Chapter – 2

Socio-Literary Perspectives of Mulk Raj Anand’s and Mahesh Dattani’s Writings
Time was when Indians were diffident about expressing themselves in English a language that is alien and yet not quite. Indian novelists have now proved their ability and Indo-Anglian fiction has acquired an identity of its own. Yet not all the fictional attempts of all the novelists stand the test of time. Mulk Raj Anand certainly enjoys the reputation of being a major figure in the field of Indo-Anglian fiction along with Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan. He has to his credit sixteen novels, twelve collections of short stories and more than twenty-five books on art and other general subjects and hundreds of articles.

Anand is Dickensian in his ultra-sensitivity to the existence of social evils in protean forms. In fact, it is the keen awareness of the human predicament that propelled him into creative writing. Therefore the themes which Anand has chosen for his novels are based on such problems as casteism and human suffering caused by a variety of factors-political, economic, social and cultural. He refuses to accept. "This tenancy on the earth as a death on the instalment plan" and says categorically: "I would no longer live by the dead idea of traditional philosophies, the ritual of the old religions or by the tame words of the classics." He tries to create in the readers an urgent awareness of the dehumanizing, social evils, to stir the springs of tenderness in them and to activise them for the removal of these evils in order that a desirable, just social order may come into being. It is commonplace to call Anand a champion of the down-trodden. But what is striking is that in his novels he reveals a triune intuition of the inhumanity of man, his exploitative nature and his possible redemption. Anand rejects all institutions in favour of man as the convincing solution could be found in man 'the maker and the breaker of worlds'. That is why with great religious zeal Anand repeats in his novels: "I believe in Man!".

The protagonists in Anand's novels belong either to the class of the suffering (Bakha, Munoo, Gangu) or to the sensitive group of people who suffer seeing others suffer (Lalu, Ananta). Anand takes care to look into the emotional problems of these human beings who are perhaps non entities in the eyes of society. Anand is aware of their great potential which often remains unrealized as they are trapped by a callous society. In their struggle to free themselves from this situation and create an everyday life for themselves they become heroic.
Anand finds the stratification of society on the basis of caste abominable. The caste system has come to mean nothing but a set of injunctions which damage social cohesion by giving certain sections of society an unfair advantage over others permanently. Though it poses an intractable problem, it is surprising that other writers have not evinced such pronounced interest in the theme of untouchability. Anand launched on his literary career with a short novel Untouchable in which he has projected this theme in such significant terms that it includes issues like loss of identity, rootlessness, etc.

The Road is yet smaller novel which shows Anand’s continued preoccupation with this significant problem. The novel views the protagonist Bhikhu’s situation as expressive of the chronic malaise with which Indian society is stricken. It makes it difficult for him to survive with dignity and unimpaired self-esteem. Despite his resentment and rebellious spirit he finds himself fighting a losing battle. Significantly the novel ends with the hero heading for Delhi. The road becomes the central metaphor in the novel and it is suggested that the road to emancipation from degradation will not be built so long as conditions remain what they are. The narrative also implies that the road to freedom is long enough to break his spirit. M.K. Naik is right when he says, “this long short story is too flimsy to bear the weight of an effective symbolic final” as the ending makes Anand’s views quite ambiguous.

The caste system is an indigenous phenomenon in India but the class system has universal dimensions and so Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud which deal with the evil of the class system cover a wider range. These proletarian novels bring into sharp focus the capitalist domination which cuts across cast, cultural, intellectual and racial distinctions since money and power are the main factors involved here. Anand charts the course of life of Munoo and Gangu, both Kshatriyas by birth; Coolie portrays the tribulations of an individual whereas Two Leaves and a Bud pictures the same problem as a group experience.

Two Leaves and a Bud begins with an exodus to the Promised Land, Assam. But it is against this idyllic background that ‘the drama of exploitation’ is enacted. Deela Haver with his endless discussions on the theme bores both his beloved and the reader alike. What remains unsaid by him is also revealed to the readers through Barbara’s reading of Haver’s writings. The club scenes are too many and the hunt scene has a farcical effect. But as there is no constant shifting of scenes as in Coolie,
the novel achieves greater concentration and has the effect of a grim tragedy. The tragedy caused by this social structure is so horrifying that in both these novels death has been referred to as “happy death” or “release”. C.D. Narasimhaiah’s comment is relevant here: “Death has ceased to frighten these poor-they are past all fright; it is life that is a threat, and death is a release.”

Epical in sweep and panoramic in purview, Coolie Pictures the various experiences of Munoo, a hill boy, at the hands of exploiters at four different places. The novel is remarkable for the largeness of its canvas, the multiplicity of its characters and the variety of its episodes. However, the focal point is always Munoo and the pathos is sustained by the emphasis on his innocence against the merciless mechanical rhythm of society. A sweeper is at least assured of his place in society because of the indispensability of his work. The coolie has no such assurance and lives under the perpetual threat of losing his job. It is no wonder therefore that Munoo in Coolie drifting from place to place, job to job appears virtually rootless and incapable of finding a place for himself in society. As the class system has proved more divisive Anand’s attack is correspondingly vehement. His eagerness to drive home his message weighs too heavily on the artistic pattern of the novel and the elaborate presentation of Mrs. Mainwaring in the last chapter is certainly an avoidable appendage.

The themes of caste and class systems have been dexterously fused in The Big Heart. Anand defines casteism in all its complexity for one sees it not in its rigidity but in its insidiousness. The relations between Lala Murli Dhar and Seth Gokul Chand harmonious on account of money considerations seem strained and coalesce in society. Anand emphasizes the impossibility of avoiding contact with castes other than one’s own as a result of the changed condition of life and the increasing use of machinery for a variety of purposes. The novel also shows the pro-and anti-machinery reactions and suggests that one should respond more favourably to the impersonal processes of modern scientific and technological development. The machine may have demonic force but man should learn to master this labour-saving public benefactor which is vital for progress.

Religion is not dealt with at length in any particular novel but there is hardly any novel that lacks a contemptuous reference to God or religion. Anand’s aim is to project exploitation in all its facets, the practice of religion being one. Counterfeit
sainthood is a ubiquitous phenomenon in our hoary land and Anand covers the priests of different religions-Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity with contempt and crushes them beyond redemption because they have reduced religion to rank religiosity and crass communalism.

Prof. Verma’s observation in *The Sword and the Sickle* that religion is “as widespread as small-pox in the lands watered by the Ganges” highlights the reality that the system and corruption promoted in the religion seem to praise critical attention. Anand explains certain changes developments in his objection to ‘the crafty scheme’ of the priests who opiate the masses who believe things against all miseries inherent in the evil social structure. The religion has often proved harmful to the progress of man as it has created either passivity or practices of of a religion and extreme belief in man. Anand’s criticism on religion has its origin in his very philosophy of life:

To me there is only one vast universe, with man, woman and other living beings, face to face with the elements, and others, alone, but seeking human solidarity. There are not tow worlds, heaven above and the earth below. There is no ‘spiritual’ world separate from the ‘material’ world. The soul is body and the body is soul. The possible emergence of human beings as individuals, through the struggle for illumination, exercised through the will, and through continuous experience, and through the search for every creative possibility, may lead to the making of the individual, to ‘Destination Man’.3

Hindu-Muslim adjustment is a gigantic national problem in India and it is a horrid mockery of ardent avowals of national integration and the blessed assurances enshrined in the constitution. In *Death of a Hero* Anand projects the last phase in the life of Maqbool, a member of the Kashmir National Movement, sent to rally the people of Baramula, which is in the grip of the Muslim fanatics. It is ironic that the so-called ‘war of liberation’, ‘jehad’ (the holy war), liberates the souls of the people from their ‘corporeal frame’. Maqbool has admirable qualities such as love of his country, lofty idealism verging on the romantic and compassion for the suffering. Yet he is too passive to be regarded as a hero. Critics have exalted him beyond his deserts and invested him with a tragic dignity which his portrayal in the novel does not warrant.
Anand is unhappy that education, expected to be a powerful instrument of social reconstruction, has not served its purpose. The prevalent educational system is an imitative one and so unrelated to the life of the Indians. The acquisition of sapless bookish knowledge does not offer much help and as recruitment to jobs is made on the basis of recommendations rather than on merit, the country faces the twin problems of unemployment and under-employment.

Scholars have an emphatic illustration of such a situation in *Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts*. It dramatizes the last days of Noor, a rank student's career. As his status as the son of a confectioner is hereditarily determined, his academic distinction does not ensure personal advancement. The teacher like the priest is a recurrent type in Anand's novels and Shah Nawaz in *Morning Face* is a lone foil to the crowd of corrupt teachers.

It is noteworthy that Anand's heroes are either educated men or lovers of learning. Noor, Prince Victor, Maqbool and Lal Singh represent the educated group. They turn out to be failures in life which in itself is a reflection of what education means in India. Anand himself has been a victim of this educational system and so his attack is quite vehement:

If education is the transmission of life from the living, through the living, the living, then we do not know how to describe the system of teaching that prevails here. It is carrying death from the dead, through the dead, to the dead.

