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INTRODUCTION
As an expression of our national genius, Indian drama, with its long history of 2000 years, is a unique phenomenon in the literary world. Taking recitation from the Rig Veda, imitation from Yajur Veda, melody from Sama Veda, and aesthetic flavour from Atharva Veda, as a legend would have it, Indian drama came into being as a subtle means of communicating the truth of things. It was rightly hailed as “Naatyashyam pancham Vedam” proving itself to be true to the Indian dictum of “kavyeshu natakam ramyam”. Having thus come into existence as the ‘Fifth Veda’ Indian drama was meant to promote the fulfillment of all the four “purusharathas” (aims of life)-‘dharama’(the god), ‘artha’(the useful), ‘kama’(the beautiful), and ‘moksha’(the true). In other words, Indian drama was expected to “comprehend whole arc of life, ranging from the material to the spiritual, the phenomenal to the transcendent, and provided at once relaxation and entertainment, instruction and illumination” (K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Drama in Modern India, pp. 1). Indian theatre can be divided into three distinctive periods:

1. The Classical period (Sanskrit theatre)
2. The Traditional period (Rural or Folk theatre)

The two-fold tradition of the Ancient Indian Theatre, that is, the classical and folk, provides a background to the study of modern Indian theatre. The modern Indian theatre is characterized with contrasting colour and variety. However, one can easily notice its unity despite its rich diversity and infinite variety. All the three traditions, that is, the classical Sanskrit, the folk and the modern are intimately connected with each other. They can be co-existent and complementary to each other. The modern Indian playwrights such as Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, and Mohan Rakesh use them effectively
and successfully. Their plays can be studied as modern with an awareness of the classical and folk elements in it. The modern Indian theatre is influenced by the Western theatre, particularly the Euro-American one. It was only after the British set up their regime in India that the crippled Indian drama received new strength and witnessed a revival. As Krishna Kriplani points out, the modern Indian drama "owed its first flowering to foreign grafting." With the impact of Western civilization on Indian life, a new renaissance dawned on Indian arts including drama. Furthermore, English education gave an impetus and a momentum to the critical study of not only Western drama, but also classical Indian drama. English and Italian dramatic troupes toured India and performed many English plays, mainly Shakespeare's, in cities like Bombay and Madras. The Portuguese brought a form of dance-drama to the West coast. A Russian music director, Rebedoff, is said to have produced the first modern drama in Calcutta towards the end of the 18th century. Thus, the Western impact awakened "the dormant, critical impulse in the country to bring Indians face to face with new forms of life and literature, and to open the way for a fruitful cross-fertilization of ideas and forms of expression" (K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Drama in Modern India, pp. 4). The newly awakened creative efforts first took the form of translations and adaptations from Sanskrit and English drama. The Western impact also quickened the drying roots of Indian native tradition with the sap of a new life, thereby opening the exciting chapter of modern Indian drama written originally in the vernaculars, and at times, translated into English.

While the theatre movement in the Indian languages had already gathered momentum under the influence mainly of British drama, the theatre in English could not flourish on expected lines. Though the first Indian play in English, Is This Civilization?, was written by Michael Madhusudan Dutt as early as in 1871 it was not followed up by any sustainable creative effort for decades together. There are plausible reasons for the arrested growth of Indian English drama.

Unlike poetry and novel, drama is a composite art involving the playwright, the actor, and the audience in a commonly shared artistic experience, calling for total commitment of the persons concerned to create a lasting impact. Moreover, since the normal medium of conversation in India is the mother tongue, it is difficult to make a dialogue between Indians in English sound natural and convincing. This difficulty, however, has been overcome to a considerable degree by some talented Indian English dramatists by carefully choosing the situations and language that transcend time and place, and the characters who are plausible and convincing.

