Chapter – II

Gender Discrimination and the Child Sexual Abuse: 
*Tara and Thirty Days in September*

Dattani's plays reflect his concern for the urban middle and upper class society. His observations reflect from his empathetic feeling for the distressed condition of the society, and this has added a new dimension to the Indian drama in English. His plays deal with the issues of discrimination, gender bias, sexuality, and religious jingoism creating chasm in communities. His plays have an over-whelming relevance to contemporary realities. Therefore, it is significant to know how appropriate it is to use the medium of theatre for sensitizing the society on several important issues. The function of drama is not to "reflect the mal-function of the society, but to act like freak mirrors in a carnival and to project grotesque images of all that passes for normal in our world." Dattani's writings reflect his sensibility to the suffering in society born out of gender discrimination.

Self and 'society' are two distinct entities; still it is the harmony of the two, which constitutes the balance of human life. Dattani wants to say that no man is an island in himself and he cannot survive isolation, but he has to make perpetual struggle to coordinate his will with the scheme of nature and society. He wants to emphasize that happiness can be attained only when there is mutual trust between the individual and the society; otherwise the individual has to suffer and the society is bound to decay.

Gender discrimination has been an age-old phenomenon but each era and culture creates its own paradigms of the power relationship representing the binary of the male and female. Surprisingly, women have been looked down all over the world and man dominated the society, thus creating a patriarchal social order. India also has not been an exception to this phenomenon, though in the ancient Indian society, the woman enjoyed equal status yet in
the medieval period, we can see the paradoxical condition of the woman in our society. They were subjected and confined to a certain space of surviving life style. In the patriarchal society, husband rules the world and sets the terms and conditions to his wife. Women were not given any opportunity of dominant practice of life. They were not given proper consideration either in her family or outside the family, and that made them to accept living with total neglected social life.

Indian tradition was very rich in respect of mother worship in the Vedic Yuga. Indian tradition has generally respected womanhood, though we do find derogatory references to women. Manu declared — “yatra naryastu poojyante, ramnate tatra devta”, where women are honoured, there the Divinity blossoms.” (Manusmriti Verse 3.56). Srutis say, “Matri devo bhava, pitri devo bhava” (Taittiriya Upanishad), consider your parents as god. Women had a considerably good position in ancient era. Like men, they had the Upnayana sanskars, spiritual studies, and also had freedom to choose their husbands through the swayamvars. They enjoyed equal opportunities—education and work. Manu says on Motherhood, “One acharya excels ten upadhyayaas in glory, a father excels a hundred achharyas in glory but a mother excels a thousand acharyas in glory.” Adi guru Sankaracharya also praises the mother’s virtue and nature in his Aparadha kshama stotra, “There could be a bad son but never a bad Mother”. In this context, the output of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan is also remarkable, i.e., “… the position of women in any society is a true index of its cultural and spiritual level. Position of women in any society is a true index of its cultural and spiritual level. Men, who are responsible for many of the views about women, have woven fantastic stories about the latter's glamour and instability, and their inferiority to men as well as their mystery and sanctity.” (Occasional Speeches and Writing IV, Qt. in Women's Education in India, Vol.-1 by S.P. Agrawal, J.C. Aggrawal)

Gender issues have attracted greater attention in Indian literature written in English and other Indian languages. In defining the role of man-woman relationship, i.e., family and
society at personal, social, political, and economic levels, the writers may or may not have been influenced by Western, European, feminist, lesbian or gay theories, but the fact is that man-woman relationship has been reassessed from a gender perspective to uncover the ideological implications.

In the later Vedic period and in the period of the Dharmasamhita, the position of women deteriorated. In the Brahmana literature, especially in the Aitareya Brahmāna, it is stated that daughter was the source of sorrow to her parents and on the other hand the son was projected as the protector.

These observations of the critics help us to be aware of the role and condition of the female gender and the idea of gender discrimination, as follows: (i) Female subjugation is a common phenomenon in all cultures, (ii) for biological reasons it seems to be inherent in the scheme of nature, (iii) it generates the psyche of self-suppression, (iv) woman is not allowed to accept honorable status in the centre, (v) violence is essential feature of female exploitation, (vi) myths and religious practices have been instrumental in the formation of female psyche.

Dattani feels that women are sent on earth with equal right. They have equal power to have their full development but men's intervention never lead that to happen, only because women are taken as the weaker section in regarding what men can do, due to physiology. But Dattani believes it does not mean she is inferior. From very early time throughout the world men always had the tendency to use women as an object of amusement and pleasure. Women's existence became meaningful and complete only with marriage and motherhood. Women have often been treated as a property of the husband and family. They have not been given equal opportunity to make their own selves and social recognition. They were absented from self-actualization. It makes them indifferent to their inner potential and ruins their urges for self development. So, the patriarchal system is to keep the status of women at the low
level and the emergence of the joint family with special property rights for the male members re-inforced male domination.

The marginalized status of women in the society is on account of patriarchal social and cultural system. In the galaxy of modern Indian English drama, Mahesh Dattani through his plays has unveiled the hypocrisy of patriarchal order and has brought to our notice the discrimination and injustice done to women in our society. No doubt, he contextualizes the position of woman within her traditional framework, i.e., family structure. He presents them as emancipated individuals who possess the autonomy of self and retain the strength to fight their oppressor. Dattani admits: "... he seems to be fighting for my feminine self. And since I have the male self, which is equipped to fight as well, it is a proportionate battle. The feminine self is not a victim in my plays. It’s subsumed. Yes! It is marginalized, but it fights back." (Katayal 2000)

Dattani deals with the issue of gender discrimination to deconstruct the pressure of gender restrictions on female psyche. The subjugation results in rebellion, violence and other undesirable mechanisms for the safety of ego. She is not only victim but can also be an instrument of affliction. Appreciating the unconventional approach of Dattani, Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri admits: "This is the twist the playwright gives to the stereotype associated with gender issues that view solely women at the receiving end of the oppressive power structures of patriarchal society." (67)

Dattani has an exceptional sensibility for the affliction in society created by gender conflict. He moves to investigate the psychic response that has caused victimization for human beings besides dealing with socio-religious myths responsible for the marginalized condition of the people. His plays discuss not only gender issues and the freedom set to women in a patriarchal society but also with gender biases and prejudices which exploit the lives of a girl-child in the middle class and also the educated and upper class. Dattani’s Tara is such a play based on gender conflict and the basic causes of this gender conflict are
inherent in the society itself. The modern society which claims to be liberal and advanced in its thought and action is in reality nothing but propaganda. The propagandas of equality between male and female, equal opportunities to women in all fields are belied. These aspects have also been beautifully presented by Dattani in the play Tara.

Recapitulating the genesis of Tara Dattani says, "I called the play Twinkle Tara and did a production of my own in Bangalore for the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival…. Alyque removed 'Twinkle' and called it Tara. When Alyque chose to direct it, he had hoardings put up all over Bombay with my name just as big as his." (MMP 27-28) Several mishaps took place during its production. Alyque fell off the stage and broke his arm, Raell Padamsee's foot got a fracture and an actor Pratap Roy playing the role of Dr. Thakkar died of a heart attack after the third performance. Dattani ruminates: "May be it was the severed 'Twinkle' from the title–who knows? But despite these mishaps, Alyque's production of Tara was a huge success and established me as a promising playwright, at least in the eye of the national media. (MMP 29)

Dattani has depicted the perspectives of the gender of the character and uses the stereotypical roles of man and woman in this play. More intriguing is the character of Mr. Patel, Bharati’s husband, who had no role to play in Tara’s deprived existence, but who is surely the reflection of a quintessential male-head of the family in a patriarchal society. Patriarchy is a social system, in which the male acts as the primary authority and central figure to social organization, and where fathers hold authority over mothers, children, and property. His responsibility is to take care of his family, whereas, the mother has to work only in the house, and her duty is to look after her house, husband and children, this is her entire world. Right from the beginning, we can observe it. Like, in a scene, where Bharati has finished her puja, and Patel is getting ready to go to office. (CP 328). These are stereotypical gender roles in own Indian society and Dattani makes full use of them. Another example, in which we can see this Indian gender perspective, when Tara explains to Roopa about the
conversation between father and son: "The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to hunting while the women looked after the caves." *(CP 328)*

