

CONCLUSION

To me dancing, singing or performing in general has always been a metaphor for living life to the fullest

(Dattani, "Me and My Plays," 39).

Drama is the most direct of performing arts which creates rapport with the audience, maintaining an aesthetic distance -- on one hand the identification with characters on stage evokes emotional response, on the other hand, a sense of performance -- stage illusion -- prevails. Dattani, the master practitioner of the dramatic art, creates both illusions of identification as well as necessary alienation for proper appreciation of play/performance through dialogue, body language, rich and complex arrangement of multiple stage spaces, lighting and other stage props: "I see myself as a craftsman and not as a writer. To me, being a playwright is about seeing myself as a part of the process of a production" (Nair, 2001). The mandatory split stage theatricalizes the essentially fractured and conflicting narratives offered by his characters and the plurality of statement and interpretation the dramatist aims at. The plays expose the Indian customs, which enjoy the discursive privilege by naturalizing the practices as "normal" and "sacred". He explores those "gray areas" society refuses to acknowledge. If thematically he takes up the daring enterprise of unveiling the "invisible issues", the medium of

expression chosen by the playwright makes his task all the more challenging. The problem to find English-speaking actors and sponsors at home and lack of healthy patronage abroad apart, it becomes most difficult to make the stage convincing as an extension of our daily life – the lived experience. In the foregone analysis of some of his plays, attempts have been made to re-locate and re-read the project of delving deeper into the hidden core of our complacent “normality” in order to dig out the “invisible issues” and some of the apparently “invisible” “meanings”. It made the reading, reading is also an act of performance, all the more exciting with a consciousness of the possibility of finding out “invisible” areas which remained unexplored and which will necessitate further readings in the future in search of the still unearthed areas.

From the very first step of his dramatic evolution, Dattani shows his characteristic technical excellence and concerns for less acknowledged areas of our social life. An innovative, hilarious and powerful resistance is located as the central mechanism of reading and interpretation of the play, *Where There's a Will*. The basic discursive areas where the play has been situated are hetero-patriarchy, Indian-urban-upper-middle-class family standing at the border line of tradition and Westernization, the tension issuing from workings of the household defining itself in a strange relation with the family ideology, patriarchal and sexist underpinnings of in the Indian family structure, increasing theoretical and practical attention to woman's right to equality, security, liberty, integrity and dignity, new conceptualization of violence against women, need for female solidarity, negotiation with tradition, relocation of identities as a means of resistance etc. Since the play maintains a clear structural division to encapsulate the two major issues of exercise of power and resistance to oppression, the discussion has been

divided into segments – “Autocracy” and “Exorcism”. It investigates the multiple ways patriarchy exerts its authority, always fusing the comic and the serious -- the interesting ways by which Hasmukh Mehta (financially and socio culturally positioned as the head of the family comprised of a dominating but domesticated man and a virtuous but vulnerable woman)- appropriates and enjoys the privilege and subjugates family members to the point of parody. He controls women’s labour through an inequitable relationship with them; excludes both wife and daughter-in-law from decision making; exploits financial dependents to assert authority; promotes egocentric perception of the world and categorization; absents female agency in sexual behaviour (wife being only a procreative tool and the mistress the producer of pleasure); and nullifies the son’s different business ethos. The most interesting becomes the documentation of the will of the disembodied authority through the “will” of the physically absent patriarch. Kiran’s story has been analyzed to show how the economic empowerment of women bred new anxiety in the patriarchy. The discussion also explores the resistant potentials of the rubric itself exemplified by the story of Kiran -- a victim of gender violence -- answering back with a powerful appropriation of the discourse of heterosexual relationship both inside and outside marriage, Ajit’s resistance by frustrating his father’s expectation of perpetuating his lineage and authority, appropriation of authority by Sonal in the kitchen, presentation of an alternative narrative of a successful businessman as a “middle-class man with lots of money”, Kiran’s efficient, intelligent and responsible management without parading authority, her refusal of agency of hetero-patriarchy, the gradual building of sisterhood between perennial opposites – the wife and the mistress, Sonal’s rejection of the oppressive and subversion of the instrument of oppression into that of

salvation by the welcome replacement of father by the father's mistress dislodging gender definition. Thus, the second chapter explores how the hegemonic authority's conjecture of 'where there's a "will", there must be a "way" to perpetuate domination' gets subverted by the "will" of resisting individuals of a dysfunctional family who expel the author along with his failed Machiavellian policies from the new order, inviting audience to enjoy the comedy and look the other way around.

The third chapter, "What is a 'MAN'?": *Dance Like a Man*," de-stereotypes the cultural construct of gender, gendered role allocation and performance in India and explores the discontinuities in the rubric. The analysis reviews Dattani's propensity towards the exposition of the dissonances in any taken-for-granted narrative, of the damaging effect of patriarchy on a "man" situated outside the gender matrix, the anxiety issuing from the male choice to dance, the shifting significations of the titular words whose cohabitation decentralizes a cultural monolith, discursivity of culture (art), de-categorization of both performance and agent, and history of oppression and renaissance of the dance form of Bharatanatyam, of the family as a tool of cultural policing, and of role-playing as well as a vision of merging of the world of art with that of everyday goings-on.

The segment "The World of Art" concentrates on Dattani's focus rather on artists than art itself, the marginalization of art by neo-colonial anxiety of reclamation of "Indian" tradition (in newly independent India) and the insurgency of consumerism following an entertainment revolution (ninety onward). We compellingly appreciate the playwright's rare insight into a rather less explored arena with its "different" prioritizing

principles and concerns; into some unpalatable realities of this world like spoiling the rival's performance giving wrong "tala" or use of sex to win favour, centrality of an artist marginalizing others, problematic reconciliation, anxiety/hope of non-recurrence of parents' failure in the child's life, and sexualization of art. Art becomes a site for exposition of independence as transference of power with no ideological liberation, monopolization of meaning of "India" by neo-colonial forces, complicated state policies, homophobia, and complicated definitional fixity of manhood, motherhood and other such identities.

Dattani also interrogates our concept of "normality" from various perspectives (discussed in "The World of Mainstream"). He problematizes gender through the dance form which cuts across different subject roles and challenges the concept of gender being strictly rooted in sex, the element of "abhinaya" leading to a graver identity disorder and provoking sexist fear of homoeroticism (liberation/aberration of women tolerated at the cost of stopping emasculation), adoption of its norms by the potential outsiders to the matrix, and violent cultural policing (death of Sankar/Nataraj). The play also presents a critique of hypermasculinity through Amritlal, the definitional/categorical "man", the freedom-fighter and state/man-builder of post-independence India, of the autocratic family version of gendered and monolithic state, glorified by those ignorant of history, of the mobilization of women's participation in man-making process; and it offers resistance through Jairaj (the son supposed to perpetuate the lineage) – the male dancer/failed provider, who over-simplifies the definition of man by preferring economic independence over freedom from oppressive ideologies.

