

**SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE SELECTED PLAYS OF MAHESH  
DATTANI:  
A CRITICAL STUDY**

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**SUBMITTED BY**

**MR. SUNIL PARASRAM ADHAV**

**UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF**

**DR. JANARDHAN P. NAIR**

**RESEARCH CENTRE**

**DEPT. OF ENGLISH  
SHIRUR SHIKSHAN PRASARAK MANDAL'S  
CHANDMAL TARACHAND BORA COLLEGE  
ARTS, COMMERCE, SCIENCE  
SHIRUR, DIST. PUNE- 412210. MAHARASHTRA**

**JULY 2021**

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**DR. JANARDHAN P. NAIR**

**(Supervisor/ Research Guide)**

**Date:** 24/08/2021

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I declare that the thesis entitled **SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE SELECTED PLAYS OF MAHESH DATTANI: A CRITICAL STUDY** submitted by me for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is the record of work carried out by me during the period from 28/10/2015 to .../08/2021 under the guidance of **DR. JANARDHAN P. NAIR** and has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship, titles in this or any other University or other institution of Higher learning. I further declare that the material obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged in the thesis.



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Date: 24/08/2021

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## Preface

Literature has always been one of the effective ways to explore and address social issues in human culture. Stories, plays, and other types of fictional media often have some social or cultural concern embedded in the thematic background of a narrative. A social issue is some problem or concern connected to a larger issue that affects society in general. Often, the social issues brought forward in plays reflect contemporary concerns in the playwright's own world. This type of issue in literature often shows up as a theme that affects the plot and outcome of the story.

The present research work entitled *Social Issues in the Selected Plays of Mahesh Dattani: A Critical Study* finds the exploration of social issues such as Homosexuality, Gender Discrimination, Patriarchy, Child Sexual Abuse, Communalism and Religious Fanaticism in the selected plays. Before analysing each play, an attempt has been made to study the background of a particular social issue with the help of different theoretical perspectives. The present research work has quoted relevant dialogues with explanations to validate the hypothesis stated in the research proposal.

The first chapter discusses the origin of drama as a genre of literature, the Sanskrit Theatre in India, the Modern Theatre in regional languages and the Indian English Drama in both pre-Independence and post-Independence periods. This chapter considers Mahesh Dattani's total body work as an introduction to the research work. Further, it discusses hypothesis, methodology and significance.

The second chapter presents the issue of homosexuality in the selected plays such as *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* and *Do the Needful*. Prior to the analysis of these plays, an attempt has been made to study theoretically the emergence and development of gay and lesbian movements from the decade of 1960, queer theory, the concept of homosexuality in the Western context. As Dattani typified the Indian 'setting' in his plays, so it became relevant to study 'homosexuality' in the Indian context in the light of on 'Section 377' in the Indian Penal Code, efforts of the NGOs like 'Naz Foundation' to decriminalise homosexuality, the judgements of the 'Delhi High Court' and the 'Supreme Court' with respect to criminalization and decriminalization of homosexuality. After studying the concept of 'homosexuality', the research work analysed three selected plays in this chapter.

The third chapter deals with three interrelated issues such as ‘gender discrimination’, ‘patriarchy’ and ‘child sexual abuse’ in the three plays entitled *Tara*, *Where There Is a Will* and *Thirty Days in September*. Prior to the analysis of each play an attempt has been made to study the theoretical base of these issues.

The fourth chapter deals with the issues of communalism and religious fanaticism in the two selected plays *Final Solutions* and *The Swami and Winston*. Prior to the analysis of these two plays, an attempt has been made to study the issues of communalism and religious fanaticism. The research work highlights communal animosity in *Final Solutions* between Hindu and Muslim communities. Communal clashes are the results of different ideological inculcations of both Hindus and Muslims. Communal ideology exists in the behavioural patterns of every community. Due to contradictory behavioural patterns, communal violence takes place. The present study also points out that politics does play a destructive role in bringing about communal violence.

The fifth chapter presents the major findings of the research work. Prior to offering findings, an attempt has been made to ensure the accomplishment of objectives and validation of hypotheses already stated in research proposals. In addition to the findings, the study looks forward to offering causes of social issues, implications and scope for further research.

**Mr. S.P. Adhav**



## **Social Issues in the Selected Plays of Mahesh Dattani:**

### **A Critical Study**

#### **Chapter One**

##### **Introduction:**

Mahesh Dattani as a playwright occupies a unique place in the field of Indian English Drama. Dattani is a versatile personality. He is a playwright, director, actor, screenplay writer, film maker and teacher. Born in a Gujarati family Dattani grew up in Bangalore. He writes his plays in English. In order to exhibit his theatrical potential he established a theatre group called 'Playpen' in 1984. Besides contemporary plays, he has so far directed several Greek plays. His first two- act stage play *Where There's a Will* appeared in 1986. At present, Dattani is recognised as one of the most successful playwrights writing in English. He became the first Indian English playwright to receive the distinguished 'Sahitya Akademi Award' for his *Final Solutions and Other Plays* in 1998. Besides writing and directing plays, Dattani has also worked as a teacher. He taught courses related to theatre at the Summer Sessions Programme of Portland State University Oregon, USA and regularly conducts workshops at his studio and some other places. Dattani is a promising writer of the 'Radio Plays' for BBC Radio 4. Some of his plays have achieved Bollywood success.

Long before the appearance of Mahesh Dattani on the Indian literary horizon, Sangeet Natak Akademi and the National School of Drama (NSD) opened a new avenue for the Modern Indian Theatre. Plays, for the most part, written in Hindi or translated into Hindi or English dominated the Indian theatre. Playwrights such as Mohan Rakesh (Hindi), Badal Sirkar (Bengali), Girish Karnad (Kannada) and Vijay Tendulkar (Marathi) played constructive roles to enrich the Indian plays and theatre. Dattani explores those social issues in his plays which affected the post-Independence Indian society. Exploration of the vulnerable existence of the Indian middle class has always been a serious concern in almost all of his plays. The whole body of his work comprises 'the Stage Plays', 'the Screen Plays' and 'the Radio Plays'. In almost all of his plays appeared in above three segments, Dattani draws attention to the social issues of 'homosexuality', 'gender discrimination', 'patriarchal dominance', 'domestic violence'

and ‘communalism’, ‘religious fanaticism’, ‘child sexual abuse’, ‘female exploitation’, ‘poverty’, ‘natural disasters’, ‘diseases’, etc. For the purpose of brevity in this research work, only eight plays have been selected to study the exploration of social issues. As a skilled dramatist, Dattani uses the comic elements contextually to envelope the indignation of the truth. Like George Bernard Shaw, Henrik Ibsen and Tennessee Williams, Dattani made use of theatre as a strong platform to foreground social issues. He has depicted marginalized people who are considered ‘non-normative, other and dependable’ in a society where stereotyped ideology subverts their position.

As far as the use of English language in Dattani’s writing is concerned, it becomes clear that Dattani is at home in writing in English. Perhaps, he has indigenized the English language. His deliberate use of literal translation from Hindi into English brings readers closer to characters and gives a feel that this is their own language. Contemporary writers like Dattani write in English language hoping that the reader community accepts their writing without any prejudice.

“Dattani belongs to a generation of writers who use the English language either without pride or guilt. Asked by a journalist why he didn’t write in his own language, he replied, ‘I do’. While Dattani is the only recent playwright to have produced and published a substantial body of work in English...”<sup>1</sup>

Before studying Dattani’s life and works in particular, it is worth considering the genre of drama, Sanskrit drama, regional forms of Indian drama and the Indian English Drama in general.

### **1.1 Drama: A Genre**

The word ‘drama’ is derived from the Greek language. ‘Dra’ refers to ‘do’ which means ‘doing’ or ‘action’. According to Aristotle, ‘action’ is the predominant component of drama. Narrative gives importance to fiction whereas drama foregrounds ‘action’ and ‘dialogue’. The emphasis on speech and action in drama enhances the articulation of the story to be presented on stage. Due to its audio-visual mode of articulation, drama proved to be a very effective genre compared to novel and poetry. It is capable of reflecting live experiences in which people go through. The live performance facilitates communication between the artist and the audience. Being one of the oldest genres of literature, drama served as an ‘instrument for entertainment and

enlightenment'. Religious places were the fountainhead for the origin of drama. According to Marjorie Boulton:

“A true play is three dimensional. It is literature that walks and talks before our eyes. It is not intended that the eye shall perceive marks on paper and the imagination turn them into sights, sounds and actions; the text of the play is meant to be translated into sights, sounds and actions, which occur literally and physically on the stage. Though in fact, plays are often read in silence, if we study drama at all intelligently we must always keep this in mind.”<sup>2</sup>

The origin of the drama as a literary art took place in ancient Greece. The three segments of drama such as ‘the beginning’, ‘the middle’ and ‘the end’ given in Aristotle’s epoch-making scripture *Poetics*, set a platform for the dramatic writing and its analysis. Drama, over a period of time, underwent a revolutionary change. Gustav Freytag’s ‘five-act structure’ is still popularly applied to analyse the ancient classical drama and plays written in the Elizabethan period by William Shakespeare and some other playwrights. In the ‘five-act structure’, a play begins with the first act entitled ‘The Exposition’ which exposes the setting of the play to the audience, development of characters and conflict building. The Act Two begins with ‘The Rising Action’ leading the audience gradually to the climax of the plot by arousing complications and making the protagonist encounter unexpected hurdles in his or her path. ‘The Climax’ appears in the act third of the play which marks a turning point of the plot. The playwright arouses suspense by twisting the plot in this act. The fourth act begins with the downward journey of the play which is called ‘The Falling Action’ The playwright indicates the ‘end’ of the play by revealing the suspense maintained in the previous act. The fifth act is known as the ‘Denouement’ or the ‘Resolution’ in which the playwright produces an outcome of the play. The end of the play takes place with the revelation of the tone of the playwright. In some plays, playwrights offer moral lessons in this act.

‘Tragedy’ and ‘Comedy’ are two major sub-genres of drama. From the structural point of view, these evolutionary phases make drama a compact piece of literature. Playwrights, performers and audience are the three variables and their equal participation leads drama to a success. Further, it can also be observed that the composition of drama is undoubtedly a challenging task. In order to embody ‘drama’

as a ‘compact piece’ of literature or worth performing on stage, a playwright has to coordinate several elements like plot, character, thought, diction, spectacle, song, etc., together. In this sense, drama becomes a complex piece of literature in which the playwright, the characters and the director respectively perform their distinctive roles to achieve ultimate results. Rather than to view drama merely as a piece of literature, it is to be considered as a synthesis of art which is written by a playwright, designed by the stage manager, embodied by the actors and appreciated by the audience.

### **1.2. The Sanskrit Drama:**

Sanskrit arts and folk arts nurtured drama in India. Unlike poetry, drama as a theatrical art established a wonderful tradition and in the course of time, it became a rich source of folk entertainment in several parts of the country. Taking into account the traditional patterns of referring to religions and God, the Indian people have always been extremely devotional. Traditionally speaking, the dancing of Lord Shiva was supposed to be a divine play. The potential scope of drama is broadly found in two great Indian epics i.e. the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

In its compositional process, the ‘Sanskrit drama’ is basically a form of poetry. According to Susanne K. Langer, drama is not only the poetry of theatre; it is also poetry in theatre. There is a ‘special type of drama poetry’ in the Sanskrit tradition of drama which is called ‘visual poetry’. The uniqueness has been underlined by saying ‘Kavyeshu Natak Ramyam’. From writing to presentation, drama has a complex form of many arts - then somewhere it is able to create a singular creation of unbroken truth and poetic beauty. Even on the stage, a poem is created through various media and arts from which the theatre takes the form of a work. Both tasting and communication go hand in hand. The play, which gives ‘happiness’ and ‘peace’ to the world through many types of emotions, moods, juices, acting of actions, karma, is considered as a wonderful work here. Acharya Bharata in the first chapter of *Natyashastra* has called ‘Natyā’ an imitation of the vast sentiments of the three worlds and has described it as the universal ‘Pancham Veda’. According to Bharata, there is no such thing as knowledge, craft, learning, yoga and karma which does not appear in the play.

The Indian drama has its distinct place with its long tradition of 2000 years. As far as the dramaturgy of world’s literature is concerned, Bharata Muni’s *Natyashastra* holds

a unique place. *Natyashastra* foregrounds drama as an art which is not just to be treated as a source of entertainment but it should be viewed as a way towards the fulfilment of the aims of life. Bharata Muni discussed aspects of drama such as ‘stagecraft’, ‘music’, ‘plot construction’, ‘dialogue’ and ‘acting’. Bharata’s dramaturgy provides a dramatic framework which was followed by actors and directors. Bharata laid emphasis on ‘rasas’ which refer to ‘nine primary human emotions’. *Natyashastra* offers an outline of ‘poetics’. The root word ‘Nat’ derived from the word ‘Natya’. ‘Nat’ refers to ‘acting’ and one who performs acting is called ‘Neta’. Bharata Muni, a great Indian theorist, rendered drama as a vehicle of illumination. K. R. Shrinivasa Iyenger states that the Indian drama was expected to

“Comprehend the whole arc of life, ranging from the material to the spiritual, the phenomenal to the transcendent, and to provide at once relaxation and entertainment, instruction and illumination.”<sup>3</sup>

The Sanskrit drama was often criticized by several critics. Their criticism equally focused upon the lack of tragic elements which eventually leaves any Sanskrit play incomplete. Compared to the Greek plays, the Sanskrit plays lacked tragic endings. The Sanskrit drama ended with the principle that ‘good always prevails over evil’. Rather, the Sanskrit plays showed ‘peace’ as the ultimate end of life. The principle of the Sanskrit dramatists was that ‘all is well that ends well’ and hence they were rather aggressive to bring about comic ends of their plays. The ancient Sanskrit dramas were abundant in reflecting Indian philosophy.

However, the statement that ‘Sanskrit plays were mostly comic in nature’ finds itself in contradiction because few Sanskrit plays were also tragic in nature. If the meaning of a ‘tragic drama’ is to depict the mourning, defeat and death of the hero, then from this point of view *Karnadhar*, *Urubhang*, *Venisanhar* and *Chandkaushik* should definitely be considered as ‘tragic dramas’.

Bharata’s prescribed norms were followed by the Sanskrit dramatists viz, Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidasa, Harsha and Bhavabhuti. These playwrights have enriched their plays with the principles of the Indian aesthetics. Also they entertained the audience

through their artistic and technical acumen. Their plays were capable of seeing the truth of life through the ironies of life.

Of the above mentioned ancient Sanskrit dramatists, Bhasa is the oldest known dramatist supposed to have lived between 500 B.C and 50 B.C. Out of his 35 plays, 13 plays are available. The epic *The Mahabharata* is found to be a rich source for Bhasa's dramatic writing. *Urubhanga*, *Duta-Vakya* and *Karna* are his most famous plays in which Bhasa is said to have explored his unique dramatic style. Bhasa, an experimental playwright, wrote ten-acts, seven-acts, one act and one-scene plays. After Bhasa Kalidasa became the most popular in the ancient Sanskrit drama. He enchanted the audience with his dramatic style. Compared to Bhasa, Kalidasa got a wider recognition as his plays were later on translated into the European languages like German and English. His play entitled *Abhignana Shakuntala* was recognized as the supreme achievement of Sanskrit drama. A major focus of his plays was upon the role of 'fate' in human life which maintains the equilibrium of delight and sorrow. Another playwright of the ancient Sanskrit drama is Bhavabhuti. Recognized widely as a poet than a playwright, Bhavabhuti is known for his three plays such as *Mahavircharitra*, *Malatimadhura* and *Uttaramcharitra*. The description of Bhavabhuti's plays is not disorderly but is restrained and ideal. It is based on pure love. Despite depicting the exciting stage of puberty, there is no lust in it. At one place he writes that pure love remains monotonous in every stage of life. In him the heart feels an indescribable happiness and peace.

The Sanskrit theatre is also known as 'Temple theatre'. The aim of performing plays in temples was to bring about awareness among common masses about spirituality. In the ancient period in India, drama was one of the most effective literary arts to perform spiritual and religious rituals. Religious books, mythological events used to be primary sources for the themes of Sanskrit plays. Such plays were archetypal representations of religious and mythological narratives in which Gods, kings, queens and heroes were admired and demons were cursed. However, the access of classical Sanskrit plays was restricted only to the elite group or the upper class of society which further resulted in shrinking its scope and suffering a huge setback. It is also found that the Muslim invasion led to the decline of classical Sanskrit theatre by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Despite the decline, the art of classical theatre survived and rejuvenated further in

the folk forms of various regions throughout the country. Several folk forms led to develop the concept of 'theatre' in India and eventually turned out to be the 'Modern Indian Drama' through different regional languages.

### **1.3. Modern Indian Drama:**

As mentioned earlier, drama survived and perhaps was revived in several regional languages of the country even after the glorious age of Sanskrit drama. The regional folk forms were 'Khel', 'Tamasha' and 'Dashavatar' in Maharashtra; 'Jatra' and 'Nautanki' in Bengal; 'Maniattam' and 'Kattakali' in Kerala; 'Rasadhari' in Mathura, 'Chadiya-Chadiyani' in Orissa; the 'Bhavai' of Gujarat; the 'Ramlia' plays of North India; 'Yakshganas' of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka; 'Bhand Jashn' in Jammu Kashmir, etc. Enlightenment through entertainment, simplicity of language, staging and costumes were some significant characteristics of these folk forms. Modern Indian theatre historically speaking has been profoundly associated with ancient Sanskrit plays and folk arts. The folk theatre more or less adopted the manifestation of plot given in ancient Sanskrit dramaturgy.

According to Santwana Haldar,

“Modern Indian drama was linked both to the classical Sanskrit drama and folk theatre. The classical Sanskrit drama manifested the concepts of plot (Vastu, hero (neta), and the lasting final impression (rasa) which was accepted to some extent by the folk theatre. The role of the comedian (Vidushaka) for social satire, introduction of the theme of the play through a sort of prologue in the very beginning, use of comic relief at the time of tension and such other devices came down from the tradition of Sanskrit drama.”<sup>4</sup>

With the establishment of British rule in India, the Western theatre became widely accessible to Indian theatre-goers. The classical Sanskrit plays were compared and contrasted with Greek plays. Further, the Sanskrit plays were criticized in the light of Aristotle's theory and Shakespeare's plays. The Western theatre had its impacts on modern Indian playwrights too. Therefore, Modern Indian Drama became an offshoot of both the Western Theatre and the ancient Sanskrit plays as it is found that some

devices which seemingly borrowed from the western tradition had their genesis in the Sanskrit plays. Comparatively speaking, the Sutradhara's performance shown in Vijay Tendulkar's *Encounter in Umbugland* is identical with that of the chorus in T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and also resembles to the comedian of Sanskrit plays. As Halder further says,

“...the role of the Sutradhara in Vijay Tendulkar's *Encounter in Umbugland* has apparent similarity with the chorus in T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*; and yet, the role is almost similar to that of the 'Vidushaka' in Sanskrit plays is necessarily a person from a royal family, and as such he is little different from an Aristotelian hero.”<sup>5</sup>

However, the folk theatre which comes under the umbrella term 'Modern Indian Theatre' represented common men or women as 'heroes' and dealt with ordinary events from social life. That is why, it can be said that the 'Modern Indian Theatre' is an amalgamation of classical Sanskrit plays, vernacular folk theatres and the Western theatres.

The vernacular theatre movement in different regions of India was substantially influenced by the Western Theatre. Nomenclatures such as the 'the professional Theatre', 'the Amateur Theatre' and 'the Experimental Theatre' were given to new innovations in theatre. These nomenclatures marked a break with previous age-old traditions of theatre. The Modern Indian Theatre received huge momentum during the British Raj in India and the then cities like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras became pivotal locations for theatrical performances. Theatre in these cities was accessible only to elite people, not to people in rural areas. Modern theatre and traditional theatre as Aparna Dharwadkar mentions, are not in direct competitions with each other as they represent several places for the fulfilment of different requirements and expectations of the audience “different locations and fulfil different needs in their audience.”<sup>6</sup>

Professional Theatre was limited to the elite section of society and became one of the most distinguishing forms of entertainment. It attracted a huge audience. Theatre halls like the 'The Star', 'Rangamahar', 'Biswaroopa', and 'Minerva' in the then cities like Calcutta became platforms for spreading feelings of nationalism. Besides Calcutta, the Professional theatre was developed in Guwahati and Thiruvananthapuram. The



tradition of the professional theatre was not carried out in other metropolitan cities. The post-Independence period proved to be a fertile ground to flourish the Amateur Theatre. The 'modern Indian theatre' with the augmentation, became the 'amateur urban theatre'. Business community gave impetus to the Amateur Theatre. Directors and actors tried their best to present novel themes with innovative techniques. The aim of the Amateur Theatre was not only to entertain audiences but also to enlighten them through strong political and satirical overtones. Amateur Theatre flourished rapidly in Bombay. The multilingual population of the city approved the growth of the Amateur theatre in Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, English, etc. Further, the multicultural and multilingual atmosphere of the country led to the establishment of the 'Indian National Theatre' (INT) in 1944. The INT expanded its scope in succeeding decades. Prithviraj Kapoor, a Hollywood personality, founded the Prithvi Theatre.

With the establishment of the 'National School of Drama' (NSD) in Delhi in the 1960s, the Modern Indian Theatre got a new direction. The NSD opened an avenue to expose theatrical potentials of actors, directors and playwrights. The NSD was headed by well-known theatre personalities like Ebrahim Alkazi, Satyadev Dubey and Alyque Padamsee; the latter staged many English plays in Indian theatres including Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*.

Besides the Professional Theatre and the Amateur Theatre, the Experimental Theatre emphasized upon the experiments of the Western playwrights such as Bertolt Brecht, Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Samuel Becket. The Experimental Theatre represented the reality of the contemporary world through experiments in subject matter, dialogues, setting, structures, stage directions, performance, etc. However, all these experiments used to be done in vernacular languages. Badal Sircar's political 'Street Theatre' in Calcutta and Safdar Hashmi's Theatre in Delhi are found to be the earliest examples of experiments in this segment. The experimental plays of Badal Sircar are *Evam Indrajit*, *The Mad House*, *The Whole Night*, *Procession*, *Bhoma*, *Stale News*, *Circle*, etc. The major emphasis of Sircar's plays was on man-woman relationship and socio-political issues in modern India, etc. Performances by experimental groups were held at the Prithvi Theatre in Mumbai. The experimental theatre offered a new identity to the Hindi drama which is witnessed in Mohan Rakesh's experimental workshop in Delhi. Ample scope was given to experiments when the

emphasis was shifted from page to stage. Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar are respectively known for bringing about experiments in Kannada and Marathi theatres. These playwrights, being experimental in their writings, are the true exponents of what Suresh Awasthi termed the ‘Theatre of Roots’ movement. These playwrights strived for a way out from the deadlock in which modern Indian drama was deep rooted in the colonial ideology. Therefore those playwrights handled indigenous themes in their plays typically representing Indian cultural ethos, tradition, Indian mythology, etc. Aparna Dharwadkar further says in this case,

“... [But] the corresponding myth also needs demystification that the return to tradition’ in the post-independence period re-established forms and conventions that colonialism had disrupted, and that this restoration is (or should be) the most significant event in contemporary theatre both in itself and as the instrument of cultural decolonization”<sup>7</sup>

Playwrights like Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar and Kavalam Narayana Panicker explored the ancient classical methods with the view to shape modern Indian Drama. Besides writing plays, these playwrights were closely associated with the directors and actors who performed their plays. Perhaps this was one of the reasons that modern Indian drama broadly remained performance-oriented. Habib Tanvir’s following remark substantiates this fact as:

“Actually, the past decade witnessed a multitude of theatre concepts, from the most formalistic and absurd to the most realistic, political anti-establishment. In quality, too, the entire range has been covered—from the rousing to the most inane... the decade placed Indian theatre firmly on the map of the world. It was, in the first place, the decade of the festival of India ... the festivals did help Indian theatre ... reach world audience ... this paved the way for a universal acceptance of the blend of rich heritage and contemporaneity. The decade began with the wide acclaim of Jabbar Patel’s *Ghanshiram Kotwal* in London. This was followed in 1982 by Naya Theatre’s *Charan Das Chor* which won Fringe First Award at the Edinburgh International drama Festival, beating 52 international entries. For years later, the same award was won by [Ratan Thiyam’s] *Chakravyuha*. The socio-political significance of these plays may

vary, but they had one thing in common. All of them drew strength from folk theatre techniques, artistically harnessed.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, according to Habib Tanvir, a real assessment of a play can only be done properly when it is performed on stage. A play starts its journey from the page and completes it on stage. Hence, the discussion of theatre movements is important while studying ‘Modern Indian Drama’. However, all the experiments done by different playwrights used to be in regional languages in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. During this period, English Dramas received little response due to factors like linguistic barriers. Therefore, it was hardly performed. Nevertheless, with the trend of translating plays into English, the Indian English Drama flourished to a considerable extent although it failed to catch up with Indian English fiction and poetry in terms of acceptance, staging, success and popularity.

#### **1.4. Indian English Drama: A Brief Overview**

Regardless of the fact that Indian English Drama was looked down upon as an ‘unwanted piece’ of literature for several decades, it gradually attained identity and authenticity through the portrayal of both rural and urban Indian scenarios with the inclusion of various social issues. Reluctantly enough the audience started responding to the Indian English Drama as it proved to be a novel form of entertainment and awareness.

“After centuries of indifference and initial efforts Indian English Drama now stands poised to acquire an identity and authenticity to find its own roots, so that it can rise to the challenges of articulating and sharing with the community to which it belongs a creative vision and portray the complex human situation. Into artistic assets Indian English drama is determined to prove that it belongs to a race with a rich and varied dramatic tradition, when drama enjoyed the status of the fifth veda.”<sup>9</sup>

With the establishment of the East India Company in the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian English Drama started to flourish. The colonial empire gave impetus to the Indian English Drama. Along with the vernacular plays, Indian English Drama represented the contemporaneity of vivid facets of Indian society. It became one of the

prominent sources of entertainment and awakening in succeeding decades. Most of the plays raised a serious concern over the discriminatory practices prevalent in Indian society. Similarly, it was viewed as a weapon against the tyrannical policies of the then British government. Along with the translation of the European plays, classical Sanskrit plays were also translated into English. The Indian English Drama was desperately dependent upon the western theatre for performative trends and techniques which could entertain only the elite class Indian society residing in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Linguistics barrier hampered performances of English plays because the audience group in any region was more interested to watch vernacular plays. Initially, English plays received poor response due to the incomprehensibility of English. The play comes to life when it is performed on stage. A dramatist needs a proper platform of theatre to put his work on analysis and to assess its impact on the spectators. In this manner he or she gets an opportunity to develop his presentation.

The Indian English Drama lagged behind poetry and fiction. Nonetheless, with the theatrical success of Dattani's plays, it re-emerged as a dynamic and vibrant literary genre. Sanskrit plays, folk plays and Western plays played a constructive role to flourish the Indian English Drama in India. Basically, the origin and development of Indian English Drama could be studied in the light of two successive phases in the history of 20th century India. These phases are as follows:

### **1.5. Indian English Drama in pre-Independence Period:**

The beginning of the Indian English Drama in India is found in the eighteenth century with the establishment of the British administration. Krishna Mohan Banerjee wrote a social play entitled *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of the Hindoo Society in Calcutta* published in 1831 is said to mark the commencement of the Indian English play. This play represented the dilemma of a youth due to the cultural juxtaposition between the orthodoxy in Indian education and modernity in the Western education. However, the playwright Michael Madhusudan Dutt is credited to have translated an Indian drama into English entitled *Is This Called Civilization?* in 1871. Rabindranath Tagore and Shri. Aurobindoo further successfully followed this trend. Though Tagore wrote in Bengali, his plays later on, were translated into several European languages. However, Tagore's translated plays got recognition as the Indian English plays. Some of these best known plays are *Sacrifice*, *Chitra*, *Mukta Dhara*, *The*

*Post Office, The King of Dark Chamber and Red Oleanders*, etc. Rabindranath Tagore has incorporated the great Indian cultural ethos in his literature. Along with the tradition of Sanskrit dramaturgy, Tagore followed the Western dramatic patterns. He seems to have been greatly influenced by the Indian and the Western Dramatic figures like Kalidasa, Shakespeare and Ibsen. Indian mythology, classical literature and legends remained substantial sources for the themes in Tagore's plays. He enriched the genre of the Indian drama with lyrical excellence, symbolic overtones and allegorical significance. Tagore's increasing restlessness regarding the problematic situations of 20th century Indian society finds a way out through his selected characters like Nandini who critically expose the social hypocrisy prevalent in Indian society.

Shri Aurobindo followed the Elizabethan and the Victorian tradition of the poetic drama in his five complete English plays. These are *Perseus, Vasavdutta, Rodogone, The Viziers of Bassora and Eric*. Lyrical insight in Sri Aurobindo's writing made his plays poetically abundant. Like Tagore, Aurobindo too invoked Sanskrit playwrights to strengthen his dramatic writings.

Sri Aurobindo is known for his accomplished craftsmanship in verse and exquisite skill in portraying characters. Variety is the most eminent feature in his plays. Different time-frames and locales ranging from the ancient Greek to medieval India and different settings covered lands from Iraq, Syria, India, Spain, Britain and Norway. Both Tagore and Aurobindo enriched their plays with affluent themes and verbal textures. Nevertheless, their plays failed in 'stage performance'. Therefore, both the playwrights are chiefly remembered for their poetic excellence.

The close follower of Tagore and Aurobindo was Harindranath Chattopadhaya who contributed remarkably to enrich the domain of the Indian English Drama. He is known as a poet, musician and actor. His reputation as a poet surpassed his eminence as a dramatist. His plays have been divided into four groups. They are 1) Devotional plays 2) Social plays 3) Historical plays and 4) Miscellaneous plays. The progressive writers' movement influenced his plays. Chattopadhaya like Mulk Raj Anand sympathized with the marginalized section of Indian society. Critics compared him to Galsworthy, Shaw and Weskar for his tacit representation of social realism. Chattopadhaya's plays could be compared to those of Arnold and Weskar for their warm, altruistic, earnest and

enthusiastic representation of the society. His anthology of social plays has been entitled *Five Plays* which was published in 1937.

His seven verse plays which were published under the title as *Poems and Plays* in 1927 seem to be deeply influenced by the great Indian saints and hence the nomenclature 'hagiological plays' suits them. They are *Jayadeva*, *Raidas the Cobbler*, *Saint Pundalik*, *Saku Bai*, *Tukaram* and *Siddharth*. As a rich source of entertainment and enlightenment, these plays pioneered the staging of social realism in Indian English Drama. Thus, the trio tried their best in growing the sapling of Indian English Drama. Also they added a new dimension to it. Solid platform created by the sincere efforts of the trio further strongly inspired playwrights like T.P. Kailasam, Bharati Sarabhai, Sudhindranath Ghose, R. K. Narayan, K.R.S. Iyenger, etc.

A.S.P. Ayyar reacted against communal orthodoxy, superstitions, conservatism, enforced widowhood, etc. through his plays. Critics have labelled Ayyar as a reformist-cum-playwright because of the themes he dealt with. He wrote six plays. Out of them *In the clutch of Devil* (1929) is his first play and *The Trials of science for the Murder of Humanity* is the last one. His plays dramatized social issues besetting Indian society and in raising the awareness among people for social change.

Besides A.S.P. Ayyar, Bharati Sarabhai is the most notable among women playwrights. Her plays are affluent with intense poetic fervour. Plays such as *The Well of the people* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952) show a distinct impact of Gandhian thought. *The Well of the People* is one of the most typical products of the Gandhian Age for its representation of innovative trends in the awareness of society in continuing the religious customs.

Further T.P. Kailasam, Sudhindranath Ghose, R. K. Narayan, K.R.S. Iyenger tried their hand at writing plays in English but did not achieve much success. Also J. M. Lobo Prabhu, Dhan Gopal Mukharji and many others wrote Indo-Anglican plays but could not survive on the Indian stage for a considerable period. The reason was that a particular regional language remained a mother tongue for both characters and audience and hence performance in English language did not become that much successful. The plays written during the pre-Independence phase were mostly short plays and even the

few lengthy plays were not in prose and also did not prove to be successful. Most of the playwrights of this phase did not write with an intention that plays were meant to be performed on stage.

### **1.6 Indian English Drama in Post-Independence period:**

Even after the noticeable advancement, the Indian English drama could not succeed due to lack of regular theatre performance. 'Five Years Plans' which was introduced in the beginning of the post-Independence era gave impetus to the performing arts considering it as an effective medium for public entertainment. The establishment of the 'National School of Drama' (NSD) in Delhi paved the way for several artists to expose their potential. Training institutions for dramatic arts were established in different cities. Departments of drama and fine arts were opened in many universities across the country. The 'Sangeet Natak Akademi' started the National Drama Festival in Delhi. Despite this development, most Indian English plays got response only in some big cities like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. However, 'The Theatre Group' in Bombay along with some other such groups successfully staged few Indian English plays, for instance, Pratap Sharma's *A Touch of Brightness*, Asif Currimbhoy's *The Doldrummers*, Gurucharan Das's *Larins Sahib*, Gieve Patel's *Princess* and Shiv Kumar's *Last Wedding Anniversary*. However, performances of these plays could not achieve that much popularity. Nonetheless, the post-Independence period proved to be a fertile ground to flourish the Indian English Drama. It underwent a dynamic change in terms of its diverse patterns. Irrespective of theatre-goers' reluctance to respond to plays in English language, the Indian English Drama evolved over the period of time particularly in its themes, settings, techniques, plot construction, etc. Some notable playwrights in this era were Asif Currimbhoy, Lakhan Dev, Pratap Sharma, G.V. Dasani, Preetish Nandy, Gurucharan Das, S.D. Rawoot, P.A. Krishnaswamy, Nissim Ezekiel, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, etc. Several of these playwrights sought to dramatize socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political issues related to the Indian society as a whole. Even though the popularity of T.V. and films increased, English plays of these playwrights remained a source of entertainment and social enlightenment. G.V. Dasani's *Hali* (1950) becomes one of the pertinent examples for its success on Indian stages and abroad. Other playwrights Lakhan Deb and Gurucharan Das have also achieved considerable merit. Lakhan Deb's plays *Tiger's Claw* (1967)

portrayed the scene of the slaughter of Afzal Khan by Shivaji, *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* (1976) dealt with historical facts such as the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and Vivekananda with the monk who spent entire life with the moral teachings of the Hindu religion. Das's play *Larins Sahib* deals with the decolonization of English in the post-British era. As far as the decolonization of English is concerned, Gurucharan Das stands comparison with Mulk Raj Anand. Upon reading Das's critical writing in context with the Indian Drama in English, it becomes clear that Gurucharan Das expected the indigenisation of English language with the inclusion of purposeful code-mixing through the expressions of his characters. According to him, it helps to make the Indian audience familiar with the use of the English language. In an interview Das replied:

“The English theatre in India will have to project the kind of hybrid English we speak, interspersed with Indian expression. My approach is that the character could speak the English that is spoken in India, using expressions like ‘Kyayar’, ‘Chalo Bhai.’ And actors can bring about a reversion in spoken English.”<sup>10</sup>

Pratap Sharma's *A Touch of Brightness* (1968), a Commonwealth Festival Play, renders a sombre picture of the red light area in Bombay. His another play *The Professor has a War Cry* (1970) projects the anguish and mental conflict of the protagonist Virendra who in the course of the play comes to know the fact he is an illegitimate child of a mother frequently raped by a Muslim and English man. Further, he also realizes that his mother was deserted by her lover who is a Hindu professor.

Nissim Ezekiel, besides his immense contribution to poetry, has written six plays dealing with the hollowness of urban middle class, the institution of marriage and futility of social customs. Ezekiel's *Three Plays* (1969) are for the most part comic. *The Sleepwalkers* is recognised as a farce on the Indo-American situation.

In the post-Independence period, Asif Currimbhoy is recognized as one of the prominent and prolific playwrights for his substantial contribution to Indian English Drama. Some of his notable plays are *The Tourist Mecca* (1959), *The Doldrummers* (1962), *Thorns on Canvas* (1962), *The Restaurant* (1960), *The Dumb Dancer* (1961), *The Captives* (1963), *Goa* (1964), *The Hungry Ones* (1965), *Monsoon* (1965), *An Experiment with Truth* (1962), *Inquilab* (1970), *The Refugee* (1971), *Sonar Bangla*



(1972), *The Miracle Seed* (1973), etc. His total body of work is a projection of social issues besetting middle class Indian society.

The decade of the 1960s proved to be very significant for English plays. Indian English playwrights were highly influenced by European modern and postmodern playwrights. The Indian English playwrights brought about experiments and innovations like their European counterparts. The experiments and innovations gave Indian English drama a very distinctive place in the canon of Indian English literature. Due to this, it could achieve remarkable success on national and international stages. The playwrights of this time made extensive use of myths, legends, history and folklore to bring about thematic varieties and experiments. Simultaneously, they foregrounded some burning social issues with the view to raise awareness among people. The Theatre Group of Bombay stimulated the genre of the Indian English Drama. This theatre group redefined the framework of 'stage performance' which was earlier strongly preoccupied with the elite and idealistic stage scenes. Contrary to it, The Theatre Group of Bombay upheld realistic representations on stage by way of several innovative experiments using the European modern and postmodern techniques. This group encouraged the Indian playwrights to write plays to be abundant in real-life situations for the sake of Indians belonging to various classes. According to Shanta Gokhale,

“The announcement in 1968 by Theatre Group, Bombay, of the Sultan Padamsee Award for Indian plays in English gave much-needed encouragement to a flourishing genre. The award was won by Gurucharan Das for *Larins Sahib*, but also in the competition were Give Patel's *Princess* and Dina Mehta's *Myth Makers*.”<sup>11</sup>

In the succeeding decades, playwrights deviated from the conventional and philosophical representation of their predecessors. The contemporary playwrights sought to articulate the voice of marginalized sections of India. However, the English plays in that period were mostly 'translated' versions of regional languages. The trend of translation into English language from regional tongues became widespread. As far as the subject matter and technical prowess are concerned, 'translated' plays were performed with bold innovations and creative experiments. By recreating legends, myths, histories and folklores the playwrights converted common situations and events

into aesthetic experiments. The plays written in regional languages or translated into English were popularly appreciated in several parts of the country. The translation of regional languages into English remarkably united the eminent theatre personalities from across the country for the national cause. This trend of translation paved the way for a 'national theatre movement'. Such plays dealt with common socio-political and socio-economic issues prevalent in a multicultural country like India. Mostly plays written in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi and Kannada were preferentially translated into English. Plays of Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sirkar and Vijay Tendulkar were staged and published in translated forms. These playwrights tried to explore the socio-psychological conflicts in diverse social conditions.

One of the renowned playwrights of this era is Girish Karnad (1938-2019) who recently passed away on June 10, 2019 in Bangalore. Application of experimental models in plays like *Tughlaq* (1972) and *Hayavadana* (1975) revitalized the dramatic spirit. Through his plays, Karnad critically comments on the socio-cultural and socio-political issues existing in Indian society by making ample use of the rich Indian mythology and history. Karnad establishes his principle of 'return to history' for marching ahead successfully.

*Hayavadana* gives a valuable lesson to Indian English playwrights that the progress of the Indian English drama depends upon its purposeful revisit to the classical Sanskrit and folk plays. Karnad composed eight plays in Kannada. He has very skilfully incorporated the myth of the epic *The Mahabharata* in this play. This experiment distinguished Karnad from his predecessors. His plays were translated into English. His play *Tughlaq* was further translated in some foreign languages such as Hungarian and German. Karnad was honoured with the prestigious award of *Bharatiya Natya Sangha* for his play *Hayavadana*. As an acknowledgement of his immense contribution to Indian English Drama, he was duly awarded with India's highest literary prize, 'the Jnanpith Award', in 1999. As a creative playwright, Karnad gave 'aesthetic embodiment' to normal events and situations.

The next leading playwright in this segment is Vijay Tendulkar. Tendulkar is known as one of the well-known Screen and Television writers, literary essayists, political journalists and social thinkers. As a dramatist in Marathi, Tendulkar remained a dominating force for the past four decades. His total body of work comprises thirty full-

length plays and twenty-three one-act plays. Most of his plays are recognised as the classics of the Modern Indian Theatre. Besides playwriting, Tendulkar has written short stories and television serials. He is the receiver of many prestigious awards such as the Kamadheri Chattopadhaya Award, the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, the Kalidas Sanman Award, the National film Award for best screenplay in 1976, the FilmFare Award for best screenplay in 1980, and in 1984. Tendulkar is mostly remembered for his acute criticism on social hypocrisies, promiscuity, dishonesty, etc., issues existing in the society. Tendulkar achieved world-wide recognition by writing two outstanding plays viz, *Silence! The Court is in Session* in 1967 and *Ghashiram Kotwal* in 1972. These plays focused on agonies and suffocation of the middle-class man. The socio-psychological conflict remains at central position in most of his plays. Recognized as an ‘avant-garde’ Marathi playwright, he represented issues of isolated and alienated humans. His other plays *Sakharam Binder* (1972), *Kanyadan* (1982), *The Vultures* (1982) and *Kamla* (1982) created a furore in the minds of audiences in both the national and international theatres. Most of his plays are abundant in innovations of stage and variations of themes. ‘Sex’ and ‘violence’ are critically exposed in his plays as these are most sensitive problems in Indian society. The characters in his plays are representative victims of sex, violence. Being a playwright of radical and progressive thoughts, he foregrounded a marginalized middle-class individual from mainstream society. As a playwright of modern India, Tendulkar remains consistently realistic in projecting the evils of Indian society. Complexities in human relationship, female degradation on both sexual and social grounds, predicament of the middle-class and lower-class population, the hypocritical practices of the Indian patriarchal society, etc. issues have been quite critically scrutinized in his plays. Tendulkar raises a serious concern over the ruling ‘value system’ which has problematized the survival of the common man in India. This view can be substantiated with what Dr. Sarika Dubey Agarwal says:

“The “middle class”, an emotion-ridden if ultimately elusive concept, has been redefined by Tendulkar as those fighting privilege to escape the economic insecurity (not to mention the indignity). In a country characterized by poverty and inequality, the complex interplay of these factors can have favourable or adverse effects on different regions and on different classes of society. Tendulkar has untapped this group’s position in the class hierarchy and in the

overall power structure, as its environmental vulnerability. Generally, people from the middle class strata are likely to be the greatest sufferers in this process. In what he has portrayed gives a great matter for Tendulkar's ideas to flourish and ripen"<sup>12</sup>

Tendulkar's plays resembled the discourse of the 'progressive theatre' in a distinguished position. Upon reading the plays of Tendulkar, Badal Sirkar and Karnad it becomes clear that there is a fine fusion of the Indian classical dramatic tradition and the European dramatic patterns. Therefore it could be said that tradition and modernity co-exist in their plays.

Badal Sirkar is another leading playwright whose Bengali plays were translated into English. He exposed the existential attitude of modern individuals through his plays viz, *Solution*, *Evam Indrajit* (1962), *That Other History* (1964), *There is Not End* (1971), etc. Known as a 'barefoot playwright'<sup>13</sup>, the theatre became for him a very effective and powerful tool with the view to bring about awareness, he wrote problem plays dealing with socio-economic issues.

Mohan Rakesh is also a well-known Hindi playwright whose play *Adhe Adhure* has been translated into English as *Half House*. The play deals with the consequence of parental discord in family and growing children. Mohan Rakesh revisits historical events in his next two translated plays as *One Day in Ashada* (1958) and *The Great Swans and the Waves* (1902). Mohan Rakesh explores the issue of man-woman relationship in the middle-class Indian society. Though his plays are very few in number compared to other modern Indian playwrights, he has secured a distinctive position in the canon of Modern Indian Drama.

Some women playwrights have contributed to enrich the realm of Indian English Drama. Dina Mehta, Manjula Padmanabhan, P. Sengupta, Mahashweta Devi and Manjula Padmanabhan are most acclaimed playwrights. Mahashweta Devi, a prolific writer, also has written novels and articles. Her Bengali work has been translated into English and French. As far as her dramatic writing is concerned, she dealt with problems of socially marginalized people and their predicament. Her plays articulate voice against deprivation of women, Dalit and children. In her well-known play entitled *Water*, she dealt with the issue of discrimination on grounds of caste and gender in the

Indian society as the play exposes injustice in water distribution to people belonging to lower casts in the rural parts of West Bengal.

Manjula Padmanabhan, the ‘Onassis award’ winner, is a very distinguished playwright. Her dramatic potential finds expression in the play *Harvest*. The play *Harvest* deals with the issue of alienation and marginalization and its consequences. The play criticizes a serious crime committed by a mother who sells her own children for buying rice. The play exposes the dark reality of family life in a slum area of the metropolitan city, Mumbai. Besides her dramatic writing, Padmanabhan has immensely contributed to the field of art and fiction. In fact, it can assuredly be stated that Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan kept the Indian English drama in the mainstream of Indian writing in English. The trend of staging ‘reality as it is’ is directly descended into the dramatic writings of both Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan who sought to redefine the Indian English Drama in their own ways. Compared to Manjula Padmanabhan, Mahesh Dattani proved to be the most prolific playwright for ceaseless production of plays. The Indian English Drama started to be recognized as one of the valuable genres of literature recently due to dynamic changes in its theatrical presentation. Another reason is that new playwrights such as Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan sought to set an innovative trend which attracted audiences and acclaimed much popularity due to their representation of social issues.

Apart from full-length plays of these playwrights, R. Raja Rao has written notable one act plays which are compiled in a volume entitled *The Wisest Fool on Earth and Other Plays* (1996). Like Mahesh Dattani’s plays, Raj Rao’s play centres on the theme of ‘homosexuality’. The play is a monologue which centres on Jaydev, the gay personality. Rao has also written two more plays entitled *The English Professor* and *White Spaces*.

Thus, the above discussion shows that the journey of the Indian English Drama underwent several hurdles to establish itself as a separate genre in the canon of Indian English Literature. However, it reached its zenith with the immense contribution of Mahesh Dattani. Therefore the study of the origin and the development of the Indian English Drama remains insufficient if Dattani’s contribution is not taken into account.

### 1.7 Mahesh Dattani's Plays: A Brief Overview

Mahesh Dattani seems to be greatly influenced both by the Western and the Indian playwrights such as Bernard Shaw, Henrik Ibsen, Tennessee Williams and Vijay Tendulkar. In many of his plays, Dattani has questioned the social hypocrisy on part of the dominant class of society. He raises a concern over the victimization of homosexuals, women, children and people belonging to minority class. He differentiates himself from Girish Karnad in terms of themes, settings, characters, etc. Rather than to represent myths and legends, Dattani foregrounds common people as his protagonists and antagonists. It could be said that Dattani fulfils the expectations of the modern generation.

The present study emphasizes upon Dattani's selected plays and issues he explored in them. But before studying the selected plays in particular, it is relevant to have a brief acknowledgement of his entire body of work. At one point, Dattani can be compared to Harold Pinter with the principle that "a play is meant to be performed" and at the other to George Bernard Shaw and Henrik Ibsen for his persisting incorporation of different contemporary social issues. His total body of work has been published in four subsequent volumes entitled *Collected Plays* (2000) *Collected Plays Vol. II* (2005), *Brief Candle: Three Plays* (2010) and *Me and My Plays* (2014) by Penguin Publication. Most of his plays were staged in Bangalore and Mumbai and broadcast on Radio and B.B.C. The total corpus of his plays is divided into three categories viz, the Radio Plays, the Screen Plays and the Stage plays. The present chapter discusses plays included in the first and second volumes for the purpose of brevity.