The mind-set of the people is that only and only son can carry the name in future. No one bothers whether girls are killed at birth or abandoned in future. People generally think that girls are other’s property, therefore, no necessity to take too much care of them. A carefully placed conversation in the text of *Tara* is about one of the most hideous cultural practices of that India which considers its daughters as curses. In a scene between Tara, Chandan, their next-door-neighbour and extremely garrulous Roopa and Bharati, a practice of drowning infant daughters in milk is mentioned in a rather subtle and casual way. Though the deed of choking daughters on a nourishing white fluid is ironic and hideous, the essence of that scene is not in creating awareness among the audience that such practices in India still exist (in Gujarati community specially, as per the play). The catch in that scene is in the attempt of Bharati to stop Roopa from revealing to her twins this practice. Why does she do that? May be, an acute undercurrent of guilt operates in her system. May be, she equates, in her mind, the act of killing an infant with what she did to Tara, by depriving her a chance at a full and healthy life.

Roopa. The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies – you know dowry and things like that – so they used to drown them in milk. *(CP 349)*

It is sad to say that in the present social mind-set, girls or female child are undesirable as well as disliked. The prevailing socio-cultural system poses several kinds of limitations, confinement, compulsions and coercion to the female child. They are not permitted to act freely and even to think freely. Tara is also the victim of such socio-cultural system. She faces prolonged suffering, humiliations and subsequently death. In the presence of the ugliest girls in the world, Tara feels humiliated and mortified because of being one-legged. Her temperament is over sensitive. She easily grasps what she hears from the people. She is offended at Roopa’s words and draws her attention to realize the seriousness of her own complications:

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Tara. So how does it feel having one tit smaller than the other?

*Roopa is stunned. She rises, her mouth open.*

Don’t worry—it’s not very noticeable, except from a certain angle. Then it’s very noticeable.

Roopa. How dare you! You one-legged thing!

Tara. I’d sooner be one-eyed, one-armed and one-legged than be an imbecile like you. An imbecile with uneven tits.

...  

Tara. *(shouts after her).* Get lost! And please ask Nalini and Prema to come here. I have something to say to them—about you! Oh, wait till they hear this! They will love it. They are going to look at your tits the same way they looked at my leg! Let me see how you can face them ogling at you! You won’t be able to come out of your house, you horrible creature! You are ugly and I don’t want ugly people in my house! So get lost! *(CP 369).*

The whole drama moves round one dark secret and its revelation. The twins, Tara and Chandan, successfully operated and separated by Dr. Thakkar. The twins had three legs between them and the third leg was well connected by Tara’s blood system. The probability of the leg’s survival was greater with Tara. But Bharati and her influential father were hand in glove to undertake the risk of supplying the third leg to Chandan. In the pursuit of procuring this malicious design the doctor was bribed with a plot of land in Bangalore by Bharati’s powerful and political father. Patel couldn’t object muscularly enough and he also ultimately became accomplice in this nasty conspiracy. The leg that had survived only for two days with Chandan could have been accompanied with Tara’s forever. Tara is devastated by this revelation that has been ultimately done by Patel himself.

For balanced and healthy growth of women’s personality, it is essential to provide them proper space and atmosphere. It is pathetic to say that there are certain social elements which are creating hindrances in the proper growth of women. Dattani has presented Dr. Thakkar as one of such important social factors. Doctors are regarded as the true messengers of God who save humanity from different kinds of disease and sufferings. Even if common
people or ignorant people or half learned people try to move in the wrong directions, doctors are not supposed to support them at least on the ethical grounds. In the present scenario, female foeticide has become so common that we are killing the foetus in the uterus after detecting the gender of the child. Strictly speaking, Dr. Thakkar is more than a culprit. Dr. Thakkar, who is presumed to abide by the ethical norms of his profession, becomes an accomplice in the bizarre act of separating the leg from Tara under the enticement of Tara’s influential maternal grandfather, who had guaranteed adequate help to Dr. Thakkar in establishing a magnificent nursing home at Bangalore. To quote Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri:

The doctor’s role in the play, however, aloof, is also suspect, as he too, becomes party to the partisan decision in agree in to give the leg to Chandan despite the contraindications. It is only later that we learn that he had his own, mercenary reason to go along with the decision. The social stereotypes sweep away even scientific considerations for the doctor make a parody of his god-like comments on his medical feats that seem to reduce human beings into guinea pigs (38-39).

Tara takes us into her personal exploration of wholeness and identity. Tara has a fight in her hands against the dogma-ridden society. Her words are realisation of the prevalent contradiction in contemporary society about woman’s position and her false glorification:

Tara. We women mature fast. Speaking of maturity, you better not skip any physiotherapy sessions. Daddy wants you to be big and sturdy. (CP 333)

One of the contradictions that Tara experiences is the inequality of freedom. Bharati, her mother, acknowledges it:

Bharati. I wish your father would pay more attention to Tara…Don’t tell me about your father. He is more worried about your career than hers. (CP 348)

It is indeed a cry of one’s repressed and exploited condition in the asymmetric society. Bharati tries to make an escape route for Tara from the traditional and limited sphere of women in the society. Tara yearns for a development and an expression both artistic and economic. Knowing her frailty, she struggles to come out of the cold stifling reality. She knows she must not crave for happiness, allowed only to men:
Tara. (*Slaps his back*). I'd probably have a ball … Having both mummy and daddy dancing around me. ‘Yes, Tara!’ ‘No Tara!’ ‘Anything you say, Tara.’ (*CP 334*)

This gender perspective of male-dominance is also seen in the expectations of Mr. Patel from his son, though he loved Tara and was seemingly concerned about her. He never thinks about Tara’s future. He is always concerned more about the future of Chandan than:

Patel. I am disappointed in you. From now on you are coming to office with me. I can’t see you rotting at home.

Chandan. I don’t want to go to the office.

Patel. You will come with me to office until your college starts.

Chandan. I don’t want to go to college! (*Fighting his tears.*)

Not without Tara! If she is going in for surgery, I will miss a year too!

Patel. You will not. I won’t allow it. (*CP 351*)

Mr. Patel insists on taking Chandan to his office in the face of his absent interest, not to Tara, why? What their daughter is worthy of is some human consideration and compassion, but nothing beyond. Mr. Patel knows very well that what is good for Chandan and for Tara. This shows that coming to office is a good thing for Chandan, whereas for Tara, the good thing is to work at home or help her mother.

The play reflects the simple mirror of condition of male and female in Indian society where both have to work and live in their limited boundaries and not allowed to cross the specific restricted areas. People always think about boy’s future, first, because people give more significance to boy than girl. If we talk about a boy, he has to follow his father, and has to learn, how to make his business progressive. All these things, a boy must learn. For a girl, she has to learn how to cook/ how to look after the house? How to behave with others? All these things, a girl must learn. These are the parameters in which a boy and a girl have to behave. Women have not their own identity in the society. Dan talks with himself; he utters…”What is Tara?” These words question where is Tara’s identity? Her disappeared identity shows female gender’s helplessness. The responsible thing for this is male-dominant society. She is the victim of the patriarchal society.
Tara sways between meaning and interpretation, determinism and indeterminacy. She comes into conflict with the double standards of the society. Dynamic in nature and dignified in presence, Tara is a character of depth and sensibility. She has represented the emerging contemporary Indian woman, who has to adjust between her desire and decision. She aspires to something higher and beyond the mundane existence of everyday reality. Tara is unconventional and has an uninhibiting and protesting voice.

