

# INTRODUCTION

“My life is big. I am BIG and GENEROUS! Only the theatre deserves me”

*(Where Did I Leave My Purdah? 59)*

Theatre has always been a glorious star in the multi-dimensional and richly adorned cultural galaxy of India. But Indian English theatre has had a rather low key representation in this vibrant cultural arena. During the sixties and seventies European influence, especially of Pirandello, Brecht, Chekhov and others, gained prominence and helped Indian theatre express the fractured reality of the time. But the indigenous Indian theatre moved past regional boundaries to become really a polyglot phenomenon from the sixties onward, and use of English helped it cross the border of language, too. Nissim Ezekiel, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar were the chief architects of this aesthetic/cultural development. But except for a few plays written in English between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and for the translations in English of the works of the above playwrights, the picture of Indian drama in English, however, appeared rather uninspiring. It was not until the eighties that English drama stepped out of the coterie of elitists and reached a wider audience. The efforts of playwrights like Nissim Ezekiel, Asif Currimbhoy, Shib K Kumar and others achieved occasional success, but failed to connect the audience with theatre's full potential. With a younger group of

playwrights a more lasting change was visible, and the plays by Dina Mehta, Poli Sengupta, Manjula Padmanavan, and Tripurari Sharma found increasingly appreciative audience. It was with the appearance of Mahesh Dattani in the 1980s that Indian English drama gained a distinct identity. India's first English-language playwright to receive the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998, Dattani says, "...this has been really the kind of endorsement that Indian English Theatre in the country has been looking for because up till now it seems as if it belonged to a fringe section of a society ..."

("Conversation with Mahesh Dattani", 26).

In such an exceptionally multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country as India, theatre developed as a heterogeneous and polyglot event, never reducing itself into what Ashis Sengupta terms as a "dominant, homogenizing construct of indigenous culture and heritage" (Sengupta, 5). Consequently, theatre acted as an inclusive genre encouraging a cross-pollination of and encompassing within itself the variety of performance ranging from temple dance to martial art, from classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam (with emphasis on "abhinaya" (enactment or acting) and Kathakali, ritual performances like Raas, Ramleela and Theyyam, folk performances like Chhau and Therukuttu, puppetry and folk lores, miming, orally delivered dramatized stories to neatly structured indigenous and Europeanized and experimental plays.

In fact, India has evolved as, to borrow words from Sengupta again, "a potpourri of cultural heritages, religions, and languages -- all of which bear on the amazing variety of its theatre and performance" (Sengupta, 8). Modern Indian theatre took its root primarily in urban settlements like Calcutta (now Kolkata), Madras (Chennai) and

Bombay (Mumbai), by mid-nineteenth century with the rise of an educated, refined and cultivated intelligentsia -- initiated by and exposed to western literature and taste. Various theatre groups, talented writers and directors worked together with rich theatre patrons to cater to the taste of a sustained audience in Calcutta, Madras, Thiruvananthapuram, Bombay and Asam. The crestfallen theatre movement during the political turmoil of the last decades of British rule was revitalized by the rise of amateur theatre groups just before and after independence -- foundation of Indian National Theatre in 1944 and later National School of Drama in 1960s arranging sponsorship and funding from central and state government for multi lingual theatres. In Kolkata alone hundreds of theatre companies got registered with leading groups like Bahurupiee, Little Theatre, Nandikar, IPTC etc; in Mumbai the Kapoor family, Narang couple, Ebrahim Alkazi, Satyadev Dubey, Sultan Padamsee and Alyque Padamsee made significant contribution. Experimental theatre made considerable advancement in the hands of Badal Sircar and Safdar Hashmi. While Delhi-based Mohan Rakesh's plays broke new ground in Hindi theatre by introducing non-realistic dramaturgy and making the body part of meaning, playwrights like Girish Karnad in Bangalore and Kavalam Narayana Pannikar in Thiruvananthapuram made extensive use of the ancient ritual forms and folk performances as a part of the process of "de-colonizing" (Mee, referred to in Chaudhuri, 8) -- a political act of expressing indigenous aesthetics and dramaturgy. Their endeavour gave birth to what is termed the Theatre of Roots movement. Women's theatre, though not feminist in the given Western sense, also emerged as a powerful medium to protest against the sociocultural regime which subjugates women through dowry death, killing of

female foetus and a hundred similar ways, and tried to retell and reinterpret the archetypical narratives with Usha Ganguli and Mahasweta Devi.

Sengupta rightly observes, “The journey of modern and contemporary Indian theatre has been multifaceted – from an ‘encounter with the tradition’ through a recuperation of the realist mode to the present impressive range of practices from different regions/communities and also from abroad” (Sengupta, 18). Just after independence theatre has been instrumented to make “a single, enduring ‘India’ by homogenizing India’s robust cultural diversity” (Sengupta, 18). With extensive industrialization and urbanization during the sixties, however, playwrights like Mohan Rakesh, Tendulkar, Mahesh Elkunchawa and others made their presence felt to the urban audience; the failings of the economic programmes in decreasing the difference between economic classes and widespread corruption and the consequent militant social turmoils prepared the ground for dramatists like Mahasweta Devi, Sircar, Hashmi, Gurcharan Das; while Sanjoy Ganguly’s Forum theatre attempted a constructive equation of “acting and activism” (Sengupta, 21), women playwrights struggled to assert female agency and women’s empowerment, and dalit theatre movement (M. B. Chitnis, Datta Bhagat and others) sought to provide an alternate narrative. Thus Indian (theatre has come a long way from the search for an “imagined or recoverable ‘glorious tradition’” to include “a sum total of its regional multiplicity” (*Theatre India* (special Issue) “How ‘National’ is our National Theatre?,” quoted in Sengupta, 20). In fact, to follow Aparna Dharwadkar, “In post-independence India, the quest is not so much for a ‘national theatre’ as for a significant theatre *in* and *of* the nation” (quoted in Sengupta, 18).

Thus when Indian regional-language theatre was undergoing a constant process of shifting direction and dimension to make it a platform for combining its commitment to its roots with its potential for global importance, Mahesh Dattani took up his journey in the rather untrodden area of Indian English drama to explore its immense potential in theme and structure, issues and performances. The most distinctive of all the factors which became his trade mark, is his deliberate choice of and conscious commitment to contemporaneity: “They [Nissim Ezekiel and Asif Currimbhoy] were writing for their times...and I am writing for my time...” (“Conversation with Mahesh Dattani”, 26). In a course of self-assessment Dattani again observes: “I see myself as a part of contemporary society and therefore I see myself as a contemporary theatre artist” (“Contemporary Indian Theatre and its Relevance,” 1). An author’s self-evaluation is, not very frequently, quite a reliable critique of his own oeuvre. However, Dattani in this case proves rather to be a stranger to the rule. In the same essay he observes: “Theatre has always been a mirror for man. A reflection of his world, of the eternal conflicts that plague him, through which he has experienced the gamut of human emotions” (“Contemporary Indian Theatre and its Relevance,” 1). Hence he holds up a mirror to his/our contemporary society, and we feel like watching a projection of not only what is in front of us but also what exists behind our back—“the invisible issues” which are strategically kept under the carpet to the convenience and comfort of the ambivalent mainstream culture (Mee, Note on “Tara”, 319).

Yet theatre is not an “imitation”, but a “representation”. It may foreground “new realities” by centering the pool of light on issues hitherto unexplored, or resituate and reinterpret existent “realities” by jolting the readers/audience out of their complacent sense of “normality”. Dattani’s is a conscious strategy to debunk the mechanism of invisibility which tends to make realities nonexistent. He deals with issues which have been made “invisible” not because they are negligibly rare, but because they are rather deliberately and strategically ignored, marginalized, made unimportant and kept outside the ambit of analysis. Erin Mee rightly remarks, “By pulling taboo subjects out from under the rug and placing them on stage for public discussion, Dattani challenges the constructions of ‘India’ and ‘Indian’ as they have traditionally been defined in modern theatre” (Mee, “Note on Tara”, 319). The desired effect is produced through creating “a very complex language called theatre. A language that has the ability to redefine the natural concepts of time, space and movement. A language that goes beyond the verbal, a movement that goes beyond the physical” (“Contemporary Indian Theatre and its Relevance,” 1).

A boy of nine, watching a stage performance for the first time in his life got spellbound at its tremendous impact and thought “I had to be a part of this magic!” (Dattani, “Me and My Plays”, 7) Mahesh Dattani is in command of the genre of English drama in contemporary India struggling for acknowledging its identity and immense potentiality. He of course had his travails (“I didn’t have an audience, because I didn’t have a language”, “Me and...,” 16) to reach out to his target audience: “I had found my validation amongst the ones who mattered -- voiceless people like myself” (“Me and...,” 32). His plays have been published, translated and staged in India and abroad including

England and North America. He is a playwright, director, actor, and dancer -- all rolled into one. His reputation rests mainly on the dozen plays he has written for the stage as well as for the BBC, though he has also been successful in his other roles, too. His experience as an all-round theater person has, in fact, made him a better playwright. Dattani has directed and starred in a number of well-known English and Hindi plays, including his own, and also written/co-written several Hindi and English screenplays. So far as his medium of expression is concerned, he defends his writing in English on the grounds that he writes for city people, and all theater in a multilingual/multicultural country is after all limited by language and region. Moreover, his characters are Indian and his English "educated Indian English" spoken in a unique manner. Prejudice, hypocrisy, guilt, and compromise form the thematic threads of his work. Dattani, in particular, is concerned with the minorities who are forced to live a double life so as to be part of the mainstream. Many of his plays, however, critique Indian middle-class morality and even defend society's outcasts and potential rebels. What is most striking about his plays is the way Dattani brings in the dynamics of choice the individual is faced with while breaking away from traditional roles and the range of emotions it generates. "Society has its concerns about civilization," he says in an interview, "and that's why ... rules are constructed". But at the same time, "the individual shouldn't be thwarted by these norms" (Dattani, "Of Marginalised Men," 3). His liberal concerns apart, Dattani writes plays for the sheer pleasure of expressing himself through this dynamic medium. His work takes on new forms as he continues to deal with serious but "invisible" issues of contemporary Indian society. Actively involved in continuous research, search for resources, and experiments with theme and technique, Dattani's plays have garnered fast-

increasing audience and have been securing more and more critical attention with the passing of time.

Critical approaches to Dattani exist chiefly in the form of book reviews. “Complex Seeing: A Glimpse of Modern Indian Drama” (1995) by Mario Relich gives just an overview of modern Indian drama in English, welcoming Dattani in the process as a dramatist of “world stature”. Sara Adhikari’s “Stage of Transition” (1995) provides an account of the ordeals Indian English playwrights usually face for choosing English as the medium of expression, and how Dattani meets the challenge most successfully. C. K. Meena, in her “Unmasking the Middle Class: The Drama of Mahesh Dattani” (a 1999 review), shows how Dattani theatrically exposes the hypocrisy of the Indian middle class. Alka Tyagi’s 2000 review of the *Collected Plays of Dattani* sums up the plays thematically. The book length study of Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri, *Contemporary Indian Writers in English: Mahesh Dattani*, evaluates Dattani as a complete artist in his various roles and approaches both his plays and screenplays from various perspectives.

Vivek Benegal, in his “Psychological Playgrounds” (1994), a review of *Final Solutions and Other Plays*, explores how the plays of Dattani bring out the psychological conditions motivating the behaviour of his characters and thus unveil the different layers of their mental life. Kasturi Kanthan’s “The Strongest Fragrance” (a 1995 review of *Final Solutions and Other Plays*) analyzes how the family in Dattani’s plays becomes a site of contest for power and resistance. Kusum Haider, in “Essentially a Comic Muse” (a 1998 review of *Tara and Final Solutions*), looks into the form/structure of the Dattani plays, with an accent on his dramaturgy. Samipendra Banerjee discusses in his article “History

Through Modernity: an Analysis of Final Solutions” how history, represented to serve the interest of certain groups, becomes the architect of destructive present and the individual gets enmeshed in mass identity with reference to the Dattani play. Ketaki Datta’s “Mahesh Dattani’s Final Solutions: A Reconsideration” records how Dattani could be placed in the literary tradition which situates communalism as a faceless violence on civilization. While R. Manjushree in her article, “Political Exploitation through Communalism in Mahesh Dattani’s *Final Solutions*,” concentrates on the colonial legacy of the policy of divide and rule in modern Indian scenario explored in the play, Sanjeev Kumar analyzes how subalternity gets unfixed with the change in the status of majority and minority in his chapter “Spivak, Subalternity and Mahesh Dattani’s *Final Solutions*,” and Pinaki Roy in his “Mahesh Dattani’s *Final Solutions*: A Brief Rereading” draws our attention to the manifestation of the venom of communalism in the play. We are confronted with a sustained theoretically informed approach to the issue of communalism and its contextualization both in Indian history (modern) and global arena of racism in the article by Ashis Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion, Nation and Violence: *Incident at Vichy* and *Final Solutions*”.

Indranee Ghosh’s article “Dattani and the Drama of the ‘Babalog’: A View of *Bravely Fought the Queen* as Theatre” discusses the dissociation of form and content in the play *Bravely Fought the Queen* and both the privilege and problem (having almost no peer to be compared with) Dattani enjoys for writing in the very little explored area of Indian English theatre. Anindya Sen focuses on the subtle ironic tension between the apparently projected reality of the same play in terms of characters’ success/failure and the author’s own stance complicating the whole process of “seeing” in “The Ironic Gaze:

A Reading of Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen*." Angelie Multani's "On Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man: The Politics of Production and Performance*" interrogates fixed gender categories in relation to the production of plays. Indranee Ghosh's observations on "Form and Content in Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man*" chiefly deals with the set up of a semi-feudal, semi-capitalist social structure in which characters change places at any possibility of alternation. Shiv Kumar's "Child Abuse and Its Psychological repercussion in Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days in September*" analyzes the post-traumatic stress disorder syndrome and their damaging impact on the characters of the play. Bishwanath Bite in his article "Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days in September: A Critical Study*" focuses how by opening the discourse on incest in the play Dattani provides observations on the social aspect of the issue of child sexual abuse. The outline of the literature on Mahesh Dattani makes it amply evident that it has left a pretty large critically potential area unexplored. Curiously enough, there are very limited number of books and published dissertations on the playwright. And most of the reviews focus on a single play or offer an overview/preview of the work under discussion. Most importantly, the critical materials I have come across so far, demonstrate poor inclination to offer a sustained critical evaluation of the major themes and issues broached in the plays and their inter-connectivity from contemporary theoretical perspectives. Hence my humble attempt will be directed towards a full-length study of Dattani's plays which deserve more critical attention and situate them in a continuous process of evolution and within a potential critical framework. In choosing the theme of my proposed work I relied on what appeared to me to be the thematic crux of the Dattani plays; yet I was no less influenced by the conversation between Dattani and Erin. B. Mee, published as "Mahesh Dattani:

‘Invisible Issues’” in *Performance Art Journal* (1996). Much valuable have been the insights provided by the book *Contemporary Indian Writers in English: Mahesh Dattani* by Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri. Moreover, in favour of my strong inclination towards the thematic issues of Dattani’s plays I may also add, to put it comprehensively in the words of Sengupta, that “Where theatre’s representational, rather than presentational, status is concerned , its relationship with social and historical reality becomes most important ...” (Sengupta, 12). And in a complex world like ours, the theatre can hardly work on the “principle of Aristotelian catharsis”, and very aptly, Dattani’s plays “leave the audience perturbed and destabilized so that the impressions they carry along beyond the performance space linger long enough to affect their lives and action” (Sengupta, 16).

## **Culture**

“Each society has its own regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth” (Foucault, quoted in Champagne, 95). The act of writing in a country like India with its amazing multiplicity of cultures with their own, to borrow words of Sengupta, “aesthetics” and “politics of truth-making” (Sengupta, 13) poses a great challenge since India has emerged as a concept far beyond its geographical boundary defying both the “Western imagining” of it as “an exotic land” or a “sheer backward region of illiteracy and poverty” (Sengupta, 1). Dattani’s enterprise becomes all the more daring as he takes up issues either marginalized as a form of deviation from the matrix of normality as constituted by the belief systems/cultural practices of the majority or kept under the layers of secrecy through a conspiracy of silence and denial. His plays contain a social and political statement that problematizes what has been almost unquestioningly accepted as the “Indian tradition.”

No culture is monolithic, as Dattani rightly observes, “In a plural society such as ours, which is culturally as diverse as European continent, and a civilization as ancient as the world, it is very difficult to define what is quintessentially Indian” (“Contemporary Indian Theatre and Its Relevance”, 2). What Sengupta observed about South Asia could well suit the description of India itself – this is “a volatile region embroiled in the ‘twin dialectics’ of nation and state, centre and region, region and community, secularism and religious extremism, neoliberalism and the fading idea of welfare state” (Sengupta, 1). Indian culture has embraced manifold differences within its corpus. More than 4500 cultural communities exist here with their actual or potential differences. The mingling of interregional traits of language and behavior, a phenomenal growth in bilingualism and proliferation of electronic mass media – all have contributed positively to accelerate mutual reciprocity. But unfortunately the colonial strategy/legacy and the industrial economy that activated the rigorous homogenization during the British rule have unfortunately been supplemented by neo-colonial forces which attempt to reduce Indian “tradition” into a singular identity. The entertainment revolution has converted culture into commodity, which requires homogenization of both consumer products and market processes even in the arena of cultural symbols, styles and behavioral pattern (Singh, 31-8). Consequently, a tension builds up between the anxiety to preserve the peculiar communitarian/regional inheritance and the threat of overarching nationalization and globalization. Culturally sensitive persons have been active to deconstruct the monolith. Dattani’s plays, by seeking to bring upon the stage several contemporary issues, have affirmed the multiplicity of India at social and cultural levels. From this point of view, his plays might be said to be an arena of, to put it in Gramsci's words, “the cultural battle that

transforms the popular mentality” by “renovating and making ‘critical’ an already existing activity” (quoted in Champagne, 96).

There are plays by Dattani which seem to ask if we can think of difference/otherness without devaluing it. This is to think of the other/different—in the manner of Rosi Braidotti—not as other-than/different-from, but as a positively other/different entity (Braidotti, 177). The goal here is not to deny difference but to recover it by giving it a substantive content and generating an autonomous entity. However, Dattani has also written plays which rethink difference in terms of an expanded understanding of equality that can simultaneously respect difference. This equality is to be understood not as a universal value because of likeness between subjects, as Rita Felski would argue, but as a notion “that is genuinely open to diversity” (85-86). As the traditional discourse of equality may subsume difference, to borrow phrases from Felski again, the argument for openness to diversity may also exacerbate “the problem of formulating values and norms that can mediate between the claims of competing forms of difference” (87). However, it is possible to accept in principle that there is “no reality-in-itself that can provide ultimate proof of the...value of either difference or similarity” between subjects. Both the construction of commonality and the assertion of difference are, Felski rightly maintains, “political acts, gestures of affiliation and disaffiliation that emphasize some properties and obscure others” (87). It is only in such contingent terms that their value/truth can be assessed. In this light, then, “difference is not a foundation but a relation, not an inherent property but a distinction engendered within a given semiotic framework” (87).

In an interview, the playwright observed: “Our culture is so rich with tradition, and that’s a great advantage and a great disadvantage as well, because . . . we’re living in the present and there are so many challenges facing us . . .” (quoted in Mee 319). “All ‘modern’ exercises of negotiating tradition begin with the realization of a rupture within the tradition,” as Javeed Alam observes, which in turn “implies a notion of crisis” (172). Dattani implies that when tradition refuses or fails to have an ongoing dialogue with itself, which, if conducted over a long period, can alter what Alam calls “its own conceptual terrain[s] as well as those of its people,” it gives birth to a cold and static society (171). By foregrounding many serious but “invisible issues,” as Erin Mee notes, Dattani actually challenges the construction of “Indian” that conveniently ignores whatever deviates from our age-old conceptions of “right” and “normal” (Mee, 319). He dramatizes the tensions of contemporary Indian society, that include “gender troubles,” the stereotyping of gender roles/gender-role identities, destabilization of sexual categories, communal disharmony, the predatory nature of the disablist society, and the like. The central drive of the present thesis is an attempt to appreciate the way “the issues under the rugs” are laid bare and the possibilities of decentering the majority experience as only “authentic” is explored.