However, the two worlds meet: The understanding reached by the would-be couple's respect for difference (Lata valorizing Jairaj's kind of masculinity and respecting Viswa's love for children without sacrificing her own passion and latter showing reverence for his fiancé's alien passion and varying socio-ethical criteria) brings in a possibility while the nexus of Ratna (art) and Amritlal (hetero-patriarchal normalcy) proves catastrophic. Dattani's mastery is evident in his preference for an open-ended conclusion -- less oppressive and less hegemonic. The epiphanic vision of the couple dancing together in "perfect unison" becomes metaphorical of life in the way Shakespeare metaphorized the stage as an equivalent of life itself.

"The Gendered Subject: *Tara*" probes Dattani's daring project of presenting the issue of gender complicated by that of disability -- a rarely explored and mostly misrepresented arena in art. Apart from the hyper-real presence of a disabled female cum feminine[d] cum asserting-female figure, the play merges the two marginalized identities (the woman and the disabled), sometimes replacing one with another, sometimes making one the metaphor for the other -- both undermined and kept outside the matrix of "mainstream" constituted by "patriarchy" and "able-bodied". The intersection gets further complicated by issues like expulsion of disabled persons from their gender role, society's role in perpetrating and perpetuating the categories, exclusion from epistemic agency, various methods of colonization ranging from cultural imperialism of the west, parental domination, financial subordination, hegemonic control of the regime of truth by science to the narrator's control of textual meaning etc. The presentation of disability interrogates why, when the socio cultural narrative of practical life is disturbed by the anomaly, disability is often resorted to for aesthetic exploration, omitting the

disagreeable aspects and the experience of the originals, making it signify something beyond itself by the meta-narrative of transformational art to celebrate the fiction of perfection and nobility of the “normal”. Instead of valorizing the freakishness which also shadows the relationality between art and the real, Dattani attempts to revitalize the possibility of a different moral, aesthetic and epistemic standard beyond any meta-discursive commitment.

Dattani’s attempt is initiated by the process of generic destabilization at the level of the attempting-to-be-an-author – the author dissolving into the text, his rejection of orientalism complicated by leaving physical India (disability having specific meaning here), refutation of an omniscient objective dramatist, act of writing giving way to the incoherent act of remembering, unmasking of the author, breaking of stereotypes, wish for death of both author and subject, rupturing all the grand narratives (even of science), capitalization of angst of artistic material, reduction of the author into a mere functionary organizing artistic matters, his submersion into a mere voice without authenticity, fantasy gaining ground (real infertile) uniting the female and the male and the self and the object. The play endorses sharp disbelief in any neutral narrative and explores points of conjunction and disjunction of mutually exclusive narratives challenging, omitting, destabilizing one another (for example, conflicting narratives by the Patel couple -- historicizing the past and positioning and representing the present). The labyrinth of narratives leads to the destroying of the universe of the family and the structure of meaning by which Tara used to interpret and interrogate the world around. The false narrative provided by the hyper-real and authentic discourse of science also problematizes the “truth” itself.

The gender question deals with the variant of gender politics in areas of career designing, division of labour and internalization of patriarchal norms turning victim into agent, unfixing categories of “man” and “woman” in the interest of stabilizing patriarchy etc -- though finally the gendered self becomes complete with the union of the feminine and the masculine. In the same manner, Dattani’s treatment of disability varies from the project of confirming the centrality of “normal” body by Othering the atypical body situated in the discourse of disability which positions it as abnormal, victim, punished and pathologically unfit, biologically separate, homogenous, asexual, epistemologically inferior. However, a dialogue between centre (Roopa) and margin (disabled twins) is initiated by redefinition of categories resisting discourse of helpless dependency (proving self-worth, exaggeration, aggressive defense and subverting standard, appropriating the oppressive tool to expose abnormality in normal body if seen from a “certain angle”), acknowledgement of issues of love-hate relations of disabled persons with their prosthesis as well as the pain of carrying the burden of an oppositional identity. The most interesting point the play makes is the complicated meeting of the sister issues of gender and disability in areas of role allocation based on biological rationale, preservation of autonomy and wholesomeness of the male body at the cost of the female. By exposing cultural constructionism, the narrative of the play itself succeeds in refuting biological determinism without obliterating biological difference and at least creating the possibility of redefining the relation of the centre and the margin.

However, Dattani also works – as documented in the chapter “Beyond Female Stereotypes: *Bravely Fought the Queen*” – on the dark realities which determinedly preclude any possibility of resolution. The all-pervasive hetero-patriarchy passed as Indian tradition works through compulsory hetero-sexuality, gender hierarchy, commodification of the woman’s body, familial ideology working at micro level through household, sanctified institution of arranged marriage, domestic violence, the masculine market and corporate world, varying kinds and degrees of minoritization (homosexuality and subalternity), and so on. The Trivedi household, structured within and working through the hegemonic framework essentializes male domination and female subjugation, invades the female body, property, knowledge and labour through the institution of marriage (sexage), colonizes and de-legitimizes wifhood of the ignorant outsider, inserts women in a permanently unequal power relation barring ways of exit, even tricks the woman into a marriage which covers up the partner’s non-normative or promiscuous sexuality, violates her basic human rights, propagates (though does not practice) sanctity of female sexuality even by violent means, subordinates the bride’s family, quarantines women in domestic sphere, regulates desires and activities, deters women from grouping together, prevents the mutual sympathy between minorities like women and sexual others by inculcating misogyny and placing family solidarity over wellbeing of individuals.

The oppressive mechanism operates on the level of troubled childhood as the abused child either turns into a tool for inflicting torture in maturity (like Jiten whose dark complexion distanced him from his racist mother/feminine towards identification with dark father/violent patriarchy), or gets maimed by traumatic rejection of a part (like Nitin growing into a parasite). The lack of courage and confidence makes him a closeted

homosexual ruining the life of the unsuspecting Alka (sexually starved and leveled barren), and getting himself exploited by the more masculine Praful (same hetero-normativity breeds frantic fear of effeminization in Jiten). The gendered and classist market becomes an extension of the workings of ideologies of corporate masculinity: money is extorted from the bride's brother to mobilize capital, the female employee gets sexualized and commoditized, the male employee gets effeminized and his professional expertise is subordinated to the class ethos, feminine sexuality is packaged denying female agency both as producer and consumer. The issue of subalternity is also treated in a covert manner exemplified by Baa's obsession with fairness Otherizing her dark (probably lower class) husband and Jiten who strike back with hypermasculinity, and most tellingly, through the old beggar woman in the driveway disturbing the elitist show by mere presence and getting killed brutally leaving most characters unconcerned.

