried to stir up compassion for this class.

Do the needful is another play which deals with another phase of complex relationship. In this play, the dual problem of love and homosexuality is deftly handled, Lata, the female character, loves Salim a Muslim belonging to a separate community and above all is a terrorist. Their marriage being an impossible event, Lata resorts to an incompatible marriage with Alpesh, a homosexual, whose homosexuality proves to be a feasible cover-up for meeting their respectable lovers – Lata and Salim; Alpesh and Trilok. Throughout the play, we are taken aback by Lata’s indifference
and stubborn attitude towards her expectant parents and at the same time thwarted by Alpesh’s placidity and indecision towards marriage. Though towards the end it is finally Lata who embarks upon putting forth her reluctance to marry Alpesh before him, it is only then he tells her about his refusal on their marriage.

The Indians hold the institution of marriage with great esteem. Treatment of this great institution as a trifle contract to facilitate their selfish ends fills us with great distaste. Both Lata and Alpesh could see no way out of the marriage arranged by their parents and were not ready to give up their respective lovers, so they strike upon a halfway through, which was suitable to both of them. But the path which both of them choose is a default and desecrates the sanctity of marriage and can never be acceptable to our society. This play stirs the feeling of misgiving for the characters – Lata and Alpesh. Though such characters may be existing in our midst but such blatant disregard for a sanctuous ceremony fills us with horror. No sooner Lata and Alpesh marry than they decide how to deceive their family and go and meet their respective lovers.

*Final Solutions* is a play outwardly focused on Hindu – Muslim incompatibility but inwardly full of mutual disagreements amongst the family members. The clash between fanaticism of Hindus versus fanaticism of Muslims is highlighted. Lack of accommodation between the two communities and unacceptability gives rise to acrimony resulting in terrorism and anarchy. The play itself is a question mark on this age-old enmity between the two communities wondering if there would ever be a final solution to this endemic problem.

Love does not restrict itself to religion, caste and creed is evident from Smita’s hidden love for Babban, one of the outsiders. Her mother Aruna, a staunch Hindu lady believing in purity and distance for the other community, faces opposition from her daughter Smita, who is thwarted by her mother’s indifference towards Babban.

The electrified atmosphere within the house amongst the family members who have personal grudges against each other for their own reasons, facilitate the rioters Bobby and Javed to thrive on them and consequently save themselves from being destroyed by the mob thirsting for their blood, outside the house. To the readers, Ramnik Gandhi would seem to be a brave man who fortified himself against the Hindu crowd who seemed hatred personified to save the two Muslim rioters, but it
was all out of resentment for his father's black deeds which he wanted to vent upon his mother Hardika who was shocked by his attitude and terrified by the consequences of her son's stubbornness.

Much could not be achieved out of the good act put up by Ramnik Gandhi as the roots of hatred and unacceptability are deep - rooted and require time and untiring efforts on both the sides to root out the tree of hatred.

*Bravely Fought the Queen* is a play which deals with women from rich families who enjoy recreating themselves with beautifying themselves and indulging in vigorous shopping sprees, parties, balls etc. basically they are highly disappointed and distraught ladies who try to find solace in such activities. Alka and Dolly are two such ladies who make untiring and useless effort to drown their sorrows in booze and sex. Alka who is a perfect alcoholic pours out her venom towards her husband and brother-in-law in a drunken state. Her thirst for freedom and mobility from constant confinement in the house is seen when she goes out into the rain and dance in the mud regardless of spoiling her expensive sari. Nitin is a homosexual and consequently is unable to satiate his wife's desire which is also a source of pain for Alka.

Nitin and Praful had sexual relationship between them and one learns at the latter half of the play from Nitin's conversation with his mother that Praful tricked him into marrying his sister, Alka. No wonder he had no attraction or concern for Alka which becomes obvious from the same piece of conversation where he further says that he did not care if Alka stayed there or left or drank herself to death. He is over - awed by the lengthening impact of Praful over his life. He is portrayed as 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.