Anand, the champion of the outcastes, pictures in his novels the predicament of woman too, for she is another victim of the rigid social order. At home woman is often made to act the part of an unpaid domestic servant with a marginally superior status. She is treated as an inferior creature, pleasure-giving commodity or a child-bearing machine. Marriage incites man to be a capricious autocrat.

Anand is quite impartial in his treatment of this theme and he presents both vigorous and devoted wives, Docile as well as revolutionary women. He is not blind to the existence of Ganga Dasis who can control the private lives of public figures with utterly disastrous results. However, he describes the silly sentimentality of Indian women and their meek acceptance of inferior status advocated by the 'diabolical code of priestmade laws'. At the same time, he perceives in them a great
potential for constructive work which often goes a waste owing to the chauvinistic attitude of the menfolk.

While stressing the need for the emancipation of women, Anand suggests that they should break the ties that bind them to the hearth and boldly venture out into fresh fields. The familiar types of women characters are relegated to the background as contributory characters and the non-conformist women and given full realization in his novels. He pictures woman’s place in a fast-changing society. He “brings out well how the strains of the new situation modify, warp or transmute into yet finer forms the traditional responses of the women.”

In Death of a Hero hope is placed in Maqbool’s younger sister, Nur. Maqbool hopes that he would inherit the poet’s compassion and save mankind from religious bigotry. The widowed Maya in The Village breaks through the shackles of vicious society and joins her lover, Lal Singh. Though Maya’s turning into a revolutionary (in The Sword and the Sickle) “in a flickering of an eyelid” to assist her husband is not convincing enough, one sees in her character women’s change in role in the modern world.

Janki in The Big Heart dares to live with Ananta, though their relationship has no social sanction. Janki ranks higher than a wife in devotion and that is further proved after Ananta’s death. Her ailment as a T.B. patient does not break her spirit. Guided by the spiritual mentor Puran Singh, she continues Ananta’s mission after his death by organizing the women comrades for a revolutionary life and by living with and for others. She thus emerges as a New woman.

However modern and revolutionary Maya and Janki may be, their role is only subsidiary because they try to propagate the feminine ideal of their of their lovers by identifying themselves with it. The Old Woman and the Cow is the only novel in which Anand spins the plot around a woman character. Gauri, the heroine, falls in line with Anand’s suppressed heroes. But while most of his heroes register their protest within the frame work of an evil society, Gauri sheds her narrow domestic coils before they can strangle her to death, and escapes into the refreshing world of modernity. Whereas most of the heroes face premature death, she emerges as an awakened woman, with a fresh lease of life. When her husband Panchi hits her, the enlightened Gauri retorts: “...if you strike me again, I will hit you back...” (p-28).
Her decisive walk-out and her choice of a non-domestic profession in the context of woman's predicament in India is a tremendous act of protest.

This is effectively illustrated by the skilful, modified use of the Ramayana myth. It enhances the thematic pattern of the novel. Gauri is a 'modern version of Sita's but Panchi has very little of Rama in him. Gauri refuses to be hoodwinked by the sanctimonious humbug about submission and self-effacement. Anand's modification of the myth suggests that the original has become outdated and irrelevant in the modern context. It also disproves the doctrine of woman's inferior position as the weaker sex. She is no longer and encumbrance on man and the prospect of her economic independence makes her an autonomous being. *The Old Woman and the Cow* along with *The Big Heart* has come to represent 'the high watermark of Anand's fictional genius'. This is partly because of the successful women portraits in these novels.

As a responsible artist Anand suggests various answers to the human problems dealt with in his novels, refraining from imposition of any kind. As said earlier, Anand is aware that man has to turn inward and find the right solution. He should develop a 'big heart' that cherishes values like equality, human tenderness, religious tolerance, devotion to duty, liberty, etc. one needs no institutionalized religion to advocate these values. Anand calls it 'religion without religion'. Human suffering at times cannot be avoided. But it can certainly be alleviated by the 'togetherness' of men: "...one man is the other: other men are in one: all men are brother. The recognition of that truth is the next promised world revolution-which literature may help to bring about, against all the odds of our age-so tragic and yet potentially so full of hope for man..."5

Anand feels that a keen awareness of the predicament should whet man's questioning spirit, which in turn should enable him to shed all fatalism and revolt against the oppressive forces of society.

All of Anand's heroes do become acutely aware of their predicament at some point or other in their lives and they predicament at some point or other in their lives and they begin to search for the meaning of life and destiny. This is often referred to in the novels as 'the journey into the unknown'. When involved in such a quest, the characters invariably grow. In *Confession of a Lover*, Krishnan begins his search
when he is disillusioned with the educational system and the society he lives in. The growth of the character is reckoned in terms of realization and understanding. He speaks with conviction thus:

The important thing is to be — to become rebellion itself! Free! Free! Free! Utterly Free!... Rebellion and Freedom!... Not acceptance and death!... It is only through rebellion against everything false that I have written poetry... And I want to embrace the people—even those who are illiterate and down and degraded! Because once we are free, all of us will grow and discover marvelous things!... We will become a big people! We will make a new life.6

In *The Bubble*, fourth in the series of Anand's autobiographical novels, he presents the young man, Krishan Chander Azad, pursuing a doctorate under the guidance of Prof. Dawes Hicks. In this novel one finds that Krishan wants to transcend the blindness around him and see what has been buried inside him under the debris of the broken spirit. Hence this novel like *Confession of a Lover* is in the great tradition of the *bildungsroman*. Putting it all down on paper is Krishan's way of enduring human condition. This process of self-discovery begins when he encounters Irene Rhys (in England), an artist who liberates him in more ways than one. Irene's casual affair with 'Casanova' Mehta arouses in him pangs of intense sexual jealousy but he is soon liberated from conventional male-chauvinistic notions of sexual morality.

Irene leaves for Ireland to join Maud Gonne in the Irish freedom movement. Krishan, who visits her there is liberated in yet another sense. He becomes more aware of his role as an Indian and as a Gandhian. He comes back to London to write a highly acclaimed thesis and gets ready to return to India to join the Gandhian Movement and write a novel on Bakha.

Rimbaud in one of his poems says, "We live inside a bubble as in a womb. And in this we grow. But at times we can see ourselves in it." This passage casually quoted by Irene holds the key to the entire novel.

Anand's passionate espousal of the cause of the dispossessed in his novels has been attributed to his alleged Marxist ideological persuasions by some critics who forget the fact that in his novels Anand in a way turns the Marxist formula upside down to show that it is society that has betrayed or failed the human potential.
Indeed, what he holds up for admiration is the striving of the individual to create the utmost freedom for himself within a coercive system.

It is undeniable that some of Anand's novels have a propagandistic tone because Anand is eager to ram home his humanistic message. The poet-figure in his novels where poets do not figure Anand has introduced some "big-hearted" idealistic characters who unfortunately indulge in elaborate moralisings and often act as the author's mouthpiece. However, Anand's central aim is to project his 'desire image', what he would like life to be as against what it is. According to him an artist should interpret reality and not reproduce it. His object is not merely to shock his readers by a representation of reality but to stimulate their consciousness.

Anand has exposed social evils in its myriad manifestations and has evocatively presented different layers of human experience in his fiction. His wide reading and travel have enabled him to vie humanity at large in a proper perspective. His close association with the underdogs and his passionate recordation of their woes have given his novels a rare cogency and an intimate quality of felt life.

Acclaimed as a minor classic when first published three decades ago, Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable has continued to attract critical attention for reasons which are not far to seek.

Anand deserves credit even for his thematic choice for his very first novel-a choice which is in perfect consonance with his humanistic concern for man as man, irrespective of his as his protagonist to project the pathetic predicament of a vast segment of Indian society, which has for centuries been the victim of cruel contempt and heartless exploitation at the hands of a hypocrical society, is a daring act which established Anand as a pioneer fictionist with a burning social consciousness, indeed a step ahead of his illustrious predecessors and contemporaries, such as Sharat Chandra, Tagore and Premchand. Few Indian novels before or after it project the predicament of the untouchables that of one who seems to have no choice but to live out the stereotypes of traditional Indian imagination. Whether regarded as subhuman or unhuman, he is always placed outside of the democratic plan in the sense that he is not admitted into any of the strata of the Hindu Society. The condition of the untouchable in India in the pre-Independence past was no different from that of the American Negro, since he was subject to the some kind of typification that his
American counterpart had to suffer for centuries—a typification that spelt deprivation, exploitation and reduction to a part of the myth of the Sanskritizing Hindu community. His condition since Independence has virtually changed out of all recognition, thanks to the crusading efforts of Mahatma Gandhi and others to wipe out the canker of untouchability, which has been eating into the entrails of the Hindu society. However, social discrimination against the untouchable, though now carried on very subtly, still continues in a large measure to the embarrassment of the Indian leadership. Anand’s novel, *Untouchable*, has the distinction of pinpointing the issues concerning the calculated, deliberate subordination of the untouchable from childhood onward, which makes for his harrowing plight. Indeed, it focuses protest and even revolt against the caste-ridden structure of the Indian society without becoming a ‘protest novel’ or a work of socialist realism. It articulates in a most disturbing manner the untouchable’s sacrifice of his creative initiatives to the unjustifiable societal demands.