The resistance offered through defense and defiance takes multiple, though diminutive, forms like utopia (Dolly's fantasy of rendezvous with Kanhaia woven round the erotic Naina Devi), articulation of women's sexual pleasure, appropriation of the feminine make-up, psychic presence of transgressors like Naina Devi and Lakshmbai releasing immense potential of resistance, behaviours unbecoming of woman and exploding of the myth of protective patriarchy. The make-believe world of masked ball destabilizes normative categories -- the mujra outfit mocks sanctified womanhood, the costume of Jhansi ki Rani steps into "manly" sphere, dance costume mimics the physiotherapy of spastic Daksha to symbolize her mother's predicament. The women's group critiques a hitherto unopposed patriarchy: Alka counters Jiten -- the founthead of power -- Nitin breaks the patrilineal ethics of subservience to elders, and the most

submissive Dolly decisively changes the rhetoric of appeal to re-tell the history as a powerful mechanism (story of her victory consisted of subverting the patriarchal eulogization of motherhood), her mimicry bringing into play the non-verbal aspect of language which breaks Jiten down. Unable to bear the truth, he hysterically runs away running over the beggar woman outside and thus entering into the regime of legal crime. More complicated resistance builds in forms of Baa's decision of making Praful the trustee of her house to be inherited by Daksha, based on feminine reason of the latter's loving Praful as well as valorization of Kanhaia and the "powerful black arms" destabilizing racist and classist rubric.

The resistance, however, does not acquire the stature of any ideological revolution though the act of recognition of truth itself critiques the imaginaries foreclosed for analysis. The choric presence of the Sridhar couple envisions a moderate and mediocre family space of mutual care and respect for the other's individuality, while the projection of the performative nature of many of our attitudes and gestures opens up possibility of reconstruction. In the same manner, "The Title" exhibits the metaphorical elimination of the epithet "manly" from the title poem releasing myriads of significations (Dolly fighting her battle through fantasy and finally with mimicry, Alka suffering an unconsummated marriage by her own ways and Nitin -- "manly queen" -- fighting his compulsion to suppress his sexual orientation), but the cult figures operate only in a meta-theatrical structure making the rebels appear like bonsai (for example, Dolly's fantasy is ironically concretized by Nitin's rendezvous with the driver). Dattani takes a stand to project a structure which (not very common) precludes any possibility of

resistance. Daksha alone escapes the social constructionism and structured violence (though born out of it) by her power of obviating and thus resisting its operation.

The chapter “Transformed Resentments: *Final Solutions*” investigates Dattani’s unique approach to the issue of communalism. He tries to locate a historical process by which the narrative builds (merging the private and public, past shaping present and present relocating past) the time span of around fifty years, condensed through the character of Daksha/Hardika who assumes the status of a ubiquitous narrator -- one who dominates and is dominated by the textual politics beyond his/her control. In her narrative the overtly political gets fused with the overtly personal, and history itself becomes part of subjective experience and interpretation. The narrative of independence is interspersed with the colonization of a young girl (physically, nominally, in terms of artistic taste and, most important, epistemically) by post- and neo-colonial forces, and a sense of minoritization and exclusionary logic of communalism gets embedded in the discourse of independence. The situational subaltern position becomes evident with Hardika’s place in the mainstream following her incorporation into the history of hatred as well as Aruna’s marginalization consequent upon her enlightened husband’s anxiety to negotiate his own feeling of shame and prejudice.

Dattani’s technical excellence reaches high water mark with his appropriation of the classical device of the chorus in a modern context which assumes the dimension of an unstable, fractured and incoherent self achieving unity only by drowning the potential dissenting voices in mainstream/majority interest, replacing doubt with decided criminality and pain with anger, playing roles of both Hindus and Muslims exhibiting

identical nature of violence, and pounding sticks as manifestation of hegemony and phallic power threatening violence against the violator. It is the mob who becomes euphoric at independence, initiates horrible bloodbath, manifests in a stylized manner how the event gets interpreted and interacted, and influences the interpersonal relation -- the binary of "we" and "they" thriving beneath our innocent neutral attitude. Communalism is exposed to be a legacy of colonial forces intricately fabricated in our territorial identity and collective unconscious sometimes through a fear psychosis like Daksha's, sense of guilt like Ramnik's, age-old samskara like Aruna's, an offensive defense of humiliation and extermination like Javed's, panic at rumour like Smita's and Tasnim's. Protectors' assurance of peace demeans heroism of the benefactor, the performance of violence in riots finds root and validation in professed liberality, arrogance to deny charity unmasks intolerant shallowness. Ruptures get exposed in apparent homogeneity, both through difference -- Hardika and mob, Ramnik and mob, Javed and his family as well as Bobby (propensity and reluctance towards violence), Smita and Aruna etc -- and similarity -- Javed and Aruna (prejudiced), Javed and Hardika (burdened with painful past), Smita and Ramnik (leveled as traitors), Bobby and Smita (claiming right not to belong or be categorized) and so on. Dattani, however, makes the assurance of belonging problematic as alienation and feelings of otherness find voice and liberalism and craving for acculturation ensures mainstreaming. The identity/position of the opposite sets is exposed to be constructed and interchangeable: victim ("Please don't throw us out) and the victimizer ("You are protecting me from men like me."), self-protective measures of the individual and sadism of the mob -- each claiming exclusive

access to the regime of “truth” (“If they cannot respect it, they must learn to tolerate it”, *FS*, 210). Absent narratives are introduced to relocate meaning.

Finally, Dattani attaches multiple significations to the idol of Lord Krishna making it a site for contesting ideals: staunch belief, atheism, restoration of awe, anxious blasphemy, fanatic faith as well as the tolerance and love emanating from any religion overthrowing the pounding sticks to acknowledge that “You cannot remove my smell with sandal paste and attars and fragrant flowers because it belongs to a human being who believes, tolerates, and respects what other human beings believe. That is the strongest fragrance in the world” (*FS*, 225). The message of tolerance apart, the play succeeds in exposing the rather unacknowledged corners of our banal everyday normalcy – “The more powerful community’s delusion of self-innocence, sustained often by popular religiosity, can thus seriously weaken the foundation of a plural society. This is in fact true of any religio-cultural community since scriptures and myths as veritable texts of a people’s history may partly be a metonymic articulation of its actual or fantasized sovereignty over its Other. Moreover, what the holy books *actually* mean is also contingent on the varying interpretations of the religious authority and is therefore guided by its ‘innocent’ interests” (Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion...”, 226).

The chapter “Coming out of the Closet: *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*” focuses on Dattani’s daring take on the issue of same-sex love in Indian context. The focus is concentrated upon the pre-eminence of sexuality in the formation of human subjectivity and experience: the textual politics of promoting heterocentricity by normalizing hetero/homo binary and by absencing or downplaying non-normative sexual practice,

gender interest, performativity of sexuality, de-familiarization of any identity-disturbing phenomenon, sexualization of identity, homophobia, cultural policing, pathologization and criminalization of homosexuality by science, hetero-patriarchal mechanism of marriage perpetuating gender hierarchy, anxiety of heterosexuality to be exposed as a discursive production and an unstable category, and neo-colonial homogenization of Indian culture.

