Chapter-IV

A Critical Analysis in Mahesh Dattani’s Plays
Mahesh Dattani is a man of Drama with intelligence. Most of his plays are related to the Indian middle class family. He shows gender issues, problems of Hijra community and place of women in Indian society. Dattani concentrates on contemporary society and reality in the fast changing world. He is a playwright on modern urban India and his plays are topical dramas. The question he addresses in his plays is those of gender, sex, religion, communal tension, feminine identity, same-sex marriage, and above all, gay and lesbian relationship. Hence, his plays show to be revolting, sometimes, outrageous. The total corpus of his plays which include Radio plays, Screen plays and Stage plays is sixteen. He came to limelight and shot into fame with the winning of the first ever Sahitya Akademi Award for a playwright in 1998 for his work *Final Solutions* and *Other Plays*.

Mahesh’s plays often feature characters who are questioning their identity, and who feel isolated in some way. (Jeremy Mortimer, ‘A Note on the Play’, Collected Plays, 4). Mahesh Dattani frequently takes as his subject the complicated dynamics of the modern urban family. His characters struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, cultural constructions of gender, and repressed desire. Their dramas are played out on multi level sets where interior and exterior become one, and geographical locations are collapsed-in short his settings are as fragmented as the families who inhabit them. In his plays, Dattani takes on what he called the ‘invisible issues’ of Indian society. (Erin Mee, ‘Note on the Play’, Collected Pays 320) The most important aspect of Dattani’s Plays is that they address the “invisible issues” of contemporary Indian society. The second important aspect of Dattani’s plays is that they dive deep into human heart and create characters true to life situations. The third important characteristic of his plays is the family bond that binds its members together or the breaking of that bond through mutual distrust and suspicion. If Girish Karnad deals with myths and history, Mahesh Dattani highlights contemporary reality in his plays. In this play, Dattani examines the psychology of persons who are by nature ‘gays’ or ‘bi-sexual’ and the desire on the part of some of them to turn heterosexual. Dattani’s plays embody appropriate visual images and the scenes are well designed. He combines in him the skill of a director, the performing art of an actor and above all.

*Seven Steps Around the Fire* was first broadcast as *Seven Circles Around the Fire* by BBC Radio 4 on 9 January 1999. The play begins with Uma, a Ph.D. scholar in
Sociology and wife of the Superintendent of Police. This can be interpreted as a protest play against the injustice meted out to the downtrodden in the 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. Postcolonial aspects are discussed in the play with the theme of Feminism and Plight of women. It has been seen that before independence and after independence situation of women is different. Because of some old belief like “Woman’s place is only in kitchen”. Education was not given to the girl child. Some colonial rules and British rules are the responsible for woman’s injustice.

In this play, Dattani observes 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 may seem to be 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. To see this play on stage is to feel how these characters turn their inside out. Dattani has hinted at the need for same-sex marriage in the Indian context. Plays of Dattani deals with the discriminations against people in our society on the basis of religion, class, gender and sexuality with insight and empathy. Mahesh Dattani, the most significant Indian English playwright of our 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. 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 forest. Rama was pleased with their devotion and blessed them. There are trans-sexual 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 (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 at himself. The suicide was hushed up. Uma, the researcher moving from pillar to post to find out the man behind Kamla’s murder, meets other hijras like Anarkali and Champa and interrogates them.

She thinks aloud about hijra community. Dattani is questioning the age old belief of marriage being based on heterosexual relationship. Dattani has done a good job by introducing a new theme to Indian English drama. Hence, gender studies and postcolonial criticism both apply to this play. Dattani tries to represent here the wide distance between the third gender and the ‘normal’ gender. The story of the love affair between Kamala and Subbu shows the impossibility of the marriage between a eunuch and a man in Indian society. The play is about the identity crisis of the third gender and their longing for social acceptance.

_Seven Steps Around the Fire_ shows Dattani a master of language and characterization. Each one of us is marginal in a way, residing in a no man’s land—between crisis and comfort zone—trying to belong to the comfort level while the crisis pulls us back. As we can refer the term “Subaltern” to the marginalized group this “subaltern” in _Seven Steps Around the Fire_ is forced to maintain silence against oppression and injustice.

In the traditional society of India, the identity of gays, lesbian, _hijras_, and homosexual has not yet been organized. Dattani dramatizes the crisis of those relationships that are not rigidly demarcated in terms of socially accepted gender constructions. Dattani’s play _Seven Steps Around the Fire_ represents the voice of eunuch community who are not even allowed to show their faces in community. The play deals with the violence inflicted on the _hijras_, who are unseen and unheard in the society. The play expresses the identity crisis of the _hijras_ and their heartfelt longing for being treated as a social being in an indifferent society. The communication in general and the speech situations in particular in this play are obviously influenced by the theme of the play, as also by a whole lot of other components of a radio play. In short, postcolonial approach is shown with the use of different themes. Condition of hijra is dramatically
presented with the story of case study. Dattani has courage to discuss different themes like discrimination, plight of woman, feminism and condition of hijra. Mahesh Dattani came with new concept in Indian English Drama.

It is a protest play against the social exclusion of the *hijras*. Such exclusions can be found everywhere in the Indian society like the caste, class, religion or inclination based bias, but the *hijras* suffer this on the basis of their neutral gender. Dattani underlines the fact that other than the social customs and bindings, the *hijras* have a ‘self’ that longs for dignity and when it is denied the same, it tries to break free of such customs. When they protests, most of the times their voice is suppressed by the established order that prevails in the society. Dattani has added a new dimension to the theatre by taking up such themes in his plays. It is remarked:

“Dattani has done a good job by introducing a new theme to Indian English drama. Conservatives and social activists should not turn a blind eye to reality...We have to accept the reality of life, however, painful that might be.” (Das, Bijay Kumar p.17)

Dattani’s *Seven Steps Around the Fire* revolves around the existential problem of the 'third gender', the community of eunuchs their existence on the fringes of the Indian milieu. They inhabit at the tiny pockets of Indian cities and tread areas that are generally brushed aside to the fringes, the margins of society, as it were. This is literally a no man's land in many senses of the term, and no woman's either.

(http://researchlink.in/FullIssue/Research%20Link%2095/4%20English%20Literature.pdf18/8/13 12:19pm)

The relationship between the three characters is wonderfully crafted, and is all the more successful for fitting within an established pattern of detective fiction. 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. Dattani’s
exactly does the same. He raises the issues from sexuality to criminality and then moves on to topical subjects like communal violence, and deadly disease like Aids and allows the characters to express their views freely. His plays evoke a good deal of empathy. His theatrical language modifies his dramatic text and is reflected in the performance of the characters.

*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* deserves to feel 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 unfaithfulness. It is a play about how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates. *(CP 45)* Since love is more in the mind than in the body, the attitude to sex varies from person to person. No doubt, society imposes restrictions on individuals as to how to gratify their sex. But individuals are individuals—they find a way out to fulfil their love and sex. Dattani knows this too well and hence, his characters go in their own ways. In this play, Dattani examines the psychology of persons who are by nature ‘gays’ or ‘bisexual’ and the desire on the part of some of them to turn heterosexual. Dattani has hinted at the need for same-sex marriage in the Indian context. In *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, a play on gay and lesbian relationship, Ranjit asks a basic question in the opening line of Act III, “Why do people get married?” The answer is given by Bunny, “It is natural to the majority of the people”. That is because heterosexual love leads to procreation. But this question and the answer to it can’t be taken as authorial voice. In an e-mail reply to the present author, Dattani wrote, “you can be a nurturer and provider in a same sex marriage just as you can in an opposite sex marriage, procreation is a choice which some married couples don’t exercise”. The whole play deals with unisexual and bisexual love relationship. Dattani examines this unusual love relationship among individuals both at psychological and physical level. In postcolonial era, It was a time when people were conservative and unable to speak about open issues of the society like ‘gay relation’. But Dattani has tried to discuss openly about this kind of issues openly through drama. He discusses about husband wife relationship and issues in Indian middle class society. In modern era, people are well educated and using technology, they have different technology to get answer of his personal questions. So they are feeling well to discuss it openly with audience too. The major differences between postcolonial and modern era is technology and
people’s awareness in different subject like sex and social issues. As per the rules of Indian culture and tradition, relationship between husband and wife should be dutiful and holy in the society. But now this concept is old in Indian culture. Indian people are blindly follows western culture and tradition and it is dangerous for family and social relationship. Ethic, moral and values are the base of Indian culture and tradition. But now people are not interested to handle the difficult situation and responsibility. They are under stress and because of this they used to drink alcohol and some other habits. The same thing is in this play too about the relationship between husband and wife.

*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is a play which is unique because it does not deal with one individual who is homosexual but a whole community of homosexuals and their psychological traits. The plot hinges on Kamalesh’s trying to hide from his sister Kiran the fact that he was in a relationship with the man she is about to marry. Prakash and Kamalesh were deeply in love with each other. The separation between Prakash and Kamalesh causes immense pain and distress in the heart and mind of Kamalesh. Thereafter, he comes in contact with Sharad and develops a homoric relationship with him. However, Kamalesh can’t adjust himself with Sharad as he is haunted by memories of Prakash, who is now known as Ed and intends to marry Kiran, divorcée sister of Kamalesh. The play samples a wide range of male homosexual presence in Indian society. Kamalesh is a well-adjusted straight acting gay man. His ex-boyfriend Sharad is intelligent and campy. Ed is in denial and is about to enter into a heterosexual affair with his fiancée’s brother, Kamalesh. Bunny is a celebrity and is in the closet. Ranjit is visiting from the Uk, working with HIV Counselors. The play foregrounds the subjectivity of queer people in contemporary urban Indian gay society. The play begins with the description of Kamalesh’s flat which is “too perfect to be real” (Dattani 49) which shows his effort to create “a world where he can belong”. He knows well that he will not be accepted by the heteronormative society as it always tries to subordinate homosexuality. This can be supported if we focus our attention to the relationship that Kamalesh shares with his flat’s security guard. The guard being conscious of his identity as gay replies “no” when being asked by Kamalesh if he does this for money. The
reply suggests that he is also a gay but he is ashamed to admit the fact. So, he instantly changes the answer and says that he does this for money. The guard knows that if he proclaims himself of being a gay then the heteronormative society will not accept him. In order to survive he has to construct an identity for himself. Sharad is the only character who is not afraid of homosexual identity. Sharad obviously does not believe in performing gender. He is ready to accept who he is. The play is the first in Indian theatre to openly handle gay themes of love, affiliation, trust and betrayal, raising serious ‘closet’ issues that remain generally ‘invisible’. Dattani projects the crisis that gays face as they are torn between their true self and what the traditional Indian society thinks and expects of the gays. Their hidden fears and feelings are carefully exposed by Dattani, within the framework of dramatic structure and he tries to investigate the identity crisis of the gays, who occupy no honorable space in social order.