Jiten on other hand is shown to be a cruel, imposing and most discourteous man who did not have the courtesy to talk politely to a lady. His rudeness to Laltiha, Sridhar's wife is an example to support this. Jiten's character is a stark contrast to Nitin's. Jiten maintains a simultaneous life with prostitutes, whom he entertains in his office. Any opposition from his accounts officer Shridhar is met with threat to his job. In a nutshell, in this play, Dattani depicts the bizarre picture of high - class society.
The play’s name *Bravely Fought the Queen* centres on Alka who fights with Jiten right on his face even in her drunken state. She even goes to the extent of calling Jiten a leech.

*Tara* is again a play in which Mahesh Dattani picks up an issue which is glaring in the society and itches an Indian female in every walk of life. The preference of a boy child over a girl child forms the infrastructure of the play. The girl may be more enterprising than the boy but what is the great deal in it, she nevertheless fails in the race of favour. Both the twins revel in their love for each other and adoration of their parents. Everything shatters into irretrievable pieces when they come to know about the manipulation of their separation by their mother and grandfather, Tara eventually dies and Chandan escapes to London to hide his guilt which he feels strangely over his sister’s death. This issue is quite prevalent in India and whether it is an educated or uneducated family, inclination towards a male-child is blithering and consequently the rising graph of female infanticide is mind-boggling.

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

*Dance Like a Man* is a Chennai based play where dance is an integral part of life. The characters in this play Jairaj, Ratna and their daughter Lata are dancers. Ratna believes that her daughter should soar to such heights which she could not achieve because of opposition from Jairaj’s father Amritlal. She considers herself a failure and for this she blames Jairaj. She vents her frustration on Jairaj and accuses him of being a jelly in front of his dominating father.
The impact of patriarchal authority in a joint family and kowtowing of the rest of the family members before their decisions has been specifically spotlighted in this play by Mahesh Dattani. Though now-a-days, nuclear families have become more prevalent in India, traces of joint families could still be found. The result of such high-handedness is quite natural as in the play. No sooner did Amritlal close his eyes than Jairaj changed absolutely starting by alteration in the house. Too much of stringency leads to revolt which, though remains undercover, gushes forth whenever it find an outlet.

Where There's a Will is another play in which Mahesh Dattani has depicted another aspect of patriarchal dominance. Let it be daughter, wife, daughter-in-law or mistress, all are dependent on man for financial and physical security. Man has always taken up woman as a liability and a source of requirement. Women have been looked down upon by men as an object to meet their needs. They should be there to cook their food, smile cordially at his friends, run around attending to their needs and sexually satisfy them whenever they have the urge. If the wife is unable to satisfy the husband then there is always a mistress to do that. That mistress also is subject to compulsion to kowtow before him for he may be having reins to her weaknesses. Everything finally boils down to one conclusion, which is the autocratic nature of man discreetly dealt with by Dattani in this play. Hasmukh Mehta is an autocrat and cynical man who always criticizes his son and wife also looks askance at his daughter-in-law. To him they are all his enemies trying to squander away his hard earned money. He also had a mistress name Kiran Jhaveri about whom he had a high opinion and had made the trustee of his property. His family was ignorant about his second relationship and its revelation was shocking to them which came their way after his death. But here the difference between a man and woman has been discreetly outlined by Dattani. Hasmukh being a man was arrogant and tactless and therefore was unable to make place in the hearts of his family members, whereas Kiran Jhaveri being his mistresses, had impressed Sonal so much that she became her confidante. Ajit and Preeti also accepted her as one of them and were quite at ease with her. Hasmukh Mehta, whose spirit was a mute -- watcher of all the developments in his house after his death was greatly disappointed and thwarted to see his mistress take the place amongst his family members which he had desired throughout his life.
The various plays written by Mahesh Dattani and enacted in different theatres of the country and felicitated world-wide, gives us a glimpse into such hidden issues that have been existing and unconsciously accepted by us. But such issues have never been given so much importance as to find their way into print. To pull them out from under the rug and display them threadbare is an uphill task and requires grit and forbearance which Dattani has proved that he has.