The Pre-Independence era saw some stalwarts - Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, T.P. Kailasam, A.S.P. Ayyar, Lobo-Prabhu, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Bharathi Sarabhai - who contributed substantially to the growth and development of Indian English drama. Although the pre-Independence Indian English drama is notable for its poetic excellence, thematic variety, technical virtuosity, symbolic significance and its commitment to human and moral values, it was by and large not geared for actual stage production. Very few Indian dramatists so far had shown great interest in producing drama for the stage. One singular exception to this phenomenon was Asif Currimbhoy who is rightly hailed as “India’s first authentic voice in the theatre” (Faubion Bowers, “Introduction”, Asif Currimbhoy’s Plays, pp. xii). His plays are essentially pieces of theatre. By fusing the elements of pantomime, dance, and song, he succeeds brilliantly in creating powerful auditory and visual images that go a long way in making his plays vitally theatrical. Quite a few contemporary playwrights have made a significant contribution to the development of Indian English drama. The foremost among them is Nissim Ezekiel, a well-established Indian English poet who has also enriched Indian English drama in his own characteristic way. His Three plays (1969) consisting of Nalini, A Marriage Poem and The Sleep-Walkers, and another play, Song of Deprivation, expose the hollowness of the urban middle-class life, fickleness of modern lovers, greedy fascination for American life and
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the hypocrisy and inhibitive nature of contemporary Indian society respectively. Ezekiel is an excellent craftsman. His plays are fine examples of symmetric construction, abounding in irony, wit and humour. They reveal his sharp observation of the oddities in human life, and behaviour, providing glimpses of a cross-section of contemporary society. Some playwrights like Lakhan Deb and Gurucharan Das have made a significant contribution to the development of historical play. Gieve Patel and Pratap Sharma are two other contemporary dramatists who have distinguished themselves. In spite of the impressive record of Indian English drama, it has to be conceded that in terms of both quantity and quality, it lags far behind Indian English poetry and particularly Indian English novel. Various reasons have been attributed to the paucity of Indian drama in English.

It is generally felt that Indian playwright in English have failed to draw upon the rich and varied Indian dramatic traditions, as also to make creative use of the rich fund of Indian myth and Indian historical heritage. Yet another important reason given for stunted growth of Indian drama in English is its unsuitability for production on the stage. No doubt, we have had highly talented and enterprising Indians who seriously attempted drama in English, but “seldom for actual stage production.” (K.R. Srinivas Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, pp. 226). Indian English drama has also suffered for want of a real theatre and a live audience in India. As M.K. Naik puts it, “a play, in order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, needs a real theatre and a live audience....It is precisely the lack of these essentials that has hamstrung Indian drama in English all along.” (“The Achievement of Indian Drama in English”, Perspectives on Indian Drama in English, pp. 181). Above all, the major hurdle for the flourishing of Indian English drama is said to be the lack of a viable language as suitable medium for its expression. It is generally believed that we have very few actable plays mainly because a dialogue between Indians may not sound convincing.
except when the characters are drawn from an urban, sophisticated milieu. On the
top of that, the Indian English dramatists should strive hard to turn their
professional and natural limitations into artistic assets in the manner of their
ancient forbears. They can, however, do so only if they succeed in overcoming the
temptation to play to a foreign gallery and blindly imitate the Western models.
They must necessarily write with a sense of rootedness revealing a true Indian
sensibility. However, they should be grounded in contemporary problems while
deriving inspiration and sustenance from their ancient culture. While drawing on
Indian history epics, legends, myths, folklore art and culture, they should not lose
sight of the innovative themes and techniques and current trends in the world
drama today. Given these conditions, and given a living theatre and a live
audience, there is no reason why Indian drama in English should lag behind Indian
English poetry and fiction any longer, that too in a country in which drama was
hailed as the “Fifth Veda”, and cherished as “Kavyesu naatakam ramyam”.