In Indian society, the practice of homosexuals/lesbianism is not tolerated. A consensual homosexual relationship remains a crime to this day, according to the civil law section 337 of the Indian Penal Code. The section refers to “carnal acts against the order of nature”. Even homosexuality is against religious values. As per the law, whosoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life or imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years or liable to fine. It is clear that Dattani feels the need to establish a firm connection between the possibilities of greater space for the gays from the affluent society. He, not very loudly, makes a plea for an atmosphere of acceptance and acknowledgement for the gay and lesbian community and also brings out the gay issues out of the closet into the open. He problematizes the whole issue of gay relationship and analyzes the world of gay people expecting public participation on the problem under discussion.

Asha Kuthari Chaudhari, while discussing this play, wonders:

…gay literature seems to have been beleaguered by unhappy endings. Homosexuals invariably move towards death, isolation, or a sham heterosexual marriage of the kind Ed and Kiran are heading towards. (Mahesh Dattani 50)
The reason of this apparent ‘love, sex and dhoka’ formula that seems to dominate the lives of these gay boys is what this psychological analysis has intended to underline. Even in Dattani’s Bravely Fought the Queen, the ending discloses the gay relationship that exists between Alka’s husband Nitin and her brother Praful—her marriage itself has been a strategy designed to conceal their gay relationship. The plays written by Dattani highlight the homoerotic association as a reality and hence like any other actuality this has been depicted in all its factuality, including the limitations that need to be revealed, scrutinized for better understanding, for it is the compulsion of a civilized society to comprehend before complaining. Dattani himself has stated that being ‘gay’ is not “right or wrong, it is a reality and we have to learn to accept alternative relationships and live with them”. It has been seen since past that people are not accepting reality. View point is completely discussed in the name of illegal relationship. The same theme is discussed in this play. Family clash is widely discussed in this play with the thought of women’s statement. Dattani has dared to discuss the gay issues openly with the postcolonial era.

In Do the Needful, Dattani deals with the customary theme of marriage. The marriage compromise of Alpesh and Lata shows the changing trend of Indian society in which marriages take place across castes are permissive and sometimes preferred. The dominance of modernity, rationalism in socio-cultural realm of life and milieu gives birth to the inter-caste marriage. In spite of these realities, Dattani, for all the time, is worried of the deterioration of Indian culture. Though the play has been written for the British audience, he chooses the Indian setting and the Indian system of arranged marriage, which bears wider and universal significance for it, weaves multicultural society. Further this play deals with cultural conflict, doubt and bias as well as unification of two families – one Gujarati (Patel’s family) and another Kannadiga’s (The Gowda’s family).

But Dattani’s plays are not only concerned with the traditional values of Indian culture. In fact he is more conscious to the changing socio-cultural, socio-economical, and socio political changes and development which have very worse impact on our society. According to Dattani gender identity ultimately makes way for national identity. The portrayal of Indian culture which comprises the role and status of women, Indian traditions and their importance, Indian culture
Dattani is conscious of the fact that class difference and gender difference are prevalent in Indian society. Violence against women in form of patriarchy and matriarchy, gender discrimination, and child sexual abuse (pedophilia) are rampant throughout the society and they have become the part of our culture. In Indian society and home domestic violence against women and gender discrimination are highly prevalent irrespective of caste and colour. Physical violence as well as explicit forms of aggression is used by the more powerful in the Household as methods to ensure obedience of the less powerful and therefore related to power dynamics in a household. At every stage in the life –cycle, the female body is both the objects of desire and of control. Do the Needful is the earliest radio play of Dattani. The play depicts the theme of homosexuality but in a quite different way.

The play was first broadcast on 14th August 1997 by BBC Radio 4.

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.

Since it is a radio play the dramatist discards elaborate stage description. The narrative of the play occurs at two levels – exterior and interior. Dattani writes about the society he lives in. His plays depict the dynamics and mechanism of modern urban families. Therefore, he gives way to old theatrical device to reveal the move and motives of the character. He uses newer devices like ‘thought’, ‘mobile phone’ conversations for revealing the feelings and thoughts of the characters. In this play, he employs the techniques like ‘thought’, phone talk etc.

The plot of the play revolves around the theme of arranged marriage between Alpesh Patel, a young boy of Gujarati parents and Lata Gowda, a Kannadiga. The parents of both the persons look concerned regarding their marriage. The dramatic narrative shows the tension and unrest prevailing in the minds of all the characters. Alpesh Patel and Lata Gowda are the two main male-female characters of the play. Alpesh is thirty plus divorced and Lata is twenty four years old and a very notorious girl. However, she is well read lady. Alpesh’s family
is richer than Lata’s. Gowda family is very positive about Alpesh’s matrimonial proposal. Both are well to do families and claim to have good names in their respective communities. Even though, they intend to get their children married outside their community. They are brought together through matrimonial correspondence and keen to get their children married soon. Actually, the problem prevails beneath the surface level. Alpesh and Lata are unwilling to marry each other. Alpesh is a gay. He is in love with a man called Trilok, whereas Lata is quite romantic in her notion. She is in love with a man called Salim who is a terrorist. The conflicts and turmoil of their minds are brought on the surface through ‘thought’ technique.

The play also informs about certain customs and ceremonies to be undertaken at the time of starting something auspicious task. Gifting or donating money to others especially poor people and poojari, priest etc. for seeking blessings upon the task is highlited in the play. The Patels are going to visit the Gowda family at Bangalore. Mr. Patel first gives ten rupees to lifterman and one hundred and one to the poojari for a special prayer for his son Alpesh. In the dramatic structure of play, Do the Needful, Dattani tries to show clash between the homosexuals’ sentiments and the established and accepted notions of the society which do not permit an individual to lead life according to the call of his/her conscience. The play is built up on the idea of pushing forward the institution of conventional marriage system. Being a master dramatist, he interweaves the theme of homosexuality in the fabric of the play. He is very original in his art of adopting technique befitting to his purpose. In an attempt to depict the complex and conflicting mental spectrum, he resorts to ‘thought’ device for surfacing inside story before audience properly. This is how he lays bare inside working of Lata’s mind through ‘thought’ technique.

Thus, the play Do the Needful focuses on the shared spaces between women and the gay in the society which mainly promotes the patriarchal family set up and discourages any change that challenges well-known and existing structure of it. Alpesh and Lata are forced to marry each other by their parents. Parents’ idealism is confronted with children’s individualism through the exterior
and interior dramatic decoding devices. Lata is craving for Salim and Alpesh is pining for Trilok. It is almost impossible for both of them to fulfill their dreams and desire. Socio-cultural tradition prevents them from doing so.

The play *Final Solution* was first performed in 1993, which is about the communal issues of India. People of India and Pakistan were divided before the independence of India. The division of India and Pakistan was not only the geographical division, but also Hindus and Muslims were forced to go to their respective lands, Hindus to India and Muslims to Pakistan. Thus, the play *Final Solution* is about the cultural supremacy of how Hindus suffer at the hands of Muslim Majority like the character of Hardika/Daksha in Hussainabad, and how Muslims like Javed suffer in the set-up of the majority Hindu community. It disturbs the normal social life and also is hindrance for the national progress.

Chorus is the extraordinary system introduced by Mahesh Dattani which is a symbolic way of expressing our own hatred towards another community. Another way of narration of the communal issue is also an innovative technique as the young girl Daksha who will be reading the diary which she wrote long back related to the communal riot, and immediately the young girl changes into the old Hardika. But there is no much difference between olden day’s riots and the present day’s riots as both have the same bloodshed, same strength of violence. Daksha closes her diary and then Hardika appears on the stage. In the living room of the Gandhis, Aruna, Ramnik Gandhi’s wife, enters with her daughter Smita. Aruna is a God-fearing woman who strongly follows each and every ritual, being a Hindu, Javed and Bobby on the other side that represents Muslim community. But at the end of the play, the writer wishes to stop this hatred and communal tension. The ‘Divide and Rule’ policy was adopted by the British during the colonial rule. Due to that there arouse many differences between the communities. The result was communal hatred and many of them migrated to different places, which was completely new for them. Hindus migrated from Pakistan to India and Muslims from India to Pakistan. This migration was forceful and even after so many years people were not able to come out of the shocking events caused by migration. In the play *Final Solution* we find one such family to specify it’s a character by name
Daksha/Hardika. Even after independence people of both the nation were prejudiced by the past communal riots. The feeling of insecurity and confusion rose. People belonging to this age had to confront many strange issues as they settled in a new land and problems increased. The birth of religious nationalism, disputes in national identities and decline of human values—these disorders led to linguistic, ethnic and caste identities.