Indian English drama has been thriving on translations and adaptations as far as serious substantial theatre is concerned. And the whole spectacle of Indian English stage fades into insignificance if it is not for a few names like Mahesh Dattani. Dattani is one of the most significant contemporary playwrights writing in English. His plays artfully touch some of the most serious concerns of our society today.

‘Naturalism’ is the expression that comes to mind when one reflects on the plays of Mahesh Dattani. The subjects of his plays not only reflect life but they deal with life head on. Gay relations, communal violence, human relations and the ordinary, untouched, unthought conflicts between son and father, husband and wife, lovers etc. are tackled with a skilled frankness. That Mahesh Dattani is a successful playwright is no more a contested issue. His art is revealed in his rendering of contemporary social problems in a manner that is unique to him. His characters are fully rounded men and women, and gays with a past behind them. The character’s psyche is revealed through their dialogues which offer a plane for the dramatist to display his wisdom and wit as well as his humour. Themes of some of his plays are discussed in the following section.

*Seven Steps around the Fire* is a very modern play about the ancient mystery of a whole tribe. Uma Rao is writing her thesis on the origin and contemporary status of the ‘Hijra community’. Her genuine (re)search for truth bears fruit by her sheer effort and will. Yet she is not powerful enough, in spite of being the daughter-in-law of a deputy commissioner and the wife of a superintendent of police, to bring this truth to light: Kamala, a beautiful Hijra, is murdered on a minister’s orders and Subbu, Kamala’s lover and the minister’s son, commits suicide. Both the incidents are hushed up and the real culprit remains omnipotent and beyond reach.

*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is a play with a theme often not touched upon – gay relationship and their need to assert their true identity in society. Dattani deals
with a difficult subject with a bold pen and lays open the hypocrisies of social life which imposes stereotypical roles to men and women and acknowledges and legitimizes only these roles. Male and female - these are the only sexual categories which have secured social existence and society's approbation. People who do not fit into these two classes either keep trying to fit into the rut and suffer throughout their lives a burden of the big lie, of if they choose to live with the truth they have to bear social ostracism and contempt. With a fine delineation of characters like Ed and Bunny and Sharad and Kamlesh in a lively and witty manner, Dattani brings out the psychological pressures and fears, the real and the imaginary, gays have to live with. Dattani uses symbolic means to foreground his idea of gay relations. Kamlesh's mall flat is a place where this gay group can meet openly. But in contrast to this small space available to them are visible and invisible signs of the outside world which has a continuous imposing presence – the Mumbai skyline, the wedding procession with all its loud paraphernalia, the beautiful woman who weeps and the failed air conditioner etc.

_Do the Needful_ is about two upper class families which do not understand their children’s desires and want to marry them against their wishes. The children, a gay Gujarati boy and a South Indian girl who loves a Muslim boy, cleverly clinch the deal between their parents, get married and under the cover of traditional happy married couple go their own ways. Alpesh can carry on his affairs with Trilok and Lata can meet Salim when every she wants to. Both keep each other's secret. It is again about social restrains against gays and against the social inhibition of inter-caste marriage. Lata and Alpesh refreshingly come as honest, young people of the new generation who are frank and open with each other at least.

_Bravely Fought the Queen_ is a play about sinners and their secret guilts; it is about violence against women, about exploitation of the weaker, about the mean, squalid corporate world. The play seems to be approving Freud’s theory about repression. Jiten, who had a very bad childhood has turned into a demo of a man. He is a violent, alcoholic, lecherous wife – beater inclined to kill at the slightest provocation. Nitin, who is a gay, is duped by his own best friend and suffers a guilt - ridden relationship with his wife Alka. The women - 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 mentally retarded. Alka, who longs for her
brother Praful's acceptance of herself, silently suffers a fruitless marriage with Nitin. Shadows of the past are felt throughout the present and since past can’t be undone there seems to be no end to it. The play doesn’t even end formally. Here is a remarkable merging of content and form.