Contemporary Indian drama in English translation has made bold
innovation and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and
technical virtuosities. It has been increasingly turning to history, legend, myth and
folklore, tapping their springs of vitality and vocal cords of popularity with
splendid results. Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish
Karnad have remained the most representative of the contemporary Indian drama
not only in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi and Kannada respectively but also on the pan-
Indian level. Greatly influenced by Marxism, Mohan Rakesh waged a relentless
fight against the traditional stranglehold of Hindi drama, and always endeavoured
to project something new and challenging. As Nirad Chaudhuri points out, “with
Mohan Rakesh Hindi drama makes a departure from pseudo-modernism and
traditional symbolism to the drama of ‘non-communication’-the modern man’s
failure to understand himself or to understand the other person and their mutual
failure to understand each other, which is the real tragedy of modern life” (As
quoted in Badal Sircar, Changing Language of Theatre at the Present Time, pp. 27). His plays dramatize the sufferings of men and woman who fall victims to socio-economic hierarchy and cultural hegemony, particularly in his plays like One Day in Ashadha and The Great Swans of the Waves. While Rakesh uses historical characters to project the breakdown of communication in contemporary life, Badal Sircar uses contemporary situations to project the existential attitude of modern life. Leading the vanguard of the avant-garde Marathi Theatre, Vijay Tendulkar symbolizes the new awareness and attempts of Indian dramatists of the last quarter of the century, to depict the agonies, suffocations and cries of man, focusing on the middle class society. In all his plays, he harps upon the theme of isolation of the individual and his confrontation with the hostile surroundings. Vijay Tendulkar’s plays, along with those of playwrights like Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar and Mohan Rakesh, have changed the face of Indian theatre. Unlike Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar who delve into the problems of middle-class society, Girish Karnad, the well-known Kannada playwright, goes back to myths and legends with a view to making them a vehicle of a new vision. By exploiting the various myths, he shows the absurdity of modern life with all its elemental passions and conflicts, and man’s eternal struggle to achieve perfection. Girish Karnad has given the Indian theatre a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor director. His contribution goes beyond theatre: he has directed feature films, documentaries and television serials. He has represented India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture.

Contemporary Indian theatre is extremely complex in its relation to modernity as well as tradition. It is also sprawling in extent, variety and multiplicity and manifests the modern Indian nation’s cultural heterogeneity. The Indian dramatists like Karnad, Sircar, Tendulkar in their work return to the tradition, but it is certainly not a return to a single, iconic image of a ‘pure’ Indian tradition. It is an attempt to get back to the mass basses of India, to recover some
of the suppressed performative methods as well as traditions from ancient, medieval, and colonial times, to in fact bring back a sense of history that is wider, deeper and more relevant to the majority of the people living in rural areas than the Anglicized, textbook versions. ‘Tradition’ in the case of these dramatists is not a museum exhibit. It is something to be lived and grappled with, adapted and even transformed, in order to create new forms of drama which relate to Indian people. Each of them recognizes that tradition is something vital, an indigenous energy which comes from the life of ordinary people, their day-to-day practice of religion, family relation, social gatherings, commonly observed customs, beliefs and rituals. Thus they are making connections with ‘traditional India’ or with cultural ‘roots’.

Contemporary Indian dramatists attempt to cross cultural boundaries across time, going ‘back to the past’ in a metaphorical sense to retrieve ancient traditions by creating them in their dramatic productions and playscripts a ‘transhistorical’ interculturalism. They also juxtapose various strands of Indian culture simultaneously in their work. Their return to the past is an immediate response to the immediate historical reality of ‘westernization’ in India. There is also an attempt to ‘decolonize the mind’ in the sense that Ngugi wa Thiong’o might advocate; by decolonizing definitions of culture, aesthetics and representational forms and techniques; by combining rather than separating the various languages, idioms, forms and techniques, narratives and histories that make up popular and regional cultures of India. This process of decolonization involves the practice of interculturalism at the most essential level. For example Girish Karnad’s plays reveal a healthy tension between tradition and contemporaneity. He borrows from both Yakshagana and European avant-garde. He goes back to local and folk practices which were part of his childhood environment. Karnad makes clear that his return to his roots is in reaction to the banality and social irrelevance of modern Indian drama. His *Yayati* (1961) is a self-conscious retelling of the Hindu
myth on the theme of responsibility of Sartre. *Tughlaq* (1964) deals with the spectacular failures of decentralization through the paradox of Muhammad bin Tughlaq. *Hayavadana* (1970) is an adaptation of Thomas Mann’s short story, “The Transposed Heads” written to be performed in the Yakshagana style.