The play presents different shades of the communalist attitude prevalent among Hindus and Muslims in its attempt to underline the stereotypes and clinches influencing the collective sensibility of one community against another. This play is different from other plays as it is neither sentimental nor simplified in its approach. Mahesh Dattani won the Sahitya Akademi Award for Final Solutions in 1998. In the play there is clash between traditional and modern life and discussions on class and communities.

Dattani has showed how these communal problems in the society affect our family relationships:

As Kenneth Pickering has rightly observed that “the problem
Play is that ‘which explores a particular social problem, raising
Many questions about it and provoking the audience into
Finding answers. Such plays, sometimes known as, ‘thesis plays’
Because they mount and work out an argument, may be tragic
Or comic in essence but their ideas constitute some issue of deep
Concern to the dramatist with which he wishes to engage the
Minds and consciences of the audience. (Kenneth 70)

The outburst of a riot is like a chain reaction. The play opens with Daksha reading from her diary. Then the young girl immediately changes into the old Hardika. “I opened my diary” (167). Daksha is the grandmother of the Gandhis. She closes her diary and then appears as Hardika on the stage. She feels things have changed a lot. In her family Ramnik Gandhi, her son, and Aruna daughter-in-law and granddaughter Smitha are there. Daksha is represented as a fifteen-year-old newly married young girl, writing her diary; this may be considered as the past and sometimes as Smitha’s grandmother in her late sixties in the present. So, Ramnik and Aruna also come under the present but Smitha, Bobby and Javed may be considered as representatives of the future. Daksha always tells Smitha that “those people are all
demons”, which is not liked by Ramnik.

It is clear in the play that cultural hegemony can be noticed as those who are in majority rule over the minorities—at present Bobby and Javed are the victims and sufferers under Hindus as they are Muslims that is in the present. But when Hardika reads the diary, in the past in the communal riots they were minorities and her father burnt a Muslim’s shop. Javed here is a young man, who becomes a terrorist and is exploited by politicians in the name of ‘Jehad’. He is sent to Hindu Mohalla where a ‘Rath Yatra’ is taking place. He is in the mob and he so overwhelmed that he throws the first stone on the ‘Rath’ causing chaos, ending up in the killing of the ‘pujari’ and the crashing down of the ‘Rath’. Bobby who is close friend to rescues him from the violent mob and takes him to Ramnik’s house to take shelter that night. But there is a discussion for the cause of Hindu-Muslim hatred and many terrific secrets are revealed.

Mahesh Dattani has introduced the chorus and mob in Final Solution, which helps to know, what is the intension of either the Muslim or the Hindu. And the mob gives awareness about what is going on between the two communities. Through their slogans they convey the message that they want to convey to their respective communities. It brings out the feeling of each community.

The central theme and its layered treatment in Final Solutions, the socio-political context of the play’s early productions, its long history of performances in English and Hindi-Urdu, and the public attention it has drawn, make this play an immensely rich site to explore theatre’s potential to serve as a platform for advocating religious pluralism in South Asia. In this thesis, I will examine Final Solutions both as a literary work and as a successful piece of theatre in this capacity. Through a detailed analysis of the text, I will first pinpoint the specific aspects of Dattani’s play that make it a powerful tool for addressing religious communalism. I will also explore how political theatrical events, such as Advani’s Rath Yatras, influenced the writing of Final Solutions. I will then turn to an examination of its prominent productions, again paying particular attention to how the communal tensions incited by the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign impacted them. This examination will also include a discussion of the audience’s reactions to these performances. I will next compare the Hindi-Urdu version of Final Solutions with the original English text. Here, I will explore the ramifications of the two languages for the play’s effectiveness. I will ask
if a play like *Final Solutions* should be written in English, a language not understood by the majority of India’s population. Finally, I will compare the medium of theatre to the predominant medium of South Asian popular culture: film. I will consider whether a play like *Final Solutions* can have a social impact in a country dominated by the Hindi-Urdu film industry known as Bollywood. How does the play compare to films dealing with the same theme? I will explore this question by comparing the play to Mani Ratnam’s *Bombay* (1995), a film made in response to the Babri Masjid demolition and the Bombay riots.

During my examination of both literary and theatrical aspects of *Final Solutions*, I hope to throw light on the potential of theatre to address the critical social issue of communal violence in South Asia and contribute to the building of harmony in the region. As noted in the introduction, the thesis seeks to examine whether the medium of theatre, specifically theatre like *Final Solutions*, can make a difference in promoting ideas of pluralism. However, before attempting to answer this question, it is important to ask: To what genre of theatre do *Final Solutions* belong to? Is *Final Solutions* comparable to a play of the Western theatre tradition such as Henrik Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*? Since *Final Solutions* deals with issues of religion, is the play itself related to any religious theatrical traditions of South Asia? In order to determine what type of theatre *Final Solutions* is, a definition for theatre must be established.

Colonialism and Post colonialism, while being historically reliant terms, are also terms that demonstrate a state of mind. If colonialism sought to inculcate in the colonised a sense of inferiority to the Western mode of thought, creating artificial distinctions between a superior Western Self and an inferior Colonized Other, post–colonialist modes of thought seeks to demolish this dichotomy by challenging the colonial modes of thinking and representation. Temporally, post colonialism denotes that period in history when colonialism ends and independence is achieved. But the term is not the same as ‘after colonialism’, as John MacLeod points out, for colonial values persevere even after independence is achieved. Actually, Ashish Nandy defines colonialism “as a shared culture which may not always begin with the establishment of strange
rule in a society and end with the departure of the alien rulers from the colony.” (Nandy, The Intimate Enemy, 72). Postcolonialism demands, what Dennis Walder calls, a “kind of double awareness: of the colonial inheritance as it continues to operate within a specific culture, community or country; and the changing relations between these cultures, communities and countries in the modern world”. (Dennis Walder, 2). Theatre, in this regard, has always played a very significant role. But inspite of this, it has received scant attention in postcolonial studies, feels C.L. Inns. This, according to him is “surprising given that dramatic performance raises so many issues that are central to postcolonial cultures – questions of identity, language, myth and history; issues regarding translatability, voice and audience; problems relating to production, infrastructures and censorship”. In cultures where literacy is the preserve of the, and where there is a continuing oral culture with roots in pre-colonial traditions, drama and performance provide a means of reaching a much wider indigenous audience and tapping into forms and conventions which are already familiar to them. (C. L. Innes, 29) Final Solutions is an exploration of growth of religious fundamentalism in India. As Angelie Multani points out, although there have been several literary representations of the violence, of this traumatic severing of countries on religious and ethnic lines, there has been very little attempt in literature to link what is now obvious to most sociologists and even to the layman. Namely, communal tensions and fault lines in contemporary India have their origins in the trauma of partition as well as the lack of resolution or forgiveness. Mahesh Dattani’s play ‘Final Solutions’ is a rare literary/dramatic text that connects our contemporary context with the unforgiven trauma of 1947. (Multani, 43). Multani, infact, makes a thorough analysis of the play to finally ask:

The question remains with us - how much longer are we to be trapped in this mindless cycle? Is there an end to violence and retaliation in sight?

(Multani, 50)

Dattani uses for this reason three generations – the grandmother, son and the children – of a middle-class Gujarati business family and examines their attitudes to religious tolerance or intolerance. The design of the play revolves around, first,
Hardika, the grandmother, who is possessed with her father's murder during the partition chaos and their betrayal by a Muslim friend, Zarine. Her son, Ramnik Gandhi, the second generation of the family, is troubled by the awareness that his prosperity is founded on a shop of Zarine's father, which was damaged by his kinsmen. Hardika's daughter-in-law, Aruna, lives by the strict code of the Hindu scriptures and the granddaughter, Smita, the youngest generation of the family, finds she cannot allow herself a relationship with a Muslim boy. The anxious calm in the family is bothered when two Muslim boys, Babban and Javed, very much seek protection in their home on being chased by a violent Hindu crowd. Interestingly, Dattani portrays Babban as a moderate, while Javed is seen as aggressive and violent. What follows is an exchange of judgments and angry retorts between the characters with the hint that the only possible final solution to the vexed issue was tolerance and forgiveness. The play establishes that as long as communities are alienated in their memory and representation of the events of 1947, they will never be able to forgive each other or themselves.

Dattani’s play Final Solutions is the true representative play of his observations; it deals with one of the burning issues of communal riot. Dattani shows in the play how the seed of riot is sowed and some vested groups reap its fruit. He also discusses the role of politician, police and public at the time of communal riot. The common people who live together for years, at the moment of riot, suddenly cease to recognize each other and become enemy on the ground of religion. They never realize that they are loser, and politicians snatch the opportunity to gain power. This special community utilizes the opportunity to make a profit.

It is interesting to note that the present situation of religion in India is extremely miserable. People belonging to all the sections of different communities seldom understand the real purpose of religion. They are often seen fighting without any cause or reasoning on flimsy ground. At this critical state where there is a broken relation, the politician’s task is to make a compromise and bring forth a solution. But just the otherwise we see that the champions of politics are more bent upon making a separation between these two major groups than making a compromise to make the society stable. Though we see in our country, India, our rich history and tradition is full of so many ideals and slogans which lay stress on equal respect for all religions.
The play Final Solutions also shows that the Police and the Politicians never treat the society on equal terms. The politicians whose primary purpose is to gain the vote by hook and crook, is often seen indulging in so many malpractices. We know that in a democratic state, equality is the soul of the nation. In the eyes of the constitution all men are equal. They should not be treated on the basis of caste, class and creed. Mahatma Gandhi is of the opinion:

Men are equal. For, though they are not of the same age, the same height, the same skin and the same intelligent, these inequalities are temporary and superficial; the soul that is hidden beneath the earthly crust is one and the same for all men and women belonging to all climes. (2007:46)

The Mob is nothing but they stand for the resentment of the people. They express their feeling that cannot be told individually. Through them the dramatist depicts the inner feeling and thought of the people. The Hindu chorus thinks about the temple and the Muslim chorus about the mosque. They forget the true spirit of humanity and human-religion. Such type of division is not good for any community. The Mob, at most of the places, uses the image of animals those are related to particular communities. The images of ‘pig’, ‘swine’, ‘mouse’, ‘rat’, ‘lizard’, etc, hints at the communal hatred and contempt toward other community. It suggests that such type of arrogant remarks must be stopped in the society that spread hatred and bitterness. Through these very words Dattani very sincerely depicts the bitterness between these two big groups of the country. The words of Mob are clear indication of communal disharmony of the society and its consequences are experienced by the characters Ramnik, Javed, Hardika, Bobby, Zarine’s family etc. Dattani uses the role of chorus in the play very effectively.