### **Family**

Dattani does not work on a grand scale to drive home his objectives; rather he chooses the family as the locus for the working of the issues as they unfold with potential complexity. He chooses the smaller arena of the Indian family to show how power functions at the micro level, to use Foucauldian vocabulary, how “technique of power,

one which pervades everyday life, categorizes individuals, ...and attaches them to their identity, which in brief constitutes individuals as subjects in both senses of the word that is, subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to... (their) own identity by conscience or self-knowledge” (Smart, 135). Every relation, familial or social, is a multilayered phenomenon and a site for control, domination, belonging and security. In fact Dattani shows how the family, contrary to being the shaper of a society, can be an image of the very society -- a product of the value system the society stands for and of the cultural discourse it propagates. Instead of turning the family situation outward, this means turning the social system inward in order to see how individuals and homes are mediated and even constructed by the system of which they are but part and how they in turn are conditioned to perpetuate the so-called Indian tradition. The family is exposed chiefly to be a version of the operation of power on state level rather than a symbolic representation of it as in Rushdie. The policy of preventing hijras and homosexuals from entering into the ambiance of marriage, and by implication, of family, only validates their status of outsider to mainstream in the similar fashion as various state apparatuses, including legal system, media, medical, educational and other institutions perpetuate on microcosmic level the operation of patriarchy, communal intolerance and other marginalizing forces.

Here we come across traditional, joint (fast disintegrating though) Indian patrilineal family unevenly constituted, subjected to a process of constant reconstitution, manifested differentially in the collision of ancient cultural mores and present/emergent realities. Malavika Karlekar remarked, “[I]nequality is embedded in oppressive structures of a family ideology committed to an age and gender hierarchy which is worked out

within a household” (Karlekar, 1742). Several generations are shown caught in the complex fabric of relationships; individuals keep changing roles within the power structure. The plays are powerful subversive re-reading of the popular television serials nursing the hearts of Indian viewers which are nothing but the variants of the “eternal” family saga, with a family at its centre presided by a Babuji (father) and Maji (mother), going through trials and tribulations, followed by the eventual triumph of, to use the blanket term, “Indian tradition”. The present family dramas, however, pose a potential threat to the manipulated patriarchal project of reinforcing the gender stereotype and gender hierarchy. To be specific, Dattani concentrates on the “complicated dynamics of the modern urban family” (Mee, 319). It is chiefly the patriarchal and patrilineal Hindu joint family where all members are expected to unquestioningly ascribe to the autocratic father/mother figure. Any individual voice- especially of women and children – is subsumed by the unwritten laws of family conduct. Any potential rupture is thwarted. The playwright does not venture to present exemplary rebellion or enormous revolution in the life of victims, rather his characters feel or learn to feel the constructed nature of the oppressive mechanism. “The earlier, idealized, Indian view of family harmony, domestic comfort, supportive relationships or nurturing intimacy is somewhat jeopardized in Dattani’s plays” (Kanthan, 32). Critics make an important distinction between the household and family, and maintains that whereas “household is a physical structure, localized and a specific constellation of emotional and economic relationships among its core members,” family is “more amorphous, seen as larger kinship groupings, spread over time and space” (Ghosh, “Contextualizing Domestic Violence: Family, Community, State”, 58). Household is the “operational unit” that “provides the ground,

so to speak, for a working out of family ideologies around specific roles and expectations” (Karlekar, 1742). While familial ideologies remain the same, household structure gets shifted according to emergent social, economic and political changes outside. Hence, woman’s participation in public role may change the structure by destroying the sexual division of labour or win women agency in home, but sometimes it may subject the working women to violence consequent upon the threat to masculinity. New trajectory of aspirations breeds new anxieties and adjustments in patriarchal arrangements. The economic empowerment of women by working or inheritance brings an awareness of the fissures between ideological and material production (subjugated even after being economically equal), makes the oppression visible, and breeds an awareness of the inherent contradiction and opens up the possibility of resistance as well. Extra income by women (sometimes better than male members of the family) necessitates alternate forms of parade of masculinity.

With the extension of globalization, liberalization, privatization and urbanization, the relation of class, caste and community is rearticulated, and since “women’s link with cast and community”, observes Nivedita Menon, “is made through family” (quoted in Ghosh, “Contextualizing Domestic Violence ...”, 61), the form of violence in private and state level gets changed with historicity and the locale. Sangari points out, “[Patriarchies] are simultaneously located in specific modes of production, in class structures and mobility, in particular forms of class-caste status and inequality, and intersected by specific forms of self-identification with custom, tradition or religion” (Sangari, 373). Often Even female body becomes marker of class or community and makes women vulnerable to violence.

Clarifying his position as a deliberate portrayer of middle class, Dattani observed, “[here] writing about the middle class is seen as unfashionable” (quoted in Chadhuri, 24). The upward mobile middleclass, more than 200 million in number -- maintaining a fragile balance between value and disvalue -- forms an appropriate site for the dramatic tension between conflicting emotions and desires. Dattani maintains that his attempt to write about working class people would amount to an outsider’s view since he does actually belong to the middle class and naturally,. ”The setting for all of Dattani’s plays then, is necessarily embedded within the mechanisms of the middle class Indian family, and this is the context from which he operates” (Chaudhuri, 24). His plays expore what lies under the facades which characters and families put on in order to conform to the normative truth, but in the process reveal the essential loneliness...the emotional price they pay for successful appearance in their need to belong and to cope with social vigilance. However, they are not long to maintain the mask: “...their prejudice, hypocrisy, jealousy and sense of deep guilt stand exposed” (Meena, 8).

### **Marriage**

If domesticity is the chosen area of the playwright, he must direct his attention to the institution of marriage, which, in a hetero-patriarchal society, is the foundation stone of the family. Yep held, “As an institution, heterosexuality is rooted in gender hierarchy and manifested through its central mechanism, marriage” (Yep, 29). Then again, to put it in terms of Yep, “Implicit in the marriage contract is men’s appropriation and exploitation of women’s bodies (e.g., sexual, reproductive) and labor (e.g., domestic, emotional)” (quoted in Yep, 29). Hence, the institution of heterosexuality positions man as “sexual

subject” and Woman as “sexual object” (Jackson, quoted in Yep, 29) and defines sex in purely phallogocentric terms. The identities/roles conjectured for women regulate the behavioural and attitudinal choice of both men and women and women are valorized or denigrated according to her conformity to or rebellion against cultural expectations. Marriage is sometimes exposed as a labour contract that ties women in unpaid domestic work commonly trivialized as “housework” (Tyson, 98.) Women are considered non-workers and remain unpaid. What she receives from the man/provider is not in exchange for her work, but as a gift handed out to perpetuate his interest and maintenance of labour power. The wives/mothers in Dattani’s world like Sonal, Dolly, Alka and Aruna are subjected to various forms of direct physical appropriation of their labour which Guillaumin termed *sexage* – such as the appropriation of women’s time, sexual obligation and care for dependent family members and healthy male members (referred to in Tyson, 99).

Marriage has remained a powerful tool by which society maintained and validated a lifestyle based on peaceful and conscientious cohabitation of partners and permanent sexual partnership from time immemorial, but the problem arises when the tough cultural policing of sexuality and sexual practice under the garb of so-called liberalism in modern India valorizes only the\_hetero-sexual intra-religious marriage (based on reproductibility, preferably son) relegating to the margin or expelling other kinds of (nonreproductive) sexual union. Dattani takes issue with the Indian custom of arranged marriage that privileges family prestige over personal choice, subordination of the bride’s family, validation of heterosexual relationship as only “normal”. In the Indian variety of meritocracy the husband and his family top the pyramid, and the bride and the

bride's family occupy the lowest stratum, the relational importance gets complicated if the bride's family holds remarkably greater property and prestige. Sobha Venkatesh Ghosh rightly observes, "in most Indian marriages women enter as strangers into an already structured world, the creation of a permanent inequality in the relationship of the natal and conjugal homes, and over-arching domestic ideologies that legislate gender status and role" (Ghosh, "Contextualizing Domestic Violence ...", 58). In Dattani's plays, however, the bride's family is not presented as merely passive recipient of exploitation, rather, as a part of the patriarchal mechanism, plays its own part in oppression. The woman is regarded as a burden and could be given away in marriage. In *Bravely Fought the Queen* we meet a brother – exploited by the in-laws of his sisters strictly protective of his sisters from "men", marries one to a "letch" and the other to his former gay partner.

Most threatening is the fact, as Hossang Merchant puts it, that: "...most homosexuals get married due to social pressure.... Most adjust to a double life, so do their wives...there is no greater misery in such marriages than in most Indian marriages which are arranged" (Merchant, xvi). His plays are a fair case study of how social intolerance works in the oppression and extermination of any outsiders to the social matrix of marriage. In the feel-good comedy *Do the Needful* Dattani explores how society's hegemonic intolerance forces two rebels (a gay man, already divorced, and a Hindu girl in an affair with a Muslim man) into a marriage contract/compromise ignoring all other considerations (difference in community, educational background, taste, culture etc) under the veneer of liberal cosmopolitanism. The discursive privilege the marriage enjoys is evident from its ubiquitous nature cutting across the cross sections of society,

and even the way it destabilizes the power mechanism based otherwise so effectively on class (the liftman gets upperhand with owner of the flat). However, a class resistance is conceptualized by subverting the tragic potential into something liberating and refreshing – which is a fine strategy of silence -- “Teri bhi chup, meri bhi chup” (*Do the Needful*, 142) (your silence and mine as well). What the plays bring out is not the undesirability of the institution, but these oppressive aspects.

However, in Dattani an absolute freedom from the pressure of tradition, culture or family is hardly conceived as the goal or even a possibility. Rather he tries to forward his argument against the stricture of exclusion and inclusion which so rigorously projects substantial number of people as outsiders like homosexuals and hijras, and also uncovers the thin crust to expose the fractured narrative which exploits its insiders like women and children.

### **Gender**

One of the recurring issues that surfaces in Dattani’s plays is his characters’ struggle to break free from the hetero-patriarchal intolerance of any discontinuity in the regime of gender identity and gender hierarchy in the specific cultural context. Indian society still maintains the centrality of patriarchy and fixity of the gender polarity. The patriarchy reinforces itself by privileging a habit of seeing, a way of looking at life using men’s experience as standard to judge the experience of both sexes and thereby ignoring woman’s take. We meet a set of people programmed to see life with internalized patriarchal norms and values. The plays attempt to exhibit the culture- specific Indian urban variation of the operation though on a deliberately varying screen. We also feel

how the inclusive Indian culture is monolithized by neo-colonial forces in name of reclamation of the discourse of Indian tradition and is used to perpetuate hetero-patriarchy which is nothing but a colonial legacy. As the playwright himself remarked, “You can’t talk about a middle-class housewife fantasizing about having sex with the cook or actually having a sex life – that isn’t Indian either – that’s confrontational even it is Indian” (quoted in Mee, 319).

Hetero-patriarchy is an overarching system of male dominance through the institution of compulsory heterosexuality. Tamsin Wilton (1996) observed: “This heteropolarity is necessary for patriarchy, for it must be possible to distinguish men from women in order to institute and reproduce a power differential that is (precisely) predicated upon that difference” (quoted in Yep, 31). The oppressive hetero-patriarchal power is visible in various ways- validation of women’s oppression by marriage, changing name, restricting movement, stunting aspiration, compelling women to tolerate husbands’ sexual promiscuity, forcing unwilling woman into a marriage, physically assaulting the pregnant wife leading to the birth of a spastic child, tricking the ignorant woman and the gay man into a marriage of convenience, defining woman as a sex object and marketable commodity, exploitation of child’s need for love for sexual gratification turning her into either frozen (like Shanta) or promiscuous (like Mala) -- both categories detested by patriarchy -- and so on. Stories of Baa, Daksha, Dolly and Kiran provide further evidence. The double standard applied to women as wife and mistress, as well as the slippery morality allowed for men is dealt with explicitly.

Steven Seidman and Kath Weston observed, “For centuries, the biological act of reproduction has been, and continues to be, a ‘defining feature’ of kinship and families” (quoted in Elia, “Queering Relationships”, 64). In a hetero-patriarchal society, reproduction becomes the axis around which evolves the binary of men and women. Hasmukh Mehta realizes: “I think the important reason anyone should marry at all is to get a son ...Because the son will carry on the family name?” (*Where There’s A Will*, 475) Following an inevitable logic the absence of reproduction is conceived in terms of the woman’s inability, and Uma continues to see the doctor though he finds nothing wrong with her and suggests a check up for her husband.

The ideological contingency of patriarchal arrangement is the cooption of women in its network, and possession of their consent in their own subjugation. Patriarchy ceases to be a one-way traffic of male domination over women through the internalization of its norms by its victim-turned-agent. As family becomes the site for struggle over power and resources, the perpetrators of violence find women allies and secure their complicity and active participation in inflicting abuse on other female members. Women members are inserted in hierarchy based on marriage, maternal status, age, ranking among daughters-in-law and so on. This differential access to power and resource leads to re-division of household works, antagonism between relations and “re-entrenchment of patriarchy” as the more privileged women become or act as “surrogate or violent agent” (Ghosh, “Contextualizing Domestic Violence...” 58) of male hegemony and control. Women are also incorporated into the patriarchal narrative: mother in law instigates her son to hurt his wife; the wife colludes with the father-in-law to destroy the career of her dancer husband to make him a man. Most telling is the way the mother

becomes an accomplice to deprive the girl by grafting the third leg of the Siamese twin onto the boy, while his twin sister had the better claim. The possibility of women collectivity remains unrealized and, even in the non-nuclear families, women members feel isolated. Natal families show reluctance either to intervene in the sanctity of marriage or take the responsibility of the woman. Patriarchy also operates through the constant pressure exerted to repress what it conceives as feminine within a man and denigration of rebels.

Gender also works in the world of profession and vocation. As Kumkum Sangari rightly observes, “[I]n practice, the public and private not only interpenetrate, but are produced together in varied and often systematic ways connected by condensation and displacement ...” (Sangari, 367). The father (Patel) sharply reacts against his son’s (Chandan) helping his mother with her knitting, but bothers little – though very much concerned about Tara’s health -- about his daughter’s career who might have proved smarter in the work world. The transgressive act of taking up dance as a career by a man poses a major threat to the gender ideology and every measure is taken to deskill him in the woman’s art.

Dattani’s preoccupation with gender question, to quote the playwright himself, has much “to do with my own comfort with both the feminine and the masculine self in me” (“Of Page and Stage”, 32). He also adds “since I have the male self, which is equipped to fight as well, it is a proportionate battle. The feminine self is not a victim in my plays. It’s subsumed, Yes, it is marginalized, but it fights back” (“Of Page and Stage”, 34). He is contemptuous of traditional mother figures and de-stereotypes the

images in characters like Bah, Aruna, Prema Gowda, Sonal and Bharati; and creates “calculated troubleshooter” like Ratna (Chaudhuri, 48). However, the playwright also states, “I don’t mean to say that this is a definitive view of life. But several of the images that we carry in our mind are politically generated images and we accept them to be as true... My characters are simply a personification of my perception” (Nair, 2001).

Dattani’s family dramas present gender stereotypes, but only with a view to exploding them. While his plays are revelations of the endemic and pervasive realities in women’s life of being victim of domestic violence, to borrow the words of Rinki Bhattacharya, “they are sagas of immense courage that challenge accepted cultural ideals of womanhood and question conforming to female destiny” (Bhattacharya, 13). Besides, they expose the politics of power that lurks beneath patriarchal constructions of fixed gender identities/roles and proliferation of the hyperbolic versions of “man” and “woman.” Dattani’s work shows quite interestingly how the policing of gender can be equally damaging to men and women at both domestic and social levels. The question of gender identity has been developed in some of his plays into the more crucial issue of sexual identity, dealing with the travails of the gays and transsexuals who do neither belong to the family nor to society. However, there is still a sense of the family—a family, if you will, of sexual deviants—loving and betraying one another in a hetero-patriarchal society and at times revolting against it. The individual in Dattani therefore largely suffers as a consequence of an oppressive cultural ideology, which, with all its prejudice and duplicity, determines the moral fabric of the family.

With a view to building a gender-just society, for last decades, domestic violence has been at the forefront of various feminist movements. The world conferences on woman organized by United Nations first held in Mexico 1975, and especially in Vienna conference 1993 on human rights, woman's rights are recognized as basic human rights and violation is defined as the violation of fundamental human rights. The theory of Family Violence gradually gave way to the theory of Violence Against Women, and brought domestic violence out of private sphere to violation of woman's basic human right to equality, security, liberty, integrity and dignity (Adelman, 196). It also marked a paradigm shift with the introduction of a new concept of human rights itself. The state responsibility and accountability in the case of Domestic Violence ensued a process of gendering of human rights, and whereas previously the territory of human rights violation was limited within the relation between government and individual, now onward the state is directed to control and regulate the relations between individuals and family members as well.

In India, the New woman's movement taking its shape in 1980s, took up the issue of violence against women ensued from asymmetry of gender, legal bias and lack of women's citizenship rights and mainly centered round incidents of violence against women, with special emphasis on the protest against custodial rapes, dowry murders, suttee, procurement of minor for prostitution etc (Ghosh, "Contextualizing Domestic Violence...", 51). Though the movements offered a message of the political awakening among women, as Flavia Agnes argued, "placing dowry violence on a pedestal" in their movement, Indian feminists got incorporated into conservative agency of counting gender violence more as exceptionalism than as the defining context of woman's life

(Agnes, 109-10). In 1983 and 1986 criminal laws were amended to include the “cruelty to wife” under the impasse of law, but the term remains rather clumsy and therefore difficult to explain and easy to circumvent. “Cruelty” was defined as any act resulting in “grave injury or danger to life, limb or death” (Ghosh, “Contextualizing Domestic Violence... ” 52), leaving out of its ambit other non-physical forms of violence. Moreover, with its excessive stress on dowry, police and legal system showed reluctance to register the offence unless it is appended on dowry demand.

After the 1990s domestic violence began to be seen as an endemic and pervasive reality in woman’s life and violation of her fundamental rights. Then onward the paradigm shifted in consonance with the international laws and regulations regarding violence against women. The LCWRI’s (Lawyers’ Collective Women’s Rights Initiative) definition of Domestic Violence encompasses “any act, omission or conduct which is of such a nature as to harm or injure or has the potential of harming or injuring the health, safety or well-being of the person aggrieved or any child in the domestic relationship and includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, and verbal and mental abuse and economic abuse” (quoted in Ghosh, “Contextualizing Domestic Violence... ”, 52). The form of Domestic violence of course varies with the material, cultural and ideological context, geographical locale, and social structure. The 2001 bill against domestic violence moved by the Government of India was rejected by different feminist groups on the ground of its overwhelming prioritization of welfare of family over the wellbeing of the woman. It held that, in order to be counted as a legal offense, the violence should be the habitual assault, cruelty of conduct, forcing women to live “immoral” life or otherwise “harm[ing] or injur[ing]” the aggrieved, and when it is not done for “his own protection or

protection of his or another's property" (quoted in Ghosh, 54), thus giving the perpetrator greater opportunity of self-defense than the victim of redress. No mention of child custody, right over matrimonial property and right to continue in marital home was made, in effect, compelling women to live in abusive environment for economic vulnerability, fear of losing children, lack of support outside home and family structure.

Various patriarchal state apparatuses were activated to resist the perspectival shift. The discourse of Indian culture "Bharatiya sanskriti" was forwarded to justify the sanctity of family and preservation of marriage. The structure of normative "family" and notional "Indian woman" were accorded dignity and honour which necessitates the disempowerment of women. The majoritarian state policy interprets Hindu as Indian which valorizes a specific version of womanhood, and thus keeps other women beyond its ambit (Ghosh, "Contextualizing Domestic Violence..." ,55). The state policy of co-opting women in its ideological rubric is attempted to be realized by assigning women public role and giving agency in a structure basically patriarchal. The problem lies in the fact, even if the state is recognized as a "stabilizer of patriarchy and class interest", it is still regarded as the "guarantor of rights and entitlements to its citizens" (Adelman, 197).

Dattani touches upon this very contemporary and burning issue of domestic violence in some of his plays. Kiran is compelled to live in a severely abusive atmosphere where she was a victim of the "habitual" violence of her husband first interpreting it as his way of showing care and then due to an inability to convince her parents of the impossibility of continuing in the holy bonding. Both Kiran and Baa recount the same story of either hiding their scars and thus preferring to be hurt in covered body surfaces or

explaining it away as to the consequence of an accidental fall. Even the legal system grants the perpetrator of violence an easy bail. Dolly is beaten up in her pregnancy leading to the birth of a spastic child. Most importantly, Dattani does not try to offer any reason/justification for such acts and presents them in black and white.

