Chapter - 5

VIOLENCE IN DATTANI’S PLAYS
Violence is a universal phenomena representing man's aggressiveness, hostilities, conflicts, and brutalities towards the individuals (including the self) and the groups. Suicides, murders, rapes, loot, arson, riots and genocide are all violent manifestations on individual and group levels. Modern man in the present age of science is equipped with devilish tools of death and destruction. The aspirations and need for a wholesome existence are fraught with man's primitive impulses. Non-violence and peace are ideals in which many governments hypocritically believe and a few openly denounce. This behaviour considerably affects societal conditions and thus social misery becomes a great incubator of violence.

Violence may be defined as the expression of aggressive drives on personal and social levels. **Personal violence** is a violent act of a man or woman against other man or woman; genocide, concentration camps, communal riots and nuclear warfare refer to **social violence**. The factors that operate in the dynamics of violence are often complex: psychological, cultural, political and even religious. The manifestations are varied and bizarre. Violence, by its very nature, is a destructive force: it may destroy the desirable and can annihilate the undesirable.

Violence literally means "rough or injurious physical force, action or treatment".¹ It appears to be an anti-thesis of non-violence that refers to "the policy or practice of refraining from the use of violence as in reaction to oppressive authority".² Nonviolence is not merely the absence of cruelty to others; it is rather a positive attitude of kindness.

2. Ibid., pp. 962.
“Many nonviolent acts, seemingly bloodless and harmless may inflict terrible psychic torture and thus may not be called truly nonviolent. Sometimes nonviolence becomes horribly violent”.¹ This calls for a psychodynamic understanding of the violent behaviour.

“The analysis of violence from a dynamic angle involves the significant acceptance of mental and developmental processes”.² The instinctual impulses which are culturally inhibited and determined as "wrong", manifest the repressed aggression through various complex mental mechanisms. Ego resorts to certain defensive measures to get rid of the pressure of excessive anxiety and tension. This occurs unconsciously. It distorts reality and reduces the tension through a number of processes called defence mechanism: repression, projection, reaction-formation, fixation and regression. Repression may hamper the normal functioning of personality; for example, one may become impotent or frigid, if afraid of the sexual impulses. Repression may be transformed into displacement. A wife who has hostile feelings towards her husband may redirect her aggressiveness against other males, may be her own dear son. Through Projection the individual seeks to indict the external conditions rather than his own inner-self; instead of saying that he himself dislikes them, he says, they dislike me. When an anxiety producing impulse-to avoid the real experience of anxiety-is psychologically camouflaged by an opposite attitude, reaction-formation takes place. An obsessive staunch hatred for drinks is indicative of the repressed desire to drink. Regression is seen when the individual behaviourally retreats back to an early phase of development as a bid to escape the anxiety and fear associated with a new experience. An appreciation of these psychological processes is essential to understand the motivational background of the violent behaviour that is apparently puzzling and confusing.

Violence, in general, is a coercive mechanism to assert one's will over another, in order to prove or feel a sense of power. It can be perpetuated by those in power against the powerless, or by the powerless in retaliation against coercion by others, to deny their powerlessness. Any hierarchical system of social organization, where there are categories of dominant groups and subordinate groups, is inevitably accompanied by the victimization of the latter through various means—subtle pressure, through the power of ideology, through mechanisms of socialization that reward compliance and punish noncompliance and also through open force. Usually, the last form is resorted to when other methods fail. In fact, it is often not even necessary to actually use physical force or inflict severe injury, for the mere threat to do so is enough to subdue the subordinate person or group. Any individual or group facing the threat of coercion or being disciplined to act in a manner required by another individual or group, is subject to violence. This is not necessarily confined to physical violence but the creation of an atmosphere of terror, a situation of threat and reprisal.

Collins dictionary defines violence as (1) "Behaviour which is meant to hurt or kill people;" (2) "a great deal of energy used in doing something usually because you are very angry"; (3) "words, actions or other forms of expression which are critical or destructive." The Oxford dictionary defines violence as (1) "the quality of being violent;" (2) "violent conduct or treatment, outrage, injury;" (3) "the unlawful exercise of physical force;" (4) "intimidation by the exhibition of this." The Thesaurus adds a few additional dimensions to the concept offered by the two dictionaries. It indicates that the noun 'violence' connotes vehemence, impetuosity, vigorousness, excess, destructiveness, vandalism, turbulence, turmoil, roughness, severity, brute force, brutality, savagery, mercilessness, exacerbation, explosion. The adjective 'violent' is explained among other terms by the terms aggressive, charging, disorderly, turbulent, stormy, anarchistic, nihilistic, intemperate, immoderate. Thus, at the end of the exercise of consulting the
dictionaries and the Thesaurus, the connotation of the term violence comes across as coercive, destructive behaviour, with a great deal of powerful, aggressive energy and force, destroying in a merciless manner what it is directed at, and disorderly, anarchist, turbulent, outrageous and unlawful in its functioning.

If we look at the Mahesh Dattani's plays, we see different types of Violence. 'Communal Violence' in the play Final Solutions, 'Violence Against Children' in Thirty days in September, 'violence against women' in 'Bravely Fought the Queen', 'Violence Against Sexual Minorities' (hijjra's) in 'Seven Steps Around the Fire', 'Conflict or Violence between Son and Father in Where There's a Will, Dance Like a Man and Do the Needful. With the background explicated above, this thesis proposes to examine Violence in the plays of Dattani. Let us analyze, the concept of violence in Mahesh Dattani's plays.

a. Communal Violence

Fig. 5.1. A scene from Final Solutions, Production : Alyque Padamsee
**Final Solutions** is a stage play in three acts. The play was first performed at Guru Nanak Bhavan, Bangalore, on 10th July 1993. The play was also translated into Hindi by Shahid Anwar and directed by Arvind Gaur for Asmita Theatre in 1998. The play was performed at Tara Theatre, Mumbai, on 11 December 1993, directed by Alyque Padamsee.

Most of us experience anger in some form or other almost every day. Anger is a negative emotion; it can cause violence, it can ruin relationships. When a person is angry, he tries to take out his/her anger on anybody closest to him. Alyque Padamsee writes in "A Note on the Play": "Taking out your anger on your wife, children or servants is an old Indian custom (Alyque Padmasee, A Note on the Play, Dattani, Collected Plays: Final Solutions, pp. 161).