Tara. My, oh my! You sound just like mummy! You men can imitate us so well if you want to. Pity we can’t return the compliment. (*CP 357*)

In spite of regarding women as the Goddess in Indian culture, they are not provided proper consideration and opportunity, and *Tara* is a good example to show this contradiction and double standard of the Indian society.

The themes of Dattani’s plays bear the testimonial of varying tone, temperament and treatment. Dattani expanded his range and canvas of creativity from stage plays to radio and screen Plays. He has an ability to amalgamate the traditional beliefs with ultramodern disposition and conviction. His plays are heavily charged with socio-political, emotional, physiological and psychological issues. The theme of family covers the large chunk of plays wherein its members are found to be struggling and wrestling with one another. The best example of such play is *Tara* which circles around the grave and traditional issues of gender biasing. The play is contextual and relevant in the light of the burgeoning incidents of foeticide and widening gap in the sex ratio of male and female child.

*Tara* is not about a character by the same name. It is more about what remains unsaid and undebated. It is a story of a girl who wants to twinkle and shine, just like her name. It shows gender difference in Indian society, and the playwright presents the agony, dilemma, torment of a girl child in a male dominated Indian society. Tara’s individual self has a little dream, of emerging as a new woman. She is imaginative, filled with her dreams, a wild and fiery spirit, instilled with a creative spark:
Tara. Yes, he is going to write a story –about me.

…


…

Tara. I have always demanded more and more. (CP 350)

Tara. Oh! What a waste! A waste of money. Why spend all the money to keep me alive? There are thousands of poor sick people on the roads who could be given care and attention, and I think I know what I will make of myself. I will be a carer for those people I… I will spend the rest of my life feeding and clothing those … starving naked millions everyone is talking about. (CP 370)

The idea also brings to mind the concept of the Binary star systems that consist of two stars that “are gravitationally bound, and generally move around each other in stable orbits. When two such stars have a relatively close orbit, their gravitational interaction can have a significant impact on their evolution. Just as the Siamese twins in this case have an interwoven identity; and has a great impact on each other, mentally and biologically in their evolution. They are spiritually inseparable. With the demise of Tara, Chandan experiences a sense of identity crisis. The inseparable twins very evocatively remind us of the celebrated pair Rahel and Estha in Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things who are forcibly separated by choice. Just as they emerge from a zygote they get back their revenge on society as they go into a taboo method of fusion towards the end of the novel. The twins in the prescribed play are born as ‘inseparably fused’ - hugging each other emblematizing their emotional coherence at the very outset. Chandan envisages their reconciliation towards the end of the play as they get together in a tight embrace, back to their former fused form. They stand for two sides of the same concept.

Talking about Tara in an interview with Erin B. Mee, Dattani says, “it’s a play about the self, about the man and the woman in self, but a lot of people think of it as a play about the girl child.” Further elaborating, he says that it is a play ‘about the male denying the female, and how the cultural construct of gender favors the male….it has to do with coming to terms with one’s own self in terms of the feminine in the self.’ (Multani 158-159).
The play is centered not only on twins and their life but also reveals the domestic tragedy involving grandfather, parents and children. The plot of the play hinges around four major figures – the Siamese twins named Chandan and Tara, and their parents Patel and Bharati. The central protagonist of the play is Tara, a girl of fifteen, Chandan’s twin sister and the daughter of Patel and Bharati. The birth and brought up of twins and marginalization of a girl child of the conjoined twins has been disclosed in the play. The play reveals the birth and brought up of twins and marginalization of girl child of the conjoined twins. Dattani has systematically and laudably exposed determinism, sexism and parental hypocrisy in Tara.

The plot of Tara is arranged around familial relationship where each individual in his own way has to bear 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 Bharti, Mr. Patel was forced to leave his parental home because this relationship was not accepted by his parents. The shadow of insecurity looms large around him. He had a painful realization. Here, the writer presents a peculiar reality of the woman playing second fiddle to man. The characters suffer from repressed desires because of unreasonable bondages of traditions and very often are victims of the cultural construct of the gender. The writer delves deep into the mind of such characters laying stress on their fractured psyche especially when they are living in an equally fragment social set-up. It comes across as a play that deals with twin aspects that are two sides of the same coin.

Tara: And me. Maybe we still are. Like we’ve always been. Inseparable. The way we started life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out… (CP 325)

The play’s focal point is the gender bias prevalent in an average Indian household, where the son is usually given the priority over the daughter. To look son and daughter with biased and discriminating eyes has been traditional and age old custom in India and it has been tagged with rites and rituals of life. Parents think their daughter of alien home as one day she would be married and would be of her husband. They have superstitious and mythical
belief of being ultimately emancipated at the hands of their son. This fact pertaining to illusion of life is optimally exploited by Dattani in this play.

In an interview with Lakshmi Subramaniam, Dattani had himself made a statement – “I see Tara as a play about male self and female self, and the male self being preferred in all cultures. The play is about the separation of self and the resultant angst.” (Interview 2002) In these lines of Dattani, it becomes amply clear, that this play is being enacted as a microcosm of the practices and psyche of the society. History has been witness to a cruel and inherent bias against its female members since ages. Societies have come and gone, but the politics of gender have never been completely erased from its face. Invariably, it is the society which assumes a deterministic role over the life (and body, as we will discuss in later paragraphs) of a girl, which ordains tenets for their existence. This ‘society’ is usually a male set-up; if not that, it is heavily patriarchal in character.

At that time, Bharati and her father think about a boy, because, perhaps, her mother, Bharati, knows the travails of a physically handicapped girl. She knows the hardships a girl child might face in the event of her physical deformity thrusts upon her and knows that the leg legitimately belongs to the girl child. But she has not the temerity to stand out and cry hoarse: "they thought that boy can hold the heritage of his father and can be helpful to his father in his business. So, a boy is better than a girl. After operation, when she knows the condition of Tara, at that time she realizes her mistake but it is too late to repent on it. She can’t apologize for her mistake to Mr. Patel because she does not consult in critical situation. So, Mr. Patel never forgives Bharati.

As mentioned earlier, Tara and Chandan are conjoined twins. Birth of conjoined twins is an extremely rare phenomenon, and in most cases where they are surgically separated, only one of the two survives. Chandan and Tara, however, carry with them the promise of living as two separate individuals. They have perfect chances of surviving after surgery, with each important organ present in each body. There is, however, one issue. The boy and the girl,
together, have three lower limbs, and chances of the limb surviving on the girl are more, as stated by Dr. Thakkar, also present in a significant role in the play. In a cruel judgment, the mother of the twins, Bharati, with the help of her father, convinces Dr. Thakkar to graft the leg onto Chandan’s body, where it does not survive for long! Thus, there seems to be something destiny ridden in the way both twins are again made equal—they both now boast of one Jaipur foot each. What is interesting to note here is the application of gendered role of a girl. Since time immemorial, female body is seen as a means for comforting, rejuvenating and even entertaining the male body.

Poor Tara, even before being given a chance at a full life, is deprived of it, because the classic male-child-preference psyche operates here, in this case. There is a certain cold ease with which the mother (microcosmic representation of the society), strips the girl of the right to live as an able bodied, complete woman and seizes from the girl which is biologically, and hence naturally hers.

Ironically it was not a simple surgery of two bodies which nature had made one, not only a battle between nature and medical science, but it was an emotional separation of two lives. The process of discrimination against the girl child begins right from her birth. the political influence of Tara’s grandfather and his act of bribing the doctor for unethical surgery reveals not only the hurried face of the cultured lot, but also expose unequal social structure which ignores a girl child. The very nature of surgery was not only unethical but also in human since a limb and a vital organ from the daughter was taken to favor the son. Consequently Tara loses her strength of he and brother thrives.