During his school and college days, Dattani actively participated in the 'theatre movement'. In his growing age, he acted and directed several plays. He also started his own theatre company named 'Playpen' in 1984. Initially, Dattani found interest in translating and directing plays. Dattani's growing interest in reading the plays of Vijay Tendulkar finally turned himself into a playwright. Dattani used to translate plays from Hindi and Gujarati into English. However, over a certain amount of translating plays, he realised that a mere translation fails to retain the original effect. Besides Vijay Tendulkar, Dattani writing resembles the American playwright Tennessee Williams as both of them emphasize upon the deplorable situations of women in highly turbulent society. However, upon reading Dattani's plays closely, we come across that his female

characters are not just passive recipients of injustice but react strongly against it. Their transgression indicates that women strive for freedom. Dattani himself declares in an interview given to Sachidananda Mohanty as:

“Well, I was particularly impressed by the plays of Vijay Tendulkar. Actually, that was one of the reasons why I decided to write myself, because when I saw plays in Hindi or Gujarati and I managed to acquire the translation, they just didn’t have the same impact. *Silence, the Court is in Session!* Wow, such a brilliant play, but I felt that the translation in English threw away most of the effect. Later on, it was Tennessee Williams. I relate to Tennessee Williams because he writes about vulnerable women in a very violent society. I think I tend to do that as well, although I don’t see my woman as vulnerable, in the sense that they do fight their battles. They are not on the winning side of the battle, and I think I have learnt a lot about dramatic structure.”<sup>13</sup>

In the present position of the Indian English Drama, Mahesh Dattani turned out to be a very powerful and dynamic playwright. With his innovations and experiments, Dattani enriched the domain of Indian English Drama. As a playwright, director, actor and teacher, all in one, Dattani is a versatile personality. He achieved tremendous success in India and abroad. Perhaps Dattani is the quintessential in making ‘drama’ a successful art, lifting it from page and articulating on stage. Dattani’s plays concentrate on ‘what is happening today in the Indian society’ which also causes controversy. Despite causing controversy, his plays mark a benchmark of having a worldwide significance.

Dattani develops a progressive approach towards drama and considers theatre as a platform to represent the plight of the marginalized strata of Indian society. In a very realistic way, Dattani addresses the social issues of homosexuality, gender discrimination, communalism, patriarchy, HIV positive people, child sexual abuse, religious fanaticism, natural disaster, consumerism, etc. By foregrounding such taboo and invisible issues, Dattani kills two birds with one stone; first, he articulates the voice of the marginalised; second he expands the horizon of the Indian English Drama. Dattani, being fond of theatres, prefers himself to be called a ‘theatre personality’ rather than a man of literature. Therefore, he founded his own theatre group ‘Playpen’ which

encouraged new artists to showcase their dramatic potentials. Dattani gives credit for success to this theatre group and responds accordingly in an interview given to Erin B. Mee. He says that he is a successful dramatist due to his own theatre company Playpen and theatre background from childhood. Dattani also mentions that he writes creatively because of this theatre background.

Dattani's education and profession are poles apart. He is a post-graduate in finance and a dramatist by profession. Therefore, it is curious to know how he turned out to be a playwright. During his childhood, Gujarati plays used to be performed in theatres which influenced young Dattani to write and direct plays. The theatrical performance of Gujarati and other regional plays sensitized Dattani towards deep-rooted social issues. Hence, he mostly deals with several issues in order to raise awareness among people. Dattani confesses his growing predilection for theatre and longs for to learn many things which were alien to him. He mentions that he was involved in theatre movement since his childhood. Earlier he translated some European plays.

Dattani adheres to the Gujarati plays as this is a base for his dramatic career. Therefore, it may be said that the Gujarati setting in most of his plays is a sort of influence. Dattani mentions that Madhu Rye laid a great influence on him as far as the projection of the middle class Gujarati hypocrisies is concerned. So far as the subtle illustration of women characters is concerned in his plays, Dattani remains indebted to Vijay Tendulkar especially for the two plays such as *Silence! The Court is in Session!* and *Sakharam Binder*

Apart from Vijay Tendulkar's Marathi plays and the Gujarati plays, it is also found that American playwrights particularly Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams left a huge impact on Dattani's stagecraft. The influence of the American theatrical stagecraft helped him to apply typical Indian dramatic devices and techniques. His deliberate use of dialogue from Hindi and Gujarati languages helps him dramatize Indian linguistic and cultural ethos. Perhaps his attempt is to connect the oriental and occidental worlds together. Dattani's insistence over writing plays in English language is found in his upbringing in the surrounding wherein English is mostly used. Therefore he finds himself at ease writing in this language. Dattani does not address issues of a particular



region in India, rather he portrays common themes which are concerned with the entire nation and hence writing in English is mostly preferable for Dattani.

As a dynamic playwright of our time, Dattani never felt the use of English language could be a stumbling block between his plays and Indian audience. Rather, he produced plays directly in English with the view to develop a 'unique theatre' to be understood and appreciated both by domestic and international audiences. Dattani acknowledged the fact that only the English language could help him to address multi-cultural issues and raise common awareness throughout India to redress misunderstandings at present in Indian society. Dattani always prioritizes performance over language and believes in multi-faceted ways of communication. Dattani is moreover a dramatist not a writer in the true sense of the term because he enlivens his plays when he himself performs them on stage. Dattani mentions that a dramatist should not work in isolation, rather he or she has to be a part of a group of people who work together in theatre. According to him, a playwright can only expose his potential when he associates himself with a theatre movement. It can be said that Dattani believes in the accomplishment of a play when it completes its journey from page to stage.

Dattani's achievement as a successful playwright is to be acknowledged with the contribution of some renowned theatre personalities who rendered invaluable support. Alyque Padamsee is one such theatre figure who is credited to have set Dattani's theatrical career. He presented Dattani's plays in some popular theatres in India and abroad. Dattani received huge public response and critical acclaim due to Padamsee's initiative in performing his plays in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and London. Padamsee's following remark proves Dattani's greatness as:

Lillet Dubey is another theatre personality who embodied Dattani's characters on stage. Besides directing *Dance Like a Man*, she performed the role of Ratna, Jayraj's wife. She also directed *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. In *Thirty Days in September*, Dubey played the leading role of Shanta. Also Dubey has co-directed stage performances with Dattani in many of his plays.

Dattani is a director par excellence. He himself directs the first performance of the play he writes. As mentioned earlier, Dattani believes in the principle that "a play comes to life when it is performed on stage". This principle differentiates drama from the other

genres of literature such as fiction and poetry. BBC Radio 4 has aired Dattani's Radio plays. Dattani preferably directs the first production of his plays as it helps him strengthen stage directions. The first production Dattani thinks paves the way for other directors to perform his plays with proper guidelines.

Dattani is a very sensitive dramatist. He did not indulge in presenting conventional or conservative ideas which have almost become cliché in fiction, poetry and films. Rather he explores some invisible issues which are almost 'taboo' in the conservative atmosphere of Indian society. He shackles people from their illusion and opens their eyes to not only observe but to take necessary steps towards the dynamic social changes. According to him, Indian society needs a strong dose to heal age-old injuries of marginalization, ostracization, suppression, subalternization and so forth. As a social observer, Dattani has enumerated experiences he took in the socio-cultural environment in which he was born and brought up. He expresses his growing concern and disappointment over social issues he deals with in the following opinion.

“They invariably do. Social issues move me and I like to examine ideas from different angles. The plays where the content came first are *On a Muggy Night* and *Final Solutions*. As for the latter, I was asked to write a play about communal tension, and I said ‘what can one write about that other than platitudes? But out of that churning emerged ‘Final Solutions’. Sometimes the characters spoke to me first, as in *Tara* and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Dance Like a Man*, the plot emerged out of a flashback structure where the actors play different generations. Sometimes images make the first impact; then the set.<sup>14</sup>

After discussing diverse aspects related to Dattani's personality, it is essential to study his plays in brief detail. Dattani began his dramatic career with the production of the play entitled *Where There's a Will*. This is his first full-length play exploring the ruling patriarchal ideology in middle-class Gujarati families. Though the play is labelled as a comedy drama, it uncovers hardships of children, wife and other family members under the despotic rule of father Hasmukh. The play highlights the fact that individual freedom is natural and must be given to every human being. The play represents the rigidity of the patriarchal ideology through posthumous influence Hasmukh Mehta, an

autocratic head of the family. He follows the footprints of his own patriarchal father and expects the same from his own son. He looks down upon his son, wife and daughter-in-law. Before Hasmukh dies, he signs a 'Will' which states that his son Ajit will hire the property only when he would reach forty five of his age and will have to follow all business etiquettes laid down by Hasmukh himself under the guidance of Mrs. Kiran Jhaveri, Hasmukh's mistress who comes to stay with Hasmukh's family after his death. After initial disappointment, Ajit, Sonal (Hasmukh's Wife) and Preeti (Ajit's Wife) welcome her and the denouement of the play takes place with a happy ending. In this play Dattani underlines the fact that the head of any family who treats his family with the patriarchal mindset invites problems for himself and the entire family as well.

*Tara* (1990) is the most heart-touching play which criticizes the mindset of the orthodox Indian parents who discriminate between their own son and daughter on grounds of gender. Discrimination against girl child in the contemporary society has become a burning issue. The play highlights the unethical medical practice performed by some doctors for the sake of money. The Patel couple i.e., Mr. Patel and Bharati, give birth to 'Siamese / conjoined' twins Tara and Chandan. The Siamese twins are born with only three legs. A major blood supply to two legs is from Tara's body. Bharat's grandfather, a dominant politician, bribes Dr. Thakkar to carry out a surgery of newly born babies through which two legs are given to Chandan and one to Tara. Tara survives on an artificial leg brought from Jaipur throughout her life. Bharati was herself involved in this complicity. The entire play throws light on the issue of gender discrimination and resultant deplorable situation of women in society. The second leg does not suit Chandan's body and is to be amputated. Finally, Tara dies and Chandan escapes to Landon. He tries to get rid of his tragic past and hence changes his name to Dan. However, the 'guilt consciousness' in Dan's mind makes him restless. Dattani opines that this play centres on the 'selfhood' of both male and female. The male child is expected and extreme care is taken in his upbringing whereas the female child is looked down upon as an unwanted addition to the family. Therefore the play emphasizes upon the unethical and unnatural separation which causes discomfort in the Patel family.

Deviating from the conventional and clichéd themes Dattani undertakes the unbeaten track with the issue of homosexuality which has often been side-lined by novelists,

playwrights and filmmakers yet. This issue was not only new to Dattani but also to the audience who responded to issues of feminism and postcolonialism, etc. so far. Dattani criticizes the fact that the discourse of feminism is avidly accepted and discussed whereas the deliberation on the issue of homosexuality is largely controlled by the conservative thinking. Moreover, the issue of homosexuality is treated as if the Indian society has nothing to do with it.

Dattani foregrounds the issue of homosexuality in the plays viz. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Do the Needful*, *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *Seven steps Around the Fire*. He performed *Bravely Fought the Queen* in 1991 in Mumbai. Subsequently, it was performed in London at the Battersea Arts Centre in the following year. Michael Walling, the director of Border Crossing Theatre Company mentions that the post-Independence India and the European countries like Britain must address the issue of homosexuality on a broader level to free homosexuals from the social and cultural constraints.

The title of the play refers to a poem on the 'Queen of Jhansi'. Along with homosexuality the play highlights. Jiten and Nitin, the Trivedi brothers, run an advertising company. Their wives Dally and Alka are supposedly confined to home to look after their mother-in-law, Baa. Outsiders such as Lalitha and Shridhar are very much involved in the Trivedi family. Other characters such as Daksha, daughter of Jiten, Dally and Praful, brother of Dolly and Alka remain behind the curtain but play constructive roles to design the conflict of the play. Jiten's patriarchal behaviour creates dispute in the family. He avoids his wife and stays with a prostitute for sexual gratification. He forces Alka to marry a person who satisfies Praful sexually. Dattani uses flashback technique in the play to represent exploitation of women on multi-layered levels of stage. Upon reading the plays it becomes clear that men in the family stick to their ego and repression which ultimately victims women for no fault of their own. Women are rather looked down upon as servants for men and treated unwisely.

*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* was first performed in the Tata theatre, Mumbai on Nov 23, 1998. Perhaps this is the first play dealing openly with the issue of homosexuality in the Indian theatre. Dattani portrays homosexual characters in the play that are not stereotypical. Sharad and Deepali seemingly feel comfortable with their sexuality. Yet

both of them display different ways of being gay. Kamlesh and Prakash, passionate lovers of each other, keep changing situations. Kiran who is Kamlesh's sister knows his homosexual nature and accepts it for the sake of his happiness. But she is shocked when she finds that the person with whom Kamlesh fixed her marriage is his own sexual partner. The play in this sense indicates the hidden nature of homosexuality and its non-acceptance in heterosexual society.

Dattani's next play dealing with the dual problem of illicit sex-relationship and homosexuality is *Do the Needful* was broadcast on BBC in 1997. The play is labelled as an unconventional 'romantic comedy'. The characters in the play consider the institution of marriage as a temporary contract to fulfil selfish motives. Despite being reluctant to follow conventions of institution of marriage, Lata gets ready to marry Alpesh who is a homosexual person. Lata has already been in sexual relationship with Salim and Alpesh has homosexual contact with Trilok. Therefore, the proposed marriage between Lata and Alpesh becomes a way out to seek their sexual gratification.

*Seven Steps Around the Fire* was broadcast on BBC in 1999. Earlier the play was entitled *Seven Circles Around the Fire*. The play exposes the predicament of the hijra population living as beggars and prostitutes in India. It criticizes the marginalization of eunuchs from the mainstream heterosexual society. The play revolves around Uma whose character is portrayed as the sole daughter of the Vice-chancellor of Bangalore University and the wife of the Superintendent of Police, Suresh Rao. She is a research scholar in sociology. She uncovers the murder mystery of Kamla. Kamla is reported to be a good-looking hijra who gets murdered by Mr. Sharma, a dominant politician. As a matter of fact, Mr. Sharma's son Subbu is in love with Kamla. Mr. Sharma rejects it and brings about Kamala's murder. Anarkali, another hijra, is cunningly arrested on false conviction. Subbu kills himself on the eve of the marriage his father arranged for him when the present hijra group shows Subbu the photo of his beloved Kamala. At the end of the play Uma succeeds in detecting the murderer i.e., Mr. Sharma himself. Thus, the play displays the unpleasant condition of the hijra community. Hijras are merely allowed to sing and dance at the time of marriage and childbirth and ironically deprived of experiencing these two phases in their own life. In the course of the Uma observes

the fact that Minister Sharma is behind the murder of Kamla and the matter has been hushed up by the corrupt police mechanism.

Dattani's Sahitya Akademi Award winning play *Final Solutions* gave him name and fame. It appeared on stage following the incident of the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1993. The play is a bold portrayal of the communal conflict in India. The play is set in the background of Hindu-Muslim hostility. The use of the 'chorus device' helps audience understand the representatives of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities. The use of 'flashback technique' and multi-layered levels of stage help Dattani to intensify the communal acrimony between two communities i.e. Hindu and Muslim. The mob/chorus is symbolic of Hindu-Muslim representations.

Dattani exposes the lack of human understanding in modern society and the primitive way of thinking process. The play is set in the house of Ramnik Gandhi. Javed and Bobby take shelter in Gandhi's house. Ramnik's act is strongly opposed by his mother Hardika, wife Aruna but supported by daughter Smita. By giving shelter to the two Muslim boys who fortunately escape from the hostile Hindu mob, Ramnik wants to rectify the blunder his grandfather and father committed by burning the shop of a Muslim person. Ramnik's mother plays double roles as Daksha and Hardika symbolically representing a single woman who experienced two generations. The conversation among two characters reveals the conspiracy, misunderstanding, prejudice and politics which eventually ruined both communities on social and moral grounds. Like other plays *Final Solutions* deals with the conflict between 'tradition and modernity'. But thematically speaking the play centres on the issue of communalism. The play uncovers the historical background of the Hindu-Muslim riots over various concerns in India.

Dattani's second volume entitled *Collected Plays*. Vol. II was published by Penguin Books India in 2005. This compilation also includes his Stage Plays, Screen Plays and Radio Plays. The second volume republishes two erstwhile published plays such as *Seven Steps Around the Fire* and *Dance Like a Man*. Hence the brief review of the second volume begins directly with the discussion of the play *Dance Like A Man*.

In 1989 Dattani came out with the second play *Dance Like a Man*. It explores the conflict between tradition and modernity. Besides, the play is a good critique of fixed gender roles in the orthodox Indian society. Jairaj is willing to become a dancer and adheres to the idol of Natraj despite his father's reluctance and strong opposition. His wife Ratna is very much interested in the dance profession. However, the head of the family forbids the couple from pursuing their hobby of dancing. Dattani through this play highlights the fact that fixed gendered notions are prohibiting many people from exploring their potentials.

The third play in this volume is *Thirty Days in September*. It was first performed at the Prithvi Theatre in Mumbai on May 31, 2001. This play deals with one of the sensitive and gruesome issues i.e., 'child sexual abuse'. The play projects the horror and the pain in the mother-daughter relationship. It opens with Mala responding to the counsellor. Mala is the daughter of Shanta. Since her childhood, Mala has been frequently abused by uncle Vinay who is Shanta's own brother. Shanta throughout her life maintains silence over Mala's complains of sexual abuse. Mala in her youth behaves hysterically and becomes addicted to sex. Due to her post-traumatic mental disorder, she longs for sex with any person she meets. Simultaneously she also accuses her mother for ruining her life. However, at the end of the play, Mala becomes sympathetic towards her mother when she realizes that her mother was also victim of the sexual abuse by the same person. What Shanta bears silently throughout the play and why she does not rescue her daughter from sexual assault is all out of her financial need which is supported by her own brother, Vinay, the abuser. Mala gradually recovers from her hysteric behaviour and realizes that both of them are striving miserably to survive.

The fourth play in this volume is *Clearing the Rubble*, a Radio play, was broadcast on January 17, 2002 on BBC Radio 4. Dattani was commissioned to write a play to be broadcast on the anniversary day of the Bhuj earthquake in 2001. The play deals with a natural disaster i.e., earthquake which devastated lives of people. Jeffrey, an English journalist, observes the consequences of the earthquake and writes about the hardships of the people. Jeffrey meets Salim, a young Muslim boy who is in search of his mother and sister who are dumped under the debris. Salim reveals discrimination on the part of government in the rescue operation. The impartiality on the part of government mechanism in the distribution of goods and supply of medical facilities benefits the

Hindu community and the Muslim community is left to suffer on their own. Salim exposes the injustice against the Muslim community on part of the government in addressing their problems after the earthquake takes place.

The fifth play is *Mango Soufflé* which was produced by Sanjeev Shah. This screenplay is based on *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. Dattani highlights the taboo issue of homosexuality. The play projects gay / lesbian relationship in the higher society of metropolitans. Dattani himself speaks on the exploration of such relationship as,

*The Swami and Winston* is the sixth play in this research work. It was first broadcast on June 3, 2000 on BBC Radio 4. The character of Uma reappears in the play. Along with the issue of communalism, the play exposes religious fanaticism. An English lady comes to India to visit her brother and gets killed in the car of a Muslim driver who is arrested and harassed. Uma, being a sleuth, uncovers the murder mystery and finds out that the ‘conspiracy to murder’ was committed by Sitaram Trivedi. Jeremy Mortimer, in his ‘A Note on the Play’, says:

“Still researching her thesis on violence in India, and having one solved case to her credit, Uma comes into contact with religious fanaticism at its most extreme when investigating the death of a member of the English aristocracy. ... But why did Lady Montefiore visit the ashram in the first place when she had little interest in the Hindu religion, and what can be possible motive of her murder?”

15

The film on Dattani’s play *Morning Raga* was released on October 29, 2004 as a part of the Cairo Film Festival. This play is a unison of the two worlds and two generations. It juxtaposes modernity and tradition. Based on the theme of *Dance Like a Man* this play exposes the predilection for music in the young generation and opposition to it by the old generation.

The eighth play entitled *Uma and the Fairy Queen* was broadcast on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2003 on BBC. The character of Uma Rao reappears for the third time. Jeremy Mortimer explains the theme of the play as:



“And the play’s the thing-in this instance a special production of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* put on to mark Independence Day. Things go horribly wrong when Michael Forsyth, the leading actor playing Oberon is kidnapped, only to reappear just in time to play his part. But he disappears again before the end, and is found shot dead in the greenroom by Nila Ahmed, his famous Pakistani wife and co-star. To make matters worse, it’s rumoured that their marriage is on the rocks. Uma Rao is intrigued by the whole affair, gets to know Nila, finds out that she has been married before and suspects that there’s more to this than either problems. It seems to Uma as she tries to sleep through the long hot night, after her husband has once again been berating her because she has no children, that the clue lies somewhere in the play, and a certain line ‘I do but beg a little challenging boy’ goes round and round in her head. With the help of Liam Tate, British cultural Ambassador, Uma outwits her husband as usual, and gradually unravels the mystery of why Michael Forsyth was killed, although she is left finally with her own very personal dilemma.”<sup>16</sup>

The ninth play in the second volume is *Ek Alag Mausam*, a film which was released on February 4, 2005. The play deals with the predicament of HIV positive people. Characters in the play are shown as HIV positive people counting down their days in a hell of terrifying seclusion. Dattani represents the agony of those deceased who are dying of AIDs. Some of them have no fault of their own and knowledge of being affected is a shocking feeling to them. Aparna is one such character who wishes to give birth to a baby but is advised to terminate pregnancy due to her disease. She suffers from double shock: one is her disease and the other is her dissertation from her husband. Aparna takes shelter in the organisation which takes care of HIV positive people where she meets George, a diseased person and an Orphan girl Paro. George inspires Aparna to live a positive life as:

“Forget for a moment that we are HIV. Forget that we have five, seven, ten, twelve years to live. Forget that and then think of our life together ... We are doing to ourselves.”<sup>17</sup>

*The Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child* is the tenth and last play in this volume. It is included in the segment of a Radio play which was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on

October 29, 2000. Anna Gosweb is an English lady revisits India to help Jaman who lives in a village in India. The storyline is that Anna Gosweb had an affair with Jaman Gopalia twenty years ago; who was a farmer in a village of Gujarat Anna meets him in Goa. After twenty years, Anna receives a letter from Jaman asking for one thousand rupees assuring to repay her soon after good harvest. When Anna reaches the village, she learns that the village is in drought and Jaman committed suicide. Anna saves her dying wife and daughter and returns to her home.

Thus, all these plays are abundant and varied in issues and stylistic content. Over a period of twenty-five years, Dattani has written plays on social issues and is recognised as a serious playwright of India. As far as the English language is concerned, Dattani is a successful Indian playwright because of his purposeful use of Indian English. Without distorting facts, Dattani projected reality as it exists. As a director par excellence, Dattani reaches the audience directly with his message. His intention was not to impress the audience but to sensitize them to respond to the issues such as the inhuman treatment rendered to the homosexuals, HIV positive persons, communalism, child sexual abuse, gender discrimination, patriarchal dominance, etc.

Thus, this research work attempts to present a scrutiny of different social issues and their consequences through the selected plays. Dattani writes on social issues which affected the post-Independence Indian society. Exploration of the vulnerable existence of the Indian middle class has always been a serious concern in many of his plays. The whole body of his work comprises Stage Plays, Screen Plays and Radio Plays. In almost all of his plays appeared in above three segments, Dattani draws attention to social issues of 'homosexuality', 'gender discrimination', 'patriarchal dominance', 'domestic violence', and 'communalism', 'religious fanaticism', 'child sexual abuse', 'female exploitation', 'poverty', 'natural disasters', 'disease', etc. For the purpose of brevity in this research, only eight plays have been selected to study the exploration of social issues. Like George Bernard Shaw, Henrik Ibsen and Tennessee Williams, Dattani wants to use theatre as a powerful tool for bringing about necessary social change. He has depicted marginalized people who are considered 'non-normative, other and dependable' in a society where stereotyped ideology subverts their position.

The present thesis is an attempt to project social issues as the major themes with which the playwright deals. The thesis is a critical commentary on what makes Dattani write

on various social issues. Upon reading Dattani's life and works, it becomes clear that Dattani has been strongly influenced by playwrights such as Vijay Tendulkar, George Bernard Shaw, Henrik Ibsen, Tennessee Williams, etc. In one way, Dattani imitated their works and in another way, he juxtaposed 'tradition and modernity' to explore the current scenario of Indian society. The present thesis is an attempt to foreground the nature of different social issues and the resultant angst of homosexuals, women, children and minority population living in a state of marginalization and suffering of social exclusion. Simultaneously it is also an attempt to analyse these plays in the larger social context. Out of the total body of Dattani's work, eight plays have been selected in the present study and studied in the light of social issues such as 'homosexuality', 'gender discrimination', 'patriarchy', 'child sexual abuse', 'communalism' and 'religious fanaticism'.

Apart from discussing the genre of 'drama' with special reference to the Sanskrit plays, Modern Indian plays, pre-Independence and post- Independence Indian English Plays and Mahesh Dattani's plays, this introductory chapter further presents objectives of the research work, hypothesis, methodology and techniques to be used and finally the significance of the research work.

### **1.8 Chapterization:**

The thesis is worked out through a total of five chapters. The second chapter deals with the 'issue of homosexuality' in the three plays selected for this research work. Prior to the analysis of these plays, an attempt is being made study the emergence and development of gay and lesbian movements from the decade of 1960, queer theory, the concept of 'homosexuality' in the Western context. As Dattani contextualized Indian setting in his plays, so it became relevant to study homosexuality in the Indian context with special reference to 'Section 377 in the Indian Penal Code', efforts of the NGOs like 'Naz Foundation' to decriminalise homosexuality, the 'judgements of the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court' with respect to criminalization and decriminalization of homosexuality. After studying the 'issue of homosexuality' in both Western and Indian contexts, the research work analyses the three selected plays in this chapter. The analysis emphasizes upon the predicament of homosexuals, violence, social exclusion, vulnerable existence, deprivation of several human rights and opportunities, isolation, psycho-social disturbance, etc. In this chapter, each play will

be discussed separately and some of prominent and relevant dialogues will be quoted to contextualize the 'issue of homosexuality'.

In the third chapter, the research work focuses upon the three interrelated issues explored in plays entitled *Tara*, *Where There's a Will*, and *Thirty Days in September*. The incorporation of these issues projects the vulnerable situation of women and children in middle class families. Tara is the victim of 'gender discrimination' as she is denied two legs due to her female gender despite the fact that she could have survived with two legs. The research work critically studies the role of Tara's parents in the physical separation of their children and their attitude of partiality in bringing up male child and female child. Injustice against women is the common theme in these plays. India is one of those countries where the patriarchal ideology is still in progress. Dattani exposes this patriarchal ideology in *Where There's a Will*. The research work highlights exploitation of women and children under the patriarchal authority of a male patriarch, Hasmukh Mehta. It further proves the fact that patriarchal dominance oppresses women and children. The research work finds that the excessive patriarchal power leads to hostility and domestic discord which is evident in the behaviour of Ajit, Sonal and Preeti. The present study discusses the exploration of the issue of 'child sexual abuse' *Thirty Days in September*. This plays underlines the fact that children are not always safe with their relatives and neighbours. The research work analyses the consequences of sexual abuse which victimizes both children and parents.

The fourth chapter deals with the 'issues of communalism' and 'religious fanaticism' in the two selected plays *Final Solutions* and *The Swami and Winston*. Prior to the analysis of these two plays, an attempt has been made to study the issues of communalism and religious fanaticism. The research work studies factors related to communal animosity between Hindu and Muslim communities shown in *Final Solutions*. Communal clashes are the results of different ideological inculcations of both the Hindus and the Muslims. Communal ideology exists in the behavioural patterns of those people who take disadvantage of violence. Due to contradictory behavioural patterns, communal violence takes place. The present study also points out that politics does play a destructive role in bringing about communal violence. Unemployed youths like Javed are easily motivated to carry out riots and murders. Title of the play *Final Solutions* itself is a question asked by the playwright to all Indians to think over it and

come out with a sustainable solution. Like communalism, the issue of ‘religious fanaticism’ has been foregrounded in Dattani’s *The Swami and Winston*. A few religious fanatics like Sitaram Trivedi destroy religious ethics for their monetary benefits. Minority people are often victimised of the fanatic ideology which is found in the characterization of Charles Montefiore, Lady Montefiore who are Christians and a Muslim Taxi Driver. Therefore the research work looks into consequences aroused in India due to ‘issues of communalism and religious fanaticism’.

The fifth chapter is the summing up of the overall study and findings of the research work. It states conclusions concerning reflections of different social issues in the selected plays. It considers how enduringly Mahesh Dattani foregrounds issues of ‘homosexuality’, ‘gender discrimination’, ‘patriarchy’, ‘child sexual abuse’, ‘communalism’, ‘religious fanaticism’, ‘natural disaster’, ‘disease’, etc., with the intention to shackle the illusion of people. As a matter of fact Dattani is the first Indian English playwright who has dared pull taboo issues out of the closet. It is not the case that playwrights prior to the Dattani did not deal with social issues. However their portrayal was bereft of realism and poignancy. Most of them imitated Western subject matters, portrayed ancient Indian myths, legends and dealt with high class urban life. Before the arrival of Dattani’s plays most of the Indian English plays appeared in translated versions from various regional languages like Marathi, Hindi or Kannada. Dattani directly wrote in English and his localization of English language helped him do a realistic representation of what is happening around us. Considering this, an attempt is being made in this research work to study different social issues with special reference to the selected plays and to state findings.

### **1.9 Objectives of the Research Work:**

The present research work is planned with some objectives in mind which are to be accomplished. These objectives are as follows:

- A. To study the origin and development of Indian drama:
- B. To study the contribution of Mahesh Dattani in the development of Indian English drama
- C. To understand homosexuals’ plight in the Indian context through Dattani’s selected plays

- D. To analyse issues of ‘gender discrimination’, ‘patriarchy’ and ‘child sexual abuse’
- E. To observe issues of communalism and religious fanaticism

### **1.10 Hypothesis:**

The present research work attempts to validate the hypothesis which was stated in the beginning. It finds out that the selected plays explore social issues of homosexuality, gender discrimination, patriarchy, child sexual abuse, communalism and religious fanaticism to foreground deplorable position of homosexuals, women, children and minorities. The projection of social injustice and social realism of marginalised individuals through the conflict between tradition and modernity prove selected plays to be the problem plays.

### **1.11 Methodology and Techniques Used:**

From the standpoint of the social and cultural milieu, the research work attempts to present the thematic analysis of each play commenting on characters, their social situations, their implications and reactions. For the detailed thematic analysis, the researcher is analysing the primary sources such as *Collected Plays* (2000), *Collected Plays Vol. II* (2005), *Me and My Plays* (2014). For the theoretical analysis of social issues represented in Dattani’s plays, the researcher refers to secondary sources such as books written or edited by eminent authors and editors. Few of them are Marjorie Boulton, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Aparna Bhargava Dharwadkar, Michel Foucault, Hoshang Merchant, R. Raj Rao, Jyoti Puri, Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, Simone de Beauvoir, Beena Agarwal, Anjali Multani, Mohini Khot, Kamla Bhasin, Sylvia Walby, Kate Millett, Nancy Whittier, Jitendra Narayan, Ram Ahuja, Bipin Chandra, Azgar Ali Engineer, etc. The researcher is browsing online journals, articles, blogs and websites and will cite their web links properly in the reference list. Besides, the researcher takes into account Dattani’s own opinions from the interviews conducted by different scholars like Erin B Mee, Sachidananda Mohanty, Laxmi Subramanian, Anjali Multani, etc. All the citation entries will be mentioned in the reference list at the end of each chapter by using MLA Style Sheet, 8<sup>th</sup> edition.

### **1.12 Significance of the Research Work:**

The Indian English plays prior to Dattani's plays portrayed conventional themes. Compared to them, novelists had attracted a great attention of the audience and readers. That's why the present study attempts to focus on the plays of a playwright who enlightened the spirit of Indian Drama in English. Mahesh Dattani offered a powerful social consciousness which shackled the illusion and conservative beliefs of society. His innovative ideas represent the evils of society. His body of work gives a lot of attention to current burning issues. Each of his plays addresses a significant problem existing in our society. The present study is not only an attempt to display social issues in the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani but also critically examine some discursive aspects involved in them. He focuses on the problems of everyday life and living. These problems are individual as well as social ones. Therefore, the research will be helpful to literature lovers and scholars as well as common readers to understand various social issues with which Mahesh Dattani is dealing with. It will also be helpful to the Ph.D. and M.Phil. students to understand issues like homosexuality, gender discrimination, child sexual abuse, communalism and religious fanaticism. The study will motivate the deprived and subaltern strata of society to establish their voice firmly. In this study, an attempt will be made to find out practical solutions for eradicating some social issues. From this point of view, the subject of this research work is significant.

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## Chapter: Two

### **The ‘Issue of Homosexuality’ in *Seven Steps Around the Fire, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* and *Do the Needful***

#### **2.1 Introduction:**

Mahesh Dattani's selection of unexplored issues in his plays separates him from the contemporary playwrights. Among many issues that he incorporated in his plays ‘homosexuality’ is the most sensitive issue which shackled people from illusion in India. Regardless of the fact that it is difficult to process the issue of ‘homosexuality’, the theatre-goers and readers acknowledged it. Dattani makes us think, condemn and remark on the regrettable state of homosexuals and the outlook of the standard heterosexuals and the exploitative limitations of Section 377. In this chapter, an attempt is being made to study the issue of homosexuality in the light of the Western theory including ‘Gay and Lesbian Studies’, and ‘the Queer Theory’. The theoretical framework considers the issue of homosexuality in the Indian context too. This chapter focuses upon provisions made in Section 377, attempts to repeal it through the petitions and trials conducted in the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court, critical writings of Dr. R. Raja Rao, Hoshang Merchant, Ruth Vanita, Saleem Kidwai, etc. After this discussion on the issue of homosexuality, the analysis of the three selected plays namely in the light of the issue of homosexuality is presented. For contextualizing the issue, some relevant dialogues from each of three plays have quoted with proper citation.

#### **2.2 The Western Theory:**

The decades of the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the rise of the Gay Studies and Lesbian Studies. Both the discourses thrived broadly in succeeding decades. Alongside the African – American women's activist developments, both the Gay and Lesbian Studies anticipated themselves as liberal movements. The activists of both the movements strived to accomplish social, political and economic rights for gays and lesbians equivalent to heterosexuals. As there were two separate movements, for example, the Gay Studies and the Lesbian Studies, they had a few logical inconsistencies in their points of view. The gay individuals regularly thought of themselves associated with men whereas lesbian to women. The lesbians were related with feminists’ movements. The lesbians criticized the gay movement for inculcating ‘anti-female’ attitude of the

ruling patriarchal ideology. Despite such logical inconsistencies, the commitment of the two developments turned into a firm foundation for the ascent of the Queer Theory. The Queer Theory incorporates the basic works of gay, lesbian and women's activists. It does not delimit itself to compositions. The Queer Theory likewise upholds variations in several things, for example, cross-dressing, cross-sexuality, trans-sexuality, and so forth. In spite of the fact that the term, 'queer' was frequently utilized censoriously for marking male and female 'same-sex' as socially degenerate and unnatural, it was generally embraced from 1990s by gays and lesbians to make it a lifestyle and an insightful discourse.

The word 'queer' has various implications. It very well may be a thing, descriptive word, or an action. In simple words, it holds a meaning that is different from the normal. The Queer Theory is a discourse which studies interrelations among socio-cultural contradictions, transgender desires, transsexuality, etc. The portrayals of these interrelations are represented in writing, films, music, pictures, artistic creations, and so forth. The term is considered as 'reconciliatory' one to interpret marginalizing social orientations and a theoretical model which has been developed from the gay and lesbian studies. The term 'Queer' is firmly associated with the term homosexuality. A Hungarian psychologist Karoly Meria Benkert coined the word 'homosexuality' in the year 1869. However, until 1890, it was hardly used until sexologist Havelock Ellis adopted it.

The term 'homosexuality' compared to gay and lesbian or queer, is less discussed theoretically. Around the decade of 1960s, the liberationists began to utilize the word 'gay' which is a 19th century misused slang term meaning 'a woman of doubtful morality'. In spite of being less discussed the term 'homosexuality' has deliberately been used to counter the binary oppositional term 'heterosexuality'. Terms like 'gay', 'lesbian', and 'queer' follow the verifiable improvement of the idea of same-sex love. However, they are frequently misjudged and distorted by common people. Whatever may be the linguistic development in this case; the real undertones of words like gay, lesbian or queer signify the same sex desires. With respect to several discussions of these problematizing words, James Davidson rather relevantly comments:

“Queer is in fact the most common solution to this modern crisis of utterance, a word so travelled it is actually at home in the 19th century drawing rooms accommodating itself to widespread insinuation, on the street of the nineties, where it relates its profile to that of empowering slogan.”<sup>1</sup>

‘Queer’ is the result of the discussions and the development of lesbian and gay identification in socio-cultural dimensions that experience times of mankind's history. In *Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman* (1955) Sigmund Freud builds up the hypothesis of ‘female sexual reversal’. His hypothesis is based on an eighteen years old girl who is beautiful and clever and comes from a well-to-do family. However, the girl has been infatuated by a woman ten years senior to her. According to Freud, the woman was of doubtful character. He remarks in the beginning of the investigation that homosexuality in a woman is not significantly less normal and glaring and this reality has been disregarded both by law and psychoanalytic research. He says that the law has disregarded woman's homosexuality and psychoanalysis overlooked it not on the grounds that it is excessively present and obvious in society. Freud comes to deduce in his case that in every single ordinary individual, an impressive proportion of oblivious or inactive homosexuality is very much present. Notwithstanding, the ‘homosexuality’ that is available in a woman needs some exceptional factor that is ‘libidinal’ reminder or surplus as Freud has termed to convert the homosexuality and thereby making the woman homosexual.

During the 1970s, researchers claimed that earlier there was a fixed, stable, and exceptional way of life as a gay man or a lesbian woman in history. M. H. Abrams says:

“A major endeavour was to identify and to reclaim the works of non-heterosexuals writers from Plato to Walt Whitman, Oscar Wilde, Marcel Proust, Andre Gide, W.H. Auden and James Baldwin and from Plato to Greek poet Sappho of Lesbos to Virginia Woolf, Adrienne Rich, and Audre Lorde. The list included writers (William Shakespeare and Christina Rossetti examples) who represented in their literary works homoerotic subject matter but whose sexuality the available biographical evidence leaves uncertain.”<sup>2</sup>

Abrams, notwithstanding, further notices that with the development of the perspectives and investigative techniques for Derrida, Foucault, and some different poststructuralists during the 1980s and 1990s, the earlier presumptions of unique, stable, fixed identity were put to question. In view of the poststructural notions, fields of 'gay' studies and 'queer' theory were given force by scholars like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Jonathan Dollimore, and Judith Butler. In fact, gay studies and queer theory were already reinforced by some pioneering efforts made by Oscar Wilde and Michel Foucault. Goldman and Wolfreys in their essay, 'Works on the Wild(e) Side Performing, Transgendering and Queering: Gay Studies/ Queer Theory' mention:

“Wilde’s writing, his life and his ‘iconic queer status’ and Foucault’s founding works on sexuality are touchstones in the work of Sedgwick, Dollimore and Butler and many other gay and queer theorists.”<sup>3</sup>

Michel Foucault, in his *History of Sexuality* (1990) demonstrates the cultural emergence and the construction of homosexuals as species. The notion of ‘homosexuality’ has been talked in Foucault’s writing with discourse of ‘resistance’, which involves affirmation. Foucault further talks about ‘gay’ and ‘transgression’. ‘Identity’ is an aspect of human social nature. Oscar Wilde in the 20th century seems to have embodied many transhistorical models of homosexuals.

Gay Studies and Queer Theory deal with political consequences, advantages and disadvantages of culturally fixed categories of sexual identities, their marginalization and diversion from the mainstream heterosexual society. Irrespective of the fact that the obvious objective of gay studies and the queer theory appear to be comparable, we come across certain logical inconsistencies in their exercises. Their terminologies likewise determine a few logical inconsistencies. For this situation, as has been referenced by Goldman and Wolfreys, we can say that the queer theory is the predominant force during the 1990s and is viewed as a heritage of earlier, gay studies of the 1970s. The gay studies has some closer associations with the lesbian studies and lesbians with feminists. Consequently, the queer theory appears to have given a voice to those classes, which are regularly underestimated by gay and lesbians. These are, for example, ‘bisexuals’, ‘transsexuals’ and ‘sado-masochists’. However, though the queer theory

has foregrounded those voices, it was also criticized simultaneously for quietening their voices and bringing them under one category.

In this way the queer theory itself is by all accounts in a confusing state and affected by post-structural notions, for example, identity, sexuality, power, and *résistance*. Nonetheless, it is obvious that the existence of the queer theory is impossible without some pioneering efforts made by the gay and lesbian studies. In this manner, the term, 'queer', gains various implications, for example, odd, irreducible, ambiguous, questionable, unidentifiable, confounding, and so on.

Alan Sinfield, in his book, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and Queer Movement* (1994), utilizes queer and gay words for separating phases in history. He utilizes the term 'queer' for a specific historical phase, which was influenced by the writings of Wilde, prevailed in the 20th century and turned into a generalization. Sinfield's book explores the way Wilde embodied gay life before he faced trials which ultimately put an end-mark to his career as a playwright. However, the book mentions that the trial gave Wilde an identity as the most famous gay personality since the time of Socrates. The book further stresses upon the notion of 'effeminacy'. The representation of gay man became a stereotype in Wilde's dramatic writing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick was actively involved in the Queer Movement and AIDS Campaign. Her essay 'Jane Austin and the Masturbating Girl' brought her some problems. Her first book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (1985) opened new vistas for gay studies. The book is a critical account of the 19th century literature with an analysis of 'homosexuality', 'homosociality' and 'homophobia'. She exhibits the connection between male homosexual and homosocial desires and structures for keeping up and transmitting man-centric power. In another outstanding book, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Sedgwick contends that modern western culture is inadequate if it doesn't think about critical analysis of modern homo/hetero definition. She further notices that critical analysis should start from the 'decentred' point of view of modern gay theory. Jonathan Dollimore utilizes the term 'sexual dissidence' to clarify the sort of 'resistance' that operates in terms of gender that frequently loses the opposition between the dominant and the subordinate. He says that the literature, histories, and the subcultures of sexual dissidence which are regularly

missing from current literary psychoanalytic and social debates demonstrate surprisingly illuminating in the discourse of queer theory. Dollimore takes recourse to Derrida's 'deconstructive' technique of binary opposition such as subversion/containment, dominant/marginal or centre or margin, etc. Dollimore clearly says that:

“The dissidence may not be only repressed by dominant (coercively/ideologically) but in a sense actually produced by it, hence consolidating the powers which it ostensibly challenges. This gives rise to the subversion/ containment debate, one of the most important areas of dispute in contemporary cultural theory.”<sup>4</sup>

His subsequent discourse on 'homosexuality' in his writing investigates that the nullification of homosexuality is its symbiotic centrality, which is opposite to heterosexuality. That is the reason subversion or marginalization of homosexuality is another centre for it. Queer theorists disassembled the oppositions such as male/female, heterosexual/ homosexual, and natural/unnatural. Such oppositions strengthened and assorted things into two categories in which the first category prevailed with power, centrality, etc. whereas the second is downgraded, side-lined and subverted in several spheres of society. Taking this into account, Adrienne Rich in an important essay of 1980, 'Compulsive Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' coined the term 'lesbian continuum' which is explained by M. H. Abrams as:

“a way of stressing how far-ranging and diverse is the spectrum of love and bonding among women, including female friendship, the family relationship between mother and daughter and women's partnership and social groups, as well as overtly physical same-sex relations.”<sup>5</sup>

Queer theory additionally dismisses the “essentialists” presumption that heterosexual and homosexual are universal and trans-historical types of human subjects. Both heterosexuals and homosexuals are less biologically constructed but more culturally constructed due to different discursive circumstances. In Michel Foucault's first volume of *History of Sexuality* (1976) it is stated that medical and legal discourses have constructed the identity of homosexuals.

### 2.3 'Homosexuality' in the Indian Context:

Except the western discourse of the queer theory, Indian queer theorists and activists have also tried their best to enrich the domain of the queer theory. However, other theorists of western origin have captured the interests of researchers and academicians in India. Therefore it is necessary to do more research in this field in order to give exposure to the voice of homosexuals in India. There is dearth of research, discussion and awareness regarding homosexuality. Vanita Ruth and Saleem Kidwai express their serious concern over the dearth. They point out that there is a

“...studied silence maintained by the Indian academy on the subject of homosexuality. While avidly picking other kinds of critical theory generated in the Western academy, such as Marxism, feminism, deconstruction and postcolonial theory, the Indian academy has by and large avoided gay and lesbian studies.”<sup>6</sup>

Hoshang Merchant speaks on the term the term 'homosexuality'. He says:

“There is no such beast in Zoology like 'homosexual'. It is an invitation of late nineteenth century European science, half Greek (GK 'homo'= 'same') and half Latin ('Sexual being Latin in root'). It denotes not a person but a category that several sensitive persons, obliging science, have tried to fit themselves into. NRI gays in Trikon (Sane Jose California) have concocted a terminology for Gays: 'Samlingan' for the sexual activity 'Samlinga' for 'homosexual' i.e. a literal translation of Western terms. ...As Foucault reminds us in *History of Sexuality*, sex is not modern, talking about it is.”<sup>7</sup>

In particular, Raja Rao acquires a prominent place in the canon of the 'gay writing' in India. He is perceived as a public force of the Indian gay writings all over the world. His lucid writing represents gay issues. His famous novel *Boyfriend* (2003) has been translated into the French and Italian languages. The film *BomGay* is based on six of his poems. He succeeded in his struggle to introduce a new subject entitled 'Alternative Literature II: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Writing in India' at the department of English, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune. Rao, along with

Dibyajyoti Sharma, has also edited a book entitled, *Whistling in the Dark: Twenty-One Queer Interviews* (2009). The book is quintessential in the sense that it uncovers the voice of homosexuals in India.

Rao with a couple of former students formed a group called 'Queer Studies Circle' (QSC) IN 1999. It was a support group, as he himself says, concerned with intellectual, sociocultural, rural and political aspects of homosexuals in India. In his above-mentioned book, he talks about sex queer identities in India. These are 'gay', 'bi', 'MSM', (Men who have sex with men) and so forth. R. Raj. Rao communicates his distress, for he was not allowed to introduce a subject LGBT literature in the Dept. of English of Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune. Rao mentions that this course was rejected assuming that students would not accept it. In order to fortify his battle, he wrote:

“India is not just a land of Khajuroho and the Kamsutra and the ghazal as a lyric form that celebrated homosexual love, there is a whole host of myth pertaining to same-sex love that surround our very god and goddesses.”<sup>8</sup>

R. Raj. Rao's statement bears resemblance with what Hoshang Merchant says in his book *Yaraana* (1999) as:

“The Oriental male like the Oriental gods, is polymorphous perverse. Sexuality in the East has always been a continuum rather than a category. There is a variety of gods in the non-Islamic East and it is nothing but arrogance in this world to say there is only one god or to say there is only one sexual play.”<sup>9</sup>

Thus both Raj and Merchant here support the presence of homosexuality, its variety, assortment, perversity, and transgressed nature. The prime argument of the queer theorists and activists is the mainstreaming of queer identity and treating gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals equivalent to heterosexuals. Urvashi Vaid, in her book, says that objectives of such mainstreaming ought to be for “civil rights for lesbian and gay people and our integration into mainstreaming of politics, law and society.”<sup>10</sup>



Different nations like Canada, Spain, the Netherlands, South Africa, and a few states in the USA have attempted to bring homosexuals into the mainstreaming by upholding and legalizing marriages of same-sex lovers. These countries have acknowledged homosexuality equivalent to heterosexuality. They are making huge efforts to give homosexuals worldwide recognition and support. However, in India ‘homosexuality’ has been stigmatized as ‘unnatural’ and ‘immoral’. R. Raj. Rao says:

“In India, the archaic 19th century laws such as Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), authored by T.B. Macaulay, the very man who introduced English education in this country in 1835, must be abolished.”<sup>11</sup>

It could be said that homophobia in India is the result of colonial reign and subsequent emergence of Indian nationalism which strengthened the roots of heteronormativity. The homophobic discourse kept developing during the post-Independence period until recently on both social and legal grounds. The horrible picture of heteronormative discourse can be seen through attack on Balbir Krishnan on 6<sup>th</sup> Jan 2012 during the Exhibition of Erotic Works by unidentified assailant in Delhi.