Various prevalent hetero-normalizing measures mobilized at micro and macro levels are exposed: promotion of the rhetoric of de-Westernization (actually reproducing a colonial legacy), various institutional affiliations and sanctions (for example, exclusive hetero-sexual marriage), legal vigilance instituted by the anti-Sodom statute of IPC 377, judicial aversion and populist politics (defuncting the petition of NAZ Foundation), the politics of penetration invalidating other kinds of sexual practice, religious surveillance, scientific sanction of hetero-normative discursive parameters (psychiatry encouraging curative therapies) and so on. The violence leads to the creation of victims such as Ed – his attempt at self-negation/alienation leading to self-abnegation to propensity towards self-annihilation, victim-turned-victimizer, Kamlesh – suffering acute depression, Bunny Singh – playing the role of the model hetero-sexual “man” both on the television and in his family based on hetero-normative norms, while the anxiety of camouflage creates in him an extreme sense of isolation, Ranjit – finding it impossible to hyphenate his gay identity with Indianness opts for Westernized acculturation, Kiran – a victim of gender performativity/severe gendered violence, the merchant’s wife – denied any female agency even in sexual practice, and the like. The hetero-normative violence instituted by “Soul Murder” and “Internalized Homophobia” (Yep, 20), by reorientation and

reproduction of dominant cultural values and an urge to mould oneself into the “manipulatable characterological types” (*Bersani*, 39) breed a severe sense of insecurity which leads to defensive mechanisms and even abuse of others – Ed tries to be straight by marrying Kiran and Bunny leads a “normal” life with his unloved yet made “contented” wife.

Positive resistance builds through resilience and resignification that claims a subjunctive autonomy for difference: restructuring of family is conceptualized by replacing the family of origin based on biologistics of reproduction with the family of choice, dissociation of gender from sex, subversion of “marriage” to appropriate it as a disjunctive ritual, a superbly comic exposition of the construction of hetero-sexuality itself by mimicry of the roles and hyperbolic representation of the pre-queer rubric of identities by the camp Sharad, and so on. Shifting the perspective, the play tries to appreciate the inverted image of hetero-normativity by offering the Other viewership and situating the centre at the object position which challenges and re-evaluates neutrality of any category (situating hetero-sexual partnership in stage space “shunya” and reversing the anchor position of hetero-normality by making it packageable with a voyeuristic gaze) and destabilizes the definition of “man” or “woman”.

The experience of reading the play or watching it being performed on the stage, makes us realize that the social meanings attached to our desires, emotions, impulses and behaviours are derived from the same organizing principle which orders sexuality, gender and even pleasure in the interest of “a historically specific cultural invention called

heterosexuality” (Yep, 20). The play seeks to expand the possibility of inclusion without subsummation which can promote solidarity among the large humanity.

“Understanding the Hijra Community : *Seven Steps Around the Fire*”_tries to re-read the whodunit as a powerful subversion of the genre of detective fiction with its pervasive focus on the issue than on the cult detective figures like Sherlock Holmes (the detective/research scholar herself a run-away not from the state law but the discourse itself which forms the law); the focus is on preference for subjective involvement leading to revelation of some “realities” lying beneath visible surface rather than on fact (getting revealed in course of unregulated event and hushed up). Dattani’s mission of uncovering the invisible issues focusing on the hijra community living on the fringe of Indian society complicates our understanding and knowledge of the third gender, problematizes sufficiency of sexual politics in representing the third sex and critiques the gender binary. The pan-Indian (Brahminical, Buddhist and Jain) acceptance of multiple eroticisms in ancient time alongside the concept of renunciation faced a paradigmatic shift in medieval India with the eunuch discourse (incorporation of hermaphrodite substituted by castration) conferring high socioreligious prestige as well as the slave discourse revalidating eroticism. However, the pre-modern multiplicity got replaced with sexist, gendered and racist principles and criminalizing strategy of the colonial discourse (highlighting hypermasculinity of colonizers) and, as a counter discourse, androgyny got valorized by Gandhiji and Vivekananda. But the dimorphic neo-colonial forces designate the position of the third sex as cultural outsider (“neither man nor woman”) legitimizing institutional violence to suppress any attempt to de-stereotype the discourse of marriage (marriage of Subbu and Kamla) by way of the secret nexus of state, media

and other machineries. Though the myths of origin and functioning of hijra people root them in love and alternative reproductive role which institutionalize their role as ritual performer -- myth of loyalty adding to their social ubiquity -- neocolonial hegemonic intolerance of any gender discontinuity (derogating erotic aspect and decreasing ascetic importance) pushed the section of humanity to farthest margins only retaining the power of conferring infertility).

However, the existence of the Other itself fights back: If their identity of man minus man gets authenticated by their lack of reproduction, Suresh's sterility (though constantly denied) problematizes his manhood; their claim for femininity decentralizes gender boundary by their non-feminine behaviours like loud clap, abusive language, lack of shame (potential exposure of genitals) etc. Whereas the refusal of identity (castrated male) is fought back with exaggeration to the point of parody, normativity is challenged by the gender system based on performativity and other configurations of identity which validate the marriage between Subbu and Kamla. Naturally they are marginalized in many subtler ways, like epistemic subordination (non-acceptance of their enactment and production of feminine identity), dehumanizing of the uncategorizable group, positioning of the gender outcast (hyper libidinous or ascetic) to secure autonomy of male body and desire, withdrawal of right to security (Anarkali is housed with male prisoner), delegitimizing of relational identity (denying the jodi even filial or consanguine or constructed bonding of sibling), and endangering of their autonomous individual existence. Yet, resistance builds through developing alternative relations rather than reproductive, exposition of ruptured morality of mainstream relations, denying oppositional gender role (Champa claims to be both father and mother), building a

sisterhood between the marginalized woman and the not-man hijra leading to discovery of truth and minor performance of counter move.

The playwright's attempt to critique the institution of marriage – building block of the family – makes the play a journey from one marriage to another -- death frustrating/fulfilling the desired union. The non-normative relation is excluded from the impasse of marriage and reduced into non-entity; its sanctity denied (refusing Kamla's wifhood), its discursive nature exposed. The gender hierarchy and subjugation of women in marriage add to the process. The power play breaks the boundary of special institutions, turns victims its agent, class hierarchy complicates gender discourse (subordinate feminized and superior masculine), role-reversal exaggerates hyperbolic and performative nature of patriarchy, and the rhetoric of domination is subverted by the internal organization of the hijras. In fact, generic experimentation challenges the construction of historical foundation of truth (official record and media report), exposes the myth of falsehood attached to the margin preserving "truth" for mainstream alone, equates the revelation and suppression of truth with death, makes category of "right" unstable, historicizes the margin's lesson against any attempt to readjust with centre and punctures the illusion of public interest.