So an appraisal of Indian drama shows that while drama in various Indian languages has shown a marked development, it has not done so in Indian English. In this literature, drama is a plant of poor growth. However, English plays are occasionally staged, especially in big cites like Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta. Visits of foreign troupes are arranged from time to time by the British Council and the American Center. In Delhi, Yatrik group has actively staged several plays. It is mainly there that Indian drama in Indian language and the drama in English translation which has registered a remarkable growth in the recent decades. During the last few years, several plays originally written in the regional languages have been translated into English. Today, a sizeable number of such plays exist, and it is possible for scholars to assess and evaluate Indian drama in its totality. Many academics have felt the need for English translations of literature in the Indian languages. English translations of classics in the Indian languages should form an important component of Indian English literature. The translations have forged a link between the east and west, north and south, and contributed to the growing richness of contemporary creative consciousness. Thus regional drama in India is slowly paving a way for a “national theatre” into which all steams of theatrical art seem to converge. The major language theatres that were active during the Sixties, Seventies and Eighties that rejuvenated and consolidated are those of Hindi, Marathi, Bengali and Kannada. A study of Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar and Girish Karnad clearly shows that they are the symbols of the new resurgence in their own areas and have made bold innovations, fruitful experiments and given new directions which go in the history of Indian drama as a significant mark of achievement.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Very recently Indian English drama has shot into prominence. Younger writers like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan have infused new life into this branch of writing. Bangalore-based Dattani has published forceful plays like Where There is a Will, Final Solutions and Tara etc., Padmanabhan’s Onassis award-winning Harvest has achieved world wide acclaim. Incidentally, both Dattani and Padmanabhan do not write on the traditional subjects. Dattani writes about mean, ugly, unhappy things of life; Padmanabhan projects a dehumanized, terrifying world in which mothers sell their sons for the price of rice. Her play Harvest is about an impoverished family living in a single room in a chawl of Bombay. Population explosion has rendered the city dwellers into helpless, poor, dehumanized lot struggling for their survival. In this scenario, driven by hunger and unemployment, twenty-year-old Om Praksh decides to become an organ donor and mortgages his body to a white First World buyer. Padmanabhan projects in her play a more serious, grim and unpalatable world.

Theatre as we see today is fast changing keeping in tune with the contemporary problems.

India is a curious mixture of traditions / myths on the one hand and the struggle to compete with global standards on the other. Caught in the flux of flowing time, it is grappling with myriad problems. Gender and violence – which is the highlight of this thesis – is one such area which always been a troublesome and much debated area. This thesis is an attempt to discuss gender and violence in the plays of Dattani.

Gender could be understood to be a social construct. The concept of ‘Gender’ is developed by feminists to contest the naturalization of sexist culture that lays bare the hierarchy and antagonism inherent in it. Ruthven in Feminist Literary, An Introduction, claims that “Gender is a cultural meaning attached to sexual identity. The purpose of making this distinction is to free women from
sexist stereotyping based on limiting conceptions of their nature” (pp. 4). Lacan rejects the notion of biologically rooted fixed essence for men and women. For him, both masculinity and femininity are linguistic concerns, and it is language that has erased the distinction between the terms ‘female’ and ‘feminine’, which has led to inferiorisation of women (Lemaire, Anika. Jacques Lacan, pp. 89).

The struggle over the term ‘Gender’ is crucial to feminist scholars, as it is the focal point of women’s oppression, which not only denotes the sexual differences but also highlights the inequality between the two sexes. Further it determines the socially acceptable behavior for both men and women. Men and women are associated with a hierarchical value system that always privileges the male.

Gender oppression in India takes on different dimensions. In comparison to ‘developed’ countries, the problems of women in India have had a different history. The system of Sati, though thought to be ancient, is still a burning issue. So also are female infanticide, dowry etc. Child marriages thought to be eradicated, is still in vogue. The plight of widows is still critical and pathetic. The possibility of widow marriage is very low. This indicates a very bad plight of widows. They are even treated as untouchables in orthodox families [“Husband should marry again, in order to be able to continue to perform religious rites for which a wife’s presence was essential. A widow, however, should never think of remarriage, because she should aspire for mukti (salvation) rather than swarga ----” (Manusmiriti:5. 167 - 8,6.65)]. Women were refused from the right to enter the ‘masculine’ public domain. So there is a long tradition of questioning the social position of women.

Further, gender is now one of the busiest, most restless terms in the English language, a word that crops up everywhere yet whose uses seem to be forever changing, always on the move, producing new and often surprising inflections of
meaning. Gender is a much contested concept and has become such a vital, but nonetheless intensely problematic word in the contemporary critical lexicon.