The characters in the play motivate us to think that angry outbursts lead to chain reactions. The play opens with Daksha reading from her diary. An oil lamp converted to an electric one suggests that the period is the late 1940s. Hardika is the grandmother of the Gandhis, mother of Ramanik Gandhi, who sometimes is seen as a girl of fifteen on the stage. When she is seen as a girl of fifteen on the stage, she is called Daksha. Daksha thinks that she is "a young girl who does not matter to anyone outside her home" (Dattani, Collected Plays: Final Solutions, pp. 166). She says: "Last year in August, a terrible thing happened... and that was freedom for India" (Ibid, pp. 166). "The Mob whispers: "Freedom! At last Freedom. Daksha closes her diary and now Hardika appears on the stage. She feels the things have not changed that much. A period of forty years is not a long period for a nation" (Ibid, pp. 167). But on the stage, the drumbeat grows louder and the Chorus slowly wear the Hindu masks. The words spoken by Chorus show the beginning of disharmony and painful period ahead. As long as the persons are on the stage they are normal but as soon as they are behind the masks, their thirst for blood rises. Whether we are angry with someone or someone is angry with us, each outburst takes its toll on both parties. The Chorus with Hindu masks burst with angry words:
“Chorus 1 : The procession has passed through these lanes
Every year,
For forty years!
Chorus 2, 3 : How dare they?
Chorus 1, 2, 3: For forty years our chariot has moved through their mohallas.
Chorus 4, 5 : What did they?
Why did they today?
Chorus 1 : How dare they?
Chorus 2, 3 : They broke our rath.
They broke our chariot
and felled our Gods!
Chorus 1, 2, 3 : This is our land!
How dare they?
Chorus 1 : It is in their blood!
Chorus 2, 3 : It is in their blood to destroy!
Chorus 4 : Why should they?
Chorus 5 : It could have been an accident.
Chorus 2 : The stone that hit our God was no accident!
Chorus 3 : The knife that slit the poojari’s stomach was no accident!
Chorus 4, 5 : Why should they?
It could have been an accident”. (Ibid, pp. 168)

The words spoken by Chorus are the indications of domestic violence, political mischief and social unrest. In the beginning of the play as Daksha (Hardika) says: “Last year in August a terrible thing happened…. and that was freedom for India” (Ibid, pp. 166). Later in the play she feels the things have not changed that much, even after forty years. The agony and suffering of both the Hindus and the Muslims during the time of partition is still green in Hardika’s (Daksha) memory. The agony and suffering which she undergoes during her father’s house before marriage, where she lost her gramophone records of
Shamshad Begum, Noor Jehan, Suraiya in one of the riot when the Muslim mob attacked their house and even her father was injured. And when she married, in her in-laws house she was badly treated by her husband and father-in-laws because of her good relationship with Zariana, a Muslim friend. “Daksha (as if to Hari her husband). No. What are you saying, Hari? It is not true! It is just not true! Kanta is lying. She lied to you! I did not touch their food! (Recoils as if she has been hit). Ah! Don’t hit me! (Angrily.) Don’t do that! I swear I didn’t eat anything! Aah! Stop that! Stop it! All right. I won’t go there again. Please, leave me alone. (Crying) Please! Stop! (Lies on the floor, sobbing)” (Ibid, pp. 222).

Because of all these she thinks that she lost respect in the eyes of her husband forever and from their onwards hatred began to build in the mind of Hardika (Daksha), against the Muslims. So when two Muslim boys Javid and Bobby came to Ramanik Gandhi’s (Son of Hardika) house for rescuing themselves from Hindu mob during one of the riot, the moment Hardika (Daksha) saw these two Muslim boys old memories come flooding back, she saw the same pride in the eyes of these two boys, which she thinks is the same pride which made her suffer in the hands of her husband, which made her lose respect in the eyes of her husband, which made her to lost her entire record collection, which led to her father injure. Because of that after seeing both Javed and Bobby, the two Muslim boys in her son’s house she says “All memories came back when I saw the pride in their eyes! I know their wretched pride! It had destroyed me before and I was afraid it would destroy my family again” (Ibid, pp. 172). She was totally upset with this wretched pride game. Even at the end of the play, she goes to the extent of saying to Javed and Bobby that, “I hate the way your (Muslim) community look, I hate the way your community dress, I hate the way your community eat” (Ibid, pp. 220). This shows that the agony and suffering of both the Hindus and the Muslims during the time of partitions is still green in Hardika’s memory, which suddenly burst out when she saw these two Muslim boys. And she remarks
that things have not changed that much even after forty years and a period of forty years is not a long period for a nation, shows that though we got independence from Britishers, the hatred which was there in the hearts of two community before independence and partition is still burning in the minds of both Hindu and Muslim community. So Dattani in this play (Final Solution) asks the question is their Final Solutions for this hatredness of two community. Hence, the title of the play can be seen as an interrogation, a question of whether these really can be a final solution to this problem in India. The effective use of the Chorus in the play is a dynamic technique used by the playwright. In the stage directions, the playwright gives hints on the Mob/Chorus.

*The Mob/Chorus comprises five men and ten masks on sticks. The masks are strewn all over the ramp. The player 'wears' a mask by holding the stick in front of him. At more dynamic moments, he can use it as a weapon in a stylized fashion. There are five Hindu masks and five Muslim masks. The Mob/Chorus become the Chorus when they 'wear' either the Hindu or the Muslim masks. But when referred to individually, they remain Chorus 1, Chorus 2, etc. The players of the Mob/Chorus do not belong to any religion and ideally should wear black (Ibid, pp. 165).*

"Their chariot fell in our street!" remarks Chorus I with Muslim masks. The words 'This is our land,' 'fell in our street' show that the borderline is clear. Nobody thinks it is the land of Indians. Hardika says that the pride has destroyed her before. Her family doesn't want equality. It wants to prove superior than somebody else. Hardika can't stand this 'wretched' pride game.

In the living room of the Gandhis, Aruna, Ramnik Gandhi's wife, enters while Aruna's daughter Smita and her husband are retiring for the night. Ramnik doesn't like Hardika's telling his daughter that "those people are all demons." (Ibid, pp. 173) Aruna. is a typical Gujarati housewife doing 'pooja-path' everyday. She is overburdened with work. The following dialogue is a comment on the creator of the chaotic situation. When Aruna complains about her uneasiness, Ramnik asks:
Ramnik  : Nobody is asking you to pray all day.
Aruna  : Who do you think is protecting this house?
Ramnik  : Who do you think is creating all this trouble? (Ibid, pp. 173)

Aruna promises everybody: "Our Krishna will protect us." (Ibid, pp. 174) Aruna is a God-fearing woman who thinks that everything will be smooth and peaceful one day. There is Lord Krishna who will protect everyone.

Daksha remembers her best friend Zarine. She admires her beauty: "I have never met anyone as pretty as her! What a complexion! It's true that Khoja women are the prettiest in the whole world" (Ibid, pp. 175). Daksha feels her beauty but hates the place where she lives as it is 'a place where they sell unmentionable things' (Ibid, pp. 175).

In this play two Muslim boys Javed and Bobby (Babban) take refuge in the house of a Hindu businessman, Ramnik Gandhi, while a communal riot rages outside. Ramnik saves the two boys, Bobby and Javed, when the Chorus shout: "Kill the sons of swine!" It is the demon of hate that has been let loose. Nobody helps the boys. Finally, Ramnik opens the door for the boys. The bitter hatred intensifies. The irrational behaviour of the two communities lingers for some time showing one's prowess over the other. Chorus 1, 2 shout: "We are few! But we are strong!" (Ibid, pp. 179).

The Chorus calls Ramnik 'a traitor' for protecting the boys. Deep hatred makes the Chorus devoid of any human feelings. Hardika betrays her feelings by saying that she hates Javed. Aruna wants that the boys to go away from the house. She gives them water but puts the empty glasses separate from other glasses. Act I ends with the violent words of the Chorus: "Throw them out!" (Ibid, pp. 187) The Chorus goes to the extent of saying: "You mad man! They'll stab you in the back! They'll rape your daughter" (Ibid, pp. 186). This shows how stereotypical we characterizes particular community. In India, these are deeply embedded in the

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psyche of the majority community: Even the majority community circulates these ideology against minority of that country in the minds of people for their individual purpose. The seeds are sown and hatred grows. One could take this as 'projection' (for further reference: turn to page No. 146 of my thesis).