It is the politics of difference which brings torture to Tara and reduces her to be an unwanted thing in the Patel family. Her health, intellectual power, career, status as heir, even her welfare is ignored. Patel does not bother whether Tara takes milk regularly or not, whether she has put on weight or not. Tara always wins at playing cards and she has potential to be a great business woman, but her father fails to recognize the potential within Tara.
However, Patel’s failure is not that of an individual alone, but metaphorically it is of society as well. The grandfather’s property would go to Chandan and Tara would not get anything because society cares for sons and grandsons too often at the cost of daughters and granddaughters. Tara never got a fair deal, not from nature and not from human being.

The playwright also seeks to portray science and nature in a similar manner - how Science and Nature complement each other. However, Science cannot conquer everything and has its own lapses as Nature does. This is signified by the twins with impaired legs as they form a mirror image of each other. The play depicts how Science cannot always conquer Nature as the leg attributed to the boy is rejected by the body in a brash attempt at disregarding both Nature and God. Dan hits the nail on the head when he asserts, ‘conflict is the crux of life. A duel to the death between God and nature on one side and on the other—the amazing Dr. Thakkar.’ (CP 330) This explains the God-like stance of the Doctor, who is seated with a seeming omnipotent presence representing Advanced Technology.

Dattani plays with the idea of female infanticide that is prevalent among the Gujaratis, and by implication Indians, and also suggests Patel's hegemonic patriarchy when he insists that proper division in the gender roles be made. Tara gives us a glimpse into the modern society which claims to be liberal and advanced in its thought and action. In a society which claims that its mothers are educated today and have 'Devis' like Durga, Kali, Saraswati, Lakshmi etc. whom not only women but men also pay obeisance, differentiate between a male child and a female child. All the propagandas of equality between male and female, equal opportunities to women in all the fields are belied. Dattani's deep preoccupation with gender issues leads to the emergence of the idea of the twin side to one’s self—quite literally embodied in one body and the separation that follows.

Mahesh Dattani has presented the bizarre reality of the woman playing second fiddle to man. The play, Tara opens with Dan who remains busy in typing the text pertaining to his lifelong experience. Dan is undergoing mental pain and conflict caused by reverberation of
some tragic incidents of the past. Dan and Tara had shared one body which is popularly and scientifically known as Siamese twins and in the terms of Dan they were like “two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out...And separated.” (CP 325). He lives in London to keep sufficient distance between his bruised past and present and searching for unified self and how he relives his personal history and tragedy by writing a play in the memory of his twin sister. The case of play within the play is witnessed as Dan is writing a script of a drama known as “Twinkle Tara” which has comprehensive connotation as Tara is protagonist of the drama under discussion and also the literal meaning of the twinkling star.

Dan (older Chandan) starts by dropping off different masks or identities that he has acquired in the course of his stay in London. “I am a freak”, he declares and frees himself to “Allow the memories to flood in” (CP 324). The memories of his twin sister whom he had nearly forgotten are brought to the fore of his conscious mind when he decides to write a play in her memory. Reminiscing about Tara, Dan realizes that “maybe I didn’t forget her. She was lying deep inside, out of reach...” (CP 324). Getting entrapped into the trance of memories Dan goes on to reflect that “we still are, like we’ve always been. Inseparable. The way we started in life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out . . . And separated.” (CP 325). Here we get an early clue that Dattani wished his play to be read from altogether different perspective. This play depicts the emotional and psychological trauma of the forced separation of Tara and Chandan, the two conjoined twins:

Patel. A scan showed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl. Your mother asked for a reconfirmation. The result was the same. The chances were slightly better that the leg would survive . . . on the girl....I couldn’t Believe what she told me- --that they would risk giving both legs to the boy....The Doctor had agreed, I was told....He had acquired three acres of prime land---in the Heart of the city---from the state. Your grandfather’s political influence had been used. A few days later the surgery was done. As planned by them, Chandan had two legs---for two days. It didn’t
take them very long to realize what a grave mistake they had made. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead flesh which could have---might have---been Tara…. (CP 378)

_Tara_ centres, observes Erin B. Mee, "on the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins following the discovery that their physical separation was manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favour the boy [Chandan] over the girl [Tara]. Tara, a feisty girl who isn’t given the opportunities given to her brother [although she may be smarter] eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan, and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister’s death by living without a personal history. Woven into the play are issues of class and community, and the clash between traditional and modern lifestyles and values." (CP 319)

Patel and Bharati are educated parents but they created new discriminations. Bharati’s father, a resourceful person, is also considered to be one of the factors in this mishap. If Bharati had been led astray by her father's high handed decision, why didn't Patel put his foot down and stand against their decision? Father should be strong enough to fight this discrimination. The relationship of Bharati and Tara, mother and daughter is subordinated to her subjugation to the expectations of the society. She has no free will and her compassion for Tara, proves weak in her preference for her son Chandan. She plans for the surgery for the separation of the children and determines to offer her kidney to give a new lease of life to Tara. Bharati is quite much fearful about the future of her daughter:

_Bharati. It’s all right while she is young. It’s all very cute and comfortable when she makes witty remarks. But let her grow up. Yes, Chandan the world will tolerate you. The world will accept you- but not her! Oh! The pair is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable and what about forty and fifty! Oh, God! (CP 349)"

_Bharati 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 expatiate 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, roles, gender perception and prescribe unequal means to achieve. Dr. Thakkar occupies the one on the highest level throughout the play. Tara and Chandan are conjoined, Siamese twins who must be separated to survive. The dichotomy between the twin gendered selves is recognized, and a physical separation is made through surgery "Like we’ve always been. Inseparable…. we were forced out… And separated." (CP 325)

Dan tries to define his other half, the feisty Tara. "…She never got a fair deal. Not even from nature. Neither of us did. May be God never wanted us to be separated. Destiny desires strange things…. But even God does not always get what he wants. Conflict is the crux of life. (CP 330). Chandan enjoyed greater preference and Tara was left to enjoy the position of a subaltern. The suffering of Tara and Chandan is a symbolic justification to the perception that the grace of the relationship exist not in their separateness but in their moving in a coordination or interdependence. For the problem of gender conflict, women themselves are to a large extent responsible. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri opines:

That the injustice is perpetuated by Tara’s own mother who professes to belong to the more ‘liberal’ community, rather than the father, who actually belongs to the more rigidly patriarchal social milieu, gives immense power to the play. It suggests that it is the women who continue to be willing instruments in the vicious cycle. Dattani, however, counters one woman with another: Tara herself-spirited, tough, a survivor with a sense of humour and delightful repartee-fighting against prejudices the society has against the crippled, and the female (38).

Bharati is fully aware about the discrimination meted to women because she herself has experiences such discriminations. Therefore, she is worried about Tara’s future. She contemplates about the situations Tara is going to face in near future. Chandan as a male will enjoy so lots of privileges in comparison to Tara.

Bharati. It’s time Tara decided what she wants to be. Women have to do that as well these days. She must have a career (CP 348).

…
Bharati. . . Yes, Chandan. The world will tolerate you. 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! Oh God! (CP 349).

Tara was more enthusiastic and full of jest and spark of life. She had high aspirations which she could not accomplish because of her handicapped state while the boy was comfortably ensconced and had come to terms with his handicapped life. Why was then Tara denied the privilege of the good leg? Why? Is it because she was a girl? Is being a girl in the society a curse. Why so much partiality and differentiation done to women in the country which has rich heritage and where women are otherwise placed on the pedestal. Mr. Patel always worries for a bright and happy future of his son. On the other hand he is least worried for the future of Tara. Finding that Chandan is helping his mother in knitting, he is exasperated and sickened. The problems of gender discrimination come on surface while going through such dialogues:

Patel. What are you two doing?

Chandan. Mummy’s knitting and I’m helping her sort out mistake.