Gender is always "Heterogender" (Chris Ingraham, pp. 79), The asymmetric stratification of the sexes in relation to the institution of Patriarchal Heterosexuality. All sociological studies (even feminists) of gender relations in society rely upon the "heterosexual imaginary, A way of thinking which conceals the operations of heterosexuality in structuring gender and closes off any critical analysis of heterosexual as an organizing institution. Heterosexuality is thus taken for granted.

In 19th century word "sexuality" eventually moved away from its association with the purely biological aspects of 'Sex' and came instead to refer to some one's sexual feelings or sexual preferences. Sexual identity no longer linked to internal nor external genital organs - Now it's a matter of taste, aptitudes, satisfaction and psychic traits. So sex and gender are therefore intimately related both are inescapably cultural categories that refer to ways of describing and understanding human bodies and human relationships, our relationship to ourselves and others.

'Sex' is the name given to the language through which we speak and come to know our desires, whole 'gender' denotes the cultural practice or cultural media that enable these desires to be played out. In her important book "Gender Trouble", Judith Butler has argued that gender is a Symbolic form of "Public action" whose recurrence allows for our recognition as designing and desirable subjects.

According to Butler – 'Gender' is fragile, provisional, unstable, masculinity or femininity come in many transient guises, all of them in some measure unfinished or incomplete. Gender is primarily an act of signification or representation can
sound As if gender is a matter of choice, of picking up and discarding identities at will.

Gender, not as an identity that we freely embrace, but one that we also struggle against, that sustains us at the same time as it constrains us. Gender underpins our capacity to make decision and Act upon them, while constantly shipping out of our control and ensnaring us in complex webs of meaning that no single individual can ever hope to master. There are many genders. Varies are the different conceptions of masculinity and femininity that emerge from the miscellany of sites and settings in modern societies, that we can justifiably refer to them in the plural as masculines and feminities. “Gender” identity starts with the knowledge and awareness, whether conscious or unconscious, that one belongs to one sex and not the other, through as one develops, gender identity becomes much more complicated, so that for example one may sense himself as not only a male but a masculine man or an effeminate man or even as a man who fantasies being a woman. So gender identity sound like alienation, people feel uncertain as to whether they were ‘really’ masculine or feminine.

Violence is a general term to describe behaviour, usually deliberate, that causes or intends to cause injury to people. So violence can be defined as that which harms, debases, dehumanizes or brutalizes human beings, animals or the natural world and the violent person, as one who causes harm in speech or action, either directly or indirectly or whose mind is filled with such thoughts. Violence, probably the most familiar word in human life has become a part of every individual’s life these days. Despite of man’s progress in improving his material conditions he has failed to free himself from barbarism of the heart. So it is very hard to define violence, since it is not restricted to a particular area, person, caste, creed, colour, class and gender and to particular causes. Violence is a fact of life in present day society. So it can be defined as the use of physical force to injure somebody or damage something or the illegal use of unjustified force.
Violence is often associated with aggressive behaviour that may be physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Physical abuse involves pushing, shoving, shaking, punching, kicking, burning or any other forms of physical assault on a person(s). Emotional abuse involves verbal attacks, threats, taunts, slagging, mocking, yelling, exclusion, and malicious rumours. Sexual abuse involves sexual assault or rape.

In society, we find violence against women, violence against children, violence on sexual minorities, communal violence etc. Women globally and Indian women, live in a social environmental where violence is an immediate reality, overriding socio-demographic differences of cultural background, class, education, occupation, etc. Feminist definitions of violence use ‘power’ and ‘domination’ as the operative constructs to explain male violence against women. Within the scope of this definition, violence is criminal behaviour, perpetrating fear, misery, injury, sickness and possibly death in the victims. Usually women grow up in a climate of fear and violence.

Children are physically, emotionally, sexually abused. Thousands of children today suffer silently from sexual abuse; in most cases the offenders being people whom no body would suspect.