Queer theorists look forward to queer culture as a counter culture. By doing so, they try to oppose and challenge mainstream assumptions in their own way. R. Raj. Rao refers to ‘the Beat Generation’ in the 1950s and ‘the Hippies’ during the 1960s and 70s. These generations, according to him, have opposed the values of the majority and worked for their upliftment. The queer identity is comprehended as subversive and transgressive. Queer theorists additionally do not reject this claim but instead acknowledge it as a result of their disagreement to the heterosexual ideology. Heteronormativity believes in only ‘penile- vaginal’ intercourse as natural and all other forms unnatural. In this manner, ‘transgressive sexuality’ upholds the idea of multiple sorts of sexual intercourse and does not bother about promiscuity. It foregrounds all forms of sexual activity besides vaginal intercourse. Heterosexuals believe only in vaginal intercourse in the light of the fact that only this kind of sexual activity is equipped for leading to pregnancy and childbirth. However, advancement in medical sciences such as sex reassignment surgeries, test-tube babies have offered impulse to queer activists to raise their voice and defend multiple sorts of sexual intercourse. These forms include anal sex, oral sex and masturbation. R. Raj. Rao very critically says:

“In queer theory, the anus is not just an artifice in the body for the discharge of excrement. Like the vagina in feminism; it is a political site, with all its implications of entry, exit, surrender and feminization of the male body.”<sup>12</sup>

However, the ‘transgression’ is not much noticeable in real life situations. Rather it is represented through literature, arts, theatre, cinema, and painting. Therefore, painters like Bhupen Khakhar; filmmakers like Riyad Wadia and writers like Mahesh Dattani, Raj Rao, Vikram Seth, Sunita Namjoshi and Hoshang Merchant have given rise to ‘transgressive’ sexuality through their work. They attempted to set an alternate model through the canon of gay literature in India. Despite the fact that there are some other writers writing about gay issues, the literature is seldom included in the mainstream literature. The gay literature compared to the feminist and other literature is backward in its degree of production, availability of readers and research. Some writers have merely portrayed few characters as gay in their writings. However, that does not suffice to establish ‘gay literature’ as a distinct canon. Consider the example of mere portrayal of gay characters in Makrand Paranjape’s *The Narrator* (1997) and Vikram Chandra’s short story *Artha* (1997). Both works fail to give a particular identity of characters as ‘gay’ and therefore there is no embodiment of being gay literature to these two works. R. Raj Rao suggests in this case:

“...gay literature like any other alternative, must formulate its own critical tools and critical vocabulary by which it must be evaluated, in the absence of which, it may emerge as aesthetically inferior. This is because gay writing is against the grain, often unabashedly autobiographical and confessional, cashing it on personal histories and understanding the personal as ‘political’.”<sup>13</sup>

That’s why, a gay writer should be extremely cautious with respect to his style, diction, point of view, plot, construction, characterization, imagery, symbolism, and so on. ‘Heterosexism’ is a significant term in the discussion of homosexuality. The gay rights activist Craig Rodwell first used the term in 1991. Heterosexism is discrimination and prejudice intentionally developed against homosexuals. It assumes that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation. Heterosexism foregrounds the opposite sex, as it can only be the ordinary way of sexual intercourse. However, from the homosexual point

of view, it is a false belief to expect the opposite sex for sexual intercourse. Heterosexism assumes homosexuals as secondary citizens in the event of legal and civil rights as well as economic opportunities and social equality. Raj Rao criticizes this Heterosexism in his book. He writes:

“In India heterosexism reinforces social and cultural taboos that insist on a segregation of sexes until marriage. Boys and girls are not allowed to mingle before marriage which are strictly arranged by parents and family members and this is manifested in the way there are specially demarcated seats for women in trains and buses. Even separate queues for them in cinema halls and places of religious worship.”<sup>14</sup>

In this way, it is a direct result of the rigorous practice of heterosexism, homophobia gets included in the minds of people. This homophobia results in the isolation and subversion of homosexuals from mainstream society. In the typical conservative Indian society, homosexuals prefer to remain side-lined. The status of homosexuals is lower than women sex workers. Indeed, women sex workers can assert their sexuality firmly, but the voice of homosexuals is stifled. Women sex workers can stay in the red-light areas and run their prostitution market. However, there are hardly such places reserved for homosexuals. Therefore, they have to practice their sex in secluded places. Such kind of sex is often unsafe and likely to infect them with HIV/AIDS or other viral ailments. Due to legal and social restrictions, homosexuals are rather helpless in the bargaining of sex and are easily deceived. At this juncture, most people prefer to go to male homosexuals rather than female prostitutes. These frequent visits to them result in a special predilection which gives rise to the so-called MSM (men having sex with men). The MSM for the most part, are regardless of their identity. Epidemiologists coined the term in the 1990s to study the spread of disease among men having sex with men. It is mostly used in medical sciences and social research for identifying such groups, which are obvious to their identities. According to Raj Rao,

“MSM are those for whom sexual activity with persons neither constitutes an identity nor a preference. At best, they see it as a tendency something they got addicted to like tobacco or alcohol and to find it hard to relinquish.”<sup>15</sup>

#### **2.4. Discussion on ‘Section 377’, ‘the Naz Foundation’ and ‘Judgments of the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court’:**

The discussion on the ‘issue of homosexuality’ would be incomplete Section 377 given in the Indian Penal Code and the ‘judgments of the Delhi High Court’ and the Supreme Court are taken into account. Section 377 of the ‘Indian Penal Code’ states that

“Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to 10 years and shall also liable to fine.”<sup>16</sup>

It means in simple words, any penetration which is against the order of nature is liable to be charged under section 377 as ‘carnal intercourse’. T. B. Macaulay introduced this law, notoriously known as ‘anti-sodomy’ law, in 1860 which was drafted in 1837 after his *Minutes on Education*<sup>17</sup>. He is criticized often for regulating his Western ideology through the *Minutes* and Section 377. Raj Rao’s comment on Section 377 is worth considering here. He says,

“...A law validated only ‘natural’ sex, that is, vaginal intercourse between a man and woman, and all other innovative forms of sexual activities are illegal, would effectively terminate the licentiousness that was the legacy of medieval India. Britain itself scrapped the law in 1967, a little over hundred years after it was introduced in India, but India continues to hold on to it for reasons best known to our politicians.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus, technically speaking the law makes all homosexual ‘guilty’. They are supposed to be criminals for they do not practice the so-called ‘natural intercourse’. Lesbians may be excluded from the realm of Section 377 as the emphasis is on ‘penetration’. Queer activists are of the opinion that some actual cases have been registered in several courts in our country because of the vested interest of corrupt police and political mechanism. Jyoti Puri argues:

“As a criminal code, Section 377 is typically deployed when there is complaint about non-consensual sex involving adult of the same sex differently sexed adults or assaults on children.”<sup>19</sup>

Most of the time, people in India are indifferent to several social issues until they themselves are affected by such issues. People often avoid speaking about homosexuality due to the homophobia or the fear of the law. Ignorance towards homosexuals does not free them from problems; rather, defend themselves in a troublesome situation. Therefore, it is very necessary to have open discussion with respect to problems and issues of gay people. Chetan Bhagat has exposed some social issues through his literary and critical writings. He, in one of his books, entitled *Making India Awesome* (2014), wrote an essay “Section 377 is Our Collective Sin”, says:

“In all this denial and hypocrisy we have buried and accepted a gross injustice and clubbed our nation with some of the most backward regressive regimes in the world. It is issue of gay rights or the infamous Section 377 that still exists in our law books and criminalizes homosexuality. This, despite of oodles of scientific evidence of homosexuality as natural and almost medical and scientific experts believing that is ‘nothing’, ‘abnormal’ or ‘incorrect’ about being gay.”<sup>20</sup>

Despite the fact that the law has criminalized the homosexuality and religions have despised of it as perverse, science has enough evidence to prove the fact that being ‘homosexual’ is not ‘abnormal’, ‘unusual’ or ‘strange’. However, this mere evidence from science still fails to defend homosexuality as natural before religious, legal, social, and cultural standpoints. These standpoints are major obstacles in decriminalizing homosexuality. People are not immediately ready to accept the fact even though medical science has proved it. In this way, ‘homosexuality’ is a complex issue in the eyes of law. Chetan Bhagat further says:

“Scientific evidence shows that homosexuality exists in nature. From a point of view, the orthodox stance is anti-homosexuality, but among many denominations of several religions accepts or is neutral towards it. In Hindu religion, the stance ranges from positive to neutral to antagonistic. The Rig Veda

says ‘Vikruti Evam Prakriti’ (perversity/diversity is what nature is all about, or what seems unnatural is also natural.)”<sup>21</sup>

The law has made the mindset of the Indian people very rigid and insensitive towards gay people. It is unfair that gays are expected to behave like homosexuals. It is immoral that they are forced to marry someone of the opposite sex. In addition, it is illegal to hush up crime against them. Section 377 has made the lives of homosexuals in India quite vulnerable. Chetan Bhagat expresses his unrest over such unethical law as:

“We have on it as it is a part of India’s cultural heritage, whereas it is nothing but a relic of an unscientific Victorian past.”<sup>22</sup>

There is a common appeal from a larger part of the homosexual community that Section 377 should be repealed, as it is essentially an infringement of individual freedom and personal life. Raj Rao writes:

“The English language press and private television channels have frequently featured stories in support of gay rights and no less legal luminary than formal Attorney General of India, Soli Sorobjee, seems to concur with their point of view, as his public utterances have often shown. Last year, writer Vikram Seth was one of the panellists on a ‘We the People’ Show on NDTV 24x7, anchored by the redoubtable Barkha Dutt and he used the opportunity to declare that he is ‘gay or partly gay’, even as he too called for a reading down of Section 377. But the presence of celebrities notwithstanding, India continues to be one of the few countries in the world where a draconian 19th century law rules the roost in the 21st century.”<sup>23</sup>

The law-enforcing or law-protecting mechanism like police makes use of Section 377 to harass homosexuals. The harassment is not only done due to homophobia but also to receive bribes and confiscate essentials. Recently, the police raided ‘a Lkhnw-based gay support group’ called ‘Bharosa Trust’, and issued non-bailable warrants against several gay-rights activists. The support group ran an NGO for the welfare of homosexuals. The police destroyed their documents. Some other places have also witnessed similar incidents where religious fundamentalists and conservative

heterosexuals likewise oppressed homosexuals. This is typically known as ‘Gay Bashing’. Raj Rao says:

“...a universal phenomenon all over the world, including the West, is a consequence of the homophobia that permits all layers of society.”<sup>24</sup>

The gay bashing gets fortified due to the presence of the law. Incidentally, Section 377 does not secure the rights of homosexuals. Rather it encourages heterosexuals to suppress their voice. Trials are hardly run in the defence of homosexuals. That is why, gay bashers often go scot-free. Raj Rao has given two categories of gay bashers i.e. ‘police’ and ‘hoodlums’.

Voices for the decriminalization of homosexuality in India are on the increase. The nationwide struggle to decriminalize homosexuality by repealing the anti-sodomy law and Section 377 was initiated by the ‘Naz Foundation’<sup>25</sup>, which is a Delhi-based NGO, to be established to work for HIV/AIDS. The NGO filed a PIL asking for reading down of Section 377 to exclude consensual sex between adult homosexual above the age of 18. Gautam Bhan argues in favour of reading down Section 377. He says:

“If we read down the law, we decriminalize same sex sexual activity between consenting adults in private. What we do not do is challenge the idea of ‘unnatural’ sexual activity in the first place. At present, there is clear and hierarchical division between natural/unnatural, public / private, heterosexual, homosexual sex in our legal code, and an understanding (given government’s response) that this hierarchy is reflective of the way Indian society thinks. Reading down the law simply insures that we do not fall under the ‘criminal’ category any more but it would not, in any way, challenge the very idea that the state, law and society have the rights to decide that certain sexual acts are ‘unnatural’.”<sup>26</sup>

‘The National AIDS Control Organization’ (NACO) has recently intervened in the matter of repealing ‘Section 377’. NACO supports the views of the Naz Foundation that Section 377 is, in a way, responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS. The reasons that the fear of law makes many homosexuals stay in isolation and refrain from undergoing medical check-ups. Therefore the petitioners of the Naz Foundation foregrounded this

predicament of homosexuals in their argument. They exposed certain incongruities regarding the implementation of Section 377 which results in the harassment of homosexuals. The Naz Foundation supports NACO's standpoint on grounds of decriminalizing homosexuality. Before the Naz Foundation filed a writ petition in the Delhi High Court seeking decriminalization of homosexuality, there was unrest among some groups regarding the issue of the anti-sodomy law. However, the Naz Foundation's strong initiative paved the way for the struggle. Jyoti Puri writes in this case:

“When the Naz Foundation sought the modification of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, the anti-sodomy law that declares “carnal intercourse is against the order of nature,” So that it no longer pertained to adult, consensual same-sex activity, it was not the first attempt at decriminalizing homosexuality. That honour belonged to the AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan's (ABVA) attempt to repeal Section 377 dating back to 1994. But the Naz Foundation's legal initiative is distinctive and worthy of sustained attention because it inspired a national-level campaign beginning gradually with the first cross- country coalition of activists and organizations aimed securing rights sexual and gender minorities.”<sup>27</sup>

However, despite embarrassing the union government, the NACO and the Naz Foundation could not prove absolutely that Section 377 was responsible for the exploitation of homosexuals due to their discrepancies in presenting arguments. The PIL continued wavering between the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court. Further, the Delhi High Court also cross-examined the writ of the Naz Foundation and lastly it was dropped. Even after that cancellation, several sexuality rights groups situated in Bangalore, Chennai, and Mumbai and New Delhi fought for the rights of homosexuals. Their fight for right and repeal of Section 377 turned into a collective struggle to decriminalize homosexuality. For them, the decriminalization was an indication of social equity for social and gender minorities. ‘The National Coalition of Sexuality Rights’ was formed in Bangalore. New Delhi was the centre for the coalition to continue the struggle. Members of LABIA, an autonomous group of feminists in Mumbai claimed as Jyoti Puri says:



“...decriminalizing homosexuality would not lesson the role of the state in regulating the lives of homosexuals but in fact give it a greater rich and power.”

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Sappho, a support group for lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women in Kolkata supported the Naz Foundation's legal challenge to Section 377. Thus several such groups came together with the perspective on decriminalizing homosexuality and the Delhi High Court's reaction on 2nd July 2009 was positive when it issued a historical judgment announcing that Section 377 violated the individual's fundamental rights to equality, freedom and personal liberty under Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Indian Constitution. However, the Supreme Court toppled the judgment by keeping a large portion of Section 377 flawless in 2003. The Supreme Court refused to decriminalize homosexuality and to repeal Section 377 considering the public morality as a majoritarian view. P.N. Sharma, in an article, 'Homosexuality' criticized the Supreme Court's judgment as:

“The Supreme Court's judgment striking down the Delhi High Court's decision on Section 377 of the IPC has pitched many of us back to 1895, when Oscar Wilde tried for his sexuality, was jailed and victimized by a society that feted him. The judgement is conservative and archaic, a reversal to blind prejudice. The Delhi High Court's striking down that part of Section 377 as unconstitutional which made the sex between consenting adults criminal.”<sup>29</sup>

In 2009, the Delhi High Court put forth an attempt to honour homosexuals by mentioning that only- consensual sexual acts of homosexuality are liable to be punished. Hence, as per this judgment, Section 377 violated the privileges of LGBT people in light of the fact that along with non- consensual sexual acts, the Section incorporated some different exercises of these people as culpable. The Supreme Court dismissed this judgement by referencing that it depends upon decriminalizing homosexuality in other countries without considering complications in regards to homosexuality in India. The Supreme Court's judgement demonstrates the way that India is not among those liberal nations to advocate same-sex relationships by decriminalizing homosexuality. It further states that the Delhi High Court's decision is merely based on advancements in other countries and it can not be applied blindly

despite the fact that it appeals for the privileges of sexual minorities. If the dispute is over the unnatural sex then heterosexuals should also be punished for they also practice such sex. However, heterosexuals are the majority and homosexuals are minority. This might be one of the reasons that the Supreme Court might have been compelled to give a decision in heterosexuals' favour. There is a strong force of religious groups and fanatic people. Considering the reasons about the judgement of the Supreme Court, P.N. Sharma talks about the dispute between 'public morality' and 'constitutional morality'.

According to P.N. Sharma, the Supreme Court upholds the public morality and the Delhi High Court the constitutional morality. Though public morality is a majoritarian view, there is a dire need to follow constitutional morality from a plural and democratic point of view. Homosexuality in Indian context is viewed as a taboo, unnatural and perverse issue. Politically, India is a democratic country and plurality is there in the Indian culture. Consequently there is a need to consider homosexuals equal to heterosexuals from a pluralistic point of view. There is also a dire need to rectify the law. The policy makers need to take cognizance of evidence from the ancient India about homosexuality. The law is the unwanted legacy of the British Raj, which instilled homophobia by introducing Section 377. The realistic portrayal of Konark and Khajuroho caves is a proof of the recorded truth of same-sex love. In this manner, though homosexuals are looked down upon in Indian society, there is a ray of hope for them as they are effectively associated with various forms of activism. Homosexuals have made all India associations to campaign for their privileges. In the political field, they are making definitive strides. Shabnum Mausi became India's first MLA from the hijra community in 1999. Other political persons for example Kamla Jaan (Mayor of Katni) and Meenabai (President of Sahora Town Municipality) worked hard for the welfare of gay individuals. In 2000, Asha Devi was elected as the Mayor of Gorakhpur. These people are working for the acknowledgment of their privileges. Their essential interest is the repeal of Section 377. IRS Smarak Swain, in his article on 'LGBT Issues in India' says:

“Yet when the law is progressive there is a better chance for LGBT's to assert them. As self-assertion of sexual minorities will increase social values and norms that are presently prejudiced against them will change. It will take some

time for society to accept the fact that alternative sexual orientation is normal.”

<sup>30</sup>

According to Raj Rao, English language plays a reformatory role in the Indian queer culture. He says:

“Much of the terminology in English, for ideas pertaining to queerness, is expressible mainly in that language. The vernacular word ‘Samlingi’ (for a homosexual man) has gained currency only recently and it is only in the present time that serious books such as *Indradhanu: Samlaingikteche Vividh Rang* (Khire 2008) in Marathi, authored by Bindumadhav Khire have begun to see the light of the day.”<sup>31</sup>

The Humsafar Trust in Bombay and Sangama in Bangalore have been doing the work bilingually to support those homosexuals who are alien to the English language. Recently, the Supreme Court has likewise consented to re-evaluate the law condemning homosexuality. The Naz Foundation challenged the 2013 judgement of the Supreme Court, therefore efforts are being made to review the law and repeal it.

## **2.5 The ‘Issue of Homosexuality’ in the Selected Plays:**

In the wake of having adequate discussion on the theory and issue of homosexuality in general, it is relevant to study how Dattani has incorporated this hazardous issue in his the selected plays in particular. The three plays expose the predicament of homosexuals, their transgressive demeanour, deprivation of mainstream social institutions, their harassment and compromising positions. Dattani purposely foregrounds the issue of homosexuality considering the fact that simultaneously he wants to shock readers / audience by offering a different subject to them. He held a prominent place in the Indian English theatre on the basis of his realistic and artistic portrayals of homosexuals in India. Dattani’s own comments are very helpful in understanding ‘the issue of homosexuality’ given in his plays.

Dattani opens taboo subjects before readers and anticipates appropriate solutions. He challenges several age-old notions of hetero-patriarchal society. The homosexual love relationship and problems of lovers in continuing such relationship finds an ample

expression in Dattani's plays. For the sake of convenience, each play is being discussed separately. The discussion begins with *Seven Steps Around the Fire*.

## 2.6 *Seven Steps Around the Fire*

The play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* appeared 1999 as *Seven Circles Around the Fire*. The story of the play is uncommon in the Indian context. Unlike his erstwhile playwrights, Dattani offers a quite innovative theme which has been so far side-lined in the canon of Indian English literature. In this play and the other two selected in this chapter Dattani deals with the plight of homosexuals who are systematically thrown away from mainstream social life. *Seven Steps Around the Fire* explores the murder mystery of a hijra named Kamla because of her secret marriage with the Minister's son, named Subbu. This is a 'whodunit' play perhaps because Uma the wife of Superintendent of Police Suresh Rao searches for the murderer as it is a part of her research work on the "class-and-gender-related violence" shown in the play.

Dattani foregrounds the hijra community through this play. The play projects problems faced by the 'hijra' characters in the heterosexual society. Kamla gets murdered and becomes a victim. Anarkali is arrested for no fault of her own. Champa is afraid of revealing the name of Kamala's murderer. It is thus the fear of homophobia which prohibits the 'hijras' to secure their life against the injustice put on them by heterosexuals. As far as the categories of homosexual community are concerned, Dattani has focused particularly upon one homosexual community i.e., 'hijra'. In other plays *Dattani* talks about homosexuality among people in general. Therefore it is relevant to understand the word 'hijra' in different contexts before analysing the play. The transgender community has acquired different names in different countries and cultures. Serena Nanda states:

Historically, transgender communities has been mentioned in many cultural contexts with different names given according to the place, such as Bakla in the Philippines, Xaniths in Oman, Serrers among the Pokot people of Kenya, and Hijra, Jogappas, Jogtas or Shiv-shaktis in South Asia. The Hijras, also called 'third gender' or eunuch-transvestites, have existed for centuries in the Indian subcontinent. <sup>32</sup>

Homosexuals are categorized as lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders and R. Raj Rao has given multiple sex queer identities. The present play centres around one queer category i.e. hijra (eunuch). Therefore, before analysing the play, it is appropriate to consider the origin of the word 'hijra' and the community through following references. IRS Smarak Swain, in his essay 'Problems of Third Gender' talks about the initiation of the word 'hijra' as:

“Becoming a hijra is a process of socialization into a “hijra family” through a relationship characterized as ‘chela student to guru’ teacher; leading to a gradual assumption of femininity. Typically, each guru lives with at least five chelas; her chelas assume her surname and are considered part of her lineage. Chelas are expected to give their income to their guru, who manages the household. Hijra families are close-knit communities and often have their own houses. Often children initiated into a hijra family are abandoned or sold by their family.”<sup>33</sup>

In India, there are supposedly three types of hijras; those who are born intersex; those who are castrated and become eunuch; those who are male but have feminine sexual orientation and therefore wear and behave like women. There are approximately six million hijras in India about which eight percent are castrated. Smarak Swain further says:

“Hijra tradition is deeply rooted in Hinduism; hence the process is actually a ritual by which emasculation takes place. Emasculation is the total removal of penis, testes and scrotum. In this ritual, boys are taken into the jungle and their testes are cut with a knife without applying anaesthesia. This process is called ‘nirvana’, which means rebirth. The priest then folds back a strip of flesh and creates an artificial vagina.”<sup>34</sup>

The second reference to the term 'hijra' is from the play itself in which the character Uma explains that the word 'hijra' has originated from the Urdu language. She further also mentions that the word is a combination of Hindi, Persian and Arabic languages which literally means a person who is “neither male nor female”.<sup>35</sup> Her illustration about the word 'hijra' has a mythological connection to the epic *The Ramayana*. In this epic,

Rama is shown as going into exile by crossing the river followed by some people. While crossing the river, Rama ordered men and women to turn back. His order as Uma says in the play, was not followed by some men who thus lost their masculinity and became hijra.

The third reference is from Purnima Kulkarni's essay 'Reconsiderations of Mahesh Dattani's *Seven Steps Around the Fire*: Enthusing, Enlightening and Empowering Eunuchs' in which she traces the root of the word. She says:

“... the word, derived from the Arabic root ‘hijr’ in its sense of leaving one’s tribe and how the philosophical notes say that it has traditionally been translated into English as ‘Eunuch’ or hermaphrodite.”<sup>36</sup>

The play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* begins with Uma Rao, who is a Ph.D. scholar in sociology. She tries to collect information from Munnaswamy, a constable in the office of the superintendent of police about hijra, Anarkali who is behind the bars under the false charge of murdering Kamla, a beautiful hijra, Anarkali is contemptuously referred to as ‘it’ by the police. Uma becomes pathetic toward Anarkali. Her sympathetic nature makes her work for the upliftment of the hijra community. According to Uma, India is not an exceptional country as far as homosexuals are concerned because this community exists in all parts of the world. She clears her motive behind pursuing her research on homosexuals as she wants to learn the status of homosexuals in India. These people long for love and family. Homosexuals are welcomed at events like marriage or childbirth and ironically they themselves are deprived of experiencing the same events in their life both by culture and nature.

The play presents the story of murder and abuse of hijras by the mainstream heterosexual society and police mechanism. Uma Rao, the protagonist of the play, decides to unfold the mystery of Kamla's murder using detective methods i.e. ‘whodunit’. As Uma visits the jail, she experiences cruelty and injustice against hijras. She approaches Anarkali there and tries to enquire about Kamla's murder. In the beginning, Anarkali avoids Uma, assuming that the latter may be a journalist or a media person. However, after proper identification of Uma, Anarkali comes to terms with Uma's queries. During the conversation with Anarkali Uma declares her motive behind the meeting that she is currently pursuing her research on “class-and-gender-related

violence”<sup>37</sup> in India. In the initial exchange, Anarkali behaves indifferently with Uma supposing that she has nothing to do with Uma’s research. Perhaps Anarkali is comic enough to ask Uma about the need of her singing and dancing after Uma will pass in the examination. Apparently it seems that Anarkali laughed away Uma’s sincere work, but it is the actual situation of almost all the hijra community that they think of only singing and dancing as a source of their livelihood. The play in this context raises some questions as to why these hijra people have been conditioned to think of merely singing and dancing and why these people have not been privileged to think of something else. Uma continues with her inquiry and asks Anarkali to say something more about herself to which Anarkali replies that they sing and dance at somebody’s wedding and childbirth. She further humorously mentions that people give them money to avoid the misfortune. While talking to Uma she confesses that Kamla was her sister and she does not have anything to do with Kamla’s murder yet cutting her days in prison on a false charge.

Anarkali’s hesitation in disclosing the name of the real killer of Kamala to Uma is ‘homophobia’. Due to the heterosexual dominance, she tries to remain silent to avoid impending harassment to herself and the community she belongs to. The homophobic atmosphere of the Indian society has left no space for homosexuals to expose their potentials and to avail the social benefits. As far as their livelihood is concerned, these people have to survive on the money they get through singing and dancing in events like marriage. However, while doing so, they rather overlook their harassment at the hands of heterosexuals and the law. Uma observes the ‘homophobia’ in Anarkali’s reply that people will kill her if she discloses the name of the murderer. In a pathetic tone, she says that she is ready to end up in prison but will never disclose the truth. Uma sympathises with her and assures her safety in jail which makes Anarkali advise Uma to go to the Russell Market and visit the head hijra. Uma decided to see Champa for more information. Thus, she begins to see the nature of the hijra community.

“UMA (thought). “Nobody seems to do anything about them. Neither do they. Did they come to this country with Islam, or are they part of our glorious Hindu tradition? How do they come to know of these weddings? And why do they not take the singing lessons? (Pause) Is it true? Could it be true what my mother used to say about them? Did they really put curse on her because they did not

allow them at their wedding? Or was that their explanation for not being able to have children of their own. Or...a reason to give to people for wanting to me?"

38

Other characters like Suresh Rao, Munnaswamy, the minister Mr. Sharma and hijras Anarkali and Champa revolve around Uma. Her frequent connection to all of them leads to the consistent development of the well-knit plot in a detective manner. Uma is actively involved in unfolding the murder mystery of Kamla. She is the only exceptional character to feel sympathy towards the predicament of hijras. Her determination and willingness for giving justice to Anarkali and Kamla separate her from the remaining dominant heterosexual society. As a counter to male-dominated society, she also tries to assert her sexuality to some extent. Dattani deliberately creates a form of resistance to the accepted norms of society through Uma's character. Despite Munnaswamy's hesitation to go to the Russell Market, Uma moves there and meets Champa. She persuades Champa to tell the truth. After initial reluctance, Champa responds to Uma positively by stating that neither she nor Anarkali is responsible for Kamla's murder. The conversation between them reveals the fact that Kamla was already married to Subbu, the minister's son. Uma gets the photograph of the marriage. Her anxiety about the murder and unrest over the scot-free status of the actual killer problematize the issue of homosexuals in India. Dattani exposes the deep-rooted hypocrisy in Indian heterosexual society. The murderer here is, as Raj Rao calls 'gay basher', who gets off scot-free and Anarkali is arrested under the false charge. Dattani unfolds the politicized legal system criminalizing the innocent and protecting real criminals. Uma is committed to pursue her research on 'hijras' and find out the real culprit who conspired Kamala's murder. Her phone call to the professor reveals her sincerity towards homosexuals.

Mahesh Dattani unfolds the precarious position of hijras in Indian society. Three hijras in the play Anarkali, Champa and the dead Kamla are victims of the brutality of the conservative heterosexual society. Dattani's detective method is based on a realistic technique such as Uma's first visit to jail, second to the Russell Market and third to the minister's house. Uma's visit to the minister's house, her conversation with Saleem and the minister brings Uma closer to the truth of the murder. Though she is doubtful of the minister, she does not dare to blame him directly. Rather she says that it is difficult to search the criminals because hijras are afraid of disclosing the name. Anarkali is a



pessimistic character and hence loses the hope that the murderer will be caught and she will come out of prison. Despite giving confidence, she asks Uma as to what she wants to do by knowing the name of the murderer. Her pessimism represents the darkness prevailed in the life of the hijra community because their complaints are treated as insignificant and hence they are deprived of justice. Anarkali is well acquainted with Suresh Rao's corrupt job and informs Uma that "...One hijra less in the world does not matter to your husband?"<sup>39</sup>

This exchange displays Uma's belief and Anarkali's disbelief in the law and order. After sustainable development in Uma's search for the murderer, she is very much closer to the truth. Still she expects more information from Anarkali and Champa. Her expectation makes her sympathize with the plight of the hijra community. Both Anarkali and Champa become sympathetic and cooperative to Uma. But due to the impending harassment, Anarkali advises Uma as: "Don't put your position in danger. Go home." Champa too suggests: "Go home to your husband."<sup>40</sup>

As the action of play reaches denouement, Uma again approaches Mr. Sharma at his son's wedding along with her husband Suresh Rao. Mr. Sharma, being an artful person, tries to humour Uma with flattery. He asks her about the search and the result very cunningly by saying that there is a spiritual zest in her eyes. Their exchange reveals the tactic of Mr. Sharma, the minister as under:

“UMA.                    And is that what you see in me?

MR. SHARMA.    Yes, I see a search for the truth.

UMA.                    Do you think I will find it?

MR. SHARMA.    If you look in the right place.

UMA.                    Which would be?

MR. SHARMA.    You know the saying about the musk deer? He searches everywhere for the heavenly fragrance, not realizing it is contains within his own body.”<sup>41</sup>

Champa and Anarkali who come there to sing and dance attend the wedding ceremony. Mr. Sharma abuses them and tells them to leave the place. During the wedding, Anarkali shows the photo to Subbu of his previous wedding with Kamla. On seeing the photo Subbu produces a gun and kills himself. Subbu's suicide alternates Anarkali's plan of proving Mr. Sharma's hand behind Kamala's murder. Anarkali expresses the truth to Anarkali in the following dialogue.

“UMA.           Why didn't you tell me?

ANARKALI. Would you have believed me? Anyway, what is the use of all that? What does it matter who killed Kamla? She is dead ... So many times I warned her. First I thought Salim was taking her for his own pleasure. When she told me about Subbu, Madam, I tried to stop her. I fought with her. I scratched her face, hoping she will become ugly and Subbu will forget her. He wanted to marry her ... She gave me that picture to show to Champa, I saw the men coming for her. I told her to run ... (Cries for a while.) Here, Madam, take this.

UMA.           What is it?

ANARKALI. A Special Mantra is in the locket. Champa gave this to me for you. Wear it and you will be blessed with children. Sister! May you and your family be happy! Now go away, and do not come here again. Please go, sister!”<sup>42</sup>

Further, Uma tells her husband the truth of Kamala's murder, which he already knows, yet he pretends not to be convinced. Rather, he is more interested in hushing up the matter. He tells his senior officer that he knows the truth, but will not act on it. His words, “... And Mr. Sharma's gratitude will be expressed in the ways that will be, I am, more than adequate...”<sup>43</sup> reveal his corrupt nature and cynical attitude. It is an irony of the situation where his wife wants the criminal to be punished, and he unlawfully allows the real criminal to get off scot free. Therefore, Uma's agony arouses her pathos in following words:

“They know. Anarkali, Champa and all the hijra people knew who was behind the killing of Kamla. They have no voice. The case was hushed up and was not even reported in the newspapers. Champa was right. The police made no arrest. Subbu’s suicide was written off as an accident. The photograph was destroyed. So were the lives of two young people.”<sup>44</sup>

*Seven Steps Round the Fire* explores the plight of the transgenders in a gender imbalanced society. In their vulnerable state of existence, transgenders are destined to be discriminated against, exploited and victimised. The subaltern state of transgenders deprives them of claiming selfhood. Kamla’s murder and subsequent arrest of another hijra Anarkali under false conviction shows insensitivity and corruption on the part of police and bureaucrats in maintaining law and order in society. The age-old prejudice has stigmatised the transgender community which is evident in hastening Kamla’s death and the treatment given to Anarkali by constable Munnaswamy and other prison-mates. Therefore marginality is the result of traditional misunderstanding regarding the existence of the third gender. The exchange between Uma and Munnaswamy throws a light on the prejudice, misunderstanding and confusion among normative people. Uma suspects whether Anarkali will talk to her or not and asks it to Munnaswamy who in his reply makes the use of a third person pronoun by referring to Anarkali as ‘it’. He further assures Uma that if it does not respond then it will be beaten up. Munnaswamy’s use of such language against hijras is the legacy of Section 377 as Dr. Raj Rao calls it in his book. Section 377 has privileged police with punishing homosexuals for their so-called unnatural sexual activities. However, police in the true sense of the term have misinterpreted the provision mentioned in the Section and harassed many hijras under false charges.

The confusion prevails over the identity crisis of transgenders as far as their categorisation under genealogical study like male and female is concerned. The transgenders do not conform to the two categories i.e. male and female. Hence, the heteronormative discourse of Munnaswamy makes him label Anarkali as ‘it’. As far as the means of livelihood of homosexuals are concerned, they are very scanty or perhaps closed as homosexuals are isolated from family and deprived of education. The exploitation of homosexuals is the process of socialization leading to the denial of privileges to which Louis Althusser calls “the reproduction of the ability to manipulate

the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression”.<sup>45</sup> Dattani has successfully maintained the stereotypical identity of homosexuals in all circumstances. It could be said that Dattani himself has implied the possibility of marriage between homosexual and heterosexual. By doing so, he has questioned the practice of stereotyping heteronormativity through marriage institutions in Hindu society. Kamla’s marriage with Subbu becomes an act of resistance challenging the heteronormative practice of dehumanizing homosexuals. This further indicates the reversal of long- established marriage tradition by transcending the codified boundaries of heterosexual society. The above statement seems to be in accordance with what Ranjit Guha says as

“The most significant outcome of this revision or shift in perspective is that the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the ‘subaltern’.”<sup>46</sup>

Thus, the play *Seven Steps Round the Fire* foregrounds several social issues related to the hijra community rather than a single issue of Kamala’s murder. The play presents homosexuals as victimized by society on grounds of fixed notions of sex identity. The play exposes the paradoxical situation where the singing and dancing of hijras is believed to be holy and fruitful for the parenthood of the married couple. However, it is heartening that the hijras are deprived of both marriage and childbirth. Seldom do these people appear in mainstream social events. They are considered objects of mistrust, ridicule and contempt. This situation leads them to become outsiders and marginalized from social affairs. Dattani characterized Uma as a daughter, wife and social worker. Her character is symbolic of every rational human being in society. It teaches us a lesson that an individual needs to be conscious of socially imposed roles. She is the quintessence of being sympathetic towards the hijra community. Uma stands out as superior to her husband, Suresh Rao, the constable Munnaswamy and the ministers Mr. Sharma as far as the humanitarian approach is concerned. The entire course of the play is Uma’s attempt to find out the truth and to rescue Anarkali from forthcoming victimization. The play represents the brutal treatment given to hijras. Kamla’s murder raises the issue of homosexual’s harassment in India and demands a special forum for the redressal. Anarkali’s arrest stands for stringent legal action under Section 377, homophobia, police and public. Suresh Rao, the SP and Munnaswamy, the constable, represent agents of corrupt politicians. Thus, the lack of

acknowledgement towards injustice against homosexuals has given them a huge setback.

The play presents how the human relationship is viewed through the institution of marriage. Such a relationship rather ignores the selfhood and individual expectations of both husband and wife. Walking around fire seven times fixes the lifelong relationship is the Hindu marriage custom and hence the title bears significance. It symbolizes the sacred vows of marriage. The playwright has questioned the sanctity and sustainability of marriage and relationships in the modern world. Therefore he foregrounds homosexual characters that are transgressive in nature. He reveals the low social status of hijras through Uma's visit to the Russell Market. Dattani also highlights certain lacunae in the operation of the judicial system and police force that need to be rectified by giving them the facilities of mainstream society. Dattani endows them with dignity, inner strength and gives them courage to endure their pains and struggle. He deliberately situates his plays in real life situations in order to shatter social norms and to challenge established assumptions of the heterosexual society. His attempt is to expose contradictions within the dominant culture of heterosexual society.

Thus, the play exposes discrimination at its extreme level against the hijra community in the Indian society. The plays contextualizes situations in which homosexuals are suspected and boycotted. Due to the social and legal constraints, homosexuals are often afraid of mixing with the rest of society and prefer to stay in isolated positions. The play also highlights the need for rethinking over the status of homosexuals and identifying them with respect and privileges so that this community would be able to survive properly. Through the play, it becomes clear that homosexuals too expect themselves to be adjusted among others and accept their existence without prejudice.

### ***2.7 On a Muggy Night in Mumbai:***

The second play in this chapter is *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. It also explores the same theme of same-sex love relationship. This play has been categorized as a 'stage play' which was performed for the first time at the Tata Theatre in Mumbai on 23 November 1998. The play was published in *Collected Plays* (2000). In *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, the representation of the predicament of the homosexual community is quite different from that of *Seven Steps Around the Fire*. The tone is not as

melancholic as in earlier discussed play. Kamlesh, Ed, Kiran Sharad, Deepali, Ranjit and Bunny are the characters in the play. All of them have different homosexual orientations representing gay and lesbian. The play begins with Kamlesh who appears speaking in Hindi with the guard. Dattani transliterates the conversation. Kamlesh owns the flat in the apartment and invites his friends there to have a party with them. Ed, Kiran, Kamlesh and Sharad appear gossiping with one another. Kamlesh is shown as having the same-sex relationship with the person who plays double role such as Prakash and Ed with the intention to make love relationship with Kiran, Kamlesh's sister. He also keeps the same relationship with Sharad. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is a true reflection of human relationship and human behaviour in respect of the 'same-sex relationship'. Dattani, in the preface to *Collected Plays* which appeared in 2000, mentions that his plays explore those issues which are problematizing contemporary Indian society. Being a playwright of the present time, Dattani captures disturbing situations where homosexuals are facing problems. The theme of the play is universally applicable to the society in which homosexuals exist at margins. In fact, it is the first play which explored the issue of homosexuality in the theatres openly. This play emphasizes upon the biased social set up in which homosexuals are destined to life-long injustice. Therefore, homosexuals among themselves establish relationships to secure their expectations. To some extent, their expectations are fulfilled. In the play Sharad and Deepali appear to be satisfied with their relationship despite variations in their sexual orientations and behavioural patterns. Kamlesh is constantly anguished and often gets disappointed over betrayal by his sexual partner. Ed is shown as homophobic and hence deceives Kamlesh due to the feeling of insecurity. The T.V actor, Bunny due to the traditional instincts accepts the heterosexual pattern of society by marrying a girl and denies to declare his sexual orientation publicly. Ranjit settles in Europe as it is easier and secure for him to adjust himself in the European society compared to India. Dattani portrays all homosexual characters with different behavioural patterns despite their sexual orientations they are not stereotypical. Therefore, these characters often transcend the boundaries of traditional expectations. Many of these characters expect a change in their expectations but it is difficult for Kamlesh to change himself with passage of time. He often is rooted in his past secrets.

Homosexuals too have expectations from their sexual partners and almost like heterosexuals they are often disappointed over betrayal. However, restrictions on their

sexual gratification imposed by society leave individuals broken and isolated. Despite restrictions, many individuals find a way out to fulfil their love and sex. Therefore, homosexuals' expectations are also as common as those of heterosexuals are. The following conversation between Kamlesh and Sharad reveals the state of being of homosexuals:

“SHARAD (after a while). You know I still love you.

KAMLESH. (in a matter-of- fact manner).

Then why did you walk out on me?

SHARAD. You were relieved when I did.

KAMLESH. I am sorry ...

SHARAD. I knew it within a month of moving in with you ...

KAMLESH. I tried, Sharad, I ...

SHARAD. You tried to love me, but ...

KAMLESH. I wanted to love you, I tried for a whole year.

SHARAD. But you couldn't

KAMLESH. I do love you.

SHARAD. Oh! Spare me the lies! You could never love anyone

because you are still in love with Prakash!”<sup>47</sup>

The conversation continues when Deepali enters the room. She already knows the relationship between Kamlesh and Sharad and therefore comments very sarcastically by saying that she is always there “for gay men's cause”<sup>48</sup>. Dattani portrayed the character of Deepali as a lesbian woman. Their attitude to love towards love is often conditional and influenced by the dichotomy between homosexual and heterosexual standpoints because of their differentiation between ‘love’ and ‘marriage’. Deepali says to Kamlesh that they could have been in love if he were a woman. In the same way

Kamlesh too mentions that if she were a man, they could have been in love. Again Deepali converses with Kamlesh with a different attitude about marriage. She says that they could have married if they were heterosexuals. This shows that ‘marriage’ is something that takes place between two opposite sexes, perhaps opposite genders and it is still typically considered a heterosexuals’ privilege which deprives homosexuals of living together.

Thus, Dattani shows how heterosexism or the wish for being heterosexuals is embedded in homosexual people and how they long for having a family and a stable life. Therefore, the apparent comfortability of homosexuals leads them to get marginalized in heterosexual society. Deepali’s utterance is quintessential here in the sense that only heterosexuals are permitted to marry and Kamlesh too reveals his secret and regrets his action of being gay before his friends. He seeks Ranjit’s help to get over his difficulties. Ranjit also soothes Kamlesh. Kamlesh says,

“Please! I am afraid! I need your help! I need you all ... After Sharad went away – I decided that I didn’t need anyone to live with me. I had my work. That should have been enough. It wasn’t. I felt this void. The same feeling when three years ago, Prakash left me, I would have understood it if he had left me for another man, but he left me because he was ashamed of our relationship. It would have worked between us, but he was ashamed. I was very angry... for the first time in my life, I wished I wasn’t gay.”<sup>49</sup>

Kamlesh was depressed and nostalgic about his relationship with Prakash. Dattani uses the postmodern technique here by giving one character two identities i.e. Ed/ Prakash. Here Dattani has problematized Kamlesh’s life because his sister Kiran is already in love with the same person i.e. Prakash with whom Kamlesh has already had the same-sex love relationship. In order to foreground ‘homosexuality’ as an issue, Dattani portrays homosexual love relationship with frankness and boldness. Ranjit is compelled to admit the fact that he is ‘gay’, and is very reluctant over the legal constraints. Ranjit criticizes the unjust law which has made him move to Europe and establish same-sex relationship with an English man. In this sense, the play highlights the rigidity of the legal affairs as far as the same-sex love relationship in India is concerned. The legal



restrictions are disappointing homosexuals in India and forcing them either to leave the country or to accept the heterosexual ideology.

The first act of the play ends with the open declaration of all characters as 'gay' and contemplation over their predicament. Kiran also declares her forthcoming marriage with Ed. Act II begins where Kamlesh and Prakash meet in the park. They feel closer to each other in a lonely place and become nostalgic about their past secrets. Ed expects Kamlesh's close vicinity whereas Kamlesh is scrupulous about Kiran's love affair with Prakash.

Except Kiran, all characters realize secrets of one another's private lives and of the same-sex love. As Ed and Kiran are going to marry soon, Deepali threatens to show the photograph of Kamlesh and Ed in an objectionable pose to Kiran. That is because Deepali wants to know Ed's past. Kamlesh thinks that Ed has now become heterosexual because he goes to church every week and also visits to a psychiatrist. Kamlesh, a scrupulous gay man, thinks that his erstwhile same-sex relationship with Ed was a sinful task. He overcomes his earlier disappointment with Ed over the betrayal in the same-sex relationship because he imagines Kiran's beautiful married life with Ed. However, Sharad, being suspicious of Ed's nature, tries to shake Kamlesh's illusion as Ed may betray Kiran. Sharad expects that Kiran should realise the truth to avoid the impending risk.

Kamlesh's friends are busy in planning how to tell the truth about the relationship between Ed and Kamlesh. Kiran is already much disgusted with all other characters. As Ed appears there, Kamlesh says that they should be allowed to talk. If they want to love each other then there should not be any problem. Ed also supports it by saying that they should not be afraid of what people think of them. Since these characters are 'gay', they don't have any inhibitions about sexual life. Act II ends with Kiran leaving the stage in a disgusting mood.

Act III begins with a 'wedding band' as Ranjit questions out of his curiosity as to why people get married. This question arouses curiosity in all other characters. Sharad, Ranjit Bunny, Kamlesh are all homosexuals, they don't acknowledge the value of marriage between heterosexuals. The homosexual characters in the play are envious of the heterosexual society. Ed looking at the crowd outside the compartment exclaims

that the people, perhaps heterosexuals are the real men and women.<sup>50</sup> Some of the gay persons in the play are bi-sexuals and some of them try to be homosexuals. Dattani shows the deep-rooted inculcation of heterosexual ideology in the minds of these characters. Therefore, Sharad, a 'gay', wants to be heterosexual because now he understands the power of opposite sex. He says,

“We-ell, let me see how I can put it. You see, being a heterosexual man – a real man as Ed put it – I get everything. I get to be accepted- accepted by whom? – well, that marriage let down there for instance. I can have a wife, I can have children who will all adore me simply because I am a hetero- I beg your pardon – a real man. Now why would I want to give it all it up? So what do I have to change a little? If I can be a real man, can be king. Look at all the kings around you, look at all the male power they enjoy, trusting themselves in the world, all their penis power! Power with sex, power with muscle, power with size. Firing rockets, exploding nuclear bombs, if you can do it five times. I can do it six times and all that stuff, (*Thrusts his pelvis in an obscene macho fashion.*) Power man! Power!”<sup>51</sup>

Even though they long for heterosexual love, they are honest and bold enough to confess their sexual orientations, sexual exploitation and their transgressive nature. They try to understand their problems and come out with outstanding disclosures. For example, Bunny makes a confession of his sexual life in the following words:

“I know just as the man whom my wife loves does not exist. I have denied a lot of things. The only people who know me – the real me – are present here in this room. And you all hate me for being such a hypocrite. The people who know me are the people who hate me. That is not such a nice feeling. I have tried to survive. In both worlds. And it seems I do not exist in either. I am sorry, Kiran I lied to you as I have lied to the rest of the world. I said to you that I am a liberal- minded person. I am not them but I accept them. Actually it is they who are liberal minded. They have accepted me in spite of my letting them down so badly. I deny them in public, but I want their love in private. I have never told anyone in so many words what I am telling you now- I am a gay man...”<sup>52</sup>

Act III ends with the breaking off the engagement between Kiran and Ed. In a typical postmodern way, homosexual characters experience an absurdity in their life as they are finally in search of their identity. However, they realize that their search for identity turns out to be a futile attempt in the heterosexual society. They contemplate their achievement and failure. Finally Sharad's soliloquy brings out the feelings of all characters. He asks himself what he got and what he is and he is not.