Dattani consciously avoids what Lois Tyson termed “ oversimplified, negative view of feminism that still persists in...culture at large-the home, the work place, the media, and so on ” (Tyson, 82). He de-stereotypes both the image of “real” man – essentially hetero-sexual, rational, assertive, decisive, protective/patronizing, autonomous, and self-sufficient and fund provider and that of women – compulsorily hetero-sexual, irrational, submissive, incoherent, nurturing, contingent, relational and economically dependent. Men are exposed to use aggression only to block their unmanly fear and pain, and women fantasize (the utopia transgressing both class and gender ethos) sexual liaison, and contrary to expected concealment, announce it to answer back to their husband’s promiscuity.

### **Child Abuse**

The endorsement of women’s lib in India initiated the process of ‘breaking the silence’ about some of the issues wrapped in secrecy for centuries regarding women’s experience, and with the acknowledgement of the existence of child sexual abuse in our society, got exposed “family’s best-preserved skeletons from the ‘khandaani closets’” (Virani, 46). Every society has its own arbitrary criteria of defining the border between silence and speech into which experience is divided. Patriarchy maintains its centrality in both ways - -first by its eloquence in condemning incestuous women and by implication, subjugating

them to the privileged role of angel in the house, and, secondly, by its silence about men's role in creating such deviants. If the promiscuity of adult could be safely deposited into account of the "bad" women, the child sexual abuse remains, by definition/implication, beyond the boundary of language/speech. The extent of society's denial to accept the fact could well be gauged the way Freud was compelled to replace his observation about bitter childhood sexual abuse being the root cause of most cases of women hysteria with that of Electra complex. In the same manner, Sandor Ferenczi (for his insight into CSA), John Caffey (findings of internal injury of children due to sexual abuse) and others were shouted down. It is only with the publication of Henry Kempe's *The Battered Child Syndrome* in 1962, the phenomenon got accepted as an "in-family evil" (referred to in Virani, 44). However, the victims still continued to face denial and strategic minimization of the abuse. (In India doctors continue their indifference and denial either by avoiding any investigation in the matter or terminologizing them with other medical jargons.

Child sexual abuse encompasses acts like the adult exposing his own or touching the child's genitalia or vice versa; involving children in pornography; having oral, anal or vaginal intercourse with children; making any kind of sexual suggestion; engaging children in sexual activities among themselves; and inserting any foreign object in child's body for his/her sexual pleasure (Virani, 6). According to Driver and Erosion, the definition of child sexual abuse refers to "any sexual behaviour directed to a person under sixteen of age without that person's informed consent", (quoted in Virani, 7).

Indian parents detecting the fact (in most cases the child guards the shameful secret or is either hushed up or denied credibility), concentrates on the physical aspects and social standing -- the emotional feelings being locked up. As the child grows up, s/he displays long-term “sleeper effect[s]”: mental health problem (anxiety, phobia, depression, suicide, addiction,), sexual traumatization (propensity towards sexual feelings and attitude leading to developmentally inappropriate and interpersonally dysfunctional relation, promiscuity, aversion to sex, confusion of sex with love and care showing, re-victimization), inappropriate parenting skill (over-protectiveness, fertility control, abusing own children in sexual or non-sexual way), stigmatization (negative and shameful self-image), social dysfunction (delinquency, criminal behaviour, violence against self or other, victim role), the feelings of powerlessness (curving of the child’s desire and sense of efficacy making him anxious, inefficient and escapist, eating and sleeping disorder, disassociation, employment problem), sense of betrayal (loss of faith on near ones, vulnerability to re-victimization, discomfoting intimate relationship, marital disharmony, ) etc (Virani, 64-6). Most importantly, the act remains outside the ambit of legal sanction due to lack of evidence, and no law can save an adult from his/her childhood abuser.

The issue of child sexual abuse is set in a larger frame of patriarchal power play by Dattani. Since the hetero-patriarchal framework of ethics dumps shame and sin on victim rather than the perpetrator, the child becomes a survivor of sexual trauma through developing defensive strategies to protect his or her inner core like repression, denial, detachment and dissociation and even denial of access to memory of sexual abuse. Virani observed, “The cycle continues, wheels within wheels, spokes of shame being added each

time the child recalls the sexual abuse and the sense of powerlessness” (Virani, 65). The “survivor cycle” which the victims undergo serves the interest of patriarchy: “confusion” about own identity (child’s inability to stop the thing which s/he does not like, confusion about what is actually happening and to whom to turn to, doubt about its moral status), self-estrangement (counting oneself as bad, abnormal, unwanted), sadism (hiding/protecting the “real” me from being exposed, aggravation of torture by confirmed silence), entrapment in sense of guilt (shifting responsibility onto oneself for allowing, attempt to seal the secret, confinement within the cave of “It is My fault), negative image of self and isolation (sense of being lone sufferer and deserving for being extra-ordinarily mean). In this regard we may quote the observation by Dr. Rani Raute, “women who have survived in dysfunctional relationships, tend to react negatively when they enter a functional one. They may even try and spoil it for themselves with some kind of psychobabble” (quoted in Virani, 198). When the child is emotionally, physically and financially dependent on the abuser, the sense of helplessness and betrayal and need for secrecy put huge pressure on the victim. The child gets silenced, and as Pinky Virani observes, “Ethics, thus, is what society can use as its framework of values and with which it can justify ‘interference’ in the private life of the perpetrator and his victims” (Virani, 43). Patriarchy thus ensures its centrality by detesting the frozen and promiscuous women – both unable to satisfy the patriarchal demand- and when exposed to be its author, tries to absolve itself by a simple formula of “she made me do it”.

*Thirty Days in September*, to put it in words of Anuja Gupta and Aswini Ilawadi, “is part of RAHI’s effort to turn incest/child sexual abuse from a private issue to a public one and help women survivors come into recovery” (Gupta and Ilawadi, Foreword, IX).

The artistic contribution forwarded by the playwright thus serves the vital purpose of “breaking the silence and myth surrounding the perpetrators, victims and survivors in our society” (Gupta and Ilawadi, “Foreword”, IX). By situating the play in an upper middleclass family, he also shattered the defensive myth – to put in Virani’s term – “...what happens among People Like Them, specially People Like That (Plat), does not touch, and therefore should not concern, People Like Us (Plus)” (Virani, 12). It was part of Dattani’s conscious design -- “I chose this setting because I did not want them to dismiss sexual abuse as something that does not happen to people like them” (quoted in Bite, 7). The six year old Shanta and seven year old Mala abused by their brother and uncle (the same person), justify what Syeeda Hameed in her opening address to the seminar “Recognizing Violence Against Children in the Private Sphere” said, “It can be a myth that home is the safest place for children” (quoted in Virani, 14). In the same seminar Kiran Bedi observed, “the victim cuts across all categories of class, caste, religion and educational background; the offender belongs to no particular age group” (Quoted in Virani, 15). Hence most cases of CSA are categorized as “invisible crime”, to put it in police terminology, and this is “a denied social syndrome and we can do nothing. We can only deal with evidence” (Quoted in Virani, 18). Dattani’s is an attempt to break into the cultural reticence and provide the absent language that may reverse the strategy of transferring the loss of ‘honour’ from the victim’s part on to the perpetrators.

### **Hijra community**

In the course of “uncovering some of the hidden India” (Mortimer, “A note”, 4) Dattani explores an area outside the ambit of social relation, a periphery which hijras are pushed into by the highly gendered and sexist society that fails to define them in terms of social relations. However, as Kira Hall observes, “Marginalized both socially and spatially, the hijras have created an elaborate network that spans all of India, establishing a divergent social space that both parallels and opposes organizations of gender in the dichotomous system that excludes them” (Hall, 429). They are institutionalized as third sex and are identified by a flamboyant and subversive semiotic system distinguished by the unique choices of dress, gesture and discourse. The hijra identity is enmeshed in an extremely complicated network of performative markers (sartorial, sexual and presentational) than mere anatomical – It is not merely the penetration which determines the koti-panti discourse, but the body is located in multiplicity of disciplines and difference, which include economy, religion, class, cast, the language choice, behavioural pattern (whether completely feminine or superficial) and others problematizing each other (sometime they call themselves musulmans for circumcision and some times for marrying a Muslim panti). The presence of the concept of third sex and other varieties of sexuality in the narrative of Indian consciousness is evident from the abundance of transgender desire, stories of same sex procreation and other non-normative fantasies in mythological, folk-lore, Vedic and Puranic literature.

Ancient, medieval and colonial (still powerfully prevalent in postcolonial India) narratives, specially literature, represent the hijra people through society’s own ideological agenda and framing premises, while the objects of representation themselves remain silent. The pan-Indian acceptance of the third-ness of sexuality in ancient time is

evident in the convention of dividing humanity into three sexual categories -- man, woman and napumsaka -- depending on presence and absence of certain physical features, procreative ability and the differentiation between material or physical (dravyalinga) and psychic sex (bhavalinga) (Zwilling and Sweet, 365). They were often called “Kliba”, the signification of the term ranged from eunuch, sterile or impotent man, and man having oral or anal sex with man, transvestite, hermaphrodite to man giving birth to female children alone. In Islamic medieval India the focus was shifted on to the eunuchs (“khoja” or emasculated man) in their important courtly and imperial role as political adviser and administrator, religious figure and slave -- specially recruited as protector of the female domain. Their social and embodied difference -- both for many of them being imported from outside the boundary of the state and for the inability to perpetuate the lineage -- stereotyped them as clever, strong and loyal servants in a world of nepotism and shifting loyalty.

With increasing colonial intervention, gendered, sexist and racist principles got functional: European travelers tried to explain their high status in oriental imperial and religious sector by referring to the not-man aspect availing them to handle women without impropriety, and thus, sexualized the role of eunuchs. They could not understand or appreciate the sentiment of veneration of these “ugly brutes”, and their narrative of gendered sexuality replaced slave discourse with sexualized love. Colonial narrative, however, repudiated their slave or third sex status and projected hijras as one of the castes or tribes stratified by gender and religion. The Criminal Tribe Act of 1871 officially included the caste in the list of criminal tribes, compulsorily under registration, surveillance and control. Citizens were encoded in gendered sexuality and all the

previous discourses of active and passive sexuality that were accorded free and slave status were uniformly reinterpreted as masculine and feminine or natural and unnatural propensities. This secularization of the discourse on the eunuchs resulted in epistemic shift of understanding of “homoeroticism, social hierarchy and embodied difference” (Reddy, 25-8). Male impotence was categorized as the defining feature of eunuchs: cross-dressing and performances like dancing of men in public places were prohibited; laws were passed criminalizing their body and proscribing their labour -- sexual or asexual work/occupation. The knowledge legitimized the moral condemnation and subjugation of the criminal castes by which these bodies must be servile, regulated and control, in effect, made docile Reddy, 25-30).

Indian culture had found a very Indian way to “...validate a positive identity for hijras by identifying their alternative gender role with deities and mythic figures of the Great Tradition of Hinduism” (Nanda, 13). Apart from their social prestige derived from their position in Muslim court, Hinduism invests the impotent hijras with the paradoxical power of generating fertility. “The two events in mainstream Hindu culture where their presence is acceptable [are] – marriage and birth – ironically the very same privileges denied to them by man and nature” (“Seven Steps...” 10-11). In India, Sadhir Kakkar observes “...the subordination of the individual to the super ordinate family interest and relationships is a preeminent value” (Kakar, 124). Hence in an Indian mode, the hijra people try to situate their identity in relational and social context and position themselves in the discourse of marriage. Of course the “Baddhai” hijras, ideally leading ascetic life, are of greater honour, but the concept of marriage between a “koti” (female) and “panti”

(male) and even of “kanda” hijra as sex workers are equally prevalent. *Kamasutra*’s mention of the figure of “sukumarika” appeared in ancient Indian literature.

But the hegemonic allegiance to the sexual dualism in the sexist society of modern India, which dominated with neo-colonial forces in order to enjoy its discursive privilege, tends to oppress the erotic aspect to the point of immorality and unnaturalness. Yet the sexual arousal and sexual appeal of the outcasts to the mainstream led to sexual intimacy between the hijras and so-called “normal” man. In this case, either the non-normative practice is kept under secrecy or the minority is cast out and even exterminated. On the other hand, the increasing regularizing of secular temperament corresponds to the weakening of the mythical sanction of their role as ritual performers leading to the decline of their ascetic importance.

The hetero-patriarchal society feels it disturbing to allow the hijras the sexual role which is not only threatening to the male identity but is transgressive to the feminine image since their mimicry of the image, to follow Homi Bhaba, is at once a resemblance and menace. The ideals subscribed to and the practices deployed to enact the gender role as well as the repeated political claim clearly mark the hijra people’s identification with female sex. To look like woman is highly valued and cherished, but it is not an unproblematic imitation of the role. Their loud clap announces their difference and allegiance to the category, and signals destructive potential -- social, symbolic and physical. In fact, as Kira Hall observes, “By employing what some Indian sociologists have named as *lil e-uarh dviarthi bhasa* ‘obscene and double-meaning language’, the hijras are able to assume a position of control in their interactions with the public,

inviting their non-hijra listeners to enter a linguistic space that questions dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality” (Hall, , 432). Their sexual ambiguity perhaps gets reflected in their linguistic ambiguity from historical period. Niccolao Manucci, an Italian physician traveler in mid 16<sup>th</sup> century, thought they were friendly to women and inimical to men owing to the jealousy for what they were deprived of (Hall, 432). The European travel reports of the court eunuch frequently highlight the verbal insolence with physical cruelty, vulgar language and oral abomination. In the modern period, their speech style may be described as symptomatic of gender disphoria -- different from women by lewd jokes, obscene and aggressive style, and from men by penchant for gossip and excessive chatter (Hall, 436-7). Traditional Indian prejudice accords their speech a negative performativity since they can stop lineage with curse/utterance of omen by virtue of their own impotence. Hall further adds, “The Hindi-speaking hijras I spoke with in Banaras see their use of verbal insult not as a logical consequence of a self-motivated withdrawal from society but as a necessary survival technique in a society that enforces their marginalization” (Hall, 442). Being denied access to the “normal” epistemic standard, like disabled people, the term “hijra” is often used metaphorically to point out the ineffectiveness of the referent by writers like Hindi poet Ved Prakash Vatuk, Khushwant Singh and others. The hijras live without “sharm” (shame), propriety associated with class, caste and gender. G. Morris Carstairs notes that the hijras he worked with "had the security of knowing that they had no vestige of dignity or social position to maintain; and their shamelessness made people reluctant to provoke their obscene retaliation in public" (quoted in Hall, 445). They often use abuse to fight marginalization, to strengthen solidarity and reclaim “izzat” (respect). The hijras’ constant reference to the secret male

body parts and implied prostitution shamelessly collapses traditional divisions of the secret and the known, private and public, home and market, feminine and masculine (Hall, 447-48). Interestingly, they avoid “mardana gall” (Hall, 450), manly abuse, which includes violence against women to settle the anxiety to show masculinity. Moreover, to quote Hall again, “the hijras have a kind of between-sex status in contemporary India, their very existence serves as a theoretical challenge to previous characterizations of women's speech and men's speech as discursive styles indexically derived from the sex of the speaker” (Hall 452). Their enactment and production of the gender identity both reflect their yearning for femininity and at the same time parody the gender role by the very attempt at imitation. Thus they embody a potential ambivalence in India’s cultural universe.

Apart from the threat to normative body, the sexual discourse of Hijra people disturbs the normative structure in another way: their sexual cartography differentiates gender depending on sexual or gender performativity rather than anatomy. Centered on penetration in sexual intercourse, *pantis* refer to the penetrative masculine men and *kotis* to the receptive feminized men as well as *narans* i.e. all women. It also refers to the complexity and specificity of the configuration of gender identity that varies with the spatial, temporal and life/history positioning and could be contested, negotiated and reconstructed. In fact, the cartographic understanding which positioned their self-definition against the *koti-panti* spectrum, challenges the hermeneutical theorization of gender difference by showing the embeddedness of sexual difference in other differences and problematizes the construct of hijras as personification of third sex (Reddy, 74-7). In a research among transvestites in Salvador Brazil, Kulick observed that they have

changed the “man/ woman schema into man/not-man” -- penetrator and recipient (Kulick, 579).

Yet the fact remains, with the decline of their traditional role the hijras have become a butt of sexual exploitation and are being engaged in criminal activities. Only secrecy permits the practices to slip through the moral net. But the complicity arises, as Dattani shows in his play *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, when Subbu, a ‘normal man’ attempts to acknowledge his relationship with a hijra publicly, through marriage. The young, beautiful hijra, Kamla, is burnt down.

### **Sexuality**

A question is asked in one of Dattani’s plays, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, and is reiterated through most of his work --“What Makes a Man a Man?” (*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, 55) Judith Butler once observed that despite the production of normalized subject by the disciplinary society and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain, “the distinction between sex and gender comes to seem increasingly unstable”, “a free floating artifice” (Butler, 6). She farther argued that our gendered/sexed body has “no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (Butler, 136). The construction of coherence only conceals the gender discontinuities Mahesh Dattani is the first dramatist in India to bring the issue of homosexuality on stage and he does it with a boldness which is really quite ahead of his time.

Foucault claimed, “...sexuality, far from being a natural force repressed by the imposition of power in the interests of social order, was deployed through various micro-

political processes” (quoted in Wilton, 516). The sexual stratification system socially privileges heterosexuality which enjoys social legitimacy, juridical-administrative recognition, symbolic esteem and moral/ethico-cultural validity. “Heterosexuality is not an independent and stable master category but rather, a subservient and unstable construct in need of constant affirmation and protection” (Yep, 12). This is a very powerful process of othering which creates categories that are attached lesser importance, deemed as less consequential, less authorized, and often recognized to be less human – a process which creates categories based on gender, race, class, sexuality and even ability. The process of normalizing of hegemonic heterosexuality presents itself as an area of knowledge foreclosed to analysis which is to be accepted uncritically. In fact, “Heterosexuality is not merely sexual; it is social” (Yep, 28); heterosexuality pervades our life as an institution, as identity, as practice and as experience. Even after cornering homosexuality as illegal, irreligious, un/anti-social, unnatural, abnormal and immoral, heterosexuality cannot absolve itself from the anxiety of losing identity: “heterosexuality secures its self-identity and shores up its ontological boundaries by protecting itself from what it sees as the continual predatory encroachment of its contaminated other, homosexuality” (Fuss, quoted in Yep, 12). The destabilizing potential of gender structure of the discourse is perhaps the most threatening to the hetero-patriarchy. Moreover, hetero-polarity becomes the essential instrument for patriarchy to perpetuate the power differential.

In ancient India variation of sexual configuration was venerated and tolerated, recognized under cover of stories of circumlocution. Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, in their book *Same Sex Love in India: Reading From Literature and History*, record that

before the 19<sup>th</sup> century such relations were not actively persecuted despite disapproval. Different circumstances- occupational, cultural, religious- leading to extreme sexual segregation in single sex institutions, obsession with mother image as well as misogyny had ever encouraged condoned same sex love. However, in modern India, observes Suparna Bhaskaran, “Heteropatriarchal ideologies of shame and duty coupled with cultural and structural violence continued to be powerfully articulated by the post and neo- colonial forces of homophobia” (Bhaskaran, 27). Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code reads: “Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.” (quoted in Bhaskaran,, 15) The postcolonial nationalists’ responses to non-normative sexuality have defined a colonial sexual code as “Indian tradition”, and posited the advocacy of civil right of homosexuals as elitist mimicry of the west. Thus, legal bias legitimates exploitation of the myrmidons of law; psychiatrists level it as gender identity disorder, and medical science finds homosexuals as carrier of HIV. Putting the practice under moral scanner, hetero-patriarchy prevents the practitioners from entering the ambit of civil rights like marriage, adopting children, inheriting parent’s property, and protest against discrimination and so on. Consequently, most of them suffer from humiliation, sense of guilt and alienation leading ego alien homosexuals to commit suicide. The distorted and derogatory representation of such relations in movies like *Girlfriend*, *Masti* and *Kal Ho Na Ho* makes the case worse for the ostracized minority.