At the beginning of Act II, the characters are all in the same position as at the end of Act I. The Mob/Chorus is restless. The conflict deepens as the chariot lies broken in their streets. Chorus 1 doubts their leader's intentions. He says, "They want our blood to boil" (Ibid, pp. 188). But what should boiling blood lead to, nobody knows. Chorus 1 laments that the leaders have succeeded in their mission. After lot of bloodshed and bitter enmity, the Chorus understand their flaw.

Smita recognizes the two boys as Javed, Tasneem's brother, and Babban or Bobby, Tasneem's fiance. Tasneem is Smita's classmate. Smita's feeling of hatred for the political parties can be traced here:

"Smita : (to Ramnik) They hire him! They hire such people!
Ramnik : They who?
Smita : Those-parties! They hire him! That's how he makes a living. They bring him and many more to the city to create riots.
To.: .. throw the first stone!" (Ibid, pp. 195). This can be taken as Biblical over tones, where Christ ask the people to throw the first stone by one who is innocent on adultress, one could take this as 'Projection' (for further reference: turn to page No. 146 of my thesis).

Javed turns furious at these words and calls Smita a "Traitor" (Ibid, pp. 195).

Act III opens with a spotlight on the two men sitting on the floor, looking troubled. The Muslim Chorus is on the highest level of the ramp. They sit with their legs folded under them in prayer position. The wordy duel between Ramnik
and Javed goes on, accusing each other. The flames of hatred are still in their minds. Ramnik says to Javed that his life is based on violence. Ramnik thinks that Javed is a riot-rouser and criminal. Ramnik emits a few curses on Javed.

Ramnik thinks that Javed has done an unforgivable act. Ramnik, a liberal-minded person, offers a job to Javed only to give him a chance.

Daksha's complaint about her in-laws that they don't allow her to play gramophone makes Zarine sympathetic about Daksha. Zarine's father is busy narrating the stories about the clash between two communities and how his shop is burnt purposely. Javed sarcastically remarks: "You scream with pain and horror, but there is no one listening to you. Everyone is alone in their own cycles of joy and terror." (Ibid, pp. 205) Javed admits that he himself doesn't know, what he is doing there. He is totally disillusioned. Smita frankly tells her mother, Aruna, not to burden her anymore with religious prejudices.

In the last lines of the Third Act, Bobby picks up the image of Krishna and tells everybody: "He does not burn me to ashes! He does not cry out from the heavens saying He has been contaminated!" (Ibid, pp. 224) Aruna feels uneasy by seeing this act but Bobby clarifies: "if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate" (Ibid, pp. 225).

The agony and suffering of both the Hindus and the Muslims during the time of partition is still green in Hardika's (Ramnik's mother) memory. It is only towards the end of the play she is rudely shocked to learn from her own son the truth for the 'mysterious' bitterness between them and their Muslim friends. She quite innocently asks her son:

Hardika : Haven't you gone to your shop?
Ramnik : No.
Hardika : Why? It is late. Your workers will be waiting for you.
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Ramnik : I can't go.
Hardika : Why not?
Ramnik : I just can't enter that shop any more. I can't bear thinking about it.
Hardika : What?
Ramnik : I didn't have the face to tell anyone. For me there's no getting off.
No escape.

Hardika : What are you talking about? (Looks at her with pity) It's their shop. It's the same burnt-up shop we bought from them, at half its value. (Pause) And we burnt it. Your husband. My father. And his father. They had it burnt in the name of communal hatred. Because we wanted a shop. Also they learnt that... those people were planning to start a mill like our own. I can't take it any longer. I don't think I will be able to step into that shop again...

Hardika : (Crushed) Why didn't you tell me? All these years.
Ramnik : You have to live with this shame only for a few years now

Ramnik transfers his anger at his own father's black deed (burning the shop) to his mother. In the name of communal hatred, this shameful act is done by Ramnik's father. This is the reason why he does not want to go to his shop. In the play Smita looks very innocent. She doesn't like hypocrisy or over-reaction to religious duties. So, she openly opposes her mother: "I can see so clearly how wrong you are." (Ibid, pp. 211) Aruna is proud of her religion. Aruna listens to the stories of Gods while Smita thinks it is all rubbish. Aruna's own daughter does not show any respect for all the religious rituals her mother observes. Smita boldly says to her mother: "You have to admit you are wrong" (Ibid, pp. 210).

Does the playwright, at the end of the play, wish to stop this game of hatred and communal tension through the character of Ramnik? Does Ramnik accept that his father has done the black deed? Because of this are there any final solutions to
the problem of communal riots, disputes and acts of hatred? Can we came out of this vicious circle? Mahesh Dattani gives no answer. Alyque Padamsee asks: "Is life a forward journey or do we travel round in a circle, returning to our starting point?" (Ibid, pp. 161).

The play is a fine example of transferred resentments. Smita, who is unable to express her love for Babban, criticizes her mother bitterly. Smita hates praying and fasting. Her mother accuses her of running away from religion. The characters in the play express their anger at every stage. The members of the raging communities do not know that negative emotions like anger tend to release harmful toxins in the body. The mob seems to be symbolic of our own hatred. The play mocks at the politicians who use people as their puppets. These puppeteers are the real culprits.

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

Theme of carrying guilt comes up in final solutions. Ramnik Gandhi—there's lots in a name, it's not for nothing that Ramnik has been given the surname Gandhi—carries the guilt of the wrongs committed by his father and grandfather. They had got Zarine's shop—Zarine was a friend of Hardika—burnt up in the name of communal hatred and later bought it at half its value. Hardika does not know the whole truth. She was given to understand that they were asking for a price much higher than what they deserved. Hence the resentment. As a result Hardika spends all her life hating them and their community. She does not appreciate Ramnik's
liberal attitude towards the two Muslim boys who have taken shelter in their home during the riots. But Ramnik has been living with this shame all these years. He has nothing against his wife personally but he cannot stand her rigidity in religious matters because it reminds him of his father's sin. To make up for the wrong committed by his father, he offers Javed a job at the shop. He wants to set things right but it does not happen that way. The boys leave and Ramnik and Hardika are left behind to live on with their shame. Much as Ramnik may want, he fails to find a final solution to his problem.

Dattani has attempted a neat balancing act when it comes to tracing the malady of communal disharmony to certain elements within both the communities-Hindu and Muslim. Food habits or kitchen-fads of the two communities are brought into focus. Utensils getting contaminated by the touch of a member of the other community is one such fad.

The other unraveling is about the shop that got burnt down. That accounts for a guilt feeling.

The fears and anxieties of the two communities are partly an aftermath of partition. Then there is the feeling of being second grade citizens. There is the sensitivity to music being played near a mosque. There is the Hindu sensitivity in the matter of general Muslim food habits that go against vegetarianism. There are fears of contamination. Politicians exploit most of these things and hired goons help them.

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

b. Hijjra's – The Marginal Community

Hijjras are the most visible sexuality minorities (people oppressed due to their sexual orientation/gender identity) in South Asia. They are transgender people who are born biologically male and wish to be women. They undergo castration (surgical removal of male sexual organs) and join the hijjra community. Some of them are born intersexed.