Thus, Dattani has presented the real life situation of homosexuals in India. Every character in the play is the victim of socially constructed gender identities. They are stigmatized, marginalized and forced to conceal their sexual identity, which is called 'closet'. The playwright has used the technique of interior monologue very efficiently. Though all the characters are homosexuals biologically, they too have their own different attitudes, ideologies and perspectives, etc. In Act II, Kamlesh, Kiran and Ed/Prakash are put forth on three different levels. The three characters share their memories simultaneously as under:

“KIRAN. Not that way, I mean, well (*Laughs nervously*)

Ed (enters). Hello, Hi, Kamlesh.

*Kamlesh and Kiran move to another level of the empty area. Ed continues to address them as before.*

Ed. Mind if I dance with your sister?...Would you care to have this dance with me?

SOFT MUSIC. 'Begin. The Beguine' or similar. Ed mimes dancing with

Kiran.”<sup>53</sup>

Besides being a playwright, Mahesh Dattani is a stage director par excellence which can be exemplified through this play. He creates the spaces like a party in which Ed dances with Kiran and the park in which Kamlesh and Ed meet for the first time. Such spaces are recreated on a physically restricted place i.e. stage. Apart from bedroom, closed house, park and he creates darkness to show the intimacies of same – sex lovers. Moreover, lack of dialogue, silence in open spaces among majority of the heterosexual people experience the homophobic world. Even the compound of the apartment where

Kamlesh lives, represents the space of homophobic. Prakash's fear of the people downstairs implies the difficulties that homosexuals face to come out of the closet. Ed/Prakash assumes the homosexuals in Kamlesh's house as 'other' because he tries to define his 'self' as a heterosexual person. In order to make his play more realistic, Dattani takes great efforts. His use of binoculars is symbolic of the voyeuristic nature of human beings. Sharad's act of peeping into the sexual intercourse of the Diamond Merchant and his wife shows the desire to see, to know more about heterosexual people. Here Dattani's represents the Diamond Merchant and his wife as symbols of marriage and family, which is further, an institution of exploitation. The playwright deliberately uses the closed spaces to show how homosexuals practice their sexual activities, which are unethical, illegal, abnormal and unnatural from the social and legal point of view. Therefore, homosexuals become looked down upon as 'other' and heterosexual become 'central' as 'self'. The use of closed spaces indicates the apprehension of socially and legally restricted sexual acts of homosexuals. Heterosexual society establishes power politics by instilling the discourse of being 'other' in all homosexuals. Dattani's endeavour in dramatizing the deplorable state of homosexuals could be said to be a deliberate act of reversal of power politics prevailed in the literary scenario. Therefore it is worth considering here to refer to what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick says in *Epistemology of the Closet* as far as the apprehension of homosexuals to practice sexual activities in open spaces and Dattani's purposeful foregrounding the issue of homosexuality is concerned.

“The contradictions I will be discussing are not in the first place those between prohomosexual and anti-homosexual people or ideologies, although the book's strongest motivation is indeed the gay affirmative one. Rather, the contradictions that seem most active are the one's internal to all the important twentieth century understandings of homo/heterosexual definition, both heterosexual and anti-homophobic.”<sup>54</sup>

In this play, Dattani brings out a psychological turmoil of homosexual characters as they are in a great dilemma as to how to continue with their sexuality or how to accept the heterosexual pattern of society. This is for the most part an unusual theme in the Indian context. However, such people do exist in society though their survival is

vulnerable. Therefore, Dattani recreated the characters in their own situations by foregrounding the ‘issue of homosexuality’ in the second play. He hinted at the repeal of Section 377 and approval to the same-sex marriage in the Indian context. Dattani’s plays reinforce the view of the Naz Foundation and the NACO for reading down the anti-sodomy law i.e. Section 377. Dattani asks some basic questions in the play as to why Indian people think the same-sex love relationship is problematic if it is natural and if it is accepted in other countries. The law is oppressing homosexuals and unfortunately it goes unnoticed by a large part of society.

The play closes with all characters facing an existential dilemma. Kiran says a final farewell to Ed realizing his erstwhile sex-relationship with her own brother. All the characters Kamlesh, Sharad, Prakash, Ranjit, and Ranjit experience an ethical quandary for their sexual orientation. Dattani portrays genuine emergencies of the homosexuals as they face, in actuality, and their intense endeavour to come out of their ensnared hopelessness. The plot of the play is designed in such a way that the homosexuals are in search of their identity which is lost due to continuous negligence towards their expectations and privileges by the Judicial system and the society itself in which they have to survive. The play also highlights the need of rethinking over their individual and social desires and their fulfilment. Dattani raises a concern over the victimisation of homosexuals on grounds of gender, ethnicity, social prejudice and culture. However he represents their existence as it is.

### ***2.9 Do the Needful:***

The issue of homosexuality finds expression in Dattani’s next play entitled *Do the Needful* with a different overtone. This play has been categorized as the Radio Play. BBC Radio 4 broadcast it on 14 August 1997. The play appears to be a family drama but its underlining theme is the suppression of homosexuals under dominant heterosexual society. Simultaneously, the play also stresses on ‘feminine assertion’ and ‘transgression’ in patriarchal society. The play is considered as an unconventional romantic comedy. It deals with the efforts of parents to bring about an arranged marriage of their children. The play also blends the theme of North and South Indian families, cultures, their differences and the issue of homosexuals. The story of the play has comical touch but the abnormal behaviour of the married couple in the so – called normal hetero - patriarchal society shocks the readers. The play represents the Patel

family and the Gowda family. The Patels represent the south Indian culture and lifestyle. They are Vokkaligas, a sub community known as 'Morasu Vokkaligas' having history from the 11th century. The Gowdas are basically farmers. Dattani shows the helplessness of both the Patels and the Gowdas (Parents) to bring about an arranged marriage of their children due to different problems. The problems of their children bring the two families together. In this play Dattani presents a story of Alpesh and Lata who are eventually compelled to marry each other despite their different sexual expectations.

The characters of the play are Alpesh Patel, Lata Gowda, Chandrakant Patel, Kusumben Patel, Devraj Gowda, Prema Gowda, Mali and Liftman/Coconut Seller. As per the plot of the play, Chandrakant Patel and Kusumben Patel are desperate in getting their son married to comply with the marriage institution of society. Likewise the Gowda parents are also worried about the marriage of their daughter Lata. Hence both the families respond to a matrimonial advertisement and decide to bring about the marriage of Lata and Alpesh. Dattani portrayed the character of Lata as somewhat abnormal and therefore her parents are desperate to arrange her marriage at the earliest. Due to Lata's lecherous attitude, her mother is anxious about the Patel family's agreement. Devraj Gowda, Lata's father, thinks Alpesh as the right life partner for Lata due to the age factor of both Lata and Alpesh.

Same is the case with Alpesh. His mother is apprehensive as Alpesh is already a divorcee and his proposed second marriage with Lata is going to be an inter-caste one. Alpesh has homosexual relationship with Trilok. Being a homosexual, Alpesh finds it difficult to perform the traditions and rituals of heterosexual society. Despite his opposition, his parents look forward to the second marriage. Dattani portrayed the character of Alpesh, a homosexual person suffocated by heterosexual parents. His conversation with his mother reveals the fact as:

“ALPESH. Yes, All right. I give up. If you like her, I will marry her.

KUSUMBEN PATEL. It is not a question of what I like or don't like. When we are begging, what is the point in hiding the begging bowl?

ALPESH. Baa, I want to ask you something.

KUSUMBEN PATEL: Yes?

ALPESH. Is it ... is it very important for me to get married.

*Pause.*

KUSUMBEN PATEL. Hmm.

ALPESH: (thought). Trilok you can't say I didn't try.

KUSUMBEN PATEL. Why do you ask me that?

ALPESH. What is it ... I didn't get married.

KUSUMBEN PATEL. Why don't you want to get married?

ALPESH. Because I am happy alone.

KUSUMBEN PATEL. Alone? You don't know what being alone is. When  
have you been alone?

ALPESH. (thought): Always

KUSUMBEN PATEL. What are you thinking? I know something is  
happening inside that head.

ALPESH. (thought): My head, my heart, my cock, my soul ...

KUSUMBEN PATEL. Alpesh ... My son ...

ALPESH: (thought). Yes, touch me ... hold me... That feels good, Trilok.”<sup>55</sup>

Alpesh is not interested in marrying a second time as he tells his mother that this marriage will also bring disappointment to their family. However, his mother is rather aggressive and emotional in this case to which Alpesh has to agree on. Likewise, Lata is also not interested in her forthcoming marriage as she already has a sexual relationship with a terrorist, Salim. Dattani soliloquized Lata's thought and her obsession for Salim as follows:

“Salim, I know you are allowed four wives-what’s the point in thinking all of that now? I will have to be content keeping you as a lover. How are we going to work this out? What if you have to go back to Kashmir? ... I will have to find another lover. I can have more than four ... Why do think all this? I am a bad girl. I will rot in hell. Oh! Damn the Bangalore Catholic School, sending me on a guilt trip now.”<sup>56</sup>

Both Alpesh and Lata feel uneasy about getting married. They have already chosen their ways of enjoying life. Dattani exposes the hollowness of the modern generation who runs away from rigid conservative traditions. Moreover, homosexuals are rather victimized and pressurized under certain cultural and patriarchal constructs. The patriarchal constructs force both Alpesh and Lata to get together. However, the transgressive homosexuality in Alpesh and the feminine assertion of Lata find it convenient and to do the needful. The first meeting of Alpesh and Lata in the backyard of Lata’s farmhouse proves to be an initiative to live life together and fulfil their individual desires from respective sexual partners.

After a formal introduction to each other, they feel comfortable as they share cigarettes and smoke together. Alpesh’s expression in Hindi as ‘*Teri bhi chup and meri bhi chup*’ has multiple connotations. As they speak further about Mali’s beating of drum loudly, Alpesh thinks of Trilok as “Love me Trilok! Yes! Kiss me. Oh! Oh! Oh! Oooh!”<sup>57</sup>

As a matter of fact, both the characters wish to share a lot about their past to each other. However, they dive deep in the thoughts of their respective lovers. For instance:

“LATA (thought). I had the chance! I couldn’t lose it. I had to tell him about you, then or never.

ALPESH (though). What could I say, Trilok? How would I tell her to reject me?

LATA. Look, I don’t want to marry you. I’m in love with some one else.

ALPESH (thought). That was good of her.

(Pause.Speech) Can we sit down somewhere?



LATA. Keep walking. Might as well see Gauri's bloody calf.

ALPESH (thought). She was waiting for me to say something. May be should have told her about you. After all she was decent enough to bring up her Salman or Salim or whatever. At that very movement, I imagine our parents were sort of clinching the deal.”<sup>58</sup>

Initially due to the different expectations of both Lata and Alpesh, they agree to marry each other which in the true sense of the term will allow them to continue their sexual relationship with their partners. Both are very reluctant to enter into the confinements of heteropatriarchal society. Lata frequently thinks of Salim and scolds her fate for ruining her life. Alpesh too longs for homosexual love for Trilok. However, Alpesh is afraid of revealing his homosexuality to Lata. The reason is that he has already accepted heterosexual norms for the sake of his parents. His parents have inculcated heterosexism in the mind of Alpesh. However, Lata comes to know his state of being homosexual when she watches Alpesh and Mali in an unusual condition. The conversation among Alpesh, Lata and Mali brings out Alpesh's reality before Lata and Mali's homophobic nature. Mali is afraid of losing his identity as a heterosexual man. Homophobia in a way forces heterosexuals to behave contemptuously with homosexuals. In the same way homosexuals too feel it awkward when they approach any heterosexual man or woman. Alpesh is rather afraid of seeing Lata when he is engaged with Mali. Lata asks Alpesh about his sexuality but he does not respond because he too is getting exposed before her. Lata becomes furious and scolds Alpesh for including Mali in the proclivity. Initially, Alpesh rejects the blame. Nevertheless, when Lata threatens Mali of disclosing the truth to his father. Alpesh intervenes and assures both Mali and Lata that he will accept the blame to which Lata accuses him of involving Mali in this job which is supposed to be crime in the heterosexual society. Apart from Alpesh and Lata, Mali's homophobia arouses furiously. He is afraid of getting boycotted from mainstream society. He anticipates his exclusion from his village and his work in the market. Moreover, he thinks of suicide because he thinks that nobody will marry him. After listening to Mali's homophobic expression, Lata thinks of running away alone from her parents to enjoy her individual life. Mali requests her to stop and marry Alpesh. Both Lata and Alpesh find it hard to live separately

because marriage is a way out for them from restrictions of their parents and the society. Both agree to marry as a compromise. Dattani showcases here marriage as a ‘sacred institution’ for a boy and a girl to have sex which unanimously permitted by the heterosexual society. However, the homosexuality of Alpesh and feminine assertion of Lata look forward to this marriage from their individual perspectives. Because by doing it they can continue their sexual relations with others.

Lata reiterates what Alpesh has already said as ‘*Teri bhichup, Meri Bhi Chup*’ but now in English as “...your silence and mine as well”...<sup>59</sup>The dialogue itself is sufficient to prove the fact that in India, voices of homosexuals and women are hushed up or crushed. The dialogue is an indication of their transgressive nature as well. Alpesh becomes happy when Lata tells him that Salim lives in Bombay city. He very comically but cunningly asks Lata “Will you bring Mali as dowry?”<sup>60</sup> It is thus the title of the play *Do the Needful* is very apt here. The couple again dives deep in the thoughts of their respective partners.

“ALPESH (thought). Trilok, I don’t know how much I am actually going to say you. I assume you will not understand some of it. I am certainly not going to tell you about Mali. One more lie, I guess I am used to it.

LATA (thought). Salim, I will be meeting you soon. I hope you understand.

You had better at least with you, I can be more honest. And

demanding.<sup>61</sup>

In order to fulfil parents’ expectations, both of them undergo the process of marriage institution supposing it to be a part of social and cultural compulsions. This marriage on the one hand paves the way for them to continue with relationships with their different sexual partners i.e., Alpesh with Trilok and Lata with Salim and on the other hand the couple is not blamed for diverting the traditional customs of marriage. Therefore the marriage between Lata and Alpesh proves to be a mutual compromise which allows both of them to live their life with lesser social restrictions. The title of

the play *Do the Needful*, has ironic significance. Apparently Lata and Alpesh are not blamed for their sexual desires or devaluing the traditional system of marriage and at the same time they are actually fulfilling their sexual desires and also diverting the ethics stated in the marriage institution. Hence Dattani entitles the play 'do the needful'. Dattani displayed the mentality of Indian parents for they take excessive care of their children and expect much from them in future. The disappointment occurs when their expectations remain unfulfilled. Dattani exposes the gap between tradition and modernity. His representation of different sexual orientations makes us think positively about homosexuals. Homosexuality is often stigmatized on grounds of superstitions, hypocrisy, misunderstanding and Section 377.

The Indian society looks down upon the homosexual love relationship something as perverse, unnatural or unethical and this standpoint has notoriously spoiled the social atmosphere of the entire country. Due to the influence of such orthodox perspective, people in modern times in India still treat homosexuals in an inhuman way. Alpesh in this play is shown as a victim of this conservative ideology of his parents and perhaps society. Dattani juxtaposes tradition versus modernity in this play. The Patel and the Gowda parents maintain their preservative outlook and force their children into the marital life which is more or less unsuitable for them. Lata and Alpesh maintain their unconventional approach. They get married but are often in search of the fulfilment of their sexual desires. By presenting a novel theme, Dattani, in a way, seeks to redefine the concept of the Modern Indian Theatre and simultaneously broadens its scope at global level. In addition to it, Dattani intentionally showcases a 'sign of change' among Indian people who gradually have started to accept the so far neglected community of homosexuals.

Dattani has handled the 'issue of homosexuality' in this play with great acumen. Homosexuals like Alpesh are forcibly pushed in the framework of heterosexuals' marriage institution without giving them space to articulate their voice and expectations. Along with the issue of homosexuality, the playwright brings about a fusion of diverse cultures of North and South India in the name of marriage. Alpesh is homophobic enough not to reveal his homosexual orientation to his parents. Rather he is fortunate enough to be supported by his fiancée Lata. However, her support is conditional to secure her independence and free will. By presenting an off-beat theme

in this play, Dattani draws attention of parents and society perhaps towards their children's wishes and expectations of homosexuals. Alpesh, despite being from a well to do family, gets ill-treatment which is always filled with contempt and cynicism. At the end of the play, the couple failed to comply with the expectations of their parents to continue their relations with their sex partners. In this play, Dattani handles two issues simultaneously. The homosexual Alpesh and the feminine Lata eventually find their space and identity in an uncompromising social set up.

Thus, it is Dattani's endeavouring task of handling an off-beat issue of the sexually marginalised community in India in these plays. The portrayal of homosexuality in each play has a unique postmodern touch because these plays not only deal with 'urges and identities' of homosexuals but also foreground their pain, anguish and suffering with weariness. The homosexual characters are unable to get rid of their travails, stigmatisation and discrimination. Dattani himself does not openly propose any particular solution to them but sensitizes us contemplate over their problems. Prior to Mahesh Dattani's plays in Indian English writing, the European novels such as E.M Forster's *Maurice* and D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* already portrayed courageously the controversial issue of gay and lesbian people in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These works pioneered a trend of queer writing in mainstream literature of modernism. However, Dattani is quite realistic in his dramatization of homosexuality; he does not offer happy ending to his plays as Forster did in his novel. His plays end with ceaseless sufferings of homosexual characters and incompetence of heterosexual onlookers perhaps readers to come to terms with the issue. The purposeful negligence towards the pathetic condition of homosexuals adds to their loss of hope which becomes a characteristic feature of postmodern literature. Dattani opines that whatever he writes is related to the time, place and manner in the sense that he addresses most churning issues which require urgent solutions because they have affected both the rural and urban India. Dattani mentions that he receives inspiration to write about the social issues from those people who are desperately striving to be privileged and enjoy freedom in the society. Dattani does not write something with which people are quite indifferent or unknown. He just seeks to draw attention of people to those social issues which have been intentionally or unintentionally side-lined by the majority of the Indian society. He foregrounds the subject matter which has been in existence since time immemorial but has been given prominence on the literary platform. Dattani holds a view that the

audience tends to overlook the oft-repeated themes and hence he explores the marginalized sections of the society. It would be relevant to sum up the discussion of the second chapter with Dattani's own remark about his plays.

“I write for my milieu, for my time and place-middle-class and urban India...My dramatic tension arises from people who aspire to freedom from society...I am not looking for something sensational, which the audience have never seen before...some subjects, which are under-explored, deserve their space. It's no use brushing them under the carpet. We have to understand the marginalized, including the gays. Each of us has a sense of isolation within given contexts. That's what makes us individual.”<sup>62</sup>

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### Chapter III

#### **The Issues of ‘Gender Discrimination’ in *Tara*, ‘Child Sexual Abuse’ in *Thirty Days in September* and ‘Patriarchy’ in *Where There’s a Will***

Mahesh Dattani is a prolific playwright. He has explored several social issues which have hampered the equal social progress of both man and woman in post – Independent India. In the previous chapter, three plays have been analysed in the light of the pressing issue of homosexuality. The conservative Indian society has been treating homosexuals as ‘others’ and they have been destined to suffer in the state of marginalization. In the same way Dattani has represented sufferings of women and children on gender and patriarchal grounds. The present chapter analyses three plays viz. *Tara*, *Thirty Days in September* and *Where There’s a Will* in the light of interrelated social issues of gender discrimination, child sexual abuse and patriarchy. On a surface level, the three plays deal with three issues, but ‘subordination of women’ is a common phenomenon in these plays. The concepts of ‘gender discrimination’, ‘child sexual abuse’ and ‘patriarchy’ foreground the voice of women against their victimization in male-dominated society. The present chapter is further divided into three parts; each part dealing with a social issue and its articulation through the play.

#### **Part One:**

##### **Gender: The concept**

In the first part of the chapter, an attempt is made to study the concept of gender and the ‘issue of gender discrimination’ prior to proceeding with the play itself. The concept of ‘gender’ has become a platform of much dispute in all social sciences and humanities. Arguments and counter-arguments have been made by several critics on two confusing terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’. However, these two terms have their different origins. ‘Sex’ is a biological term whereas ‘gender’ has socio-cultural connotations. Nature has differentiated male and female on the basis of their sex organs. Anatomically, there are conspicuous physical differences in male and female. Andrew Edger and Peter Sedgwick have stated the difference between ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ in following words:

“The concept of ‘gender’ is typically placed in opposition to the concept of ‘sex’. While our sex (female/male) is a matter of culture. Gender may therefore be taken to refer to learned patterns of behaviour and action, as opposed to that which is biologically determined. Crucially, biology need not be assumed to determine gender. This is to suggest that while what makes a person male or female is universal and grounded in laws of nature, the precise ways in which women express their femininity and men express their masculinity will vary from culture to culture. Thus, qualities that are stereotypically attributed to women and men in contemporary western culture are seen as gender, which entails that they could be changed.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the word ‘difference’ is replaced by ‘discrimination’ in social context. Therefore, the discrimination on grounds of gender prevailed in the social framework of human beings.

“Gender is the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity. Depending on the context, these characteristics may include biological sex (i.e., the state of being male, female, or an intersex variation), sex-based social structures (i.e., gender roles), or gender identity. Most cultures use a gender binary, having two genders (boys/men and girls/women); those who exist outside these groups fall under the umbrella term non-binary or gender queer. Some societies have specific genders besides "man" and "woman", such as the hijras of South Asia; these are often referred to as third genders (and *fourth genders*, etc.).”<sup>2</sup>

Sex refers to the ‘biological distinction’ between male and female in human and all other species whereas gender is a ‘social construct’. Gender refers to socio-cultural distinction between men and women. In fact, gender is an ideological phenomenon which has assigned different social roles to men and women.

“Sexologist John Money introduced the terminological distinction between biological sex and gender as a role in 1955. Before his work, it was uncommon to use the word *gender* to refer to anything but grammatical categories. However, Money's meaning of the word did not become widespread until the 1970s, when feminist theory embraced the concept of a distinction between

biological sex and the social construct of gender. Today, the distinction is followed in some contexts, especially the social sciences and documents written by the World Health Organization (WHO).”<sup>3</sup>

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, gender is

“a subclass within a grammatical class (such as noun, pronoun, adjective, or verb) of a language that is partly arbitrary but also partly based on distinguishable characteristics (such as shape, social rank, manner of existence, or sex) and that determines agreement with and selection of other words or grammatical forms.”<sup>4</sup>

‘Anatomy’ determines one’s sex as a ‘male’ or ‘female’. But the concept of ‘gender’ constitutes traits of masculinity and femininity in the behaviour of men and women. The gendered bias of our civilization has become a social construct. Traditionally speaking, the ‘masculine’ is identified as brave, active, dominating, cognitively efficient and physically strong whereas the ‘feminine’ is timid, passive, subversive, cognitively inefficient, weak and dependent. Further, the feminine traits are also identified as being emotional, acquiescent and affiliated to the masculine. These traits represent binary opposition such as the masculine as dominant and the feminine subversive which as a result leads to gender discrimination. However with the emergence of feminists’ voices around the world, the masculine traits were scrutinized critically. Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and Margaret Fuller’s *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) paved the ways for the social awareness among women about their social status. These books particularly highlighted the struggle of women for their own social recognition, their cultural roles, their achievements and their social and political rights. Virginia Woolf, through her fiction, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and some other writings highlighted the patriarchal dominance and the consequent cultural, economic and social disabilities of women. She criticized the prevention of women from accelerating their potential in creative and productive things. The ‘second-wave’ feminist Simone de Beauvoir is recognized as a radical feminist. Through her book *The Second Sex* (1949), she reacted against cultural identification of women as an ‘object’ and of man as ‘subject’ who is supposed to represent humanity

as a whole. "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman...; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature... which is described as feminine".<sup>5</sup> 'Gender studies' reinforce the standpoint of feminist criticism and queer theory with possible variations. 'Gender studies' emphasizes upon what Abrams says, "...the roles of males, and varying conceptions of masculinity, in the course of social, political and artistic history."<sup>6</sup> 'Gender studies' seem to be broadly influenced from the works of Michel Foucault because of his analysis of several sexual identities. Foucault observes such identities either normal or transgressive ones. Often these sexual identities underwent constructions and reconstructions with the passage of time due to various social discourses. Abrams further mentions Judith Butler's argument through her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). In this book,

"She argued that gender is not an innate or essential identity, but a contingent and variable construct that mandates a "performance"- that is, a particular set of practices which an individual acquires from the discourse of his or her social era and strives to enact."<sup>7</sup>

Contemporary feminists have defined the concept of gender and interpreted it in different contexts. Shulamith Firestone resists a view of gender-based roles of men and women. She upholds the view that there should be complete elimination of gender roles to bring equality in the status of man and women. Because it is the gender ideology that causes 'oppression' and 'discrimination'. In her book, *Dialectics of sex* (1970), Firestone upholds 'liberation of women' from 'child bearing and child rearing'. Luce Irigaray opposes the view that women should no longer be viewed as 'breeders' only. According to her, due to the burden of pregnancy and motherhood women are deprived of empowerment and freedom in their own life. The traditional confinement has narrowed down women's space in the male-dominated society. These feminists hold the view that "the motherhood has been cunningly glorified by generations of men to chain the women in the cycles of production of children."<sup>8</sup>

Judith Butler presents the 'interconnectivity' of the terms 'sex' and 'gender'. Gender pervades its scope over sex and thus acquires 'social and cultural' significance. The term 'sex' remains in very limited scope in the discourse of human society. Butler states,

“If gender consists of social meaning that sex assumes, then sex does not accrue social meanings as additive properties, but rather is replaced by the social meanings it takes on; sex is relinquished in the course of that assumption and gender emerges, not as a term in a continued relationship of opposition to sex, but as the term which absorbs and displaces “sex”, the mark of its full substantiation, into gender or what, from a materialistic point of view, might constitute a full desubstantiation... If gender is the social construction of sex and if there is no access to this “sex” except by means of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed gender, but that sex becomes something like a fiction...”<sup>9</sup>

In short, the term ‘gender’ refers to distinct social and cultural characteristics of being male and female as individuals. It further attributes economic and political affairs concerned with individuals. Therefore, ‘gender’ is not the creation of nature. It is the socio-cultural ideology which keeps different expectations from men and women. The heterosexual ideology based on ‘gender’ which has inculcated male domination and female subordination in the minds of both men and women. Both men and women are made to perform their distinct social roles. The construction of ‘gender’ assumes men are superior and women inferior. This binary opposition of superiority and inferiority becomes a discourse of male dominance and female subordination in almost all spheres of society and women are thus conditioned to become victims of ‘gender discrimination’.

## **2. The ‘Issue of Gender Discrimination’:**

‘Gender Discrimination’ is an interdisciplinary topic of research. The issue of ‘Gender Discrimination’ has acquired a prominent place for research in both social sciences and humanities. With the emergence of feminist’s movements across the world, gender sensibility has been aroused and women for the most part have raised their voices to reclaim their equal share in the social formation of human being. The theme of gender discrimination has been one of the most favourite ones among contemporary novelists, poets and playwrights in India and abroad. ‘Gender Discrimination’ can simply be defined as kin of procedure of prioritizing or denying opportunities, freedom and special privileges to a particular person considering his or her gender. ‘Gender

Discrimination' is based on sexual discrimination. It refers to the lop-sided sex-ratio, unequal socio-economic development and the subordination of a particular section in society. This subordinated section in any society is that of women. The predicament of women and denial of the right to equality causes gender discrimination. Women are victims of such discriminatory practices since their birth or childhood. Mahesh Dattani has dragged special attention of audience towards this phenomenon through the groundbreaking play *Tara*.

“Discrimination based on gender (or sex) is a common civil rights violation that takes many forms, including sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination, and unequal pay for women who do the same jobs as men.”<sup>10</sup>

Discrimination occurs in society on grounds of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, etc. However, out of all these, discrimination based on gender is the most severe one because it hampers the social development of one species of human being i.e. woman compared to other species i.e. man. 'Gender Discrimination' exists in higher, middle and lower classes of society across the world. The term 'gender discrimination' refers to the way the dominant section treats the subordinate one. Therefore, this issue has become the most distressing one in all modern societies. Women are conditioned to face exploitation, unequal treatment and subversion at the hands of men in the hetero-patriarchal society. Because gender is often regarded as parallel to sex and the 'female sex' is deemed to be inferior and 'male superior'. The issue of 'gender discrimination' could be best understood with what De-Lauretis says about the concept of 'gender'.

“The cultural conceptions of male and female as two complementary yet mutually exclusive categories into which all human beings are placed constitute within each culture a gender system that correlates sex cultural contents according to social values and hierarchies. Although the meanings vary with each concept, a sex gender system is always interconnected with political and economic factors in each society. In this light, the cultural construction of sex into gender and the asymmetry that characterizes all gender systems cross-culturally (though each in its particular ways) are understood as systematically linked to the organization of social inequality.”<sup>11</sup>

The issue of 'Gender Discrimination' in the India has acquired a disastrous nature in the present time. It does not mean that this issue did not exist in the ancient and medieval periods. However, with the passage of time, the status of women ruined in several facets of society. Women also raised their voice to challenge discriminatory practices and took strong initiatives for sustainable empowerment. Historically speaking, women used to have reputable social positions in the ancient 'Vedic Period'. Evidence of their equal sharing and contribution with regards to education, marriage, wealth and inheritance are still found in some history books and religious scriptures. Women enjoyed voluntary participation in social activities. One of the most remarkable facts of the 'Vedic Period' is that the practice of widow remarriage was prevalent. After the 'Vedic Period' was over, the 'Smriti Period' followed in India. Historians have labelled this period as the 'dark era' for women as they lost their legacy of equal statuses from the 'Vedic Period' to men. In this period, women were confined to their household duties. One of the worst rituals of this period is the practice of 'child marriage'. The widowed girl child was not allowed to remarry. Therefore, women are said to have lived a very miserable life. The deterioration in the social status of women increased during the 'medieval period'. The religious cultures of both Islam and Hindu prevented women from open social, cultural and religious access. Even the 'purdah or veil system' was introduced in this period which put more restrictions on women to stay in the four walls of the house. The worst ritual of the child marriage still continued during this period. The practice of 'Sati' which means volunteering to burn alive at a husband's funeral became prevalent throughout the country. It was one of the major consequences of 'gender discrimination' because only women had to go through the ordeal. Women slavery was also rampant. Therefore, discrimination based on 'gender' victimized women to a greater extent in this period.

The arrival of the British period was a ray of hope for women as the British administration set up efforts to improve the social status of women. The introduction of 'modern education system' in India reduced 'gender discrimination' to some extent. The British administration initiated proper education, nutrition and health for women. The barbaric practice of 'Sati' of the 'medieval period' was banned in which the social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy played a significant role. The practice of 'widow remarriage' was re-introduced. However, the orthodox Indian ideology looked forward to these reforms as 'restrains' on their religious and cultural customs and stood in strong

opposition. The practice of 'Sati' was stopped. However, 'child marriage' continued in some parts of the country in post-British period also. Thus, the British administration set up a reformatory mechanism for the upheaval in the social status of women.

The 'issue of gender discrimination' continued in the post-Independence period. Despite the increase in population and revolutionary changes in living standard, educational facilities, industrialization, transport, communication and technology, women are still deprived of their equal share compared to men. Hence, 'gender discrimination' requires a serious attention in forming policies for women's empowerment in present situation.

“Women constitute half of the world's population, perform nearly two-thirds of its work hours, receive one-tenth of the world's income, and less than one-hundredth of the world's property.”<sup>12</sup>

There are innumerable direct and indirect ways through which women are victimized. 'Gender discrimination' exists in the form of the 'sex determination' (female foeticide), starvation, denial of education, improper health treatment, eve-teasing, rapes, sexual harassment at domestic and job levels, dowry, religious and cultural beliefs and prejudices, honour killing, illiteracy so on and so forth. There are two recent cases of rape which shook the entire nation. One is 'the Delhi Gang rape' in 2013 and the other is 'the Kopardi rape case' in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra. Both 'Nirbhayas' lost their lives for no fault of their own. These cases raised the question of women's safety in India. After these two nightmares non-governmental organizations (NGOs) conducted awareness drives at schools, colleges and public places. The common appeal was raised to punish the victimizers with stringent laws. Every day, numerous cases of women exploitation take place and unfortunately most of them often go unreported.

“Violence against women is partly a result of gender relations that assumes men to be superior to women. Given the subordinate status of women, much of gender violence is considered normal and enjoys social sanction. Manifestations of violence include physical aggression, such as blows of varying intensity, burns, attempted hanging, sexual abuse and rape, psychological violence through insults, humiliation, coercion, blackmail, economic or emotional threats, and control over speech and actions. In extreme, but not unknown cases,



death is the result. These expressions of violence take place in a man-woman relationship within the family, state and society."<sup>13</sup>

According to Sonalde Desai, the denial of equal status almost begins from the parent's unbalanced treatment of their daughters compared to sons. Daughters are discursively subjected to provide an all-round education right from pre-primary to higher level. She criticizes the absurdity of parents thinking that the education of girls does not return anything to them. There is an irony of the situation in many places in India wherein women are harassed or killed and idols of goddesses like Saraswati, Laxmi and Durga are worshipped with intense care despite knowing the fact that goddesses are only mythical creations. Women are treated as unwanted, less significant, secondary citizens, etc. 'Female foeticide' and 'dowry death' are the most sensitive issues related to women that are still happening in some places in India. Such problems are ruining womanhood.

### **3. Reforms Initiated by Government and Public to Curb 'Gender Discrimination':**

Thus, considering the severity of the issue of 'gender discrimination', efforts have been made by both government and public. The government took initiatives against 'female foeticide' and legalized abortions under the "Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act in 1972". However, after realizing the misuse of 'sex determination techniques', the parliament passed the "Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act" which came into force from June 1, 1996. After considering lacuna in this Act, in 2002 the Parliament again passed "Pre-Conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of sex Selection) Act." Article 14 of the 'Indian Constitution' has guaranteed equality to every citizen. 'Section 376' deals with rape. The government has taken initiatives to mainstream women. In January 1992, the government came up with "the National Commission for Women." The commission creates sound awareness against the 'discrimination related to women'. One of the positive steps the government has ever taken is the "Reservation for Women in Local Self Government." In order to ensure survival, safety and development of the female child the government had launched "The National Plan of Action for Girl Child" from 1991 to 2000.

“This plan seeks to prevent female foeticide and infanticide, eliminate gender discrimination, provide safe drinking water and fodder near homes, rehabilitate and protect girls from exploitation, assault and abuse.”<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, in 2001, ‘the Ministry Of Human Resource Development Centre’ through its portfolio department of ‘Women and Child Development’ launched a “National Policy for the Empowerment of Women.” The ‘BJP’ government launched a laudable scheme “*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojna* in 2015. The goal of this scheme is to eliminate ‘gender discrimination’ against women and provide educational access to girls equal to boys. Another scheme such as “*Sukanya Samriddhi Account*” encourages parents to raise funds for future education and marriage for their daughters through bank accounts. Higher Education Institutes being affiliated to ‘Savitribai Phule Pune University’ have launched a scheme entitled ‘*Mazi Aai Mazya Mahavidyalayat*’ (My Mother in My College) to achieve gender equality through the ‘Student Development Board’ of each affiliated college. Thus, these and several other reforms have been made to address the issue of ‘gender discrimination’ in India. Literature, films and media have played a crucial role to foreground this issue. The Indian English novels have addressed the issue of ‘gender discrimination’. Some Indian English playwrights such as Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sirkar, Girish Karnad, etc. have dramatized this issue through their plays. But Mahesh Dattani rose all above them to stage this issue with innovative representation in his play *Tara*.

#### **4. ‘Gender Discrimination’ in *Tara*:**

*Tara*, a two-act play, has been categorized in the segment of the Stage Plays’. *Twinkle Tara*, as its erstwhile title goes, was first performed at the Chowdiah Memorial Hall in Bangalore on October 23, 1990 by the ‘Playpen Performing Arts Group’. It was also subsequently performed as ‘Tara’ at the ‘Sophia Bhabha Hall’ by Theatre Group, Bombay on November 9, 1991. The play was directed by Alyque Padamsee. The play portrays the physical and emotional separation of Siamese twins. In the course of the play, it becomes clear that the separation was surgically carried out by a corrupt doctor named Thakkar who was then bribed by the maternal grandfather of the twins for committing this crime. Besides grandfather, the mother of the twins, Bharati and the father, Mr. Patel were also involved in the complicity. The family prefers the male child over the female one and hence decides to attach two legs to the body of male child

named Chandan and one leg to the female child named Tara. Notwithstanding the medical report stated that two legs suited Tara's body and one to Chandan as the major blood supply to two legs was from Tara's body. Injustice is meted out Tara since her birth and it continues till the moment of her death which actually occurs due to the kidney failure. Bharati repents a lot over her involvement in Tara's life-time deformity and dies of grief. Chandan shifts to London and changes his name to Dan with the view to escape himself from his tragic past with the Patel family. However, he is sensitive enough not to forget the loss of his sister due to the unethical preference of the male child in the Patel family.

Issues related to women have been profoundly represented in both Western and Indian English plays. Helene Keyssar in her *Feminist Theatre* observes,

“...although plays about women have existed since the origin of drama, and plays by women have been written and performed in the Western world at least since Sappho, Feminist drama emerged as a distinct theatrical genre.”<sup>15</sup>

The 'Avant-garde movement' in the European theatre in the sixties and the revival of women's movements in America foregrounded the issue of 'gender discrimination'. The dominance of the patriarchal ideology was considered to be harmful than that of capitalism and therefore attempts were made to liberate women from the clutches of male-dominated ideology. As argued earlier that Simone de Beauvoir explained the status of women as 'second class citizens' in her book *The Second Sex*. This book and other such activities raised awareness among women and gradually they became acquainted with the anti-patriarchal ideology which eventually challenged male-dominance. Mahesh Dattani also recognized the subaltern status of women in Indian society and handled the issue of 'gender discrimination' with his exclusive theatrical expertise.

Mahesh Dattani genuinely stages his every play in such a way that his stage directions are designed in accordance with the theme of the play. He makes use of 'theatre' techniques. The Patel household occupies the large part of the stage as the entire setting of play takes place in it. The middle-class family is composed of Mr. Patel, his wife Bharati and their two children Tara and Chandan who were born exceptionally and

unfortunately as 'Siamese twin' sharing one leg common but separated physically through a surgery. This surgery was an unethical medical experiment of Dr. Thakkar. The next level, which is only realistic, represents the older Chandan (referred to as Dan in London) who is nostalgic of his sister. Dattani has reserved a higher stage level to Dr. Thakkar who remains seated throughout the play. Symbolically, Dr. Thakkar's sitting on a higher level represents the 'God-like' position and the pseudo supremacy of science over nature. It is because both Tara and Chandan were physically united but Dr. Thakkar separated them surgically as a new scientific discovery. Thus, Dattani took efforts to make his stage look as good as the real life situations.

The entire body of the play is portrayed through Chandan's recollections of his childhood memories with his sister Tara and his parents. Tara and Chandan are surgically separated as they were conjoined twins having three legs. Bharati's Father, a Bangalore-based politician, demands his daughter to let her twin go through a surgery and Bharati too consents to it. The male-centric discourse prefers male kids to female one and thus two legs are given to the male youngster and one to the female regardless of the way that the major blood supply to two legs was from Tara's body. Unfortunately, both children remain physically handicapped because two legs do not suit Chandan's body and Tara is supported with an artificial leg brought from Jaipur. Although both Chandan and Tara are physically separated, they are interwoven on an emotional level. Chandan is reluctant to follow the footprints of his father, Mr. Patel who only looks forward to his son's career and neglects his daughter's education and career. As the play proceeds, some minor characters appear on stage. Roopa, a next door neighbour and Tara's friend keeps coming to Tara to play. Other characters such as Dr. Ray, Grandfather and O prema are revealed to us only through the memories of major characters. Dattani makes use of flashback technique through which provides background knowledge to the audience regarding the medical history and physical and emotional struggle of both children. Upon reading Dattani's opinion in the interview given to Erin Mee, it comes across that the play is often misinterpreted by many people as the emphasis is laid on the medical history of the twins. Actually Dattani has applied the device of metaphor by showing a female infant and a male infant tied physically together. Through this metaphor, Dattani wants to show the natural gender equality which is later turned into inequality due to the preoccupied mind-set of parents that the male child is the sole inheritor of the property. Therefore, nature herself treats both male

and female species equally, it is our cultural prejudice which brings about discrimination.

It seems that Dattani is not at any way a mere imitator of the feminist ideology because unlike the radical feminists who stressed exploitation done to female in the patriarchal society, Dattani portrays a world wherein both the male and female are ideologically supposed to be under the illusion. This illusion compels both man and woman to accept socio-cultural polarities. Dattani has projected a realistic view of Indian society which is notoriously known for keeping abominations against women. Simultaneously, he also offers a dream world at the end of the play when Tara and Dan (erstwhile Chandan) are seen hugging each other. This simultaneous projection of the real world and dream world is relevant here enough to understand the deep-rooted issue of 'gender discrimination'.

*Tara* is a quintessence enough to present a 'gender-biased' society wherein decisions are taken and policies are framed mostly by men. A woman's identity is rather hidden or defined by her male partner as mother, wife and daughter. Mr. Patel who represents the patriarchal authority in the play is very intent on clarifying the role of his son Chandan and ignores his daughter Tara. The accepted norms of 'gendered' roles are so rigid that nobody seeks to go beyond them. The following dialogue among family members is an example of how 'gendered' roles are assigned ideologically. It is heinous for Patel to see Chandan assisting Bharati in sorting her imprecision in weaving.

“PATEL: Let Tara do it.

CHANDAN: It's Okay.

PATEL: Give it to her.

CHANDAN: Why ...?

PATEL: Chandan, leave that damn thing alone!...

PATEL: (to Bharati). How dare you do that to him?... You can think of

turning him into a sissy- teaching him to knit!”<sup>16</sup>

It is thus highly irritating for Patel to see Chandan helping Bharati in weaving which is traditionally supposed to be done by women. Patel's patriarchal angst tortures himself and the rest family members. Chandan represents himself here as an 'agent of change or a reformer' in the modern generation. Chandan challenges the age-old concept of gendered roles and tries to reverse them. However his act of reversing traditional phenomena invites problems in the family.

As argued earlier that prior to the Indian English playwrights, novelists have raised the issue of 'gender discrimination'. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* becomes a case in point here because of its projection of typical 'gendered' roles. The protagonist in the novel, Jaya is expected to mend the shirt of her husband as it is a part of her routine obligations. Men are not supposed to be involved in such obligations. Her sarcastic response to it uncovers the force of the issue that the duties of man and woman are poles apart and men should not intrude on women's duties or vice versa.

The similar presentation is also found in the play *Tara* when Patel prefers Chandan to go to office. Traditionally, it is taken for granted that a woman must do all household work such as cooking, child bearing, and child rearing, serving to men and being polite and punctual. Man is supposed to work outside the house. Tara critically comments on this tradition referring to the Stone Age that men in those times used to go hunting outside as a part of the livelihood of their families, whereas women used to do all household works living in their caves.

Though physically handicapped, Tara is intellectually superior to her brother Chandan and neighbourhood girl Roopa. In the above quoted expression, Tara intentionally refers to collocations associated with men as 'brave', 'decisive', 'macho', etc. and women as 'timid', 'indecisive/dependent', 'loving, caring, etc. Therefore, the practice of 'gender discrimination' has been in existence since the 'Stone Age' in which men used to go hunting as a part of the livelihood of their family and women were assigned to look after their babies and caves. Tara questions the initiatives which are taken to empower women to work with men shoulder to shoulder due to prevailing discriminatory practices taking place in several ways.

Dattani portrays Tara as more intelligent than Chandan. However, Patel thinks of only Chandan's career. He becomes unhappy when Chandan decides to lose one academic year as Tara is also losing her for kidney transplant surgery. Patel reiterates that he has some future plans for Chandan and overlooks Tara's future. Tara's position is more precarious than Chandan though both are physically challenged. The dialogue between Bharati and Chandan reflects the social attitude towards women. Bharati is worried about Tara's future. She mentions that Chandan being a boy will be accepted and perhaps tolerated in the world. Whereas Tara will have to suffer her pain on her own. With her growing age Tara's pain will grow which will be very difficult for herself to survive in this world. Bharati imagines Tara's future filled with angst and woes. The darkness prevailed in Tara's life saddens Bharati which becomes a reason to disclose the truth to Tara.

Bharati's concern for Tara increases gradually as the play proceeds. She becomes more attentive to Tara and is highly worried about her future. Bharati's guilt consciousness makes her restless and she decides to go through the process of purgation. However, her act of purgation will not suffice for Tara's physical and emotional compensation. Besides Patel and Bharati, Tara is victimized by her grandfather, the orthodox old folk, who nominates Chandan as the only heir to his property after his death and overlooks Tara who needs financial help to survive in the actual condition. Dattani seems to have taken impetus to deal with the issue of 'gender discrimination' in *Tara* from Tennessee Williams play *The Glass Menagerie*. Like *Tara*, a similar anguished voice of a mother for her crippled daughter Laura is heard in this play. It represents attempts of Laura's mother to make her daughter smart despite being crippled. She wants her daughter to get settled well by marrying a gentleman. The mother tells her daughter:

“Why, you are not crippled, you just have a little defect – hardly noticeable, even! When people have slight disadvantageous like that, they cultivate other things to make up for it – develop charm and vivacity – that is all here to do!”<sup>17</sup>

It is thus be it America of the 1930s or India of 1990s or even of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the mother's concern remains the same for the welfare of their daughters. The reason is that girls in any society are considered as consumer commodities and defective commodities are hardly accepted in the market. Dattani is clever enough to make Tara a tragic

character than that of pathetic like Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*. The reason is that there was conspiracy behind Tara's deformity in which along with Patel, grandfather and Bharati herself were involved. Bharati's guilty consciousness makes her reveal this conspiracy to Tara. It was decided by Bharati's father to bring about the surgical separation of the twin so that Chandan would get two natural legs. This happens due to unfair preference to male children. Bharati gradually becomes hysterical due to her unconditional involvement in the sin. As far as Bharati's role as a woman is concerned, it can also be assumed that she was guided by the age-old myth of women's masochism. This masochism can be attributed both to Bharati's consent and Tara's sacrifice of one leg for the sake of her brother Chandan. Paula Kaplan, in her book, *The Myth of Women's Masochism*, observes that,

“Women enjoy their suffering” becomes “responsible for profound and far-reaching emotional and physical harm to girls.”<sup>18</sup>

Women themselves are for the most part responsible for ‘gender discrimination’. Even though women are progressing equal to men, scientific advancement has brought innovative ways of doing injustice to women in which they themselves are knowingly or unknowingly involved. Before the advancement in science, superstitions were prevalent. Baby girls used to be killed soon after their birth. It can thus be said that tradition and modernity have equally contributed to make the issue of ‘gender discrimination’ more sensitive. Roopa's (Tara's friend) explanation of this fact becomes a case in point in the play.