However, at last increasing social visibility through sharing public places, mushrooming queer organizations, proliferation of help lines, recent legalization of such relation under French law at Goa, marches and other organized protests are helping homosexuals to come out of their cloistered existence. In addition to these factors, as Anjali Arondekar puts it, “The transnationalism has emerged as a heuristic modality with endless promise, creating connecting conversations across a diverse and previously segregated range of spatialities and temporalities” (Arondekar, 114). In 2001, NAZ Foundation in collaboration with a progressive legal-reform group filed a petition against the Government seeking to declare the section as violation of some of the fundamental rights of Indian citizens like equality (Article 14), the right to freedom (Article 19), and the right to life and liberty (Article 21) of the Indian Constitution. The petition referred to the proliferating global conscience, the demand of post-colonial India, the historical/traditional support for indegenity and acceptance of such relationship, relationality between citizen/subject and civil rights, privacy of sexual life and most importantly, the necessity of coming out to take precaution against HIV. The term MSM was chosen carefully and unlike USA where the emphasis shifted from “protection of act” to “protection of identity”, it depended on issues of civil rights and medical risk, and tried to formulate the continuance of the statute as instance of judicial westernization and legacy of an outmoded Christian law. The petition did not see success at first, but it was able to bolster the conscientious in its favour. Amartya Sen in his brief note remarked that “the Civil War in the United States began the same year as the establishment of 377 (1861) and that while the United States had managed to abolish slavery as a result of the war, the Indian state had, as yet, not stepped up to its promise as a modern democracy by

refusing to abolish Section 377” (Quoted in Arondekar, 118-120). The 2009 dictum of Delhi High Court went in favour of de-criminalization of homosexuality in accordance with global pressure and increasing protest from grass root workers for this cause, victims and a major portion of intelligentsia. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court repealed the verdict in 2013 on ground of constitutional restraint necessitating political consciousness or consciousness of political parties for a need of a breathing space for all.

Even before *Fire*, films like *Andaaj*, *Sangam*, *Sholay*, *Subhah* and the creative writings like the *Golden Gate*, *The Starry Night*, and *The God of Small Things* have addressed the mindset. Dattani took up the daring enterprise of treating the subject on stage – a dangerously potential arena of direct public contact. Talking of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, McRae observed, “It is not simply the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal. It is a play about how society creates patterns of behavior and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates” (McRae, “A Note”, 45) Dattani’s plays also bring out the threatening fact of the marriages in which the homosexual persons are tricked into by their desire and compulsion to belong to the fold of secured mainstream life patronized by establishment.

### **Art**

In Dattani’s world, art ceases to be a mere aesthetic pursuit and enters into discourse making, often redefining the inter- and intra-dependence of the art, artist and the socio cultural context. It determines the operation of power and controlling strategy of family, state and society at large. We are introduced into a world where social

surveillance is active in the arena of art with a double standard. Art is both a product of consumption and an object of denigration. *Arthashastra*, chapter-xxvii, states in a clause that the rules prescribed for the ganikas were also applicable to dancers, actors, singers, musicians and pimps. The monolithic state of independent India, unable to interrogate the mode of practice of associating the artistic pursuit of women with prostitution, perpetuates it by the program of rehabilitation. Instead of promoting, de-stigmatizing and preserving the art of Bharatanatyam performed by Devadasis, which could be a part of the process of reclaiming the identity of multicultural India, the monopolizing leaders triggered off the mission of reforming the practitioners and thus permanently affiliating their status as prostitutes. If state regulates its production, foreign recipients are found to be the chief consumer -- as the veteran Devadasi in *Dance Like a Man*, Chennaiamma is occasionally visited by foreign tourists and journalists. The state program of rehabilitation of 'devadasi' is balanced by Amritlal's objection to Ratna's practice of a "harlot's pursuit". As described by Dolly in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, the thumri queen Naina Devi is often mistakenly conceived as a 'tawaif'. The dancer niece is unscrupulously conceived as an object of consumption by her uncle since she is "meant for entertainment" (*Dance Like a Man*, 410).

Entertainment revolution initiated the process of commodification of art with a view of men being the chief consumer. Manusmriti prescribed the constitutionally adulterous women to be man's property in ancient time; in modern India that property could be commodified and presented as a package for the global market. Consequently, in order to fulfill the demand of the patriarchal market for the supply of women as sexual object, the entertainment industry, thus, dissociates sexual "sanctity" from the

manufacturer of artistic pleasure, and denies artist women any socially acclaimed role, denigrates art from something creative into catering. The alienation of the art form of dance from the 'authentic' male behavioral pattern thus gets a close link with the marketing strategy of the product. More over, the association of art with masculinity problematizes the discourse of hetero-patriarchy. Male dancer is marginalized since it would otherwise authenticate a strong homo-erotic implication. Naturally, Ratna's uncle doesn't find it disturbing anyway to the "normal" pattern of morality to propose "incest" to his dancer niece, since the entertainer resides outside the moral regime. Following the same discourse, culture acquires feminine identity.

Naturally, the culturally disruptive image of a male dancer threatens the rubric of hetero-patriarchy and jeopardizes intimate relationships. Amritlal, given the alternatives between allowing his son to continue the woman's art and his daughter-in-law to perform the stigmatized art of the prostitute (implicated through the facts that devadasis had to take up the profession), decides to tolerate the woman's pursuit of the harlot's art in exchange for the wife's strategic participation in deskilling her husband in woman's art in order to materialize the alluring prospect of making him a man. The male dancer dancing feminine number leads to graver identity disorder and intensifies sexist fear of homoeroticism. The process of gendering gets so intense that seems natural. Woman/feminine is asserted and appropriated only to conceptualize and materialize the man-making process. Here the woman makes the most useful tool partly by conscious design/choice (itself part of and controlled by trans-individual network), and partly by collective ideological preference.

Dattani's handling of the issue attempts to create a rupture in the oppressive narrative and hits upon a process of re-negotiation with the established ideological terrain. In Amritlal's brand of Indianness "sadhus (saints) with long hair are revered, the dance guru of Jairaj is leveled "abnormal" for his long hair and the financially dependent son is prohibited to grow his hair. Fracture is also visible when a man dances and is applauded for dancing a feminine "ashtapadi" in female costume. The events disturb the process of gendering which seemed so natural and once again exhibits how cultural genital takes little care of the biological sex. An alternative view of culture is perceived in the myth of "Nataraja" (the Hindu dancing god), though its mortal version Sankar – the son of Jairaj and Ratna -- gets killed by an overdose of opium, symbolizing culture's rigorous attempt to keep it dormant or dead. A variant of priority/preference in constructing the idea of masculinity is sought by valorizing men with greater androgyny like Jairaj, Deepak, Subbu, Dan, Sharad and others over "manly" men like Amritlal, Hasmukh, Ed, and Ramnik.

### **Communalism**

When religion transgresses the boundary of individual feelings/faith into the arena of public sentiment with strong a political foundation, the sense of community hardens into communalism with its emphasis on -- to borrow words from Anderson -- "relativization" and "territorialization" which enthrone a particular faith as "truest" than "true" (Anderson, 17). Now religion becomes the uniting principle of a fundamental socio political unit irrespective of difference of language, class, nationality and even culture, when the unit identifies its politico economic interest as same and the interests of

different communities appears at variance with and even oppositional to each other. With the coming of Islam, the Hindu identity got transformed from a geographical to a cultural identity, but the political anxieties apart, Hindus and Muslims lived side by side without maintaining any policed border between their socio cultural identities until the fissure became visible between the Westernized Hindus and the defensively self-conscious Muslims during the colonial rule. The colonial policy of divide and rule circulated through the entire body politic of the colonial and post-colonial state. Unlike the Western concept of secularism where it stresses separation of religion and state, in India an attempt was made to coordinate between different communitys' religious selves. The crisis takes shape when the communal identity of Hindu gets identified with nationalism and that of Christians and Muslims is categorized as separatism since, in that case, there is no equation of holy land and their fatherland (Goswami, 137-152). Thus, the animosity between the communities -- Hindus and Muslims in particular --, to quote Paul R Brass, was "seeded and grown in the hothouse of British imperial rule, implanted in the minds of the Indian populations, tended carefully by specialists, allowed to remain dormant for varying periods, and released when the conditions are favourable for their full growth" (quoted in Sengupta, "Of Race/Religion...", 223). Ashis Sengupta farther observes, "If it was a matter of imperialist advantage during the days of colonial rule, it may be added, it is predominantly electoral politics that systematically cashes in on communal riots in post-independence India" (Sengupta, "Of Race/Religion..." 223).

Commenting on his play *Incident at Vichy*, Arthur Miller remarked, his play is neither “about Nazism” nor “a wartime horror tale”, but about “our individual relationships with injustice and violence” (quoted in Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion...”, 218). In a country where religion was the key determiner in imagining the nation, and where communal tension informs the lifestyle of millions, the invisible channels of communal hatred obviously offered a large unexplored area for the present playwright. In Dattani’s world history emerges as an active participant in changing patterns of communalism and the frameworks of history and theatre merge. Shanta Gokhle rightly observes, “What saves Dattani from the pitfall of equilibrium, from the deadening effect of symmetry, is his historical vision. He shows that communal attitudes have evolved over a period of time and are often based on ignorance” (quoted in Banerjee, 280). *Final Solutions* – written in line of Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, Shashi Tharoor’s *Riot*, Manohar Malgaonkar’s *A Bend in the Ganges*-- performed in 1993, in the background of post Babri Masjid Bombay where the experience of Bombay blood was still fresh, offered a powerful statement of the need for reevaluating our “normal” attitude and innocent/neutral life style.

“This inglorious legacy of the land theatrically unfurls in piecemeal through Hardika’s readings from her private diary, punctuated by ‘present’ happenings, of the entries she made in 1948 about the riot she lived through during the historic Partition. Ironically, contemporary India continues to be virtually divided into Muslim and Hindu India, lacking mutual trust and confidence and often erupting into violence” (Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion...” 223). The fifty-six line description of that turbulent time (the British-sponsored communal riot) by Hardika (herself a victim of colonialism) during her

stay in Hussainawad, and the two Muslim boys in desperate need of shelter from a blood-thirsty mob, show how subalternity is situational. The use of the device of the chorus serves yet another purpose: as Samipendra Banerjee pertinently remarks, "... the theatrical gesture of the continuous stage of the Mob/Chorus in stylized and 'becoming' postures suggests extended selves of the characters that are stripped off of cultural restraints as fluid locations where communal hatred reigns" (Banerjee, 282). Communal consciousness is strategically construed, hardly to be founded on the ground level of human consciousness. Rather it is historically produced and self-alienable like Hardika's fissures of identity -- a staunch hater of Muslim community (consequent upon previous experience), however, cannot identify with Hindus ("Where were our own people when we needed them?" *FS*, 191) The act of wearing different masks to express different religious attitudes and removal of them to become an opportunistic mob is in itself symbolic of the constructed nature of the sentiments. Religion is shown to be oppressive which works its way through the logic of binary opposition between the outsider and the insider. It makes the choice compulsory between the positions of being defensively apologetic or offensively aggressive. The majoritarian politics defines the mainstream, and the minority either undergoes the process of acculturation as a means of self-defense (as Bobby in *Final Solutions*) or chooses violence for self-assertion (like Javed). Consequently, as Benegal observes, "The viewer can no longer view the spectacle of faceless loompane mobs slaughtering one another and go home catharsized and feeling comfortably superior...One is forced to review one's own automatic assumptions and the postures one takes for granted..." (Benegal, 61)

Dattani does neither conclude in despair nor offer any simplistic solution; in fact the “s” appended to the title of the play *Final Solutions* opens up possibilities of multiple solutions. The author’s own remark in this regard may be mentioned: “The title is in the plural to suggest that Hitler’s pogrom . . . can [recur] and *has* recurred in different ways . . . Bigotry and nationalism need not go together, although that is what both Nazism and the . . . Hindutva movement were trying to do” (quoted in Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion...” 216). Arbind Garh, the director of the Hindi translation staged by Asmita observed, “No concrete solutions are provided in the play to the problem of communalism, but it raises questions on secularism and pseudosecularism. It forces us to look at ourselves in relation to the attitudes that persists in the society . . . communalism has no face, it is an attitude and thus it becomes an image of the characters” (quoted in Datta, 265). If for some characters experience becomes the circuitous course of hatred like Hardika and Javed until too late, other relations like the friendship of Smita and Tasnim, Smita and Bobby and Bobby and Javed signal a better future. However, the self-criticality of the text deters any simplistic assumption, as Sengupta observed in the comparative analysis of Arthur Miller’s *Incident at Vichy* and Mahesh Dattani’s *Final Solutions*: “The endings of both plays posit a certain notion of justice, but without clarifying whether it can be realized through ‘the true humanly valuable concepts’ of decency and love or whether it functions more as ‘a claim made by the oppressed’” (Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion...”, 215).

## **Disability**

An attitudinal barrier has been at work in excluding the issue of disability from social theorizing for encouraging other marginalized issues like women's issue, environment, and caste, poverty and so on and thus making disability physically and metaphorically invisible. Invisibility renders a further marginalization, reinstating centrality of the able-bodied. In India disability is chiefly seen as personal tragedy, therefore unredeemable or working of fate – in both cases essential and individual. The view conveniently omits the role of a disablist society for creating and perpetuating marginalization. Medicalization also tends to overlook the non-pathological disabling factors and sociocultural role allocation. The negative image is further reinforced by the widespread inaccessibility of the disabled to the public area, their nonrepresentationality in educational sector, rampant unemployment, unavailability of satisfying personal relationships, and their general non-acceptance in society. Hunt argues that “the problem of disability lies not only in the impairment of function and its effects on us individually, but also, more importantly, in the area of our relationship with ‘normal’ people” (Hunt, 146). The shocked reaction at the obvious deviant stimulates culture's deepest fear of tragedy, loss, dark and unknown. Disability, Irving Zola observed, “[A]s the object of medical treatment evokes the image of many ascribed traits, such as weakness, helplessness, dependency, regressiveness, abnormality of appearance and depreciation of every mode of physical and mental functioning” (quoted in Barnes and Mercer, 10). What Dattani focuses on here is not the impairment or the biological destiny of the individual, but the process of handicapping the individual by the disablist society by creating social barriers in order to maintain its power relations.

Disability paradoxically always attracted artistic pursuit which tends to use it for serving the greatest of all purposes, namely, being “different” as opposed to “normal” commonality. However, the aesthetic craze about representation has mostly carefully tended to omit the disagreeable aspects of the originals, denied the experience of the persons concerned and used disability as a signifier of something beyond and besides itself. Disable persons are even excluded from the normal epistemic standard of knowing by experience and the outsider commentators’ version got prioritized over the lived experience. Actually the metanarrative has always dictated the knowledge by leveling terms which in fact helped to bolster the confidence about superiority of the able-bodied and the nourishment of the fiction of their perfection. Even the celebration of freakishness remained no more natural or no less social and participated in the history of what Mitchell and Snyder call “metaphorical opportunism” (Mitchell and Snyder, 17). It acts as a depository for the centre to expel its anxiety and contradiction. To quote Davis, “[d]isability is more than a background ... it is ... the basis on which the ‘normal’ body is constructed... disability defines the negative space the body must not occupy” (Davis, 68). Thus disability/disabled persons continued to be artistically devalued as negative symbols, politically made “invisible” and socially Otherized -- yet never absented from the narrative of the able-bodied mainstream.

Dattani attempts to set a different aesthetic standard for the representation of people whose actual appearance is repulsive by subverting the reading of the fact and turning the direction of the mirror. The lack of stability and coherence in Dan’s narrative

(in *Tara*) proves that renovation and revitalization of our moral and aesthetic criteria and the standard of knowing are possible. The present playwright tries to come out of any metadiscursive commitment and avoid the voyeuristic gaze of an aesthete. He addresses the problem rather from within and even accords space to the atypical and impaired body (prosthesis becomes body parts) which is, according to Merleau-Ponty, a “grouping of lived-through meanings which moves towards its equilibrium” (quoted in Iwakuma, 76). Dattani also places the issue in disability to the larger arena of power play. It is in this specific point, where both discourses of disability and femininity intersect, that the special charm of Dattani’s play. Both gender and disability make up the conceptual frame which gives meaning to the body. For years, biological destiny was the accepted rationale behind the exclusion of women, coloured and disabled people from the life they desire and deserve, and, compelling them to a particular social role as subordinate and dependent. However, the identification gets complicated when disabled women are excluded from the traditional gender role of care-giver and they come out of the boundary, men feel feminized and their impairment is seen as a threat to the autonomous patriarchal male body presenting a grave consequence. Here Dattani’s concern is not to prove some disabled persons are as productive as the able-bodied, valorizing health over illness (illness is an undeniable factor of the life of many impaired people like Tara), and autonomy over dependency, but to challenge the biological determinism without devaluing or obliterating the biological difference.

## Resistance

The plays of Dattani endorse a sharp disbelief in any neutral narrative and explore points of conjunction and disjunction of various narratives challenging, omitting, destabilizing and even disqualifying one another. Words go beyond text, and create meaning through performance of the act of even mere reading. We meet an author painfully aware of the artistic capitalization of the angst and suffering of the subject, and his plays both embody and narrate the events. The author sometimes talks directly to the audience through symbols or in style of a parabasis, and the Prospero merges with the dramatist. The process of reading turns out to be a constant interplay of making and unmaking changing hypothesis.

The playwright once stated, “I am not interested in characters asking existential questions in a limbo. My characters exist in a definite space and time, in a social context that’s what stimulates me. I don’t focus on a message but the context is important” (Santhanam 2003). Hence the appearance of his characters is never taken for granted nor of any relation. The plays explore what lies under the “facades which characters and families put up to fool the world” (Meena, 8). Here, as Indranee Ghosh points out, tragedy does not bring character closer, but “[l]atent tensions, ancient grudges, thwarted ambition, shameful secrets churn like lava beneath” (Ghosh, 300). They suffer from, as Dattani puts it referring to Tara, “...in tension with their own sensibility as opposed to the cultural sensibilities, they may have knowingly or unknowingly subscribed to” (“Muffled Voice,” 129). The process is finely illustrated by Chandan’s miming of removal of

masks. In this world love is not often an end in itself, but a means. Bharati uses her love to compensate for the grievous deed of depriving the girl to privilege the boy as well as to assert her superiority over her husband. Ed and Bunny Singh deploy their affairs to camouflage homosexuality and be acceptable by larger society. On the other hand, Mala's sexual promiscuity turns out to be only a revictimization of an early nightmarish experience.

“Science's claim to truth carried a social authority that made it productive of forms of personal and social life” (Seidman, 199). Naturally, the so-called neutrality of science stands exposed in Dattani and is presented as something formed by and forming the mainstream discourse. Pseudo-scientific categories mystify the “...socially desirable behavior as natural, and undesirable behavior as result of abnormal psychosexual development (a deviation from *The Way to Healthy Manhood*). Thus psychiatry leads the homosexual person to hate himself for being what he is and leads him to further ego-alienation (*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*). Medical science is exposed to be a machinery to perpetuate the gender hierarchy under the garb of performing miracle to undo nature's design to destroy Tara. However, the authentic science is valorized as, to quote Steven Seidman, could be used “against its own stereotypical, stigmatizing constructions” (Seidman, 199). In plays like *Thirty Days in September*, science, more specifically, psycho-analysis, is seen to provide the necessary support system to victims of child sexual abuse and helps the victim to fight the gendered social construct.

We, the reader/consumer/interrogator/appropriator, of literary “composition”, are stumbled on to the title of the product (if not already conditioned by other reviewers), and if the plays are by Dattani, even a cursory look at them it difficult to situate them within a normative pattern. *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, glittering with all the glamorous paraphernalia of marriage, exposes the flipside of the coveted institution; *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* with its gorgeous metropolitan feel of a party atmosphere, introduces us to a group of marginalized cloistered for their sexual preference; *Do the Needful* turns out to be a “needful” modern adaptation of a utilitarian phrase; while *Thirty Days in September* shocks our sensibility with a dreadful dystopia. Anxious to construct a definable form of the disturbing “expectations” roused by almost non-normative phrases in *Dance Like a Man*, the unusual cohabitation of the marginal words, “DANCE” and “MAN”, creates a constant commotion, anxiously trying to find a definite order/“meaning” at the centre of signification. In fact, after reading the plays, one is smoked out of his/her “anxiety of influence” by the revoltingly ironic appropriation of the phrases by the playwright. The titles thus constantly disturb any fixity and create space for contesting ideas.