... Pateli Chandan, leave that damn thing alone! . . . I can’t see you rotting at home! (CP 351)

Patel plans to send Chandan abroad for higher studies but what about Tara? Does Tara need not have higher education? Who has the time to think about her? Comparing Chandan and Tara, one finds that Tara is full of potentialities but Chandan is deprived of such potentialities. Tara is more intelligent, sharp and witty than Chandan, and she would have performed well if given the opportunities in life. Despite this Mr. Patel favours his son not his daughter:

Patel. Chandan is going to study further and he will go abroad for his higher studies.

Bharati. And Tara?

Patel. When you have ever allowed me to make any plans for her? (CP 352)
Tara experiences the conspicuous gender discrimination in her own family. She is not only deprived of the leg which ought to have been attached to her body but also she has not been granted a single penny by her maternal grandfather who has left a huge amount for Chandan. Chandan and Tara’s maternal grandfather was wealthy man. He was a politician and was in a position to become the chief minister. His will is a testament of the kind of treatment that is meted out to girls in Indian society:

Patel. He left you a lot of money.
Chandan. And Tara?
Patel. Nothing.
Chandan. Why?
Patel. It was his money. He could do what he wanted with it. (CP 360)

Patel's attitude has also been negative. He blames his wife and father-in-law for the damage done cannot be denied. The fact that male is always given the greater chance is obvious from Patel’s planning for Chandan’s education and future career. No consideration whatsoever for her feelings! Tara is the victim of this collective social system. Her father, Mr. Patel, is not much different from his wife, though Bharati is guilty of a more serious crime against Tara. He continuously and doggedly favours Chandan when it comes to giving him higher education abroad, and a career.

But Tara could have made her deficiency, her strength and fight the society to etch a place of her own. Tara is discouraged openly, notwithstanding her feelings in the matter, even though she is more intelligent, sharp and witty and would perform well if given opportunities in life. Economic and cultural factors have been responsible for the antipathy against and inferiorization of the girl child. All these factors combine to create the social system in which the girl child has to live and die. Tara is killed by social system, which controls the minds and actions of the people. The trauma of coming to know the role her mother had played in her life, and the discrimination become too much for her. And why is she killed? Tara is not wanted. Girls are not wanted.
Tara is not restrained by the injustices done to her by her parents but she presents herself as an endowed lady to face all the hurdles. She shows sympathy towards the downtrodden. Her attitude is rather positive and she feels resolved to serve the starving millions, as it is evident from her own assertion: “I will spend the rest of my life feeding and clothing those . . . starving naked millions everyone is talking about. Maybe I can start an institution that will . . . do all that. Or I could join Mother Teresa and sacrifice myself to a great cause. That may give . . . purpose to my . . . existence. I can do it. I can do it, can’t I? I will be very happy if I could, because that is really what I want . . . ” (CP 370)

Tara was a bright and shining star which was a source of cheerfulness and happiness of the family. A complete life could have done wonders and she would have scored the limits which her brother Chandan couldn't have. Tara's potentiality was sacrificed on the altar of gender. Identity crisis becomes a chain with which a female is fettered when the question of choice between male and female arises. In this family drama, Mr. Patel, Bharati, Chandan and Tara, all these four characters try to live in their world and that is why they are talking about future plans. This mechanism requires reviving, which is worse than death. Bharati bribes Roopa because Tara would not feel that she has no friends. By doing this, Bharati tries to correct her mistake. Moreover, she has stopped socializing, because she cannot endure when people ask about Tara. In a way, she is running away from reality.

When Chandan comes across the reality that he is responsible for Tara’s death, he cannot tolerate more and then he goes to London. He changes his name as “Dan”. In a way, he also, like Bharati, escapes from reality. They both are escapists. On the other side, Mr. Patel has to face the society because of Bharati’s mistake. He endures the society’s harshness silently. At a moment, Mr. Patel erupts on Bharati. He says, “When have you allowed me to consult for Tara?” This is how Dattani has the psychological conflict between characters. Towards the end Dan reflects on his helplessness and his inability to act; and realizes that he is only “An object like other objects in a cosmos, whose orbits are determined by those
around. Moving in a forced harmony.” (CP 379). Tara desired freedom and thus was “hurled into space, doomed to crash with some unknown force.” (CP 379). Finally, Dan asks for forgiveness from his dead sister and yearns for togetherness... Dan apologises to Tara for doing this "Forgive me, Tara. Forgive me for making it my tragedy." (CP 380)

The play ends with Tara and Dan walking without the limp. The two become whole and complete as they embrace and hug each other, recreating and reliving that state when they were one, inside the womb of their mother. Such completeness and totality of being can only be achieved beyond the boundaries of time, in the memory, in the creative mind of an artist like Dattani. Also, in this play we can see Dattani to experiment with the stage. A modern play in technique which has left audiences stunned ever since its first performance, it is structured in two acts with multi level set and with characters often taking in groups. It also presents the conflict between illusion and reality as echoed by the multi-level set. The house of the Patels is as kept in memory. The only realistic level is the part of the wall covered with faded wall paper that has the writer writing the play in which he appears to the audience. In this sense, the playwright presents meta-theatrical aspects as he talks of distancing oneself from the experience and writing about it.

Tara is throughout a tragic play and it is difficult to point out only few points for its tragedy, but even then I would say that besides Tara and Chandan's physical and mental condition, though they are mentally sound, Bharti is more tragic in comparison to Tara and Chandan, her demented behaviour, her demonstration of so much affection to Tara is just a convincing attempt. Bharti has been feeling guilty for her partiality towards Chandan from the time of their operation in Victoria hospital in Bombay where she and her father favoured the separation of these Siamese twins and giving the kidney to Chandan while it had its major blood supply from Tara/s body. And that's why her statement like 'love can make up for a lot' and her turning the children against Mr. Patel strike much as they have the inner sense of guilty and overloaded feelings. Besides Mr. Patel, though never appeared in despair, always
thought of his children but deep inside he was stung. Dan is also trying to recover from the tragedy of being Siamese twins and loss of Tara just by writing about her.

The play can be taken as Dattani’s commentary upon gender discrimination and forces of social apathy towards injustice done to a girl under the cloak of gender dichotomy. Tara is neither a story about gender identity nor a story of medical phenomena; it presents how a female is marginalized to the extent of distorting herself. The play is a gruesome tale of injustice done to a girl child by her own parents and grandfather inspite for developments in science and technology. Our society is still following the tradition and conventions which suppresses the individuality. Dattani shows how gender discrimination kills all other bonds of familial relationships and how socio-cultural myths and conventions control and construct the course of the human life. Dattani highlights the complex situation in which two conjoined twins are trapped by nature. The manipulation made by the patriarchal society makes it more complex and intricate situation for a girl child, and it brings for the very unhappy absurd situation for a girl child Tara.

Two kinds of discriminations have been foregrounded in the play: one is class discrimination and other is gender biasing but Dattani deems the gender issues more prominent and grave than the problems of class. He presents his own views in this regard in a conversation, "Because I think that’s the most visible form of discrimination in our country. Well, you could say that class is the most visible form, but in a way it is such, so ingrained the class system, that sometimes it remains unquestioned. You know you can order your servants about nobody questions you. You know weapon to fight discrimination against her."

(Qtd. in Jha).

The twins, especially ‘Tara’, are repeatedly referred to as “freaks”. The term ‘freak’ has been conventionally used to refer to person who has something unusual regarding their appearance or behaviour. The older usage of the word ‘freaks’ refers to the state of being physically deformed or characterized by rare diseases and conditions. The word was utilized
to suggest ‘sideshow performers’. In such an instance, the word ‘freak’ represents the state of women, who are marginalized. The female race who is not congenitally deformed but is so as society forces the handicap upon them. It is widely held that while one's sex as a man or woman is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concepts of gender – of traits that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in temperament and behavior – are largely, if not entirely, *social constructs* that were generated by the pervasive patriarchal bias of our civilization. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman… It is civilization as a whole that produce this creature… which is described as feminine." (Beauvoir 1/2000)

A natural freak refers to a genetic abnormality, while a made freak is a once normal person who experienced or initiated an alteration at some point in life (such as receiving surgical implants). Here both the terms can be used to describe Dan and Tara. But Tara is less of a natural freak; as Nature was more in her favour. "Freak" has also been employed to describe genetic mutations in plants and animals, *i.e.*, "freaks of nature." "Freak" used in the verb form, implies: "to become stressed and upset". Here, the twins are in a state of depression owing to their predicament but utilize a curtain of sarcasm and wit to shield the same.