The play thus tries, though on a rather minor scale, to liberate the identity of hijra people from divine, imperial or criminal signification, or sexual thirdness and situate them in a modern context and explore their marginality. It also resignifies the genre of the detective story relocating the truth itself which unstructures any hegemonic theorization.

“Breaking the Silence: *30 Days in September*” is Dattani’s treatment of the phenomenon of child sexual abuse, redeeming it from the discourse of denial, evasion and minimization. He shows real understanding about the specification of the behaviour, acts -- physical or verbal--, gestures, circumstance, and age that come under the impasse of the offense; the child’s helpless confusion about the definitional and consequential implications (ethics of privacy/personal precludes public intervention); the long-term “sleeper effects” and the survivor cycle. Situating the scene in the customary middle-class background, the playwright punctures the illusion of the class’s exemption fostered by the “conspiracy of silence” and the indifferent legal system. The network of abusers creates a “life-denying social structure” (Walling, quoted in Shiv Kumar, 82), to perpetuate patriarchal power play by creating and denigrating and thus subjugating frigid women like Shanta or promiscuous women like Mala. Gender issue proves ubiquitous: patriarchy cuts across class, the abused tries to fit into the role of “bad” absolving the perpetrator (man in the party), the abuser both enjoys unsanctioned sex and plays protective patriarch (Mala’s cousin), patriarchy creates utmost silence making the offended feel betrayed by the silent non-offender (uncle Vinoy abuses seven year old Mala up to thirteen defuncting her speech mechanism in various ways and mums Shanta by freezing her speech from the age of six and thrusting silence by acting provider) and makes women dependent for financial and social protection, inculcates emotional dependence cutting them from all other identities except sex object (Mala, unsure of any non-sexual care, is ready to offer the body for approval), and controls knowledge (ugly and unlovable). The callous indifference and complacency is exemplified by Vinoy’s

playing the “head” of the family -- affectionate and responsible --, exerting authority to suppress rebellion, acting a liberal well-wisher and buying the flat for his dear sister.

Defacement comes in the form of the victim’s submersion into the coldly comforting zone of survivor cycle—illustrated by the playwright with real insight into psychiatric investigations. If the wound makes Mala bleed profusely, Shanta’s blood freezes: they show symptoms like repression and denial, dissociation and withdrawal, confusion between truth and fantasy as well as love and sex, loss of memory, sexual traumatization (wife’s frigidity), poor parenting skill incapacitating mother to save her daughter from victimization, extreme vulnerability towards revictimization (in spite of all professional and sensitive qualities), relational dysfunction to the real loving partner, promotion and projection of a negative image of “bad girl” (“it is my fault”, “made for this”), and confinement in the frozen tortured moment. Deep scars condemn victims into the solitary cell (one to the escape zone of worship, other to sexual aberration) even in the absence of any visible warden to dominate, protect or provide. The fear and insecurity finds defense of forgetting in one and anger in another pushing each farther away from the other through misinterpretation – the history of unredeemed pain of a child is met with the device of non-recognition and deliberate suppression by the mother (feeding and falsifying) herself tortured by the demon in her daughter. The illusion of a caring father is upheld to comfort or confront the child with its unworthiness, hide the wife’s own failure as well as the fact of the abuser being the provider – confining both within “I wish she could listen to me” and “I wish she wouldn’t be so lost in her religion. I wish She had been there for me!” (*Thirty Days...*, 49).

The arena of partnership exudes tension – while Shanta’s husband fails to delve deeper into his wife’s hysteric aversion to sex, Mala’s casual suitors both consume her and prove their unblemished morality. Deepak is presented as a desirable subversion of the fairytale hero rescuing and enjoying life-long grateful submission of the fair vulnerable lady; rather he pleads for contact, ignores insult, forces his way, suggests professional help, diagnoses the sexual perversion as a symptom of wounded psyche instead of feminine frailty, bears up with his partner’s indifference during her convalescence, appreciates “the real person in you”, detects her own suffering and craving for company, himself sees the psychiatrist to fight his own tiredness, and actively accelerates the exposition of the demon till the point of Mala’s exuberant longing to be with her fiancé. Dattani’s commitment both to his art and factual reality in dealing with the psychosocial problem becomes evident in his graphic detailing of Mala’s gradual process of awakening: she undergoes the stages of “exit cycle” to love herself and believe deserving of it; the narrative shuttles back and forth between past and present, refusal/misrecognition to reinterpretation and re-naming (sense of guilt replaced by self-esteem, badness transferred from oneself to abuser) of both fact and person, base point and peak, psychological time and real time. The urge for ignominy gives way to rejecting uncritical ubiquity of the abuser (controller and monitor), and the woman, entitled to life and mutual forgiveness, Mala rejuvenates a childhood which she never had and really grows up simultaneously after several sessions; and with melting of the frozen suffering, Shanta (decamped of power to feel, speak and act) breaks away from the silent zone, “I remained silent not because I wanted to, but I didn’t know how to speak” (*Thirty Days...*, 67).

This is not an exposition of an “ugly India”, but recognition of existence of horrible reality to be dispersed with, and the play perhaps achieves its aim, as Dubay notes down: “through it they believe, their silent screams have finally been heard” (quoted in Bite, 15).

An interesting point about researching on a living author is that her/his oeuvre keeps expanding while the researcher faces the constraint of wrapping up the thesis at some point in time. Though not part of my thesis as such, the two most recent plays of Dattani -- *Brief Candle* (2010) and *Where Did I Leave My Purdah?* (2014) -- are discussed very briefly in the Conclusion only to reinforce the point that his concern with the “invisible issues” of our society continues, incorporating newer areas and acquiring further dimensions. The first is a play which at once situates and de-situates its author in a literary tradition that explores the existence and experience -- both physical and emotional -- of persons suffering from some fatal disease. Following the legacy, the play celebrates the promotion of life-affirming instincts, but the individuality of Dattani is stamped in the attempt to capture the fear of death in affected characters (generally the suffering of near ones gets focused) -- with exception of Vikas -- and their desperate struggle to forget its inevitability, and most importantly, the fear of losing the body parts which acquire cultural significance in determining identity. The story rotates around the staging of a posthumous comedy *Hotel Stay Longer*, authored by Vikas and enacted by the cancer patients -- losing an actor during rehearsal – in order to raise funds for the hospice. The performance of the play-within-a-play also turns out to be the struggle of both Deepika (unaware) and Vikas (deliberate) to “live through his (Vikas) absence” (*Brief Candle*, 27) .