Deep down under a comedy are the most intense elements of a tragedy. *Where There is a Will* is one such comedy where Hasmukh, a self-made millionaire, wants to control the lives of his son, his wife and his daughter-in-law. His house is a battle ground of arguments and counter-arguments between him and his wife and son. The daughter-in-law is too clever to offer defense. Hasmukh dies with a will to reform everyone. This psychic will of mind mingles with the legal document that he bequeaths as his will. The document holds the powers to control others now that he is dead. Atrocities imposed by the will are nothing compared to the heinous desires of the survivours for Hasmukh’s money. Where there is a Will uses ‘Will’ as a fantastic pun.

*Tara* is about the courage and spirit of a handicapped Siamese twin who could have survived but for her mother’s decision to give the extra leg to her twin brother. Roop’s joke about how the Gujarati is used to drown their infant daughters in the milk comes out to be true in the end. Tara’s mother got a leg amputated from her Siamese twins when there was a great probability of the survival of the girl.

*Final Solutions* is a very serious and delicate drama on the well-worn subject of Partition, the violence it unleashed and its after-effects which are still reflected in the communal riots that often arise. Dattani, however, is successful in touching the deep sense of futility which fills the heart of those involved in committing such violence. Javed is not the only sinner. Ramnik, Aruna and Hardika -- all have played their part and ultimately have to share the burden of guilt. The final solution seems to be a life proposed by the young Smita and Bobby who posses a consciousness that is liberated from sifting caves of religious cults and who meet their fellow beings at a secular plane.

In most of Dattani’s plays the past is a constant presence in the character’s consciousness; mostly past is relived in the memory or narrated in the dialogue of characters. Old people are there in every play. They are neither stereotypically revered, morally perfect beings nor downright victimized beings. They are normal
human beings with very real shortcomings and vices and virtues. In fact they are the carriers of the past with which they interact or cleanse the minds of the progeny.

Mahesh Dattani is a leading professional playwright for whom theatre is an art with a function. In all, his plays are a refreshing treat for a reader as his performances are to spectators with the innovative use of theatrical space and other elements.

Indian English literature, G.N. Devy points out, is not one of the condescendingly designated “New Literatures” for it cannot adequately and comprehensively be defined as merely “postcolonial” in the sense that African and West Indian literatures can. Not only is there a two hundred year history of Indians writing in English but also a significant bulk of Indian writing that endorses any literary culture that is truly Indian. All Indian literature, including Indian English literature, represents the typically complex Indian experience which is historically multilingual and multicultural but does not fail to underscore well-defined concepts of national identity. Indian English literature has steadily moved towards self-assertion and self-definition and acquired an unmistakable sense of “selfhood”.

The original of Indian drama can be traced back to the Vedic period. As a manifestation of their national sensibility Indian drama came into existence as a means of exploring and communicating the truth of things and was popularly hailed as the “Fifth Veda”. Iyengar, defining the scope of Indian drama said that it was envisioned to “comprehend the whole area of life, ranging from the material to the spiritual, the phenomenal to the transcendent and provide at once, relaxation and entertainment, instruction and illumination.”

Dattani’s plays, then, have purely performance- -oriented scripts that elicit from the audience an emotional as well as a strongly intellectual response. His plays are a commitment to what Iyengar calls the “manifestoes of the new realism” and conform closely to the requirements of a play that communicates, for as M.K. Naik observes, “a play, in order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, needs a real theatre and a live audience”. Dattani has created a vibrant, new theatrical form which is a marked development on the hitherto stagnant Indian drama in English.

Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian playwright writing in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi award. The award citation says that Dattani’s work “probes
tangled attitudes in contemporary India towards communal differences, consumerism
and gender....abrieflant contribution to Indian drama in English." The producers of
Dattani's plays praise him highly because his plays are great in performance and also
for his treatment of contemporary themes. The purpose of this paper is to study his art
and his plays by putting them in the proper perspective.

As it is, India has had a rich tradition in drama. His contribution has to be
placed against this tradition in order to assess its value. It is also to be borne in mind
that judging a contemporary is not a simple job. The detachment that is required in
judging someone comes from distance in time. Only then can things be seen in a
proper perspective. Moreover, there are also chances of the artist outgrowing himself.
However, while no final judgements can be passed, the trends can always be gauged
and an assessment made.

To begin with, the word ‘drama’ comes from the Greek word dram - to do.
That is to say, drama is a performing art, a living art in a way that no other genre of
literature is. It is an art that involves the playwright, the actors and the audience in a
single creative effort. And it is in this context that the Indian English drama cuts a
sorry figure. Cut off from the masses that are so vital for its development as a living
theatre it has not grown the way Indian English fiction has. This appears a bit ironical
considering the rich tradition of drama that India has had. But a cursory glance through the history of drama in India will explain things.

Though many of the early dramas have not survived. It is clear that Sanskrit
drama developed fairly rapidly in the centuries immediately preceding the Christian
era. By 500 B.C. there already existed the Natyashastra, a detailed treatise that deals
with all aspects of the diverse arts that are embodied in the classical Indian concept
of the drama, including dance, music, poetics and general aesthetics. Here Bharata
describes drama as mimicry of the actions and conduct of the people
(owasthanukriliamaalaym). It follows that it should be rich in various emotions,
depicting different situations, relating to men good, bad and indifferent, and gives
courage, amusement, happiness and advice to all of them. Whether its origin was
religious or secular remains to be decided. But this highly stylized form of drama
called natyadharmi flourished till about the 10th century A.D. There also existed
another form of drama, the realistic or popular drama called lokdharmi. This popular
theatre which included folk and devotional genres and puppetry and dance dramas
continued to exist even when the performance of classical Sanskrit drama ceased. A number of factors were responsible for this. First of all, with the foreign invasions beginning eleventh century A.D. the Hindu kings were replaced by Islamic rulers who forbade theatre. So far Sanskrit drama had thrived on royal patronage. Moreover, Sanskrit gradually ceased to be a language of the masses. Only the elite spoke the language so that Sanskrit drama had only a limited aristocratic audience.

The folk theatre and the natak companies continued to depend upon the patronage of local kings, ministers, zamindars and temples. Gradually they switched over to the local languages and dialects. The subject of the plays invariably being tales from the mythologies, the actors did not require going through rigorous rehearsals. The audience too used to be an active participant in the drama and much of the enjoyment depended on the unpredictability of it all-on how the actor could improvise in the new situation created by the comments of the audience, within the limits of the given narrative.

Gender discrimination is a theme that Mahesh Dattani returns to again and again. In Brovely Fought the Queen and Where There's a Will one of the concerns is the complicated modern urban family where the old patriarchal code finds a formidable foe in the new feminist ideas. In the former play, living suppressed life drives the women to indulge in fantasies. What they miss out in real life they achieve in their dreams. It requires great courage on the part of the writer to take up such subjects that are taboo in India. While feminism has become acceptable, a middle-class housewife having a sex life or even fantasizing about one is certainly not acceptable. Dolly emerges as a strong and beautiful woman who is a rebel not only in fantasies but also in reality.