No less importantly. Anand’s rejection of Gandhi’s suggestion to write a scio-politico-cultural treatise on the problem of untouchability in favour of a fictionalized projection of it was an act of courage as well as wisdom. A tract is, by its very nature, patently propagandistic and has a ring of wooden dogmatism about it, whereas a novel allow its author to present an impressionistic vision of reality in its multiple aspects. Had Anand accepted Gandhi’s suggestion, he would have produced, maybe in a couple of days if not hours, a work which would have been undistinguishable from a host of such other works without making any appreciable impact on the public consciousness or imagination. But he chose the difficult path of writing a novel which involved around five years’ hard imaginative labour and we know that the this has made for greater appeal and longer-lasting impact. Anand’s choice is justified in that he could create in his novel a kind of an echo-chamber in which the sources of the sounds are identifiable with the phases of the untouchable’s consciousness functioning under a variety of pressures, including those of religion and history. Anand’s novel is undoubtedly Dickensian in that it has sought to stir the public consciousness as Dickens’s novels have done. But the comparison cannot be pressed far. If only for the reason that Anand’s interests and sympathies are much wider than Dickens’s. Moreover, his purpose is not entirely directed towards the same ends as Dickens’s, apart from their not functioning under correspondential pressures. There
are other divergences such as those related to the fictional techniques and narrative power which makes the comparison between them untenable beyond a certain point. However, it may be said that both Anand and Dickens play with different degrees success the role of a diagnosticians of society and their work is marked by a moral engagement which imparts the necessary substance to their rhetoric.

Anand’s Untouchable is not a thesis novel, since it transcends the formulaic exploration of untouchability as prevalent in Indian society. The novel, though centering on the day-long experiences of its protagonist, Bakha, strives to relate them to those of the dispossessed of the earth, and in the process realizes a remarkable and rich mosaic of meanings that can be read into untouchability as a social phenomenon. The novel is, indeed, informed by what may be called “the philosophical science of man” which takes as the starting point of its inquiry “man with man” and thus may be said to offer a telling commentary on the existential structure of the untouchable “dasein”. It exemplifies the fiction of the human condition, of the Promethean struggle for self-definition amidst conditions of existential isolation and alienation. The novel, detailing a day in Bakha’s life, focuses not so much on the socio-politico-empirical as on the psycho-spiritual, since it is Bakha’s responses from his inmost being to a chiaroscuro of humiliations and embarrassments that are brought into focus. The organizing principle of the novel is to present a day in the life of Bakha. It could be an ordinary day like the other days that he has already spent or like the days which he is going to spend but Anand has deftly contrived to make it an exceptional day and that is what makes it significant. Also, this is where it rises above a mere flat representation of the untouchables. It is an exceptional day for, as Anand emphasizes it several times, it is Bakha’s unlucky and inauspicious day. For instance, he says:

Today, however, he (Bakha) had had more than enough. The spirit of fire which lay buried in the mass of his flesh had ignited this morning and lay smouldering.

The implication is that the day, though ostensibly like any other day in Bakha’s life, stands out as an exemplum of the life of the untouchables in India. In other words, it is the sequential occurrence of such unexceptional experiences as those which Bakha has on that day that lends credence to Anand’s narrative technique of telescoping events that mark the average life of the untouchable. The selection events
is dictated by Anand’s interest in the basic premises on which the life of the untouchable is built. The premises relate to the socio-cultural, economic, political and existential postulates of untouchability in India. Anand’s narrative strategy is to present a double vision of the condition of the untouchable which explains his use of fantasy that is subtly subordinated to strongly realistic program. For instance, while waiting to receive bread from a kindly lady, Bakha lapses into a kind of reverie which has the effect of obliterating the distance between fantasy and reality, memory and desire. It defines not only Bakhs’s nature and character but also points to the interlocked issues of fact and fiction, myth and meaning, appearance and reality, dream and disenchantment with it as found criss-crossed in his life. However, it is not a “reverie of the ego” but an attempt at articulating an intensified sensitivity which proves helpful to the projection of a decadent aspect of the Hindu society.

Nevertheless, Bakha’s proneness to day-dreaming is expressive of his living, however momentarily, in a world of illusions and even fantasy into which he tends to escape when discomfited by reality. Bakha’s imagination does conjure up a make believe world in which he could freely mix with the highest and the most exalted of the land, the sahibs, on equal terms. Such excursions into the realm of the dreaming mind prove pathetic of not tragic in that he becomes all the more painfully aware of the harsh reality of the situation whose predeterminate structure seems inviolable.

Rudely woken up by the shouting of his father before the break of the day, Bakha sets out to work only to experience a series of humiliations and mortifications as the day advance. Paradoxically enough, he forgets when he sights the bandsmen in their gorgeous embroidered uniforms with their gleaming musical instruments associated in his imagination with the musical instruments associated in his imagination with the glittering West and he receives an unexpected gift from his hockey hero. It is a typical case of the self disintegrating as it were in order to advance towards a higher state of being which however proves unrealizable in his case. Significantly, Bakha is transported to a higher level of awareness of his identity as a human being when he happens to join a large gathering of people listening to Mahatma Gandhi. Though Gandhi’s exhortations do not help him to achieve a breakthrough to a new identity structure, they bring home to him an intensified sense of the significance of work.
Despite its ironic implication that untouchability is perpetuated because of the kind of work that the untouchables perform, Anand’s solution of equipping latrines with the flush system emphasizes the need for formulating a radical approach in the problem of untouchability. On the face of it, it invokes mechanical means to resolve a deep-rooted psycho-social problem which need not necessarily be taken at its face value, since Anand is as much aware as anyone else of the incongruity between the means and the ends in this regard. It may be regarded as a startling thrust away from the domain of personal relationships and sensitivities towards that of technology and science. This thrust is intended to convey the possibility of eliminating unequal human contacts and relations through the use of mechanical means since work seems to confer status and even define a man’s personality. It is a possibility which may not become a probability in India in the foreseeable future unless a humanistic revolution takes place. However, it represents an opening out of the novel’s abstract vision and not its defeat which is what Anand perhaps intended.

The narrative style of the novel is predominantly realistic or naturalistic. However, Anand also works through some poetic strategies: there is a remarkable use of imagery in the book (of the brook at instance) which Anand scarcely makes use of in his later fiction with the same degree of seriousness. This gives the novel its extraordinary power and beauty. Anand invariably employs the poetic and the symbolic strategies. Much of this is possible because he uses the device of the interior monologue.

*Untouchable* contains several descriptive passages which are charged with suggestive significance. Take for instance, the description of Bakha’s first reaction to the gods he sees in the temple:

His eyes caught the sight of the magnificent sculptures over the doors extending right up to the pinnacle. They seemed vast and fearful and oppressive. He was cowed back. The sense of fear came creeping into him. He felt as if the gods were staring at him. They looked so real although they were not like anything he had ever seen on earth. They seemed hard...He felt weak and he wanted support.

This passage is realistic, and yet highly suggestive. Since Anand is describing the scene through Bakha’s consciousness, even such things as stone images take on a
new colouring. Gods look fierce, hard and oppressive. Further, it acquires another dimension when the suggestion is also built into it that these gods are like the hard-hearted Brahmins, the people who worship them. In this way, a seemingly objective-looking description works at more than one level. There are such passages throughout the book.

All the heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflections of the real people. I had known during my childhood and youth. And I was repaying the debt of gratitude I owed them for much of the inspiration they had given me to mature into manhood, when I began to interpret their lives in my writings. They were not mere phantoms...they were the flesh of my flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood, and obsessed me in the way in which certain human beings obsess an artist's soul. And I was doing no more than what a writer does when he seeks to interpret the truth from the realities of life.7

Untouchable, then, is a phenomenal success as a species of realistic fiction, which yet retains strong overtones of the universal, Says Anand: “Though I believe in realism, I am for a poetic realism. I would like, for instance, to stress the importance of the desire image, or romantic will in writing, and I stand altogether for art against literary photography.” Untouchable, all in all, is a brilliant example of sustained poetic realism. Although it employs a low mimetic form of fiction, it also has esoteric poetic fights, and a breadth of metaphor uncommon to such a form.

Coolie marks a greater self-assurance in the art of Anand and a further deepening of the moral tone. It comprehends greater variety and deeper levels of degradation than does Untouchable. The plot of the novel is such as will not readily yield to a plain summary of facts. Here is the story of a hill-boy, Munoo, who moves from the village to the town, from the town to the city, and then up to the mountains. He traverses in experience, and is finally swept away to his doom. He explores the limits of existence before he goes under.