This play shows that the familial relationship is governed by male-psyche and female-psyche, which means male writer and humanistic critic. The girl child Tara is used by male-psyche and female-psyche patriarchal society. Tara represents female-psyche. Women themselves are taught to internalize the reigning patriarchal ideology that is the conscious and unconscious pre-suppositions about male superiority, and so are conditioned to derogate their own subordination. Bharti (Tara’s mother) is also a victim of patriarchal society; she is subordinate to her husband. But Chandan soon realizes that Bharti is not guilty, fault is his own, so Chandan changes his name to Dan and is described as an escapist by Mahesh Dattani.

Mahesh Dattani has very deftly revealed the theme of gender discrimination in this play. All along social norms, economic standards and cultural factors have been responsible
for injustice against the girl child. All these factors combine to create a social system in which the girl has to live and die. Tara too is killed by this social system, which controls the minds and actions of the people. The trauma of coming to know the role that her mother had played in her life and the discrimination she faces becomes too much for her. Tara's potential is thereby sacrificed at the altar of gender. Identity crisis becomes a chain with which a female is bound when the question of choice between male and female comes up. The play shows the hollowness of middle-class lives and explores what lies below the façade that characters and families put up to fool the world, revealing the essential loneliness of people. He presents to us the vulnerability of characters, the emotional price they pay in their quest for successful appearances, in their need to belong. Most of Dattani's characters are usually displaced and disenchanted. They are average people who are in search of happiness and fulfillment. They need to work out their destinies within the family unit, which is the microcosm of the society at large.

Dattani's other play *Thirty Days in September* (2001) is based on a very sensitive issue of child sexual abuse. It was regarded as the best play of the year 2006. It was written at-the request of an NGO called RAHI (Recovery and Healing from Incest) which helps the survivors of child sexual abuse, Dattani wrote *Thirty Days in September*. It was a well directed play by Lillete Dubey and first performed at Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai on May 31, 2001. The play is based on the experiences and interviews of over a dozen survivors of child sexual abuse.

In his conversation with Anitha Santhanam Dattani has aptly recorded his experiences, “I was completely exhausted at the end of it all. Felt very drained. Infact, I didn't go back to the material for a long time. I couldn’t bring myself to”. (Santhanam, 2001) The interviews disturbed Dattani so much that he could not take up the matter for a long-time. The gap made him organize the material in such a way that it had the capacity to draw the attention of theatre lovers.
Regarded as the best play of the year 2006 *Thirty Days in September* deals with a very sensitive issue of child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent uses a child for sexual stimulation or sexual gratification. It adversely affects the psyche of the child and may lead to several complications like depression, physical injury, post traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, poor self-esteem and propensity to further victimisation in adulthood.

A survey by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2007 declares 53.22% of children have faced sexual abuse. 5.69% had been sexually assaulted (oral sex or penetration of vagina or anus). 21.90% of child respondents faced severe forms of sexual abuse including assault, exposure or being photographed in the nude. 50.76% reported other forms of sexual abuse including sexual advances in travel or marriage situations. 50% of abusers were known to the children or in a position of trust and responsibility. Most children had not reported the matter (“Sexual abuse.” [http://en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)). According to World Health Organization one in every four girls and one in every 7 boys in the world are sexually abused. These figures resoundingly break the silence that surrounds sexual abuse of children and perpetuates the evil.

Unlike most other plays by Dattani, where he uses multiple levels on stage to depict and define individual space, *Thirty Days in September* focuses more on the mental and psychological terrain and the thought process of the characters. It endeavours to explore the issue of child sexual abuse, within the family, which is often hushed behind the veil of silence. After listening to the horrified tales of child sexual abuse Dattani was convinced that the tabooed issues pervaded even the middle class homes in India. He deliberately selected the upper middle class setting for the play. He confesses: "I would see the setting of Thirty Days as upper middle class. I choose this setting because I did not want them to dismiss sexual abuse as something that does not happen to people like them." (Vardan 2004)
It further accentuates the need for plays like *Thirty Days in September* as a stimulant for the society. The story has been woven around four major characters-Mala, the protagonist and the main victim, Shanta, her mother and also a sufferer, Vinay, the abuser, Mala’s maternal uncle who victimises both the women, Deepak, Mala’s true lover and the anchor who pulls Mala out of the doldrums.

*Thirty Days in September* makes a bold attempt to lift the veil of silence which surrounds the scarred psyche of Mala, the protagonist of the play. It reveals the traumatic experience of Mala who is constantly molested by her maternal uncle and who cannot forget the haunting memories of her abused past. Her own uncle subconsciously lives with her all the time. He damages the natural growth of Mala, deters her from pursuing her love interests beyond the ominous 30-day period and scars her soul every now and then. Though Mala withers under the psychological pressure exerted on her by the abuser, her mother voices no protest. Mala feels betrayed on account of the silence of her mother and indifference of her father on this issue. The play is rooted in "the familial system that betrays the individual–a child–who will carry the scars into adulthood, and never trust it again." (Chaudhuri 45)

The play narrates a dark and gripping tale of a complex daughter-mother relationship which explores the brutal severance of the bond between the child and the mother. The mother discovers the truth but remains silent on account of her own circumstantial compulsion. Their heated dialogue leads to their self-discovery and their intricate relationship. Dattani experiences the agonising traumatic experiences of Mala but allows her to narrate her own naked experiences. He further wants to give the impression that such sexual abuses do not take place only in working classes but in the upper middle class also. The only difference is that upper middle class is fond of sweeping such experiences under the carpet and gives the impression to the society that it never exists in their set-up. Dattani has succeeded in penetrating below the surface and subverting, says Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri, “the complacent beliefs that everyday reality is constructed with, and make visible the invisible issues that haunt so many of his plays.” (74).
Dattani explores the traumatic experience of Mala and expresses his serious concerns about her fate. He makes us realise that the brutalized faith may be resurrected and wrongs may be rectified. Mala’s boyfriend Deepak becomes the agent of her transformation. He has the courage to unmask the evil, correct the wrongs even at the cost of his own love. In the play Dattani adopts the process in which the audience has to listen to the perplexing revelations made by a female child who has faced sexual exploitation at the hands of a molester who is none other but her own maternal uncle. The play compels us to think why child sexual abuse takes place, how it takes place and what can be done to prevent it from taking place again? Dattani provides no relief whatsoever to the audience throughout the length and breadth of the play. The audience sympathises, empathizes and sometimes identifies with the characters of the play which leaves one shaken to the core by the time of its climax.