She bravely holds her ground against her husband even in front of a stranger. She defends her sister and her brother and makes it clear that she can never forgive her husband for causing the abnormality in their daughter. But the fact remains that even today women are expected to be subordinated to the men. Where There's a Will shows what can happen when they are pushed to the edge. However, this play has many interesting facets. It is a very entertaining comedy and a strong comment on the money mindedness of people today - even personal relationships are based on money. Wife, son, daughter-in-law-all are interested only in the huge amount of wealth that garment tycoon Hasmukh Mehta has acquired. The most interesting aspect of this
play, however, is the philosophical angle given to it. After his death Hasmukh’s ghost stays on in the house observing all that’s going on. And now comes the realization that it is not just the members of his family who are to blame. It is as much his fault. All his life he has controlled his family not through love and affection but through his money. Even after his death he tries to rule over them through his will. Kiran, his mistress, who is the trustee of the will for twenty-one years, is right that the only reason he wanted to do this is because his father had ruled over his family. He never really grew out of his father’s shadow, never really tried to understand his people and therefore became a victim of his own machinations.

Dattani’s plays have deep moral undertones but never really does he take on the stance of the moralist, never raises himself to a pedestal from where he could preach. He treats his characters with understanding and sympathy whether they are good or bad, right or wrong. He never pronounces any rewards or punishments, thereby allowing the natural law of justice to prevail. He seems to be a genuine artist in love with his art. His plays are meant to be performed, not just read as literature. A fact corroborated by Erin Mee, a theatre director, “It is important to note that all of Dattani’s plays including Tara, are first worked up with his company Playpen in Bangalore. Dattani puts the finishing touches on his dialogue only when it is spoken aloud by actors in rehearsal— in other words, Dattani writes plays to be seen and heard, not literature to be read”. The sad part is that Indian drama in English is yet to again sizeable audience in India. “No wonder Dattani’s plays address the middle-class and only the middle class. The reason is not far to seek—it is the class that constitutes his audience. He language barrier prevents the lower classes from coming to the Indian English theatre. But with the spread of education and the circumstances that make learning English a prerequisite for a good career one may just hope that things may not remain the same for long. For tomorrow is an other day.

Dattani is altogether different in his approach and presentation. While talking of Dattani, Rehmat Merchant says, “Mahesh Dattani’s pathos— with a punch approach, picked with a dash of humour. Makes him the perfect candidate for chronicling urban angst. His plays are people with city slickens wrestling with issues ain a manner close to the modern psyche...change-the-world brnd of range and impulsiveness, threatens to upset some apple cartys.....subtext of complex relationships...eager to understand mind contrasted by informed prejudice...character growing....build in conflict in
marriage collapse of certain stereotypes....prejudic holder forced to look outside the
cosy community circle” Dattani is taken to be a true successor of Girish Karnad and
responsible for the revolutionary progressivon of Indian English drama, a a drama
teacher, as a stage director, as an actor, as a Bharatnatyam dancer and a a sociologist
explaining various complexities of society Dattani’s contribution is an asset to
Indian writing as a whole.

Indian writing comprises plethora of plays, in other words, playwrights dictate
the making of Indian writing. The rich and varied Indian dramatic tradition, the ‘fifth
Veda’ enshrined in Natyasstra, expounded by Bharatimuni, is enviable to the other
writings of the world literate Indian English writing, too, has sufficient number of
plays. With a history that can never be accepted as steady or consistent. K.R.
Srinivasa lyengar is highly depressed at the dismal sight of the birth and progress
of Indian English drama. “Modern Indian dramatic writing in English is neither rich in
quantity, nor on the whole of quality. Enterprising Indians have fer nearly a century
occasionally attempted drama in English but seldom for actual production.19

In the same way Dhayaneshwar Nadkarni declares in “Butcher the Indo-
Anglians, “Butcher them (the Indo-Anglian Playwrights), castrate them and force
them to write in their native Hindu or Urdu or whatever languages their fathers and
mothers used to speak. “However, the postcolonial scenario is completely different,
at least with the advent of Karnad and Dattani the present practitioners like Vera
harma, Derek Antao, Gieve Patel, Shashi Tharoor, Khushwant singh, Nissim Ezekiel,
Dina Mehta, Ima Parameswaran, Manjulka Padmanabhan, T.S. Gill, J.P. Das, S.
Vasuki, G. Prasanthi, R. Raja Rao, Leo Fredricks Saros Cowasje, Suraj Puohit, Bina
Bhakta, etc., we find a quantum jump (so to say)