A generic destabilization is set in motion in various ways: an intentional confusion of “reality” (of the play) and “fantasy” (the play-within-a-play) is created to capture the kaleidoscopic view of the life of the characters and the world of drama – each losing its border in creating myriads of meaning. For Vikas, the act of writing merges with that of living a life one has never lived (for himself he made his living an act of artistic creation). Hence, he fulfils his promise of making Mahesh a rich man by providing him the role of some Mr. Kulkarni having a private plane which becomes his reference framework of self-definition (his point is answering back not the unknown comfort of actually having it); Amarinder plays the role of a “real” man anxious both to increase and advertise his manhood by taking Viagra (manhood depending upon penis power); and Shanti performing the sexy femme fatale. Amol, running short of money received from insurance, finds his alter ego in Mr. Sengupta overdrawing his credit card though assured of a last glass of “bloody merry”, and gets an opportunity to provoke laughter and laugh hysterically in order to dissipate the dark shadow of death. Deepika, trying to fight her sadness by refusing to recognize, ultimately gets through it -- never her musk of indifferent manager falling off -- finally up to the point of listening to the “those three magic words ... that every woman wants to hear—‘You turn me on’” (*BC*, 44) from a “leaving” man with whom she stuck in a lift for moments (an imagery of her living moments with Vikas). Vikas’s constant presence acquires layers of meaning -- his metaphorical presence as author, player and carrier of the death mask signifies a close link between life and stage; the persons become at once the creator of their roles (imparting their secrets to the playwright) and created by the moments of the drama: his presence as the known face in the characters’ memory and a hidden unknown face in

Deeepika's problematizes unified categorization; his memory keeping the characters conscious (specially Deepika) of the dual plane of our existence (playing role created by Vikas and interacting with him in psychological space); his memory both evoking laughter and reminding of death, and keeping him alive and clung to life (only at the end he leaves Deepika to liberate her).

The myth of Markandeya living short but significantly and never surpassing youth gets appropriated through Vikas bubbling with life (always chants Maha Mrityunjaya mantra "Om Trayambakam Yajamahe", *BC*, 19). Dattani himself commented in his note: "The mask of death is predominant almost to the point of ridicule" ("A Note", 3). By situating someone suffering from the disease and succumbing to death consequently in authorship, Dattani finds it easier to play upon the idea of death: death by suicide is trivialized into something to be deferred by a day to enable Mahesh to go to Hanuman temple ("not to day"); it is presented as an oppressively haunting reality the characters are trying to come to terms with not by avoidance but by making it ordinary; it's a reality which Deepika professionally counsels to accept but feels personally too much to face.

Dattani touches a covered live wire by shifting emphasis from the fear of death to a far greater concern for losing something else. When professional counseling focuses on the alleviation of fear of death by encouraging a love for life and faith in curative possibility, Vikas looks into the invisible areas of suffering -- as Amarinder claims, "...he got to know us so well... He understood what I was going through" (*BC*, 22). While the diseased body suffers intolerable physical pain which could be lessened to some extent

by morphine, the fear of losing the meaning /identity by being deviated from “normal” physicality maddens the mind. It’s a fear of being abnormal, of losing hold from the centre of mainstream, of losing the meaning it stood for. Amarinder’s extreme fear of losing manhood and therefore losing manly authority in a phallogocentric world even overshadows his fear of death and he, for a time being, contemplates avoiding the surgery. Shanti’s femininity which paradoxically hitherto kept her sexually unconscious of her genitals, feels threatened to lose its centrality by removal of her cancerous breast in the same manner her resolve not to “give in” to let her husband a full view of her body is nullified by the “invading” of her body by technicians.

Complications arise in the world of emotion and it ceases to be unproblematic. The conflict/convergence of the professional and personal makes Deepika vacillate between a plethora of emotions -- “being a doctor you can’t really be too sensitive” (*BC*, 25). Refusing “to be a victim of his anger” (*BC*, 26), she tries to stop the performance where everybody finds only laughter. Emotions are exposed to be discursively mediated (Shanti recollects her mother’s advise not to be enthusiastic, gently protest and then give in); the absence of certain body parts make their past existence meaningful for Shanti (“A part of me that I had barely felt. That I had never seen fully myself. Gone”, *BC*, 32); Amol tries to hide from the public view sometimes behind laughter; sometimes behind death so that nobody can spy on (tries to spare Rosa see him dying). Even the separation between Vikas and Deepika was not a simple story of unreciprocated love or misunderstanding; it was something they could not understand: “To me wandering was life itself. I would not have stopped for any one. Not even for life...Changed tracks. Move on...Of all the images that I have of all the people – I woke up with the vision of

your face. I knew then what my destination was... I realized that it will soon be me who will move away by staying still", (*BC*, 340). It moves beyond the version of gendered exploitation (male chauvinistic capitalization of female or cruel femme crushing devoted lover): "you never touched me once when I was ill... You can touch me now... I long for your touch" (*BC*, 26). Ultimately what transpires is deliberate generic anomaly of a "comedy with a flaw" ("A Note", 3) – the performers/author denies the fact of Amol/Sengupta's death since "He has no choice. It's a comedy, you see. In comedies, people don't die" (*BC*, 47). To stretch the generic span in order to match the imperfect life our playwright also keeps the characters even more alive through memory and performance.

The experience of reading Dattani's latest play *Where Did I Leave My Purda?* is a thing in itself which achieves its effect by creating sheer awe at an artistic height the playwright could reach through a long process of evolution and self-improvisation. The play is about a theatre or production of a theatre or some theatre artists -- about revival of the Modern Indian Theatre Company as Postmodern Indian Theatre Company where borders of life, myth and theatre merge. It's a story of Nazia Sahiba, a veteran theatre artist, her attempt to revive a theatre company with the staging of a postmodern version of the performance of the legend of Dushyant and Shakuntala during 1950s by contextualizing the theme of forgetting and recognition of a long-forgotten but ever-present history leading to forgiveness and reconciliation between generations as well as expression of the deep subterranean mutual attachment.

The play is a fair illustration of the ever-close relation between life and performance (performativity of life itself) in Dattanian poetics. It opens with a shock shared by both the audience and characters of the play offered by a character, “loving and living for theatre.” The anxiety/expectation of an imminent thriller with discovery of an unusual death (evident from Vinoy’s call for security) is frustrated by revelation of a bet taken by a woman in her eighties (age itself breaking the convention) to have the assistant director kiss her in order to win a lunch -- at once destabilizing the centrality of youth and exposing the performative aspect of our gesture (actually “resuscitation”). It is Nazia’s commitment to and command and understanding of the art which makes her careless about everything except for the demand of her artistic pursuit: denied the attention since her meek approach would best suit the stereotype “dadima” image, she leaves the shooting floor without a second thought. “There’s always a time in your life when the truth strikes you” and she leaves the cinema in the same manner by refusing to take chemotherapy, saying “I don’t belong here! ... That’s what I told them when they wanted to give me chemotherapy. I don’t need this shit...Your cinema is too small for me. My life is big. I am BIG and GENEROUS! Only the theatre deserves me” (59). Her dance continues across the scenes and in the next scene she is seen dancing in front of the young actress who has come to give audition for Shaku, a modern revival of Abhigyan Shakuntalam to be produced by Modern Indian theatre. We meet the artist Nazia Sahiba, the uncompromising devotee of art alone (“the role I live for... The role I die for”); driven by artistic passion, she shows a thump even to commercial compromises.