“Since you insist, I will tell you. It may not be true. But this is what I have heard. The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies-you know, dowry and things like that- so they used to draw them in milk. So when people asked them how the baby died, they could say that she choked while drinking her milk.”<sup>19</sup>

However, now parents do not have to commit the crime of killing baby girls because the medical practitioners have taken this responsibility on their shoulders. Tara, perhaps, is a lucky girl enough to be born and survive although in a state of deformity for her brother's sake. Tara becomes anxious when she realizes the fact that her mother herself was involved in the conspiracy. This realization is more harmful to Tara than



her physical deformity which brings her death at the end of the play. Tara is misfortunate enough not to receive affection from her father and a share in the property belonging to her maternal grandfather. The following conversation between Tara and Chandan reveals Tara's predicament in the 'gender biased' society.

“TARA: Oh, What a waste! A waste of money. Why spend all the money to keep me alive? It can not matter whether I live or die. There are thousands of poor sick people on the roads who could be given care and attention ...oh, bullshit! Don't care! I don't care about anyone except mummy!...

CHANDAN: You should. You should care for people around you.

TARA: How do you expect me to feel anything for anyone if they don't give me any feeling to begin with? Why is it wrong for me to be without feeling?... I have the right to be selfish, like everyone else!

CHANDAN: No, you don't! we don't. We are not everything else ...

TARA: Oh, don't bother. You are not my big brother. Okay? I can teach you a trick or two if I want to.

CHANDAN: (annoyed). Oh sure! Women mature faster!

TARA: Yes! We do. We do. And we are more sensitive, more intellectual, more compassionate human beings than creeps like you and ...

Daddy!”<sup>20</sup>

Like Tara, Bharati is also shown to be dead at the end of the play for her prolonged physical and mental sufferings. Her complicity takes her life. Bharati is also a victim of gender discrimination for she is rudely treated by her husband. Mr. Patel even does not allow Bharati to reveal the truth to Tara. However, as mentioned earlier, Bharati goes through the process of purgation by confession, despite Patel's resistance not to reveal the truth, she challenges the patriarchal ideology. Dattani exposes another side of male supremacy in the play. Van Bal, a famous anthropologist, observes,

“The supposition that society’s rules of conduct are exclusively or predominantly male-made is preposterous. The fact that the codification of the rules and the supervision of their observance very often are male prerogative should not lead us to make the mistake of the cock perched on hedge crowing because the hen laid on egg.”<sup>21</sup>

Speaking in an interview Dattani mentions that the issue of gender discrimination is more visible one than issues of castes, creeds, religions, etc. in India. He rebukes cultural polarity as it is an artificial one which prioritizes male gender over the female. Tara is not only handicapped through the surgical separation but also handicapped by her gender being female. The surgery was in fact the beginning of the discrimination against her which continued throughout her life. Mr. Patel treats her as inferior to Chandan despite the fact that Tara is intellectually superior to Chandan. He remains concerned only about Chandan’s education and career. He does not bother about Tara’s upbringing and therefore neglects her. Thus Tara experiences the gender discrimination in the every step of her life.

During his discussion on the film *Sophie’s Choice* with Roopa, Chandan realises the predicament of his sister due to his parents’ impartiality for his sound health. Chandan compares Tara to Sophie and arrives at a conclusion that women irrespective of any country, race or time, are treated secondary to men which is against the law of nature.

Chandan is sensitive enough to raise the issue of ‘gender discrimination’ while watching the movie in which the polish immigrant Sophie is forced to choose one child from her two, a boy and a girl.

CHANDAN: What would you do if you had to choose between a boy and a girl? Who would you choose?

ROOPA: A boy definitely!

CHANDAN: Definitely?

ROOPA: Yes, it’s bad enough studying in an all girls’ school. I would definitely want a boyfriend.

CHANDAN: No, No. I didn't mean that!

ROOPA: Then what did you mean?

CHANDAN: I meant a son and a daughter.

ROOPA: Oh, boy child and girl child. Say that!

CHANDAN: What would your choice be?

ROOPA: I would be happy with either one.

CHANDAN: That's not the point. In the film, I mean. The Nazis will  
only allow her to keep one child. The other one would be taken  
away to a concentration camp or something.<sup>22</sup>

The casual discussion between Chandan and Roopa on the issue of gender discrimination is supportive to the main theme the play. Chandan makes her concentrate on it although she fails to understand the depth of the issue. The use of 'mirror image' in another casual discussion among the trio reveals the feminist attitude of the playwright. The discussion is on the movie *The Mirror Cracked* is as follows:

“ROOPA: What a nice title! The Mirror Cracked. Very dramatic.

TARA: Imagine not being able to have children because  
somebody gave her German measles when she was pregnant.

ROOPA: How does the poem go?

CHANDAN: ‘The curse has come upon me! Cried the Lady of  
Shallot.’

ROOPA: I feel sorry for the Lady of shallot. Locked up. Not being able to see  
the world, you know. Just sitting and wearing a tapestry or  
something and having a cracked mirror.

ROOPA: The Mirror Cracks later.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the typical feminine image appears in a woman holding the mirror to her face. A woman is conditioned to hold the mirror to her face in the male dominated family as a mechanism to ensure her beauty and sex appeal. A woman is rather afraid of losing her beauty and frequently uses a mirror to insure it. Dattani makes use of an intertextual reference in his play to strengthen the issue of gender discrimination. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, through their feminist reading of the story 'Snow White' observe:

“... the mirror into which every woman looks, reflects not the woman's own image but the patriarchal simulacrum of that image. A woman's self-evaluation is ruled by the patriarchal voice of judgement; the woman internalizes the male voice; his voice resides in her mirror, her own mind.”<sup>24</sup>

The 'issue of gender discrimination' leads to the loss of identity of a particular gender. The sense that the identity as a man or woman is lost, efforts are again made to reassert it through different ways. As far as the character Tara is concerned, she expects moral support from parents and brother. However, after going through the disillusionment, she is in search of a positive role in future.

Through the discussion with Chandan about her future, Tara mentions that she has decided to spend her remaining life in the service of those who are isolated, neglected and dehumanized due to the prevalent cultural prejudices among people. Tara's decision to start an institution for the welfare of poor or starved people indicates her vision of achieving the 'equality' among people irrespective of differences in gender, race, class or religion. Her reference to Mother Teresa in sacrificing herself to the noble cause is significant in the sense that if one generation fails to serve the society, the next generation has to serve it and eradicate social issues. Tara considers that her social work for marginalized people will only make her life meaningful.

Thus, after going through the play, it becomes clear that Dattani not only raises the issue of gender discrimination but also highlights the necessity of having both masculine and feminine qualities in a human being to survive. Dattani uses the concept of Siamese twin which itself is a symbol for the equality of gender. The analysis of the play from the standpoint of gender discrimination could be best summed up with the view that nature has not discriminated both Chandan and Tara biologically. It is the hetero-patriarchal ideology which brought about gender-based dissection of the Siamese twin.

Therefore, it becomes clear that gender is a socio-cultural phenomenon which leads to discrimination. The emotional attachment between Tara and Chandan in the dystopian world becomes a utopian representation of gender equality. Both the children consider each other through a harmonious equality which is a sign of change in attitude among the people of the modern generation. In this play, Dattani exposes the juxtaposition of modernity versus tradition. The Patel parents and Grandfather hold the conservative attitude whereas Tara and Chandan advocate the rational perhaps equal attitude as far the 'gender' is concerned. Dattani implies this solution through this play that at least the young generation should lay the foundation of gender equality so that women can work shoulder to shoulder with men in every field. In the present context women are working efficiently in almost all fields which were earlier supposed to be men's territory. Yet there is a need to provide some extra space to women where they can expose their potential and assert their identity firmly.

## Part Two:

### 3.5. Patriarchy: A Concept

Patriarchy is simply defined as a kind of social system in which males hold the higher authority in families or in societies for that matter. Patriarchy, in general, maintains hierarchical structures between men and women. This hierarchical structure leads to dominance of men and subordination of women. It becomes a barrier for women to uphold their social status. The dominance of male and subordination of females is not biological but rather a social construction. Women are perceived as a means for men's utilization. They are deprived of asserting their existence, stating their opinions firmly and living life democratically. Their life is for the most part designed and defined by their male counterparts. Therefore, women are forced to lead a miserable life. The patriarchal burden is imposed upon women to suppress their voice. Except for some biological differences in physical structure, females are equal to males. However, the ideological male supremacy creates hurdles for women to go forward in society despite being equal to men in merit and intelligence. In the majority of cases, the patriarchal institution in society is responsible for the degradation of women in several spheres because absolute power rests with men and women have to follow the footprints of men.

Patriarchy has become a social issue which has caused massive exploitation of women in several parts of the world. However, women are becoming conscious of their social deterioration in current times. They have started raising their voice and asserting their existence firmly through different activities. Even a considerable number of men have taken initiatives to bring women into the mainstream of society. Through social activities, organizations, literature, media, films, etc. women are proving their significance profoundly. Literature has become a forum through which the issue of patriarchy is being redressed. Along with novels in Indian writing in English plays of Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani have foregrounded this issue. Mahesh Dattani has bravely addressed the issue of patriarchy, its consequences and the mechanism to deal with this problem through his first play entitled *Where There's a Will*. However, before discussing his play from a patriarchal standpoint in particular, it is necessary to have a brief overview of the term 'patriarchy' in general.

“*Patriarchy* literally means "the rule of the father" and comes from the Greek πατριάρχης (*patriarkhēs*), "father or chief of a race", which is a compound of πατριά (*patria*), "lineage, descent" (from πατήρ *patēr*, "father") and ἄρχω (*arkhō*), "rule, govern".”<sup>25</sup>

“Historically the term patriarchy has been used to refer to autocratic rule by the male head of the family; however, since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century it has also been used to refer to social systems in which power is primarily held by adult men, particularly by writers associated with second-wave feminism such as Kate Millet; these writers sought to use an understanding of patriarchal social relations to liberate women from male domination. This concept of patriarchy was developed to explain male dominance as a social, rather than biological phenomenon.”<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the term ‘patriarchy’ is used to refer to a particular section of family or society governed by men. A man in a patriarchal institution rules over women, fellow men, children, etc. Kamla Bhasin in her book *What is Patriarchy?* says the word patriarchy is used to...

“to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterise a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways”<sup>27</sup>

Male domination becomes prevalent in both individual and social spheres. Therefore, feminists have preferred the term ‘patriarchy’ to display the binary opposition of dominance and subordination between men and women. According to feminism, patriarchy is an ideology which is used to suppress and oppress women on several social and domestic grounds. Therefore, feminists use this term to refer to the subordinate status rendered to women. Patriarchy is thus a discourse which enables us to realize the social status of women.

Different thinkers have defined the term ‘patriarchy’ in their own ways. A feminist psychologist Juliet Mitchell defined patriarchy as “a kinship system in which men exchange women.”<sup>28</sup> Gulnaz Fatma defines “patriarchy is the result of sociological

constructions that passed down from generation to generation.”<sup>29</sup> Fatma’s definition emphasizes the ways older men oppress women. Sylvia Walby, a sociologist, discusses the system of patriarchy as a social structure which is considerably dominated by men to oppress women. Walby criticizes that the notion of ‘biological determinism’ differentiates men from women, their bodies and their assigned roles. The patriarchal system thus holds the view that men are privileged to dominate women in any way.

### **3.6. The ‘Issue of Patriarchy’:**

Most prehistoric so-called hunter gatherer societies were ‘egalitarian’ as far as the anthropological evidence is concerned. Because there was hardly any patriarchal development until the age of agriculture and domestication flourished. Gerda Learner in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986) mentions that

“there was no single event, and document that patriarchy as a social system arose in different times.”<sup>30</sup>

Learner states that anthropologists did not come across norms of ‘dominance’ and ‘subordination’ based on ‘sex’ of human being in that period. Religious fundamentalism is one of the major reasons to establish patriarchal dominance. Race, class, ethnicity, cast and religion are strongly associated with patriarchy.

After gradual development in agriculture and domestication, the male supremacy shaped the ‘social structure’ which became the patriarchal structure. Consequently the status of women was devalued. The conservative ideology is that men in the society are born to govern women. The inculcation of patriarchal ideology among women subordinated them socially, culturally and economically. Women are deprived of contributing their equal share in society even though the fact is that they themselves reproduce human beings. Women have no control over their own reproduction system as it is controlled by men. The patriarchal society disempowered women and upheld the social status of men. Patriarchy is imposed on women through several ways such as lowering their social status, exploiting them, viewing them as sex object, violence, etc.

In patriarchal society, women are looked down upon as second fiddle. Men play the role of protagonist and subordinate roles are assigned to women. Women are



ideologically conditioned to give in to what men decide for them. Kate Millet, in her book, *Sexual Politics* (1977), states that women are disciplined

“through institutions such as the academy, the church and the family, each of which justifies and reinforces women’s subordination to men.”<sup>31</sup>

Thus, ‘hierarchy’, ‘power’ and ‘dominance’ are characteristic features of the patriarchal society through which women have been dominated, oppressed and exploited. It is believed by traditionalists that the patriarchal social system has been in existence since the origin of mankind and will continue forever as it is one of the steps of nature’s hierarchy. However, this view has been challenged by arguing that patriarchy is not natural but rather a man-made discourse which could be changed. Gerda Learner has summarized Aristotle’s standpoint of viewing male as ‘active’ and female as ‘passive’. For Aristotle, female is a “mutilated male”<sup>32</sup> meaning ‘a human being without soul’. The biological inferiority is visible in their ability to reason whereas man is superior to rule. Learner mentions Aristotle’s opinion as “the courage of man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying.”<sup>33</sup>

However, such explanations are bereft of scientific and historical evidence. Even though there are biological differences, these differences do not discriminate between man and woman as far as general intelligence is concerned. And this helps us assert that patriarchy is man-made discourse, not natural one. Frederick Engels, in his book, *The Origins of family, Private Property and the State* (1940), challenged the notion that patriarchy exists since time immemorial and will continue to exist forever. He mentions that with the development of private property, women have started to be subjected to the power politics on the part of men. Due to the division of classes and labour, the social status of women lowered. Historically, men have been privileged to acquire the property and women were supposed to continue themselves to look after their men and children. The inheritance of property passed from one generation to the next leading to the subordinated status of women. According to M. Mies, in her paper entitled, ‘The Social Origins of Sexual Divisions of Labour’,

“...despite diverse ideological standpoints among various feminist groups, they are getting together on the same platform i.e. the anti-patriarchal ideology which rejects Sigmund Freud’s notion of “women’s anatomy is destiny.”<sup>34</sup>

The unison of diverse feminists started a kind of rebellion against the age-old concept of patriarchal hegemony. Therefore, Mies states that “the male-ness and female-ness not biological givens, but rather the result of a long historical process.”<sup>35</sup>

The normal predominance of male over female is the presupposition of male-centric ideology. In all spheres of life, women’s dependence on men is taken for granted. This assumption results in the predicament of women in both family and society because the sole power or authority is handed over to men. Subsequently, women are looked down upon. They are dismissed from enjoying democratic freedom of their own life. Simone de Beauvoir contends that men consider women not quite the same as themselves. Women are viewed as ‘second sex’ and hence they are subjected to men. Kate Millet argues that under patriarchal domination women are viewed as ‘dependent’ sex class.

Women have to experience their subordination on daily basis from individual to social, from home to working place regardless of class, caste, religion they belong to or the designation they hold such subordination occurs in the form of discrimination, insult, exploitation, force, control, violence, oppression, etc. The discrimination becomes visible in male child over female one, distribution, life style, low payment in jobs, so on and so forth. Patriarchy is instilled through families, offices, religious practices, schools, films, media, literature, etc. Gerda Learner further says that

“The use of the phrase subordination of women instead of the word “oppression” has distinct advantages. Subordination does not have the connotation of evil intent on the part of the dominant; it allows for the possibility of collusion between him and the subordinate. It includes the possibility of voluntary acceptance of subordinate status in exchange of protection and privilege, a condition which characterizes so much of the historical experience of women. I will use the term “paternalistic dominance” for this relation. “Subordination” encompasses other relations in addition to “paternalistic dominance” and has the additional advantage over “oppression” of being neutral as to the causes of subordination.”<sup>36</sup>

As far as the Indian patriarchal social structure is concerned, it can be observed that even though plenty of efforts from government and NGOs have been made to empower women, there seems to be dearth in upholding the social status of women. In historical times in India women were forcibly pushed in the funeral fire known as ‘Sati’ i.e. jumping into the burning rite of a dead husband. The issue of ‘sati’ was exemplary enough to witness the deep-noted patriarchal ideology in India. However, this custom was banned by the social reformer Raja Ram Mahan Roy who brought social awareness with the help of the then British Government. This could be one of the first initiatives taken against the patriarchy. Albertine Shabana and Dr. Palanivel have rightly observed in their article ‘Patriarchy in Chetan Bhagat’s *Revolution 2020*’ as

“The denial of basic rights and facilities to women even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and significant high cases of female foeticide, honour killing, dowry death, etc. is a thing to ponder upon how patriarchy is deeply rooted in the very foundation of the society.”<sup>37</sup>

Of late, in modern Indian society, there seems to be a considerable change taking place in the status of women. The women population of the country is almost half of the population of the country. The government comes out with several welfare schemes to raise the social status of women. Stringent laws have been passed by the Parliament to protect the rights of women. Women seem to be working shoulder to shoulder with men in almost all sectors such as industry, Space, research, sports, media, politics, military, so on and so forth. However despite this heightened status of women, patriarchy still has its strong foundation which is difficult to eradicate. Women still undergo traumatic experiences. They are still victimized by patriarchal influence which limits their progress consciously and unconsciously.

Therefore the time has come to relegate patriarchy to mainstream women, youngsters, children, etc. for which Mahesh Dattani has already taken initiative through his play *Where There’s a Will*.

### **3.7. The ‘Issue of Patriarchy’ in *Where There’s a Will*:**

With this play it is Mahesh Dattani’s first attempt to set a platform for himself as a playwright. The play fetched name and fame for him which inspired him to produce a

series of plays exploring different social issues. It was first performed by Playpen at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore, on 23 September 1988, as part of the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival. It is a 'stage play' in two acts. Sita Raina who is a Delhi-based actor and theatre director has directed this play states that Dattani views this play a sort of exorcism of patriarchy. Women in the family are treated as secondary to men. A woman has to live under patriarchal dominance before and after her marriage. The double dominance by the father and the husband marginalizes a woman to great extent. Dattani through this play exposes consequences of the patriarchal dominance of Hasmukh Mehta over his family particularly on his wife Sonal, son Ajit and daughter-in-law Preeti. The play revolves around Hasmukh who treats his family members merely as servants with less intelligence. The family in the play is totally controlled by the patriarchal influence. Even after Hasmukh's death, this influence continues. The posthumous influence of Hasmukh's nature affects the relationship of son and mother, husband and wife and mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. However, Kiran's accompaniment to the family helps them to recover from the influence. Hasmukh's ghost becomes the watcher of his own machinations which leads his family into problems.

The gist of the play is that the protagonist Hasmukh Mehta establishes the patriarchal authority on his wife Sonal, his son Ajit and daughter-in-law Preeti. The family members are suppressed due to his dogmatic role inside and outside their home. Hasmukh's patriarchal power is so rigid that it keeps oppressing his family members after his death through his ghost and the 'Will' he signs. Throughout the play, Hasmukh seems to be disappointed with his wife because according to him, she fails to fulfil his sexual expectations and household duties. Hasmukh is very disappointed over his son as the latter fails to follow patriarchal footprints of the former. Hasmukh is also disappointed over his daughter-in-law Preeti as he thinks she is very cunning and keeps a watch on his property in a selfish way.

Kiran Jhaveri, Hasmukh's secretary-cum-mistress, to whom he considers equal to himself as far as intellectual level is concerned. Hasmukh establishes a sexual relationship with her. Hasmukh signs his 'Will' in such a way that after his death Kiran will head his business and Ajit will have to work under Kiran's mentorship. However, this age-old concept of patriarchy has been challenged by Ajit, Sonal and Preeti. Kiran

Jhaveri, despite being Hasmukh's mistress, is much against Hasmukh's patriarchal nature because she too has been victimized by the patriarchal mind-set of her father, brothers and ex-husband. Thus, the entire play has comic and didactic tone per excellence. Mahesh Dattani has represented the deep rootedness of patriarchal ideology and expected the necessary social change among people.

The following writing will emphasize the exploitation due to patriarchy and relegation of patriarchal tradition with selected dialogues among characters through the play itself. In the beginning Ajit expresses his disappointment with his father to a friend on a phone call. He is frustrated because his father Hasmukh Mehta has denied giving him five lakh rupees to rejuvenate his company. Ajit, who is a representative of the modern generation, wants to upgrade his company by manufacturing electronic typewriters. However, his father's distrust over him ruins his plan. Hasmukh is of the opinion that his son is not eligible to run his company because Ajit is spendthrift and will lead the business to bankruptcy. Hasmukh curses his own fate to have a son like Ajit. He remarks:

“... I actually prayed to get him. Oh god! I regret it all. Please let him drop dead. No, no. What a terrible thing to say about one's own son. I take it back. Dear God, don't let him drop dead. Just turn him into a nice vegetable so he won't be in my way. Ever since he entered my factory, he has been in my way.”<sup>38</sup>

Tradition and modernity seem to clash when Hasmukh and Ajit speak to each other. Hasmukh's patriarchal mind-set hinders Ajit's progressive thinking. Therefore, Hasmukh speaks to Ajit with his bitter taunts and criticism. Hasmukh says: “I am not trying to humiliate you. I am trying to put some sense into you. Trying to fill up the empty space.”<sup>39</sup>

Hasmukh who is an arrogant character with comic inclinations does not spare space for his son near to him. Hasmukh expects Ajit to be the replica of his personality as far as patriarchal mind-set is concerned. Ajit resists following Hasmukh's ways and eventually loses his father's confidence. The hot exchange of words leads Hasmukh to slap Ajit before Sonal and Preeti. The elder slapping younger is one of the 'patriarchal codes' which Hasmukh utilizes as a part of his lineage to assert his power within the family framework. Like Ajit, Sonal and Preeti are victims of Hasmukh's patriarchal

dominance. The quarrel between Hasmukh and Ajit tortures Sonal mentally and physically which raises her blood pressure. However, due to husband's dominance, she sets dinner ready, neglecting her disease. Sonal performs her household duties mechanically which becomes monotonous for Hasmukh. To some extent, she resists maintaining his dietary routine and she serves him salad which he dislikes. Hasmukh is diabetic and hence refrains himself from eating sweets. His rejection of sweets is obligatory to his family also. Despite it, Sonal makes orange flavoured halva for Ajit which enrages Hasmukh. The family observes loss of faith among one another due to Hasmukh's tyrannical behaviour. Whenever the family gets together for dinner Hasmukh behaves rudely. Most of the time, he targets Ajit and Sonal. He teases Ajit as: "You should get a son like yourself. He will finish you off much faster than you're finished me."<sup>40</sup>

After retiring to bed, Hasmukh is nostalgic of his father and the patriarchal upbringing he received from him. Hasmukh finds solace in retaining his forefathers' stringent lessons of patriarchy and usually regrets over the negligence on the part of his son and other family members. Hasmukh's repents with deep regret over his decision of getting his son married. He accuses his son of not following his lessons taught by him. Hasmukh is proud of himself as he was brought up with all patriarchal teachings by his father. Hasmukh blows his own trumpet of becoming one of the richest businessmen in the city. He criticizes his brothers who according to him wasted their life in doing filthy things. However, he is over-concerned about Ajit's social development from a patriarchal point of view. Hasmukh criticizes Sonal for her failure to play the role of his wife. Due to excessive patriarchal inclinations of his behaviour Hasmukh's conjugal relationship with Sonal remains unstable which leads him to establish his extramarital affair with Kiran. However, it is not entirely Sonal's efficiency. Hasmukh's lecherous behaviour is responsible for it. Therefore, it is found that patriarchal mind-set makes men to be free from family bonding and keeps women under control. Hasmukh's dissatisfaction finds a way out in what he thinks of Sonal. According to him, he did not enjoy sex with Sonal as she herself did not enjoy it during last twenty five since their marriage.

Thus, his frustration in conjugal life with Sonal leads him to have sexual relationship with Kiran Jhaveri who is his typist and secretary. As already mentioned, Hasmukh considers Kiran as compatible with himself on an intellectual basis. However, Sonal's comic nature mocks Hasmukh the way he deals with family members. Dattani uses the device of 'the irony of the situation' in relation to Hasmukh and by doing so, he mocks the issue of patriarchy which is prevalent in Indian society. Sonal, while talking to Preeti, clears the meaning of the word 'Hasmukh' which means 'Smiling face'. Ironically, Hasmukh is always showing a grave face, ordering, and instructing others. He is very intent on performing his patriarchal role in the family but gets often disappointed over his son, wife and daughter-in law who resist him although in an indirect way. Sonal clears the fact that Hasmukh's mother passed away when he was only four years old. Therefore his marriage with her was merely an effort to fill the vacuum of women in his life. Hasmukh compliments to what Sonal criticizes him as he utters:

“Why does a man marry? So that he can have a woman to himself? No. There's more to it than that. What? Maybe he needs a faithful companion? No. If that was it, all men would keep dogs. No. No, I think the most important reason anyone should marry at all is to get a son. Why is it so important to get a son? Because the son will carry on the family name? Why did I marry? Yes, to get a son. So that when I grow old, I can live life again through my son. Why did my father marry? To get me. Why did I marry? To get Ajit ... I should be a very happy man. I've got a loving wife who has been faithful to me like my dog would be. She has given me a son ... I should be happy ... I've got what I want ... Why do I have a mistress? Because I am unhappy ... Why am I unhappy? Because I don't have a son. Who is Ajit ... He's just a boy who spends my money and lives in my house ... He doesn't behave like my son. A son should make me happy. Like I made my father ... happy. That's what I wanted my son to make me... But he failed! Miserably! He has not a single quality I look for in a son... It won't be long before everything I worked for and achieved will be destroyed!”<sup>41</sup>

Thus, in the first act of the play, Hasmukh rules over his family as a living person. In the second act of the play, Hasmukh is dead, but his ghost is still exercising patriarchal power. The effects of the patriarchal ideology remain in existence in descending generations also. But here in the case of the protagonist, his patriarchal pressure is still built up around the family members. Dattani makes use of a 'gothic' element to showcase Hasmukh as exercising his authority over his family. As a ghost, he haunts his family to continue his patriarchal hegemony. The family observes people coming to pay tribute to him. News about his death gets published in the media. Hasmukh feels proud of it becoming more popular posthumously through newspapers, T.V. Channels, photographs and gossip. Hasmukh feels happy after his death as his health problems get over. In the posthumous condition, Hasmukh realizes that whatever he did in his life has become useless for him. He is of the opinion that his family members, particularly his son, is not liable to inherit his property because he lacks the patriarchal instincts of his father. Hasmukh repents over the loss of his life. However, all he thinks about his past and present remains 'the day after fair' for him. The reason is that his wife, son and daughter-in-law have nothing to do with his demise but they are worried about the 'Will' of the property.

The family members came to know about the conditions which Hasmukh put into the 'Will'. All three members are very upset, quarrel and accuse one another for not behaving properly with Hasmukh. They are left with nothing in their hands. Through the 'Will' it becomes clear that Hasmukh had donated his property to a trust by making Kiran Jhaveri the head of the trust. The trust will be handed over to Ajit once he reaches the age of forty five. However, he would be able to acquire all that only if he remains punctual in his duties. The exchange between Ajit, Sonal and Preeti reveals ill-effects of Hasmukh's patriarchal mind-set. Ajit seems helpless regarding the 'Will' and gives up all his efforts to gain his share thinking that it was his father's property and he did whatever he wanted to do with it. Ajit represents the pitiable condition of those children who are oppressed under patriarchal fathers. In reply to Ajit's helplessness his wife Preeti condemns Hasmukh calling him 'mad' and decides to get a certificate from a medical practitioner stating that Hasmukh was a psychopath at the time of signing the 'Will'. But Hasmukh was clever enough to make a qualified physician as a witness to certify his sound mentality while executing the 'Will'. Ajit's reaction through soliloquy is the aftermath of Hasmukh's patriarchal dominance. Ajit goes into a state of



depression and becomes helpless because he thinks his father has ruined his life since childhood in the process of making him a 'patriarch'. In a state of dilemma, Ajit sometimes repents over not following his father's instructions regarding the family and the business. He realizes that his father was worried about his career. However, being merely worried about son's career does not suffice to make Ajit's career. The play implies that parents, especially fathers in any family should let their son or daughter to expose their potential and to provide scope to it to achieve a successful career. Hasmukh never allows his son to do so and always underestimates him for his disobedience to follow the patriarchal codes.

The posthumous patriarchal dominance is prevalent in the Mehta family. Dattani comically portrays the posthumous character of Hasmukh as narcissistic. Hasmukh seems to be upset as his family members do not garland his photo with fresh flowers. He reminisces about how he used to take care of his father's photo which is larger than his own photo. Hasmukh finds faults with own photo for designing faulty cheeks, lips and eyes. He is worried about his wife and son that they would not preserve the photograph for a longer time. Therefore his ghost prefers to stay on the 'Tamarind tree' planted outside the house. He utters: "I think I'll go outside and swing on the tamarind tree. Upside down."<sup>42</sup>

The tamarind tree is symbolic both for Hasmukh and other family members. Hasmukh's posthumous residence on this tree is the relic of patriarchal aura as there is no place for himself in the Mehta household. As it is mentioned in the 'Will' that Mrs Kiran Jhaveri will share the Mehta house after Hasmukh's death, she comes to stay there and initially becomes an extra addition to the disappointment for Ajit, Sonal and Preeti.

A. J. Sebastian sdb, in his article, 'Patriarchal Subjugation in Mahesh Dattani's *Where There's a Will*', compares the role of Kiran to that of Oedipa Mass as:

"The role assigned to Kiran is similar to that of Oedipa Maas in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, where she receives a letter naming her the legal executrix of the estate of Pierce Inveracity, one of her wealthy ex-boyfriends. She knows that the estate was in total mess, however, Oedipa silently resolves

to perform her duty. She suspects that her husband, Mucho Mass, will not be able to give her any help.”<sup>43</sup>

The same way Kiran becomes executrix as per the ‘Will’. Both Kiran and Oedipa do not willingly leave their husbands. They undergo ordeals of patriarchy and have to choose another path for survival. After coming to the house, Kiran clears her role before the Mehta family that she has come to assist them. However, the family members, especially Preeti, are not in a position to welcome her in their house because Preeti is also victimized by the patriarchal nature of her father-in-law. Hasmukh ‘Will’ has threatened Preeti so much that she is afraid of losing her living standard in the Mehta family. Like Hasmukh she too starts believing Ajit as a spendthrift fellow and hence Hasmukh left all his property in the hands of Kiran, an outsider to the family. In this sense, after Hasmukh’s death the family experiences a state of uncertainty and distrust among one another. The play indicates the predicament of all family members due to Hasmukh’s ‘Will’.

Gradually, Kiran succeeds in taking the family into confidence and clears the fact that she is only a trustee of Hasmukh’s wealth not the owner. It is her duty to train Ajit to be a business tycoon. The ‘Will’ which Hasmukh made is also influenced by his patriarchal tendency. It states that Ajit will acquire Hasmukh’s wealth once he reaches the age of forty-five and his son twenty-one. Sonal and Preeti will get their allowances on a regular basis. Thus, the ‘Will’ has given authority of inheriting property to the male members of the family and the female members are thus subordinated as they will receive only allowances. Hasmukh’s patriarchal rigidity is still felt in the house. He is intent on exercising totalitarian authority for preventing happiness to the family members. Compared to Sonal and Preeti, Ajit has to undergo the ordeal of regular office duties and follow the professional formalities laid down by Kiran. Sonal sympathizes with him and the ghost of Hasmukh blames Sonal for overlooking Ajit’s mistakes. Besides Ajit, Hasmukh tries to establish his inherent patriarchy through his grandson. Hasmukh’s ghost dictates terms through the ‘Will’ which brings more disappointment for Ajit.

AJIT. He is making me do things he wanted me to do. Through her! In the

Office. Without realising it. She has replaced father and is also replacing me with father. ... Everything she tells me to do is exactly what he would have wanted me to do. We are all living out a dead man's dream! ... <sup>44</sup>

Unlike Ajit, Preeti is intelligent and cunning enough to handle Hasmukh softly. She also warns Ajit to adjust with the bossy nature of his father. Preeti compromises to Hasmukh's patriarchal behaviour. She pretends before Hasmukh that she is too obedient to follow all patriarchal codes in the family. In a way, she expects Hasmukh's death to enjoy freedom. Her following expression shows that she wins in her strategy as:

... he's gone, we can have all the freedom to do what we want and also have the money. I almost succeeded. He would have left everything to us if you hadn't protested. That was your mistake!"<sup>45</sup>

Preeti's conspiracy brings about Hasmukh's death by mixing her vitamin tablets with Hasmukh's medicines of diabetes in one bottle which Hasmukh consumes and dies. Her tolerance under patriarchal dominance comes to an end. In the next scene Kiran appears to be conversing with Sonal. Initially Sonal accuses Kiran of having an affair with her husband. Kiran justifies her side by mentioning that she developed this relationship out of her financial need. She confesses that her relationship with Hasmukh was just for the sake of money. Kiran's honest confession brings herself and Sonal together on emotional levels against patriarchy because Kiran further reveals her tragic past with her parents. Her father, being a drunkard, used to beat her mother regularly. She further confessed that her mother constantly felt that her children should never hate their father.

The inculcation of patriarchal ideology is visible here in the nature of Kiran's mother that despite of getting humiliated, exploited and beaten, she is intent on giving respect to her husband in the eyes of her children. Kiran very boldly criticizes the hollowness of patriarchy and subsequent subordination of women, children, etc. Her criticism of Hasmukh, her brothers and her ex-husband reveals that men having a patriarchal mindset are mean and weak by nature. She says:

"Hasmukh was intoxicated with his power. He thought he was invisible and that he could rule from his grave by making this will... Isn't it strange how repetitive

her life is? My brothers have turned out to be like their father, going home with bottles of rum wrapped in newspapers. Beating up their wives And I-I too am like my mother. I married a drunkard ... And I too have learnt to suffer silently. Oh! Where will this end? Will the scars our parents lay on us remain forever?"<sup>46</sup>

Like George Bernard Shaw and Henrik Ibsen, Dattani also exposed social evils through plays. Kiran's reference to scars could be, compared to what Mr. Alvings says in Ibsen's play *Ghost*.

"Ghosts ... we are all ghosts ... there is in me something ghost. Like from which I can never free myself ... It isn't just what we have inherited from our father and mother that walks in us. It is all kinds of dead ideas and all sorts of old and obsolete beliefs. They are not alive in us; but they remain in us nonetheless, and we can never rid ourselves of them."<sup>47</sup>

Both Ibsen and Dattani have indicated that the roots of age-old patriarchy need to be eradicated to elevate the social status of women. Like Chandan in *Tara* Kiran becomes the 'agent of change' here to challenge the patriarchal ideology. Kiran underlines the fact that Ajit's life was totally dominated and controlled by his father. Hasmukh's patriarchal behaviour cuts Ajit's wings and prevents him from further progress. Ajit's failure lies in restrictions on his potential. Kiran further reveals that Hasmukh was entirely influenced by his own father and he sought to instil the same patriarchal upbringing in his son. Therefore, Hasmukh was also haunted by the ghost of patriarchy. According to Kiran, Hasmukh himself was suffering from the disease of mental instability. Hasmukh throughout his life remains under the wrong impression that he is a good decision-maker and his son can never in any circumstances catch up with him. But in the true sense of the term, Hasmukh depended desperately upon Kiran for emotional intellectual affairs. Kiran's job as a secretary fulfils Hasmukh's sexual and psychological desires. Therefore, Kiran becomes rather sympathetic towards Sonal and Ajit as both are enormously oppressed by Hasmukh.

On emotional ground, Kiran brings the Mehta family together to fight bravely against the injustice they received from Hasmukh's patriarchal attitude. She praises Ajit that to some extent he resisted his father's dictatorship. Thus the resistance is a part of transgression which directly or indirectly challenges the patriarchal hold of elders.

Ajit's rejection to follow his father's footsteps was an anti-patriarchal effort. Hence Kiran further says:

“He may not be the greatest rebel on earth, but at least he is free of his father's beliefs. He resists ... That's enough to prove that Ajit has won and Hasmukh has lost.”<sup>48</sup>

Kiran makes use of the reconciliatory mechanism as a part of diplomatic behaviour striking balance among the three family members and getting affinity for her in the household. They insist Kiran stay with them forever. This affinity is a sort of weapon against patriarchal demons like Hasmukh. The reconciliation between Kiran and the Mehta family panics the ghost of Hasmukh which goes in search of his own identity because Hasmukh himself has lost his identity whereas Ajit has always been in search of identity throughout the play. Hasmukh's ghost realizes the fact that his life was being ruled by his father's own patriarchal mind-set.

Hasmukh: It is ... true? Have I merely been to my father what Ajit has been to me? Have all my achievements been my father's aspirations for me? Have I been my father's ghost? If that is true, then where was I? What became of me, the real me?<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, Kiran detects Preeti's cunning plan of killing Hasmukh and proves it as Preeti takes no more vitamin tablets from that bottle. Kiran decides to disclose Preeti's secret of killing Hasmukh to Ajit but hushes it up due to Preeti's pregnancy. They all organize Ajit's birthday party which Hasmukh's ghost dislikes. Hasmukh's ghost decides to stay permanently on the tamarind tree. However, the neighbouring family complains of power cuts due to the obstacle of the tamarind tree. Ajit eventually cuts off the tree and the ghost disappears for good. The cutting of the tamarind tree is symbolic here in the sense that it shows no place for patriarchal aura around the household. Likewise, Dattani uses the metaphor of the cutting of a tamarind tree to the exorcism of patriarchal supremacy.

Thus, in this play Mahesh Dattani ridiculed the emptiness of the patriarchy through the protagonist. Hasmukh was imposing the orthodox tradition he inherited from his father.

His every attempt was to establish patriarchal dictatorship over his family through his wealth and the 'Will'. However, Ajit, Sonal, Preeti and Kiran have successfully resisted Hasmukh's patriarchal chariot in their fair and foul ways. Due to Hasmukh all the characters get together to initiate anti-patriarchal movement. As already mentioned, like Ibsen, Dattani has successfully explored the social issue of patriarchy through the play.

### Part Three:

#### 3.8. 'Child Sexual Abuse': The Concept

'Child sexual abuse' is one of the pervasive and shocking social issues across the world. It results in abnormality, mental and physical disorders among children which affects their adulthood. It stigmatizes children and the families they are born in. Due to this stigmatization, the serious offence of child sexual abuse often goes unreported. Worst is the fact that children are not supported emotionally once they go through it. They are left to suffer on their own.

The third part of this chapter deals with Mahesh Dattani's thought-provoking play *Thirty Days in September*. It explores the issue of child sexual abuse and the miserable life of a girl and her mother. Mahesh Dattani is very topical in his choice of themes. In all his plays, Dattani explores current social issues and the struggle of middle class Indian people to get rid of their problems. In India the severity of 'child sexual abuse' as a gruesome issue is increasing. Dattani has already awakened people from their lethargy to raise awareness and take prompt initiative to protect the future of their children. That is why, the present analysis of Dattani's play is an attempt to study the issue through literature. However, before proceeding with his play it is pertinent to review the issue briefly.

Around 1970, the issue of child sexual abuse was very rare and easily ignorable. But over the last three-four decades, it has become a serious concern for both children and parents. It has also attracted media coverage the world over. Some survivors disclose the nightmare they went through. The 'Me Too Movement' also acquired the same platform through media. However, child sexual abuse is a different phenomenon. The survivors' experiences sensitize us about the harmful impact of the issue. The media sensitizes public and private organizations to redress the issue. Nancy Whittier, in her book, entitled *The Politics of Child Sexual Abuse: Emotion, Social Movements and the State* (2009) has recorded dynamic changes in the ways child sexual abuse takes place and also mentioned contribution of activists working for the welfare of affected children. She presents activism initiated against child sexual abuse. This activism traces its emergence in anti-rape efforts made by feminists since 1970s. Nancy Whittier

further traces the development process in mainstreaming the affected children and their success and failure in public survival. In her book, she states:

“Until the early 1970s, the prevailing view was that child sexual abuse was extremely rare and mostly confined to the economically disadvantaged or to particular ethnic or racial groups. Seductive children were thought to provoke sexual contact with adult and incest was often believed to be the result of controlling mothers who drove their husbands into their daughters’ arms (Browmiller 1975; Butler 1985; Rush 1980). The issue was rarely disclosed to no one. While some ideas remain in circulation today, the scope and speed of change are remarkable.”<sup>50</sup>

‘Child sexual abuse’ occurs at different places. Home is the most prominent place where child sexual abuse is likely to happen to a greater extent. Other places are mostly schools, hospitals and offices which involve children wherein the abuse takes place. In pre-Independent India, ‘child-marriage’ used to be common a phenomenon leading to the sexual abuse. Incest is a form of sexual abuse by committed by a member within a family which results into more serious mental problem. Mahesh Dattani’s play *Thirty Days in September* deals with the incest of two women by a single man who is nobody else but the brother of one woman and the maternal uncle of other.

“The global prevalence of child sexual abuse has been estimated at 197 % for females and 7.9 % for males. Most sexual abuse offenders are acquainted with their victims; approximately 30% are relatives of the child, most often brothers, fathers, uncles, or cousins; around 60% are other acquaintances, such as “friends” of the family, babysitters, or neighbours; strangers are the offenders in approximately 10% of child sexual abuse cases. Most child sexual abuse is committed by men; studies on female child molesters show that women commit 14% to 40% of offences reported against boys and 6% of offences reported against girls.”<sup>51</sup>

The rampant misuse of technology increases abuse and exploitation of children. Child pornography has become an alarming issue which poses a serious threat to children to



grow up in a fearless atmosphere. As a result, technological advancement is proving notorious due to growing malpractices. The availability of sexual content on the internet increases abuse and cybercrime.

“Computer technology has transformed the production of child pornography into a sophisticated, universal and home-cottage industry. Anyone with access to a computer and a modem can connect to on-line commercial services and the Internet, this remarkable network linking some 100 million people to each other in the four corners of the globe. In this way, the internet is fast becoming the most significant factor in the sexual abuse of children and the principal means of exchange of child pornography. It excludes any simple analogy with existing media or with the other traditional modes of communication. It would be a tedious, pointless exercise to list all the techniques available to paedophiles for exchanging and/or selling their material. I could name image capture, data encryption, anonymous re-mailing through specialised companies as but a few examples. On-going progress means that fixed images are now increasingly mobile, recorded productions are more and more live productions, meaning that children are raped and tortured to order, with simultaneous transmission to the computers of interested parties, images are modified to create new ones, etc., etc. The boundaries of horror will continue to be pushed back with the assistance, albeit unintentional, of technological progress.”<sup>52</sup>

Discussing child sexual abuse typically in the Indian context, government and non-governmental organizations have taken necessary steps to eliminate it. ‘Cactus Foundation’, which is a non-profit NGO has its headquarter in Solapur, Maharashtra. ‘Cactus Foundation’ works to empower adults to prevent the child sexual abuse.

“Till date CACTUS FOUNDATION has trained and sensitized more than 1,00,000 individuals for different causes like STOP CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE, Responsible Parenting and Mental Health Awareness.”<sup>53</sup>

Nusrat Khan and Rohit Pahade established the ‘Cactus Foundation’ in 2011. Keeping in mind the sincere motive to bring the neglected offences related to children into the judicial framework, the ‘Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of

India', enacted a stringent law entitled "Protection of Children from Sexual Offences" in short 'POCSO' Act on November 14, 2012. To a considerable extent, the law prevented sexual harassment and pornography. The law also helps to protect the rights of children in the judicial process. The law has designed a mechanism for child-friendly reporting, recording of evidence, investigation and trials in FastTrack courts.

"The POCSO Act, 2012 is a comprehensive law to provide for the protection of children from the offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography, while safeguarding the interests of the child at every stage of the judicial process by incorporating child-friendly mechanisms for reporting, recording of evidence, investigation and speedy trial of offences through designated Special Courts."<sup>54</sup>

Apart from this, the issue of child sexual abuse has been given much voice through literature and films in order to raise awareness among people. Mahesh Dattani's play *Thirty Days in September* is quintessential here as far as the issue is concerned. This brief review is contextual here to analyse Dattani's play from this standpoint.

### **3.9. 'The Child Sexual Abuse' in *Thirty Days in September*:**

Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days in September* which is a stage play in three acts was first performed in Mumbai at the Prithvi Theatre on May 31, 2001. RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest) which is a support group for children and women survivors of incest commissioned this play. John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation supported the RAHI. Lillet Dubey, who is a well-known stage director and theatre personality, writes in her 'A Note on the Play',

"In August 2000, when I was shooting for Monsoon Wedding in Delhi, Mahesh met me and told over a cup of tea that he had been commissioned by RAHI to write a play on child sexual abuse and would like me to consider producing it. I agreed almost immediately. It was the first time that I committed to doing a play, without even seeing an outline of the scripts! But RAHI's commitment and Mahesh's integrity and my own response to the subject, left me in no doubt that this was a play I had to do! My only condition was, that the play should

work first and foremost as a piece of theatre, that the issues addressed should be organic to the plot and the message subliminal.”<sup>55</sup>

The simple storyline of the play is that Mala, Shanta's daughter, gets sexually exploited frequently in her childhood by her maternal uncle named Vinay who is also reported to have had such incestuous relationship with his sister Shanta. This incestuous assault ruins the physical and mental equilibrium of both the daughter and the mother thoroughly. As a result of it, Shanta's husband leaves the family for good to let Shanta suffer the agony on her own. Mala accuses Shanta for the former thinks that the latter is totally responsible for this incestuous relationship. Dattani portrays the character of Deepak as the agent of change who truly loves Mala and wants to marry her. However, Mala, a psychologically disturbed girl in her youth and the seeker of sexual pleasure, denies Deepak's proposal of marriage. Shanta retrieves herself in the worship of Lord Krishna. Thus, the life of both the mother and the daughter gets destroyed. Dattani, through this play, seeks to sensitize people to save the lives of their children inside and outside the house from rascals like Vinay.