However, Dattani’s plays are not pessimistic. He actually challenges the construction of “Indian” that conveniently ignores whatever deviates from our age-old conceptions of “right” and “normal”. His plays dramatize the predicaments of those, who, either are compelled to live the roles assigned to them by the family/society or break away from them, no matter at what price. Dattani’s characters feel “a need for acceptance and at the same time a need for rebellion” (Dattani, “Of Page and Stage,” 31).” They want to be accepted for being different and simultaneously come to accept

“those areas in [themselves] that are different” (Dattani, “Of Page and Stage,” 32). It is not simply the individual against the establishment since s/he is also the establishment, says Dattani, but the individual pushing “the boundaries of what the establishment is” (Dattani, “Of Page and Stage”, 32). Naturally, “His characters struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, cultural constructions of gender, and repressed desire” (Mee, “a Note”, 319). They struggle for space, yet desperately want to belong: “This is my hell. This hell is where I belong!” (*Thirty Days in September*, 67) In Dattani, an absolute freedom from the pressure of tradition, culture or family is hardly conceived as the aim or even a possibility. However, the possibility of resistance always remains there: “...it comes with a bit of practice. In the beginning, you will have a lot of dead shoots on your hands. But then you learn and it ...comes” (*Bravely Fought the Queen*, 246).

The network of power is paralleled by multiple forms of resistance. Here is no grouping together; rather the characters direct their opposition to local and immediate exercise of power. Most interestingly, to quote the dramatist himself: “... they are going to fight those battles and they are going to stay right there” (Dattani, “Of Page and Stage,” 32). It ranges from Subbu’s ‘violent’ escape by committing suicide to re-codification of the state-program of rehabilitating devadasis as a version of subjugation to the colonial norms. A forced marriage is countered by an escape or ruse as the couple rediscovers the marriage to be a convenient cover and catalyst to continue their respective romances outside marriage. The boundary with the abuser in childhood is renegotiated by a recovered adult. The camp, by parody, mimicry and a performance to the excess, undermines the categories that exclude him. Wife’s fancy of sexual liaison is a potential

appropriation of the husband's disapproving behavior. Mimicry and performance release potential destabilizing power. The sociocultural disjunction of male and female self is conjectured to be recycled into a union on a cosmic level. The family, built by homosexuals and hijras counter the narrative of family that excludes them. The essentially comic vision of Dattani is evident in the life-affirming possibilities conceptualized in the plays and the resilience demonstrated by his characters. Hence he often presents very serious issues with heavy doses of humour. The spirit may well be recognized in the manner he makes jokes about the teachers teaching in his missionary schools, eulogizing British and Anglo-Irish writers like Shakespeare, Yeats, Whitman and others, perhaps without thinking that some of them were "gay, bisexual and were considered immoral in their time" (Nair 2004).

The only Indian English playwright to be awarded Sahitya Accademy, Dattani shows a rare efficacy to synchronize his love for Indian traditional art form with his admiration for western 'well made' structure to produce dramatically his concern for contemporary issues. Working within the traditional art form he addresses the potential differences within the rubric of Indian culture which is getting distorted as a monolithic discourse by marginalizing the rich variety that it has encompassed through the ages. Chaudhuri observes, "In a typically reactionary postcolonial situation, to write in English -- the language of the colonial ruler -- in the newly independent India, came to be largely considered politically incorrect" (Chaudhuri, 10 ). In the same breath, he adds, "people have to come to terms with the fact that English is an Indian language! ...India has this

enormous capacity to absorb from all sources” (Ayyar, 2004). Technically his Indianness is reflected in creation of a shared space by audience and performers to make possible a true synergy or “Rasa”. Since “Theatre is a collective experience and the audience have to finish in their own heads what the playwright began” (Nair, 2001), the target audience of Dattani is not a passive receiver but an active producer of meaning. He explores the issues existing in form of potential ruptures, and exhibits the way they manifest themselves in Indian contexts to help create a public discourse on them. Therefore, as Sengupta puts it, “‘Relations of power’ remain, but waiting to be given ‘the rules of law, the techniques of management, and *also* (my emphasis) the [situational] ethics’ so that the games of power are played ‘with a minimum of domination’ and some communication, or transaction, established” (Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion...” 227). Thus, the reading of the plays initiate a journey – a journey bound to chart out conceptual landscape, conceptual mobility and evolving conceptual spaces.

## **Exorcising the Patriarchal Code: *Where There's a Will***

### **Foreword:**

Foucault observed, "...in the relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance... that reverses the situation" (quoted in Champagne, 5). Dattani's comic muse appears at its most elegant of demeanors when it cuts deepest into the rotten and hidden structure which holds a sick society. *Where There's a Will* is a comic masterpiece which offers a sharp critique of hetero-patriarchy, the specific brand of politics prevalent in the sociocultural milieu of the Indian upward mobile urban upper middle class family, standing at the border line of tradition and Westernization, and at the same time, gives an unexpected solution – innovative, hilarious and rejuvenating. It shows how the possibility of resistance lies in the very structure of oppression itself.

Hetero-patriarchy like other forms of human expression is extremely complex. As an institution, it is rooted in gender hierarchy which acquires validation from its central mechanism of marriage. As Yep rightly remark, "[i]mplicit in the marriage contract is men's appropriation and exploitation of women's bodies (e.g., sexual, reproductive) and labor (e.g., domestic, emotional)" (Yep, 29). But its ubiquitous presence reduces it into the uncritical ordinariness, and ordinariness precludes reflection privileging further the exercise of power. However, many of the identities available to women under the hetero-patriarchal structure like wife, girlfriend, mother, daughter and daughter/sister-in-law shape, regulate and constrain the ways both men and women operate and function in the family and society at large. "[C]ultural conceptions of a 'good

wife' or 'good mother' create expectations and experiences and regulate women's behavioral choices" (Yep, 29). Founded upon gender hierarchy, it systematically and structurally creates and maintains the subordination of women ranging from physical and emotional exhaustion to violence and diminished mental health. The asymmetry of power and sexist norms are common in the regime so far so that "Through institutionalized heterosexuality, discourses and representations of sex are articulated in phallogocentric terms, that is, the positioning of women as sexual objects and men as sexual subjects" (Jackson, Quoted in Yep, 29).

In India the family is the primary structural and institutional unit of society and, naturally, it acts as the most vital site of the perpetuation of the ideals of hetero-patriarchy. It serves as the moral community, unit of productive enterprise and the support group to its members. The predominant form of family is the traditional joint family – fast disintegrating though -- based on common ties of ancestry and property. It is patriarchal and patrilineal in nature, and based on prioritization of consanguine and filial bonds over conjugal relations. In most cases, it acts as a unit of production and consumption; and apart from shared economic function, it maintains a familistic organism determining the goal of the individual, following a collective conscience and family consciousness. Patriarchy and fixity of gender are central to its construction. Authority rests with male head (sometimes in his absence the matriarch); status depends on age, generation and relation open to the upward mobility in the hierarchy replacing the dead -- in every stratum men being higher than women. Women and younger members are generally excluded from decision making process and attempts are made to hinder and carve individual aspiration especially at variance to the family values.

In order to facilitate the understanding of Indian family, Critics make an important distinction between the household and family, and maintains, whereas “household is a physical structure, localized and a specific constellation of emotional and economic relationships among its core members”; family is “more amorphous, seen as larger kinship groupings, spread over time and space” (Ghosh, “Contextualizing Domestic Violence: Family, Community, State”, 58). While the familial ideologies remain the same, household structure gets shifted according to the social, economic and political changes outside. Hence, if woman’s participation in public role may change the patriarchal structure by destroying sexual division of labour or winning women agency at home, it may produce new anxieties. It is often seen that working women are subjected to violence. The structural change breeds new patriarchal anxiety and violence is chosen as a means to restore the status quo. The new condition leads to new pattern process of coercive and controlling behaviour and power and control ways.

We get so fully programmed to see life from and internalize the norms and values of patriarchy, that it is very difficult to locate the oppressive mechanisms outside the arena of exceptional violence. The New Woman’s movement in India, taking its shape in the 1980s, mainly centered round violence against women. The landmarks of violence like custodial rapes, dowry murders, suttee etc show the asymmetry of gender that highlight the social formation, legal process and citizenship rights. However, it was only in the nineties that the theory of exceptionalism got replaced by the recognition of violence in psychological, emotional and sexual domains. The definition of domestic violence given by LCWRI may be drawn on in this regard which encompasses “any act, omission or conduct which is of such a nature as to harm or injure or has the potential of

harming or injuring the health, safety or well-being of the person aggrieved or any child in the domestic relationship and includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, and verbal and mental abuse and economic abuse” (quoted in Ghosh, “Contextualizing D V...”, 52). Thus the human rights of women sought to include along with right to life the rights to security, equality, liberty, integrity and dignity.

With the framing of domestic violence as the violation of woman’s human rights and gender violence and locating it as an endemic and pervasive reality in women’s life, the concept of violence against women has been shifted from a social condition to a social problem. Unlike other oppressed groups, women lacked shared tradition, and have remained unwritten about in history. Hence, the possibility of women’s collectivity could not be realized. Woman-only groups are expected not only to give women confidence and opportunity to speak but to positively act towards female solidarity.

Dattani calls attention to the underside of the Indian tradition by exposing the patriarchal underpinnings of various institutions that often denied freedom to its individual members, especially women and younger persons. His family dramas expose the politics of power that lurks beneath patriarchal constructions of fixed gender identities/roles and proliferation of the hyperbolic versions of “man” and “woman.” However, in Dattani, the complete independence from the pressure of tradition, culture and family is neither conceivable nor desirable. But individual pushes the boundary in order to accommodate a space for oneself.

In *Where There’s a Will*, the scene is set in the household of Hasmukh Mehta, the autocratic patriarch, and within his jurisdiction are his wife, son and daughter–

in-law. Here the drama of resistance really becomes amusing as individuals, disillusioned of being protected by authority, relocate their subjugated identity, mistress and the subordinated wife, develop a sisterhood and the rebellious son is applauded for rejecting the patriarchal inheritance and the authority is re-coded as the slavish internalizer of prevalent power structure.

### **Autocracy:**

“[I]nequality is embedded in oppressive structures of a family ideology committed to an age and gender hierarchy which is worked out within a household” (Karlekar, 1742). Since in *Where There's a Will* Dattani chooses the arena of the nouveaux riche family of Hasmukh Mehta to work out his dramatic skill of superb fusion of the comic and the serious, the scene is laid in the household of Hasmukh himself living with his wife Sonal, his son Ajit and daughter-in-law Preeti. Positioned as the head of the family -- financially and socio culturally, Hasmukh appropriates and enjoys the privilege hetero-patriarchy offers to the coveted post. The method of subjugation adapted by the autocratic patriarch includes the constant hammering and establishing of the idea that he has the sole proprietorship of the life of his family members - both behaviour and ideologies -- in the same manner of his property. Thus we see the dominating but domesticated man and the vulnerable but virtuous woman living in an ideal gender relation in the household working as an operational unit of Indian family - by implication the society. However, the mimicry and exaggeration of the role he performs reduces it to the point of parody and serves the desired comic effect.

Men do control, monitor and appropriate women's labor in most domestic situations by gendered division of labour, emotional blackmail and sexual behaviour. Like so many other heterosexual women, Sonal lives in inequitable and exhausting relationship arrangements in her family: she carries the burden of housework, care-taking expectations, and accepting child-rearing obligations, and parenting responsibilities associated with motherhood. Following the typical patriarchal norms, the man Hasmukh casts himself as rational, strong, patronizing and decisive and therefore having the sole power of decision-making. And he misses no opportunity to present the women folk of his family as irrational, emotional, weak, submissive and nurturing like his wife or scheming like his daughter-in-law and uses his experience as the standard to judge others' life-position caring little for their own. Sonal has also been subjected to what Guillaumin calls the "sexage" Referred in (Tyson, 97) as the household has appropriated her time with no limit or holiday which the garment tycoon enjoys at the end of the day and that of the week, her body was invested for the sexual pleasure of the man and the procreation of the future generation and her care is continuously appropriated to look after the "men". Losing all identities of her own, she is reduced to a social tool assigned to the task men don't want to do.

Christina Delphi holds the family as an economic unit in which women constitute a subordinate class. She defines marriage as a labour contract that ties women in unpaid domestic work commonly trivialized as "housework" (Tyson, 97). Sonal as a wife is thus excluded from the "realm of exchange" (Tyson, 98) where service is paid. Not that she gives less time or labour, but she is considered a non-worker since in Indian sensibility, domestic labour is kept outside the realm of economic productivity and

women family members remain unpaid. What she receives in form of her subsistence, is not handed out for the work she performs, but independent of her work. It is rather treated as a gift in man's own interest to maintain the labour power as well as his status in a society. Hasmukh does never forget and make others forget that he is the provider and therefore the only will that should be respected in the family is his.

The egocentric perception of the world which is central to patriarchy is brought through minute and apparently insignificant details of everyday life providing the author the scope to exhibit the working of power mechanism at micro level and produce comic effect. One example may suffice for the rest. Hasmukh reacts sharply at making "halwa" (a sweet dish) since it is harmful to his health ("How can I eat halwa when I have sugar in my urine? ...Why should she bother making it?" (*Where...*, 462), disregarding the fact that any body might like it and have it without any damage to health. Financially and ideologically positioned as the fount head of power, he never stops to acknowledge his disgust with and threaten other members. As Linda Barrette argued, in a patriarchal structure, the emphasis remains not on what the women feel but how they display it since the emotions are supposed to serve the interest of the subject (referred to in Tyson, 102). In the course of the play we find Sonal and Hasmukh feel same indifference towards each other, but while Hasmukh is unconcerned about the fact, Sonal keeps anxious to display more care to "become" a proper wife: "Who do you think the doctors will tale If you get another heart attack? Me" (*Where...*, 467).

The categorizer does not stop to label other members: Hasmukh detects Preeti to be "sly as a snake", (*Where...*, 456) who could have no other motive except grabbing his

wealth behind marrying a “dead loss” (*Where...*, 456) like his son. Neither does he stop to express his disgust with other members for whom he claims to act as a provider. He evaluates Sonal as “good for nothing”, (*Where...*, 472) calls Ajit a “nincompoop” (*Where...*, 456) and goes on complaining the loss he has to suffer on account of his marriage offering him a wife like Sonal and a son like Ajit.

If women speak something which undermines patriarchal logic then it is readily labelled as incoherent and unintelligible and it is only by having access to the semiotic dimension of language that women can go beyond the patriarchal language. Hence it is the tentative and indefinite answer to Has Mukh’s questions offered by both Sonal and Preeti that they refute Has Mukh’s authority – the mathematical mind so adept in calculating even the abstract feelings of life. The scant respect he has for his wife in particular and woman in general is dramatized in the mimicry of the women’s non-committal attitude always answering “yes” (*Where...*, 456) to his question “Is dinner ready?” (*Where...*, 456).

Holland and colleagues (1996) observe that “‘proper sex’ [is] widely defined as a specific version of heterosexual intercourse in which the man’s penis penetrates the woman’s vagina; *it starts with his arousal and finishes with his climax*” (quoted in Yep, 30). In India, in terms of sexual practice, sex is defined as “penetration for men’s pleasure in which women find fulfillment primarily in the relationship, in giving pleasure” (Holland and colleagues, quoted in Yep, 30) and performing the vegetable procreative function. The absence of female agency in the context of desire and method is evident in the way Has Mukh maps out his sexual relation with his wife. He

takes up to describe Sonal's experience and declares her unworthy: "Twenty-five years of marriage and I don't think she has ever enjoyed sex. Twenty-five years of marriage and I haven't enjoyed sex with her" (*Where...*, 473). Hence he had sex with his wife for procreation, for reproduction of a son who will be made in the maker's own image. Sonal exemplifies for him the type of good girls whose sexuality he can control and whom he can dominate financially so that his sexuality is not threatened.

Men sleep with bad girls but don't marry them. Hasmukh carefully chose a mistress Kiran - a market executive in his office for pleasure. She strikes of course a fair deal with her boss providing her with a secure, high salaried job and a flat in a posh area, but her story of marriage reveals a varying version of gender violence. Women invest their meaning in husband and son because, as Beauvoir claimed, they try to escape their freedom to realize their full potential in the world since it is risky, with no guarantee for success or wellbeing (Referred in Tyson, 97). But Kiran's story reveals another façade of the institution. She makes a pact which turns out to be an ironic appropriation of the institution. She is conveniently married with a man who required some one to supply him with his basic needs like bottles of Johnny Walker every evening in exchange of the marital status to his wife who needs it as the cover for a relation with her married boss. The story of Kiran's mother and sisters-in-law reveal the pathetic saga of domestic violence, her childhood experience presenting only a variation of it, and her present story offers an alternative which is another version of oppression.

Hasmukh recounts his loss and gain in a characteristic manner. In order to compensate for his own brother's rebellious act of running away from home to join

hippies, “He [father] took great trouble to make sure I [Hasmukh] didn’t turn out like my brother” (*Where...*, 464); his father put him on the harness of hard work by day time and counting of the profit for “half of the night” and “dream of being millionaire” (*Where...*, 464) for another. He gets married and becomes father both adding to the debit side of his ledger, though they produced happiness not by effect but by proving lucky, since “Within no time we were running a very successful export house” (*Where...*, 464). Now the self-made man is one of the “richest” men of the city, the “success in capital letters” (*Where...*, 464).

Ironically, the greatest frustration of Hasmukh’s life lies in his failure to make his son replicate him, to live his “life again through my son” (*Where...*, 475). Hence he tries every measure to trim and shape Ajit’s life and ideology by deterring his independent moves. He refuses to disburse sufficient money to Ajit to renovate the factory chiefly because it was Ajit’s plan. He did not even read the project report prepared by his son: “because the answer was no” (*Where...*, 456). Another fear of accepting a younger person’s suggestion may be the fear of being leveled as old or out-dated which will amount to being economically unproductive leading to the lowering of his status. He enjoys the supreme authority to define, categorize and certify. Naturally, he defines Ajit as “bankrupt” in brain following his own line of reasoning – “My son isn’t really after my wealth. That’s because he doesn’t have any brain” (*Where...*, 456) -- “nincompoop”, “failure” (*Where...*, 458) -- a “big zero” without the number (*Where...*, 461) added before him.

Hasmukh keeps on reminding that it is his house Ajit lives in, his phone he uses, his office where he is the JMD, it is his typist whom Ajit's friend Deepak flirts with to the comic extent of claiming that the blood which runs through his son's body is his: "...it's my blood. Only younger" (*Where...*, 457). The authority always controls the epistemic standard of "right" and "wrong" in both senses: "I, Hasmukh Mehta, have every right" and "I am stubborn because I know I am right" (*Where...*, 458). He just regrets having prayed for a son who, instead of "making" him happy and live his dreams, turns out to be a perennial embarrassment for him. It is not that he does not love his son, but what he wants is a younger version of himself in the latter, a desire by which patriarchy reproduces itself: "Just turn him into a nice vegetable so he won't be in my way" (*Where...*, 455). Even when training his son in managerial minutiae of putting stress on "what" and not on "how", what he means to assure is the art of giving "order" (*Where...*, 458), deactivating any possibility of dialogue - "counter argument" (*Where...*, 460). His attempt at "seasoning" or "toughening" (*Where...*, 460) his heir is, as Ajit puts it, an extension of his desire to make Ajit "to run your [Hasmukh's] show, to "play the big boss" (*Where...*, 460) through him.

Even after he drops dead, the rubric of power does not collapse and Hasmukh enjoys continuing the ring master who "run[s] the show" as per his own expectation and the discourse of which is his own and by which our experience acquires meaning and behaviour regulated. Positioned in a director of the show, he puts all stress on the enactment/performance of the roles assigned objectively and without caring much about the way of feeling. Hence he feels uncomfortable at the thought of Sonal's being asleep without discovering his death, but gets happy and applauds her ("well done," *Where...*,

477) for the first strong reaction at the discovery. For the first time in the play we see an ear-to-ear grin in his face as his wife and daughter-in-law begin to cry and Ajit runs to verify the truth. Though a bit concerned about Ajit's supposed incapacity to arrange his funeral without him to guide, he is rather pleased by the number of condolence calls, the way Sonal managed the condolence visits – “cried at all the appropriate moments” (*Where...*, 479) --, the traffic resulting from the gathering of large number of cars in front of his house, and of course, not the least at the mention of the incident in the paper: “‘Garment Tycoon Dead’. ... You never know how famous you are until you are dead” (*Where...*, 479).