Munoo's life is tragic in the extreme, although it has moments of comic relief. The poor orphan is cast away by his aunt and uncle who have no love for him. He gets a job as a domestic servant in the house of a bank clerk at Sham Nagar. He imagines that he will henceforth live in peace and comfort but is soon disillusioned.
The miseries of the past pale into insignificance in the light of his new experience. Although Sheila, the teen-aged daughter of the master of the house, is kind to him, her mother treats him shabbily: he realizes finally his position in the world. He is to be a slave, a servant who should do the work, all the odd jobs, someone to be abused, even beaten though as yet it had not come to that. He feels sad, lonely.

The ambivalence that torments Bakha in *Untouchable* torments Munoo as well. He resolves henceforth to be a perfect servant, but the path to perfection is not easy. He is squarely blamed for the fiasco which takes place during the visit of a senior bank official to the residence of his master. Later, when he picks a fight with the neighbor's servant, he is severely injured. During his convalescence, he experiences the birth trauma of desire for Sheila, as he sees her coming out of the bath, a silhouette of pale bronze. At the same time, he is aware of the vast gulf that exists between him and Shila. He stifles his passion, but no sooner does he return to health than his wanton. Irrepressible desire asserts itself. He gets involved in a merry game with Sheila and her companions. He enacts the role of monkey just to amuse her, and she pulls him by the ear for fun. All of a sudden, he bites her on the cheek in the momentum of inexplicable will, he has to face the music—a tornado of abuse and beatings from the master. He quits the place in disgust and takes a train to the unknown.

In the feudal town of Daulatpur, he runs into Prabha, a partner in a pickle factory and is instantly hired as a coolie in the warehouse. Prabha's wife soon grows fond of him and gives him motherly warmth. But life in the factory proves as unrelenting as ever. To add to his discomfiture, Prabha is ruined financially and returns to his native village. Munoo is left alone in the world with no art or craft to earn his living. He becomes a self-employed porter, carrying loads on the streets. When a circus visits the town, Munoo gets to know the elephant driver and manages to get to Bombay with his help.

No longer in the backwaters of a small town, Munoo feels the surge of waters in the big metropolis. But he never makes the great withdrawal from life. He finds kindred hearts in Hari and Laxmi, with whom he shares his lodgings. They, however, are far too advanced in the scales of suffering. Munoo's hero, however, is Ratan, the wrestler, who faces life with calm confidence. He wants to emulate Ratan and be like him: "I want to live, I want to work, to work this machine. I shall grow up to be a
man, a strong man like the wrestler”. Ratan takes him one night to the house of a prostitute, who excites his pent-up desire. Back in the lodgings, he is baptized in the life of flesh by Laxmi.

Soon, crisis overtakes the city, and normal life is paralyzed. Munoo finds himself in the midst of the labor strike, followed by an outbreak of communal violence. He is both an actor and a spectator who drifts with the crowd. He senses the futility of rhetoric as also the greater futility of disorganized action. The words of poet Sauda—“there are two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor”—echo in his ears, but soon the anarchy of the ocean drowns him in sleep. Even at this hour, he is aware that “the city, the bay, the sea at his feet, had an unearthly beauty”. Now the feeling of pain seems to tinge everything. He is run over by Mrs. Mainwairings’s car and is taken to Simla as her page and rickshaw-puller. She takes a fancy to him and wants to play the seductress, but Munoo is already broken. The strain of pulling the rickshaw sucks his life blood, and he contracts tuberculosis and dies. The peasant lad sprung up from the hills returns home to his origin.

Two Leaves and a Bud, which further dramatizes moral issues, shows a tremendous dramatic power through the counter pointing of good and evil and through a conscious manipulation of characters and incidents. The novel is therapeutic in effect, although the effect seems rather contrived. Gangu, the hero of the novel, leaves his native village in the Punjab and journeys to distant Assam to take up a job with Macpherson Tea Estate owned by Englishmen. He is accompanied by his wife, Sajani, and by his daughter and son, Leila and Budhoo. He is past middle age. His children, of course, are young companions of Bakha and Munoo. Sajani feels a glow of wonder at the prospect of commencing a new life in the plantation. Gangu, however, feels “a vague perturbation in his soul, the ache of an unapprehended doom”. Narain, one of the co-workers in the plantation, strikes the keynote when he says: “I suppose it was in our kismet. But at home it was like a prison and here it is slightly worse”. Gangu and his family learn this the hard way. First a dizzy spell of malarial fever breaks him completely; as soon as he recovers, the contagion kills his wife; Gangu receives a severe jolt. He has no money even to arrange a funeral and has to run from pillar to post. When he goes to Charles Croft-Crooke, the manager of the estate, he is blamed for spreading the contagion, and is instantly turned out of his office. In the meantime, discontent, which is rife in the plantation, is aggravated by
the brutal behaviour of Reggie Hunt, the assistant manager. Gangu finds himself involved in the strife. Beaten mercilessly by Reggie Hunt’s men, the workers stage a demonstration before the manager’s office, but are forced to disperse at gunpoint. Airplanes bring in the armed militia, and the workers are terrorized into submission. An uneasy peace returns, but the event leaves bitterness. De La Harve, the physician, who is engaged to Barbara, the manager’s daughter, is asked to quit as he sympathizes generally with the workers’ cause. Life then returns to normal, at least temporarily. Consequently, the governor visits the estate, and a tiger hunt is arranged for the occasion. In the meantime, Leila, who has grown into a comely maid, attracts the attention of Reggie Hunt, who, in a mad frenzy of desire, follows her up to her house. Unable to appease his hunger, he acts like mad, shooting Gangu at point-blank range as he appears on the scene. He beats a hasty retreat as soon as Gangu falls dead on the spot. A trial follows in which the killer is declared “not guilty.”

“I conceived Two Leaves and a Bud as a poem in suffering,” said Anand in a letter to J.F. Brown, adding: “I admit that it is the most bitter of my novels, but it is poetic. Were it in literary reportage, it would be hundred times more bitter.” The truth of the matter is that Two Leaves and a Bud is neither authentic reportage nor a poem in suffering. Its sensitized and to some extent truthful delineation of experience is much too peripheral and casual to be truly poetic. It is flashy and episodic in the extreme, whereas true poetic rendition implies an integrated and functional view of life. The sufferings of a Lear or even a Tess have the whole weight of poetry behind them, leading to purgation and illumination. Gangu and his family suffer because God has ordained that they should. They are mere scapegoats sacrificed at the altar of narrow racial and class prejudices.

Like the previous novels Two Leaves and a Bud may be regarded as a brilliant piece of naturalistic fiction. It has little or no use of irony, which alone could encompass the whole range of feeling from the sublime to the ridiculous. It leans rather on pathos, making it do the work of irony. It must be conceded, however, that it succeeds in transmitting an overwhelming sense of passion which gives it its telling dramatic force. Comparing it with the previous novels, Iyengar says: “If Untouchable... has a sort of piercing quality that is akin to the lyrical; if Coolie, with its enormous rage and multiplicity of action and character, has an almost epic quality, Two Leaves and a Bud may be said to be essentially dramatic novel.”
is apt and discriminating. The scenic tension in the novel touches high points of drama. Melodramatic devices, multiple points of view, dramatic telescoping of action and character are contributing factors toward building moments of dramatic tension.

ANAND’S next novel, Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts, marks a return to the primitive and universal aspect of human experience. It rejects completely the use of ready-made myth or symbol as means to express the modern disillusionment which is the basis of the strength of many modern novels. On the contrary, it leans almost exclusively on realizable, concrete experience to create archetypal forms. The novel, thus, is a prototype of transformation, and perhaps gives glimpses of the direction Anand’s art might take in the future. Anand’s understanding of life has never been in doubt, but here he probes the very nature of pain, central to existence. The basic, irremediable, irreplaceable human situation is firmly grasped, and the “why” and “wherefore” of life itself are questioned. Furthermore, the Lament raises questions the implication of which can perhaps best be grasped in terms of existential thought.

The story Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts is more in the nature of a dirge, a lyrical lament, moving with relentless pressure toward a point of no return. A young consumptive, Nur, looks back at life with mixed feeling of regret, rage, and anguish. The present with its trailing consequence of futility and waste merely prolongs the nightmare. Although death is around the corner, he finds a crumb of comfort in Stoic resistance to it, wishing to live and to suffer. He looks forward, but there is nothing to look forward to, except the yawning abyss. His father, the hardhearted confectioner, is absolutely callous to his suffering and even upbraids him at intervals out of his own frustrations. His mother has been dead for a long time. The only person who cares for him is his ugly, old grandmother, whom he only partially accepts. His wife, Iqbal, though deeply attached to him, is much too gently and passive to be a source of strength to him. His own sensitivity and intellectual bearing make it almost impossible for him to accept.