Pre-colonial and postcolonial experiences in literature cannot be
compartmentalized in true sense, they are not divorced from each other, rather a
continuous process, recording the vicissitudes of time. Successive waves of
colonization have left its vestiges in the natural psyche and national polity, and the
near schizophrenic scenario is a colonial legacy accumulated over centuries, pre-
independence political preoccupations centured on idealization, generalization,
mystification, etc. available in contemporary literature. In fact, commonwealth
literature has been rechristened as postcolonial literature and Indian writing in English
is a legitimate product of our historical and existential conjectures, a genuine
expression of our—profound postcolonial civilizational crisis, signifying the disparity between the publicity it attracts and its literary quality and ability to reflect our social and spiritual lives. Like other subaltern theories of literature, postcolonialism stands for those who have been sentenced by history to subjugation, diaspora and displacement, empowering the marginalised by retrieving the voices, space and identities silenced by colonial power. In Indian English writing, postcolonial exits from Raja Rao to Salman Rushdie, among several others, in the plays of Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Elkunchwar, etc the complexities of postcolonialism being inherited from the colonial and pre-colonial times. Like Arthur Miller and Arnold Wesker, Asif currimbhoy is critical of values, materialism, corruption, frivolity, etc., with the reform oriented movements of the nineteenth century began the major phase of anticolonialism which sought the tradition to be re-examined. In the modernism of the Fifties and Sixties, there was also a pan Indian shift in sensibility, for instance, the Dalit movement, the women’s movement, etc. In modernizing postcolonial tension and anxieties are visible the colonial education, ruthless urbanization, inhuman industrialization, loss of faith, erosion of ethos, challenges to the identity, etc.

Mahesh Dattani emerges as a compelling playwright who rearranges the social fabrication and projects the postcolonial dichotomy operating at different levels. Commenting upon the nature of postcolonial writing, Taher Ben Jallouin, a writer from Morocco, says; “We have two cultures, it is as if we had two mothers and two fathers, perhaps we don’t have total control, like writers in the West, but we have two possible inner worlds, I think we are doubly clever, firstly to use the narrative techniques of the West and secondly, to exploit the narrative countries, and we have come up a third type of literature which is unlike Western writing, which is essential provincial, egocentric and onward looking. We have created literature which is open to other cultures and situations.

Dattani belongs to the section of writers who established women at the centre of their fictive world and may be called avant grade feminist. Western education has a liberating influence on women, bringing promise of a new life outside the claustrophobic environment of purdah and other conservative measures. The response is so eager and selfconscious that is ready to welcome the accident with gestures of mutual exchanges. Thematically that did not desist from the portrayal of
the Indian background, they offered the gifts of the East in the forms of Sanskrit epics and Hindu myths and legends.

Mahesh Dattani is to be estimated on two counts. First his concern for the fair sex and second his visit to the virgin landscapes, that is of homosexuals, eunuchs, etc., Kiran, the mistress of Hasmukh in Where There's a Will, Ratna the wife of Jairaj in Dane Like a Man, Tara the protagonist in the play Tara, Old Baa Dolly and Alka in Bravely Fought the Queen, Deepal in On A Muggy Night in Mumabi, Gowda and Lata in Do the Needful and Uma in Seven steps around the Fire are faced with the seminal question of identity and dilemma of feminine sensibility to an extent that it brings forth the colonial perspectives of society Gayatri Spivak in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' analyses the question of female subaltern, when she describes women as doubly marginalized subjects in colonial / postcolonial discourses 'Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject the track of sexual difference is doubly effected....It is rather, that both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominate, if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the female as female is more deeply in shadow. Spivak quotes female subaltern as doubly effected the otherness of postcolonical literature. Kiran, the mistress of Hasmukh in Where There's a Will and Ratna, the wife of Jairaj in Dance Like a Man, both belong to the postcolonial era, the new women bold and self confident. Deepali confirms it in her statement. Every time I mensurate, I thank God I am a woman. (On A Muggy Night in Mumabi)