Final Solutions by Dattani was staged in the backdrop of the communal fever gripping not only India but also many other Islamic countries, particularly in neighbourhood on account of demolition of Babri Masjid by the so-called Ramsewaks (worshippers of Lord Rama as per Hindu mythology) in 1992. The play by juxta posing the people belonging to two different and dominating communities in India-Hindu and Muslim divided on the basis of their religious and cultural beliefs once again opens up the wounds of communal violence.
inflicted on humanity during partition. The characters delineated in the play fall into two categories; one group comprises of Hindus such as Hardika, Ramnik Gandhi, his wife and daughter Samita while the other comprises of Muslims like Javed, Bobby and their family members; even chorus which plays a very significant role in the development of action in the play represents these two communities. Dattani while delving deep into the psyche of his characters, analyses the process of their attitude formation towards people belonging to different community resulting in their communal preferences and abhorrence and consequently their aspiration for communal hegemony, and explores possibilities of finding a solution to the problem of communal divide and hatred. The past beckons us that in India there have always been clashes of cultural identities between the Hindus and Muslims and our partition in 1947 was also the result of this religious divide and cultural dissimilarities. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri while supporting this point affirms:

"For the Indian, the most important battle for the establishment of a distinctive identity within a territorial location lay in the partitioning of India. National identities were conceived and took shape in accordance with the ideologues that formulated these on the basis of religions (and later, linguistic, ethnic, caste), identities. The gruesome rioting and communal/religious disharmony that took seed in 1947 has continued to throw up countless of such incidents independent to secular India" (Chaudhuri, 2005: 77).

Bravely Fought the Queen is one such play that makes us think and think seriously. It is first performed in 1991, while it is published in 1992. The play has three acts categorized into three gender segments: Women (Act I), Men (Act II), and Free for All (Act III). As it uses a spatially segregated proscenium stage and a language which is regarded by most as the “colonizer’s idiom,” therefore Mahesh Dattani’s Bravely Fought the Queen (1992) is regarded by many as hardly “Indian.” But what is “Indian” theatre anyway? As E. Mee has pointed out, our language is something which we internalize, work upon, fight with, accept and reject at the same time. It is a part of our identity. Dattani’s comfort in using his third language, English, has much to do with his upbringing, education, locale, and exposure. And who said that his “English” interspersed with cultural markers, indigenous expressions, local flavour, and subjective constructions is not Indian? Instead of sticking to our ancient traditional theatrical forms, we need to look
around and state how such things are not enough to gauge the present situation in India. Mee has much to say in this context. According to Mee:

What we need to do now is to look at those forms and say we’re approaching the twenty first century, this is who we are and this is our legacy, so where do we take t happening and that’s a matter of serious concern (Mee, 1997: 24-5).

Alka: You said you make bonsai? Lalitha: Yes. I’ve got a whole collection. Alka: How do you make them?

Lalitha: You stunt their growth. You keep trimming the root and bind their Branches with wire and . . . stunt them. (Bravely: 16)

This discussion between two of the female characters in Mahesh Dattani’s play, Bravely Fought the Queen, in fact summarizes the hidden problem of the Trivedi family, in particular, and the patriarchal social matrix, in general, where women are coerced or conditioned to arrest their emotional and mental growth. The image of the bonsai, a plant whose growth has been arrested artificially through human intervention, assumes a dominant metaphor in the play for Dattani in order to introduce the theme of stunting the mental and emotional growth of women.

Through an urban middle-class drawing room setting Dattani is able to hold up like a mirror to society where the Jitens and Nitins romp in large numbers throttling the spontaneity and formation of self of innumerable Dollies and Alkas. In Bravely Fought the Queen, Dattani seeks to situate the locus of the timeless face of exploitation of women and the sense of wrong carried about by them in the four women characters – Dolly, Alka, Baa and Daksha – and even in the marginal figures – Dolly’ mother and even Lalitha. The image of the bonsai, the detailed process of its creation, helps him to draw parallels between the stunting of a plant’s natural growth through unnatural and artificial means with the strategy used by patriarchy to arrest the growth of women, who are then reduced to artificial objects capable of exhibiting the superiority of the creator but unable to display the natural qualities it was endowed with.

Bravely Fought the Queen is a play which consciously uses the metaphor of the Bonsai to connect its characters with it at every level and expose their role in relation to it. When Lalitha describes the process of growing it she unconsciously seems to
chart the process through which society conditions, fashions, clips and arrests the spontaneous and complete maturing of its women. Lalitha’s description is applicable to Baa, Dolly and Alka’s mother, the two sisters themselves, to Daksha, the Re-VA-Tee model and unknown to her, to Lalitha herself too. All of whom have been saplings at the hands of male figures who have sought to curtail their full growth and led to the growth of grotesque artificial plants, with miniature inedible fruits, capable of being exhibited for their aesthetic appeal but unable to serve the real purpose of natural trees – to provide shade, fruits, flowers and shelter to the organic world. Thus like the bonsais, the women in the play are incapable of realizing their full potential – Baa misses her chance to cultivate her talent, Dolly cannot enjoy the wholeness of motherhood, Alka is deprived of experiencing maternity, Lalitha has come to delude herself to believe that her husband’s work and decisions are her own and Daksha has been denied a normal life at the fetal stage all through the intervention of the stunting process of Patriarchal force. The female bonsais of the play become a silent and subtle weapon with which Dattani exposes the invisible process through which society wires, twists, clips the heart and soul of women to make them fit into prepared moulds of tradition.

*Bravely Fought the Queen* throws light on the home confined identity and exploitation of women at the hands of not only men but also women and their resistance. The play also exposes issue of extramarital relationship and touches upon the issue of homosexuality. Set in the world of consumerism, the play depicts Alka, Dolly and Baa as women whose lives are defined within the four walls of the houses. Revolving around the Trivedi family which consists of Jiten and Nitin Trivedi, Baa, Dolly and Alka, the play depicts the exploitation of women in the family. Indian society considers women as uncivilized, rude, and ill-mannered needing to be polished. The process of the refinement of their actions and their behaviour horrifies our eyes violence is the tool which is used for the socialization of the women. Alka’s present condition is the result of this civilizing process which also creates a rift between Dolly and Alka who are managed by their brother Praful. This play, like *Tara*, also depicts women as the perpetrator of patriarchy. Dolly suffers in the hands of her mother-in-law who provokes her son to beat her. Like *Kanyadan*, this play also dramatizes women as a commodity of male gaze. Jiten and Nitin gratify their sexual desires with market girls. The class-conflict also constitutes the theme of the play. Sridhar is humiliated by his masters Jiten and
Nitin who forces him not only to follow their eccentric views about campaign which ignores women as consumer but also to work as a pimp just to manage a whore for Jiten. The issue of homosexuality has touched upon in the play. Nitin has homosexual relationship with Praful. Emotions and desires of women of the family has no significance for the male member of the family and they suffer due to their husband’s degraded morality. In the end of the play Alka and Dolly both rebels against the male dominance and their husband’s realize their mistakes. Bonsai in the play symbolizes the limited freedom of women.

The play has been critically commended all over the world, including Britain’s prestigious Leicester Haymarket Theatre. The play is set in Bangalore of the 1980s and 1990s and charts the emotional, financial, and sexual workings in the lives of an urban Indian family of two brothers. The brothers are the co-owners of an advertising agency, married to two sister’s women who remain mostly at home and look after the men’s old mother, Baa. The play dramatizes the emptiness and sham in the lives of its cloistered women and self-indulgent, unscrupulous men, blurring the lines between fantasy and reality, standing on the brink of terrible secrets, deception and hypocrisies.

Act II ‘Men’ transforms the sets into offices with the common component of the bar and Baa, and in a sort of parody, the entire sequence is enacted again, this time from the perspective of the men. With Jiten dominating the scene with his overbearing, egoistical and corrosive presence. Nitin seems almost ineffectual while Sridhar tries to be assertive in various ways. Apart from the repeated motif of the cancelled party, Baa’s delirious ravings provide a sense of movement back and forth in time. Meanwhile, the men discuss the psyche of women and the ‘ReVaTee’ brand of lingerie that they are to market. Even as Jiten argues for a male perspective on the item they are trying to sell women’s underwear-Sridhar tries to argue for the female. One set of stereotypes is contested by another. Jiten forces Sridhar to fetch him a prostitute. Sridhar gets back at him by giving him ‘leftovers’. Nitin remains neutral, always. The reference that is made to Praful creates a matrix of significant suggestions that carries forward the play with increasing tension towards the ‘Free for All’ of Act III.

The play zeroes in on an Indian joint family, with the eldest male as the certain
head, raising a gamut of questions on the nature of the relationships between the brothers and their wives (also sisters) and the manner in which identities form and firmly entrench themselves within these structures. Following some of the discussion on the family in the preceding chapters, we have noted the location to which the women are tied down, following the diktat of their men folk—they remain at home most of the time, with their chief duty being to care for the men’s ageing mother Baa. As the enclosed, cloistered female world of Act I clashes with the male world of wheeling and dealing, corruption and adultery of Act II, it becomes obvious that both the men and the women have assumed roles that ill-suit them, and hence all the characters have to seek support in fancy and the unreal. The veneer is ripped apart and the revelation is made as to the nature of their true selves in the confrontation of Act III, and the realities of their lives emerge. The braggart and wife-beater, Jiten is revealed to be another pathetic escapist and a weakling who literally runs away from the scene of confrontation in tears; Nitin homosexuality becomes apparent in his revelations about Praful, the absent manipulator of the entire situation, an even the apparently ‘correct’ and ‘sensitive’ Sridhar show himself to be one of the many male chauvinists in the play in his game of one-upmanship with Jiten.