The prevailing civil laws for marriage, adoption, inheritance, property, insurance, pension, gratuity, housing, etc., deny space for sexuality minorities (lesbian and gay), as they recognize only heterosexual marriages and families as legitimate. The Indian constitution recognizes only two genders: male and female. Hijras have no space in it. Non-recognition of gender makes it impossible for hijras to avail employment opportunities, education, housing, health facilities, property rights, marriage rights, ration cards / passports / voter identity cards etc. Very often sexual minorities face physical violence, verbal abuse, emotional back mail and rejection from families too. Many are thrown out of their homes and
denied a share of the property. Sometimes sexual minorities are forced into unhappy ‘heterosexual marriages’ by their families where, not only sexuality minorities, but also their spouses and children face oppression. Some families opt for unethical, unscientific, misinformed and outdated psychiatric treatment to ‘cure’ their children of their ‘sexual orientation/gender expression’ and subject them to dangerous drugs, electric shocks and aversion therapies. These methods cause enormous harm and destroy sexuality minorities, physically and psychologically. All these shows society’s ignorance, prejudice, bias and intolerance towards sexuality minorities.

Sexual minorities face harassment, abuse, ridicule, discrimination everywhere: in the streets, at work places, school / colleges, hospitals etc.

The incidence and intensity of violence, which has become part and parcel of India social life, has been continuously increasing and consequently undermining and disrupting the process of nation building. There is nothing extraordinary or unique about the nature and causes of communal violence. There are riots not only between the Hindus and Muslims but also between the Hindus and Jains, Hindus and Buddhists, Hindus and Christians and Hindus and Sikhs. Intra-communal violence is also quite frequent. The people of India who are multilingual believe in different religions, follow various cultures, and perceive historical traditions differently are bound to present diversities in social and political life. The forces of religion, language, region, etc., divide the people and at the same time strengthen the feeling of caste or communal solidarity and communal unity. It is believed that the existence of several groups and their operation in socio-economic life generates an area of conflict and disharmony. At present, communal rage is sweeping India. In Gujarat Carnage (2002), nearly thousands of people, both Hindus and Muslims died in Post-Godhra riots. There are reports everywhere of gang-rape of young girls and women, often in the
presence of members of their families, followed by their murder by being burnt alive.

India, a country that has happily nurtured different peoples, cultures, languages and literature, has a long and glorious dramatic tradition of her own. The Indian theatre, says Krishna Chaitanya, "... is at least as old as the Indus Valley civilization which in the light of its extended reach disclosed by archaeological explorations in recent years, is emerging as a Ganges Valley civilization as well".1 The fusion and interaction of cultures have given it a rich and varied legacy. Moreover, the dictum - whatever happens in life, happens in literature holds true of Indian drama, which, springing from the psychosocio-cultural background of the soil, presents an authentic record of Indian life and society. It questions and challenges such issues as injustices, inequalities, and hierarchies within the society.

The Indian society is basically patriarchal in nature. The father acts as the chief agent of patriarchy. He enjoys a favourable position in the hierarchy and holds the dominant position within the family unit. Manu, the earliest of lawgivers, laid down social and moral codes on much the same terms. He propounded the male supremacist ideology. Likewise, ancient dramatic and epic texts, in keeping with Manu's principles glorified the father figures. These texts endorse the patriarchal culture through the portrayal of strong father figures.

The modern playwrights, in their own ways, tried to map the concerns of Gender and Violence onto the terrain they were exploring through their plays. Gender and Violence was one of the major components of their work. In fact, the awareness of gender and Violence and representation of gendered subjectivities is

what emerges as a common thread that binds most of modern playwrights together. The major playwrights who are considered to be the founders of modern Indian theatre, Badal Sirlar, modern Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani etc., seem to be pre occupied with this problem.

Mahesh Dattani is one such modern India playwright in English to indicate oppressive nature of patriarchy or to highlight issues of gender and violence. This thesis then is an attempt to read some plays of Dattani from the point of view of gender and violence. Gender oppression is discussed as also violence.

Mahesh Dattani is arguably one of the best playwrights the country has ever produced. Born in Bangalore on 7 August 1958, Dattani studied in Baldwin’s High School and St. Joseph’s College of Arts and Science, Bangalore. He is a graduate in History, Economics and Political Science. He is a Postgraduate in Marketing and Advertising Management. He has worked as a copywriter in an advertising firm and subsequently with his father in the family business.

Dattani’s theatre group Playpen was formed in 1984 and he has directed several plays. The author of more than 15 plays, he made his directorial debut with Mango Souffle.