Like the issue of 'homosexuality', the 'child sexual abuse' is often overlooked. It is still considered in India a 'taboo' or for the most part a Western phenomenon. Intense care is taken to hush up this issue. The conservative Indian mind-set prohibits the victimised from articulating their voice openly and from providing the platform to redress this with preventive mechanisms. Parents of sexually abused children deliberately keep this issue hidden to avoid social ostracization and social stigmatization which ultimately results in increasing the number of cases and most of them often go unreported. In many cases children are threatened by family members and victimizers not to disclose the matter and further pressured to forget this trauma. However the ill-effects of child sexual abuse disorder the natural and social growth of a child leading to behave hysterically and abnormally in society. Beena Agrawal observes in this case:

“...Cultural identity is integrated in the human psyche and the deviation from accepted faiths, conventions and religious practices give birth to the feeling of 'guilt' and 'shame', and uncompromising self-accusation and unbridled contempt for social order. Such complex dynamics of human relationship has become the central theme of *Thirty Days in September*.”<sup>56</sup>

The play opens with the protagonist Mala who talks to the counsellor. The discussion reveals the conundrum of Mala's behaviour. Dattani uses the technique of 'self-realization' for Mala through the counselling and her recorded voice on the tape. Through this technique, Dattani represents the psychological conflict between the conscious and unconscious mind of Mala. During the conversation, Mala does not hesitate to utter her full name as Mala Khatri and discloses the name of the person who molested her. She also discloses that she was made a sheer victim of his lust. Mala's recorded voice takes her into flashback of 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2001. The perplexed mind makes her accuse her own mother Shanta. The 'post-traumatic mental disorder' leads Mala to behave hysterically and indecisively. She says:

“I- I don't know how to begin ... Today is the 30<sup>th</sup> of September ... 2001 and my name is ... I don't sorry... I know it is all my fault really ... It must be I must have asked for it ... it's not anybody's fault except my own. Sometimes I wish that my mother ...”<sup>57</sup>

The above fragmented words and faltered expressions are a result of the frequent sexual abuse on Mala. Here, she accuses herself of being involved in the complicity of incestuous relationship. Simultaneously, Mala blames her mother that if her mother had thought, she could have prevented Mala from being sexually abused by her brother. Mala's unbearable pain of sexual abuse makes her lose faith in human relationship and hence she keeps accusing her mother for being a merely silent observer of the predicament of her daughter. Dattani develops the mother – daughter conflict through Mala's sexual exploitation, her post-traumatic abnormal behaviour and her mother's indifferent attitude towards all happenings. Mala becomes upset because she thinks that her mother betrayed her. Mala accuses her mother for her deliberate negligence towards frequent sexual abuse on Mala. This play implies parents maintain secrecy regarding the sexual abuse of their children to avoid social stigmatization and to make their children grow safely which in turn becomes extremely problematic for them in future. Because the sexual abuse not only ruins children physically but mentally also. Parents become responsible for the mental instability of children. Mala repeatedly questions Shanta for her absence during the time of abuse. Also Shanta herself never raises her concern over the abuse. Therefore parents themselves put their children in danger which later on becomes harmful for themselves. Shanta becomes a criminal in

the eyes of Mala. Shanta tries to pacify Mala's anger by diverting her from the grim reality and avoiding the disclosure of this sexual abuse. However, the more Shanta diverts Mala from her horrible past, the better Mala recollects it as a part of her unconscious mind. Mala says:

“I am not talking about the bad dream! I am talking about the time when uncle Vinay would molest me. When I was seven. Then eight .Nine. Ten. Every vacation when we went to visit him or when he came to stay with us. You were busy in either the pooja room or the kitchen. I would go to papa and cry. Before I could tell him why I was crying he would tell me to go to you.”<sup>58</sup>

Parents are not in position to listen to problems their children face. Even if they come to know the truth, they try to hush up to avoid social stigmatization as argued earlier. Here, in this play, Mala's mother seeks to hide the reality whereas her father ignores it completely. Children due to their immature stage of life, are not able to raise the issue of child sexual abuse publicly. Therefore, if they suffer from any physical pain, they complain about it to their parents. Some parents are careful enough to rescue their children from further abuse either by complaining against the abuser to police or counselling their own children. Shanta is the kind of parent to raise the problem of her daughter and punish her brother. Those children who are prone to frequent sexual abuse before reaching to the stage of adolescence are harassed. In Mala's case, one can observe her disbelief in love relationships and development of hostile attitudes. By exploring the issue of 'child sexual abuse' or incestuous relationship, Dattani has raised questions on the ethics of relationship, faith in relationship and the very concept of family. The loss of faith is more harmful to Mala than the assault of exploitation. Dattani himself substantiates this view in an interview given to Laxmi Subramanyam. He replies:

“Though sexual abuse is at the core of my play, the mother-daughter relationship is equally important. The main protagonist, who has suffered at the hands of uncle, feels a deep sense of betrayal that her mother did not stop the abuse and failed in her role as protector.”<sup>59</sup>

Sexual abuse since childhood has rotten Mala thoroughly. Each and every time she targets her mother for not saving her from sexual abuse. Mala criticizes her mother that whenever she went to her mother to complain, the mother used to feed her with favourite food. According to Mala, this was a kind of escapism or a subterfuge which her mother used against her daughter. Shanta's insensibility towards Mala's sexual abuse by Vinay creates chaos in Mala's mind. Upon realization of the truth, Shanta becomes a culprit in Mala's judgement. She says:

“Oh yes, you would remember that I always like aluparathas 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 tired all the time, and you know what? I began to like them. I thought that was the care for my pain. 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 ...”<sup>60</sup>

The issue of 'child sexual abuse' not only affects the harmonious atmosphere of a particular family but also disturbs the social relation of that family. Mala's sexual abuse is a case in point here as the family life and the social status of both the mother and the daughter are on the verge of decline. Mala's mother is indecisive over her daughter's complaints and accusations. Her father has escaped himself from this drudgery. The family is scattered away. Shanta, on listening to her daughter's accusations, withdraws herself into the pooja room and keeps worshipping Lord Krishna. Dattani projects the precarious condition of helpless parents to rescue their children from getting sexually abused. In case any child is victimized of sexual abuse, his or her parents often try to hush up the matter to secure the future of their child. However, while doing so, they themselves indirectly help the crime increase. In this play, Shanta does not want her daughter to make this issue public to avoid social stigmatization. She is more worried about her own social status than her daughter's abuse. The silent mood of Shanta over Mala's uproar increases Mala's anger. This is one of the aspects of Shanta's 'post-traumatic mental disorder' which she is unable to overcome. Mala is intent on making Shanta respond to her anxious questions.

Due to the frequent sexual abuse by Vinay and her mother's indifferent attitude destroy Mala's mentality. Despite her uproar, Shanta prefers to remain cool which again adds fuel to Mala's rage. In a fit of rage Mala throws the frame of Lord Krishna away from the pooja room which breaks Shanta's silence. The incestuous relationship has destroyed the family ambience. The blame-game between Mala and Shanta begins as a result of indifferent attitude of parents towards children and children's misunderstanding towards their parents. Shanta too accuses Mala for the latter's voluntary involvement in sexual relationships.

Children are likely to get addicted to frequent sex. It becomes a part of addiction or physical need. If it is fulfilled, children in many cases are satisfied. However, this predilection for sex becomes problematic in youth. Children live in a state of dilemma whether they should continue with their addiction or skip it which is not easily possible for them. Same thing happens with Mala as she can be an exception to it. During her childhood, she is addicted to sex so much so that she becomes 'sex seeker' in her youth. Therefore Shanta objects to the accusations labelled against her by Mala. Shanta in her counter argument says that Mala herself used to attract Vinay and sleep with him in the bedroom.

Eventually Mala succeeds in knowing the truth through Shanta's confession that it is Vinay who supported them financially, not her father. Shanta was helpless to receive the financial help at the cost of her daughter's virginity and mental stability. There are multiple reasons which make parents overlook the sexual abuse of their children. Besides social stigmatization, poor financial condition is also another reason. If parents could fulfil their financial needs at the cost of their children's sexual abuse, they may let it happen without thinking the future of their children. Shanta also goes into great financial degradation after her husband leaves her alone with the responsibility of growing Mala. At this juncture, Vinay helps Shanta financially but in return abuses Mala sexually which is often overlooked by Shanta. However, this help and its unaffordable return destroys Mala's 'self' thoroughly.

Thus, besides her physical and mental abduction, Mala is ruined socially. Dattani's attempt is to explore the severity of this issue which is destroying numerous children of

the country due to the negligence of parents, fear of social ill-repute and failure to set up a preventive mechanism. He also criticizes the age-old ideology of male supremacy over female and female's passive reception of the exploitation committed by male. The character of Mala is representative of all those sexually abused children who have lost their faith in the institution of family. Mala's reaction is a case in point.

“You know I couldn't say anything to you. You never gave me a chance to. If you only had looked into my eyes and seen the hurt, or asked me ‘beta’, What's Wrong? Then maybe I would have told you ... But ma, I did look to you for help, while you were praying, your eyes avoiding mine and I knew, deep down I must have known, that they would never ask me that question. Because you already knew the answer.”<sup>61</sup>

Shanta fails to justify her explanation as a reply to the accusations made by Mala which increases Mala's anguish and the feeling of betrayal. It is obvious that both Vinay and Shanta are equally responsible for Mala's physical and mental destruction. Asha Kuthari Chaudhari rightly mentioned that

“Thirty Days is by far the most sombre of all his 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 dramatized vividly.”<sup>62</sup>

The ‘sense of guilt’ among characters is a common factor in Dattani's several plays. In the earlier discussed play, *Tara*, in this chapter, Bharati, the mother repents over her partiality in bringing up her son and daughter. In *Thirty Days in September*, Shanta, the mother, suffers from her failure to prevent her daughter from getting sexually abused. Shanta tries to compensate for the injustice she did to her daughter by requesting Deepak to marry her daughter. However, this proposal is ultimately rejected by Mala herself. Mala turns down Deepak's proposal of marriage for she thinks she is at present incapable of becoming his life partner. Mala's physical vulnerability leads her to change male partners frequently for excessive sexual gratification. Mala tries to attract a man to the party and also complains to Deepak that the man is staring at her. Deepak, in a fit of rage, starts beating the man. However, Mala interrupts and confesses that she



herself stared at him. The consequences of the 'child sexual abuse' are so dreadful that Mala goes almost mad and compels the man in the party to have sex with her. She asks him to accompany her and do whatever he wants to do with her.

This reflects that the sexual abuse by her uncle has totally devastated Mala. Despite realizing the truth, Deepak tries to rescue Mala from further devastation and tries to support her emotionally. However, Mala is now unable to respond to his supportive efforts. Her failure to overcome the assault of sexual abuse is leading her to more problematic state. She is not in state to love Deepak and rejects his proposal. As mentioned earlier that negligence of parents increases instances of 'child sexual abuse'. However, negligence endangers the future of both the children and parents. In this play, Shanta is a criminal from Mala's point of view. She accuses her mother for ruining her emotionally. Shanta tries to confess the reality that she herself is the victim of this incest which silenced her own voice. She confesses that she was six years old and Vinay thirteen years old when she was abused. She vehemently expresses her continuous sexual abuse almost for ten years by the same person. She mentions that she was conditioned not to raise her voice against her abuse. Being superstitious and illiterate, Shanta used to pray God healing the pain. Shanta's confession of her own sexual abuse by her brother saddens Mala. Both Shanta and Mala are victims of the sexual abuse in their childhood by the same person. Shanta is a silent recipient whereas mala reacts and challenges male dominance by rejecting Deepak's proposal of marriage. Exploited by the same person, both Mala and Shanta are sympathetic to each other. Mala regrets over accusing her mother all the time.

Both Mala and Shanta are victims of sexual abuse during their childhood. The moment Mala realizes the reason behind Shanta's silence, she becomes rather sensitive towards her mother. Dattani has portrayed the family which is ruined thoroughly by frequent incest. Besides the sexual abuse, the issue of escapism has been explored in this play. Shanta's husband leaves his wife and daughter to survive on their own. Contrary to it, he could have considered Mala's abuse seriously; he could have reprimanded his brother-in-law or perhaps complained against him to the police station or he could have supported his family financially and emotionally. Rather than to escape from family conflicts, he could have stayed with the family and prevented Mala's physical and psychological degradation.

Thus, Dattani finally succeeds in uniting female members of the family emotionally to assert their survival against the exploitation by male partners. He tries to break the silence of those characters to whom justice is denied. Perhaps, such characters are themselves responsible for the injustice they meet. In the previous chapter, Dattani represented the voice of homosexuals. In this chapter, he foregrounds victims of 'gender discrimination', 'patriarchal dominance' and 'child sexual abuse'. Both mother and daughter undergo the same trauma of 'child sexual abuse' by the same person. This sexual abuse is incest because the abuser is their close relative. This incestuous relationship challenges the traditional and cultural ethics of familial human relationship.

As far as the gender dynamics in Dattani's plays is concerned, the women characters who are treated violently by men, are not only submissive to men's dominance but also they have the potential to transgress. In order to defend their gender identity, some women characters have successfully resisted the oppression by men in a direct or indirect way. Dattani has endowed his women characters with the ability to resist and fight back against the injustice.

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## Chapter Four

### The ‘Issues of ‘Communalism’ in *Final Solutions* and ‘Religious Fanaticism’ in *The Swami and Winston*

Communalism as a matter of discourse requires serious attention as it is acquiring a monstrous form in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Communalism has become a global phenomenon. It is haunting different parts of the world. The phenomenon of ‘communalism’ has always been an interdisciplinary topic of discussion and research. Literature has usually been a suitable platform for the representation of communalism. The Indian English literature, especially novels, for instance, *Pinjar – The Skeleton* (1950), *Train to Pakistan*, (1956), *Aag Ka Dariya – The River of Fire*(1959), *A Bend in the Ganges*(1964), *Aadha Gaon- A village Divided* (1966), *Azadi* (1975), *Midnight's Children* (1981), *Ice-Candy Man – The cracking of India* (1988) and *The Shadow Lines* (1988) have already represented diverse aspects of communalism, communal violence and the resultant mental and social status of victimized communities. The issue of ‘communalism’ finds its expression also in Indian Drama in English, especially in the plays of Mahesh Dattani’s. His two plays *Final Solutions* and *The Swami and the Winston* foreground the issues of ‘communalism’ and ‘religious fundamentalism’ and resultant violence. Before analysing Dattani’s play from the standpoint of communalism in particular, it becomes pertinent here to study the notion of communalism in general. The term ‘communalism’ is being studied here in the Indian context only.

#### 4. Communalism: The Concept

In the Western world, the term ‘communalism’ is used to refer to the “theory or system of government in which virtually autonomous local communities are loosely in federation.”<sup>1</sup> Communalism in this sense rebukes the market monopoly and renders lands and enterprises in the hands of community. In the Indian subcontinent, the term ‘communalism’ refers to communal tensions, disharmony and the resultant violence.

“Communalism in South Asia is used to denote the differences between the various religious groups and the difference among the people of different

communities. And generally it is used to catalyse communal violence between these groups.”<sup>1</sup>

As far as the meaning of the word ‘communalism’ is concerned, it has been defined variously. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, communalism is a “social organization on communal basis.”<sup>2</sup> Communalism is a “loyalty to socio-political grouping based on religious or ethnic affiliation.”<sup>3</sup> The word communalism derived from ‘community’ which has been defined as “a concept used in sectarian, territorial and functional context about the persons who are in social interaction within a geographical area.”<sup>4</sup> Robert Hardgrave defined the term ‘community’ typically in the Indian context. He says

“In India, community usually refers to a racial, caste, linguistic or religious group rather than a locality as in the United States.”<sup>5</sup>

‘Communalism’ is used by one community as a sort of weapon against another. It is practiced to secure political benefits. The intensity of communalism between two or more communities increases because each community looks down upon the ways of the other. Loss of faith between two communities in every social development is one of the salient features of communalism. Communalism in India and perhaps in some other countries is practiced as a discourse which divides two or more communities. Two or more communities are pitted against one another. Differences and discrepancies for the most part in the interest of communities spread communal ideology. Members from each community who practice antagonism against the other community or religion are essentially called communalists. The antagonism against occurs in the form of false accusations, rumours, distortion of historical narratives or facts, insulting customs of a particular community which further turns into violence riots, arson, abduction, mob lynching, assassinations, etc.

Communalism is a political mechanism which is used to grab political power. Richard Lambart defines communalism as, “Something colours political behaviour and produces a community – oriented outlook.”<sup>6</sup> Satish Saherwal says: “Communalism in our sense means the channelling of personal sentiments and actions primarily with reference to the inscriptive group whose boundaries are determined by the accident of

one's birth.”<sup>7</sup> However the view that communalism is a religion-oriented phenomenon has been challenged by some scholars because other factors are also responsible for the spread of communalism. Zeenat Banu quotes Prabha Devi as:

“Communalism in India is neither the reaction to anti-communalism nor an outgrowth of religious and cultural differences but it is a triangular power struggle of the elite.”<sup>8</sup>

#### **4.2 The Issue of ‘Communalism’:**

Communalism has become a global challenge. Earlier, the Western countries were assumed to be free of this threat. However, it has now prevailed much in Europe, America, Africa and Australia. Communalism has become a social-economic and political issue in countries India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, etc. India has witnessed a series of communal violence (riots) since Independence. India is a multi-religious country and hence the Indian Constitution does not advocate a particular religion but has adopted the principle of secularism. However, the very ethics of secularism are trampled by the fanatic groups of different religions. The notion of ‘unity in diversity’ is at risk whenever people fight for the sake of communities. In fact, being a multi-religious country is itself a breeding ground for communalism. In India, Hindu religion is in majority whereas Muslims, Sikh, Christian, Jain, etc. are in minority. Since Partition the country has witnessed a number of communal riots at several places. The rapidly increasing communalism has created a feeling of terror and insecurity among all religious communities. Mahesh Dattani projects the communal violence between Hindu and Muslim communities for the sake of religion. Therefore, it is important to study the concept of communalism because its rapid growth is turning into terrorism. Dattani’s plays highlight the necessity of a ‘solution’ on communal problems, communal riots, communal politics, etc.

Communal identity in the Indian society supersedes all other identities. Identities, for instance, linguistic, regional, political, gender-based, etc. are side-lined in front of the communal identity. Communal disharmony prevails due to deep-rooted antagonism among pseudo care-takers of religions and communities. TKN Unnithan holds the view that,



“The term communalism connotes the state of communal disharmony. In the strict sense, communal harmony may be taken to mean a state or condition of peace, normal or good relations and presence of fraternal relations between communities. Regarding Indian situations communal harmony means the persistence of fraternal relationship between Hindus and Muslims.”<sup>9</sup>

Communalism results in the hatred, hindrance and opposition of each other's communities. As already mentioned, communally influenced people capitalize religion for political purposes. Religion is often connected to a particular issue for achieving political gains. At present, India is witnessing a plethora of issues which are directly or indirectly linked to religion. For example, the issue of 'cow-slaughter' has gained media coverage throughout the country. People are harassed and sometimes killed for possessing and selling cow meat with or without strong evidence. The self-proclaimed 'Gorakshaks' (cow protectors) accuse beef and exploit beef merchants. Communalism is propagated through the deliberate provoking of religious sentiments. Common issues are represented as religious concerns which become a bone of communal contention. Ram Ahuja states:

“Among leaders, those religious leaders are communal who run their communities like business enterprises and institutions, which raise the cries of Hinduism, Islam or Christianity in 'danger' the moment they find that donation into their holy corporations begins to dwindle or their leadership has been challenged or their ideology has been questioned. Thus, 'communal' is not one man who is a man of religion but 'one who practices politics by linking it with religion'. These power politicians are not good Hindu's nor good Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis or Buddhists. They can be viewed as dangerous political 'scum'.”<sup>10</sup>

People practicing communalism are called communalists. The dogma of communalists is that the social, political and economic division of the Indians should be made on the basis of their communities. In the Indian context, it is an acknowledged fact that a religion controls the mind-set of a particular community, whether it is the Hindu or the Muslim. However, this leads to the subversion of the ethics of secularism. The religious

principles override the constitutional principles. Communalists divide the society on religious grounds not for the sake of religion but for securing their materialistic benefits in the name of religion. Their social activities are organized keeping religion at a central point. Communalism is institutionalized among people from their childhood through schools, residential surroundings, business, lifestyles, culture, so on and so forth. Communal reverence to the religion is a sort of strategy to reinforce material aspects. Therefore, communally influenced people may not necessarily be religious. Azgar Ali Engineer observes it as:

“Communalism is a modern phenomenon and its fundamental causes are secular like competition for share in power or government jobs. Religion is not its fundamental cause but an instrumental cause because it has great mobilizing power.”<sup>11</sup>

Azgar Ali in his next book has mentioned that Muhammad Ali Jinnah demanded<sup>15</sup> a separate nation for Muslim community. Therefore his policy of separatism proves him as a communalist not as a religious person. Contrary to this, many religious persons who were well-versed in their study of religion were not necessarily communalists nor did they try to provoke communal rift between people of different communities. Rather their efforts were to unite different communities through the moral teachings of religion. Sarvappally Gopalkrishna writes:

“...Outstanding theologian, Maulana Azad, was irreconcilably opposed to separatist politics. He was a great champion of Hindu-Muslim unity and found legitimacy for this unity in Holy Koran. He came up with the concept of *wahdat-i-deen*, i.e. unity of religions. According to this concept, laws and rituals might differ but the essence of religion is one...”<sup>12</sup>

However, very few are those who adhere to religion and preach lessons of unity and integrity. There are also people in India who advocate secularism. Worst is the fact that people practicing or propagating secularism are harassed or killed. The proponents of communalism consider religion as the topmost authority for their communities. The proponents of both Hindu and Muslim communities stick to their religious traditions

and religious rigidity. The conservative mind-set of communalists has created an obstacle for development of science and technology in the country. Therefore religious customs in both communities are followed for mobilizing communal passions and securing selfish economic and political ends. The genuine spiritual feelings for religion do not find expression. Azgar Ali further states that,

“Religion in the hands of communalism is divested of all that makes it vital and eternal; it is reduced to a slogan, a symbol, and an instrument to excite passion or to obscure reason – opiate or a heady wine.”<sup>13</sup>

The caste-based division of labour in India has developed the issue of communalism among several communities. The discrimination in the allotment and standard of work has created animosity. Therefore, the feeling of hatred for ‘others’ is nurtured which results in all happenings in society and interprets them from religious framework. Communal activities within a community decide the social development of a particular community. This increases malpractices among communities. The success of one community is deemed to be the failure of another. Such ‘success’ is deemed to be a dominance of a rival community and ‘failure’ as subordination of the other community. As far as Hindu and Muslim communities are concerned in India, the trend of establishing dominance over each other has debased the very existence of secular ethics. In this regard, Bipin Chandra states:

“The communalists blame any personal failure to achieve an objective on the other community. The Muslim backwardness or a Muslim failure to get employment becomes the product of Hindu progress or animosity or domination. While Hindu’s progress was diseased to be constantly thwarted or frustrated by Muslim hostility.”<sup>14</sup>

As mentioned earlier, communalism is a phenomenon of modern times. As far as the base of communalism is concerned, studies have shown that it was not developed in the ancient times or the medieval period. In the pre-British era, all communities used to have harmonious relationships and instances of violence on communal basis were very few in number. The reasons for harmonious existence were the excessive devotion to

the ethics and moral teachings of religion, less economic and political advancements in India and for the most part ‘respect’ to each other’s community and religion. Even communities like the Hindu and the Muslim used to stay together without much prejudices.

“Communalism was not a remnant of the past- a hangover from the medieval period ... communalism was a modern phenomenon that aroused as a result of British colonial impact and the response of several Indian social strata.”<sup>15</sup>

Communalism was less rampant in India especially between the Hindu and the Muslim communities until the Britishers started their policy of ‘divide and rule’ to secure their economic purpose. In the pre-colonial era, people belonging to different communities lived together with lesser prejudices and accepted to some extent each other’s culture and tradition. In the ancient times,

“Ashoka followed religious tolerance and focused mainly on Dhamma. In medieval period, we have examples such as – Akbar, who was epitome of secular practices and believed in propagating such values.”<sup>16</sup>

India has always been a pluralistic country wherein acceptance of different cultures and traditions was practiced till colonizers established their colonies. Aurangzeb, who was called a sectarian ruler by historians, was intolerant of Hindu religion. However, his emphasis was on establishing power and religious practices were least important for him. It is not the case that there was no communalism at all before the commencement of the British era. Religious practices were controlled by imposing taxes. Attempts were also made to institutionalize the ideology of communalism through destruction of temples, coercive conversion and lynching of religious gurus (practitioners). But such incidents did not harm so much the co-existence of Hindu-Muslim communities as it did during the colonial period. The reason is that both Hindus and Muslims served common socio-economic and political purposes.

“Communalism in India is the result of the emergence of modern politics, which has its roots in the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and the future of the electorate

under the Government of India Act, 1909. Later, the British government also appeased various communities through communal awards in 1932, which faced strong resistance from Gandhiji and others. All these acts were done by the British government to appease Muslims and other communities for their political needs. This feeling of has deepened since then, fragmenting the Indian society and being a cause of unrest.”<sup>17</sup>

The colonizers were shrewd enough to understand the fact that it was impossible for them to establish their trade and power without dividing people on grounds of religion. Ideologically Hindus were made hostile to Muslims and vice versa through different ways. Compared to nationalism, communalism developed rapidly which eventually benefitted colonizers to administer the country. The British evoked feelings of communalism and received a huge response from both communities. Gyandendra Pandey rightly observes this as,

“Many have underlined the fact that communalism as we know is a new phenomenon, far from being of hoary origins, or even of very long standing it is a development of the late colonial period arising concurrently with nationalism if not being brought forward as a counter-weight to it.”<sup>18</sup>

The origin and growth of communal problems are less found in religions but more in the economic and political progress of both Hindu and Muslim communities in India. The scope of the term communalism seems to be confined in the conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. Very few are the instances where communities other than Hindus and Muslims got engaged in communal conflicts. Therefore, the base of communalism is largely found in the heinous ‘divide and rule’ policy of the British government. Communal violence in the form of riots has become a by-product of communal discourse in post-Independence India which was intensified during the British Raj. The actual victims of communal violence are poor sections of all communities whereas the upper and middle classes are institutionalizing communalism for economic and political benefits. Poor sections exist in both Hindu and Muslim communities who are deprived of availing the facilities of higher education, obtaining jobs in both government and private sectors, etc. Though communalism seemingly appears to be an inevitable phenomenon at present, it is the need of the hour to bring communally affected strata

into mainstream society. There has to be some reformative mechanisms to reduce assaults done by communal ideology in the age of globalization. Azgar Ali writes:

“The real roots of communalism thus lay in the competition of jobs and governmental favours between the elites of two communities. Religion was the substantive issue; of course religion does play a role in community formation and consciousness rising. But it was not at the root of genesis of communalism.”<sup>19</sup>

After acknowledging the term ‘communalism’ and its base, it is pertinent to discuss incidents and causes of communal violence in India. The term ‘communal violence’ can be defined as the ‘participation of people belonging to different communities against each other through the feeling of hatred and hostility, exploitation, discrimination, etc. The history of communal violence in India is that of the Hindu-Muslim riots. The moment of the Partition was the first biggest communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. Since then communal violence has increased in several parts of the country. The communal violence in general has no particular shape or face. The enemy members of the opposite community are targeted. Communal riots take place in an uncontrolled manner because of no particular leadership. Therefore, the base of communal violence is hatred, revenge and hostility. Government has enforced laws to control communal violence but to no avail. The reason is that the hostility between both the Hindus and the Muslims has crossed the limit and trampled the judicial system.

“There is no legal solution to these issues because the legal solution touches only the externals and cannot reach the heart of the problem.”<sup>20</sup>

Communal violence takes place frequently and a plethora of things apart from religion are responsible for it. Mahatma Gandhi is said to be the first victim of communal violence which followed assassinations of several people including journalists from the decades of 1970 to 1990. The destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992 eventuated serial bomb blasts in Mumbai in 1993. These and other such plethora of events paved the way for communal riots in many states such as in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, etc.

Distortion of historical facts, the binary opposition of dominion and subversion, economic disparities, political strategies, coercive conversion, etc. are the factors which play destructive roles in bringing about communal violence. All these factors are different from religious discrepancies. People who are mostly influenced by communal ideology do not necessarily differentiate between a community and a religion. In the true sense of the term, a community never replaces a religion and vice versa. The discrepancies in performing religious customs between the Hindu and the Muslim religions have created several problems for the harmonious existence of a society. As there are two religions, obviously differences are there in performing religious customs. Despite the differences, the teachings of both religions are ideal and humane. However, communalists purposefully distort the teachings to challenge the law and order in a society. Even though the goal of both religions i.e. the worship of god is common, there is paradox in the ways and methods of worshipping. Hinduism performs the worship of god through symbolical idols whereas idol worship is strictly prohibited in Islam. Hinduism emphasizes upon loud drum-beating, music and reciting of hymns whereas Islam expects pure silence during prayer.

“The contrast between Hinduism and the creed of the Arabian Prophet is extreme. Hinduism accepts whole-heartedly the worship of God, symbolized in images and elaborate temple worship: Islam rejects absolutely all idolatry. Hinduism makes its appeal to the multitude through religious music and ritual: Islam is sternly austere in its Puritan rejection of music at the time of prayer. Hinduism by its metaphysical speculations and its accommodation to the crude idea of masses, makes room for a Pantheon of deities and heroes in its conception of the unseen and the Eternal. Islam arising from the bare solitude of the Arabian Desert has avoided metaphysical subtlety, and insisted on the majestic unity of God, transcendent and omnipotent.”<sup>21</sup>

Hinduism is ‘polytheist’ whereas Islam is ‘monotheist’. The contradictory rituals lead to communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. For instance, the killing of cow is considered to be a part of rituals in Islam whereas cow is worshipped in Hindu religion as a sacred animal. There are recent instances where Muslims public cow

killing and Hindu's strong reaction to it in the form of lynching Muslim people. The issue of cow protection and cow killing has affected both communities since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

“In the 1882 Swami Dayananda Saraswati founded ‘Gaurakh Sabha’, a cow protection association and published ‘Gokarunanidhi’, a book which aims to rouse the Hindus against beef-eating Christians and Muslims and to encourage them to petition government to stop cow killing.”<sup>22</sup>

However, Muslims revolted against it strongly, assuming it was a restriction on their religious freedom. Riots took place in states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Punjab where Hindu militants pressured Muslims not to kill cows.

“When the followers of Islam lead a cow in sacrifice along the main street with a sacrificial garland over its neck marking it out for slaughter, riots may take place.”<sup>23</sup>

Apart from contradictions in practicing religious rituals, economic disparities have eventuated the communal violence between the Hindu and the Muslim. The economic structure of the Muslim society was paralyzed in the early British period. Muslims were deprived of government jobs and Hindus were promoted to avail job facilities. During the time of the Partition, a financially prosperous Muslim class preferred to go to Pakistan and those who stayed back faced discrimination in several spheres. The poor section of the Muslim community remained illiterate and unskilled in professional fields and survived under the dominance of Hindus. In post-Independence period, the Muslim community deteriorated due to agriculture-oriented base of the Indian economy. Hindus possessed lands and Muslims remained landless to work as labourers. Nepotism and discrimination against Muslims played a notorious role in ruining the social status of the Muslims in India.

“A study on data collected from 150 central government offices in 14 states showed that out of 75,953 employees there were only 3,346 Muslims, i.e., 4 percent.”<sup>24</sup>



This was the situation in the decade of 90s but there is hardly a change in increasing Muslims employers or employees in the present situation. Hindu's dominance is a single reason but conservative Muslims are still sticking to their religious restrictions that have impeded their progress. The economic progress of the Muslims is considered to be the help they get from Arab countries or Pakistan and the economic progress of Hindus is considered to be their majority condition. The communal violence due to the economic imbalance between Hindu and Muslim is the result of vested interests communalists for securing their economic ends. Intolerance, jealousy and hostility, etc. all contribute to rising communal violence.

'Misinterpretation of history' has also caused communal violence in India. This misinterpretation and the resultant violence have shaken people's faith in harmonious existence. During the British period, both British and local historians almost changed the narratives of both religions. Ideologically such narratives were inculcated in people to raise voice for their respective communities. The misinterpretation benefited the British administration to establish their rule and provoke Hindus against Muslims and vice versa. The British historians rewrote history which induced both Hindus and Muslims with communal spirit. The distorted narrative created a communal atmosphere and today's communalists are colouring it with added flavours. The foreign rulers invaded the country for establishing their power but it was linked to the Hindu-Muslim conflicts which created a rift between these communities. British historians portrayed kings belonging to both Hindu and Muslim religions as the preserver of one's own community and the destroyer of other. The 'distorted narratives' have misinterpreted the very concept of 'nationalism'.

“The books that children use and have been using for generations in schools and colleges spoke not very much of ‘Indians’ but of Hindus and Muslims; of Hindu rulers and Mughal emperors; of Shivaji’s battles and Muslim wars; of various religious communities and of Indian society or Indian sons and daughters.”<sup>25</sup>

The recent example of the 'misinterpretation of history' is that of the issue of the Ram Janma Bhoomi and the Babri Masjid. This issue has been sensitized by the communalists. The issue of the demolition of the Babri-Masjid and the consequent riots and serial bomb blasts in several parts of the country influenced Mahesh Dattani to

dramatize the communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India through his path-breaking play *Final Solutions*. The communal violence that flared up in the country took lives of more than 1000 people and the then government was compelled to ban some organisations igniting communalism.

“After the demolition of the disputed shrine in December 1992 at Ayodhya, when communal violence flared up in various states, more than 1,000 people were said to have died in five days, including 236 in Uttar Pradesh, 64 in Karnataka, 76 in Assam, 30 in Rajasthan and 20 in West Bengal. It was after this violence that the government banned Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal, Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS) and the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind in December 1992.”<sup>26</sup>

The religion and community-oriented organizations are platforms which influence communalists through the ‘misinterpretation of historical narratives’. Efforts have been made to reduce communal violence through different mechanisms since Independence. The advocacy of secularism in the Constitution of India serves as an antidote to communalism. Yet there needs to be effective measurements to control the damage caused by communal discourse. Literature, films and media sometimes present contradictory situations which instigate people strongly towards communalism. However, some novelists have tried their best to represent communalism as one of the most heinous social stigmas through their novels. The Partition of India from Pakistan and the aftermath violence broke shackles of illusion about the culture and tradition of ‘unity in diversity’. The Partition was considered to be the by-product of British colonization. Political leaders like Barrister Jinnah, Mahatma Gandhi and others were criticized for their respective roles in the Partition. The event of Partition found its expression through literature during and after partition time. Sisir Kumar Das states,

“For the first time our writers realized how violence sustained by ideology could be challenged by unmotivated violence or violence that totally commodifies human beings. Violence could be a game, a source of pleasure, like sex. And it is not a coincidence that both violence and sex become dominant in our popular literature after 1948. Attempts were made by critics, and other literary

intermediaries, to legitimize both violence and sex under the banner of politics, psychology and modernity.”<sup>27</sup>

There are fewer plays representing the ‘issue of communalism’ than novels. For many reasons, the Indian English plays have not been so successful. Nonetheless, Dattani’s *Final Solutions*, which is a problem play par excellence, emphasizes the need for mutual coordination between the two communities and arouses the readers to come up with some admirable solutions to the ethnic question. Another play by Dattani entitled *The Swami and Winston* sheds light on people's communal attitudes. Below is an in-depth analysis of Dattani's two plays that demonstrate the issues of ‘communalism’ and ‘religious fanaticism’.

#### **4.3. The ‘Issue of Communalism’ in *Final Solutions*:**

After the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh in 1992, Mahesh Dattani’s Sahitya Akademi Award winning play *Final Solutions* was first staged in 1993. The play exposes the deep-rooted communalism in India. Dattani is very innovative in presenting this play. He frequently uses multilevel sets for flashbacks. It complicates the stage setting as both internal and external and the past and present exist simultaneously. Mob / chorus activities representing both Hindu and Muslim fanatics take place on the stage where Dattani descends the end of the crescent shaped ramp to the stage level. The main characters in the play are Ramnik Gandhi, his daughter Smita, wife Aruna, mother Hardika, Javed and Bobby, two Muslim children. Hardika's dual role means the old lady who is currently diligent in her role as Hardika in post-Independence period and the newly married young bride Daksha in pre-Independence period. Dattani has used flashback techniques to show the coexistence of past and present in the play. The entire action of the play takes place in the Gandhi family. The structure standing on the stage indicates Gandhi's house i.e. living room, kitchen and worship room. These characters are present in the memories of characters like Tasneem, Noor Jahan, Zarine, Kanta etc.

The play, *Final Solutions* is based on the social theme of ‘communalism’ which has become a disaster in the current situation of the country. In this play, different aspects of the communal ideology prevalent in both the Hindu and the Muslim societies have been presented. In the current sense of the term, the play uncovers a harsh reality of our

lives. As mentioned earlier, Dattani uses 'flashback techniques' to represent different time-frames from the pre-Independence to the post-Independence periods. The action of the play is often changed in the past and vice versa. The play depicts the time of the Partition and the current riots. From the pre-Partition times to the present day, Dattani has presented four generations in an artistic manner. Daksha's parents and father-in-law appear in the pre-Independence period which is the first generation in the play. She herself is of the second generation character in which India and Pakistan and the Partition from the British monarchy witnessed two historical events. Ramnik Gandhi and his wife Aruna represent the third generation which has been influenced and affected by prevalent communal politics. The fourth generation is represented by Smita, Javed and Bobby in which we find the axis of ethnic ideology and secular thinking. Different time periods make sense here that different shades of communalism exist among them. It is thus the stream of communal ideology which has gone through noticeable changes from one generation to another. With the passage of time, both communities experienced the rise and fall in both communal and secular ideologies.

As mentioned in the previous section that the partition has sowed seeds of violence which poisoned both Hindus and Muslim so much so that it has become very difficult to find a panacea to the disease of communalism. Therefore, through the play, Dattani is raising the question such as 'Is there any final solution? The two communities i.e., the Hindu and the Muslim have been pitted against each other since the pre-Partition times in India. From trivial to major reasons, these communities in several parts of the country have been in frequent conflicts. Many times attempts have been made from the government and from the rational-minded people of both communities with a view to resolve issues related to their ways of practicing religious and cultural customs but to no avail. Misunderstanding against each other and the feeling of majority- minority cause communal tensions.

As soon as the play begins, Daksha is seen reading from her diary which she wrote forty years ago. At the same time, Hardika is sitting quietly there. Both Daksha and Hardika are one person in which two names represent two different timeframes. The whole course of the action is seen through the eyes of Hardika. Daksha's Dairy is abundant in personal life and issues related to the country. In her diary she mentions the eve of Independence as the most terrible one took place in the country. Daksha remarks the

Independence of the country as “the most terrible thing” as this event shocked her so much. Daksha further reads from the diary that the moment was thrilling as everyone woke up till midnight like a schoolboy waiting for the last bell to ring on the last day of school. However, the loss of everything in the post-Independence communal riots made it difficult for many Indians. Daksha recorded her father's happiness as the Indians became free from the British. However, before leaving India, she was embarrassed to hear her father say that the British had 'let go of the dogs'. Her father's words break Daksha because she did it to her friend Zareen's father. Daksha was ignorant of the Hindu-Muslim disintegration in the first phase of the South. On the night after independence, while she was waiting with her mother for her father to return to his home in Hussainabad, communal riots broke out. Her father was killed during the riots. The incident changed Daksha's attitude towards Muslims and she started accusing them of losing her father. Daksha experienced the Muslim rioters who, according to her, burned a record collection of love songs by Noor Jahan, Suraiya and Shamshad Begum, along with household items. Throughout the play, Daksha or Hardika blames Muslims.

Simultaneously, the play represents another communal riot which breaks out at the outset of the play when the chariot procession of Hindus is passing through the Muslim dominated area. Violence breaks out, the Hindu chariot lies broken on the street, idols of God break into pieces and curfew is imposed. Hindu people are prohibited to enter the sensitive area. Pujari is stabbed on the spot. Hardika links the on-going violence to the historical event of the Partition. Due to her prejudice that the Muslim community is possessed with instincts of violence, she again writes in her diary that there is no change in the relationship between the Hindu and the Muslim communities. The way Hardika looks at the present situation is already influenced by her own communal instincts and therefore she says that “Yes, things have not changed that much.”<sup>28</sup>

During her lifetime, Hardika witnesses the second communal riot now in the small town of Amargaon where she lives with Ramnik, Aruna and Smita. The mob /chorus represented in the play are replica of both Hindu and Muslim communalists. In fact, they are symbolic of our own resentment and communal ideology. The mob/chorus consists of five men and ten masks on sticks stand for five Hindu and five Muslim fanatics. Alternatively, the mob /chorus play the roles of Hindu fanatics when they wear Hindu masks and Muslim Fanatics while wearing Muslim masks. The mob/chorus

becomes frenetic when they are behind masks. The presence of Hindu chorus on stage displays their anger against Muslims during the riot time. They shout loudly standing before Gandhi's house and ask for two Muslim boys Javed and Bobby to whom Ramnik has provided shelter out of his generosity. Mob/chorus holds these two Muslim boys responsible for the riots, breaking of the chariot and killing the Hindu priest. Chorus 1, 2, and 3 are accusing Muslim community for staying on the land of another community. The Hindu communalism becomes visible through the following conversation.

“CHORUS1: How dare they?

CHORUS 2, 3: They broke our rath. They broke our chariot and felled our  
Gods!

CHORUS 2, 3: This is in their blood!

CHORUS 1, 2, 3: This is our land! How broke 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; stomach was no accident!

CHORUS 1: (Pounding with his stick) Send ... them ... Back

CHORUS 4: (Questioning) Send them back?

CHORUS 2: Drive ... them ... out?

CHORUS 5: Drive them out?

CHORUS 3: Kill the sons of swine.”<sup>29</sup>

The above set of dialogues brings out reactions of Hindus when chariot procession is attacked by Muslims. The Partition of the country was brought about on communal basis and Hindus hold the view that Muslims should be driven to their country. This view is also supported by Hardika. However, Ramnik Gandhi has liberal insight like his daughter Smita and both of them advocate Muslims living in India. Hindu majority possesses a superiority complex and forcibly induced the minority people to live in the subaltern state. A miscreant commits a crime and the blame has to be borne by the entire community. Therefore, the majority dominates the minority which results in violence. Here the ideology of the Hindu chorus is similar to what Madhav Golwalkar says about the non-Hindu people living in India that people not belonging to Hindu religion living in India must not only adopt the Hindu culture and language but also adhere to the Hindu religion. Golwalkar further says that non-Hindu people must be absorbed in the Hindu nation. "... they must cease to be foreigners and may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen rights."<sup>30</sup>

Hindus hate Muslims and vice versa. This can be seen in the attitude of Noor Jahan, Tasneem's father. Tasneem stays in Muslim hostel along with other girls which is bombed during communal riots. Smita is Tasneem's close friend and is worried about Tasneem. In order to know the whereabouts, Smita makes a phone call to Tasneem's father. This conversation takes place between Ramnik and Noor Jahan as Ramnik takes the receiver from Smita. However, this is a monologue rather than dialogue because Noor Jahan just listens to what Ramnik says and does not respond but cuts the phone off. Noor Jahan is worried about the safety of her daughter and hesitates to believe a Hindu person i.e. Ramnik Gandhi. It may be because Noor Jahan remembers that his shop was burnt by Gandhi and hence shows contempt for Hindus. The feeling of hatred and acrimony is still alive in Noor Jahan's mind.

The reaction of the Muslim community towards the Hindu community is represented by Muslim mob/chorus who replies to the queries of Hindu mob. Muslim mob/chorus makes fun of the Hindu God as it lacks warrantee. The Muslim communal ideology also finds expression in the following conversation.

“CHORUS 1: Their chariot fell in our street!

CHORUS 2: Their God now prostrates before us!

CHORUS 3: So they blame it on us?

CHORUS All: Why did they? Why did they? Why?

CHORUS 5: (Emotionally) Why? (Pause)

CHORUS 3: They say we raised their temples yesterday.

CHORUS 2: That we broke their chariot today.

CHORUS1: That we'll bomb their streets tomorrow.

CHORUS All: Why would we? Why? Why? Why would we?

CHORUS 5: (Emotionally) Why would we?

CHORUS 1, 2, 3 And 4 split

CHORUS5. (Meekly) Where?"<sup>31</sup>

The Hindu-Muslim hostility has its roots in history. In the medieval period, Muslim rulers sought to demolish Hindu temples in India. However, blaming present Muslim generation for devastation of Hindu temples in the past is the sheer communal prejudice of Hindus because the Muslim rulers invaded India to establish their powers for economic and political purposes and spread of religion was least important for them. Ramnik provides shelter to the two Muslim boys who are badly beaten up and chased by the Hindu mob. Hardika is reluctant over Ramnik's generosity as she hates the Muslim psychology. Her mind is prejudiced enough to accept the fact that Muslims can be loyal if they are protected. Her distrust towards Muslims is seen in her behaviour with Javed and Bobby.

“Those two who were begging for their lives. Tomorrow they will hate us for it. They will hate us for protecting them. Asking for help makes them feel they are lower than us ...I know their wretched pride! It had destroyed me before and. I was afraid it would destroy my family again! (pause) They don't want equality. They want to be superior.”<sup>32</sup>

The communal ideology has been inculcated in Hardika's mind by her husband Hari and servant Kanta. Her prejudice is also reinforced as she thinks that Muslims are killers of her father. Due to her communally influenced mind-set, Hardika fails to acknowledge the fact that her friend Zarine and the family were also victimized by communal violence. Hardika repents for her prejudice at the end of the play when she learns from Ramnik that her husband and father-in-law had set on fire the shop of Zarine's father



during communal riots and later on bought it at half its cost. According to Hardika, Muslims are filled with wretched pride. As a matter of fact, Hardika unknowingly misinterprets the event of job-offer by her father to Zarine's father and its rejection as it was actually an act of false pride or quasi- generosity. She suspects Javed and Bobby as rioters and instructs Ramnik to expel them from the house. Hardika is a communally prejudiced old woman who is does not easily accept the stay of Muslim boys in her house. She reprimands her son Ramnik to expel them from the house, supposing them to be rioters. After Ramnik's resistance to follow her instructions, Hardika reluctantly allows him to shelter Javed and Bobby till the next morning but expects their exit in the early morning. Hardika is not only one woman from the Hindu community to hate Muslims, in fact she is the representative of people belonging to the old generation who developed prejudice against the entire Muslim community. Same is case with the Muslim people who have been prejudiced against the Hindu community for multiple reasons.

Hardika herself is a victim of the 'communal ideology' and the 'patriarchal dominance'. Her husband does not want her to interfere in his business and expects her to be a typical Hindu housewife doing only household duties. She is even prohibited from visiting Zarine at her house. She goes through beating from her patriarchal and communalist husband for she visits Zarine, eats food there. Therefore, Hardika is psychologically conditioned to hate Muslims and blame Zarine for the domestic conflict. Hardika wrote in her dairy about Zarine and the Muslim community as a whole that she hates the way Muslims look, dress and eat. There are innumerable reasons behind having such a contemptuous attitude. The Hindu people have the superiority complex and hence consider the Muslims as 'other'. Therefore Hardika is rather hateful towards the living standards, costumes and food culture of Muslims.

Hence, the influence of communal and patriarchal ideology victimized Hardika. At the end of the play, Hardika realizes the conspiracy of her husband and father-in-law and repents for leading a life filled with communal hatred. She becomes a 'round character' and changes her attitude towards the Muslim boys. She asks Ramnik if these Muslim boys will ever return their home again.

Dattani criticizes the involvement of political leaders in causing riots. Political leaders from both Muslim and Hindu communities instigate communal violence for securing their vote banks. In doing so, they employ youngsters like Javed to bring about violence. Dattani exposes the real-life situation of the middle and lower class people who are used by wealthy and politically dominant people. Youngsters like Javed become complicit and ironically they don't know the consequences that follow due to their blunder. The Hindu Chorus represents those poor unemployed Hindu youngsters who are threatening Ramnik to hand over the two Muslim boys, Javed and Bobby to them. Secular people like Ramnik do exist in both communities but they are threatened and harassed.

In the Act II of the play, Hindu Chorus threatens Ramnik for sheltering Muslim boys and calls him a 'traitor.' However, the character of Ramnik as said earlier, represents a secularist who tolerates the other faith. Just as a humanist, he is committed to protect the Muslims boys in his house despite his mother's reluctance and threats of Mob. He is of the opinion that the majority community is responsible for communal violence. Ramnik's statement explores the plight of the minority community. It may be because the Hindu-Muslim dispute has still been smouldering even after the Independence which offered the Muslim community a subaltern social status and proved to be a hurdle for entering into the mainstream Indian society. The character of Javed, misinterpreted as a miscreant, regrets to be born in a minority community and thinks that he suffered discrimination from majority Hindus. In his reply to Ramnik, Javed remarks that he (Ramnik) must be rejoicing in the majority. Javed sarcastically asks Ramnik that the latter can do anything he wants. Javed holds a view that Ramnik belongs to a majority community and pretends to be a civilised individual. In fact, Javed misreads Ramnik as far the latter's rational or perhaps secular attitude is concerned. Javed suspects Ramnik despite accepting shelter in his house. Javed's misunderstanding towards Ramnik is the result of communal prejudice which has pitted him against all Hindu people. Another reason is that Javed is an illiterate person and hence is unable to differentiate between a communalist and a secularist.