The sadistic ghost observer represents the disembodied nature of authority which controls even during the physical absence and determines the behavior of his family members through the apparatus of will. Hasmukh exercises his “will” to “play the big boss” most effectively by the “will” he made which was read to the family members by the solicitor after seven days of his death - the time period enough for them to “dream of spending money” the way they chose. He is almost intoxicated with the sadistic pleasure at witnessing the effect of the will on his intended victims. Each of the three was accorded a nominal amount of allowance from the trustee and a permission to live in the house as long as they follow the terms and conditions mentioned such as Ajit's presence in the office from nine A.M. to six P.M, taking lunch there etc and satisfy the vigilant trustee. Ajit can only have his money at the age of forty-five if he abides by the terms otherwise it will go to the charitable institutions as pre-ordained by him.

Initially, it breaks the bonding and union of the victims to the great satisfaction of the victimizer. Sonal and Preeti accuse each other, sob, cry, shout and scream. Both women allege Ajit “It’s allyour fault” (*Where...*, 481) - Sonal for marrying such a “scheming” creature instead of the “good girl” (*Where...*, 482) chosen by her sister Minal and Preeti for not being pretentiously obedient to his father: “If you had been nicer, all this wouldn’t have happened” (*Where...*, 481).

The travail brings out the hitherto unexpected features of the characters. Sonal -- as usual -- troubled and puzzled pathetically turning to her sister for consolation and support, calls her husband a “nasty no-good man” (*Where...*, 484), and at the same time, points out his ability to probe through Preeti’s calculated appearance: “You didn’t fool him for a second” (*Where...*, 481). It is Preeti who “has changed overnight” (*Where...*, 480) as the ghost of Hasmukh observes. She makes it plain that she married Ajit only because he was well-placed reiterating Hasmukh’s assumption about her, misbehaves with Sonal, holds Ajit and his mother responsible for not being sufficiently good to him for the misfortune come upon them, curses her fate and the “tamasha” (*Where...*, 486) (jokes) made by her in-laws. Preeti declares that Ajit does not half her brain. She even attempts to contest the will on the ground that during the preparation of the will, Hasmukh was senile and tries to get their family physician Dr. Jhunjhunwallah bear witness in support. The only person who appears to be sane and reasonably managing the situation, is Ajit. He requests the women not to humiliate each other, suggests relief, provides proper information to both outsiders like Minal aunty as well as to Preeti trying to contest the will on vain ground and even does not forget to perform his duty to hang the photograph of Hasmukh in the wall and put garland on it.

The greatest blow comes in the form of disclosure of the identity of the trustee who is none other than Hasmukh's former mistress Kiran. In this context we may allude to the demand of SNTD Mumbai to bring within the ambit of domestic violence "all acts perpetrated in the private domain of the home to secure woman's subordination; and which is rationalized and sanctioned by the prevailing gender ideology" (Ghosh, "Contextualizing D V..." 53). The present play exhibits how law, as a patriarchal institution, fails to protect a family from the tyranny of an autocratic patriarch.

### **Exorcism:**

If "conflict" is the crux of the play in general, the play *Where There's a Will* derives its meaning, motivation and its comic magnificence from it. Moreover, here the opposition comes from the very sector which is expected to be the most faithful ally. The flow of power on a reverse direction is shown as a potential if not actual counter move. Ajit's refusal to allow his life to be moulded by his father, to "dance to your tune" (*Where...*, 458), deters the linear flow of power: "We can't do that" (*Where...*, 482). His blatant denial to enter into his shoe to replicate and perpetuate the autocracy through generations presents a powerful rupture in the rubric. He refuses to be the "son" through whom his father may control and regulate and replicate himself even in his absence and, instead of being the means of playing the "big boss" – an act performed by Hasmukh himself --, Ajit hunts for his own identity: "And what becomes of me? The real me?" (*Where...*, 461)

The outside-inside-home dichotomy by which patriarchy functions in regulating the life of the subordinates, offers/restricts Sonal within the regime of the kitchen. Naturally, it becomes the only space where she could assert her existence and enjoy triumph over her male counterpart. She goes on cooking plenty of foods unnecessarily, making Ajit's favourite dishes to provide for his nourishment, controls Hasmukh's diet as a token for her duty towards her husband and thus escapes from the responsibility of being stigmatized as an improper wife: "My own sister blaming me for your condition! As if you would listen to me even if I was firm with you" (*Where...*, 467). Hasmukh's stubborn refusal to eat salad is countered by Sonal's refusal to stop preparing it. It is the precise point where she alternates the authority of her husband to be subjugated by, with that of Minal, her sister, since she cannot come out of the habit of being dominated.

The present (Hasmukh), though it tries hard to make itself a continuance of the past (father's appendage) and shudders at its discontinuity into near future (Ajit), the rupture was a presence in the family's history, though attempts have been made to obliterate it. Hasmukh's father ensured Hasmukh should be like him unlike his brother who fled home to join the Hippies and opted for an art form leaving the masculine pursuit of money. Hence, while Hasmukh conceives of a replication of Ajit through his unborn child as a suitable punishment for him, on Ajit's part a continuum is desired for the distant future: "Now if he turns out like you, that would really finish me off" (*Where...*, 463).

The narrative of history gets also ruptured by the simultaneous presence of two alternative narratives. A typical patriarchal mode of continuing lineage through marriage is evident in Hasmukh's account of his conjugal life. He got married at the age of twenty-one ("greatest tragedy") and became father the next year ("tragedy after tragedy", *Where...*, 456). His initial assessment of his wife Sonal "as good as gold" turns out to be wrong and he soon finds her "good-for-nothing" (*Where...*, 472). The dissatisfaction in sex life made him channel his instincts to greed for prohibited food (he is a patient of diabetes, blood pressure and enlarged heart) and enjoys sex outside marriage. In order to maintain a balance between pleasure and reputation, he arranged for an in-between "a wife and a pick-up" (*Where...*, 473), a mistress. He chose a "hard-headed market executive" of his office, "who had brains to match mine" (*Where...*, 473). In an attempt to account for his decision to marry, he forwards following reasons: one marries to have a woman all for himself -- a property ensuring uncontested possession --, ore convincingly, to have a "faithful companion" (*Where...*, 475) - though the purpose might be served better by keeping a dog --, and finally reaches the conclusion by locating the reason to have a "son who will carry on a family name" (*Where...*, 475). Yet, after all that, having a faithful wife, who has given him a son, the ledger of his happiness tilts on the debit side since what he gets is not a son but "a boy who spends my money and lives in my house" (*Where...*, 475).

However, a counter narrative is presented through Sonal. An extremely fond mother, she sees her husband nothing better than a "crow painting himself white to become a swan", a middle class man with "a lot of money" (*Where...*, 472). And it is this

large sum of money which has made him arrogant, “king of all he surveys! And we are his subjects” (*Where...*, 472).

The embodiment of power is confronted with the greatest rebellion from Hasmukh’s own body which gets afflicted with so many diseases limiting his consumption of many things he had plenty of, and finally refutes his authority by collapsing into death: “I never imagined it would happen so soon” (*Where...*, 476). The person who most effectively creates a rupture in his dream, “When I grow old I can live life again through my son” (*Where...*, 475), is Ajit himself who resists his father’s mission: “to play Big Boss. And you can do it through me” (*Where...*, 460) - by always hunting after the “real me” (and thus extinguishing his will to live after death).

The first challenge Hasmukh meets after his death is in the form of his inability to break Ajit’s resistance. The latter of course is honest enough to admit his fondness for his “little money” to give a damn to it, and even if by doing this he was going to lose the property even at the age of forty five. He does never regret to have been what he used to be, a rebel. The framed photograph which Ajit hangs on the wall makes Hasmukh begin to feel a sense of a kind of restraint imposed on his regime of power at the comic level of touching up of his photograph. He regrets Ajit not having the sense of touching it up as he did with his own father’s to make him a bit more “dignified”. He seems really disturbed at the thought of himself being remembered by the world as having hollow chicks, tight lips and “mean little eyes” (*Where...*, 488) and being fathered the son like Ajit.

With the arrival of Kiran, his mistress, to live in the house “as one of you” (*Where...*, 494), as per the terms put down in the will, Hasmukh’s triumph appears supreme. Kiran appears to be very practical, and acts smartly enough to avoid any melodramatic scene. In order to avert any embarrassment, she behaves civilly and discreetly enough, not to mention any unpleasant parade of her power, but proves intelligent, efficient and quick-sighted to evaluate the characters at first sight. She is rather cordial with Sonal and sympathizes with her humiliating position being insulted this way by her husband: “if I had known about his plans I would have persuaded him not to do it” (*Where...*, 492). However, once given the responsibility, she frankly points out the duties imposed on her: “I can’t promise not to get in your way. But I’ll certainly try not to” (*Where...*, 494). The person who feels even more threatened than Sonal and Ajit and outraged by the decision is Preeti and she explores every measure to get her out of the house until Kiran states in clear terms the extent of her power: “...I have the right to make a statement declaring that since the recipients of the trust, namely you all, are not complying with the rules set down by the deceased, the holdings of the trust will be divided between certain charitable institutions recommended by the founder” (*Where...*, 494). But otherwise she quite sees it as part of her official job and no opportunity to show off her triumph and power. She is only the trustee of the property, which “rightfully” (*Where...*, 493) belongs to the family, and that too until Ajit is forty five, and Preeti’s child twenty one and the trust dissolves. She must work at a fix salary and be the decision-maker in interest of the company and “training Ajit Mehta and eventually delegating most of my responsibilities to him in phases” (*Where...*, 493). She reacts sharply at Preeti’s suggestion to prove to the world that it was Kiran who influenced the

will so that they might contest the will: “But to desire it with such a ... passion! Don’t you see anything wrong in that?” (*Where...*, 492)

Interestingly however, the employee of Hasmukh, expected to carry forward his “show” through his “will” even after his death, refuses to be an agent of patriarchy which was his real project. She recounts her story of being in an affair with Hasmukh Mehta who arranged a convenient marriage for her with an excise officer who eventually got fired being found out having the “little side business” (*Where...*, 491) of selling empty liquor bottles with foreign stamps and could not but approve of Kiran’s relation that assured him a bottle of Joni Walker every evening which is his “basic necessity” (*Where...*, 490). The little confusions about the persons referred to as “he” regarding Hasmukh and Kiran’s husband, hints at a kind of replacability of one for the other both copying and embodying the structure of hetero-patriarchy.

Hasmukh at first misses the point and enjoys having turned the life of his family members upside down—the exact position in which he hangs from the tamarind tree. He sets down the reasons for conducting the “nasty” thing of keeping the mistress in the house: it is to teach Sonal the value of him - a lesson in “husband understanding” -- make her regret her inefficiency as a wife, most importantly, to prevent her being a “happy widow” (“One thing I can’t stand is a happy widow”, *Where...*, 496). However, he is keen enough to detect Preeti as “sly” and scheming and works rightly to keep her under check. His joy knows no bound as Ajit returns home worked up under strict discipline and training of Kiran Jhaveri (“she should have been a jailor. She has turned my office

into a prison. The only things missing are the bars on the windows...she may bring in a grindstone”, *Where...*, 497).

Preeti, the most rebellious however, reacts more desirably – she gets impatient, calls her husband a “big mistake”, or a “lout”, (*Where...*, 499) accusing him of any kind of harm done to her, and almost verging on the point of getting crazy about the “will and the mistress”: “Do you want your baby to have a nervous wreck for a mother?” (*Where...*, 500) She even alleges Ajit of a false rebellion, and designates him as a “...the son who has stepped into his late father’s shoes without a peep” (*Where...*, 500). She calls Hasmukh a save-driver with sufficient skill to drive some one mad with his bossy nature. However, she found out a way; she pretended to “humour” him and give in so long he lives (“...he didn’t have long to live”, *Where...*, 501) in exchange of the freedom and the money she would enjoy thereafter. However, Preeti was not waiting patiently and passively for the desired day. Suspense creeps into the plot as Ajit discovers a bottle of tablets hidden behind Preeti’s sari in her cupboard and she reacts sharply at Ajit’s searching her things to get her compose. She tries better means than shouting and tries to explain the peculiar event away by pointing out the warning of keeping the peals out of sun light and her getting healthy enough not to need them any longer, and agrees politely to take Ajit’s advise regarding the sedative. The moment she is alone she throws them out of the window along with the bottle, but is aghast at the sight of Kiran picking them up. Ajit feels himself being “shoved” (*Where...*, 500) into Hasmukh’s shoe, having his father’s will concretized of turning Ajit into himself, only now Kiran replacing him in his absence, making him do what exactly his father liked: “we are all living out a dead man’s dream!” (*Where...*, 501)

However, a drama of resignification gets its start imperceptibly. In spite of all the misbehaviour shown by Preeti, Sonal seems concerned for her and her baby and feels relaxed to be around her to help her to raise her son. Contrary to the ghost's accusation of having turned "Ajit" (the victorious) into "Aju" (*Where...*, 498) -- the name of a pampered pet--, and not having a proper knowledge of "bringing up" (*Where...*, 497), Sonal proclaims her pride: "One thing I will always be proud of ...I brought my son up the right way" (*Where...*, 498).

The process of exorcism is most effective in the realm of a slowly but steadily growing sisterhood between the two perennial opposites – the mistress and the wife. Kiran nurses the cut on the finger of Sonal and shares the secret of her life. The mistress's honest confession of using Hasmukh for his money alone punctures the ghost's ego. Sure about herself, Kiran has charted out the map of her life with the education she got for being so close to life. She was aware of her managing capacity, ability to manage the office, household works, her husband and Hasmukh and now his house; the "efficient manager" (*Where...*, 505) she posed made her "useful" to him. But she also saw to it that Hasmukh, in his turn, should be useful to her: his reliance on her intelligence and efficiency gave her enough confidence, his trust gave her self-respect, but as Kiran confesses candidly, "No woman has an affair with an older man, especially a married man, for a little bit of respect and trust. It was mainly for the money" (*Where...*, 506). In the new situation, rather intelligently, Sonal discriminates between Kiran and Preeti and instead of Kiran's protest she requests her companion not to "lower" (*Where...*, 506) herself by comparing herself with her daughter-in-law. Kiran tells the pathetic story of her mother who "only gave" (*Where...*, 507), was beaten, called name by her drunkard

husband night after night, pretended happy in front of her children so that they should not hate their father. Kiran learned the lesson to escape from the nightmares of her troubled childhood, save her mother from her father's rage and pray for getting spared. She also slips a comment of herself suffering for giving too much which prompts Sonal to exclaim "I never got because I never gave" (*Where...*, 507) drawing an enthusiastic applause from the ghost of her dead husband. However, to his utter disgust, Kiran was quick to find out the "insensitive" (*Where...*, 507) nature of Hasmukh and his cruelty to Ajit. Sonal in her turn, compares him with the village buffalo. Hasmukh, she observes -- now as under Kiran's guidance she gains new knowledge and freedom of understanding --, was intoxicated with power.

A new interpretation of the behaviour and practice of patriarchal norms is given as accounts pour in of how history keeps on visiting the present. Kiran's brothers turn out to be like their father, "going home with bottles of rum wrapped up in newspapers. Beating up their wives" (*Where...*, 508); she herself got married a drunkard and suffers silently. IN the same manner Hasmukh is exposed to have fit in the scheme. The short colloquy between two women involving him resignifies the history of the great Hasmukh Mehta and reduces it into a mere story of a parasite, "living his life in his father's shadow ... whatever he did was planned for him by his father" (*Where...*, 509). However, the master blow comes in the form of Kiran's exposure of the "false strength" (*Where...*, 508) he used to enjoy. It was Kiran who was the real decision-maker when he was under the illusion about himself, she played the father in his life instead of a mistress: "he saw in me a woman who would father him" (*Where...*, 510). The final lesson of "husband understanding" (*Where...*, 496) for Sonal, for which Kiran was appointed, climaxes with

the knowledge that even his crude and loud temperament and desire to dominate his wife was a mere imitation of his father: “All his life he was merely being a good boy to his father” (*Where...*, 510). The supposed competitors turn out to be friends with open confession of enjoying each other’s company. The reinterpretation of Hasmukh’s authority puts a mirror before him to give him a reverse reflection and he catches himself repeating Ajit’s nonsense: “What became of me, the real me? O, my God! I sound like Aju!” (*Where...*, 511).

Ajit’s disobedience also gets a positive interpretation; it is read as a sign of difference - an individual’s attempt to carve a niche for himself instead of carrying the burden of his father’s lineage: “He resists. In a small way, but at least it’s a start” (*Where...*, 510).

Kiran however proved, as expected by Hasmukh, “too clever for [Preeti]” (and she discovers the dark design Preeti had been fabricating behind his death. The schemer took the vitamin tablets and put them into the bottle where her father-in-law used to keep his peals which “controlled his blood pressure”, which “kept him alive” (*Where...*, 513) and as Hasmukh took them unnoticed, “let nature do the work for you” (*Where...*, 513). Kiran expresses a positive disgust at the baseness of her unlimited greed. Yet instead of taking any hasty measures like going to the police which may not proved much effective without proper evidence, or disinherit Preeti that might affect Ajit, decides to tell everything to Ajit who will deal with her properly and hate her for whole life. However, at the last moment she changes her resolve and substitutes a dark truth which would ruin the family forever into a life-giving lie: “Preeti is planning a birthday party for you”

(*Where...*, 514). Thus the authority uses the power to preserve the interest of life by rewarding the worthy and putting the scheming evil under effective control.

Having a true companion who might guide and could offer dependence, without being oppressive and bossy like Hasmukh or authoritative like her sister Minal making her feel inadequate by herself, Sonal also finds out her own suppressed personality and rejects the authority of her sister altogether: “I have always lived in my sister’s shadow” (*Where...*, 511) and asks her to “go jump into a bottomless pit” (*Where...*, 516). Now she takes up the responsibility of the family on her shoulder and owns the agency of her action in real sense.

Hasmukh now feels himself unable to enter the house comprised of an efficient housewife, an expecting mother, a sufficiently individual man and an authority who manages without oppressing: “...I don’t think I can enter this house... They are not my family any more. I wish I had never interfered with their lives... With Kiran sitting in my place. O... I wish I had lived” (*Where...*, 515). With a light comic touch, the family members also decide to chop off the tamarind tree - the only place in the world for Hasmukh’s ghost to hang upside down from. The subversion of the power mechanism turns the instrument of oppression into that of salvation.

Thus, the mistress, supposed to perpetuate the oppression, turns out to be a resisting individual. Quite contrary to expectations, Kiran develops a kind of sisterhood with Sonal. She keeps the scheming Preeti under control. The potential difference of Ajit is honoured. Hasmukh’s dependence on his mistress as “father” and the welcome replacement of the father himself by the father’s mistress dislodge the standardized

gender definition. In his turn, Hasmukh is exposed to be living out a dead man's (his father's) dream. Sita Raina maintains, Hasmukh "perceives that his desire for control has led him to be the victim of his own machinations unlike Kiran who uses power play to essentially improve her relationships" (*Where...*, 451).

## What is a 'MAN'? : *Dance Like a Man*

### Introduction:

Working with multiple dissonances, rather than unity, Dattani's plays become the contesting area of discordant forces within oneself, family and various informing orders in society. A project of de-stereotyping gender roles, *Dance Like a man* focuses on the damaging effect patriarchy exerts on the man who tends to keep outside the gender matrix. The play explicitly deals with the problem of dancing like a man in a normative pattern and invites disturbing "expectations". Of course, it wasn't the denotation, even the connotation of the four individual words; rather, what was disturbing, was the silent "fifth" signifier -- creating a rapidly shifting "meaning" ...The unusual cohabitation of the marginal words, "DANCE" and "MAN", creates a constant commotion, anxiously trying to find a definite order/"meaning" at the centre of signification, though constantly disturbing any fixity and creating space for contesting ideas.

Both gender and culture are discursively permeated and constructed, and the performance of dance by a man, especially *Bharatanatyam* -- loaded with the history of being performed by Devadasis -- offers a visible menace to gender normativity and breeds a strong fear of effminization of "man". Hence, the monolithic neo-Indian colonialism tends to subsume, suppress, subordinate and exclude the possibility of a mandancing, since in this context dance ceases to be an art form and enters into a

discourse. The performance, “doing”, and the agent, man, get categorized and are prohibited co-existence.