_Thirty Days in September_ opens with Mala who is now a mature and independent woman with her lover Deepak, who identifies her obsessive disorder and makes her realise the need to consult a counselor. Her conversation with counselor in Act II reveals the central theme of the play:

My father left us, for another woman…I feel of I were more lovable he would have at least visited us. We continue to get money from him every month, and he pays the rent … but I haven’t seen in fifteen years…I…don’t think my mother and he got along-that way…I have been so bad, I can’t tell you where to begin! It’s not just the men in the office I told you about but before…much before! I – oh God! I-I seduced my uncle when I was thirteen! I-slept with my cousin – and – anyone who was available… No, there is nothing to tell about my uncle, forget all that, please help me stop this behaviour. (CP II 33)

The gap created by the loss of parental love makes her search for it in different forms and places. This search has evolved her personality into her current self _i.e._ a nymphomaniac. She has been the victim of a pedophile at the tender age of seven and has fallen into the grip of a compulsive behaviour. An unwarranted indulgence in sexual activity has now become a
very normal routine of her life. She is aware of this adverse effect on the balanced growth of her personality but is unable to resist the pressure of her obsessive disorder:

What I am doing is terribly wrong! But it means a lot to me. I like it. That is why I am a bad person. I have no character…. I suppose it's these Western values, I wish I were more traditional then I wouldn't behave like this … no, no, that's stupid, I now, that's very easy to put the blame elsewhere …. (Listening to the counselor.) (CP II 18)

Mala is so much obsessed with sexual urges that she finds herself incapable of getting rid of them. Her childhood trauma had formed her psyche with the belief that her sexual addiction is her nature and she is made that way. She confesses her guilt to the counselor and accepts the fact that she enjoys being used by different people as a sexual object. She acknowledges her fault but realises that her mother had a significant role in it. Her mother’s withdrawal syndrome had deprived her of all kind of love. She has never felt the intensity of her mother’s love. She openly blames her mother for her negligence and total indifference.

Mala blames both her maternal uncle Vinay as well as her mother. The maternal uncle is blamed for taking advantage of her ignorance and making repeated physical abuse of her innocence and the mother is accused of ignoring her cries for help and remaining silent in spite of her awareness of their physical relationship. Instead of preventing her daughter from doing so, she preferred to drown herself into her prayers. She accuses her mother openly:

I don't know. I can't explain it. The only person who can, who could have prevented all this is my mother. Sometimes I wish she would just tell me to stop. She would have prevented a lot from happening… Here all the names of people whom I have been with. And the outline… well I just wanted a line that would put them all altogether. But if you ask me, whose face I think it is - it must be my mother’s. (CP II 18)

Mala often remembers her father's last words while leaving the house, "I married a frozen woman" (CP II 36). She was an utter failure as a wife and mother. Whenever Mala felt troubled and anguished she tried to approach her mother with her tearful eyes during the growing ears of seven, eight, nine, and ten, but her mother mysteriously turned deaf and tried
to disappear into the picture of Lord Krishna hoping for a solace. Throughout the play she appears to have been imprisoned into the prism of the picture of Lord Krishna. That was the sole cause of Mala’s trouble. When her mother insisted on knowing the real cause of agony, Mala openly stated:

I am not talking about a bad dream! I am talking about the time when uncle Vinay would molest me. When I was seven. Then eight. Nine. Ten. Every vacation when we went to visit him or when he came to stay with us. You were busy in either the pooja room or the kitchen. I would go to papa and cry. Before I could even tell him why I was crying he would tell me to go to you… You always fed me and wanted me to go to sleep so that the pain may go away. And – Oh God! It did go away. But it comes back. It didn't go away for ever. (CP II 25-26)

Shanta's passive state is broken when Mala throws away the picture of Lord Krishna in anguish. She tries to justify her side, as is evident from the following dialogue:

Shanta. Please don't misunderstand me, Mala. I remember, seeing you with my brother during the summer holidays. You were pushing yourself on him in the bedroom.

Mala. No! That's not true!

Shanta. I remember, Mala. You want me to remember? You were telling him to kiss you.

Mala. No.

Shanta. To touch you.

Mala. I didn't.

Shanta. To pinch your – breasts.

Mala. Stop it!

Shanta. You were forcing him to say things to you.

Mala. Stop it I said!

Shanta. To do things to you.

Mala. I did not! I did not!

Shanta. That is why I forget. I went to the kitchen to vomit. Then I prayed. I prayed for you Mala. (Pointing to the portrait). That is what I was praying to. To
our God, so He could send his Sudarshan Chakra to defend you to defend us from the demon inside you, not outside you. But you wouldn't let me. You don't let me.

Mala (crying). No! (CP II 27-28)

The dialogue clearly indicates that Shanta knew about Mala's relationship with her maternal uncle as well as her cousin. She did not take positive steps to prevent her from doing so. She rather preferred to go to the kitchen to ‘vomit’ and get lost in her own world. The statement of Shanta appears to be a defence statement against her feeling of guilt.

So far as the role of Mala's father is concerned, his insensitivity towards Mala further aggravated her troubles. When his seven years old daughter ran towards him crying for help, he simply repulsed her asking her to go to her mother. Despite his awareness that he had married a frozen woman, he did not bother about Mala's future with Shanta as her sole guardian and decided to start a new life with another woman. However disenchanted he might have been with his wife, his breaking of all chords with Mala is totally unjustifiable and also unpardonable in view of the unhealthy atmosphere in which his daughter had been placed. Thus Mala's parents are responsible for her troublesome life as the parents are supposed to save their children from dangerous situations.

It is Vinay, her maternal uncle who is responsible for indulging in the heinous crime like incest. Naturally Vinay's character invokes unanimous hatred among the readers/spectators. Seven years duration is very formative stage for any child, even more important for Mala who was already suffering from alienation in her family. The maternal uncle is perceived as a father figure in any society and is naturally trusted. Vinay used his so called fatherly figure in pushing Mala's life towards the worst form of wretchedness. ‘Lucky seven’ for all turned out to be disastrously unlucky for Mala and caused an irrecoverable damage to her psyche. Vinay used his emotional blackmails as his tools to sexually exploit Mala:

Man. Touch me here.

*Mala withdraws her hand sharply, frightened.*
Man. You don't love your uncle?

…

Man. Quickly before someone sees you. Touch...Shhh! Don't cry...you are seven now. Ready for a birthday present. Lie down. Come on quickly.

…

Man. Hold your frock up. Up over your face! shut up!

…

Man. Good. Good, Keep singing..Again, don't stop until I Stop. See, I love you even though you are so ugly. Keep singing... Nobody will tell you how ugly you are. But you are good only for this…only for this. See how much I love you. See… Now go away. Quickly.

…

Man: (Now more moralistic than before, the furtiveness gone). You like it! You enjoy it. After four years, you have become a whore! At thirteen you are a whore! (CP II 42-44)

The agony of Mala began in this way and gradually she is addicted to her sexual urges which were initially in the form of sado-masochistic manner but finally solidified into compulsive obsessive disorder. From the age of 7 to 13 whenever Mala came in contact with Vinay, she was manipulated emotionally for indulging in sexual abuse by the latter. Slowly but surely her addiction became the addiction of a drug addict craving for more and more cocaine, as if it was the only thing on earth. She kept looking for someone who could pacify her sexual urges. In the party she sets her eyes on man who was accompanied by his fiancé Radhika. She walks up to the man and gives him the impression that she is interested in him. Her eyes tell him to dance with her. They start dancing and come very close to each other. Mala requests him to hold her closer, kiss her and do whatever he wants to do with her by taking her to his room. After raising Mala's inebriation to this level, Vinay just got disinterested and rebuked her as a ‘bitch’ or ‘whore’. The level of his Satanic bent of mind is seen when he boastfully talks about his victory among the relatives and sends them as his ‘references’ to Mala. Thirteen years old Mala gradually began to share multiple sexual partners. Those unfortunate 30 days in September began to be constantly repeated or re-enacted in her life. It is evident from Mala's own statement:
It has to end in a month's time. In fact I like it best when I can time it so it lasts for thirty days. I even mark it on my calendar. After that, I have to - move on, if you know what I mean.... Well it means that it is no longer. (CP II 18)

Mala gets accustomed of all this. Vinay's viciousness does not end here. In fact it achieves culmination in his coldblooded benevolence showered upon Shanta and Mala. Like a thorough criminal he leaves no stone unturned to crush the vanquished under the burden of his favours simply to buy their silence. For Shanta she became a saviour who helped her through the hardest time by sending money regularly when she was completely deserted by her husband. He supported her emotionally by showing his fatherly care and concern for Mala. His guiltless ruthlessness sends shivers down the spines of the audience when adding insult to injury he openly says: "Shanta, you know you can always rely on my help. That is nothing. Isn't she like my daughter also"? (CP II 38). One can only wonder whether he would have behaved with his own daughter in the same manner as he behaved with Mala. Would he have sent his 'references' to his own daughter? Dattani seems to warn us so that rogues like Vinay are identified and girls like Mala could be saved.