The play *Tara* was performed as Twinkle Tara at Chidian Memorial Hall, Bangalore on 23 October 1990 by Playpen Performing Arts Group. The plot of the play revolves round the family of Mr. Patel. It is related with the life of congenial twins, one girl and one boy who are joined together at the hip. Chandan and Tara are to be separated through a surgical operation which will cause danger to one of them. Their mother Bharati insists on giving the third leg which was common to them, to Chandan so that he may lead a healthy life. Bharati and her father bribes the doctor and make him save Chandan, although they know that the leg suited Tara well. Mr. Patel remains a mute witness to the injustice imparted to their daughter. But the operation leaves Chandan with a slight limp and Tara crippled. Thus it turns out to be futile for both children. Bharati is shocked and goes out of her senses, and tries to repay Tara with all her love and affection.

The plot of Tara is arranged around familial relationship where each individual in
his own way has to stand the burden of social values and their efforts to go beyond them, bring helplessness in their lives. In Tara, after the marriage of Mr. Patel and Bharati, Mr. Patel was forced to leave his parental home because this relationship was not accepted by his parents. The shadows of insecurity loom large around him. He had a painful realization. The anxiety of the separation from parents, then the birth of Siamese twins, makes Mr. Patel isolated. He is forced to decide for the surgery of kids for their separation. In this surgery, the tragedy was imminent. The surgery was conducted, Tara becomes a cripple, Bharati goes insane and Mr. Patel becomes violent and aggressive. He ignores the identity of Tara and doesn’t care for the consequences involving the risk of life of Tara. It directly indicates the gender prejudices prevalent in society.

As Gajendra Kumar states, “Tara is not simply an exposition of dramatic contour and finesse but a critique of the complexity of human relationship in a society where life becomes chaotic and neurotic” (123).

The most striking part in the play is that Tara is discriminated by her mother who herself is a woman. Dattani brings out the root of gender discrimination by making the woman, the destroyer of another woman’s life. Although Bharati’s father also plays a part in this crime, it is Bharati who has to bear the brunt of blame ultimately. She might have done it also because of the huge fortune of her father, which he wanted to be inherited by Chandan, his only grandson. We see the motive of crime lying hidden in the patriarchal system in our society, where women are considered inferior to men.

Tara, who is the innocent victim of the society’s injustice, has to carry the burden of being physically disabled all through her life. She secretly longs for two legs, when she says:

*Tara:* I would wish for both…I would wish for two of them.
*Chandan:* Two Jaipur Legs?
*Tara:* No, silly, the real ones. (Tara 266)

She thinks that it is only her mother who strongly loves her. Somehow, Tara begins
to assume that her father hates her. But she appears to be a bold girl, who cheerfully faces her critics and opponents. Her brother Chandan remains a strong support for her throughout.

A patriarchal society is completely presented in Tara where the major decisions are made by the numbers. In such a society, a woman’s identity is defined by others in terms of her relationship with men. Patel, the head of the family is very concerned about the future of their son, Chandan. He has great plans for Chandan and wants him to join college, whereas he does not speak about any plans for Tara. Patel wants Chandan to accompany him to his office. He wants Chandan to be bold and outgoing. He gets furious when he finds Chandan helping his mother with her knitting. He shouts at Bharati for making his son do something considered to be feminine.

Patel: Chandan, leave that damn thing alone!
Bharati: (Frantic.) Go! Chandan, just go!
Patel: (To Bharati.) How dare you do this to him? (256)

Patel feels disappointed at the growth of his son without any responsibility in life. He says ‘I am disappointed in you. From now on you are coming to the office with me. I can't see you rotting at home!’ (256)

The relationship of Bharati and Tara, mother and daughter, need specific mention. Bharati’s inner self is divided for her different commitments as a mother and a woman. The fractured images of her inner self cast shadows in her love for Tara. Her guilty conscience makes her shower love on Tara. She is always very concerned and worried about Tara and her future. The play begins with the scene where Bharati is admonishing Tara for not taking her milk. In another context, she remarks to Chandan about Tara, “The world will accept you-but not her! Oh, the pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable. And what about forty and fifty!” (254). It is only Bharati who has plans for Tara. It might be her guilty conscience which causes her to make safe her daughter’s life. She says, “I plan for her happiness. I mean to give her all the love and affection which I can give. It’s what she-deserves” (255). Patel does not seem happy about the way Bharati treats her daughter. According to him she treats Tara “as if she is made of glass” (DCI 257). Bharati’s mental trauma makes her go out of her senses and she
breaks down finally. Tara, when returns home after her kidney transplant, is depressed to hear about her mother’s illness. She feels that only her mother loves her and she has lost it forever.

Dattani focuses on the common approach of people about everywhere to promote boys and discard girls. He brings out the particular situation in an Indian home in Tara. Women should be given equal opportunities to develop their potential. He shows how women are responsible for the degradation of their own group. It is high time men and women realize that they ought to complement each other in their lives. A complete life is possible to us only when we learn to value our both aspects, masculine and feminine. Then we will be able to realize a world full of possibilities. In the play, Dattani contemplates the emotional dilemma of Chandan; hence the action is almost internalized. All the major characters in Tara, Bharati, Mr. Patel and Chandan suffer from an uncompromising sense of remorse and in the course of the plays, it is evident that everyone seeks a means to vent their guilt and contribute their share in Tara’s suffering. The psychological turmoil of all the characters is laid bare and we can have a glimpse of their anguish. In order to compensate for his loss, he distances himself from the societal ambience. Mr. Patel’s sadistic attitude towards Bharati is a frantic endeavour to run away from the trauma of parental responsibilities. Even Bharati is tense about Tara’s future. We need to comprehend that her concern Tara is a reflection of her insecurity. This trepidation surfaces owing to the patriarchal conventions and the disability of Tara. It is a bold attempt on the part of the playwright to bring to the limelight such burning issues. In this rigmarole, Tara’s bold stance and her outlook towards life is more appealing to us. She maintains a stable position by neither brooding over her dilemma nor extracting sympathy from her dear ones. Her confidence is supreme and so is her sense of humour. She does not get vexed when her friend “stared at her leg, felt it and knocked on it”. She describes herself as “Strong, Healthy. Beautiful.” Both Tara and Chandan proudly show their legs to their neighbours without manifesting any inhibitions. They are intellectually smarter as compared to other children of their age. Even though Tara is required to undergo a kidney transplant, she exhibits a bold disposition. Dan is not able to come to terms with Tara’s untimely death and has served all ties with his own family. After her death, he learns that their separation
was inevitable. The doctor who operated them believes that the greatest challenge was to keep the girl alive. Patel tells Chandan that the twins had three legs. The third leg was fed by the girl’s blood system. The chances of the leg’s survival were greater with the girl. But Bharati and her father decided to give the leg to the boy. With this shocking disclosure, we come to know that Bharati’s love for Tara was an outcome of her guilt consciousness.

Though a change comes over Bharati’s behavior towards Tara, Patel remains unchanged. Chandan considers that he was responsible for Tara’s tragedy. He strongly believes that as he was a male, he snatched away the possibilities of a healthy life from Tara. Dr. Thakkar is also one of the wrongdoers as he was involved in Tara’s operation. Dan tries to overcome his agony by scripting a play “Twinkle Tara” and dedicating it to her.

To masticate my memories in my mind and spit out the result to the World in anger. *(Picking up the sheet he has typed.)* My progress, so Far, I must admit, has been zero. But I persist with the comforting Though t that thing can’t get any worse. I keep staring at my Typewriter everyday wondering how best to turn my anguish into Drama. All I find every day, without fail, so one typewritten sheet with The title of the play, my name and address, and the date. Nothing Changes-accept the date. *(Drama: Contemporary India 232-233)*

Tara is, no doubt, a victim of the tragic consequences that keep happening around her. Adding to her misery is the attitude of the society towards the physically challenged. Thus, the tragic element is accentuated to a great extent. Nobody befriends Tara, owing to her disability. Bharati has to bribe Roopa with cosmetics and other such stuffs to make her come close to Tara. Yet, Roopa has a hidden dislike for the freaks. Towards the end of the play, there is a verbal war between Tara and Roopa. As a result, Roopa places a poster with a slogan “WE DON’T WANT FREAKS” agains a wall in the area. This demoralizes both Tara and Chandan. They are shocked and are afraid of meeting new people. The element of tragedy incorporated in the play speaks volumes of the playwright’s concern for the disabled. To quote Bijay Kumar Das:

*Mahesh Dattani frequently takes as his subject the complicated dynamics of the modern urban family. His characters struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, cultural constructions of*
gender and repressed desire. Their dramas are played out on multi-level sets where exterior and interior become one and geographical locations are collapsed—in short, his setting are as fragmented as the families who inhabit them. (Das 7, 2008)

Family tension also augments the impediments of Tara. Thus, Dattani embarks on a mission to voice the sufferings of the handicapped and reaches out to the multifarious issues associated with the same. He has also delved deep into the concerns that plague the society. The play Tara vouches for the much-needed acceptance that society needs to expand to individuals like Tara. The conversation between Tara and Chandan shows how the twins are connected to each other. They know each other very well and have a deep understanding of their predicaments as well. The comments made in a lighter vein, jokes, curt replies to Roopa and debates over choices and preferences, all go on to prove that both can’t do without the other. That is the reason why Chandan’s approach changes dramatically when he realizes the truth about the separation. He is the only character in the play who expresses grief towards his beloved sister’s death. Though the play exposes the tragedy of Tara, it focuses equally on the tragedy of Chandan (Dan) as he now understands that the future is bleak for him and life, absurd.