Theatre, according to Mahesh Dattani, "is a reflection of what you observe. To do anything more would be to become didactic and then it ceases to be theatre." What Dattani observes can well be seen in almost all his plays where he has tried his best to assimilate both matter and manner. Although each and every play of Dattani raises some prominent issues concerning the various maladies contaminating the healthy tissues of the society, he is never seen didactic and straightforward in his attitude. He knows the art of expressing the views through some powerful images, symbols, stage direction and other means of art. Dattani himself observes that in his plays, "Everything is geared towards rasa." Michael Walling thinks that the plays of Mahesh Dattani "fuse the physical and special awareness of the Indian theatre with the textual
rigour of western models like Ibsen and Tennessee Williams. It is a potent combination, which shocks and disturbs, through its accuracy, and its ability to approach a subject from multiple perspectives. Postcolonial Indian and multi-cultural Britain both have an urgent need for a cultural expression of the contemporary; they require public spaces in which the mingling of eastern and western influences can take place. Through his fusion of forms and influences, Mahesh creates such a space. 21

*Final Solutions* is a stage play in three acts. It deals with communalism, religious fanaticism and the Hindu-Muslim riot mostly engendered by the self-centered politicians. On the second level of meaning the play also suggests the deep-rooted hatred planted by our forefathers. The demons of hatred are not in the procession or on the street but they are sitting stably in our hearts. The playwright seems to fling a mild satire on those fanatics who don't understand the true property of religion, boast the merit of their religion and are mostly driven like dumb cattle by the egocentric and selfish politicians. In "A Note on the Play," Alyque Padamsee observes: "The mob in the play is symbolic of our own hatred and paranoia. Each member of the mob is an individual yet they meld into one seething whole as soon as politicians play on their fears and anxieties. . . . This is a play about transferred resentments. About looking of a scapegoat to hit out at when we feel let down, humiliated. Taking out your children or servant is an old Indian custom." 22

India issue which Dattani has raised in this play is not confined to only our land, but it has assumed a universal character. It is a confrontation between Arabs and Jews, whites and blacks, Hindus and Muslims, traditional and modern, and above all, between the innocent general people and crafty politicians. The author is in suspicion whether there is any final solution or not. He seems to be raising questions: "Is life a forward journey or do we travel round in circle, returning to our starting point? Can we shake off our prejudices or are they in our psyche like our genes? Will we ever be free or ever-locked in combat?" (173)

Mahesh Dattani, in his preface to his *Collected Plays*, says that he is always confronted with remarks such as 'Your plays are reaching to the converted. You would do *Final Solutions* in the village.' But the fact is, if his works are read and evaluated with the eyes of a judge, they look like fine examples of art. The author has no theory or principle to express and expose. He simply allows the play to run
smoothly oil the path of literature. The path is shadowed and decorated with the
colourful trees and manifold flowers. In other words, it is his characters who speak,
not the author. Dattani observes: "I also know that I have a lot to say and am probably
not saying it well enough. But my characters have a lot to say too, and they seem to be
doing rather well at having their say.... I am completely aware that it is my character
that has done the work for me."

Thus, this brief analysis of Mahesh Dattani's three plays shows that the author
is bestowed with a special gift of fusing feeling with the form and thereby turning the
play into art or in Eliot's terminology an Emotional Equivalent.


3. ibid., P-55.


7. Conversations with Mulk Raj Anand.


11. ibid., P-344.