‘No other dance form’, observes Dattani “has such a fascinating history of oppression and Renaissance as *Bharatanatyam*” (quoted in Multani, “Politics of Production...” 59). The play, though in a passing glance, seeks to reevaluate our attitude towards this ancient dance form by making critical our complacent admiration ignoring the travails of the practitioners to keep it alive. The dance form, specifically associated with Devadasis had always burdened the performers with socio cultural signification and the lived experience incumbent upon it. The history of oppression ranges from their sexual exploitation by powerful ritual functionaries and political personae to the post-independence programme of rehabilitation which sought to destroy their art to fulfill the mission of purifying the temples. The seventy-five-year old Chennai amma, an exponent of an endangered dance form, is bound to earn her living by selling flower in temple steps. This was an accepted and regular custom until recently (1988), before the performers revived the art to a prestigious place in the cultural map of India.

In Dattani, “the focus is on the family as the representative unit of the corruption of culture and morality, in whose midst the politics of ambition takes on the most ruthless forms” (Ghosh, “Form and Content...”, 298-99). Jairaj’s choice of dance, a feminine pursuit -- more specifically the harlot’s pursuit -- disturbs the hetero-patriarchal normality. The play presents the complexities and intricacies issuing from its protagonist’s refusal to conform to the culture-specific genre of “man”, and the consequentially emergent complications in a modern post-independence urban India. As

in other plays, family is portrayed as a product of the value system the society stands for and the cultural discourse of which it is a part. The play records how the wide socio-cultural discomfort with the culturally disruptive image of a male dancer jeopardizes the intimacies and sense of belonging in a family, and how the members, in their “need to belong”, interrogate the deviation (Meena, 8).

With a fine mastery over stagecraft, Dattani makes the same actors play various characters and the alternate roles played expose the constructed nature of the ideologies they represent. Individual gratification turns to be the socio-economic extension. Rashi Sharma observes, “Gifted with the sensibility to see beyond the stereotype representations of man and woman in society. Dattani attempts to penetrate into the abstruse world of emotions and inner discords of his characters. This becomes the axis around which his characters move in order to realize their strength and prove their dignity” (Sharma, 100). The human relations degenerate under the cowering pressure of social set up and the sense of failure shimmering beneath surface erupts every now and then from the caldron of fuming emotions.

In the course of the play, we are shuttled between the two worlds – the peripheral world of art and the centre held by the mainstream “normal” going on -- each defying fixed/monolithic identity and policed border and often merging with one another to generate both tension and possibilities. However, the play also tries to find out a resolution of the conflicting forces and renovation of pestilent corrupting orders both on human and divine level. The vision of harmony emanating from the divine dance

movement which sublimates baser elements by the end of the play, at least envisions a possibility of harmony on human level.

### **The World of Art:**

If the play is about art, it is not about the aesthetics of the craft, rather about the world of art populated with artists and the life they live and the standard they live by and about the merging of borders and clash between the “normal” world and that of art. What we are faced with is the cultural policing initiated by the hetero-patriarchy in two time frames: in lately independent India while art gets marginalized by zeal to reclaim the core “Indian” identity, in the nineties the consumerism replaces its predecessor.

Very carefully Dattani introduces us to the world, in the company of a character who is out and out a citizen of the ordinary social life, and lives by the socio-ethical standard of upper-middle class people of modern urban India, Viswas -- the future husband of Lata. He accompanies his fiancé to their house to meet Lata’s parents both for an introduction and approval. Quite contrary to the expected anxious waiting of the bride’s family, Viswas stumbles on to both the physical absence and psychic unconcern. They are not yet home while the visit was pre-arranged with their prior knowledge and consent and a promise to their daughter. Lata divines the cause to be an “emergency” which strikes Viswas with a note of improbability. It is beyond the edge of his knowledge that the performance is not merely about the practice and acquiring the skill for stage performance, rather it is the arrangement of the whole thing which requires much stress, strain and strategy. Really surprised, he puts it in his own way: “Only doctors and firemen go out on emergencies. Dancers stay at home till it’s show time. They also stay at

home when they have invited their future son-in-law to their house” (*Dance...*, 387). All this is of course said in a very light and rather good-humoured manner, but the observation brings out the basic difference between the two worlds which bears such great impact on the life of the dancer couple and gains such serious and wide dimension in the course of the play. Another striking feature of this world is the priority accorded to the various aspects of life which varies from the “normal” goings on. Lata puts it in a half-serious manner: “Actually they couldn’t care less who or what you are. As long as you let me dance” (*Dance...*, 388). They can even overlook the threat that their son-in-law may whisk their daughter away to the Harem of an Arab sheikh if she is able to continue her dance there because dance is the very identity and staff of their existence.

In answer to Viswas’s wide-eyed astonishment, Lata only sums it all up by saying: “I told you, they are different” (*Dance...*, 388). She leads Viswas to the dancing hall and he fails obviously to gauge Lata’s sensitiveness and deep attachment to the art and all that is associated with it. He cannot feel the thrill she feels touching the dancing bell which her father wore for his first performance (“I get goosebumps every time I touch them”, *Dance...*, 389) and can only “hear” and not “feel” the vibration and the special atmosphere of the room whose floor felt millions of “adavus”.

With the arrival of the elderly Parekh couple amidst Viswas’s unaware antic, wrapping the antique shawl, the difference in standards and prioritization becomes all the more apparent. Viswas gets extremely embarrassed and apologizes, but the only response he gets is a command from Jairaj to put the shawl back and Ratna’s offering to fold it neatly and request to sit. Completely ignoring his presence, they engross in the crisis they

never faced in their whole life. Their helplessness in the face of the crisis makes Viswas uneasy for being identified as a problem but is assured by his future father-in-law, that he is not sufficiently known by them to be qualified as a problem. In a flash, a night at Moscow reveals another façade of this world as the curtain is lifted. At three o'clock in the morning Ratna comes to the corridor apparently in order to spy upon Jairaj's activity, Jairaj keeps drinking Vodka along with another troop and Seshadri sneaks into Chahndra Kala's room. Some questions remain unanswered as to why Ratna was in the corridor in such an hour of night and how Jairaj could identify the very night she is speaking about so quickly. The problem which is of paramount importance to the dancer couple is as follows: The mridangam player Srinivasa has broken his leg stripping over his dhoti, that Lata cannot perform without the mridangam, and they cannot ask Seshadri as a substitute since he practices with Chandra Kala and also maintains an illicit relation with her, who is a rival of Lata. Sabotage is apprehended. Hence, if sometimes Ratna contemplates to ask for Seshadri, she quickly changes her mind taking a lesson from the previous incident of Nalini's predicament.

The dancer parents, especially Ratna, thinks that their daughter's life is ruined and she is destined to become an "average human being": "If she can't dance, what else can she be?" (*Dance...*, 402) We find an absolute identification of the artists with their passion and art; they overlook the presence of their future son-in-law. How other concerns reside in the margin of the territory of an artist's consciousness become evident when Jairaj gives his consent to the marriage between Viswas and Lata based on Viswas's meager account of himself; Ratna shows her concern only to the extent of knowing whether he is well-off and would allow Lata to dance after marriage.

Though unable to gauge the depth of the problem, Viswas shows enough focus as to bring the Parekh couple back to their concern from straying away with the life style of Seshadri. He also shows tolerance, courtesy and common sense as to leave the place for the time being without spite, relieving them of his presence since he is not of any help. But at times both worlds meet as the value system of one gets applied to the other. Ratna reiterates and follows the criterion of the so-called mainstream world when she codifies Jairaj as the “spineless boy” (*Dance...*, 402) who ceased to be a “man” for her from the day he returned to the house of Amritlal and accepted his incapability to support his family by earning money.

The intrusion of the values of the other world vitiates the personal life of the dancer couple who, after forty years of marriage, can only be free and honest with each other if they can drink together -- the wife only makes sense to the husband when she is upset and loses control over the expression of her feelings. We meet them for moments at night before they go to sleep. As usual, they try to pretend to each other -- Jairaj feigns to give Viswas company in drinks while Ratna pretends not to know where the bottles are kept hidden. Confession of the truth reveals, one is drunk and the other knows the whereabouts of the bottles and takes it out to top them with water and put them back in place. They confess and drink together, decide to ask Chandra Kala to lend Seshadri. Ratna is quailed, but Jairaj can't forget the emasculated image of himself which his wife, and perhaps, himself, held for so long. He wants an explanation whether it was more “manly” to let his wife sleep with her own uncle than to return to his father's house. Ratna tries to avoid the issue by according it to her being upset, and tries to convince him that she prefers to overlook Jairaj's inability to support his family since he was pursuing a

“higher thing. Something better than just working for money alone” (*Dance...*, 411), taking blame on both Jairaj and herself for leaving the house impulsively. But in Dattani’s world, reconciliation is not so smooth. Jairaj insists her to be true and congratulates her on hiding her sentiment for so long, but beneath the veneer of the kindness, detects the snake under the flower – the guilt. It turns out to be an unspoken contract of mutual forgiveness: “...may be it’s not kindness. Something deeper than that. Like...guilt? You forgive me and I forgive you. Forgive what you did to Sankar” (*Dance...*, 411). Ratna now really feels weak and appeals not to bring the subject as promised by her husband.

For moments, the veil is lifted; Ratna sincerely wishes to undo some part of their life --“we could start again” (*Dance...*, 411). Both of them realize too many sacrifices have to be made and all these lead to nothing worthy: “It was too great a price to pay, Jai” (*Dance...*, 411). A sense of depravity is unmistakable since after the life-long pursuit of the art form, the artists find that it has brought them nowhere. In answer to Jairaj’s question why she is planning the same frustrating life for their daughter, Ratna first forwards the reason that Lata’s success will make all their travails worthy and then builds her hope on times being changed as well as Lata’s having parents to push her forward. She gets lost in her dream of Lata’s success -- which is her own too -- since Lata has talent, her parents’ experience, her mother’s skill of buttering up the foreign ministers to arrange foreign tour and journalist C. V. Suri (alluring to make him chief guest in Navaratri festival) to have rave reviews. The artist’s world gets lost in the uncertainty of consumerism.

The world of art suffered marginalization in various stages in Indian history, but the neo-colonial forces tend to obliterate and subjugate an identity by constructing a myth of monolithic Indian-ness. Performed by *devadasis*, female slaves of the Hindu deity, in the temples of southern India, the dance was an art offering to temple deities, and was considered as the best form of prayer. Symbolically married to the god, the *devadasis* were prohibited to marry any mortal man. However, in course of time their services became bound to the corrupt priests and other ritual functionaries, and they were degraded into prostitutes by the convenient duplicity of religious sanction. Their art is not recognized, their skill is not respected and the hegemony of “Indian” society subsumes and otherizes the cultural practice within its grand narrative. The old, sexually inactive Devadasis were reduced to beggars: the “seventy-five and dying” Chennai amma, “the oldest living exponent of the Mysore school ...the only link ...with the old school” (*Dance...*, 419), earns her living by selling flowers on temple steps.

The monolithic state, unable to interrogate the mode of practice of patriarchy, perpetuates it by the program of rehabilitation. Instead of promoting, de-stigmatizing and preserving the art, which could be a part of the process of reclaiming the identity of multicultural India, the monopolizing leaders triggered off the mission of reforming the practitioners and thus permanently affiliating their status as prostitutes. Even during a casual reading of the play, specially confronting the character of Amritlal, the state/nation of India (as conceptualized by post-independence authority), emerges as gendered, perhaps a version crafted by “man”. Independence is exposed to be a mere transfer of power from one colonial authority to another that tries to reduce the rich variety of Indian culture into a monolithic discourse of consumption. Amritlal: “...our priority is to

eradicate certain unwanted and ugly practices which are a shame to our society... I will not have our temples turned into brothels! ...Nobody is running down your art. It is the people who perform it and for what reason, that we are trying to ...” (*Dance...*, 416-7).

The abolition of the devadasi convention is recoded as oppression and subjugation of an ideology. Viewed from a different angle, the panoptic vision gets disturbed: “Send them back to their temples! Give them awards for preserving their art” (*Dance...*, 416). It is in the hands of these reformers, as Ghosh points out, that “The transformation of ancient art forms into commodity is a common enough phenomenon in modern times where a certain cultural form which once formed an integral part of the social system is degraded into a quaint, ethnic and slightly shameful remnant of a lustful past” (Ghosh, “Form and Content...”, 298). Jairaj subverts the missionary zeal as a form of oppression and points out the need for patronage for this rich cultural legacy: “You have no knowledge of the subject. You are ignorant... If you really wanted any kind of reform in our society, you would let them practice their art” (*Dance...*, 416). An interesting negation of the state’s rhetoric of its welfare programme of eradicating poverty and illiteracy is made when Ratna changes the priority set by the state. Ratna: “She [Chennai amma] doesn’t mind at all being poor and lonely. What she is frustrated about is that in her youth she did not have the freedom to express her art” (*Dance...*, 420).

The regulating authorities of the market and the advertising agencies of the neo-colonial India like ministers and journalists, find foreign recipients as the chief consumer of Indian culture. Ratna, well adept in the art of “pushing” carefully chalks her strategy to

assure Lata's career: "If she does well, she will be a national figure. Then if we butter up the right ministers, we can even get foreign tours arranged" (*Dance...*, 411). The handling of public opinion after Lata's performance by Ratna brings out the insurgency of consumerism in the world of art.

Ratna's conversation with Mr. Gowda over the telephone throws light on the issue from multiple corners. She expresses extreme gratitude for being called by him on behalf of Lata who must be thrilled by both the present of flowers from him and the call, not because he is a minister, but because, he is so genuinely "knowledgeable about dance and also known to be so critical" (*Dance...*, 428). He deserves special thanks since he wasted so much time remembering Lata even after being so busy "organizing the Indian festival in Canada" (*Dance...*, 428). He is given the information of Lata having received a standing ovation from the president of India after completing the tillana and is offered any kind of help the minister needs from Ratna herself and Jairaj in his enterprise, since they are now like a "family". At this point Jairaj however cautions her for "overdoing" her part (*Dance...*, 430) and making herself obvious. But Ratna's shock comes in the form of hearing the name of Chandra Kala on the selection committee. Even after her great effort, she can't hide her jealousy properly and acquiesces to his observation on the latter's being a good dancer with the twist "twenty years ago" (*Dance...*, 429). Of course she tries to patch up by agreeing formally on Chandra Kala Devi's impartiality, but she has already made herself too obvious. Another phone call from Seshadri, however, confirms Ratna's fear about sabotage as Seshadri calls in order to apologize for the wrong "tala" (beat) given by him at the beginning. Yet after Lata succeeds in drawing huge admiration from all quarters, he tries to plead his innocence and keep in good favour with

them. Ratna plays her role superbly: she pretends to believe his pretensions, gives the news of Chandra Kala's being nominated as a member of the selection committee and takes the opportunity of his ignorance of the fact to cook up the story that she was asked personally by the minister but refused it on the ground of knowing all the dancers personally and proposed Chandra Kala's name instead.

It is Ratna who arranged things previously for Lata's acclamation by "sweet talking the critics" and promising some one to make the chief guest of Navaratri festival to extort rave reviews the following morning while usually the critics actually take time of a day. As jairaj puts it, the critics have to prepare the reviews beforehand in order to publish it the next day. Lata gets famous after the night – newspapers flooding with her praise – "the discovery of the decade", "one star which will shine bright in the sky of Bharatanatyam", "[h]er angashudha and grip over rhythm stand head and shoulders above the rest, even surpassing veterans like Chandra Kala Devi" (*Dance...*, 432) and so on. Some concentrate on her adavus, some on angashuddha, and some one on the tillana. Her "expressive face" and "subtle figure" work wonder, and the tearful expression and the "heaving bosom" during the ashtapadi create "tenderly intense and intensely tender" effect (*Dance...*, 434). By Ratna's skillful design, some papers even find her better than Chandra Kala Devi and rank her among legends like Balasaraswati and Rukmini Devi.

The entertainment revolution has converted culture into commodity, which requires homogenization of consumer products and market processes both in the realm of commodity and cultural symbols, styles and behavioral pattern. The commoditization of the art found the men as the chief consumer of the product, and the patriarchal market

demanded the constant supply of sexual gratification as the essential component. It is felt in Jairaj's sarcasm: "Is that why you like to dance? To have men admire your assets?" (*Dance...*, 442) A strong overtone is felt in Ratna's anxiety to please the minister and fear that "Chandra Kala is probably sitting on his lap!" (*Dance...*, 429) The entertainment industry, thus, dissociates sexual "sanctity" from the manufacturer of artistic pleasure, and makes the female performers Other than the woman accepted in different socially affiliated roles, and denigrates art from something creative into catering, from a vocation into a cultural commodity. As Indranee Ghosh rightly observes, "There is no actual performance of the Bharatanatyam by any of the actors although it is the context in which the drama unfolds. The musicians and teachers remain unseen, their presence suggested by the mimetic actions of the main protagonists – taking in a tray of coffee cups, commenting on the musicians' reactions, bidding goodbye with folding hands, all of which take place off stage. Such omission may be taken as deliberate, indicating the virtual loss of the value of the art itself in its transformation into commodity" (Ghosh, "Form and Content...", 298).

Apart from the visible threat to the signs of masculinity, the alienation of the art form of dance from the authentic male behavioral pattern thus gets a close link with the marketing strategy for the product. The male dancer is naturally marginalized (that would otherwise authenticate strong homo-erotic implication), since sexuality of the performer is required to serve ulterior purposes than mere artistic. Following the same discourse, "dance" -- broadly speaking culture --acquires feminine identity (since *Manusmriti* prescribes the constitutionally adulterous women to be man's property), that could be commodified and presented as a package for the global market, sanctified or

defiled or deified, and subjugated. Hence the association of the art with masculinity problematizes the monolith by transforming the commoditiser into commodity. A cursory look at the reviews of the ashtapadi poses of Lata makes it obvious that they are carefully mapped out by male critics to serve their target male consumers/readers. Naturally, they highlight the voluptuous aspects of the female dancer: “Lata’s tearful expression and heaving bosom conveyed all that was humanly possible” (*Dance...*, 433).

Jairaj’s pursuit of dance presents even a threat to the fixed gender construct. It also questioned the Victorian standard of utilitarian morality. Seen from outside, the Bharatanatyam reduced into “The craft of prostitute to show off her wares” (*Dance...*, 406); it becomes problematic as to “Of what use could it be to [a man]” (406) and then, “Hence any one who learnt such a craft could not be a man” (*Dance...*, 406).

Viswas gets really excited at such wonderful reviews and of course for the performance which he enjoyed with his layman’s eyes. Overwhelmed with sincere joy, Jairaj and Viswas greet Lata ceremoniously and ransack the papers for every reference to her dancing. A hint of irony is discernible both in pushing needed for such rave reviews and in Lata’s own confession that her bosom was heaving because of her fatigue after the “varnam” and that she actually forgot the last “Jatthi” and only gave a pose and finished with a flourish. Viswas, devoid of any pretence of knowledge of the art form, openly expresses his admiration since it reminded him of the picture on the post card of a dancer talking to a parrot though he is rather sharply reminded by Jairaj that during the Tillana, Lata was not expected to talk to a parrot.

However, a note of slight discord is heard at Viswas's mild discomfort with the item of ashtapadi and the description which appears a little bit too "erotic" (*Dance...*, 435). Jairaj clearly informs that he choreographed the item for his wife thirty years ago, and Lata demands why she shouldn't dance the number now. Viswas honestly confesses his inability to accept so easily that Lata is dancing the erotic number though he does not, unlike Amritlal, denounce the art form itself and openly admits his ignorance and refuses to pass judgement impersonally. However, he also agrees sincerely not to try stopping Lata if she wants to dance. Lata shows enough strength of character as to make it clear that he can't stop her from dancing and regulate the choice so far her passion is concerned, but while Viswas reminds her of the very promise she made about their children, by implication, their mutual consent to respect each other's individuality, she appreciates the sincerity of Viswas, and spending very few words, agrees to continue their mutual trust: "Thank you. I hope your father will teach you some more ... ashtapadi" (*Dance...*, 436). He rushes to the service of his mithai (sweet) shop and Lata remains in her world, but the possibility of a bridge gets brighter.

The only person, who perhaps was the most involved in making all this happen ("mostly mummy's efforts", *Dance...*, 433), strangely remains absent from the scene and is discovered to cry alone in the kitchen. She of course tries to explain it away by her usual headache. But Jairaj knows her too well to be convinced. All passions spent, she feels extremely depressed and her own failure to realize her immense potential crumbles her down. Pathetically she almost becomes uninterested in reading the reviews most of which, she claimed, was her doing, and felt, however, that he herself deserved it. But Jairaj makes it clear that Lata earned her fame by her talent: "Face it, woman" (*Dance...*,

440). Pathetically Ratna tries to compensate for her lack of opportunity to fulfill her dream by pasting the reviews in her album and being strongly opposed by jairaj, she breaks down. Here Dattani shows himself to be a subtle artist to capture this moment in Ratna's life which resists any definitional fixity. She is happy as a mother for Lata's achievement, she is all the more happy since it is mostly her doing – her guidance, persuasion of critics, using contacts, ensuring proper chance --, her unfulfilled dreams realized through her daughter, her frustration due to lack of proper channel, perhaps a hint of jealousy. But Jairaj's comment -- "At least you have a daughter to be jealous of" (*Dance...*, 440) --, hints at a history of humane failure to achieve absolute success.