Javed's prejudice is that the majority always ill-treats and oppresses minorities and perhaps this may be one of the reasons he is being hostile towards Hindus. Communal segregation is also a by-product of communal violence which is shown in the play.

Ramnik informs Javed and Bobby that earlier there were no such incidents happening like breaking of chariot and lynching of Pujari when there was only one Muslim family. However, now the area has become a Muslim Mohalla and malpractices have increased. The way minority Muslims suffer at the hands of the Hindu majority in India, Hindu minority also faces problems from the Muslim majority in Pakistan. Besides Hindu-Muslim, the dichotomy of majority and minority is found between black and whites, Arab against Jews, etc. Ramnik learns from Bobby that Javed is in need of a job and hence they have come to Amargaon. Ramnik offers Javed a job in his saree shop and says that it is his pleasure to offer him this job. However, Smita reveals the truth of Javed's past that he has been kicked out of the house due to his involvement in communal riots. Smita mentions that communalists and politicians hire Javed for causing violence which is a source of his livelihood. Smita's remark exposes the politics of communalists. Political leaders secure their communal vote bank through violence. Majority of Indians were influenced, perhaps sensitized by the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the role played by the politicians during that period. The review of Hindu-Muslim riots shows that behind each unpleasant incident lies the polluted background of hostility between the two communities and the vested interests of communalists from both communities. One community is tormented by political impartiality in unstable circumstances. Very few are the incidents where politicians or communalists are killed. Just helpless Hindus and Muslims who needed to live calmly experienced a large portion of the collective riots.

Act III of the play opens with the sarcastic exchange of the Muslim Chorus who holds the view that the Muslim community can never under any circumstances be united with the Hindu community. Here, it seems that the Muslims being a minority consider themselves 'a drop of oil' and Hindus to be 'an ocean of milk'. Different ideological standpoints have kept these communities away from each other. Muslim Chorus raises questions of their identity in India. The Muslim Mob/Chorus represents communalists from the Muslim community. They resist following the customs of the Hindu religion. However, the way they repeat certain questions such as 'should we?', or 'can we?' indicates the uncertainty in their communal standpoint.

As discriminated against by Hindus and deprived of opportunities, Muslims develop a sense of 'homelessness' or 'loss of identity' in India. Despite this state, they are reluctant to meld into anonymity by accepting the communal ideology of the Hindus. Ramnik, after he learns from Smita about Javed, hates him supposing to be one of the rioters but maintains patience and asks him anxiously as to what he gets out of it and asks Javed how much he was paid to cause the riot. Javed sarcastically replies that he was paid thousands of rupees for doing it. Javed further rejects Ramnik's job offer by arguing that he does not commit violence out of financial needs, rather he expresses his resentment towards Hindus as an oppressive majority. He remarks:

“I believe in myself. Yes! What else have I got to believe in? It's people like you who drive me to a corner and I have to turn to myself and my faith. I have a lot to thank you for! At least now I am not ignorant of my history and faith.”<sup>33</sup>

Further, the point of distrust still remains a burning question. Dattani has also exposed the violence of secular minded people like Ramnik when he slaps Javed. Javed criticizes Ramnik's liberal attitude. Ramnik's intolerance increases and he threatens Javed to throw him outside the house as a criminal.

The play exposes the behaviour of the majority Hindus towards the minority Muslims and the reaction of Muslims resulting in violence. Transgression challenges Hindu dominance. The deprived state of Muslim leads to frustration which eventually challenges the law and order of the society. Lop-sided socio-economic and political development deprives Muslims of availing equal opportunities and privileges. The biased social progress compels people like Javed to commit crimes. Javed is led into complicity due to the communal prejudice of the orthodox Hindu people. The way Bobby reveals the disillusionment of Javed's dream of becoming a neighbourhood hero due to the discriminatory practice of a high class Hindu neighbour, highlights the social nuisance of the majority community. Bobby mentions that Javed used to be treated as a heroic boy in their area while playing with the neighbourhood boys. Bobby further narrates an incident when Javed and Bobby along with some other boys were playing cricket on the street and a postman tells Javed to give a letter to the owner of the house. Javed opens the gate, a loud voice is heard from inside. The man from inside the house asked what Javed wanted and told Javed to keep the letter on the wall. The man

collected the letter and wiped the spot with a piece of cloth where Javed kept it and inside the house the man rang the bell loudly and prayed to God. Javed was frightened at the moment. Next day, the owner was very angry as somebody had thrown pieces of meat and bones in the backyard of his house. Bobby confesses that Javed was responsible for all this and lost his identity as a neighbourhood hero. Thus, due to the feeling of untouchability and prejudice, Javed joins a group of fundamentalists. Here, Dattani draws attention to the fact that Javed becomes a part of the crime due to the mistreatment to Muslims by Hindus. As mentioned earlier, *Final Solutions* exposed corrupt police mechanisms which are largely controlled by dominant political and communal leaders. Ramnik threatens Javed to hand him over to police to which Javed replies sarcastically. Ramnik represents the middle class common man who believes that the police system works to maintain the law and order in the society but on the contrary it is the same system that forces people like Javed to become criminals. Javed shackles Ramnik's illusion by saying that police may arrest him for the apparent satisfaction of people like Ramnik but it is the same system that will again make him commit some more crime which in turn stigmatize the whole Muslim community. Javed represents those Muslim youths who have lost faith in the judicial system of the country and therefore such youths are under the wrong impression that this system criminalizes them.

In this play, it seems that liberal-secularists are to some extent succeeding in changing the attitude of religious fundamentalists. In doing so, they try to change the attitude of fundamentalists towards other faiths. Javed, for instance, changes his attitude. He confesses that he was influenced by communalists to instigate riots. Javed also admits the fact it is almost impossible to get out of the terrorist group once involved in it. He repents for his complicity and says that fundamentalists encourage people like him to commit such a crime. They inculcated the ideology by propagating the misinterpretation of the word 'jihad'. Distortion of historical facts and misinterpretation of narratives are rooted in the minds of people like Javed by fundamentalists with the view to disturb social stability and to challenge communal harmony. Thus, a feeling of hatred is instigated among people like Javed by communalists from both Hindu and Muslim religions. Distortion of the word 'jihad' is spread among people. Javed realizes how he has been misused and misguided by some communalists to throw stones at the crowd and to kill the Poojari. Javed speaks:

“And ... and I was in a carnival again on that giant wheel screaming with pleasure. As I came crashing down, down. I wanted to get off, but I couldn't! The Poojari backed away...! I got nauseous and I cried. Why am I here? What am I doing here? Get me off! I want to get off!”... I let go of the knife ... I watched someone pick up the knife and pierce the Poojari. I watched while people removed a part of a chariot as planned. The Poojari fell to the ground. The carnival continued.”<sup>34</sup>

The mob psychology is revealed through the description of riots which is very realistic. People like Javed are lured to carry out such communal riots which ultimately benefits political leaders. However, somehow Javed manages to escape from the dangerous event in which he himself was involved. Ramnik appreciates Javed's endeavour and changes his attitudes towards the latter.

Besides Hardika, Aruna also has communal prejudice towards Muslims. She supports Hardika's demand of throwing Muslim boys outside the house. She discriminates Muslims on grounds of religion and community. After the mob disappears, she starts filling water from the outside tap; Javed tries to help her in filling water. However, her conservative and discriminatory approach towards Muslim does not allow her to accept Javed's help, she requests Javed not to help her in filling water. In order not to make Javed feel bad, she further says that they have nothing in mind against Muslim people or their religion. These are just our Hindu traditions that we preserve and follow. There is no doubt that we are all the same. In order to dispel the misconceptions in Javed's mind, Aruna further states they respect the Muslim religion and the welfare of the Muslim people. Aruna seems to be a hypocrite here in the sense that in one way she practices discrimination against Muslims and in other way pretends to hold the Muslim community equivalent to the Hindu community on religious and social grounds.

What Aruna says is very contradictory. She says all religions are one but ironically she does not follow this principle. Her contradictory statement is ludicrous enough when she states that they do not allow anyone to fill their drinking water. The water filled by their own hands has to be too pure to bathe their god. If somebody outside their family members fill the water, then it is likely to get contaminated. As a matter of fact Aruna was born and brought up in a very conservative or superstitious Hindu family in which

any Muslim touch to water was considered impure and her scrupulous mind-set makes her practice discrimination against Muslims. Aruna's religious dogmatism becomes a bone of contention between herself and Smita and. The way Javed is communally prejudiced, Aruna is religiously prejudiced. Hence, people in both communities like Javed and Aruna are likely to fall prey to the strategy of communalists and fundamentalists.

Contrary to Aruna and Javed, Bobby and Smita follow secular ethics and do not discriminate against people on grounds of their faith. Smita befriends many Muslim boys and girls and Tasneem, as mentioned earlier, is her best friend. Aruna dislikes Smita's open-mindedness, supposing it to be a threat to their religion. Smita criticizes Aruna for following orthodox Hindu ideology. Smita asks Aruna why she should be proud of religious matters that would push her away from a rational stream in society. From the conversation between Smita and Aruna, it seems that Smita is a girl who advocates very modern ideas and religion perhaps the Hindu religion does not have prime significance in her thinking, while Aruna is still cultivating her old religious ideas promoting discrimination against Muslims. Smita, in the true sense of the term, is quintessential to all those for whom religion does not matter so as to live a sound life. On listening to Smita, Aruna scolds her for considering her to be an atheist. What Aruna further says clearly indicates that she is a staunch supporter of Hinduism and takes pride in being so.

“What makes you think you have all the answers? Don't you have any respect for who you are? I shudder at your children. What kind of sanskar will you give them when you don't have any yourself? ... For so many generations we have preserved our sanskar because we believe it is the truth! It is the way shown to us by our saints.”<sup>35</sup>

Aruna further criticizes Smita for escaping from the religion i.e. Hinduism. The preference to religious ideology is unsettling to Smita and therefore she strongly refutes Aruna's fanatical views. Smita hits out at both Aruna and her religion saying that religion should not divide people to fight. According to Smita, religion is keeping her away from modern ideas, and it would be madness for her to try to justify herself by fasting, as her mother does.

It can also be observed that the generation gap has inculcated different ideological standpoints on Aruna and Smita. Aruna feels threatened keeping these two Muslim boys in her house whereas Smita enjoys their company comfortably. Like Hardika and Aruna, the Hindu Mob/Chorus is also critical of liberal secularists like Ramnik and Smita. The Mob-Chorus calls these people quasi-secularists. According to the Mob-Chorus the Hindu survival in India is at risk and quasi -secular people are favouring Muslims with a view to safeguard their political interests. The apprehension of Hindu Chorus is seen in the following expression.

“Our future is threatened ... our voice grows hoarse. Our bellowing pales in comparison to the whisper of a pseudo-secularist who is in league with the people who brought shame to our land! Half-hearted, half-baked greatness. He is still a threat.”<sup>36</sup>

Smita further expresses that she feels suffocated in the household because of her mother’s constant religious feeding. Unlike Aruna, Ramnik supports Smita’s rational insight. Later on, Aruna appears to be a round character. She realizes flaws in her attitudes towards another faith. She allows Javed to fill water. Both Javed and Aruna go through gradual transformation in the course of time. They realize their misconceptions regarding communities and religions. Aruna is enlightened by Smita and so is Javed by Bobby. Javed further addresses as:

“What I told Babban, you told her (Smita)... you said you wouldn’t listen to her criticism because she was not proud of her – what did you call it? – Inheritance. I said religion. Same thing -, I suppose ... We are not very different. You and me. We both feel pride.”<sup>37</sup>

Another instance of Smita’s secular behaviour towards Muslims could be observed when Bobby reveals to Smita that they (Bobby and Javed) have deliberately entered into her house to know whether she still loves Bobby or ready to sacrifice her love for Tasneem. Bobby also wants to know from Smita whether religion is keeping them apart. However, Smita clears that religion would not be a hurdle if they get united. Since Smita is a proponent of progressive thought, her concepts of love and marriage transcend religious frontiers. Therefore, she goes on to say that if she wants to have a love affair



with a Muslim boy, she is ready to have it no matter what the difficulties are. Because she is independent in her thinking as far as the choice is concerned. The character of Smita represents a modern generation which is willing to live life freely rather than to follow irrational traditions and communal restrictions. Smita thinks beyond community and religion and upholds humanity which can prove to be a suitable final solution. Smita proves the fact that religion is not at all a stumbling block for living together and God or water does not get contaminated by a Muslim touch. Rather she encourages Javed to fill the water when the latter hesitates as;

“No, I suppose you are right. That’s why I wanted you to fill it. To prove that it is not going to fly off into the heavens with your touch, putting an eternal curse on our family.”<sup>38</sup>

Smita’s above expression shows that God, if exists, doesn’t himself or herself discriminate against people on grounds of religion, faith or caste. Rather, the ideology of discrimination is inculcated among people. Smita is a symbolic character in the play for all those who have nothing to do with religion and faith and she also proves that a better life can be lived without practicing rituals of any religion. However, such people are often criticized as atheists.

Dattani himself does not propose any direct solution to resolve issues related to the Hindu-Muslim animosity through the play, but has implied a resolution in the final scene of the play through the character of Bobby. Aruna after taking a bath enters the pooja room, starts ringing bells to wake up God which breaks the silence of dawn in the house. The ringing of bells disturbs Javed and it also reminds of ringing of bells by a high caste Hindu owner when Javed had put a letter on his wall in his childhood. However, Bobby enters the pooja room and picks up an idol of Lord Krishna in his hand. His purpose is to prove that Muslims too believe in Hindu rituals. Bobby’s touch to the idol of Hindu God itself provides a solution to the prejudice of people who discriminate against others on religious and communal grounds. Bobby enlightens Javed as:

“See Javed! He doesn’t humiliate you. He doesn’t cringe from my touch. He welcomes the warmth of my hand. He feels me. And he welcomes it! I told Him who is sacred to them, but I do not commit sacrilege.”<sup>39</sup>

As Smita is a secular-minded girl, Bobby is liberal like Ramnik who respects gods of all religions despite belonging to two different religions. Bobby proves that God is one and humanity should be adhered to. He restrains Javed from complicity as he is a peace-loving person. However, it does not mean that both Bobby and Ramnik are weaker sections of society, rather they are perpetrators of that society in which humanity is the core element. Bobby’s tolerant attitude can further be observed in what he says to Aruna keeping idol in hands:

“You can bathe Him day and night, you can splash holy waters on him but you can not remove my smell with sandal paste and attars and fragrance. Flowers because it belongs to a human being who believes and tolerates and respects what other human beings believe. This is the strongest fragrance in the world!”<sup>40</sup>

Bobby highlights the absurdity of Aruna’s act of bathing God day and night. His expression implies that God will get purified only when people stop quarrelling on religious affairs. He talks about the fragrance of humanity as it is filled with belief, tolerance and respect. His concept of the strongest fragrance enlightens orthodox people like Aruna and appeals for the fragrance of communal harmony which itself is one of the final solutions. Turning to Hardika, whose mind is still preoccupied with the death of her father and her insult in Zarine’s house, Bobby proposes a mutual forgiveness on behalf of both communities. It implies that just forgetting past events or forgiving each other would not be enough, but everybody would take initiative to bridge the gap between two communities with mutual respect and understanding. In the last scene of the play, Javed and Bobby are seen walking out of Ramnik's house and later Aruna asks Ramnik if he will open the shop today as workers may be waiting there. Ramnik reveals the hidden conspiracy about the shop and decides not to open it again. He discloses the secret that it is the same shop his father bought at half its cost from Zarine’s father. He remarks:

“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... when those boys come here. I thought I would ... I hoped I would be able to ... set things right.”<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the entire play is a juxtaposition of past and present is influenced by the past as far as the issue of communalism is concerned. The mind-set of Hardika is still prejudiced against Muslims. Being an old woman, she has witnessed different timeframes in which communalism as an ideology remained stagnant. Therefore, communalism is still deeply-rooted in the minds of people like Hardika, Aruna and Noor Jahan. Ramnik represents liberal-minded section of Hindu community even though his motive of offering a job to Javed is sort of reimbursement of the complicity of his father. Ramnik’s hesitation to lodge a complaint to police against Javed represents a middle-class mentality which prefers to remain aloof from police investigation, etc. Smita and Tasneem are representatives of modern society i.e., pluralistic society. Javed represents unemployed and illiterate youngsters. Bobby at the end of the play stands out as a rational human being for whom humanity is of utmost importance and not religion. Dattani has succeeded in exposing the deep-rooted communal ideology which is threatening the harmonious existence of various communities in one society. The play *Final Solutions* shakes the illusion of people belonging to both Hindu and Muslim communities that religion should have its own separate space and it is the need of hour to co-exist harmoniously and democratically.

#### **4.4 The Issue of Religious Fanaticism in *The Swami and Winston*:**

Mahesh Dattani’s another well-known play on the issue of communalism and religious fanaticism is *The Swami and Winston*. It is a Radio play which was first broadcast on June 3, 2000 on BBC Radio 4. The play highlights communal conspiracies and criticizes religious fanatics. Along with the Hindu-Muslim communal conflict, this play uncovers the Hindu-Christian antagonism. In *Final Solutions*, Dattani explored the social issue of Hindu-Muslim communalism. However, the present play brings out the conspiracy of quasi-intellectuals and criticizes the corrupt police mechanism. The

characters in the play are Uma, a sociology scholar, her husband Suresh Rao, who is superintendent of police, constable Munnaswamy, Swami Jeevandanda, Sitaram Trivedi, Charles Montefiore, Lady Montefiore, Radha, Taxi driver, etc. The character of Uma has already been discussed in the play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* in which she fights to give justice to a hijra, Kamla. The way Uma brings to light the murder mystery of hijra, Kamala and involvement of a dominant politician, Mr. Sharma, in this play Uma takes up a new challenge and exposes the conspiracy of pseudo-Hinduist Sitaram Trivedi behind the murder of Lady Montefiore, an aristocratic English woman who comes to India to visit his brother. Both plays deal with a common issue of violence based on communal and religious politics. The play represents how people cheat in the name of religion and philosophy. It brings out deep-rooted religious fanaticism which is harmful to society. Lady Montefiore, an English lady, travels to India with her dog named Winston to visit her brother Charles who is at present staying at the ashram of Swami Jeevandanda in Karnataka.

Dattani explores the issue of religious fanaticism through this play. Fanatics are there in every religious community who cause social unrest to secure their benefits. In this play, Sitaram Trivedi is shown as a fanatic belonging to the Hindu religion and hence practices discrimination against people of other religions like Muslim and Christianity. Upon reading the play, it becomes clear that Sitaram Trivedi's conspiracy eventuate Lady Montefiore's death. It is his intention to grab her property in England for raising a Hindu ashram. However, Uma Rao appreciably exposes Sitaram Trivedi's conspiracy through her detective manner.

Communal violence has acquired a monstrous shape in the last couple of decades. Community-oriented political parties are instigating communal rights. As far as the minority is concerned, along with Muslims, Christians and members of other minority religions are being victimized through violence and attacks. As discussed in *Final Solutions*, illiterate or less educated people from rural areas are forced into complicity on religious and communal grounds. Religious festivals and processions are organized not to spread spirituality but to gain political benefits.

The play opens with Lady Montefiore talking to a taxi driver while travelling. The taxi driver insists Lady to visit the Bull Temple. Despite her reluctance, she goes to the Bull Temple where her dog Winston goes missing. As Lady Montefiore learns that she lost her dog she screamed and yelled at the driver furiously. On her way back from the Bull temple, the taxi breaks down on the road and the driver requests her to remain seated in the car and he goes to a mechanic near the Bull Temple. On his return, he finds that Lady is dead. Police arrest the driver suspecting his involvement in the murder. Uma, as mentioned previously, a sociology scholar, and at present, is perusing her research in 'Violence in India', investigates the murder case. Uma declares her motive behind investigating the murder case to Sitaram Trivedi. She is intent on knowing the truth behind the Montefiore's murder as she is currently pursuing her research on 'Violence in India'. Uma, as has already been discussed in the play *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, is a sensitive and studious woman. In that play, she works on transgenders in India and goes in search of the murderer of Kamla, a hijra. In the same way in this play too, she is again on her mission through her research work which eventually results in knowing the murderer i.e., Sitaram Trivedi. Her research work in a detective manner helps the Muslim taxi driver and Charles Montefiore prove themselves innocent and having nothing to do with Lady Montefiore's murder.

*The Swami and Winston* displays the social issue of Muslim marginalization due to majority dominance. Maqsood, the taxi driver, represents a poor and helpless section of Muslim community. Such people are extorted even when they are not involved in crime. Maqsood appeals to Uma to give him justice and pleads that he is innocent. However, what he says to Uma is his poor state of minority and prejudice against all Hindus.

“What is my crime? Being a Muslim? I tell you they will not have arrested me if I was not a Muslim! Who will believe me? You are also a Hindu... my life is important?”<sup>42</sup>

Maqsood is a very weak man who suffers imprisonment even when he has nothing to do with it. The fanatics are those who victimize people like Maqsood. Uma strives for giving justice to Maqsood and the English Lady. Like Ramnik and Smita in *Final Solutions* Uma upholds secular ethics. However, due to the influence of fanaticism, weak people like Maqsood do not dare to trust secular social workers. Maqsood's

anxiety is the result of a biased police mechanism. Maqsood exposes the prejudice against the entire Muslim community because Muslim people are held responsible for any sort of violence taking place anywhere in society. Suresh Rao's immediate arrest of Maqsood represents politically and communally biased police which holds Muslims as criminals without meticulous investigation. Fanatic Sitaram Trivedi misleads the police and puts a doubt on a poor man Maqsood as the killer of the English Lady. The communal discord between the Hindu and the Muslim communities can be observed in the following conversation between Uma and Sitaram Trivedi. Trivedi is a social hypocrite. He responds Uma over the issue of Lady Montefiore's murder case in such a way that he has a great respect both for the Muslim taxi driver and the English Lady. Trivedi often pretends to be innocent by calling Maqsood a Muslim gentleman. His comments regarding the English Lady have a cynical touch. He further mentions that Lady Montefiore was a naïve woman therefore she easily believed anybody she approached in India. With a view to know Trivedi's attitude towards the Muslim community, Uma strategically asks him that the lady should not have hired a Muslim taxi driver. However, Trivedi is shrewd enough not to reply to something negative about Maqsood instantly.

Dattani criticizes fanatic ideology of Hindus which instigates violence, riots, etc. Uma exposes the real identity of Sitaram Trivedi when the latter suggests her as "Don't take your catholic school education too seriously. Jai Shri Ram."<sup>82</sup> The following conversation between Uma and the constable Munnaswamy brings out the real identity of Sitaram Trivedi as:

“UMA: a Dangerous man.

MUNNASWAMY: What madam?

UMA: I said he is a dangerous man. He is a real right wing Hindu fanatic.

MUNNASWAMY: Why do they want to create so much trouble?

UMA: They feel they know everything. And they feel superior because they know everything. And feel threatened by the presence of Islam and Christianity.”<sup>43</sup>

Uma thus criticizes Trivedi as an orthodox Hinduist who looks down upon other communities. His staunch Hinduism pervades rationality which becomes a threat to the harmonious existence of all communities. Trivedi initiates a procession in which he is guarded by personal bodyguards because he anticipates violence in the Muslim-dominated area. This is actually a mutual threat to both Hindu and Muslim people. Such threats instigate psychological violence rather than physical one. Trivedi stands for all those quasi-religious people who pose a threat to the society. Trivedi is among those fanatics who make others instigate violence by themselves behind the curtain. Trivedi declares himself to be a protector of religion, i.e., the Hindu. In fact, a single individual cannot be the protector of the entire religion as religion is an ideology which is supposed to be followed by a large group of society. He mentions that people like him must “re-establish Hinduism”.<sup>4</sup> His statement is contradictory enough to state that such fanatics are distorting the ethics of religion.

Trivedi’s emphasis on re-establishing Hinduism is a by-product of dominant Hindu ideology which has been prevalent throughout the country since the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992. One reason may be that somewhere Hindus were worried about sustaining their majority dominance and anticipated a challenge by another community i.e. absolutely Muslim. This anticipation of threat to their dominance necessitates re-establishing Hinduism. However, the process of re-establishment from the people like Sitaram Trivedi has been very violent for communities. With the view to fulfil their religious and political expectations, religious fanatics like Sitaram Trivedi are likely to go any extreme.

In a conversation with Trivedi, Uma asks him about his daughter Radha. Trivedi falsely responds by saying that she was murdered by a non-Hindu and non-religious person. Very few religious fanatics like Trivedi tread the moral ethics of Hinduism. Such people spread rumours about the abduction of Hindu women by non-Hindu people. Trivedi too spreads a rumour of the murder of his daughter by a non-Hindu person to escape from the crime which he himself commits. It is Trivedi’s conspiracy to marry his daughter Radha to Charles Montefiore so that after killing Charles, he can inherit Charles’s property in England. Apart from communal violence, Dattani exposes domestic violence. Trivedi beats Radha and compels her to poison her husband Charles with

‘dhatoora’ leaves. However, Radha instead of doing so, chews ‘dhatoora’, leaves herself and becomes unconscious.

*The Swami and Winston* is a ‘whodunit’ play. Lady Montefiore is murdered but real killer goes off scot-free and an innocent Muslim driver is arrested on false charge. Despite Suresh Rao’s restriction, Uma secretly collects evidences of the murder and finally succeeds in detecting the real murderer. Prima facie, Uma finds that the English Lady was not killed for the cash she carried with her in the car. This finding gives Uma a clue that her murder is linked to her purpose of settling in India with her brother. On her way back to the ashram, Uma comes across a scarecrow in a roadside field which was put on a branded Burberry raincoat. She further observes that the right sleeve of the raincoat was torn and the murderer kidnapped the dog named Winston assuming that it may struggle to protect the Lady.

Uma approaches Sitaram Trivedi again with the raincoat in hand when Trivedi’s religious procession is going on. Trivedi is perplexed on seeing the raincoat and indicates it as belonging to Swamiji. Trivedi asks Uma about some confession from the driver and tries to involve Swamiji and driver in the murder case. However, Uma realizes that Trivedi is deliberately implicating Swami in the crime and deceiving the police. Uma remarks, “It can’t belong to Swami.”<sup>45</sup>

In his play, Dattani draws attention to the current state of affairs in India on the issues of communalism and fanaticism. It may be communal violence or any other sort of violence. He shows causes of violence in present times through the speech of Swami Jeevananda. Swami Jeevananda represents a devoted Hindu priest who works for the welfare of society. Uma and Munnaswamy observe Swami addressing his devotees as

“...Today we are so preoccupied with our own sense of gratification that we are unaware of the existence of our fellow human beings. We see our brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, children merely as means to fulfil our own needs. They do not exist for us unless they fulfil some need or want. That is the cause of violence today. Because we feel that anyone who does not fulfil our needs or wants is not required on this planet. And sometimes the death of fellow human



beings may also fulfil some base need in us. Today, this base need of some imbalanced person has affected us in this ashram...<sup>46</sup>

Swami's speech highlights the reason behind the murder of Lady Montefiore. The way Charles Montefiore justifies his sister's motive to come to India displays the communal atmosphere prevailed in the country as:

“My sister ... my sole relative ... ‘sole’ as in only ... come to India to visit me. She wanted me to go back to England with her. She loved me and she thought she knew what was good for me. She felt this somehow wasn't natural for me... this lifestyle. This madness, us she called it.”<sup>47</sup>

Charles mentions that his sister was upset with him over his decision to stay in India at Swami's ashram permanently sacrificing his property of five hundred acres of Hertfordshire land. Through the conversation between Uma and Charles in the market, Charles makes it clear how he was hoodwinked by an Indian man in London who preached about Advaita philosophy and invited Charles to India. However, on coming to India, Charles realizes that the man is “the most bigoted, racist, casteist, classist.”<sup>48</sup> Charles further says that a tourist from Afghanistan brought him to the ashram of Swami Jeevananda. His supposition about an Indian as classist, racist, casteist shows his resentment toward Hindu communalism. Uma inquired about his raincoat to which he further replied that he himself had offered it to Swamiji. Charles tells Uma that Swami had visited the Bull Temple on the same day Lady was killed. He also assures Uma that Swami did not kill her. Charles informs Uma about the details of his property in London and the appointment of Swami, as a trustee. Uma as in a detective role is in search of any sustainable evidence of the murder. Therefore, she visits Swami secretly. During the visit, she reminded Swami that she and her mother had met him twenty years ago. Swami too reminds that in those days there was no such issue of the Hindu supremacy and there were no such movements for asserting this supremacy. Even though Swami is a Hindu preacher, by nature he is a secular man who does not accept the influence of one religion on another. He lambasts those fanatic Hindus who demolished the Masjid in Ayodhya. He mentions his experience of the ‘irony of fate’ that he was delivering his critical speech in a seminar on the demolition of the Masjid and at the same time one Christian woman was being brutally killed. Swami Jeevananda exposes communal

politics of fanatic Hindus who are killing people in the name of religion to secure their economic benefits and political vote back. He also upholds the moral preaching of the Hindu religion which does not teach to be violent. Uma further asks about the raincoat which is the only proof to reach out to the criminal. Swami replies that he is suspicious of somebody who is involved in the functioning of the ashram. He further says that, anybody of aides or devotees uses the raincoat.

Though the religious fanatic Sitaram Trivedi tries to involve Swami in the murder case, it becomes clear that Swami is not the criminal and lives life with moral ethics. Religious fanatics can go to any extreme. When Radha enters into the private chamber of Swamiji, she falls down with 'dhatoora' leaves in her hand. Immediately, she is taken to hospital. Uma tells Charles that his own death was important to Trivedi, not his sister's. Uma further informs Charles that his sister Lady who has been killed with an intention to prevent her from executing your letter of intention to Barnsworth and Milling. With the view to mislead police, the killer deliberately used the raincoat of Charles (which Charles offered to Swami) and put it on the scarecrow near the roadside field to be found easily so that the suspicion would come upon Swami. Uma suggests Charles to take recourse to the police for his own safety. Ironically, police mechanism works for the people like Sitaram Trivedi Uma also realizes that though Swami is innocent but people surrounding him in the ashram are complicit. They are helping Trivedi to cause violence. Therefore, Uma enlightens Charles about the secret agenda of fanatics. According to Uma, the hidden motive of the murder is,

“to set up as a township or a mega ashram, to get expatriate Indians, millionaires interested in donating to the ashram which would be a façade of course, to raise funds for their grand election campaigns to gather support... for their progress ... To eliminate Muslims, Christians ... may be not genocide but to disempower them, to build temple to win 700 million strong Hindu vote bank.”<sup>49</sup>

Mahesh Dattani criticizes the Hindu ideology which is intent on establishing supremacy of Hindu religion at any cost. People like Sitaram Trivedi propagate misinterpretation of the Hindu religion and thus violate the moral values of the Hindu philosophy. That is why the common Hindu man rises up against Muslims and Christians. Radha represents a typical Hindu wife who follows religious ethics and hence does not want to kill her husband Charles; rather, she herself commits suicide by chewing leaves of

‘dhatoora’, a poisonous plant. Radha is a woman dominated under patriarchy in *The Swami and Winston* like Hardika in *Final Solutions*. Trivedi beats her and forces her to poison Charles. When Trivedi accuses Charles of killing his daughter Radha, Uma reacts angrily for his false accusation calling him a liar. She mentions that he himself killed his daughter. At that moment, a scuffle takes place between Charles and Trivedi. Trivedi gets himself killed. Trivedi’s gun by mistake hits a bullet to himself. Before he dies, Trivedi confesses that he didn’t want anything out of it for himself. What he did was solely for “the Hindu cause”.<sup>50</sup>

Trivedi feels guilty for what he did and Uma says to him that if thought, he could have done something else other than this conspiracy and could have proved himself a good Hindu individual. In fact, Trivedi himself was the victim of Hindu ideology who loses everything for the sake of his immoral expectation. Uma’s expression displays her rational mind-set. A person, who practices ethics of Hinduism, follows principles of tolerance. He or she never believes in the annihilation of non-Hindu people. Uma upholds the principles of tolerance of Hindu religion. Therefore, she never suspects Swami Jeevananda as the murderer. Rather she takes Swami’s help to investigate the murder case. Through the character of Swami Jeevananda, Dattani foregrounded those monks who spend their entire life in spreading the essence of peaceful existence of all communities in a democratic and pluralistic country like India. Swami, in this play, represents those monks who throughout their lifespan remain committed to the moral teachings of Hinduism and provide shelter to all those who want to learn Advaita philosophy irrespective of their caste, creed, religion or nationality. This is the reason Charles appoints Swami as a trustee of his 250 acres of Hertfordshire trust. In a conversation with her husband Suresh Rao, Uma compares and contrasts the characters of Swami and Sitaram Trivedi. Swami is portrayed as the preacher of Hindu moral values, while Trivedi as the violator of those moral values:

“...by framing the Swami, he would get rid of an opposer. The Swami is truly spiritual and wants none of this new brand of Hinduism. Radha was totally under her father’s control, it would be very easy for Sitaram Trivedi to manage the property once she inherits it from Charles whom I am sure he would have killed in a way to make it look like an accident. He had grand plans. England would have been the perfect place to set up his own pseudo ashram.”<sup>51</sup>

However, Suresh Rao has become a puppet in the hands of politicians. He is deliberately blind towards the complicity of Sitaram Trivedi. Suresh Rao is largely driven by his own communal insight. He forces Uma to give a witness in the court that Trivedi's act of firing a bullet was an accident. A heated exchange takes place between Uma and Suresh Rao in which the latter tries to dominate the former. Suresh Rao angrily shouts to Uma for her incapability to understand that the incident was merely an accident in which Trivedi was killed. However, Uma is firm on her decision and supports Charles. The blame-game between Uma and Suresh Rao can be observed in following dialogue which shows how police mechanism supports pseudo-religious people like Sitaram Trivedi and tortures innocents like Maqsood and Charles as:

“UMA: I am not going to say that.

SURESH: Nobody is going to believe you anyway. You have no proof.

UMA: You are a supporter.

SURESH: What do you mean?

UMA: You do believe in yourself what people like Sitaram are trying to do in this country. You want it. I am going to say what I want to say in court.

SURESH: Oh. Okay. I was on to him anyway. I would have nabbed him alive if you hadn't interfered.”<sup>52</sup>

Thus, the play deals with the superiority complex of the fanatic people and resultant threat to common people belonging to any religion. The real Hinduism is distorted and misrepresented by religious fanatics like Sitaram Trivedi for the sake of their selfish motive. This results in the marginalization of other communities from mainstream Indian society. There are few social reformers like Uma and Swami who through their different ways of working are striving for the welfare of mankind irrespective of caste, creed, race, religion, nationality, etc. However, these people are harassed and threatened. Uma transgresses at the end of the play to give justice to the innocent Maqsood and Charles. Dattani further criticized the corruption in the administrative mechanism of the country. On the contrary such agencies work for the betterment of quasi-religious people like Trivedi. Dattani raises this serious question of communal injustice and religious distortion in India which has been a burning social issue from Independence to the present times.

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## Chapter Five: Conclusion

### 5.1 Introduction

The present chapter is the summing up of the overall study and findings of the research work done in the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani. It is Mahesh Dattani's enduring task to foreground issues of 'homosexuality', 'gender discrimination', 'patriarchy', 'child sexual abuse', 'communalism', 'religious fanaticism', 'natural disaster', 'disease', etc., through his plays. In order to dispel the illusion of the people, Dattani has easily addressed these social issues in simple English language. As a matter of fact Dattani is the first Indian English playwright who has dared pull taboo issues out of the closet. It is not the case that playwrights prior to the Dattani did not deal with social issues. However their portrayal was bereft of realism and poignancy. Most of them preferred to imitate the Western subject matters, portraying the ancient Indian myths, legends of the aristocratic urban life which found to be less appropriate and less appealing to the Indian audience. Before Dattani's English plays arrived on the literary horizon in India, most of the Indian English plays appeared in translated versions from various regional languages like Marathi, Hindi, Kannada or Bengali. Dattani directly wrote in English and his 'localization of English language' helped him portray a real picture of what is happening around us. Considering this phenomenon, an attempt has been made in this research work to study different social issues in the light of the selected plays.

5.2. **The first chapter** of this research work presents a broad outline of drama as a genre, Sanskrit drama, modern Indian theatre, pre-Independence and post-Independence Indian English drama and contribution of Mahesh Dattani. Besides, the outline has also been broadened to cover rationale and significance, objectives, scope and limitations, review of related literature, hypothesis, adopted methodology used in this research work and chapterization.

5.3. **The second chapter** deals with the issue of homosexuality in the three plays selected under this research work. Prior to the analysis of these plays, an attempt has been made to study theoretically the emergence and development of gay and lesbian movements from the decade of 1960, queer theory, the concept of homosexuality in Western context. As Dattani typified the Indian 'setting' in his plays, so it became

relevant to study 'homosexuality' in the Indian context in the light of on 'Section 377' in the Indian Penal Code, efforts of the NGOs like 'Naz Foundation' to decriminalise homosexuality, the judgements of the 'Delhi High Court' and the 'Supreme Court' with respect to criminalization and decriminalization of homosexuality. After studying the concept of 'homosexuality', the research work analysed three selected plays in this chapter. The analysis emphasizes the sexual violence against homosexuals, social exclusion, deprivation of several human rights and opportunities and marginalisation from mainstream heterosexual society. In this chapter each play has been discussed separately and some of the relevant dialogues have been quoted to support the hypothesis stated in the outset of the study.

In the play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* Mahesh Dattani portrayed the oppression of the hijra community under the heteronormative society supported by politicians and bureaucrats. The playwright brings forward the unnoticed and unacknowledged hijra community. Upon reading the play, it is observed that hijras are destined to twice injustice: first by birth and second by the fellow heterosexual human beings. The entire plot of the play revolves round the murder mystery of a hijra named Kamala. Uma, a sociology scholar, investigates the case and comes to the conclusion that Mr. Sharma had the hijra burned to death. The maltreatment to hijras, social exclusion, prejudice towards their sexual identity and the resultant angst disturb the sensitive mind of Uma. Dattani dramatizes the stigmatisation of hijras as untouchables, unnatural and perverse but ironically they are invited and welcomed perhaps to bless the occasions of marriage and childbirth through their auspicious singing, clapping and dancing.

In the second play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, the research work studies a sexual relationship among six characters and their conflicts, repression and past secrets. The study exemplifies the fact that same sex relationship is as demanding as heterosexual one. The research work points out the fact that expectations of homosexuals are similar to those of heterosexuals.

In addition to the two plays, research work further finds the need and urgency of the same- sex love relationship and situational compromise of the young couple in the third selected play, *Do the Needful*. In this play the research work observes that the proposed marriage between Alpesh and Lata is a mutual compromise to fulfil their different sexual needs with their different sexual partners.

5.4 **The third chapter** deals with three interrelated issues such as ‘gender discrimination’, ‘patriarchy’ and ‘child sexual abuse’ in the three plays entitled *Tara*, *Where There Is a Will* and *Thirty Days in September*. Prior to the analysis of each play an attempt has been made to study the theoretical base of these issues. In the play *Tara* the research work lays emphasis on the gender imbalance and unethical preference to male child over female one in the educated family. The study raises the question as to why male child is direly needed and why a female child is treated as a burden. The traditional mind-set is that a male child inherits the race, the family, and the property whereas a female child is supposed to be given to others. Hence injustice follows in upbringing, treatment, education, pampering, career and life as a whole. The study further highlights the fact that medical practitioners, political leaders who are revered as saviours are involved in the complicity of ‘gender discrimination’. Worst is the fact that Tara's mother Bharati too agrees to the surgery of her Siamese twins in which two legs are given to male child Chandan and one to female child Tara despite the fact that the major blood supply to two legs was from Tara’s body. Consequences of gender discrimination are family conflict, psycho-social disturbance, subordination of feminine identity, etc.

In the second play entitled *Where There Is a Will*, the research work looks into the ‘issue of patriarchy’ which not only dominates women but also children. Hasmukh Mehta establishes his patriarchal authority over below family members as a part of his inheritance. His patriarchal behaviour ruins the three family members. He keeps unnecessary expectations from them and is often upset over the disappointment. Hasmukh Mehta signs his ‘Will’ in such a manner that even after his death his family would follow his patriarchal norms. His mistress Kiran Zaveri though works as an agent of change is also a victim of patriarchal dominance of her dead father, drunkard husband and brothers. Patriarchal ideology rules over the family turning it into a bonsai.

As an off-shoot of ‘gender discrimination’ and ‘patriarchy’, ‘child sexual abuse’ is also a gruesome issue. Mahesh Dattani explores this issue in his well-known play *Thirty Days in September*. Mala, a young girl, gets repeatedly molested by her uncle Vinay and suffers from post-traumatic mental disorder in her youth. The research work highlights the fact that the sexual abuse takes place due to poor financial condition of Mala’s mother Shanta and her alienation from her husband. Mala's victimization makes

us think that children are at risk with relatives and neighbours. Deepak is represented as a humanitarian who is ready to marry Mala and rescue her from further victimization. The research work observes that parents should spare time with their children, understand their problems and resolve them because most cases of child sexual abuse often go unreported which augment forthcoming disaster.

**5.5 The fourth chapter** deals with the issues of communalism and religious fanaticism in the two selected plays *Final Solutions* and *The Swami and Winston*. Prior to the analysis of these two plays, an attempt has been made to study the issues of communalism and religious fanaticism. The research work highlights communal animosity in *Final Solutions* between Hindu and Muslim communities. Communal clashes are the results of different ideological inculcations of both Hindus and Muslims. Communal ideology exists in the behavioural patterns of every community. Due to contradictory behavioural patterns, communal violence takes place. The present study also points out that politics does play a destructive role in bringing about communal violence. Unemployed youths like Javed are easily motivated to carry out riots and murders. Title of the play *Final Solutions* itself is a question asked by the playwright to all Indians to think over it and come out with a sustainable solution. Like communalism, the issue of religious fanaticism has been reported in Dattani's *The Swami and Winston*. A few religious fanatics like Sitaram Trivedi take disadvantage of religion for their monetary benefits at the cost of their own relatives. Minority people are often victimised due to the fanatic ideology of majority people which is found in the characterization of Charles Montefiore, Lady Montefiore who are Christians and a Muslim Taxi Driver. Therefore the research work studies consequences of issues of 'communalism' and 'religious fanaticism'.

Thus, the research studies the legitimacy of a particular social issue and its consequences on society. What makes Dattani portray issues of homosexuality, gender discrimination, patriarchy, child sexual abuse, communalism and religious fanaticism is a case in point. The aftermath of such and several other issues are loss of identity, disjuncted family life and individual suffering which polluted the social atmosphere of the country which European society already experienced during and after World War II. Dattani is truly a postmodern dramatist in the sense that he represented the middle class urban life which is disintegrated, disunited, debased, and demoralised.

The present chapter presents the major findings of the research work. Prior to offering findings, an attempt has been made to ensure the accomplishment of objectives and validation of hypotheses already stated in research proposals. In addition to the findings, the study looks forward to offering causes of social issues, implications and scope for further research.

## **5.6 Accomplishment of the objectives stated in the research proposal:**

### **A. To study the origin and development of Indian drama:**

The research work presents the origin and development of the Indian drama in three phases. The first phase is that of 'the classical period' in which the Sanskrit Theatre came into existence with religious gathering and became an instrument of folk entertainment. Referring to Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra*, the research work also highlighted the fact that drama should not only be considered as a source of entertainment but it should be viewed as a way towards the fulfilment of the aims of life. The study also noted that the Sanskrit Theatre was enriched by dramatists like Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidasa, Harsha and Bhavabhuti. These playwrights showcased the richest principles of the Indian aesthetics. The second phase is that of 'the medieval period' in which rural or folk theatre flourished. The research work observes that Indian drama could develop in the form of rural and folk theatres through several regional languages of the country. The regional folk forms were Khel, Tamasha and Dashavatar in Maharashtra; Mohiniattam and Kathakali in Kerala; Rasadhari in Mathura; Chadiya, Chadiyani in Orissa; Bhavai in Gujarat; Ramleela in North India; Yakshganas of Andhra Pradesh, etc. Enlightenment through entertainment, simplicity of language and staging and costumes were some of the salient features of folk theatre. The third phase is 'the modern theatre'. The modern theatre movement was largely influenced by the Western theatre. Nomenclatures such as 'the professional theatre', 'the amateur theatre' and 'experimental theatre' were given to theatres. The modern Indian theatre received momentum during the British period in India. The then cities Bombay, Calcutta and Madras were the epicentres for modern plays. The research work ensures the accomplishment of its first objective through the study of Indian drama in the introductory chapter.

**B. To study the contribution of Mahesh Dattani in the development of Indian English drama:**

The research work found the beginning of Indian English drama in the pioneering dramatic writings of Krishna Mohan Banerjee and Michael Madhusudan Dutt. During the 20th century, the Indian English drama experienced an emptiness because no single creative or innovative piece of drama appeared on stage in the early decades of the 20th century. The preparation of a local tradition of Indian English drama and its establishment as an authentic mode of creative expression is seen in the epoch-making plays of Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Harindranath Chatopadhyay. The research work finds the fact that the Western theatre had an indelible mark on Indian dramatic writing in English. The plays of eminent playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sarkar, Girish Karnad and Mohan Rakesh were translated into English language which sought to enrich the domain of Indian English drama. Nevertheless, the Indian English drama did not become as popular as novels and poems. However with the emergence of Mahesh Dattani as an English playwright, the Indian English theatre got a fresh identity in the Indian literary scenario. The research work has focused briefly on Dattani's total body of work in the introductory chapter. The third and fourth chapters also show that this objective has been achieved as the research work focuses upon thematic validity of his plays.

**C. To understand homosexuals' plight in the Indian context through Dattani's selected plays:**

The second chapter of the present research work analyses three plays of Mahesh Dattani in the light of the issue of homosexuality. The homosexuals are looked down upon as unnatural, unwanted and perverse. The Indian judicial system criminalized same-sex relationship under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The only thing that emerges from the three plays is the dominance of heterosexuals over homosexuals. People having different sexual orientations other than male or female, are forced to face social exclusion, detachment and hatred. Strategically, lawfully and socially the homosexual community is underestimated as well as oppressed. The research work focuses on Dattani's appeal to respect homosexuals with equal treatment. Homosexuals are often deprived of their rights and opportunities which results in their marginalization from mainstream society. The research work encompasses the theoretical study of 'gay and

lesbian' movements and 'queer theory' in the Western context. Further it focuses on Section 377, the judgements of the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court with respect to the criminalisation and decriminalization of homosexuality. In addition, the research work looks into efforts made by the NAZ Foundation, NACO and other organisations. The research work takes into consideration the literary contribution of writers like R. Raj Rao and Hoshang Merchant. In this way, a detailed analysis of the 'issue of homosexuality' through Dattani's selected plays has been stated in the second chapter.