Hijjras exist since the world's ancient civilizations, mythologies, cultures, traditions and sculptures. Hijjaras were known with different names and identities all around the world. They were respected and had a social space in the past. It is said that the role of performing badhai (dancing and blessing), was sanctioned by the mythological character Rama. The Bible says that the person who introduced Christianity to Ethiopia, was a hijjra and that Jesus Christ encouraged her to do so. Hijjaras were appointed as both friends and guards to the queens during the time of Moghuls.¹ This point can be debated.

Most hijjaras live in groups. Hijjaras need to follow their community rules. Traditionally any person who wishes to become a hijjra has to live in satla (female attire) among hijjaras for at least a year and follow all the community guidelines. This is done because if the person finds it hard to live as a hijjra she can leave the community and will not be allowed to go for nirvana (castration). The Hijjra community is organized through mother-daughter relationships. In hijjra community, chelas (daughters) have to take care of their gurus (mothers) and vice versa. This works as an alternate family as most of them do not get any support from their family (biological) and friends. Living together is very useful in dealing with the hostile society.

Hijjaras have a cultural role to play in North India. They are invited for badhai during occasions like marriages, childbirth and opening ceremonies of new shops. Some hijjaras traditionally perform puja at temples and some go for basti (begging). As badhai culture is totally absent in South India, most hijjra go for basti or do sex-work. In Bangalore hijjaras run hamams (bath houses).

The Hijjra community is organized through seven gharanas (houses) in India. Each gharana has it nayak (top leader / guru). Each guru has her chelas and gurubhais (sisters, i.e. other chelas of her guru).Many chelas also address their guru as mummy. Thus every hijjra will have a guru and would belong to any one of the seven gharanas.

Though hijjaras have existed for many centuries, they face many barriers and problems now. Modernization has decreased traditional social spaces for hijjaras. Though hijjaras are very visible they are pushed to live on the margins. They are ridiculed in public. The Indian constitution recognizes only two genders, i.e. male and female. Hijjaras find no space in it. Non recognition of the gender (sex-change) makes it impossible for hijjaras to avail employment opportunities, education, housing, health facilities, property rights, marriage rights, ration cards/ passports/
voter identity cards etc. Most Hijras in South India have to choose between begging or sex-work for a living. Above all hijras face discrimination from the state, police, medical establishments, family, friends and the society.

When we say universal human rights, the universality seems to exclude the hijras. If you happen to be a hijra, then you can be sure that even in the roll call of human suffering, you are the forgotten and the despised. Thus even among the victims of terrible violence the hijra does not figure. The testimonies raise one insistent question: why is it that it is only after half a century of Independence that we are first placing the suffering inflicted on the hijra community on the human rights roundtable? If these forms of terrible violation are closely linked to the laws framed by the colonisers, why is it that independent India has ignored these brutalised biographies for so long? The answer to this question lies in the way we have thought about citizenship which is the privilege of those who are heterosexual. Only heterosexual citizens enjoy the right to legitimacy for their sexual relationships. To all those who fall outside the borders of heterosexuality, be it lesbians, gays, bisexuals, hijjaras or kothis, their sexuality remains a target of the criminal law. They are liable to be sexually harassed, abused and raped. The law provides the legitimacy to harass the hijra. This is due to the provisions such as Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which criminalises what it calls ‘carnal intercourse against the order of nature’ which criminalises consensual non-heterosexual sex. There are also provisions criminalising soliciting under the Immortal Trafficking in Persons Act which provides a tool to make profession of the hijra/female/male sex worker a dangerous enterprise perpetually subject to surveillance by the criminal justice administration.

Further, hijjaras have no access to civil rights which their heterosexual counterparts take for granted. There is no question of civil rights for those who transit from one sex to another. The hijra community due to this inflexibility, is excluded from citizenship rights (like the right to have a ration card, passport,
inherit property etc.). Legal personhood is dependent on the crucial and unavoidable category of sex as determined by birth. If a hijra wants to be recognised as a person in law, the recognition can only be in the sex in which he was born into. The hijra has no option of claiming legal recognition in the name of either a third sex or of the sex into which she has transited i.e. female. In fact, the Madhya Pradesh High Court in the case of an election petition which questioned the validity of the election of a hijra Mayor of Katni clearly ruled that the Mayor could not be considered a woman as she was born a man (Hijra rights are human rights by Arvind Narrain, Sunday Vijaya Times, 14th September 2006).

However, the problems of the law is not the whole story. The family for hijjaras is not the safe space which it is for many others. For many hijjaras it is the space from wherein the first crude remark was passed, the first intolerance shown, or the first slap given. The expulsion from the family lays the base for the expulsion from society itself.

The PUCL-K (People’s Union for Civil Liberties, Karnataka (PUCL-K). 2003, Human Rights Violations against the Transgender Community; A Study of Kothi and Hijra Sex Workers in Bangalore report places before the wider human rights community both the violence which hijra and kothis are subject to from both state and civil society. It also documents the ways in which hijjaras are combating the violence which is inflicted on them.

Hijjaras are the most visible and most oppressed who are relegated to survive on the fringes of our society. Their gender is not recognized and they are invisible in our Constitution. They face hostility, cruelty, violence, ridicule, and shame all the time. They do not get any job opportunities and are forced to live by begging or sex-work. Goondas have sex with hijra by force. The police not only abuse them sexually but also demand money (hafta) from them. Most hijjaras face violence and rejection from their families and are excluded in property matters.
Most hijjaras are born anatomically male but go through hazardous/risky/unhygienic castration/surgeries in the hands of untrained and unskilled medical professionals in remote areas. Sometimes these surgeries lead to loss of urine control and severe infections that force them to visit medical professionals repeatedly.

Dattani’s *Seven Steps around the Fire* is a play which deals with the violence inflicted on these hijjaras, who are unseen and unheard in the society. Mahesh Dattani’s play *Seven Steps around the Fire* sensitively deals with the pathetic plight of atmosphere where a minister had a young hijjra burnt to death. Uma, the daughter of the Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University and a postgraduate student of sociology, uncovers the truth behind the murder of a hijjra. Unlike a sleuth, she uses uncommon means to discover the truth. She boldly goes to the locality of the hijjra community and asks them questions. Her attitude to the eunuchs is very friendly and sympathetic. Though her husband Suresh Rao is the chief superintendent of police, he is unable to solve the knots of the mysterious murder of a hijjra. Constable Munswamy, who was tasked by Suresh Rao with keeping his wife out of danger, creates a sense of humour and makes the story more enjoyable. Uma discovers that Kamala, a beautiful hijjra (enuch), has been secretly married to Subbu, the son of a government minister. The minister got this hijjra burned to death and arranged a marriage reception for his son to marry an acceptable girl of his choice. But the table is turned. At the wedding, all the hijjaras sing and dance and Subbu in a fit of anger, takes out a gun and kills himself. Subbu’s anger is directed at a community which is primarily heterosexual, which means it is unable to comprehend the ‘other’ relationships, vis-a-versa between Subbu and Kamala. But because he cannot retaliates against the society, he directed it inward and shoots himself.

Verbal Violence is inflicted on these hijjaras and Dattani brings to life the pain and ridicule behind it. For instance:
Chapter 5

Violence in Dattani’s Plays

Interior: The Office of the Superintendent of Police

Anarkali: We make our relations with our eyes. With our love. I look
At him, he looks at me, and he is my brother. I look at you,
You look at me, and we are mother and daughter. Oh, brother,
Give me a cigarette, na.