Another important aspect of Anand’s art, as of any novelist, is characterization. His major characters seem to step out of the printed page and merge with the flowing humanity. They embody a particular vision of reality which the novelist assigns to them, acquiring in the process the rich substance of life. This is so because Anand gives them part of his breath, his heart, his anguish, and his happiness.
Admittedly, he makes the most stupendous of bargains—a life for life. “A writer is trying to create believable people in credible moving situations in the most moving way he can,” says William Faulkner. The creation of lifelike characters is not merely the art of prefabrication. But of transformation, something connected with the artist’s inner life. Faulkner speaks of the world he created as being “a kind of keystone in the universe.” It is common knowledge that Balzac in the last phase of his illness was heard to break off a conversation and exclaim: “Let us speak of serious matters. What is Mme Maurringneuesse going to do?” There is absolutely no distinction between the people and the events of his novels and those of real life. The same could be largely true of Anand’s characterization. He himself admits that “the characters began to compel me to write them out.” He further states that “the passions which have occupied them were, perhaps, my own dominant moods, and, therefore, all those characters may be said to be the part of the same autobiography of the torments, ecstasies and passions of the last generation.” Francois Mauriac writes to similar effect when he says: “I am my characters and their world.” Anand, too, projects his own consciousness to his chief characters; the subjective focus assembles the idea and the personage at a point where they merge and become inseparable with the idea they symbolize.

In one sense, Mulk Raj Anand may be regarded as a naturalist, so far as the technique of characterization is concerned. He is more intent on drawing the prism surface than on achieving the depth of focus. Still the men and women of his created world appear singularly human and normal. The subsidiary characters, particularly, are drawn from the outside, thought they possess sharp generic features which make them appear flat. In delineating his main characters, Anand, of course, employs the technique of the “inner working novelist,” whose business is to explore the soul. Thus, the key figures of Anand are conceived in the round. They react sharply to experience, feel the tensions inherent in their situations, and grow and change in the process. They travel a long way from where they start. Whenever the novelist identifies himself completely with his character, or gives him the organ voice of his own symphony of feeling, the reality of the character is somewhat impaired. However, a complete and inseparable fusion of character and symbol leads to the autonomy, richness, and satisfaction implicit in the art of portrayal.
Most of the key figures of Anand are portrayals of the people who affected him strongly in his own life. He himself admits that “all these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels were the reflections of the real people I have known during my childhood and youth.” But actually, such characters as Bakha, Munoo, ananta, or Gauri overstep the bounds of actuality and emerge as symbols. They are no longer from the realms of fact; the come from the realms of essence. Much like Even and Dimitri in Dostoevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*, *Heathcliff* in Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*, and *Ahab* in Melville’s *Moby Dick*, they have a rich symbolic value. Transcending the limits of human actuality and emerging larger than life, they become archetypes of transformation, impassioned voices of feelings. Even when Anand creates his characters out of the blue, he still gives them the essential traits of common humanity. Such characters are no less believable than those modeled on real life, who haunt the author’s imagination, demanding expression.

The symbolic value of Anand’s characterization has been discussed already in the context of the respective novels. The hero in each novel is shown passionately engaged in a life-and-death struggle with society. Either he fights like Bhikhu in *The Road*, or he surrenders like Munoo in *Coolie*. In a world dominated by wrongs and injustices, the hero becomes the authentic voice of common humanity, the will and the conscience of mankind. He is both victim and rebel, a symbol of the tragic and the ironic, the heroic and the unheroic. At times, he does succeed in breaking the mythic pattern; in any case, there is hardly any escape from suffering. Lal Singh in the trilogy suffers because he is a born rebel against the eccentric design of the village customs and superstitions. The hero of *The Big Heart* wages a relentless war against tyranny and exploitation but has to pay the price-death. Even Bhikhu in *The Road*, who achieves the difficult feat of building a road, is forced to leave the village under the pressure of circumstance. Munoo in *Coolie* and Nur in *Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts* shiver in their helplessness, dying because of swift, quick logic of fate, the wheels of which are turned by a recalcitrant, brutal society. Sometimes, the quest pattern is initiated, giving the character a symbolic dimension as in the ancient myths and rituals. Gauri, in *The Old Woman and the Cow*, comes through because, like the quester in the Grail legends, she can ask the magic question and find and adequate answer to it, thus liberating herself and her class. Admittedly, she has the
courage to live and fight for the achievement of he ideal. Similarly, Maqbool Sherwani in Death of a Hero pursues his quest, the quest for love and truth, to the furthest limit of existence. The sentence of death and the actual execution do not for a moment dim out the glory and beauty of his ultimate quest.

The subsidiary characters of Anand, however, have a kind of Dickensian flavor. Anand's art here implies a sure and delicate devaluation of the human comedy. The flat characters, by their very nature, are less conventional than the round ones, for they have sharp moral tails but no subtlety and depth of focus. They are like familiar landscapes, irradiated by the play of light and shade, but always fixed to the center, static. The flatness of their contours in a way contributes toward the comic effect. They are, at best, like Johnsonian humors. According to E.M. Forster, flat characters are "little luminous discs of prearranged size, pushed hither and thither like counters across the void or between the stars." But the principal characters of Anand, as those of Proust, Lawrence, and Mann, are rounded ones that surprise us in a convincing way. They change through constant interaction of experience and response in the phenomenal world in which they live; an erosion of contours takes place both in the moral and emotional spheres of their being. In the universe of Anand, the two types of character, the flat and the round, find the way together. Indeed, the flat figures abound in the novels with great frequency, enriching the plot movement. They are types of characters, forming a choric pattern. Whenever the author touches any of them with his intimate brush, they at once come alive through the hidden breath of reality. Reggie Hunt, Gokul Chand, Loknath, Thakur Singh, and many others appear as convincing and real as the actual persons we meet. Similarly, Hercules Long in The Village, the priest in Untouchable, Ralia in The Big Heart, Subah in Across the Black waters, and one-eyed Sukhua in The Sword and the Sickle are delightfully comic portrayals.

It may appear to the casual reader that some of the main figures of Anand talk the same language and that they are modalities of the same idea, gyrations of the same ego. But they are controlled by a predominant passion which, in the final analysis, is also the universal passion of mankind. Anand contemplates in the way the dramatist contemplates his characters, and the beauty lies in the quality of contemplation, Anand himself stresses the value of detachment when he says:
The significant novelist broods upon human existence, feels himself at one with its sources, becomes obsessed in his soul with a theme, interprets experience, arranges the disarrangement, recalls the rhythmic life, even as he controls and constrains the flow of harmony and disharmony, and produces a pattern, which may accord with the universal urges of man...This may require a certain detachment in attachment, disengagement even in engagement, because what is part of the novelist himself is also part of the other people.

The crowded world of Anand, then is various, autonomous, satisfying, and complete. It is peopled with concrete, differentiated figures, not with mere phantoms. This world, in Faulkner’s phrase, offers “a keystone to the universe” and, therefore, has the right to life as long as humanity lasts.¹⁶

Mahesh Dattani is the first and only one Indian English dramatist to win the Sahitya Akademi Award so far for his work, Final Solutions and Other Plays in 1998. He has two volumes of plays titled Collected Plays, Vol. I (2000) and Collected Plays, Vol. II (2005) in Penguin imprint. He has just completed a radio play, vol. I, The Girl Who Touched the Stars for BBC Radio. Contemporary reality and society form the nerve center of his plays. He deals with the discriminations against people in the present society on the basis of religion, class, gender and sexuality with insight and empathy. Here, an attempt has been made to show that the social exclusion in his plays calls for a radical reformation and a change of heart leading to individual as well as social transformation.

Social exclusion is a worldwide phenomenon. In a multilingual and multicultural country like India, it is a major problem that threatens the very fabric of the society. Factors like caste, religion, community and gender give rise to social exclusion. But social exclusion as a concept emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century, though the Indian society witnessed this right from time immemorial when it was divided on the basis of caste. The upper caste hegemony was instrumental in causing the exclusion of the lower caste people from the rank of the society. Mahesh Dattani, the most significant Indian English playwright of the country deals with the theme of social exclusion in his plays not on the basis of caste but gender. How gender relationship based on sexuality causes social exclusion becomes a prime concern for him in some of his plays. Neuter sexuality, gay relationship and disease with social stigma like Aids cause social exclusion in the
country. This is a cause for concern in the contemporary society. Dattani depicts these themes deftly in Seven Steps Around the Fire, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Do the Needful, Mango Souffle, and Ek Alag Mausam. Seven Steps Around the Fire was first broadcast as Seven Circles Around the Fire by BBC Radio 4 on 9 January 1999. This is a play about hijra community who suffer from social exclusion in the country. Dattani explains the term hijra through the mouth of the Researcher in Sociology, Uma by going to the origin of the myth in The Ramayana.