**D. To analyse issues of 'gender discrimination', 'patriarchy' and 'child sexual abuse':**

As mentioned earlier Dattani foregrounds three interrelated issues in three plays entitled *Tara*, *Where There's a Will*, and *Thirty Days in September*. The incorporation of these issues projects the vulnerable situation of women and children in middle class families. Tara is the victim of gender discrimination as she is denied two legs due to her female gender despite the fact that her body could have survived two legs with major blood supply. Her mother Bharati is forced by her husband and father to consent to the surgery to separate two children. Mr Patel, Bharati's husband, looks forward to Tara and Chandan through 'gender framework' and raises the issue of Chandan's help to his mother in household duties. Tara's miserable condition makes us aware of the injustice being done to women. India is a patriarchal country. Dattani exposes patriarchal ideology in *Where There's a Will*. The research work sheds light on how a man does injustice to women and children using the patriarchal ideology. It further proves the fact that patriarchal dominance not only oppresses women and children but also kills potentials among them. The research work finds that the excessive patriarchal power leads to hostility among family members. The faction within the family is evident in the behaviour of Ajit, Sonal and Preeti. Dattani raises the issue of child sexual abuse in *Thirty Days in September*. He alerts parents that children are not always safe with their relatives and neighbours. The research work analyses the aftermath of child sexual abuse which ruins both children and parents throughout their life. Also it further implies that parents should be concerned with the behaviour of children, they should not neglect complaints of children. Parents' negligence to childrens' sexual abuse becomes more harmful in future. With this finding, the research work accomplishes its third objective.

### **E. To observe issues of communalism and religious fanaticism:**

The communal ideology has contaminated the democratic atmosphere of the country in the post-independence period. Increasingly it is devastating the secular base of the country. Dattani recognised this fact after the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 in Ayodhya and represented it through his award-winning play *Final Solutions*. This is a 'problem play' par excellence as it raises the question if there is any final solution to resolve this conflict in India. The research work traces the history of the communal ideology and its present state. The play exposes both Hindu and Muslim riot rousers who carry out violence for securing their political and economic benefits. It also highlights the fact that rational minded people of both communities like Smita and Bobby could come together to resolve this issue. The research work implies that youngsters like Javed should not the harmonious existence of both communities and refrain from falling prey to the vested interest of politicians and communalists. In order to accomplish this objective the research work looks critically into the distortion of historical facts promoting communal riots. The characters of Ramnik Gandhi, Hardika and Noor Jahan stand for Hindu and Muslim individuals who wish to rectify their mistakes and establish communal harmony. Also the character of Aruna represents those religious and superstitious people who need to discard their orthodox ideology to reduce discriminatory practices. Smita and Bobby represent modern people who uphold rational perspectives in which there is no place for communalism. Dattani's next play *The Swami and Winston* selected for the research work exposes the issue of religious fanaticism which is an off-shoot of communalism. The research work examines how people of one religion exploit others. The intention of the dominant religious group is to secure financial benefits. A religious fanatic like Trivedi cunningly gets an English woman Lady Montefiore murdered and the allegation is put on both her brother Charles Montefiore and a Muslim Taxi Driver. The research work studies how the conspiracy of Sitaram Trivedi, the Hindu fanatic, leads to the arrest of a Muslim Taxi Driver and exploitation of Charles Montefiore. The Hindu spiritual preacher Swamiji who works for peace also suffers from the suspicious attitude of police in this matter. Dattani raises a concern through this play that people should beware of such religious fanatics despite their religion because it is clear that such fanatics do not even care for their close relatives. This is evident in Sitaram Trivedi's act of killing his own



daughter Radha. This is how the research work accomplishes the fifth objective by studying critically the issues of ‘communalism’ and ‘religious fanaticism’.

### **5.7. Validation of hypothesis stated in the research proposal:**

#### **I) Mahesh Dattani plays explore social issues:**

For the purpose of brevity, the present study works only on eight selected plays and examines issues such as ‘homosexuality’, ‘gender discrimination’, ‘child sexual abuse’, ‘communalism’ and ‘religious fanaticism’. Dattani has portrayed issues like consumerism, natural disasters, disease, etc., in some other plays. A social issue affects the family, the larger part of society or society as a whole.

In the second chapter the research work studies the three plays dealing with the ‘issue of homosexuality’. They represent different patterns of homosexual behaviour. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Dattani explores the plight of hijras (eunuchs) who are harassed, arrested and murdered. Eunuchs make their livelihood by dancing and clapping hands on the occasions of marriage and childbirth. Ironically they are deprived of such experiences of life. Homosexuals are the ‘others’ in the eyes of heterosexuals. Dattani portrays homosexuals characters like Kamlesh, Deepali, Ranjeet and Bunny who are forced to practice their sex in the closet because it is legally prohibited in the play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. This prohibition increases homophobia among homosexuals. For the most part they hide their identity to save themselves from physical and mental harassment. Socially they have to behave as if they are heterosexuals. They try to escape from their physical identity and past secrets. Dattani has projected their ‘closet’ life in his plays. The research work analyses their vulnerability in a gender-biased society. Alternate sexuality finds expression in Dattani’s next selected play *Do the Needful* in which Alpesh leads his life in a mutual compromise by allowing his fiancée Lata to continue her illicit relationship with ex-boyfriend.

In the third chapter, the research work examines issues of gender discrimination, patriarchy and child sexual abuse in *Tara*, *Where There’s a Will* and *Thirty Days in September*. The gender ratio of India is 924 females per 1000 males. It

means the female population is 48.4 % and male population 51.96 %. Discrimination against women in 21st century is the pressing social issue as it affects almost half of the population of the country. The research work finds Dattani's sincere efforts to raise voice against the gender disparity through the play *Tara*. In *Where There's a Will*, the issue of patriarchy has been tackled. Patriarchy hampers development of women and children in the family. Cases of child rape, child pornography and child trafficking are reported and heard on daily basis in several parts of India. Dattani took up this issue very seriously in his play *Thirty Days in September*.

In the fourth chapter, the research work discusses issues like communalism and religious fanaticism in two plays *Final Solutions* and *The Swami and Winston*. Though the world is coming closer due to globalisation and liberalisation, people are going apart from one another on communal grounds.

## **II) Mahesh Dattani's plays foreground deplorable position of homosexuals, women, children and minorities:**

The homosexuals of any sort are a marginalised category and there are many restrictions on them in the Indian social set up. Due to 'Section 377' homosexuals are suppressed under legal prohibitions in case of their sex and marriage. Due to the deprivation of marriage, sex and family, they are homeless and isolated. Therefore Mahesh Dattani has foregrounded their unprivileged status with the view to articulate their voice for their upliftment. Recently on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2018 the Supreme Court has ruled unanimously that Section 377 was unconstitutional in the case of Navtej Singh versus Union of India. This could be a ray of hope for homosexuals to secure their privileges. Since the time immemorial, women have been treated as secondary citizens. Gender roles have assigned women only household duties as child-bearing and child-rearing. Dattani recognised the inhuman treatment given to women and articulated their voice through his plays.

The play *Tara* criticizes those parents who discriminate male and female children. In *Where There's a Will* women and children revolt against injustice under patriarchal hegemony. *Thirty Days in September* alerts parents about impending sexual abuse of their children at vulnerable places.

Though the 'Constitution of India' gives equal status to every Indian citizen irrespective of caste, creed, race, religion and gender, the minorities are deprived of social upliftment and treated as subaltern. Dattani's *Final Solutions and The Swami and Winston* are apt examples in this case. Minority individuals like Javed in *Final Solutions*, the Muslim taxi driver and Charles Montefiore in *The Swami and Winston* are the victims of communal politics. Therefore, this research work validates this hypothesis.

### **III) Mahesh Dattani plays foreground social injustice and social realism of marginalised individuals:**

Homosexuals, women, children and minorities like Muslim and Christians are destined to social injustice which is evident in the plays selected in this research work. As mentioned earlier hijras are ironically deprived of marriage and childbirth in their life and have to dance and clap only on the occasions of marriage and childbirth. Therefore there is injustice against marginalised individuals.

In *Seven Steps Around the Fire* a hijra named Kamala gets murdered due to her love relationship with a minister's son Subbu. Arrest of another hijra Anarkali under false charge of Murder, the scot-free status of the minister Mr. Sharma who is the real criminal, corrupt Superintendent of Police Suresh Rao and unsuccessful efforts of Uma Rao, a sociology scholar, equally deal with social realism causing injustice to homosexuals.

In the play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* social injustice is heaped on all homosexual characters. They are homosexuals by their destiny and hence it is not their fault to be victimized. Dattani presents social realism in the portrayal of queer-sex relationship among these characters. Homosexuals characters presented in this play are shown to be envious of the lifestyle of heterosexuals.

Social realism is more visible in the play *Do the Needful*. Dattani has challenged the tradition of marriage institutions in Hindu society. Alpesh and Lata secure their respective way of pursuing sexual gratification which is quite unethical as far as social morality is concerned. The play emphasizes that value education is the most important

phenomenon. Critically the play also implies disadvantages of illicit relationships prevalent in Indian society.

The girl child in the play *Tara* suffers throughout her life due to her physical deformity. The play portrays a realistic picture of the Indian society in which male child is preferred to a girl child. It not only compels us to sympathize with the deplorable condition of women like Tara but urges us to take decisive action for their upliftment. Dattani unfolds the dark picture of our society in which women are dehumanized. He criticizes the lopsided mind-set of Indian parents who unethically prioritise male children over female one. The family in Indian society is such a system in which male child is raised with great care and the girl child has to live a life of stumbling. *Where There's a Will* unfolds the patriarchal dominance which exploits women and youngsters at family level. Excessive boredom of patriarchy leads to the transgression in the behaviour of marginalised which challenges patriarchy. Ajit's reluctance to follow footprints of his father, Sonal's rejection to cook dietetic food and Preeti's conspiracy in changing prescribed medicines for her father-in-law are examples of transgressive nature of the oppressed characters that revolt against social injustice. When children are sexually abused, their present and future life is equally ruined. The theme of *Thirty Days in September* is supportive of the above statement. The repetitive sexual assault on a girl child Mala leads to post-traumatic mental disorder in her youth. Dattani has articulated the voice of all those children who are sexually victimised due to the indifferent attitude of their parents to this alarming issue.

People are divided, discriminated against and marginalised on communal and religious grounds. This statement finds a validation in Mahesh Dattani's path-breaking play *Final Solutions*. The menace of communal violence is presented through the play. Communal politics leads to social injustice which benefits only the dominant community. Social realism becomes visible through the vested interests of communalists and politicians who bring about violence through riots in which injustice is meted out to innocents. Also religious fanatics exploit minority individuals to secure their economic benefits. *The Swami and Winston* exhibits the unethical and unlawful acts of Sitaram Trivedi. In this way, Mahesh Dattani has criticized the social hypocrisy prevalent in Indian society which has devastated lives of homosexuals, women, children and minority people.

#### **IV) Mahesh Dattani's plays deal with conflict between tradition and modernity:**

Dattani is a trend-setter playwright. His plays deal with tradition and modernity simultaneously because he doesn't adhere to one particular dramatic tradition. Rather he infuses different traditions and sets up a new trend which could be modern and postmodern. Through this confluence, he makes bold innovations which are authentic and capable of exploring the ever unexplored issues of homosexuality, gender discrimination, patriarchy, child sexual abuse, communalism and religious intolerance. His plays have strong potential to show the audience the angst and woes of contemporary time. Unlike his predecessors who were engaged in revisiting poetry, history, romance, myths and legends, Dattani prefers to foreground the contemporary marginalized class of transsexuals, women, children and minorities who are vulnerable to exploitation. The conflict between tradition and modernity is evident through the selected plays.

In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, the purposeful exploitation of hijras is the age-old tradition. Kamala's murder, Anarkali's arrest, obstacles in Uma's detective efforts and corrupt administrative officials display homosexuals' sufferings. In contrast, Subbu's marriage to Kamala, Uma's detection of the criminal and Dattani's endurance to explore the plight of the hijra community stand for modernity.

In the play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, the exclusion and retrieval of homosexuals from mainstream society is a traditional phenomenon. A set of characters such as Kamlesh, Prakash (Ed), Sharad, Kiran, Deepali, Ranjeet and the T.V actor Bunny experience the juxtaposition between tradition and modernity in their lifestyle. Traditional elements are found in their homophobia of exclusion from the heterosexual society. Traditionally, the same-sex relationship has been stigmatized as unnatural and criminalized under 'Section 377' of the Indian Penal Code. Nevertheless, modernity exists in the love affair between Kamlesh and Prakash, Sharad and Kamlesh and Ed and Kiran and their stylish lifestyles. The reaction of these characters in frustration gives us an insight into the conundrum between tradition and modernity. Modernity could be pointed out in their contradiction between adequacy and inadequacy of expectations, love and hate among one another, ideal and real thinking process. The traditional homophobia compels Ranjeet and Bunny to accept heterosexual attitude in India and hence Ranjeet decides to go back to Europe and Bunny to get married and be settled

like any heterosexual man. Kiran's denial of Ed's marriage proposal is the inculcation of modern thinking in which an individual keeps the choice. The projection of the 'issue of homosexuality' in this play is to sensitize people to sufferings of homosexuals in several spheres of society.

The play *Do the Needful* deals with the clash between tradition and modernity in the traditional marriage in Hindu society. The main plot and sub plot in the play expose the conflict between tradition and modernity. One plot represents tradition through the anxiety of parents to go through the process of arranged marriage of their children as a part of traditional rituals. The other plot symbolises modernity through the mutual compromise between Alpesh and Lata to get married to continue their sexual affairs with their partners. The play is an apt example of the revolt of modernity against tradition. Lata's marriage with a homosexual Alpesh and her continuation of illicit relationship with Saleem emerges as a challenge to the traditionally so-called sanctity of Hindu marriage institution.

Unjust preference of male child over female in the play *Tara* implies the traditional mind-set of Indian parents. Modernity intrudes in the surgical operation of the Siamese twins as a part of the medical research. As a part of tradition, Chandan is entitled to own the entire property whereas Tara is left to suffer only in her physically challenged condition with little provision for future. Modernity intervenes in Chandan's behavioural pattern as he likes to share household duties of her mother and sacrifices one academic year for his sister Tara. His emotional support to Tara is indicative of the modern generation which resists to the practice of 'gender discrimination'. The play ends with the clash between tradition and modernity. The traditional gender bias causes the death of the innocent girl Tara. This is unbearable and unforgettable for Chandan who flees to London as an escape from the past. His past with Tara pervades his present and darkens his future. This thematic concern of the play is similar to the themes of modern literature. That is why Chandan, being a supporter of modern ideology, wants to get rid of his past as well as the traditional ideology of his parents.

The play *Where There's a Will* showcases dichotomy between tradition and modernity through the theme of patriarchy, subordination of women and children. It also raises the awareness for the empowerment of women. Family discord, dictatorship, generation gap and individual choices also throw lights on the conflict between tradition and

modernity. Hasmukh Mehta's absolute power over his family and business is the heritage of patriarchal lineage. The traditional mind-set of Hasmukh demands unconditional obedience from his family members. However, modernity contradicts tradition when Ajit refuses like a slave in front of his father, Sonal's reprimand to Hasmukh over the addiction of smoking, Preeti's conspiracy in altering prescribed medical dose and hastening Hasmukh's death. In fact Kiran Zaveri is the agent of change who manages both Hasmukh's family and business. Kiran showcases modernity through her free sex life, self-centredness, independence and the capability of quick determination. Thus, the play challenges the traditional belief system that power can be established through domination and threat. Through the play Dattani highlights the need of discarding the patriarchal influence and giving women their due respect.

*Thirty Days in September* can also be interpreted as a collision between tradition and modernity. The play is concerned with the sexual molestation of a girl child Mala by her maternal uncle Vinay. The silence of Mala's mother over the sexual abuse of her girl child is a traditional sign of subordination of women to men. On the contrary, Mala's reaction to her abuse indicates the inculcation of modernity in the young generation which questions age-old male supremacy. Mala's deterioration of mental state is due to her mother's neglect of sexual abuse by her uncle. Girls who are sexually abused or raped either have to live an unmarried life or live a life detached from society. However, Dattani's progressive thinking reappears in the character of Deepak who gets ready to marry Mala and rescue her from further victimization.

The play *Final Solutions* is a quintessential example of the combat between tradition and modernity. It is a critical commentary on communally vitiated socio-political scenarios. The play frequently oscillates between past and present. The past represents the Partition time and the present signifies the post-Independence period. The frequent time-shifting also displays the conundrum between tradition and modernity. Even the six major characters have their individual views regarding this conflict. Hardika, known as Daksha, remains hateful towards the Muslim community and reproaches her son Ramnik for sheltering two Muslim boys Javed and Babban in her house. Ramnik wants to rescue the Muslim boys from mob-lynching as a part of correcting past blunder committed by his father and grandfather by burning down the shop of a Muslim and buying it at half its cost. In a way Ramnik accepts modernity. Aruna superstitious and

scrupulous by nature because prohibits her from serving water to Muslim boys. On the contrary, her daughter Smita advocates rational thinking and mixes freely with Javed and Babban without hesitation and prejudice. Babban's rational behaviour transcends religious boundaries. His act of picking up an idol of Lord Krishna and counselling Aruna that the god does not get polluted on his palm implies the modernity of contemporary generation and nonchalance to religious tradition.

*The Swami and Winston* throws light on tradition and modernity by exploring the issue of religious fanaticism. Due to few social goons like Sitaram Trivedi, the Hindu religion has been stigmatized. On the contrary, Charles' acceptance of Hinduism as a means of revitalizing and reshaping life and his long stay in India as a Hindu ashramite gives an insight into his innovative way of looking at religion. Also Muslim community has been stigmatized as terrorist community which seriously frightens the Muslim driver for no fault of his own. Modernity can be observed in the bold nature of Lady Montefiore who travels to India all the way from England despite being a woman. Mrs. Uma Rao's ceaseless efforts to uncover the truth and imprison the accused is an example of a modern woman. Thus the present work validates the hypothesis stated in the research proposal.

#### V) Mahesh Dattani's plays are problem plays:

**'Problem play'** known as the 'thesis play' or 'discussion play', emerged in the 19th century in the dramatic writings of the French dramatists Alexandre Dumas fils and Emile Augier. Their plays dealt with controversial social issues with the view to stimulate the thought process among the audience. The credit of effectively practicing and popularizing this type of drama goes to Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright. Further, this form was brought to England by Henry Aurthor Jones and A.W. Pinero by the end of the 19th century. The problem play became more popular in the 20th century in the writings G. B. Shaw and John Galsworthy. The problems posed by these and some other playwrights like August Strindberg and Henry Granville-Barker were of sociological in nature, for instance, prostitution, unemployment, female exploitation, labour unrest, etc. As far as the Indian drama is concerned, Asif Currimbhoy, Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani are the playwrights who wrote problem plays dealing with social issues in India. Mahesh Dattani is the most topical playwright who



dramatized controversial social issues in a realistic manner. This research work tries to validate this hypothetical statement with special reference to the selected plays.

### ***Seven Steps Around the Fire***

The play is a portrayal of hardships of the hijra community. Built around the theme of 'homosexuality' the play represents cruel treatment given to hijra by heterosexuals. Due to their socially outcast state, hijras are forced to live a life of beggars. The legal provision and heterosexual ideology equally ruin the life the hijra community. It appeals to all heteros to treat hijras as humans and stop victimizing them considering their social status for which they are not responsible.

### ***On a Muggy Night in Mumbai***

This play redirects the audience towards the complexity of interpersonal relations and turmoil of transgenders through their agony, frustration and revolt in the metropolitan city of Mumbai. Dattani problematized the existential dilemma of homosexuals in a world of insecurity and uncertainty. The gay people are forced to hide their identity and sexuality to avoid social stigmatization. As a problem play, it brings to fore the lives of six characters who strive to maintain their mutual relationships despite past secrets. The play simply questions that how the heteronormative society has created different patterns of behaviour. The play criticises how gender roles have created a chasm between normative and non-normative population and how homosexuals are subalternized and what would be a solution to stop their social deviation?

### ***Do the Needful***

This play highlights the condition of a homosexual person in the heterosexual society. As mentioned in the discussion of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* that gay or lesbian hesitates to disclose their sexual identity due to the homophobic atmosphere of the country. The disclosure of their identity may threaten their life. In this play Alpesh is too homophobic to reveal his gay instincts to his parents and gives in to the marriage proposal of Lata Patel. Thus the plight of Alpesh is the archetype of all homosexuals who wish to live their individual life but surrender to the cultural norms. The play explores the unfulfillment of individual expectations from parents and society. The

gender performativity offers two options to homosexuals: either to hide sexual identity or go along with the convention heterosexuals.

Thus, the three plays together problematize the ‘issue of homosexuality’. Hence these are problem plays. Homosexuals are between the devil and the deep sea: either they have to comply with the Constitutional or social codifications or to live life on their own. As a result, they remain under mental stress and unrest throughout their life. The moment their inner urge seeks a way out, heteronormativity or homophobia intervenes and suppresses their ideas or potential. Rooted in guilt and insecurity, homosexuals are accompanied by isolation and abandonment. At this juncture, the Supreme Court has taken an initiative by legalizing same sex relationship. But it cannot yet be assuredly stated that heterosexual society complies with it and allows homosexuals to enjoy their freedom.

### ***Tara***

This play is a quintessence of the ‘problem play’. It centres on the Patel household representing the Indian middle class family where gender discrimination has a tight hold. The play highlights the crippled mentality of modern society and also rejects its claim as liberal and advanced. The play is the portrayal of the Indian society which takes pride in educating girls, worshipping them as Goddess like Durga, Saraswati or Kali. Furthermore, it also portrays differences between male child and girl child. Claims of equal treatment, equal opportunities prove to be false when a girl like Tara succumbs to death as her parents think about their son's career. The play showcases multiple injustices to Tara: first, she sacrifices her one leg for her brother; second she is not entitled to inherit property from her grandfather like Chandan; third she is deprived of quality higher education as Chandan receives; fourth her death due to her crippled condition and kidney infection. Dattani specifies the fact in the play that a woman herself is responsible for injustice which is evident through Bharati's consent to the ‘surgical separation’ of her twins. Both Bharati and Tara are victims of gender discrimination as they internalize the male chauvinism of the Indian society.

### ***Where There's a Will***

The play *Where There's a Will* problematizes the issue of patriarchy. Hasmukh's dogmatic behaviour causes problems to his son, wife and daughter-in-law. Hasmukh's

family is a broken family because of constant quarrels, negligence and bad behaviour. There is a lot of emotional turmoil among Ajit, Sonal and Preeti. Ajit's expectations from his father are intentionally neglected. Sonal is always looked down upon and Preeti is suspected of grabbing the property. Another reason for having a broken family is that Hasmukh, as a father, always treats his son with authority and tries to make him a part of his patriarchal system.

### ***Thirty Days in September***

In this typical family play, Dattani questions the safety of children both inside and outside the home. He raises voice against child molestation which not only destroys physical growth of a child but also develops mental distortion. Mala's sexual exploitation during her childhood poses problems for herself and her family in her youth when she becomes sex-seeker and goes on changing sexual partners. Mala's transgression from passive receiver to violent sex seeker and denial of Deepak's marriage proposal breaks down the established societal norms which kept women as receiver of physical and mental exploitation.

### ***Final Solutions***

In his path-breaking play, *Final Solutions* Dattani communicates his humanistic concerns. Through simultaneous projection of the three generations, he represents three time-periods almost from Pre Independence to the present time. He reviews the changing patterns of communalism through these time periods. However, he comes to the conclusion that the scope of communalism is increasing with the passage of time. Through the play, Dattani explores the prevalence of communal sensitivity and prejudices of communalists in both Hindu and Muslim communities. By displaying the communal scenario of the country in the play, Dattani endeavours to claim that if the discursive limits are disregarded in the efforts to analyse the multifaceted nature of communalism, solutions are round the corner.

### ***The Swami and Winston***

Religious prejudice of fanatic people creates problems for minority people. Most of the time, it is found that foreigners are harassed, robbed, raped or even murdered when they travel across India. Reasons for crime against them are myriad. But in this play Dattani has shown a different reason for killing the English lady. The Muslim Taxi driver and the English man are arrested and exploited. Through this play, Dattani raises a question about the safety and security of foreign tourists in India.

### **5.8 Findings of the Present Research Work:**

**I. Dattani's plays foreground those issues which are really challenging and often unprecedented.** It separates him from the other Indian playwrights and gives him a more elevated level. His unique style of projecting social issues has opened a new vista in the writing of drama in English. Human sentiment and sensibility are the part and parcel of his plays. His theatrical art resembles G.B. Shaw and Ibsen. He tries to incorporate social realism in his plays. He is poignantly displays the predicament and wrath of transgender, women, children and minority people particularly living in urban parts with a feeling of uprootedness, nervousness, uncertainty and turmoil. His plays are set apart by a high level of stageability and realistic approach towards the marginalized groups. He finds novel issues which are commonly not handled by his predecessors and contemporary playwrights.

**II. Dattani's plays redefine the theatre in the Indian context.** In each play selected in this research work, it is found that Dattani is striving to articulate the voice of marginalized and attempting to relocate and reaffirm their positions and reassert their lost identity. Perhaps Dattani is the first playwright who transcends the stereotypical theatrical canons and devices. By doing so, he, in a way, is redefining and reshaping the Indian theatrical canon.

**III. Dattani's plays create social awareness.** Unlike his predecessors whose plays were a source of entertainment, Dattani's plays enlighten the audience and perhaps compel them to do something for social change. Through comic exchange of dialogues, characters in his plays criticize social hypocrisy and hide their pain. After reading Dattani's plays, one not only enjoys reading literature but also has to think sensitively on some social issues. Dattani's plays show that those who are neglected in the society should get justice and they should come into the mainstream of the society. After

reading his plays, the reader becomes very sensitive about what is happening in the society in which he or she lives.

**IV. Dattani's plays criticize the vested interests of people.** A majority of people remain indifferent to the existing social issues as they benefit as long as the issue continues. For the most part, they pretend the issue is insoluble. Even they consider the efforts for eradication a waste of time, money and human resources. For the corrupt-minded people, a particular social issue becomes a means for implementing their political strategies. The issues discussed in the research work are all politically influenced. It is Dattani's attempt to expose the vested interests of people like Mr. Sharma and S.P Suresh Rao, the Watchman, the Gowda and the Patel parents, Mr. Patel, Grandfather and Dr. Thakkar, Hasmukh Mehta, Uncle Vinay, Hardika and Aruna and Sitaram Trivedi. All these characters are insensitive and indifferent as far as the problems are concerned.

**V. Characters in Dattani's plays are 'fatalistic, superstitious, prejudiced and ignorant.'** Some characters in his plays like Anarkali and Champa in *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, the Patels and the Gowdas in *Do the Needful*, Bharati in *Tara*, Sonal in *Where There's a Will*, Shanta in *Thirty Days in September*, Aruna, Hardika, Noor Jahan and Javed in *Final Solutions* are fatalistic. Perhaps they are superstitious. These characters attribute everything to their destiny. Homosexuals consider their gender as misfortune, women like Bharati, Sonal and Shanta are ignorant of human rights and gender equality and hence they are crushed under patriarchal dominance. Aruna and Hardika in *Final Solutions* are superstitious and prejudiced. Aruna sticks to orthodox norms of Hinduism whereas Hardika looks down upon to Muslim community as violent and inhuman. The Hindu chorus treats Muslim community as unnecessary addition to their society.

**VI. Characters in Dattani's plays are 'transgressive' in nature.** Homosexuals though afraid of law and society are transgressive. This is evident in Kamala's marriage with Subbu, the Minister Sharma's son, Anarkali's criticism on police mechanism and Champs's bold revelation to Uma about Kamala's murder. In fact Uma herself transgresses the restrictions laid by her husband and investigates the murder case. In the play, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, all six characters are transgressive. They react against the loud noise of marriage party outside their compartment. Their situational

boldness appears in their behavioural patterns. Sometimes their expectations in same-sex relationship override heterosexuals. In the play *Do the Needful*, the transgressive level of both Alpesh and Lata reaches a point where they decide to topple down the conventional marriage institution. In the play *Tara*, the girl child Tara comments critically on the heinous practice of female foeticide in the Patel family since time immemorial. Bharati reacts to Mr. Patel's patriarchal hold on her children and herself. Characters in *Where There's a Will* are apt examples of transgression. Ajit resists carrying forward patriarchal code of his father Hasmukh. Sonal reprimands her husband and rebukes him. Preeti exchanges drugs to cause the death of her father-in-law. Even Kiran Zaveri violates guidelines mentioned in Hasmukh's 'Will' to support his family. In *Final Solutions*, Smita and Bobby transcend religious frontiers to challenge the age-old communal hatred. Smita's resistance to follow her mother's footsteps in religious rituals, Bobby's touching the idol of Lord Krishna in spite of belonging to the Muslim religion and Ramnik's act of sheltering two Muslim boys against his mother Hardika's reluctance, etc., all are transgressive steps taken by Dattani's characters. Even in the play, *The Swami and Winston*, Radha, a victimized daughter of Sitaram Trivedi, goes against her father and reveals the truth of his conspiracy. These characters decisively reacted against injustice and challenged the age-old exploitative customs and beliefs of Indian society.

**VII. Presence of the Agent of Change.** In every play of Dattani, there is one character that performs the role the 'Agent of change' or 'catalyst'. At least one character in each play appears to be playing this role. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Uma Rao, a Ph.D. scholar, is working for the cause of the hijras. Uma meets Anarkali in jail and collects information on Kamala's murder. At the end of the play, Uma succeeds in detecting the murderer i.e. Minister Sharma. She tries to persuade her husband Suresh Rao, the Superintendent of Police, for giving justice to dead kamala. In *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Kiran is the agent of change. In spite of Kamlesh's sister, she supports him emotionally and treats sympathetically to all other homosexual characters. She even breaks her love relationship with Ed (Prakash) for the latter's misbehaviour with Kamlesh. In *Do the Needful*, both Alpesh and Lata could be labelled as agents of change. Their agreement to marry each other to seek sex of their choice is the way-out they choose to get rid of the burden of traditional social custom. In the play *Tara*, Chandan performs this role. As Tara is unable to continue her education, Chandan too

skips one academic year to make his father realise that the education of both children is equally important. He expresses his unrest over the issue of gender discrimination and rebukes his parents for his unnatural separation of from Tara. At the end of the play, Chandan is seen as Dan living in London. He is writing a play entitled 'Tara'. The change in name is an escape from the dark past for him. In *Where There's a Will*, Mrs. Kiran Zaveri takes up this role and brings the Mehta family on the right track. Her stay with the Mehta family after Hasmukh's death helps the family reaffirm their individual identities which were lost during Hasmukh's patriarchal reign. In *Thirty Days in September* Deepak turns out to be the 'agent of change'. He tries to rescue Mala from sexual molestation and mental disorder. He proposes to marry her which she rejects. Deepak represents the humanitarian young generation which works for the welfare of children who are sexually abused and forced to remain in isolation. In *Final Solutions*, Bobby's act of entering into the Puja room and picking up the idol of Lord Krishna despite being a Muslim boy transcends communal limitations. Also Smita's rational thinking works in the same way. In *The Swami and the Winston*, Uma Rao reappears to uncover 'religious fanaticism' of Sitaram Trivedi and gives justice to dead Lady Montefiore and Muslim Taxi driver and Radha.

**VIII. Dattani maintains an unconventional approach in his plays.** Being a serious dramatist of the present time, he deals with most sensitive social problems. He deviates from the 'water-fight dramaturgy' of his predecessors and even contemporary contestants. He explores the psycho-social conflict of individuals who are striving to survive in a world of uncertainty. Dattani meticulously probes into the mind and heart of those who are victimized under different circumstances. It is not the case that playwrights prior to him have not dealt with the psychology of people. However, the way Dattani portrays the 'self' of homosexuals, women, children and minority people is obviously unique and unconventional. By presenting real-life experience of transgenders, women, children and communally affected individuals, Dattani expands the scope of theatre from mere a platform of artistic expression. Theatre becomes a powerful tool in his hand to articulate the voice of subalterns. His theatre is a mechanism for protest and prevention of injustice and exploitation.

**IX. Dattani makes a detailed observation of contemporary Indian society through his plays.** His plays represent all those who have been conditioned to live on the periphery of mainstream society. In order to avoid life risk, transgenders or minority people prefer to live in the closed or neglected areas. Such people are denied public facilities and human rights. Dattani portrays the ugly and clumsy picture of subordinates who are rooted in the urban social milieu.

**X. Realism and humanism are the prominent features of Dattani's plays.** His portrayal of the dark reality of human life is influenced by Shaw and Ibsen. He overlaps the journey of drama from page to stage and enables theatre as a platform to foreground social issues. As mentioned earlier, Dattani's plays amalgamate 'tradition and modernity' to explore the human self. In his plays, Dattani focuses on realistic depictions of society rather than imagination. His theatrical presentation gives us a real sense of how transgenders, women, children and minority people are exploited. Besides, we do observe glimpses of humanity through some humanitarian characters. His plays are a quintessence of truth and beauty. They are poignant enough to unveil the truth suppressed under social hypocrisy, ugliness and snobbery. With the efficient use of innovative theatrical techniques and experiments, Dattani is capable of presenting the truth of human existence.

**XI. Dattani's plays are a critique of 'self' and 'other'** with the view to protest against dehumanizing treatment to 'other'. He attacks critically on the imposition of restraints and forces of social beliefs as they are detrimental to the very existence of an already marginalized section. As a skilled dramatist, he uses his theatre as a weapon to fight against malpractices and crimes of mainstream society. Heterosexuals, patriarchs and communally dominant people discriminate against homosexuals, women, children and minority people as 'other'. Therefore, Dattani criticizes the practices of 'othering' and 'distancing' through his plays.

**XII. Dattani emphasizes upon staging his plays to maintain the balance between form and content.** By doing so, he is able to transform abstract ideas written on page into concrete images enacted on stage. Hence the journey of his plays from page to stage is the embodiment of his dramatic credo. He reconstructs human life on stage with his dramatic art and theatrical craft. He is of the opinion that a word written on page is enlivened through skills and techniques while enacting it. His plays are rich with



comprehension of social hypocrisy through effective delivery of form and meaning. As far as the stage performance of his plays is concerned, Dattani is intent on using plain language. Therefore rather than to use highly artistic and figurative expressions, he prefers conversational language which is easily comprehensible to common audiences.

**XIII. Irony of the situation is found to be used in his plays to explore hypocritical practices.** His plays are a satire on the double standards existing in heteropatriarchal society. For instance, in the play *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, it is found that hijras are welcomed to sing, dance and clap in marriage ceremonies and childbirth. Ironically, they are deprived of experiencing these events in their life. In *Do the Needful*, Alpesh is forced to marry although he is unable to fulfil marital expectations. In *Where There's a Will*, Hasmukh exploits Sonal and Preeti as they are women and finds shelter in Kiran's arms. This shows that women are used to fulfilling sexual greed and household needs and later on deprived of having equal rights.

**XIV. Past and present simultaneously exist in Dattani's plays.** His plays oscillate frequently between the images of past and present in which the past rules over present. Dattani uses this 'time feature' to scrutinize psychosocial disturbance of characters that are affected or perhaps victimized by different social issues. The past is strongly engrossed in the unconscious mind of characters and influences their present behaviour with prejudice, wrath and guilt. The frequent time shifting from present to past and vice versa displays the psychological crisis in the life of protagonists. The simultaneous existence of past and present forces characters to undertake psychological journeys from self-realization to self-resistance.

**XV. Dattani incorporates various dramatic traditions to make his theatre a unique platform for addressing various social issues.** By doing so, he is able to incept a new trend of theatre which is rather innovative, realistic and authentic to represent the Indian social scenario. His plays are capable of making readers and audiences contemplate the angst and woes of those who are systematically excluded from mainstream society. Rather than to revisit myth, history or tradition like his predecessors, Dattani dramatizes the present social ills. His plays are the repository of protest by homosexuals, women, children, minorities for their survival.

**XVI. Dattani makes appropriate use of experiments and innovations to explore relevant social issues.** Throughout his dramatic career, he has constantly been making experiments in designing ‘form and meaning’ of his plays. He projects his stage mechanism in accordance with a particular social issue and changes it in a dynamic way for tackling the next issue. His use of suitable techniques and devices is relevant for the stage direction. His theatrical representation of social issues through different plays provides ample scope for discussion and solution.

**XVII. This research work observes ‘family’ as the most ‘desirable setting’ in almost all his plays.** Almost all stage plays are set in family locales. In fact, Dattani finds household settings more convenient where characters experience shocks and jerks. It is remarkable to note that the outbreak of social issues is outside the family household whereas tensions and troubles are resting inside the family. Most of the characters in his plays are close family members and they are directly or indirectly affected by a particular social issue. For instance, the dialogue between Uma and Suresh Rao about the murder of Kamala takes place in their house. All the action of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* takes place in Kamlesh’s apartment. In *Do the Needful*, Dattani brings together two families. In *Tara*, the action is set in the Patel household. In *Where There’s a Will*, Has Mukh’s family is represented and Kiran’s stay is also with the family. In *Thirty Days in September*, Mala’s sexual abuse and psychological turmoil takes place within her family. The entire action of *Final Solutions* is situated in the Gandhi household and the characters are members from his family except Javed and Bobby. The interaction between Uma and Suresh Rao reappears in their household again in *The Swami and Winston*.

**XVIII) Research work further finds the use of ‘postmodern techniques and tools’ in the selected plays.** The use of technical devices such as telephone, T.V. etc. are found to be much helpful for Dattani to relate his plays to present social dynamics. The dialogues spoken by characters are very short, fragmented, faltered and pragmatically pregnant with multiple implications which relate to lifelike experiments of audiences. Broken expression, sudden overlap in speaking, flux of consciousness and unconscious are all postmodern peculiarities that appear in his plays. Furthermore, his writing in the English language is characterized by code-mixing and literal translation from different regional languages in India. For instance, “Don’t eat my head”, Teri Bhi Chup, Meri

bhi Chup” and “Your Silence and mine as well.” Picking up words from Hindi, Gujarati and Kannada he dismantles the artistic and linguistic decorum of the English language. Perhaps, it can be said that Dattani indianizes the English language to express the changing pattern of various social issues.

**XIX. Dattani implies the need of rethinking over ‘good and bad’.** He neither expects his characters to be punished or rewarded for their respective acts. Rather, he focuses on the ethical and unethical behavioural patterns. He restricts himself from moral preaching. He involves readers in the scrutiny of ethics and morality to validate behavioural patterns. It is the audience who are expected to critically analyse existing hypocrisy in their social life.

**XX. Dattani uses ‘symbols and imagery’ to explore various social issues.** Dattani makes ample use of symbols and imagery to convey concrete meanings and impressions. In the play *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, the wedding ceremony of Subbu is symbolic of heterosexuals’ marriage tradition in the Indian society and the presence of hijras for dance and singing are beggars of homosexuals. Anarkali’s arrest stands for the legal restrictions on eunuchs. Champa’s fear to reveal the truth to Uma is the presence of homophobia. The obstruction created by Suresh Rao in Uma's detection of criminals shows that in Indian society, men do not approve of women going out of the house and interfering in society. Mr. Sharma represents corrupt politicians in India. Suresh Rao is symbolic of corrupt police mechanism In *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, fireworks and wedding party are two major symbols. These symbols play on the psychology of homosexual characters. In *Do the Needful*, the backyard of the Gowda household represents ‘closet’ of homosexuals where they practice their sex. In *Tara*, dolls and other kids’ instruments symbolize the motionless position of the girl Tara in the household like Laura in Tennessee Williams's' *The Glass Menagerie*. Chandan’s act of stitching buttons stands for the alternation of gender roles. Their surgical separation symbolizes unethical and unnatural medical practice of doctors. Image of corrupt politics reappears in the behaviour of Tara’s grandfather. In *Where There’s a Will*, cutting down the tree in front of the house is like breaking the patriarchal system in the house as there is no place for Hasmukh’s ghost to rest. In *Thirty Days in September*, Shanta’s act of remaining silent in Pooja room is her escape from guilt. In *Final Solutions*, the music is one of the most desirable symbols. Music transcends

communal limitations. Despite wearing the mask of different religions, the play shows that man is an amazing work of art created by nature. Animal imagery such as rat, mouse, swine, and pig symbolizes communal prejudice and hatred. The mob in the play stands for religious blindness and hostility. In *The Swami and the Winston*, the murder of Lady Montefiore bears symbolic significance as it shows dominance and conspiracy of fanatics.

### **5.9 Causes of Social Issues:**

Social issues are the result of vulnerable social conditions for a part of society or society as a whole. The present research work takes into consideration the isolated condition of homosexuals, subordinate status of women, and sexual abuse of children and atrocities against minorities. Social issues are found in sparsely populated or overpopulated societies. A social issue can be defined as a situation in which a relationship is affected between a group of people resulting in conflict, maladjustment or malpractices. The selected plays under this research work highlight some factors responsible for different social issues.

### **A] Contradictions in Social Systems:**

Human society is broadly divided into two categories i.e. men and women. The first category is privileged with dominance, assertion and utilization of power whereas the second category suffers from subordination, exploitation and deprivation. Women characters depicted in Dattani's plays are subject to the subjugation under patriarchal power. Uma in *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Bharati and Tara in the play *Tara*, Sonal, Preeti and Kiran in *Where There's a Will*, Shanta and Mala in *Thirty Days in September* and Daksha and Aruna in *Final Solutions* and finally Lady Montefiore and Radha in *The Swami and Winston* are all victimized women in urban middle class society. Communal imbalance in a society is one of the major causes of conflict. Besides these two categories, the third category of homosexuals does exist in every society. This category is stigmatized as unnatural, asocial and perverse and is meted out to the worst treatment. Kamala, Anarkali, Champa, Kamlesh, Deepali, Ranjit and Alpesh are destined to remain isolated due to their gender. Contradiction causes communal violence. One community deems it to be superior and treats others as inferior leading to communal disparity. The record of this fact is found in Dattani's *Final Solutions*.

### **B] Malfunctioning of Economic System:**

Malpractice in the economy adds to social problems. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, hijras are shown as beggars who attend occasions of marriages and childbirth to earn money. The manner in which homosexuals have sex is extremely harmful to their health. In *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, all characters are plagued by adverse economic conditions as they are forced to stay in one compartment. Women in middle class families are left with less financial benefits. Bharati immediately agrees to the surgical separation of her twins as she is indecisive in the decision-making process in her family. In the Indian family system, men have financial resources whereas women have to depend on men. The reason for the surgical separation of Tara and Chandan in the play *Tara* was also that Chandan should individually be able to inherit the family wealth from his father and maternal grandfather. Sonal, Preeti and Ajit in *Where There's a Will* are made to follow norms mentioned by Hasmukh in his 'Will'. Shanta's silence over Mala's abuse lies in the poor financial condition of her family in *Thirty Days in September*. Youngsters like Javed in *Final Solutions* are motivated to carry out riots and murders due to their unemployment. The economic imbalance or perhaps economic malfunctioning causes issues like deprivation of homosexuals, gender discrimination against women, sexual abuse of children, communal violence by communalists, etc.

### **C] Lack of Change in Religious Systems:**

Though the Constitution of India advocated secularism by giving equal status to all religions and individual freedom to practice religious rituals accordingly, communal or religious discrimination is an integral of people's life in India. *Final Solutions* throws light on the conflict between religious rituals and religious ideologies. The orthodox religious systems in India resist changing with passage of time which hampers the progress of the country. Homosexuals too are stigmatized as unnatural or demons by superstitious or religious ideologies. Religion plays a dominant role in the subordination of women which is evident through selected plays like *Tara*, *Where There's a Will*, *Final Solutions* and *The Swami and Winston*.

### **D] Corrupt Functioning of Political Systems:**

Mahesh Dattani has criticized the defects in the political functioning of the country. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, political leader Mr. Sharma brings about Kamala's murder

and hushes up the evidences using his political power. Anarkali is arrested under false conviction of murder. Even Champa is afraid of disclosing the truth of Kamala's murder case. The play shows that the real criminal goes scot-free and innocents are harassed. In the play *Tara*, Tara's grandfather uses his political influence and bribes Dr. Thakkar to operate Siamese twins. Therefore, it is evident that the corrupt political governance leads to the rise of social issues of 'homosexuality' and 'gender discrimination'. The impact of corrupt political systems in India is more visible in the play *Final Solutions*. Politicians take the advantage of dividing communities, splitting communal groups, distorting historical facts, provoking unemployed youngsters like Javed and securing their vote banks, etc. On the whole, Dattani's plays explore issues like gender politics and communal politics. In addition to these major factors, differentiation and multiplication of interests and functions, frequency of social change, interests of civilization, man's developed insight into scientific experiments, reluctance in government mechanism and social dichotomy are some other factors that are responsible for provoking social issues.

Thus, in order to resolve any social issue it is very necessary to find out the origin and development of it. Multiple factors are responsible for the spread of a particular social issue. But the focus should be laid on a chief factor and minor aggravants causing its origin and development. Social priority and social interest block the implementation of the curative programme. In order to eradicate social issues the society has to be effective in taking some action by adopting effective measurements without completely altering or challenging established institutions. Although the Supreme Court has legalized same- sex relationship recently, homosexuals should be allowed respectfully to enter into the mainstream society with equal opportunity and right. Besides government initiatives for women empowerment, there is a need to understand women's status in society. Parents should spend time with their children and understand their psychology. Communal issues should be resolved with mutual understanding. Rationalism should be replaced by communal ideologies.

“Social issue is a situation which affects a part of society or the whole society”. This situation can be controlled by way of collective or organised efforts. Dattani perhaps implied this suggestion through stage performance of his plays. Because all people do

not read plays but the theatrical performance of any social issue may create a furore by arousing collective action.

All issues are social in treatment. This research work finds that all social issues can be tackled through public involvement, discussion, outspokenness and continuous evaluation. With this motive in mind, the research work proposes some recommendations to deal with the problematic situations.

The issue of 'gender discrimination' can be eliminated with the active participation of all genders. In the patriarchal framework of our country women are discouraged enough to reassert their individuality. Therefore the research work explores the issue of 'gender discrimination' through the play *Tara* in which Dattani highlights the need of an evolving society and progressive mindset for a necessary change. The present research work recommends following things to be practiced for alleviating gender discrimination.

Culture of male entitlement strengthens the roots of patriarchy. Dattani's play *Where There's a Will* is a projection of a patriarchal family in which the head of the family behaves as if he is entitled to treat below family members in a dehumanizing manner. Patriarchy enforces women to tolerate aggression, or to change in their behaviour to avoid troublesome situations. Upon reading and analysing this play, following recommendations are worth to be mentioned in this research work.

The issue of child sexual abuse hinders cognitive, social and emotional growth of a child. It ruins childhood and affects the rest of life. Dattani has raised concern over this issue in the play *Thirty Days in September*. Everyday thousands of children in India are sexually molested. It is the fact that most of the cases often go unreported. Therefore this research work recommends few things to prevent the spread of this issue and ensure safety and health of children.

Communalism is the ideological confrontation among various religious communities. In a multi-religious country like India communal conflict is central among Hindu Muslim Christian, Sikh and Buddhist. Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions* is a unique projection of the Communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims since the Partition. Communalism had constantly been a growing concern for both government and public

in India. Frequent riots between Hindus and Muslims have devastated the nature of pluralistic society. After analysing this issue, the research work recommends following things to overcome it.



### **5.11 Scope for Further Research:**

- a. A Study of Strategic Co- Existence of Past and Present in the Selected Plays of Mahesh Dattani
- b. Theatre as a Powerful Tool to Represent Society as it is: A Critical Study of  
  
Dattani's Selected Plays
- c. Images of Subaltern in the Theatre of Mahesh Dattani
- d. Indigenization of English Language in the Selected Plays of Mahesh Dattani
- e. Foregrounding the Marginalized Sections in Indian Society: A Critical Study of Dattani's Selected Plays
- f. A Study of Postmodern Techniques and Tools with Special Reference to Dattani's Selected Plays
- g. A Socio-linguistic Analysis of Dattani's Selected Plays
- h. Pedagogical Significance in the Plays of Mahesh Dattani

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