Munswamy: Shut up. And don’t call me brother.

Anarkali: Just one, na (very sexual) I will do anything for you, brother.
Give, na.

Munswamy: Chee! Who would want to.... .... (flustered) I-I don’t Smoke.

Anarkali: If you had a beautiful sister, you will give her a cigarette
For a fuck, no

Munswamy: Just because madam is here.... ....

Anarkali: You are not a sister-fucker?

Munswamy: Just talk to madam and then I will see you.

Anarkali: I don’t want to talk to madam! I want a cigarette!!

Uma: I think there are some here. My husband must be keeping
His Gold Flakes here somewhere.... .... (opens a drawer)
Aha!

Anarkali: (Delighted) Oh!

Uma: Here,

Anarkali: One for the night. One for the morning.

Uma: Keep the whole pack” (Dattani, Collected Plays:
Seven Steps Around the Fire, pp. 11).

This conversation shows how the hijjaras who are also the members of the society generally speak in a friendly way. But if somebody, like Munswamy, misbehaves, they give a good retort, even go to the extent of using rude and vulgar expressions.

In the very beginning of the play we see how hijjaras are treated like non-living things; they are given the pronoun ‘it/its’ by characters like Munswamy who
have a strong grudge against them. On the other hand, Uma, the protagonist, always behaves humanly with them and uses the words ‘she/her’ for them.

*Munswamy* : You may see the hijra now if you wish, madam.
*Uma* : Will she talk to me?
*Munswamy* : (Chuckling) she! Of course it will talk to you.
We beat it up if it does not (Ibid, pp. 7).

In another important conversation between Uma and Champa, the readers/spectators find how being absolutely hated and neglected, the hijjaras generally develop a sense of frustration and isolation and that they are not the bonafide members of society. Their inner yearnings for being the members of society is seen in the laconic speech of Champa:

*Champa* : Oh! so you are a social worker. Say that.
*Uma* : Yes,...I am a social worker.
*Champa* : Please excuse me, madam. I didn't know that.....
You see us also as society, no? (Ibid, pp. 23)

Thus, *Seven Steps around the Fire* express the identity crisis of the hijjaras and their heart-felt longing for being treated as a social being in an indifferent society where people like the government minister seldom feel a qualm of conscience in getting a hijra burnt to death. So *Seven Steps around the Fire*, dwells on the theme of enuchs, their identity, their constitution and their connotation.

Uma Rao, the sociology scholar, emerges as the most powerful character of the play, who fights to establish the identity of an eunuch called Kamala, during her research on the class and gender-related violence and crime. Its justice in the nemesis of the play. An eunuch, a beautiful one, invited for marriage, and the final tragic death-all seem to be a misconstruct. But it happens. The mystery behind the death is there in the police-politician-crime nexus. Uma Rao’s research on this ancient tribe brings into focus the hypocrisy and repression that ‘the big shots’ are
capable of because they are beyond the reach of law. The society accepts a hijjra for gracing the ceremonies of marriage and births but would not allow them to partake of such ceremonies. The author has ironically portrayed this aspect which would not have been given any heed, for any matter related to them is of no importance to anyone. The heart-rending story about a hijjra murdered simply because she fell in love with Subbu, a young man having a status of importance in society, fills us with horror and sense of injustice. When the fact of her being a “hijjra” is revealed to people, she is mercilessly murdered. Her deprivation in terms of essential femininity instead of arousing sympathy and a feeling of compassion is looked down upon; she is discriminated against and ultimately murdered. A sense of horror and injustice prevails for it is not by choice but by sheer misfortune that she is what she is. If this is Violence against hijjras, then the Violence against children is something blatantly goes on in our so called traditional society. The next subsection deals with Violence against children.

c. Violence against Children

It is a matter of grave concern that sexual abuse of children in India has assumed alarming proportions. A recent study by the Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI) has brought to the fore some deeply troubling statistics. It says that every 155th minute a child below 16 years of age is raped and every 13th hour a child below 10 years is raped. One of every 10 children in the country is sexually abused. The study indicates that sexual abuse of children is far more serious than is generally acknowledged. In addition to the violence and trauma suffered as a result of the sexual abuse itself, the study draws attention to the secondary victimisation suffered by the victims. It reveals how the victim suffers fours times—when the child is subjected to the abuse, when he or she narrates the incident, during the medical examination and in courts. The study has also highlighted the utterly insensitive manner in which the police and the courts handle cases of sexual abuse involving children. Lengthy and time consuming
legal procedures not only add to the child's agony but also inhibit several victims and their families from seeking justice. Sex is a subject we refuse to talk about. Children frequently do not know they are being abused. Often the perpetrator of the sexual violence is a close family member; even a parent. In such cases, the child is frightened to speak up about violence that she is being subjected to. While victims of sexual abuse are overwhelmingly girls, boys too are vulnerable to this violence. The victim's silence, unsupportive families, an unfeeling society and insensitive courts—all work to provide protection to the perpetrator of the violence. Children are scared to tell anyone that they have been abused. Life becomes bewildering as they try to cope with the hurt and fear. Often they don't have the language to describe what has happened and most often adults don't understand what children are trying to tell them. There may be sudden behavioral and physical changes in children—these should be taken as warning signs. Like: a deep sense of loneliness and isolation, depression, anxiety, withdrawal, bed-wetting, avoidance of particular individuals, difficulty in concentrating at school or failing examinations, sudden use of sexual words, sexual exploitation/exploration of other children, irritation in the throat, anal and genital areas, constant throat and bladder infections, sexually transmitted infections. Sexually abused child learns to hide all feelings of pain, hurt and fear, if she/he finds that no one believes her/him nor is willing to understand his/her trauma. As a result she/he may have problems expressing her/his feelings for the rest of their life. Depression and a feeling of isolation are very common signs of Child Sexual Abuse. During abuse a child has an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and loss of control. This feeling then transfers itself into all spheres of the child's life and she/he may grow very diffident and insecure.

The frighteningly high prevalence of incest and child abuse in Indian families has not been properly recognised. RAHI's survey involving middle and upper middle class women in the four metros of the country revealed 76 per cent
of them had been sexually abused as children. More than 40 percent of these were survivors of incest. The scars cut deeper and the suffering of the victims lasts much longer often extending for their whole lives, because of the great emphasis placed in our society on preserving family reputation at all costs.

Fig. 5.3. Scenes from 30 Days in September

Mahesh Dattani’s play 30 Days in September is about sexual violence which take place in childhood, within the family, which has a profound impact on the child as a victim and later as an adult survivor. It is a play about the fear and isolation of victims, survivors and partners, the survivor’s struggles with their non-offending parents, their inability to develop intimate and stable relationships, the renegotiating of their boundaries with their abusers, their sexual liaisons and other compulsive and self-destructive behaviours etc.

30 Days in September was commissioned by an NGO called RAHI (Recovery and Healing from Incest) that helps survivors of child sexual abuse. At their invitation, Dattani spent a few days with about eight survivors of child sexual abuse and listened to their experiences. This play is by far the most sombre of all Dattani’s plays, with a weightiness that is maintained throughout the play. Given the seriousness of the problem that it addresses, a malaise that can at no level be taken lightly, Dattani tackles it with raw emotion, and the stark realities are
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Violence in Dattani’s Plays

dramatized vividly. This is also Dattani’s shortest full-length play, using little subplot, intensely focused on Mala, sexually molested by her uncle as a child and her relationship with her mother who knew that her daughter was being sexually abused by her uncle but chose to keep quiet, voicing no protest.