Dattani reflect on the difference in the attitude of mother and father to a girl child and shows how a woman feels when she finds her husband neglecting, ignoring, undermining or belittling their daughter. However, woman status is that of a homemaker does not protest to make her husband realise that he does that what he should not do. Bharti does the same when she tells her son that his father does not pay attention to his sister.

Bharti: “I wish your father would pay more attention to Tara.

Chandan: He does. He does not like to show his affection.

Bharti: Do not tell me about your father. He is more worried about your career than hers is.11

As Mahesh Dattani in one of his interviews with Laxmi Subramanian: “I see Tara as a play about the male self and female self. The male self is being preferred in all cultures. The play is about the separation of self and the resultant angst.12
Bharti tries to shed her burden of guilt by showing maternal love and concern for her daughter and to assert her moral superiority over her husband. She also tries to expiate by the act of donating kidney to her daughter, which was ultimately futile. Dattani establishes that mother and daughter relationship is ultimately subordinated to the directives of patriarchy. All cultures and all countries by establishing values, gender perception and prescribe unequal means to achieve. Tara and Chandan conjoined, Siamese twins who must be separated to survive. The dichotomy between the twin-gendered selves is recognised and a physical separation is made through surgery. Like we have always been inseparable. The way we started in life two lives and one body in one comfortable womb, until we were forced out ---And separated.\(^\text{13}\)

Being a 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century Indian writer, Mahesh Dattani’s plays have different issues that Indian society had faced time to time and in the same way this play too is a collection of miscellaneous indifferent chapters. Tara, as daughter experiences maltreatment and partiality from her mother as compared to her brother Chandan. As if his other plays addresses the misdial class. Mahesh Dattani in this play has also presented the bizarre reality of the woman playing a secondary role to man.

Mahesh Dattani has very skillfully revealed the theme of gender discrimination in this play. The purpose of this play is to illuminate the minds of female gender for not to give preference to a male child over a female child. He stresses women to look back at their journey of life. They were like Tara, before they became women in real sense. This play also suggests many things to the mothers. As for instance, not to feel upset at girl’s birth not to treat girl contemptuously and not to stop them from scaling newer heights in their life to come. Tara quips at this: “The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going hunting while the women looked after the cave.”(328) She highlights the dilemma of women who were supposed to be appropriate for the domestic domain only. The play as a whole thus depicts the relegation of the relevance of the Woman, and her upper edge whenever it does assert itself in a male-dominated society. This is why the Grandfather and the Mother who represent tradition prefer the male over the female; the Male is the archetypal successor or prototype of cultural progeny. This explains why the
author names the play after the female child whose identity is demoted otherwise; in order to invert the dialectical pair male/female. The woman has always been hailed in philosophy, but in practice she is treated as an object to be overlooked. As Virginia Woolf asserts in her *A Room of One’s Own*:" Imaginatively, she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history."

In the play, though Bharati dotes on her daughter Tara, she insensitively attributes a piece of her daughter to the son. The clash between illusion and reality is yet again echoed here. What is actually a public display of attention on part of the mother is actually a screen to shield her guilt. The context also serves as a satire on the self-sufficient Indian male, for whom, to accept anything feminine is beneath his dignity, and an indelible question mark on his masculinity. Even Dan acknowledges the same, as he writes the play. Though the craft of the play is his, he has to borrow the material from Tara. In *Tara*, the deformity of the Woman is caused by the Man, and caused in order to complete the Man. The playwright utilizes the motif symbolically as well. This is the reason why Tara approaches her end more quickly, and it is not owing to her inferiority. The handicap also symbolizes the predicament of girls in Indian families who are made to forsake their chances of getting educated as the edification of the boy becomes a priority.

The death of Tara has a more powerful impact than her existence. Just as the death of the Star gives way to the Black Hole. The Black Hole stands for the God in the World of Physics, it being connected to the Male Gods in Hinduism like Shiva, Krishna, and Ram etc. who are black. Religion has also been predominantly patriarchal. Christianity professes:"Men are God’s stars.”(Genesis 15:15-18.) By naming his female protagonist as ‘Tara’, Mahesh Dattani puts it otherwise. The themes of gender discrimination are all dominant in the drama, Tara. The issue of cultural discrimination with women has been elaborately and comprehensively dealt by Dattani in the play wherein female is subjugated and underestimated by patriarchal society and she remain only a care taker for household utensils, children, husband, other domestic requirements and tasks of fatigue. Thus Dattani’s drama showcases the stark reality of the life and warrants the attention of the world
towards the pressing needs of the time.

Dattani’s *Dance Like a Man*, first staged in 1989, can be read as a configuration of the characteristic grip of human identity that strongly interfaces the elements of identical autonomy and autonomous identity. Much like R.K. Narayan’s novel *The Guide*, Dattani’s play is about the incidental identity crisis where the identity of a dancer clashes with the identity of a son - the two identities of a same person. Amritlal cannot tolerate his son to be professionally a dancer because such profession is categorically restricted for the women. As far as the gender issues of our socio-political status are concerned Jairaj cannot be a dancer because there is a coincidental conflict between a manly man and a professionally dancer. The basic unwritten laws of gender identities that are prevalent in our hegemonic society prevent Jairaj to choose dance as his profession. But there is no problem for Lata or Ratna to grab dance as their profession because virtually they are female beings. Some particular roles have strictly been prescribed for men and women separately and categorically: “Me marrying a Southie my father will tolerate, but accepting a daughter-in-law who doesn’t make tea is asking too much of him.” (Dattani 391) And again the readers hear: “When my mother comes here, she’ll want to watch you make coffee. Be prepared.” (Dattani 395) The terrible stigma of tradition has to be tolerantly endured because deviation from these rules makes one to be a social transgressor. As far as Dattani’s presentation of the polarized relationship is concerned, assigned gender roles are reversed through performance. Agarwal rightly points out:

In the play *Dance Like a Man*, Dattani expresses his resentment for close fisted gender roles in the conventional social framework where the passion of an artist is quashed against the restrictions imposed on individual according to their gender roles. (24)

*Dance like a Man* is a story of Jairaj and his passion for classical dance. Oscillating between past and present, Dattani presents before us a vivid portrayal of gender roles that we practice in Indian houses. The theme of gender runs in a pathetic way in which the whole identity of the character Jairaj seems to be in a crisis. He feels like his wife has ruined him and has taken away his self esteem. Jairaj is totally dominated by his father and even by his wife. This makes
him doubt about his existence as a man. He asks Ratna, “Will finding a musician make me a man?” (DLM 21). The whole play is about gender construct and the tension and conflict that create upon a man’s life. Since Jairaj was a man, his flair for dance is suppressed, he wants to dance but his wife wants Jairaj to be the provider. At the end of the play Dattani, details the truth that divinity of human is neither man nor women. “We were only human”. The protagonist Jairaj is ostracized from his home for he chooses to dance, though dancing is a way of expressing his identity, his personality. The social bias against the art of dance among men is highlighted in the play. Mahesh Dattani has invariably been hailed as one of the leading dramatists contesting discord in society at various levels. The discord, usually springing from one’s own self, sometimes from family and friends, and also originating because of societal forces, finds vivid and somber depiction in his plays in myriad forms. His work probes tangled attitudes in contemporary India towards communal differences, consumerism and gender issues and attempts to dissect what largely remains under the carpet. Dattani takes up “the complicated dynamics of the modern society” and vividly displays their sweeping dimensions (A. Madhvi Latha 231).

The play opens with the conversation of Lata Parekh and Viswas who are chatting light-heartedly concerning their future. Viswas is there to get the approval of Lata’s parents for their wedding. Lata is a classical dancer whose career is about to commence with her maiden performance before the President of India. Unfortunately, however, her mridangam artist Mr. Srinivas trips over his dhoti and is injured badly. Lata’s parents are in the hospital to see Mr. Srinivas.

Lata tells Viswas about her ancestral house, her grandfather and parents. Later, when she is busy making coffee for him, he opens a cupboard and removes a splendid brocade shawl. He wears it and struts around without being noticed by Lata. He imitates the old man in a mock fatherly voice. It is exactly at this moment when Ratna and Jairaj enter and stare at Viswas’s frolics. Viswas gets embarrassed and offers some explanation but Ratna and Jairaj are too engrossed in their problems to pay any attention to Viswas’s attempts to explain his situation. Dattani successfully renders a realistic description of the frustrations and failures of the last forty years of Ratna’s life and shows how these failures cast their shadow on their present life. Such failures, we come to know later, have economic and social extensions which are
further associated with one’s individual demands and gratifications. The clash of interests that the playwright has invested in the characters remarkably exposes the vacuity and emptiness that surrounds their relationship. The volcanic eruption of the suppressed feelings of Ratna, for instance, makes Jairaj bitter and sarcastic. Her remark that he “stopped being a man for the day came back to house” unhinges Jairaj (21). When he retaliates by saying, “For forty years you’ve been holding that against,” Ratna strikes back, “You’re right, I’m worrying about nothing, because nothing is what we are!” (21)

The blame game starts and the reader get a sumptuous feast of contemporary relationship where the sweetness of love and care has been replaced with spicy and abusive accusations. Gifted with the sensibility to see beyond the stereotype representations of men and women in society, Dattani attempts to penetrate into the abstruse world of emotions and inner discord of his characters. This becomes the axis around which his characters move in order to realize their strength and prove their dignity. B. Yadava Raju rightly remarks that “human relationships and family unit have always been at the heart of his dramatic representation.” (The Plays of Mahesh Dattani 69)