A brief note on the popular myths on the origin of the hijras will be in order; before looking at the class-gender-based power implications. The term hijra, of course, is of Urdu origin, a combination of Hindi, Persian and Arabic, literally meaning 'neither male nor female'. Another legend traces their ancestry to The Ramayana. The legend has it that god Rama was going to cross the river and go into exile in the forest. All the people of the city wanted to follow him. He said, 'Men and women, turn back'. Some of his male followers did not know what to do. They could not disobey him. So they sacrificed their masculinity, to become neither men nor women, and followed him to the forest. Rama was pleased with their devotion and blessed them. There are trans-sexuals all over the world, and India is no exception. The purpose of this case study is to show their position in society. Perceived as the lowest of the low, they yearn for family and love. The two events in mainstream Hindu culture where their presence is acceptable-marriage and birth-ironically are the very same privileges denied to them by man and nature. (CP 10-11)

A hijra named Kamala was secretly married to Subbu, the son of a Minister. She (i.e. Kamla) was burned to death at the behest of the Minister who hastily arranged a girl for marriage to his son. But at the wedding ceremony, which was attended by guests as well as hijras, Subbu brought out a gun and shot himself. The suicide was hushed up. Uma, the researcher moving from pillar to post to find out the man behind Kamala's murder, meets other hijras like Artarkali. At long last she finds out the truth. The play ends with bathos as Uma reflects on that incident: They knew. Anarkali, Champa and all the hijra people knew who was behind the killing of Kamla but they have no voice. The case was hushed up and was not even reported in the newspapers. Champa was right, the police made no arrests. Subbu's suicide was written off as an accident. The photograph was destroyed. So were the lives of two young, people. (CP 42).
This can be interpreted as a protest play against the injustice meted out to the downtrodden in a society. Dattani is questioning - the age old belief of marriage being based on heterosexual relationship. He seems to say, that homosexual and lesbian relationships being as natural as heterosexual relationship, same-sex marriage should be permitted in India. Laws should be made to this effect. Secondly, the plight of hijras in our society is deplorable. It is an irony-of life that the hijras who are welcome on two occasions—one, at the time of marriage, and two at the time of childbirth—to sing and dance, are themselves deprived of marriage and childbirth. Nothing can be more ironical and pathetic than this. Dattani has done a good job by introducing a new theme to Indian English drama.

*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, the second play in Dattani's Collected Plays (2000), deals with gay personalities. The play begins with a conversation between Kamlesh and the guard in Hindi. Dattani without translating their conversation into English, takes recourse to transliteration. Kamlesh orders refreshments for his friends and asks the guards to make necessary arrangements. Later on Ed and Kiran come and begin to chat. Since they are engaged, Ed assures his fiance with soothing words, 'Relax, I can take care of you'. Then comes Sharad. He begins to chat with Kamlesh. They have homosexual relationship. Again Kamlesh had homosexual relationship with Prakash, who is none other than Ed.

Since same-sex love is unusual in Indian context, one can't help asking searching questions. One, is this play a true reflection of human behaviour in terms of same-sex relationship? Two. can 'gay themes of love' be a fit subject of contemporary drama? Dattani in course of his introduction to Collected Plays (2000) claims that his plays are the true reflection of the contemporary society. He opines that same-sex love is as natural as hetero-sexual love.

This view finds support in the following observations of John McRae with reference to the play, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai.

And the themes of *On a Muggy Night* deserve to touch the whole of society and to be touched by it. It is not simply the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal. It is a play about how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates.
Characters like Sharad, Deepak, Kamlesh, Ed and Bunny are all gay personalities. Kamlesh has homosexual relationship with Sharad and Ed (Prakash) who is betrothed to his sister Kiran. In the end the truth is revealed and Ed and Kiran's engagement breaks off. Each character in the play finally goes in search of his/her own identity and seeks to know what he/she has achieved or failed to achieve in life. Finally, Sharad speaking for himself, in a way sums up the feelings of all the characters in the following words:

I ask myself what I have got
And what I am and what I'm not....

In this play, Dattani examines the psychology of persons who are by nature 'gays' or 'bi-sexuals' and the desire on the part of some of them to turn heterosexual. This is an unusual theme in the Indian context. But in real life such characters do exist. Hence, Dattani has re-created the characters in their own situations. The question that puzzles the mind is "What Makes A Man A Man"

Like the hijras, the gay and lesbian personalities suffer from exclusion in the Indian context. They are looked down upon by the society.

Do the Needful is built on the theme of 'gay' relationship and as a result the marital relationship is given a new twist to suit both the wife and the husband. This story though appears to be comical reminds researchers the abnormal behaviour of a young couple who are willing to pursue their pleasures independently outside marriage. Sally Avens has rightly analysed the play in "A Note on the Play" in the following words:

In 1996 Mahesh Dattani was commissioned to write his first radio play for the BBC; the result was the somewhat unconventional 'romantic comedy', Do the Needful. Like all the best love stories, the hero and heroine end up getting married, but the road to marital bliss is full of the most unexpected twists and turns. For me, this was the joy of working on Mahesh's script: his writing, whilst taking on a conventional form and being readily accessible to an audience, never fails to challenge and surprise. And whilst the play may be set in India within the conventions of 'arranged marriage', its wider themes are universal. A British audience found it easy to empathize with a gay man being forced to live his life within the norms of a
heterosexual society or a young woman eager to prove her independence and break free from her parents.  

Responding to a matrimonial advertisement, Mr. Chandrakant Patel and his wife come to Bangalore to see Lata Gowda, the daughter of Devraj Gowda and Prema Gowda for marriage to their son, Alpesh. The Gowdas are desperate to marry their daughter at the earliest. This is evident from their following conversations:

Prema Gowda.  Do you think it will work with these Patel people?
Devraj Gowda.  Who knows?
Prema Gowda.  They seem desperate.
Devraj Gowda.  We are desperate.
Prema Gowda.  He is thirty-plus and divorced.
Devraj Gowda.  She is twenty-four and notorious. (CP,121)

Since it will be an inter-marriage the mother is apprehensive. And moreover, Alpesh is a divorcee. Devraj knows the nature of his daughter and therefore, wants her to get married-the sooner the better. The conversations between Patils and Gowdas reveal a good deal of things about the society in the present context.

Though Alpesh and Lata got married at the instance of their families, they never consummated their marriage. Lata is involved with a terrorist, Salim and Alpesh has homosexual relationship with Triok. The title, Do the Needful is ironical in the context. That Alpesh and Lata managed to go their way notwithstanding their marriage, proves the point.

Ek Alag Mausam (A Different Season) is really a different kind; a play on the latest dreaded disease HIV positive (AIDS). To write a play on AIDS victims and the reactions of the people to them is to bring alive the contemporary society which shows the predicament of human lives against the onslaught of this disease. Reader-Response criticism can be applied to this play to unfold human agony as well as selfishness of other people who avoid such diseased persons as untouchables. In this play a number of people are affected by this disease and Dattani shows how they live in the society knowing that their days are numbered. Aparna got the disease from her husband. Suresh and George got it through the transfusion of blood from his friend. Other patients got it from other sources like a child getting the virus from infected mother.
What is important in the play is the plight of the HIV positives on whose faces death stares each moment.... It is a death-in-life situation which needs human compassion to soothe and assuage their feelings.

The reaction of George's father is in a way the reaction of most of the people and their attitude to victims. George's father tells George harshly on his face to leave them. He says, "You may live for another seven years. But you have killed us before we have entered our graves. What face do we have left in this village? (With great efforts. Don't come back. Leave. Go George. (Making a gesture as if to a beggar) Go" (CP II 537).

Nothing can be more pathetic than this.

In the end, Dattani creates a new situation in which Dr Machado makes an appeal to the public to change their attitude towards HIV positives. The play ends with a hope that one may conquer AIDS as they have done other diseases in the past. "Today the world over doctors and scientists are trying to find a cure for Aids. In the interest of mankind researchers hope they succeed. While waiting for that cure to be invented or discovered, let us not forget—that miracles are known to happen" (CP It 556-57).

This is a heart touching play which shows human helplessness against the attack of the HIV positive virus. Let one try scientifically and pray for the success of the scientists. That is the message of the play.

Dattani's plays are about contemporary reality and therefore, the interaction between society and individual fascinates, his imagination. Dattani makes it clear in his 'Preface' to Collected Plays (2000):

I know that I am an artist. I don't need to underline it in me, works. I write for my plays to be performed and appreciated by as wide a section of the society that my plays seek to and are about. (CP XI)

Dattani has the courage of conviction to write about unconventional themes such as love for hijras, gay and lesbian relationships and above all about stigmatized disease like Aids which cause social exclusion in the contemporary society. By portraying such victims as protagonists in his plays, Dattani calls for social inclusion for them. Though these plays are open to various kinds of interpretations, the two approaches which suit them most are Subaltern Studies and Queer theory. Seven
Steps Around the Fire yields meanings when researchers apply the theory of Subaltern Studies to it. The hijras are subalterns, inferior in status in the society and they are incapable of raising their voices. They can't speak, they must be spoken for as Uma has done for them in "Seven Steps Around the Fire". They are 'marginals' in the society.