Child sexual abuse spans a range of problems, but it is this complicity of the family through silence and a lack of protest that is the ultimate betrayal for the abused. Dattani makes extensive use of monologues in the play to intensify the empathy of the reader with Mala, the victim who is slowly recovering from her tortured and abused past. The reader is quite literally dragged into facing the molester and made to confront him. The action is presented starkly and undiluted, as Dattani ‘travelled’ with the character without exegesis and let her narrate her own story, as nakedly as possible.

30 Days in September is a gripping tale of love and betrayal, which reveals the horror and insecurity that haunts young victims of child abuse. Scripted with a great deal of sensitivity and presented with uncanny perception and feeling, Dattani has based his writing on real life experiences of victims. How does a victim of incest react to life later? Is he/she forever bound by the silence of incomprehension? These are some of the questions the play raises. The play couches Dattani’s searing indictment of the social hypocrisy that stunts the adult lives of psychologically scarred children, brutally disrupts families and renders love impotent. This play dealing with the serious theme of incest and child abuse served a social purposes as well as genuine theatre.

Mahesh Dattani tackles head on the problem of portraying the twin processes of victimisation as well as recovery with great economy.

There are just four main characters: Shanta, the suffering mother always trying to forget the reality through prayers and submitting herself to Lord Krishna, her brother, who is the crafty seducer, her daughter Mala, 30-years old, and unable to forget her abuse at the hands of her uncle and reduced to an incorrigible
sex-hungry seductress, and Deepak, a sensitive young man in love with Mala and bent upon saving her. Mala’s refusal to marry Deepak and her constant lying about her past and her short-lived affairs sets him on the path of unravelling a fascinatingly complex but painful story of psychological manipulations, forced cover ups and multiple falsehoods borne out of one’s need for subsistence, security and one’s own worth:

Mala : It is true. It did happen, but you never believed me.
Shanta : (turning away): I don’t know what you are talking about.
I will prepare alu paratha for you tomorrow; you always Like that for breakfast.
Mala : That is how you always pacified me and that is how I know that You believe me, deep down. Oh yes, you would remember that I always like alu parathas because that’s what I got whenever I came to you, hurt and crying. Instead of listening to what I had to say, you stuffed me with food. I couldn’t speak because I was being fed all the time, and you know what? I began to Like them. I thought that was the cure for my pain. That if I ate till I was stuffed, the pain would go away. Every time I came to you mummy, you were ready with something to feed me. You knew. Otherwise you wouldn’t have been so prepared. You knew all along what was happening to me, and I won’t ever Let you forget that!
(Dattani, Collected Plays, Vol. II : 30 Days in September, pp. 24)

As always, the verbal confrontations, which Dattani sets up between his characters peeling away at each other, are razor sharp. Against Mala’s eternal complaint against Shanta that she simply refuses to acknowledge the fact that her daughter has been abused. Shanta’s rather hypocritical explanation is she actually enjoyed it!
Dattani is unflinching in bringing out the entire rage of issues involved, but he does it without ever being sensational or crass. The high point of the play is when Shanta reveals that she too has been a victim of incest for over ten years in her childhood, and of the same man. And she was so traumatised she did not even know that she should complain. Living back that dark period, she lapses into incoherent grunts, unintelligent sounds of one forced into muteness, and in sheer disgusts jabs a piece of glass into her mouth trying to cut her tongue. In the end, mother and daughter arrive at a sense of equanimity having recognised each other’s struggle to survive.

The Play revolves around the struggles of Mala, a young woman whose uncle first rapes her at age 7. Her mother, Shanta is scripted as a “mute witness” i.e., she was aware that her brother was abusing her daughter but did not stop it. As it turns out she herself was sexually abused as a child by this same brother and had to keep it a secret. When Shanta’s perpetrator-brother visits his sister, both victims are triggered-each in her own way. However, the atmosphere of silence and secrecy that pervades the family isolates each woman in her suffering and they share as survivors of incestuous sexual abuse by the same perpetrator.

The play’s title, 30 Days In September, symbolizes Mala’s inability to be in long-term relationships. When Deepak refuses to let Mala break up with him at the end of 30 days, the couple enter a tumultuous period. Deepak wants to help Mala
deal with the reasons that she cannot sustain a relationship with people who care about her. Mala resists. It is not clear in the play if Mala subsequently sees a psychiatrist because of Deepak’s intervention or if she has started that process on her own before meeting him. Dattani who is based in Bangalore has been quoted as saying that he “didn’t want to make the subject matter palatable” and that “he wanted the play to make people feel uneasy”. On both counts he succeeds. The play is bold in its approach to a controversial issue. It looks at some of the more complex aspects and prolonged effects of incestuous child sexual abuse when there is denial, silence and lack of effective intervention.

30 Days In September is as much a tale of the breaking of barriers between a stricken daughter and a silently suffering mother, as it is one that impressively addresses the issue of child sexual abuse. The protagonist Mala, is unable to stick to a steady relationship with any man (for more than 30 days). The reason lies hidden in her painful childhood, in the repeated physical abuse by her maternal uncle, which has now grown and transformed her into a woman who enjoys being taken advantage of. Mala blames her divorced mother for spoiling her life by ignoring her cries for help, for remaining silent and absorbed in her prayers. Her latest boyfriend, Deepak, refuses to let go of her. He senses her need for help and persuades her to see a counselor. Meanwhile, he also meets her mother and tries to probe into Mala’s past in the hope of uncovering the cause of her distressing behaviour. But his efforts hit a stalemate until the arrival of Shanta’s brother. Deepak suspects the uncle of foulplay. His questioning is first cut short by both Mala her mother, but finally he succeeds in urging Mala to openly accuse her uncle. This leads to Shanta’s horrifying revelation of the reason for her silence and taking refuge behind her prayers-the violation of her body as a child by her own brother and also a violence against the mind, mental trauma. Mala now begins to comprehend the true nature of her mother’s agony and suffering. The play unraveled the trouble relationship between a mother and daughter who are both
victims of incest. The protagonist Mala, who flits in and out of affairs with mostly older men, and admits she enjoys punishing herself by letting her lovers use and demean her. Her mother, Shanta, is confused and hurt by her daughter’s unseemly behavior and takes recourse in prayer. Mala blames her mother for her mental anguish, and confronts her find out why her mother did not stop her abuser. But Shanta is tongue-tied and does not have direct response. Her stalling further enrages her daughter who treats her mother with open contempt.