Life is also shown as multilayered. The note of discord sets in motion on the arrival of Ruby who is bitterly compelled to call Nazia by her name – partly because the

latter refuses to be called aunty (“I hate being your aunt”) and partly she will prefer “mam” (*Where Did I...*, 63). It gathers substance regarding the founder members of the company; Ruby hinting at some suppression of truth or forgetting to mention on Nazia’s part. With two or three master strokes Dattani captures the terrible time of post-independence communal riot breaking loose demonic forces across the border as well as the cultural policing of art by gendered religious forces. The killing of a bee by king Dushyant (part of the performance at Lahore) precluding the ecstatic romantic scene is supplanted with the murderous howl “Maar dalo un haraamion ko” (*Where Did I...*, 75). Hurried decision is made between the lovers to leave to be together (“I would rather die with you than live without you”, *Where Did I...*, 79); murder is committed to save loved one; some prefers to live in the city of birth over any possibility of free artistic pursuit in another land; the artist determines to pursue her dream of continuing with theatre company at any cost; sister promises to sacrifice the role of Shakuntala if the sister accompanies her defying the parental monopoly and another sister decides to leave her beloved city and family with much pain to protect her sister. Coming back to present, we see Nazia talking to her ex-husband after “fifty bloody years” (*Where Did I...*, 91) (“bloody” may be bleeding in retrospect) and plethora of emotions/roles come into play: she assumes callous indifference, expresses disgust, tries to exhibit pity and humiliate perhaps to hide a little bit of jealousy (“to tell me you have sons in Birmingham?” *Where Did I...*, 91), and gives vent unwittingly to the deep emotion of a supreme aesthete and a loving admirer who does not want to dissipate the beautiful past -- preserved in form of memory and fantasy -- by a wrinkled present: “We both were beautiful –but what’s the point now? It’s over. No point. Cobwebs” (*Where Did I...*, 92). The history proves cyclic.

The story of Ruby's neglected childhood ("You were so close to me and yet you may as well have been thousands of miles away", *Where Did I...*, 125) and her relations with her mother gets repeated in that of Nikhat "You went through the motions all right of being a caring mom. But you weren't. You couldn't" (*Where Did I...*, 126). The myth of the death of mother acquires multiple significances -- the mother in Nazia died leaving a desperate refugee seeking refuge sometimes in a smudging past, sometimes hatred and mostly in all-engrossing art; the mother in Ruby got lost in her own anger at her mistreated and neglected childhood.

The theme of non-recognition/oblivion, rather the curse occasioning it, turns out to be the key concept of the legend Nazia describes and also a strategy to make reality nonexistent: "I curse you. You don't exist" (*Where Did I...*, 66). The powerful character of Shakuntala becomes a site for contesting meaning and forces -- the actress craves to play the role, Ruby constantly hammers to recognize that her mother played it in 1946, a role which "Only one woman is lucky enough -- to play it for forty years" (*Where Did I...*, 67). The extra-ordinarily confident Nazia gets little perturbed at the view of the old moth-eaten costume of Shakuntala (Ruby produces them) and orders to burn them. But on the mindscape, the train from Pakistan brings in a train of memories -- the young Nazia is compelled to leave her land, her sister Zarine dies, she is gang-raped followed by the birth of a hated child whom she even denies to recognize as her own (niece), Suhel leaves the company for her comfort. Amidst all these instabilities, the only thing that remains steady is the artist fighting to maintain her theatre company which becomes an extension of her life, and by which she at once tries both to forge and remember, realize and renegotiate her boundaries as she cannot clean up the cobwebs after trying so hard.

She craves to remodel Shakuntala and reinterpret her experience by making her Shaku -- “Not this whiny little creature whose entire future depends on whether her husband can remember having slept with her or not” (*Where Did I...*, 112-3). In fact, breaking generic decorum, she puts her alter ego and smudges the distance and difference between the categories of subjective and objective. Performance becomes also a means to renegotiate with her past—at once rejuvenate and re-interpret. She manipulates the situation to enjoy caress from Vinoy who acts Dash, -- the modern version of Dushyant --, the role played by Suhel. Nazia’s character becomes a site of appropriation for both Shakuntala – bearing a child of unrecognized fatherhood -- and Dushyant offering a strong resistance to remembrance and recognition following the curse (not of any sage, but that of modern religious fanaticism).

“Things don’t get finished. They just hide in a dark corner like a ghoul and grab at you when you are not looking” (*Where Did I...*, 89). Nazia’s frantic attempt to forget the past is countered with equal zeal by Ruby who hammers her aunt to give recognition to it: sometimes she asks whether she is a consequence of an illegitimate relation between Zarine and Suhel, sometimes asks whether Suhel is her father, accuses her of calculated betrayal and manipulation of using others as ladder and pushing the co-founders into the dark to secure her undeserved fame, and almost obsessively demands to acknowledge her mother and preserve her memory. Light of recognition appears irresistible as nature leaves the imprint of Nazia on Nikhat -- her grandchild cloaked as grand niece. She also studies theatre, joins Nazia’s fan page and finally appears in costume of Shakuntala collected by Ruby from Suhel, who like Shakuntala preserved all

the loving memories: "It's like my grandmother has returned -- to claim her role" (*Where Did I...*, 121).