Dattani portrays sexuality as an important category of analysis of literary texts next to race, gender and class. Judith Butler, the author of Bodies that Matter (1993), questions fixed identities like heterosexuals, homosexuals and lesbians. All the identities come from differentiations from other identities. Paradoxically, identities are repetitions based on performances. It is in this sense that heterosexuality which takes itself as the only authentic form of sexuality is 'a string of performances'. Heterosexuality sees itself as the authentic form of sexuality by relegating lesbianism and homosexuality to the background and discarding them as inauthentic. If heterosexuality is the center, other sexualities are the margins. Queer theorists now say that like gender, sexuality is a social construct. One can be either a heterosexual or homosexual and even both at the same time. What Dattani says is that it is homosexuality which causes social exclusion. Hijras, homosexuals and Aids patients who suffer from social exclusion in researchers time, attract Dattani's attention. He portrays them sympathetically in his plays hoping for their inclusion into the society. There are hints and guesses in his plays which whispers results.

Gender Criticism, an offshoot of Feminist criticism, takes this dichotomies between gender and sex seriously. For many critics, gender is a social and cultural construct, whereas sex is biological and natural. If the gender critics hold gender as a social and cultural construct, feminist critics take it (i.e. gender) as innate in terms of masculinity and feminity. This is brought out by Russ Murfin and Supriya M. Ray in the following passage:

Certain gender critics have even questioned the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality, arguing that they, too, are social constructs. Many of these critics would also agree that sexuality as it is commonly perceived-as containing only two possibilities, homosexuality and heterosexuality-ignores the myriad variations and differences among individuals. Most people are not exclusively homo-or-hetero-sexual, these critics would argue. Such critics view sexuality as a continuum, not a fixed set of binary oppositions; they, also recognize that sexuality
encompasses a range of behaviours, from bondage to bestiality. Some gender critics (especially many gay and lesbian critics) also focus on sexuality but would disagree that it is culturally produced. These critics would argue that sexuality is innate, that homosexuals and heterosexuals are naturally different.\(^1\)

Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick have shown the difference between 'gender' and 'sex' in their book titled, Key Concepts in Cultural Theory in the following words

The concept of 'gender' is typically placed in opposition to the concept of 'sex'. While our sex (female/male) is a matter of biology, our gender (femininelmasculine) is a matter of culture. Gender may therefore be taken to refer to learned patterns of behaviour and action, as opposed to that which is biologically (letterminded). Crucially, biology need not be assumed to determine gender. This is to suggest that while what makes a person male or female is universal and groused in laws of nature, the precise ways in which women express their femininity and men express their masculinity will vary from culture to culture. Thus, qualities that are stereotypically attributed to women and men in contemporary western culture (such as greater emotional expression in women: greater tendencies to violence and aggression in men) are seen as gender, which entails that they could be changed.\(^2\)

Keeping these approaches to 'gender' and 'sex' in mind let the researchers take some of the plays of Dattani like Seven Steps Around the Fire, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Do the Needful, Thirty Days is September and Mango Souffle for a close study. Seven Steps Around the Fire is about hijras and same-sex love. To write a play, the lives of hijras seems not only to be unusual and unconventional but daring and revolutionary.

What Dattani highlights in the play is homosexual relationship and seems to ask why can't it be natural like heterosexual relationship and why can't there be marriage between homosexuals? The hijras are the subaltern. They can't speak for themselves. They must be spoken for. This is what Dattani does through the character of Uma, the researcher. The society looks down upon them after utilizing their services on the occasion of marriage and childbirth. Hence, gender studies and postcolonial criticism both apply to this play.
On a Muggy Night in Mumbai is again about same-sex love and homosexual relationship. Kamlesh, Ed (Prakash), Sharad, Bunny and Deepali all indulge in same-sex love. The whole play deals with unisexual and bisexual love relationship. Dattani examines this unusual love relationship among individuals both at psychological and physical level. He finds support from the Queer theorists on this unusual sexual relationship.

Kamlesh and Ed had a photograph in compromising position which was found by the watchman. The neighbourhood came to know about it. Kamlesh had also homosexual relationship with Sharad and Kian knew about it. Deepali seems to endorse this kind of relationship when she says, “I am alone for the gay men’s cause. Men deserve only men!” Needless to say that she herself is lesbian.

Bunny, a friend of Kamlesh, Ranjit and Sharad, is a homosexual who is married. He tells Kiran, “I have never told anyone in so many words what I am telling you now – I am a gay man” (CP 103.)

In the end all these friends disperse when Sharad sings a song:

I ask myself what I have got And what I am and what I’m not.....(CP 111).

The play is about ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ persons who pretend to be different in public. Dattani delves deep into the psyche of these types of persons who think they have a right to pursue their pleasure and live in their own way.

Behind their desire to seek same-sex love, there lies the agony of finding an identity of their own. That becomes the burden of the plays. Living in darkness away from the purview of an open society, these characters are torn between desire and recognition. They fail to fulfil their desire as it is crushed under the norms of the society and lose their identity as individuals. Their love remains unnatural and their identity is threatened in a society which only upholds heterosexual relationship leading to marriage.

The characters presented in the play are pleasure seekers. Their sexuality is threatened by the norms of the society. They want to throw away the traditional and conventional pattern of seeking love through heterosexual relationship. Their nature is different from that of normal social human beings. There is a binary opposition between their nature and the culture of their society. This dichotomy between nature
and culture obstructs their love and poisons their minds. The note of revolt against the society is unmistakable. In the age of globalization, nature triumphs over culture.

*Thirty Days in September* shows sexual exploitation of young girls and women by men who are their blood relations. The norms of morality are thrown to the wind. Mala, a young woman was abused sexually by her maternal uncle in her childhood and later on she became free with young men like Deepak who proposed to marry her. Shanta, Mala's mother knew everything and was upset with her daughter. Mala bears a grudge against the male-dominated society and turns down Deepak's proposal of marriage. Thus, Deepak tells Shanta:

I just don't get it, I thought everything was going well (Upset). I thought she loved me. May be I said or did something to upset her. But what could it be?... (Composing himself). Last week, I told her that she was the most intelligent, sensitive and dynamic woman I had met. She just stared at me and said, "I have something to tell you. It is over. I don't want to continue with our relationship." She doesn't want to see me ever again. (CP II 14).

Mala has a guilt consciousness-for being exploited sexually and also being an accomplice in her puberty and early youth-and that is why, she is indecisive about her action.

Mala's reaction comes out of her anger caused by her mother's inaction to protect her from her uncle. She in her teens is unable to resist her uncle's advances and gradually gives in. That kind of submission makes her disappointed. Out of disappointment in life she is driven to the arms of man. Mala danced with 'Man' and held him tight in a party in the presence of 'Man's' fiance, Radhika. She went to the extent of saying, "Do whatever you want with me, but take me with you now." Later on in the plan it is revealed that both Mala and her mother Shanta were physically exploited by Mala's maternal uncle, 'The Man'. Both suffered psychologically and Shanta's husband left them. When learnt from her mother that she was also exploited by the same man during her childhood, she understood the plight of the mother. At the end comes the heart to heart union between the mother and the daughter. This is how the play ends with Mala's words:
It is not your fault mother. Just as it wasn't my fault. Please, tell me that you have forgiven me for blaming you.... I know you will, mother. I know you have. (CP II 58). Apart from Queer theory this play, Thirty Days in September can be interpreted in terms of Feminist criticism which shows the exploitation of women by men. In a patriarchal society women become toys at the hands of men. It is social and cultural construct of feminine mind which fights shy of going against men. We can also apply psychoanalytical criticism to this play. The subconscious mind of Mala holds her mother responsible for the torture meted out to her.

Dattani brings the theme of incest into this play and shows another angle of human life in which the dichotomy between appearance and reality is so glaring.

Apart from writing about the physical aspect of human life in terms of human passion for all kinds of love and lust, Dattani has chosen beautiful themes like human compassion and contemporary reality for some of his plays. Final Solutions, Clearing the Rubbles and A Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child deal with themes of contemporary life and reality. In his well-known play, Final Solutions, Dattani depicts the communal tensions and riots with insight and objectivity, Daksha (Hardika) the grandmother reads her diary to reinforce her feelings about the jubilations over the country getting independence in August 1947 and regrets the communal riots which followed immediately.

When one is in true love with another, nationality, colour and social status don't matter. Love transcends all-Dattani seems to say. These two plays (Final Solutions and The Tale of Mother Feeding Her Child) can be interpreted best in terms of Humanistic Criticism. M.H. Abrams in course of an article titled, "What is a Humanistic Criticism?" says that, "a humanistic literary criticism is one that deals with a work of literature as composed by a human being, for human beings, and about human beings and matters of human concern." (JLC 8:2 21) These two plays are about human beings who are greatly affected by communal riots and poverty respectively, which cause greater concern for mankind.