Deepak is one of Mala’s erstwhile boyfriends. Although he’s been unceremoniously dumped he refuses to acknowledge that their relationship has ended. Persistent, he visits Shanta at home and tries to get her to open up about her daughter’s puzzling behavior, but with little success. Undaunted, Deepak dogs Mala and convinces her he’s willing to help her sort through her problems. He urges Mala to see a counselor. As the play progress, gaps in the plot are artfully filled in by Mala’s monologues with her counselor. Things are brought to a climax when Mala’s maternal uncle comes to visit. Deepak, who suspects Mala has been a victim of abuse, is alarmed by her reaction to her uncle’s impending visit, and is convinced that Uncle is the perpetrator. Mala, however, is unwilling to discuss anything with Deepak. Hoping to jar Shanta into admitting the truth, Deepak confronts both her and the visitor during dinner, but isn’t successful. Conversely, Shanta’s silence acts as the catalyst for Mala’s outburst that finally reveals all. That Mala was abused repeatedly from age 7 by her uncle. But the drama is heightened when Shanta breaks her lifelong silence and reveals that she herself was her brother’s victim from the time she was 6. The play ends, perhaps on a positive note, with Mala informing her therapist that she’s leading a much happier life, although plagued periodically by the old memories. Yet questions arise. Does it raise the question of Mala’s rejection of Deepak, a plea for re-creating the self which once had been mounded by patriarchy? Is it a rejection of legitimacy? Or is it a strength garnered to bear the pain / trauma?
d. Violence against Women

Violence against women is rampant not only in India, but also all over the world. It takes on various forms.

Dattani’s play *Bravely Fought the Queen* is about Violence against women, about exploitation of the weak, about the mean, squalid corporate world. In the play *Jiten*, is a violent, alcoholic, lecherous wife-beater inclined to kill at the slightest provocation. Nitin, who is a gay, is duped by his own best friend and suffers a guilt-ridden relationship with his wife Alka. The women-Baa, Dolly and Alka-are all victims of male anger. Dolly, beaten by Jiten while she is pregnant, delivers prematurely and consequently the child is mentally retarded. Alka, who longs for her brother Praful’s acceptance of herself, silently suffers a fruitless marriage with Nitin, since he is a gay. Old Baa is deserted by her husband, all alone in her last phase of life. Dolly is a victim of a brutal husband, beaten in an advanced stage of pregnancy to give birth to a deformed daughter, and Alka the wife of a homosexual.

In *Bravely Fought the Queen* Dattani presents the picture of women, who were traditionally bound, organized and manipulated by Patriarchy. In all ages by established values, norms, roles and gender perceptions, women were guided by idealism that prescribes unequal means, methods and routes to achieve the so-called ‘wholeness’ for women, motherhood and wifehood being the duel crowns of womanhood. It is the man who has defined this unequivocal term, as motherhood is disciplined by males and they further justify themselves through religions, myths, science, politics, economics etc. Women suffer due to the husband’s misdoing and the involvement of one of the husbands into homosexual relationships. It is a play which portrays women exploited by men since time immemorial. Writers like Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande have also portrayed the plight of women in their novels *My Story* and *That Long Silence*. Marriage as
an institution nauseates Kamala Das because it legitimates violence and gives men a legal control on women's bodies. Mary Wollstonecraft in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* addresses marriages as "legalized prostitution" as the husband can do whatever to a woman's body at his own free will.

In *Bravely Fought the Queen* we have three generations portraying the exploitation by men and they are Baa, Dolly, Alka, and Daksha. Baa—the mother-in-law of Dolly and Alka was ill treated by her own husband. The kind of cruelty perpetrated on 'Baa' by her husband is brought to light every now and then in the play when she feel nervous even after so many years of his death: "I have married such a villager! Aah! You slapped me? Never, never slap me. Nobody has hit me. The men in our family are decent" (Mahesh Dattani, Collected Plays: *Bravely Fought the Queen*, pp. 288). Baa's story is somewhat similar to that of her daughter-in-law, Dolly and Alka. So we have two generations sharing the same experience at the hand of their chauvinistic husbands and a yet to come third generation, Daksha who also experiences the maltreatment of her father even before her birth and is born as a disabled child. Dolly exposes Jiten’s cruelty when she says: "And you hit me! Jitu, you beat me up! I was carrying Daksha and you beat me up!" (Ibid, pp. 311). The result of all these was the premature delivery of Daksha, the disabled daughter of Dolly and Jiten. Then we have Alka, an alcoholic, whose anguish and frustration is due to her husband's homosexual libido and her brother Praful's deceit of not revealing the reality of Nitin to her. So all the women characters in the play "Bravely Fought the Queen" are examples of exploitation prevalent in educated urban families.
e. Violence between Father and Son

Dattani in the family-centred plays, brilliantly portrays the relation between father and son. The father-son relationship emerges as one of the predominant themes in his plays. There are strong father figures like Hasmukh Mehta, Amritlal Parekh, and Chandrakant Patel; there are also rebellious sons like Ajit, Jairaj, and Alpesh. In most of his plays, Dattani assigns the role of the protagonist to the son. Ajit in Where There's a Will, Jairaj in Dance Like a Man, Alpesh in Do the Needful, and Chandan in Tara share a common point. The fathers, who are the chief agents of psychic disintegration meted out to their sons, act as opponents-as antagonists. Naturally, there is dissatisfaction within the family unit. Contradictions and conflicts arise between father and the son.

The Father and the son crossfire can also be examined from a psychological perspective. Following Freud's analogy, psychoanalysts has focused mostly on
the ‘Oedipus Complex’ or the parent-child relationships as interpreted in terms of
the child’s psychosexual aspects of growth. According to Freud, “To the son the
father is the embodiment of the social compulsion to which he unwillingly
submits, the person who stands in the way of following his own will, of his early
sexual pleasures and, when there is a family property, of his enjoyment of it”

The father is, thus, a rival in the mother-son relationship. The son considers
the father to be the source of all authority, and he aspires to overpower his father.
This concept of ‘oedipus complex’ can be applied to analyse the relation between
the father and the son in Dattani’s plays. In ‘Where There’s a Will’, Hasmukh
acts as rival in the mother-son relationship. It is seen that he dislikes his wife
affectionately calling their son ‘Aju’: ‘I always hated the way she called him ‘Aju’
(Dattani, Collected plays: Where There’s a Will, New Delhi, Penguin, India, 2000,
pp. 497). He has objections to her preparing the orange-flavoured halwa for Ajit,
‘..........but she knows I shouldn’t eat it. Why should she bother making it? Tell
her not to waste her time (Ibid, pp. 462). Hasmukh represents the authority that
stands in Ajit way of living and to which Ajit unwillingly submits in course of the
action. Hasmukh constantly acts in such ways as to repress the desire of his son,
and tries to educate him throughout his life. As a natural consequence of
repression, Ajit develops hatred of his father and prefers to take his mother’s side.
He does not even hesitate to tell lies to lower Hasmukh in the eyes of his mother.
As he confesses at a critical juncture in the play, ‘yes, I lied! Because I would
rather lie than agree with you (Ibid, pp. 469). His little consolation comes from the
sense that he has been able to over-power his father in one way or the other. But
Hasmukh, the oedipal father, will not relent easily. He restricts Ajit’s inheritance
of family property through a specially designed will.

Even in ‘Dance Like a Man’, Jairaj considers his father to be the source of all authority, and, at the same time, the potent source of repressive force. It is because of Amirthlal that Jairaj has to repress his desire of becoming a dancer. Jairaj unwillingly submits to his father’s compulsion. He sees his father as an enemy. So it may be in ‘Where There’s a Will’, ‘Dance Like a Man’, ‘Tara’, ‘Do the Needful’—in all these plays, the fathers repress the sons by taking advantage of their hierarchical position and financially viable condition. Even some times existing social conditions contribute substantially to continuance of the patriarchal oppression of the father figures. Social conditions are reflected on individual life and family. The members of the society are often sullied by the established norms. At times, they are even pushed into stereotypes, into playing definite roles. Dattani’s plays explicitly deal with the matter and analyse the ways in which the father figures utilize the existing social conditions in their favour.