Jairaj is taken aback when he gets the taste of genuine feelings of his wife towards him. Their interaction and accusations expose the discord they are bound with. The fissures in the relationship between Ratna and Jairaj become too staid to allow their relationship run in a smooth manner. It is true that they could not become successful professional dancers as they had anticipated. The frustration and depression of 40 years of their past life leaves an ineffaceable imprint upon their psyche and keeps on tormenting Ratna for her supposedly failure in life. She dreams of touching the apex of her art but her middling career makes her position doleful. Dattani skillfully shows, Aditi De asserts, how “within platitude-ridden Indian society his characters seethe and reveal, probe and discern, scathing their families and neighbours, leaving each reader or watcher with a storm within as the aftermath.” (www.hindu.com)

The volcano of conflict keeps on simmering in her heart and she is no longer in a position to control her feelings, as a result, a natural eruption of her suppressed emotions takes place. The past of this couple leaves them down in the dumps and scratches the very placidity of their life. Where Ratna suffers for her over ambitious
nature, Jairaj undergoes excruciating experience both at the hands of his father and his wife. In the nineteen forties, people could hardly wish their children, especially boys, to go for a classical dance form like Bharatnatyam due to the social stigma attached to it. Moreover, the association of this dance form with Devdasis, too, blemished its image. Dattani, in an interview with Ranu Uniyal, says:

(I) t is a dance form of the Devdasis, it’s a prostitutes dance and People from respectable families did not perform or practice That dance form. It is doubly difficult for the man, you know, What business does a man have learning a prostitute’s dance? So it brings about gender roles, what is expected of genders as Well. And also the tensions between the couple and how they Solve, how they felt they used their relationship to develop their careers, dance and how they reconcile to the fact that the time wasn’t right for them. (The Plays of Mahesh Dattani 182)

This was the reason why Amritlal could never reconcile himself to the hard fact that his only son has decided to be a classical dancer rather than opting for any other respectable way of living. It is pertinent to mention here that the patriarchal set-up has a deep impact upon the psyche of the people who consider it disparaging to do anything against the accepted social norms and customs of the society. Dattani talks about the gender roles through the characters of Ratna and Jairaj that man and woman are expected to play in most of the societies including Indian. Man in Indian society is considered as head of his family and, as per expectations and requirements, he is supposed to act in a particular characteristic way. He is not easily accepted in the roles usually played by women. This is the main cause of discord between the father and the son who are unable to cope with each other because of their dissonances regarding Bharatnatyam. Jereme Mortimer observes, “Mahesh Dattani does not seek to cut a path through the difficulties his characters encounter in his plays; instead he leads his audience to see how caught up all are in the complications and contradictions of our values and assumptions.” (www.anitanair.net)

Amritlal is a freedom fighter as well as a social worker who is benevolent enough to donate money to his friends and relatives. But, at the same time, he is not ready to part with his money for the sake of upliftment of an art form. He regrets having allowed his son for continuing with his dance practice in his house. He says:
Amritlal is unable to gauge the depth of his son’s passion for dance and disapproves of his reverence for his Guru and the art form itself. He considers his calling for nation’s freedom superior and refiner than jairaj’s interest for dance. He is undoubtedly an opinionated old man for whom any diversion from set standards is deprecating and disgusting. The derision for something different is not a strange phenomenon. The human behavior has always been like this only. Any new idea or action has first to face severe criticism and disapproval at the hands of so-called sophisticated people. These people writing and squeeze the desire of any individual to experiment with new things and force them to adjust with their ideologies, however irrelevant and irrational they may be. The trouble of Amritlal commences from the negation of his will and order by Jairaj. He says to Jairaj that “there comes a time when you have to do what is expected of you. Why must you dance? It does not give you any income. Is it because of your wife? Is she forcing you to dance?”(37)

He further expresses his hatred for such practices and wishes to eradicate certain practices which are a shame to the society. He says, “I will not have our temples turned into brothels.”(38) At this Jairaj remarks, “And I will not have my art run down by a handful of stubborn narrow-minded individuals with fancy pretentious ideals” (38). He further retaliates, “You should be pleased that people from respectable families like yours are interested in reviving this dance. You should be encouraging us instead of being a hindrance.”(38)

An alert reader finds such episodes as representative instances of the dichotomy between past and present, between tradition and modernity, and between patriarchy and individuality. If Amritlal is a staunch follower of tradition and the values attached to it, Jairaj is a rebellious youth-a protestant against the set make beliefs. He is an educated intellectual who does not fight shy to go against his father’s stern instructions and choose a dance form his father disapproves. If Amritlal represents past and its heritage, Jairaj represents present which has the seeds of colorful and
healthy future for the generations to come. His rejection of his only son, nevertheless, has another dimension that is deeply attached to patriarchy. He is not so much hurt by the occupation his son has chosen as he is hurt by his son’s rebellion against him.

In short, *Dance Like a Man* is about the differences between the male and female in the society. In Indian society, the importance of male is more than female because of some conservative ideas and old hierarchy of orthodox social rules for female. Place of Women is at home only and Male is free to do what he likes. There is no rule for male for his development and freedom. The same incident happens with Ratna in this play. She is active in her profession as a dancer but her family members are not interested in her profession. Even she is more active than her husband. *Dance Like a Man* was bound to strike a familiar chord. The challenge is given in this play by the Dattani as a writer of the play. Some familiar issues are focused in the play.

Central theme of play, *Where There’s a Will* is egoistic nature of the male section of the society, especially the head of the family who always lives under the impression that without his concern not a single leaf would be allowed to fall down. In this play the family head Mr. Hashmukh Mehta is the symbol of what we say Hitlerism. He does not allow including his son anyone to do as they wish. He is a symbol of patriarchal ego. He was of the opinion that as he was the strict follower of his father’s rules, his son Ajit too had to do the same. He believes in ‘absolute power’. He couldn’t distribute his power among his family members because he wanted to dominate each and everyone including his wife Komal Mehta. He is the autocratic head who demands unquestionable obedience from his family members. Normally in most of the literary works it is found that because of such kind of father’s bossism or social norms only female section of the family had very successfully depicted that in our society the root of the family always thinks that it is he on whom the whole tree is grown. If he is cut down the tree would be laid down, actually it is not so. Sometimes small children are also proved good teachers. They teach the elder a lot of they keep their eyes and ears open. Hashmukh Mehta tried to control his family even after his death. Thus he is plenipotentiary having absolute rights or power. His dictatorship is intolerable to all members of the family but they are not supposed to speak a single word without his permission. To rule over them even after his death he had made a ‘will’ of his property. Kiran
puts: ‘Hasmukh was intoxicated with his power. He though he was invincible. That he could rule from his grave by making this will. (CP: 508). The dramatist has introduced the ghost of Hasmukh Mehta to make watcher of his actions. When Ajit asks his father to give him only five lakh to modernize his factory plant Hasmukh laughs at him. He criticizes his son’s ways. He observes categorically: “One of the richest men in this city. All by my own efforts. Forty five years old and I am a success in capital letters. Twenty three years old and he is on the road failure, in bold capital letters’….“ (CP: 464)

Twenty three years old Ajit is a managing director of Hasmukh’s factory but he is not permitted to take a single decision. He is married but according to Hasmukh still he is not mature enough to take right decision at right time. So he neglects his son’s competence to control his established business in a right way. He controls and checks the every movement of his son. He wants his son not as partner or owner of his property, but he wants his own son as a slave. Ajit is not entitled to use his father’s property, for any purpose. His father does not think to include the managing director of his factory in any decision making process. Thus like Hitler he is self-opinioned man who doesn’t allow Ajit to use his skill and talents for the business development. He has to listen to his father’s command carefully to obey them keeping his talent and efficiency aside. Once Ajit asks his father, “Don’t I have any rights at all?” Hasmukh replies, “You have the right to listen to my advice and obey my orders.” Thus the play Where there's a will represents the middle class mentality of Gujarati family. In this research I have tried to compare and contrast Bernard Shaw’s Candida and Mahesh Dattani Where there's a Will. The plays (Candida and Where There's a Will) are based on the concept of marriage and position of women in the society. Shaw in Candida exposes the hollowness of ideal marriage and Dattani too puts forward the bold theme of marriage and extra marital affair in his Where There’s a Will. How the time and ambiance changes the family bonding and interpersonal relationships has also been showcased. The difference between position of women and the concept of new women in 1890's and that of patriarchy in 1980's is compared. Both the dramatist exposes the evils of society but in their individual style. The paper throws some light on the tools and techniques used by the dramatists who made their plays unique and successful. One is an apostle of new drama, other the revolutionary dramatist who brought to forefront the invisible issues of post modern society. The dramatists draw their characters from different strata
of society. Shaw’s characters are drawn from different strata of society (lower, middle or elite) but Dattani’s characters are epitome of urban society. Shaw and Dattani though belong to different country, cultures, time span but are the votaries of art for life’s sake.

George Bernard Shaw—the follower of New Drama was born in Dublin and brought to focus the social change that Europe has witnessed during eighteen nineties and onwards. Shaw focused on the themes like poverty, slum landlordism, prostitution, reality of war, marriage, religion and so on. On the other hand Mahesh Dattani was born in Bangalore explores Post colonial and multi cultural India. He basically deals with the issues which are considered to be invisible rather taboo by the Indian society like gender discrimination, homosexuality, trans-genders, patriarchy, communalism and so on. Shaw the playwright of Ideas exposes the hollowness of ideal marriage in Candida which bears a striking similarity with Dattani’s Where There’s a Will. Dattani’s play deals with the fragmented relationships in the Post Colonial Indian society especially husband and wife relationship that is marital and extra marital affairs. Marriage is the recurrent theme of both the plays. Candida involves another important issue of the nineteenth century i.e. the ‘women question’in which women demanded equal rights with men. Dattani’s Where There’s a Will also deals with the similar theme.