It is Deepak, a true lover of Mala, who occupies a distinct position in the play, as he turns out to be her savior and pulls her out of the hell. Deepak's patient and understanding nature has a great healing effect on Mala. For the first time she realises that her behavior is not natural and is having a detrimental effect on her life. Now she is eager for a psychiatric consultation and keeps repeating the statement: ‘Please help me to stop the behaviour’. She begins to find solace in the smallest pleasures of life like the music in the sound of ‘the birds and the temple bells. Finally at the age of thirty plus, she aspires for the magic of a teenaged little girl. Even her most troublesome and painful yet compulsive habit i.e., 'sex' turns into ‘making love’.

My senses are working again. I can touch this chair and feel the chair touch me. My whole body can feel! And for the first time I enjoyed sex. Truly enjoyed it for its tactile pleasure. Not as a craving for some kind of approval. I came alive and experienced what it means to be really loved. And for once I could look at Deepak in the eyes and say, 'I love you' to him and believe it when he says the same to me. (CP II 34)
The blissful state of mind is haunted by the ghosts of her past waiting to pounce on her and push her back to the same old conditions of absent minded blunders, committed under state of numbness. Hence the newly found consciousness has brought with it a conflict back and her feeling of being fettered by her psychosis. The news of her uncle's visit to her house is adding fuel to the fire, as is evident from Mala's own statement:

My uncle just went away. He left me. He said he was disgusted with me–my behaviour. He never returned ... But now he is coming back. He is coming home...I am so confused, I don't know what I feel for him... I know you are not supposed to tell me what I am to do, I am to figure that out for myself, right? (CP II 34)

As per several psychological studies child sexual abuse has divergent results in behavioural patterns which vary from victim to victim. Mala has developed two dominant characteristics- fear and anger which complement each other to create her own peculiar behaviour. This is seen after Vinay's arrival in Mala's house. Despite being completely ignored by her uncle, Mala seems to have a sudden explosion of thoughts in her mind. We see her trauma reaching its climax when she runs to Deepak in a state of exasperation, in search of haven away from her perpetrators. She is hallucinating about some people following her:

Mala.  I am scared.

Deepak. Of what? of whom?

…

Mala.  There was a man following me.

…

Mala.  I cannot stop them! I attract them.

Deepak. This is all in your mind.

Mala. You don't understand! I am doing something that attracts them to me.

Mala. I want them to come to me.


Mala. It is true. If I were to let that man into my house, I will allow him to do anything. (CP II 39-40)
The fearful behavior of Mala makes it obvious that she has been programmed for certain behavior as if somebody has put her in a binary code things will automatically happen. Even a mere offer of friendly handshake by Deepak makes her sadder; even his touch makes her lose all her control. This fear combined with other disorders pushes her into nothing but a state of isolation from where it is very difficult to come out.

The behaviour of Mala's mother Shanta is very annoying in the beginning. She seems to have developed strong belief in the philosophy of an ostrich which feels itself to be hidden from the world just by ducking its head. Mala repeatedly complains against the negligence of her mother:

Mala. You know, I couldn't say anything to you. You never gave me a chance to. If only you had looked into my eyes and seen the hurt, or asked me ‘beta, what's wrong?’ Then maybe, I would have told you...But ma, I did look to you for help, while you were praying, your eyes avoiding mine, and I knew, deep down I must have known, that you will ask me that question. Because you already knew the answer. (To Deepak) So, You have your answer. But so what? Where do I go from here? (CP II 53)

The bitterness of truth in Mala's statement eventually reveals that the poise of Shanta was a mere tip on an Iceberg. Shanta had her own set of problems dealing with her past. Moreover her attempt at hiding it was itself like a boulder on her chest, the quantum of which was known only by her outburst:

I remained silent not because I wanted to but I didn't know how to speak. I–I cannot speak. I cannot say anything. My tongue was cut off... How could I save her when I could not save myself.....I was six, Mala. I was six. And he was thirteen...and it wasn't only summer holidays. For ten years! For ten years!!....No pain no pleasure, only silence....I cannot shout for help....I am dumb. (CP II 54-55)

The shocking revelation of Shanta automatically clears out all the complex and puzzling mysteries of her behavioural pattern and Mala's attitude towards her mother gets a sea change. She starts addressing her as her dear mother and 'Ma' and starts sympathizing with her:
While I accused you of not recognizing my pain, you never felt any anger at me for not recognizing yours. We were both struggling to survive but—I never acknowledged your struggle. Ma, no matter where I am, I always think of you. I want you to know that I am listening. Waiting for you to speak. I promise you I will listen. I am waiting for a sign from you … to say that you have forgiven me. Say something. Even a whisper. (CP II 58)

The statement explodes the agony of Shanta, and explains her dependence on Vinay. Despite being victimized she was rebuked as a culprit from all corners and ultimately found no one but her own violator, her brother Vinay as her last refuge.

The most important role in the life of Mala is played by Deepak who realizes that Mala's trauma has brought her to such a level where she is unable to distinguish between love and lust, and there is a world bigger and more vibrant than she has ever experienced. He learns that Mala does not know any other form of relationship between a man and a woman; she lives and relives the ‘Thirty days of September’. Despite all these shortcomings Deepak recognises the real and intelligent, sensitive and dynamic Mala whom he has sometimes been peeping through her own disturbed, maligned and melancholic reflection. Instead of being repulsed with all this as any common man would, he decides to infuse a fighting spirit in Mala and makes her rise like a phoenix. He brings her confidence back by helping her in multiple ways:

You are talented, beautiful, intelligent, honest. You have a rare gift of honesty. I have yet to meet a person as honest as you. Mala, I am a very patient man. I am willing to do what it takes to win your trust and to get to know the real person in you. (CP II 30)

True to Deepak's description, Mala very honestly tells him of her unworthiness for him by opening the inside out of her psyche before him:

Mala. I told you so. I know it won't work between us.

Deepak. No. It won't work between us because you are not even trying. Can't you at least try? Do something about it?

Mala. What do you want me to do? I am being honest with you about what I feel, but what can I do?
Deepak. I don't know. See a psychiatrist or somebody.

Mala. I am not mentally ill or anything.

Deepak. But you do need help.

Mala (sighing). May be. Maybe, you are right. (CP II 32)

Deepak's role starts showing a way out to Mala who starts loving, trusting and respecting him as he provides Mala the real strength to fight back. He is the spark which individuates her and strengthens her personality. She confronts Vinay who finds himself cornered and exposed for the first time in his life. Dattani makes Deepak a role model to be emulated by the society for its betterment.

The play received a global welcome because of a serious contemporary issue eating the civilised society from within. In this connection, the comment of Lillete Dubey, a well known theatre personality and stage director us his article “A Note on the play” is quite significant: “Thirty Days in September has touched hearts and consciences everywhere. Sensitive and powerful without ever offending sensibilities, it manages to bring home the horror and the pain within the framework of a very identifiable mother-daughter relationship.” (CP II 4). The playwright categorically points out that the negligence in familial relationship is responsible for the growing discontent in children.

Dattani seems to be the Indian George Bernard Shaw who has the courage to raise the unpleasant issues prevailing in the society and also the talent to sensitively present it on the stage. The stage of invisible issues like child sexual abuse is shocking, as well as sensitive. It also opens up the possibility to finding a way out or at least thinking seriously in such directions.