‘Dance Like a Man’ examines the conflict between the artist and society in our country. The society does not approve of a male’s aspiration to perfect traditional dance-forms like Bharatnatyam; instead, it considers him effeminate if he does so. In the play, Amirthlal Parkeh, father of Jairaj prevents Jairaj from becoming a Bharatnatyam dancer. He fears that the family name, even the prestige he enjoys in the society might be sullied if his son were to become a dancer. Even certain psychological factors compel the father figures to act as patriarchs. Psychologists unanimously agree that an individual’s childhood experience and environment play a key-role in the evolution of personality. Karen Homey offers the theory of ‘basic anxiety’ and describes it as the childhood ‘feeling of being isolated and helplessness in a world conceived as potentially hostile’ (Neurosis and Human Growth, 1965, pp. 18). This theory can be applied to show how the father figures turn out to be patriarchs. In ‘Where There’s a Will’, Hasmukh Mehta must have had, as Ajit indicates, a ‘deprived childhood’ (Dattani, Collected plays: Where There’s a Will, pp. 469). Though he himself never acknowledges the
fact, it can be analysed from the events of his life. Hasmukh came to the city as a child, but then, his brother ran away to Goa with same hippies; he lost his mother; his father stopped his schooling and forced him to look after the business (Ibid, pp. 463-64). Those events, occurring in succession, fostered in the growing child a sense of isolation and helplessness. His experience of the ‘bossy’ nature of his father compelled him to accept ‘living his life in his father’s shadow’ (Ibid, pp. 509). Hasmukh had learnt never to contradict his father. As the inevitable product of faulty upbringing, he cannot but expect similar behaviour from his son, and the expectation eventually transforms him into a patriarch. The other father figures, Amritlal Parkeh in ‘Dance Like a Man’, and Ramnik Gandhi in ‘Final Solutions’, also grew up in an atmosphere of rigid social norms. Later in life, they found it difficult to shake off the rigidity that moulded their own lives. Each one of them was once the victim of the system, and when his turn came, he created similar conditions by strictly enforcing the patriarchal rule within the family.

With rare sensitivity and depth, Dattani portrays the dilemma of the middle-class Indian sons trapped between individual aspirations and patriarchal demands. Ajit in Where There’s a Will is the joint managing director who has his own ideas and plans to develop and modernize the factory. He says, ‘Give me five lakhs and I’ll modernize whole bloody plant. That’s what I tell my dad’ (Ibid, pp. 455). To make his plan a success, he has ‘even made out a project report’ (Ibid, pp. 456); and having certain innovative ideas, Ajit thinks that he can assert his individuality. He wishes to be honoured not only in the office but also at home. But it has always been Hasmukh, the patriarchal father who has imposed such restrictions on Ajit as to hinder his natural way of acting and thinking. Therefore, Ajit asks his father, ‘......and what becomes of me? The real me. I mean if I am you, then where am I?’ (Ibid, pp. 461) His father nonchalantly replies, ‘Nowhere! That is just my point!’ (Ibid, pp. 461) Here, the conflict between the father and the son arises precisely out of their attempts at asserting their respective point of view. On the
one hand we have Hasmukh’s attempt to reinstitute the patriarchal social order; on the other, we see Ajit’s continual struggle to define his identity.

In *Dance Like a Man*, the relation between the father and the son is strained by conflict. Dattani internalises Jairaj’s unremitting struggle to establish himself as a Bharatnatyam dancer. The struggle acquires intensity with Amritlal’s determined efforts to constrain his son’s ambition. Jairaj is fond of dancing. His sole passion in life has been to establish himself as a Bharatnatyam dancer. The traditional Indian dance-form is to him a medium to assert his individuality as well as creativity. In addition, he is also ‘interested in reviving his dance’ (Mahesh Dattani, *Collected Plays: Dance Like a Man*, pp. 417). Jairaj asks his father to give him freedom—‘The independence to do what I want’ (Ibid, pp. 415). But Amritlal considers his son’s effort to be an effeminate one, unmanly and sick. Therefore, he tries to mould Jairaj’s approach to life and asks him to ‘Grow up’, shunning all unmanly activities (Ibid, pp. 422). Jairaj rebels against his father but the rebellion is weak, and, in the end, he sacrifices his ambition on the altar of Amritlal’s patriarchal desires.

The sons, as protagonists, continually struggle to find space for themselves within the family unit. In *Do the Needful*, the conflict between the father and the son takes on a different dimension. Alpesh, the son approves of homosexual relations, while Chandrakant, the father, swears by traditional matrimonial relationships. In *Tara*, Chandan is the recipient of a star-crossed, unwanted, tragic gift—the third leg that was fed by Tara’s blood system. He has to carry the burden of having wasted Tara’s leg that survived only for two days while it could have been Tara’s forever. He has to pay for the sins of his parents and his grandparent who risked giving the leg to him. He has also to pay for the fact that he is a ‘male’. However, the revelation annoys him, and he grow desperate to dissolve his present identity and acquire a new one. Finally, he decides not only to move out of the family but also to change his name to Dan.
The relationship between the father and the son as Dattani presents it in his plays can also be viewed in terms of the oppressor and oppressed relation. Dattani presents the father as the oppressor and the son as the oppressed. The father, taking advantage of his hierarchical position and economic stability, coerces the son both economically and mentally. In *Where There’s a Will*, Hasmukh, as mentioned earlier, is the chief provider on whom Ajit and other family members, are economically dependent. Ajit is the joint managing director of a company but, ironically enough, the company belong to his father, Hasmukh Mehta. The relation between them is that of the employer and the employee. The father takes advantage of his power and position to subjugate the son both within the family unit and in the factory. He compels Ajit to follow his institutions. Hasmukh’s wife, Sonal, makes a typical housewife’s remark on her husband when she says, ‘Money has made him stubborn’ (*Dattani, Collected Plays: Where There’s a Will*, pp. 472).

The oppressor-oppressed issue recurs in plays like *Dance Like a Man*. Amritlal is the only earning member in the family, and his son, Jairaj, has to abide by his instructions. Amritlal, who supports the family, knows quite well that other members are dependent on him. He is the head of the unit and the other members his subordinates. He exploits his position and takes advantage of his economic supremacy but eventually turns out to be the principal agent behind his son’s psychic disintegration. Jairaj never has a scope to run his life according to his own sweet will, and the father’s tyranny ultimately ruins everything that the son could have achieved on his own. It has been a continuous coercion on Amritlal’s part to gain power from his economic cohesion. Lata exposes the fact when she tells Jairaj, ‘.....your father had this house and could supports us’ (*Dattani, Collected Plays: Dance Like a Man*, pp. 411). It is, thus, evident that in his plays, Dattani depicts the father-son relation as the one that exists between the oppressor and the oppressed. Even in *Tara* and *Do the Needful*, the fathers repress the sons by taking advantage of their hierarchical position and financially viable condition. Neither
Chandan nor Alpesh can proclaim themselves over their fathers, and they make a mess of their lives.

In each play, the attempted revolt of the son and the challenge thrown in the face of the father create tension, thereby disturbing the harmony within the family as well as in the existing social order. Again, in each play, the son fails to sustain the revolt.