Over a career spanning twenty-five years he has written radio plays for the BBC and the film scripts of Ek Alag Mausam, Morning Raga and has even had 3 collections of his plays published. The International Herald Tribune while praising Mahesh Dattani described him as one of India’s best and most serious contemporary playwrights writing in English (published in International Herald Tribune, 22-09-2002, pp. 7).

This thesis has selected five plays of Dattani to show gender oppression or gender discrimination, and those are Where There is a Will, Dance Like a Man, Tara, Final Solutions and Bravely Fought the Queen. And seven plays to show
different facets of Violence in his plays and those are *Final Solutions, Thirty Days in September, Bravely Fought the Queen, Seven Steps Around the Fire, Where There is a Will, Dance Like a Man and Do the Needful*.

His first play *Where There is a Will* (1988), has depicted aspects of Patriarchal dominance. Let it be daughter, wife, daughter-in-law or mistress, all are dependent on man for financial and physical security. Man has always taken up woman as a liability and a source of requirement. Women have been looked down upon by men as an object to meet their needs. This play also deals with conflict between father and son.

*Dance Like a Man* (1989), a stage play in two acts is a Chennai based play where dance is an integral part of life. The play examines prejudice against the traditional dance form, Bharatanatyam. The characters in this play Jayaraj, Ratna and their daughter Lata are dancers. Ratna believes that her daughter should soar to such heights which she could not achieve because of opposition from Jairaj’s father Amirtlal. She considered herself a failure and for this she blames Jairaj. She vents her frustration on Jairaj and accuses him of being a jelly in front of his dominating father. The impact of patriarchal authority in a joint family and kowtowing of the rest of the family members before their decision has been specifically spotlighted in this play by Mahesh Dattani. The play also portrays the son and father conflict.

*Tara* (1990) is a play in which Mahesh Dattani picks up an issue which is glaring in our society and itches an Indian female in every walk of life. The preference of a boy child over a girl child forms the infrastructure of the play. The girl may be more enterprising than the boy but what is the great deal in it, she nevertheless fails in the race of favour.

The play *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991), portrays women exploitation by men since time immemorial. The play is about women suffering due to the
husband's misdoing and the involvement of one of the husbands into homosexual relationships.

*Final Solutions*, a three-act play (1993), 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. The play outwardly focused on Hindu-Muslim in compatibility but is inwardly full of mutual disagreements amongst the family members. The clash between fanaticism of Hindus versus fanaticism of Muslims is highlighted.

*Do the Needful* (1997), is about two upper class families which do not understand their children's desires and want to marry them against their wishes. In this play, the dual problem of love and homosexuality is deftly handled. The children, a gay Gujarati boy and a south Indian girl who loves a Muslim boy, cleverly clinch the deal between their parents, get married and under the cover of a traditional happy married couple go their own ways. Alpesh can carry on his affair with Trilok and Lata can meet Salim whenever she wants to. Both keep each other's secret. So the play is about social restraints against gays and against the social inhibition of inter-caste marriage. The play also depicts the conflict between father and son.

*Seven Steps Around the Fire* (1999), the most popular play, dwells on the theme of eunuchs, their identity, their constitution and their connotation. The play deals with the suppression of the marginalised hijra community. Uma Rao is writing her thesis on the origin and contemporary status of the 'hijra Community'. Her genuine research brings into focus the hypocrisy and repression that 'the big shots' are capable of because they are beyond the reach of law.
Thirty Days in September (2003), 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 survival. The play revolves round the story of the child victim Mala, who is raped by her maternal uncle at the age of seven.

An overview of Dattani's works reveals that gender ambiguity is a recurring theme in his plays. He explores the idea of 'being a man.' What is manliness? Who is man enough? What makes a man a man? - are questions that echo time and again. Preoccupied with gender issues, Dattani usually concentrates on the family. He neatly outlines the oppression that the female members are subjected to under the rule of a dominant male. This conflict between the genders ultimately affects family relationship and harmony. Conflict and contradiction mark every relationship - that between husband and wife, parent and child, lovers, siblings, etc. He portrays the changing, evolving, and disintegrating relationships within the family. And he also depicts the Violence which took place against Children in the form of Sexual abuse, Violence on Sexual minorities, Communal Violence, Violence between Father and Son, Violence against Women etc.

This Thesis therefore, makes an attempt to place Dattani firmly in the contemporary scene and argues that he sensitively discusses these issues in his plays.