The past unveils: Ruby's claim that actually Zarine played Shakuntala (a fact Nazia suppresses) comes true and Nazia also accepts that she "killed" Zarine who actually sacrificed her life to save her sister's from the Muslim fanatics by giving her own burkha. "But we don't want to acknowledge it. We all weave these tangled webs around the truth so we can strangle it and make it disappear" (*Where Did I...*, 127). A bleeding time gets shape with two or three master strokes: Nazia killed one of the murderous crowd to save the life of Suhel, Zarine gave her life while taking flight from a country gone crazy ("killed by her own people", *Where Did I...*, 133), Nazia confronted a "different set of demons" (*Where Did I...*, 132) waiting this side of the border. However, finally all her resistance breaks only after getting reminded of her clandestine sucking of her baby when none was around and knowing of Suhel's delaying the act to give her time whose death news almost breaks her down. Hysterically she wants now to forget and goes almost crazy with her production until she trips over the trunk and cries like a baby clinging to Zarine/Ruby. Recognition of truth opens the flood gate of affection: Ruby, the producer of Nazia's latest production, sincerely and publicly applauds her mother as the "remarkable, bold, courageous and, above all, honest" (*Where Did I...*, 140), Vinoy perhaps recognizes his gay identity as he finds his identification with the role of Julian ("And I play the part that defines my life in my own eyes", *Where Did I...*, 139), Nazia acknowledges Suhel, "The finest artiste I ever met. And the most loving husband a woman could possibly have" (*Where Did I...*, 141) and finally comes out of her deep-seated guilt and asks forgiveness of Zarine -- "A very kind, beautiful, generous, evolved

soul. Like Shakuntala” (*Where Did I...*, 141). But the spectator recognizes Shaku as real Nazia -- with two dancing feet (she commands to spin around in wheel chair) who reinterprets the role of dadima and the wheel chair itself, who’s “[a]n act like life is one big performance with a standing ovation waiting at the end of it!... Oh this wheel chair is too small for all the life that’s left in me” (*Where Did I...*, 142).

“The function of drama, in my opinion, is not merely to reflect the malfunction of society, but to act like freak mirrors in a carnival and to project grotesque images of all that passes for normal in our world” (Kothari, Nair, 26). Dattani explores the issues existing in forms of potential ruptures, and exhibits the way they manifest themselves in Indian contexts to help create a public discourse on them. The playwright-cum-director allows actors layers of experience to realize and interpret the root motivation of the characters, and “When the words are Mahesh Dattani’s, the flesh is already contained within the word” (Walling, 230). The playwright fulfils his artistic commitment, as Indranee Ghosh observes: “...he incorporates much of the philosophy and trends in modern drama, namely, the force of division and difference in the system of social relations in bourgeois society that Hegel diagnosed as the characteristic of modernity” (Ghosh, “Theatre of Babalog”, 56). Oppression is acknowledged but the possibility of resistance gets never absent there -- only “...it comes with a bit of practice” (*Bravely Fought...*, 246). The individual in Dattani never aspires to uniqueness or isolation, rather s/he tries to coordinate between various forces shaping and re-shaping his/her identity as individual as well as one in establishment/institution.

The experience of reading/watching Dattani plays introduces us to a kaleidoscopic view of the array of rather familiar (part of our experience)/unfamiliar (not projected and publicized) issues. From among the myriads, the special interest lies in the recurrent concerns which captivate our attention during reading. The plays explore how the body acquires meaning being situated in a specific cultural construct: the gendered body alone enjoys the status of the “normal” body exposing the constructed nature of both “normality” and “gender”; the diseased and disabled body loses its culture-specific gender position (with the surgery of prostate and breast cancer or a different body image); the genital ambiguity -- in-born or artificially made -- creates a third gender role and marginalizes hijras; the disabled body presented outside the aesthetic politics (symbolized to eulogize the mainstream body in various ways) posits threat and faces extreme suppression; the spastic body defies cultural constructionism; “black arms” release libido and assure security; the “impure” body requires a tool of approval and thus vulnerable to consumption and denigration; the female body becomes a marker of race and is either destroyed by killing or eaten up by rape. The issue of embodiment also exhibits culture’s anxiety over the autonomous body -- if the male dancer’s adornment of cultural genitals (like growing hair) for performance of a number disturbs the homophobic sexist society, the prosthesis used by disable persons as an almost unconscious extension of their body acquires separatist meaning in the public view; as the wearing of a cap, burkha or knotted handkerchief or their absence makes people vulnerable to ruthless violence, in the same manner the exaggeration of feminine gesture, language and sartorial markers problematize the feminine status of hijra people; the ball costume explores immense potential for exploding identity. Anxiety also builds around the gender question and the

problematic of sexgender relation as the playwright deals with issues like homosexuality, hetero-normativity, resistance (both stereotyped and confirmed gays and camp are presented though with little space for possibility of bisexuality), third gender (creating a liminal space in-between “man” and “woman” incorporating and defying and thus problematizing both), gender stereotyping by the mechanism of patriarchy and resistance (women characters are subjugated by and instrumented to perpetuate domination, but also strike back and develop in-group bonding appropriate various roles and renegotiate boundaries), gendered self (male characters also fight to de-stereotype their role), complicated gendered performance in arena of disability (claiming/asserting and destabilizing definite role allocation), child sexual abuse , traumatized defacement and recovery and others. The playwright himself tries to resist the kind of authorship exemplified by Dr. Thakkar (*Tara*) which is exploitative and encashes the subject for his/her own interest unethically and which is quite evident from the extreme caution Dattani takes not to hurt or lighten the suffering of the survivors of CSA during his project of *Thirty Days in September*. Like Dan (*Tara*), he apologizes for “taking something from” his subject matter and capitalizes the angst for artistic profit-making as he discovers himself not unique and wholesome, but “an object like other objects in a cosmos, whose orbits are determined by those around. Moving in a forced harmony” (*Tara*, 379). He tries to resolve the problem perhaps by dissolving into the narrative – though incoherent -- as in *Tara*, or more effectively, in *Brief Candle* where the author of the play himself turns out to be the sufferer and is already “dead” by the time his play is performed. The generic de-stabilization attempted in many of his plays well corresponds to his thematic commitments.

In fact the playwright's chief preoccupation centers on the acknowledgement of the existence of the "invisible issues" and he does this by pushing the fringed issues from the periphery to the centre or rather, focusing the pool of light on the dark or misty areas. The prioritized focus of his plays sometimes earns them the label of "discussion plays" – a fact which made the pages much more performative for the reader. However, his is no mission of the activist or reformer. In fact, Dattani never radically rejects the cultural set up, but here is a process of '...rendering those culturally central, apparently monolithic constructions newly accessible to analysis and interrogation. What transpires is a brilliant aesthetic product containing a re-problematized social and political statement. "I have learned to embrace change as the only way to survive in the world" ' ("Me and...", 43). With each new exploration, Dattani destabilizes the cultural rubric brick by brick. What he achieves may be illustrated by alluding to Lynn Weber—"The pursuit of social justice gives meaning to people's lives. To derive meaning from the struggle for justice, we don't have to bring about a revolution; we can plant together. By preparing the fields and planting the seeds together, we can live fulfilling lives even as we wait for the harvest" (*quoted in Yep, 79*).

Scope for Further Studies

"The petty done, the undone vast" ('The Last Ride Together', 'Robert Browning)

Every work has its limitation. The present study could not encompass the whole corpus of the playwright's oeuvre. Faced with the "problem" pertaining to most living authors, as already indicated (that is, continuous creativity), some shorter plays like *The Girl Who Touched the Stars* written in recent years were kept outside the the scope of this thesis, and the two other plays *Brief Candle* and *Where Did I Leave my Purda* were given only a passing attention in the Conclusion, which deserve full-length analyses.