The play Where There’s a Will has many trademark qualities of Dattani’s play. Like other plays, the play has Gujarati milieu and successful runs on the stage. The play presents how women in their own homes are marginalized. Though the kitchen or home is described as the kingdom of women, they are no longer ruling over them. Instead, they are pushed on the margins of invisibility. It is attributed:

Where There’s a Will has several interesting aspects. Mahesh described it as the exorcism of the patriarchal code. Women—be it daughter-in-law, wife or mistress—are dependent on men and this play shows what happens when they are.

Where There’s a Will does both delight and teach. The play was first performed by Playpen at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore, on 23rd September 1988, as part
of the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival. The play is translated into Gujarati and Hindi by Suresh Rajda and Rajendra Mohan respectively. Hindi show was performed in Tanzil Theatres, Mumbai on 25th December, 1992 under the directorship of Jaspal Sendhu.

The narrative of the play takes place in the lavish house of Hasmukh Mehta, a doyen businessman and staunch follower of patriarchal system. The dramatist has introduced the ghost of Hasmukh Mehta to make watche of his own actions. The stage is divided into three spaces namely the fancy dinning cum- living room, the bed room belonging to Hasmukh and Sonal Mehta, and the hideously trendy bedroom of their son Ajit, and his wife, Preeti. Hasmukh strictly followed steps of his father in his life. He wants his own son Ajit follow his footsteps in real life. He exercises the patriarchal authority over all the members of his family. He believes in ‘absolute power’. The dramatist focuses on fractured interpersonal relationship within the range of familial relationship. Like all modern families, there is a lack of emotional attachment and understanding towards others’ views and opinions. The character of Hasmukh Mehta can be analyzed in two ways - through his familial world and business world. He is the boss at the both the spaces. His relationship is plagued with grievances and unrest at home. However, he is enjoying the position of the ablest and the perfect boss at the business house.

Thus, Hasmukh Mehta is personified with patriarchal canons and tried to control family even after his death through his ‘will’. He is both dead and alive, but his business remains unobstructed and unceasing. The play is divided into two acts and these two acts are subdivided each in two parts. The play begins at the lavish house of rich protagonist Hasmukh Mehta. All the four members of the Mehta family stand in sharp contrast to their counterparts. Hasmukh Mehta is the autocratic head and demands unquestionable obedience from his family members, whereas his wife Sonal is quite subservient and subordinate to her husband. She has no choice of her own. She has learnt how to execute her husband’s instructions and orders in toto. In this sense, Hasmukh is anti-thesis to her. The play depicts how women are subdued and suppressed by their male counterparts in patriarchal social set up. When the play begins; Ajit is
talking on phone and Hasmukh Mehta enters through the main door with his walking staff.

The theatre attempts to articulate mores and manners of the society intending to cheer people by lifting them from physical, social and mental problems and afflictions and also offers a piece of advice for leading life in a healthier and happier way. Dattani’s plays have Gujarati family as the setting or locate. The present play Where There’s a Will deals with the mechanics of middle class Gujarati family, showing how patriarchal canons control not only the lives of women of the family but also men of the family.

Dattani’s plays reveal at the end the skeleton in the cupboard. Where There’s a Will also has the skeleton in the cupboard. The skeleton is his mistress and his will. Soon after his demise, the will was read. It sets forth avenues of varied reaction and revelations, charges and counters charges, surprises and shocks, protestation and acceptance. There is an air of turmoil and upheavals in the family of Hasmukh Mehta caused by his ‘will’. It was soon, clear among them that authorization patriarch and garment tycoon will continue to dictate their lives through the terms and conditions inset in ‘will’. The will can be viewed as whip and mistress can be viewed as the agent. The ‘will’ was very complicated and detailed one. As per Hasmukh’s instruction, the lawyer summoned them exactly a one week after his death to read out the ‘will’. As per the ‘will’, none of the three Mehta family members has any legal right over the property of Hasmukh Mehta including their present living room.

The play focuses on emptiness and uselessness of strict adherence to patriarchal code. One of the major thematic threads that dissect from the play is the conflicting relationship between father and son. It depicts the clash between conservative notions and contemporary generation. Both father and son have their own viewpoints regarding life and business. The father strictly believes that he has right notions regarding son’s life, whereas son rejects the idea of complete command over his life. At the very beginning of the play, Ajit expresses his displeasure regarding his father’s idea. He is quite young and innovative. He wants to give touch of modernity to his plant. He needs five lakh rupees. Hasmukh doesn’t trust
his son’s ways of world and his ability of dealing with business affairs. He considers him “zero” in business and practical affairs, whereas Ajit feels that his father is hard-liner and stubborn fellow. He doesn’t respect anybody’s say in decision making process. Hasmukh thinks that his son is very novice and silly in the world of business. He makes mockery of his son and shows his displeasure towards his attitude.

Later in the play, Kiran Jhaveri appreciates Ajit’s invincible spirit for telling truth on the face of his father. Ajit is not a blind follower of his father Hasmukh’s footsteps as Hasmukh did to his father. However, Ajit doesn’t raise much voice against the autocratic regime of his father. He just disapproves his father’s views and ideology.

Kiran appreciate his revolutionary spirit in this manner. “He may not be the greatest rebel on earth, but at least he is free of his father’s beliefs. He resists. In a small way, but at least it’s a start. That is enough to prove that Ajit has won and Hasmukh has lost.” (CP: 510)

The play Where There’s a Will shows that there is no significant improvement in the plight of the women as though there is spread of education and progress of mankind in almost all the human sectors. It seems that male pride or ego is the root cause of the present plight of the women in our society. Earlier, it was strongly believed that empowerment of women can be done through imparting proper education and employment. The play seeks to present that education and economical empowerment has failed to improve the quality of women’s lives in our society. This is quite explicit through the conversation between Kiran and Sonal. Kiran is well educated and employed in the office of Hasmukh Mehta, who later on, raises her to the position of directorship. Sonal is not fortunate enough to have proper access to education. So, she considers Kiran a fortunate lady. This is how Kiran falsifies Sonal’s notion by narrating her unhappy past.

Where There’s a Will dramatizes the social realism in a very comical and satirical way. The play is replete with laughter and mirth. The tone of sarcasm
and humour runs throughout the play. Dattani’s creative genius handles sobriety and humour side by side very successfully. The familial interaction is often very comical and satirical. One of the most notable things is that the names of all the characters signify certain virtues and ideas, but none of the characters act according to the virtue or merit symbolized by their names. For example, Hasmukh meaning a smiling face. Hasmukh never provides his family members the opportunity to smile. In the same way, Ajit means unconquerable. Ajit can’t win free heart accolades from Hasmukh. The play has philosophical twist and a happy end. The play explores the deteriorated inter-personal relationship among members of the same family. The viewers witness father v/s son, husband v/s wife. All are shown at war and running after money. The play stands as an outstanding for showing the protagonists as the watcher of his own action. He realizes that he has been made victim of his own mechanism. He vested in Kiran with powers; to fulfill his desire for his posthumous control over family, but she exercises these powers to improve her relationship. The ghost of Hasmukh witnesses that he has been dismissed as a shadow of his father, a man to be pitied on, a man without his own dreams and desire, vision etc.

Dattani’s family play, Where There’s a Will shows the intricate male-female relationship in the family set up. Sita Raina makes an interesting observation on this aspect:

Mahesh described it as the exorcism of the patriarchal code. Women—be it daughter-in-law, wife or mistress—are dependent on me and this play shows what happens when they are pushed to the edge. What interested me particularly was its philosophical twist. To be the watcher of one’s self is to make intelligent changes in the life. In Where There’s a Will, the protagonist has control over his family through his money and forges an opportunity to improve his interpersonal relationships. As do most of us. Consequently, when he became the watcher of his actions, he perceives that his desire for control has led him to be the victim of his own machinations unlike Kiran who uses power play to essentially improve her relationships. (CP 451). The play dives deep into human psychology. It examines the father-son relationship in which the father wants his son to follow his footprints and the son refusing to toe the line.
Where There’s a Will has numerous interesting aspects. Mahesh described it as the exorcism of the patriarchal code. The play has control over his family through his money and forgoes an opportunity to improve his interpersonal relationships. Rarely has a director been blessed with actors, backstage and technical crew that are so talented and rich in experience, which made the process of putting the play together immensely enjoyable and fulfilling. This play can be best interpreted in terms of psycho-analytic criticism and humanistic criticism. Dattani’s plays evoke a good deal of empathy. His theatrical language modifies his dramatic texts and is reflected in the performance of the characters. The movement of the characters and events is governed by stillness, silence and sound. The whole play is about the problems of Indian middle class family such as marriage negotiations, inheritance, poverty caused by natural calamities like earthquakes and droughts are treated as themes in plays.

The techniques in Dattani’s Plays are in equal with his daring portrayal of sex relations and sexual preferences in his plays. Family issue is a center of the play. When anybody reads plays of Dattani, he connects the theme with reality and compares Indian middle class family issues. Dattani is in the vanguard of those who have made this happen; he is an actor and director with his own theatre group and has an innate sense of dialogue that is vital, stimulating, lucid and effective. Dealing with compelling issues rooted in his milieu, he has dispelled the perception about English theatre being just gratuitous fizz. His audiences have been large and responsive, both to the spectacle and the language. Dattani solved the problem by writing his own play, Where There’s a Will in 1988 that was performed at the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival. And the playwright came into being. This is a play where ‘traditional’ family values clash with unexpected twists in the tale that completely subverts existing stereotypes. The story revolves around a supposedly ‘self-made’ industrialist, Hasmukh Mehta, the patriarch who is the supreme malcontent, with the typical problems.
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Sen, Roop, is a counselor in Kolkata and the quote is from his byte in Dasgupta’s article “Men will be men…..stuck in patriarchal role”, TNN, March 8, 2010. 22nd May, 2010