Dattani has dealt with crime as a theme in two of his well-known plays titled Uma and the Fairy Queen and The Swarm and Winston. Dattani unravels the mystery of Michael's murder at the hands of his wife Nila in Uma and the Fairy Queen. Milo alter Ahmed, a T.V. star from Pakistan; her first husband Man. Her son, Feroz was,
financially helped by Michael who sponsored his education. But when Michael refused to divorce Nila, she planned his murder and finally killed him. There is a hint in the play that she had an affair with Mr Liam Tate; the British Cultural Ambassador to India. Mr Liam told Urna, a detective, and police officer Suresh's wife about the strained relationship between Nila and Michael: "Their marriage is falling apart, it's an open secret in London, but it's not something they like to talk about." When Uma asked Feroz, Nila's son, "why do you think she (.Nita) would kill her husband?" he said, "Because she is in love with this whiteman!" (Liam) and added that he saw them together, "Everywhere! In the hotel! In his room! She is a whore! Vjichael died because of her" (CP II 457).

This play exposes the vulgar display of the lust of a woman leading to her criminal action resulting in the death of her second husband.

Dattani here exposes those pseudo-religious persons who play dirty politics in the name of religion. This is a biting satire on persons indulging in criminal acts under the façade of religious activities in contemporary society in India.

Dance Like a Man is the masterpiece of Dattani in which he shows two attitudes so it. The old conservative attitude to 'Dance' as a profession is not very respectable but new attitude to it is both progressive and honourable. Ratna, the protagonist, a noted dancer is very happy with Jairaj, a dancer and an admirer of the art. This couple has perfect understanding as they continue to perform on stage year after year. Amritlal, Jairaj's father is dead against 'dance' as a profession and would not like his daughter-in-law to go to a prostitute to learn the art of dancing and his son to grow long hairs. Lata, daughter of Ratna and Amritlal, is also a dancer and her mother moved heaven and earth to give her scope to earn a name for herself. Ratna loves, practices and worships the art and learns sitting at the feet of Chennai Ammu: "To master the art of abhinava, you will have to find the woman and God inside you and to dance, you must fight the demons outside you" (CP II 118).

But 'dance' as an 'art' has its pitfalls and social repercussions. It breeds jealousy, suspicion and brings misunderstanding in the family—more so, if both the husband and wife are dancers. For example, when Lata got applause and standing ovation from the Chief Minister and Ratna took all the credit for it, Jairaj became
jealous. This is how Dattani expresses the sentiments of the wife and husband in the following lines:

Ratna. You are too kind. Sathyu Sahid being such a senior government official, you are also so knowledgeable about dance ... if people like you praise her, she has every reason to be thrilled.

Jairaj exchanges a look with Vishwas. And the Chief Minister himself gave her a standing ovation. Did you see? As soon as Lata finished her tillance, he stood up and applauded. Jairaj (to Viswas). He was in a hurry to go to the toilet. (CP II 142)

This betrays Jairaj's sense of distancing himself from the encouragement which his wife, Ratna gives to their daughter, Unwittingly Jairaj echoes his father, Amrital in disapproving the attitude of the next generation towards dance. But Ratna is determined to make her an accomplished dancer and works in that direction.

Morning Raga, a play about Carnatic music and musicians, can be interpreted from psycho-analytical point of view. The inner urge of an artist and a Musician is to reach out to the audience. However, a musician or an artist does not make her intention explicit. The protagonist, Swarnalatha who lost her friend Vaishnavi in a bus accident became indifferent to her art. Abhinay, Vaishnavi's son had music in his blood, compelled Swarnalatha to come out of her self-imposed reticence to perform in a town. Abhinay was supported by Priyanka (Pinkie) and her mother, Mrs Kapoor to practice music by forming a music group. But Abhinay's father was opposed to it.

In Do the Needful the protagonists, Alpesh Patel and Lata Gowda who come from different family backgrounds get married through negotiations between two families. But their marital bliss eludes them as their minds are pre-occupied with the thoughts of other people with whom they are in love. Lata thinks of Salim, a terrorist with whom she is in love and Alpesh being a gay thinks of Trilok with whom he has homosexual relationship. The play which begins with a note of negotiation between Patel and Gowda families, ends with the protagonists choosing to live their lives in their own way behind the facade of marriage.

What is important in the play is not the love or hate between the protagonists but the depiction of contemporary reality in terms of north-south divide and the hiatus between the rich and the poor and above all dowry given in marriages. The common people protest against the marriage between the South Indian and North/West Indians.
Again Dattani brings the caste and region factors as obstacles to marriage in India to the notice of the readers and audience through the conversation between Chandrakant Patel and Devraj Gowda.

This play is about social problems and contemporary changing society in which old prejudices as well as values are making way for new adjustments. Above all, it shows the liberated young men and women who pursue their sexual pleasures in unconventional ways.

The breaking up of joint-family system in India is on the rise now-Dattani takes it as a theme in some of his plays like, Where There's Will and Bravelly Fought the Queen in the same way as A.K. Ramanujan does in his family poems. In Where There is a Will Dattani gives a twist to family disharmony by bringing the wife and the mistress together. It is an irony of fate that the woman who keeps the family together is not the wife but the mistress.

Hasmukh Mehta, the patriarch of the family wants his son, Ajit to follow his line as he did by emulating his father, which the son resents. Again he wants his wife, Sonal to be active and smart in life. Having failed in both the counts he keeps a mistress Kiran and makes a Will making her the custodian of his property. This play can be best interpreted in terms of psycho-analytic criticism and humanistic criticism.

Bravely Fought the Queen shows how women suffer at the hands of their husbands in the joint family. Moreover, the homosexual husbands enact hell for their wives. This play in three acts shows men and women in opposition to each other. The result is disastrous for the joint family. Feminist criticism is most suitable for the analysis of this play. M.K. Naik makes a pertinent observation when he says, the woman question is presented in greater detail in Bravely Fought the 'Queen' is, of course, the Rani of Jhansi, who died fighting the British in 1857. (The title is derived from a famous Hindi poem, which has the refrain, "khoob lath mardani -the manly queen fought bravely"). Her name is invoked as an ironic parallel to the women in the play who are passive, helpless victims of male tyranny.

All the three women in the play suffer, each in her own way. Old Baa's husband has abandoned her, in favour of another woman. She now lies bedridden and aged, and no one responds to her call when she rings the bell to summon someone for help. The irony is, it is in her house that his sons and their families are living. Dolly,
Baa's elder daughter-in-law, is a pale, meek creature. She is beaten up by her brutal husband, when she is in an advanced stage of pregnancy, so that her daughter is born deformed. Alka, the other daughter-in-law, has her own cross to bear: her husband is a homosexual. The two sons of Baa, Jiten and Nitin are both failed businessmen, and the bonsai plant which appears in the play more than once is an apt symbol of the two young men. (Naik and Narayan 207).

Dattani exposes the hypocritical nature of men who are either harsh to their wives in particular and female sex in general or who betray their wives by being 'gay' and 'bisexual' at the same time. Dattani has the courage of conviction to expose the inherent weakness of human nature with accuracy and objectivity.

In Tara Dattani depicts another kind of discrimination against woman (i.e. a girl child). It is here that the mother prefers a son to a daughter and in the process caused the death of the girl. This play can be read profitably if we apply feminist and humanistic criticism to it. With two children (twin) born with three legs between them-two on the girl's side with regular blood-flow and one on the boy's side, the family took a decision to operate them giving two legs to the boy and one to the girl. The result was disastrous. Tara died and Chandan was amputated. In retrospect Chandan thinks it a sin to deprive his sister of her right to live. It is an irony of fate that the person who was responsible for Tara's plight is not her father but her own mother. The exchange between Tara's father, Patel and mother Bharati makes things clear.

Patel (grabs Tara), Look at her, Bharati. And tell her that you love her very much. Bharati. Tara knows it. Leave her alone!

Tara, Daddy....

Patel. Tara, please believe me when I say that I love you very much and I have never in all my life loved you less or more than I have loved your brother. But your mother.... (CP 3541).

The play shows the good matured brother repenting for his sister's death. He seeks the forgiveness of his sister and wants to be united with her. Chandan's emotional appeal for union with his sister redeems the injustice done to her by their mother.
But somewhere, sometime. I look up at a shooting star ... and wish. I wish that a long-forgotten person would forgive me. Wherever she is and will hug me. Once again. (CP 380).

_Clearing the Rubble_ is a play on human condition made precarious by earthquake. It is written against the backdrop of 2001 earthquake in Gujarat. An English journalist revisits the place and looks for the boy he saved by making him free from the rubble. The play is in three voices. It shows the gap between law and human miser), and calls for a drastic change in our attitude to help the people in distress. Salim tells Jeffrey the difficulties about getting government compensation in a tone marked by anger and frustration.

The irony is unmistakable. Dattani has an insight into human nature and that is why his portrayal of human condition is both authentic and moving. He 'sees like steadily and sees it whole', as Eliot would put it.
END NOTES


10. ibid, p-5.


13. ibid, p-89

14. ibid, p-89

15. ibid, p-89