### **The Mainstream World:**

#### *The Gender Issue*

*Bharatanatyam*, with its essential element of "abhinaya" (acting), offers Jairaj the opportunity to assume different subject roles that cut across gender. His transgressive performance of the female gender role challenges the idea of gender, being strictly rooted in sex. His presentation of 'ashtapadi' for the army is an example in point: "So I wore your mother's costume, a wig and ... whatever else was necessary to make me look like a woman, and danced" (*Dance...*, 435). Such performance, however, leads to graver identity disorder, and poses a threat to the heterosexist society. Amritlal categorically defines such activity as "sick". The covert implication of the word "sick" is a clear pointer to the sexist fear of homo-eroticism. In some institutions practicing extreme

sexual segregation like the army, such relations are tolerated under various cloaks: "...they only wanted a woman. ... They loved it even more when they found out I was a man. Of course, knowing the army, that may not be very surprising" (*Dance...*, 435).

A very significant departure from the "normal" behavioural pattern of man is initiated by dance with the visible signs, threatening to masculinity. Viswas' jocular reference to the choice of dress by the mridangamist is only a humorous version of the greater menace: "You've got to kick it [dhoti] out of your way. Like a sari" (*Dance...*, 401). The parallelism between dhoti and the woman's wearing goes deeper than visual with its strong suggestion of womanish-ness encoded in the costume. Dance drags it yet farther. Amritlal feels really embarrassed with the "woman"ly aptitude of male dancer: I have never seen a man with long hair... I've also noticed the way he [Jairaj's guru] walks" (*Dance...*, 417). However, his Indian brand of spirituality easily accommodates "sadhus" (*Indian saints*) with long hair in the narrative of normal man.

The most powerful ideology which dominates in the play is the hyperbolic version of masculinity. Amritlal locates the happiness of a man in "being a man" (*Dance...*, 426). His tolerance even of his daughter-in-law's learning the art form of the prostitute in exchange for ruining his own son's career as a dancer – the woman's pursuit --, brings out culture's fear of the effeminate man. Emasculation poses a greater threat than liberation of women: "A woman in a man's world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman's world is pathetic" (*Dance...*, 427).

The conversation between Jairaj and Ratna in the night of Sankar's death is a fair illustration of how the gender-construct is imbibed in the life of people who are

trying to defy and differ from the structure. Young Jairaj and Ratna have come home in the middle of the night presumably from a dance show of Ratna. Jairaj, in his drunken delirium does not sound much above the prevalent gender bias as he describes Ratna as the “Lakshmi-of-the-house” (*Dance...*, 440) and mocks her for “receiving claps” from audience at dead of night while his father had been receiving award for serving the nation – a project which included the rehabilitation/nullification of the devadasis and their art. The mockery is justified so far as Ratna’s conspiratorial action of destroying Jairaj as a dancer is concerned, but the gendered sarcasm is objectionable and takes its root in deep-seated patriarchy. Even art gets enmeshed in gender network as the fact of Ratna’s excellence as a dancer is superseded by her being a “young beautiful woman” (*Dance...*, 443) – an exotic object of desire for men admiring her “assets”. Ratna herself is not free from the bias and suffers from a sense of vacuum in the absence of a “man” in the family -- a proper husband for herself and a father for her son, a provider, a head: “Oh, you will be around all right. Where will you go? But all he will see is your exterior. It won’t take him long to realize that (points to his head) there’s nobody home!” (*Dance...*, 445)

The gender policing, however, takes on more catastrophic consequence than mere accusation. Amritlal’s obsession with the idea of emasculation of a man if he pursues an art form like dance makes him compel Ratna to strike an alliance with him in his perverse project to make Jairaj a “man”. Ratna serves her double purpose of continuing her dance career on condition that she will destroy Jairaj’s so that he is cornered absolutely to try his hand in other “manly” pursuits, secondly, proving her superiority and trying to find someone “worthy” of her. A woman with a brain, she marginalizes her husband in various ways: she makes him dance his weakest item

proving his inferiority, arranges the light in a manner so that he dances in her “shadow” while the light fixes on her, abuses Jairaj in front of others, and manages to receive invitations for her alone. Most importantly, she is successful in historicizing the fact that Jairaj had nothing worthy to be destroyed and it is his mediocrity which only prevented him from dancing alone for a full year during her pregnancy and the same thing breeds in Jairaj an inferiority complex drowning him in alcohol. It gradually gets registered that he is only good for choreographing and arranging music and light for her: “...my calling in life is to serve you” (*Dance...*, 444).

The play touches the innermost chord of our heart with the revelation of the tragedy which visits the family in form of the death of the first born to Jairaj and Ratna. The destruction of a male dancer gets multiple dimensions through the death of Sankar, the dancing god -- the unrealized fantasy of Jairaj of teaching him the dance of destruction, “tandava”, on his grandfather’s head that may destroy the oppressing hegemony of hetero-normativity and order of patriarchal policing. This results from again a failure of an artist-mother to perform her fixed gender role or rather failure to fulfill the two demanding roles which leads to the disaster. In a night of her performance, Ratna administers a doze of opium to her son so that the baby does not wake up before she returns, and puts him in charge of an ayah, who in turn, ensures her own peaceful rest by applying the same doze. The overdose kills the baby simultaneously finishing off the dreams of both his father and grandfather.

The hypermasculinity of the patriarchal society gets added with the sexist fear of gay men, and casts out the male dancers into the liminal space of the fringe section of the

society. It also reveals, as Mary Hawkesworth observes, “The intensity of effort and the power relations that produce this effect are hidden by the very naturalization at the core of the gendering process” (Hawkesworth, 156). However, Jairaj fails not only due to the secret nexus between his wife and father, but it is also a consequence of a subtler social condition. The patterns of posture, dress, speech intonation and other cultural manifestations, and cultural genitals having nothing to do with the “functional” reproductory organs, constructing masculinity/femininity, build up a pattern of constraint on practice of gendering and thereby affect individual potential.

Dance, thus becomes an important tool, destabilizing gender by the potential space it provides for the role playing. The word “abhinaya” suddenly lights up the figure of Sharad, (in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*), the camp, who theatricalizes, demystifies and thus finally exposes the constructed nature of not only the identity but of desire itself by assuming the performative quality of different gender roles. Thus the male dancer easily performs the role of Radha pining for her divine lover, unfixing the category.

#### *Patriarchy – Production, Reproduction and Resistance*

Amritlal is the most imposing version of “man” in the play, enjoying the status of a definition/category of “man”hood. He is the patriarch, the “normal” man – conforming to and confirming the perpetuation of normative pattern. The authoritarian patriarch is highly opinionated for whom any difference is deprecating. He is the money-earner, head of the family, authority over dependent son and daughter-in-law, patriot (holding secret

meeting during the British Raj and institutionalizing the monolithic structure of Indian-ness in independent India), trying every means -- by fraud or by force -- to normalize his son, social reformer, the “sethji” of the town (he made real profit by selling the bungalows after the British had left, which he bought real cheap), spending money in reconstructing India by giving out a lot of personal loans to friends and relatives. Naturally, he could tolerate the peripheral existence of dance in a man’s world as a strange hobby, but it proves outrageous as an “obsession” in an adult (*Dance...*, 415). Hence, the patriarch strictly banishes every disruptive possibility that could challenge the centrality of the pattern, from the adult world of “man”: “... there comes a time when you have to do what is expected of you” (*Dance...*, 415).

Amritlal is a family version of the dangerous implication/potential of the fractured narrative of independence which India achieved with so much blood and which earned for its architects so much glory. We see him calling out to Jairaj with all authority of the great patriarch and his son has to stop in the middle of a dance item breaking the continuity only to receive the order to evacuate the musicians and his guruji, since Amritlal is expecting some guests who certainly hold far greater importance for the authority. He gets infuriated with the very appearance of Jairaj in his dancing bells and repents his decision to allow his son to pursue his interest instead of compelling him to pursue man’s hobbies like cricket. The very discourse of independence gets exposed as Jairaj confronts his social reformer/freedom fighter father who turns out to be enslaved by the tyrannical norms -- “just as conservative and brutish as the people who were ruling over us” (*Dance...*, 416). Amritlal’s apparent liberalism to give Jairaj the leave to pursue his boyhood interest in dance which made his son rather distinguished from other boys

(“most boys are interested in cricket, my son is interested in dance”, *Dance...*, 415) and promise to let him do what he likes which suits his image as a participant in the independence movement, entraps him as Jairaj’s interest turns into an “obsession”. Insisted by Jairaj, he of course admits his involvement in the movement as an “obsession”, but he refuses to put his participation in the fight for freedom and the freedom to pursue an art form (a traditional “Indian” art) on the same plane for comparison.

The dichotomy re-reads the very ideology Amritlal fought for: “You didn’t fight to gain independence. You fought for power in your hands” (*Dance...*, 416). The Victorian morality which is an unfortunate colonial legacy proves compatible with feudal patriarchy. Independence turns out to be only transference of power. In the same manner, he repents his consent to his son to marry a woman from outside his community which so well suited his image of a “liberal-minded person” (*Dance...*, 415). With power in his hand, the proponent of independence (“you are both under my care”, *Dance...*, 420), finds every measure to impose his totalitarian ideologies: he threatens Jairaj against growing his hair (“if he grows his hair even an inch longer, I will shave his head and throw him on the roads”, *Dance...*, 418), commands Jairaj and Ratna to make the musicians even their guruji leave the house on a minute’s notice, prohibits his daughter-in-law’s training in old Mysore school in the courtyard of Chennaiamma – seventy-five years old poor devadasi, and finally forbids the dance training of Jairaj and Ratna altogether. Unable to sustain outside Amritlal’s house economically, Jairaj returns with Ratna, and Amritlal loses no opportunity to set down his own terms and conditions under the veneer of mutual compromise. No illusion of love and respect is created by the

younger couple and the patriarch is clever enough to understand the hatred in their silence and does not forget to mention it: “I realize, of course, that you have come back more out of necessity than any real intension of patching up what you have undone” (*Dance...*, 425). He tries to codify his triumph by his pretension of being hurt at being hated by his children, and rather unwillingly reminds them that they vowed never to come back. He makes himself clear enough on certain points: they will continue to dance but he will be happy if they can earn their living out of it; he is not going to refuse money but asking for it will disappoint him; they will not have any right on all of his wealth since it is invested in some nobler cause than dance, they will use his library as the dancing hall, guruji will come to their house twice a week, Ratna will not learn the art from the prostitute, Jairaj will not grow his hair and so on.

With the brand of social reformation, people like Amritlal try to promote the monolithic India which damages a culture so rich in variety and multiplicity. Motivated by the zeal of reformation, they destroy an indigenous and traditional art form and take away the basic human rights of certain citizens in independent India under the garb of rehabilitation. The noble mission of eradicating some “shameful practice” and preventing the turning of “our temple into brothels” is conducted by the ignorant power-holders who can neither understand nor respect the rich aesthetic tradition of India, and merely revitalize a colonial legacy. In their hand, as Ghosh puts it, “The organic relationship of art and sexuality is dissected until both become saleable” (Ghosh, “Form and Content”, 298). Amritlal shows the audacity to send a doctor and a donation of five hundred rupees -- adding a new feather to his crown of a nation-builder --, in exchange for robbing Chennaiamma of the single student to whom she could impart her art, the only thing she

lives for: “She doesn’t mind at all being poor and lonely... It was important for her that she should impart her knowledge to someone worthy of it” (*Dance...*, 420). The feudal patriarch could not allow his daughter-in-law to dance in the courtyard of a prostitute with passers by peering into the scene attracted by the

the sound of the dancing bell, neither can he allow the seventy-five year old woman in his house for social stigma because it affects his social image, because he also is enslaved by the social code -- “There comes a time when you should do what is expected of you” (*Dance...*, 415). The hetero-normative standard of Amritlal operates on an opportunistic level as he easily approves of sadhus growing long hair and can incorporate them within the narrative of sanctified India, but gets irritated at a male dancer with long hair and “the way he walks” (*Dance...*, 417) since it disturbs the narrative of “normal man”.

Amritlal remains a constant presence even after his death (like the ghost of Hasmukh Mehta in *Where There’s a Will*), not only through experience and constructed memories as well as the “antique show” (*Dance...*, 393) of the dummy furniture, but also as an ideology disaffiliating Jairaj’s manhood. The play is haunted by the reverberated echo of the past -- both as memory and the shaping mechanism of present: “Do you know where a man’s happiness lies? ... In being a man” (*Dance...*, 425-6).

We see Amritlal through the eyes of a generation as a glorified past: for Lata he was a great social reformer, a freedom fighter who, after the “big cause” (*Dance...*, 392) lost following independence, concentrates on handling his unruly son. Viswas can well conjecture a terrible fight between father and son, but Lata insists that her father has great

respect for his father, which is why he could not part with the house and the antique furniture even after the offer of ninety lakhs.

The part and perpetuator of patriarchy precludes dance from the normative design. Neo-colonial forces work through this medium destroying the multiplicity of the Indian pluralistic culture in both planes of family (as a patriarch) and state (in role of a pre-independent revolutionary and post-independent reformer). The figure, conspicuously absent in the family album, is Jairaj's mother. She is omitted not merely as a physical presence or felt influence, but is obliterated from memory, recollection or recapitulation except for once. The act of depriving Jairaj's mother any place/space is a pointer to the validation of monolithic male domination. The second generation shows a greater tension issuing from the anxiety to interrogate the monolith.

The woman/feminine is asserted and appropriated only to conceptualize and materialize the man-making process. Here the woman makes the most useful tool partly by conscious design/choice (itself part of and controlled by trans-individual network), and partly by collective ideological preference. Perhaps, it is through the peculiar victim/resistant/agent position of Ratna in the nexus, created to de-womanize Jairaj, that we see, to use Foucauldian vocabulary, how "technique of power, one which pervades everyday life, categorizes individuals, ...and attaches them to their identity, which in brief constitutes individuals as subjects in both senses of the word that is, "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to... (their) own identity by conscience or self-knowledge.'" (Quoted in Smart, 135).

The cultural construct of the dichotomy and its close alignment with economic forces (Jairaj and Ratna were financially dependent on Amritlal), presents layers of preference. Amritlal is given the alternatives between allowing his son to continue the woman's art and his daughter-in-law to perform the stigmatized art of the prostitute (implicated through the facts that *devadasis* had to take up the profession). Interestingly the Hindu patriarch – recognized “liberal minded” by accepting a daughter-in-law from outside the community --, could not allow his daughter-in-law to dance the divine dance of Shiva and Parvati in the courtyard of a seventy-five year old divine prostitute (*Dance...*, 415). His discomfort with Ratna's pursuit of the art form is only a family version of the state program of rehabilitating the *devadasis* to conform to its idea of sanctity even at the cost of damaging their art. However, he prefers to prevent the greater calamity. The woman's pursuit of the harlot's art is tolerated at the expense of the wife's strategic participation in deskillling her husband in woman's art in order to fulfill the alluring prospect of making him a man.

Ratna's character becomes a site for contesting ideologies and positions – a devoted artist with single-minded all-devouring passion for art and a schemer with the hawk's eyes fixed on success in social term and pursuit of career, a victim of socio cultural hegemony and an internalizer turned agent of the very oppressive normativity. The uncertainty of finding a suitable mridangamist for Lata's performance leaves her hysteric, and the frustration makes her map out her own life and her husband as a failure. She feels dance has brought them to nowhere. Unknowingly, she almost reiterates Viswas's' mock performance of Amritlal whom he had barely heard: “Where will you go being a dancer? Nowhere! ... People will point at you on the streets and laugh”

(*Dance...*, 397). The very ordinary coincidence points to the impersonal nature of the forces beneath and collective psyche of a particular culture. Infuriated by Jairaj's attempt at consoling her, Ratna erupts with all her fuming anger as she pulls off her mask of an artist and changes into a spokesman of the very world of Amritlal: "You stopped being a man for me the day you came back to this house" (*Dance...*, 402). Jairaj of course failed in the role of a "man", whose primary function is to be the money-earner, the provider of his family. The dancer wife of the dancer husband finds herself caught in the urge to find a "real man" in her husband. She couldn't escape the ideological trapping of masculinity:" You! You are nothing but a spineless boy who couldn't leave his father's house for more than forty-eight hours" (*Dance...*, 402).

The master stroke of Amritlal comes in form of ensuring his triumph of his mission of making Jairaj a "man" by establishing collusion with his opposition secretly. He is of course quick-sighted enough to detect a clever and ambitious woman in Ratna. Unable to draw her consent on not liking Jairaj in womanly attire, he makes her confess that she married Jairaj more because he will allow her to dance than because she admires him as a dancer, and reminds her that now it is he who is the authority to take the decision since Jairaj's incapability to act as a provider robbed him of the authority of a husband. He also draws Ratna's confession that she thinks jairaj a merely" good" dancer and not brilliant (*Dance...*, 427) and she herself has a greater potential to be famous. Now he places the trump card and the secret nexus is established to stop jairaj dancing in whichever way Ratna thinks best in exchange for making Jairaj "worthy of you" (*Dance...*, 428).

Ratna's initial freedom from ideological trapping in finding Jairaj a suitable husband because he is a dancer is exposed by her acquiescence to Amritlal's conjecture "because he would let you dance" (*Dance...*, 426). The conjugal relation topples down like the house of cards by the temptation: "Help me and I'll never prevent you from dancing" (*Dance...*, 427). Ratna is faced with the alternative of sacrificing her pursuit of her career on the one hand, and sacrificing Jairaj's career and thus ensuring financial security on the other. The self-regarding instinct plays its part. The artist committed to and being the involuntary agent of art, chooses the obvious.

The character of Jairaj becomes the site to situate, de-situate and re-situate the contesting discourses in the play. His father approved of his pursuit of dance only as a boyhood hobby, and now when he is grown up, the former tries every measure to make him an adult, a "man even to the extent of seeking a secret connivance with his daughter-in-law. Protesting against his father's tyranny against his dance, Jairaj left his house with his wife, but was compelled to return defeated. His manhood getting de-affiliated by his inability comes at per with the imperative of his biologically determined role of the provider. Ratna pushes him away from the woman's pursuit by subterfuge and finishes her promise as a dancer to repay her father-in-law, so that the state/man builder could make him "worthy" of her. Ratna's fear of Jairaj's incapability to fulfill for their son the "need for a father" (*Dance...*, 445), is ironically balanced by the "perverse way of thrusting [him] into adulthood" (*Dance...*, 444) initiated by Amritlal. Jairaj's failure as dancer, though primarily contrived, however, does not expectedly lead to his success as a man. Though the former (failure as dancer) is accepted, the latter (failure as a man) goes

on haunting his existential status throughout the play. In fact, Jairaj himself internalizes the norms as much as to confess to Viswas that he thinks his wife right.

The inner contradiction of the discourse of “man”hood is exposed with the surfacing of the hidden alternative given to the financially weak dancer couple. Jairaj questions the validity of the essentially superior masculinity of Ratna’s uncle – the supplier of the basic accommodations of life. Ratna’s accusation of Jairaj for lacking in foundational “man”ly virtues like self-sufficiency and toughness meets a challenge in his bitterly sarcastic interrogation: “While your uncle asked you to go to bed with him? Would I have been a man then? Giving my wife to her own uncle because he was offering us food and shelter?” (*Dance...*, 410) Jairaj resisted not only by being a dancer and pursuing what he liked, but also by reconstructing that portion of the house which he did not like. Jairaj makes it clear he did not sell the house because it contained his childhood not because, as Viswas put it, it was something like a “shrine in memory of him” (*Dance...*, 406). Jairaj knocks over and over, paradoxically complicating the methodology of the man-making process by over-simplifying the definition: “Will finding a musician make me a man?” (*Dance...*, 402)

Interestingly, the gendered culture affiliates the masculinity of Ratna’s uncle by emphasizing his economic independence and self-sufficiency and obscuring his predatory design, and disaffiliates Jairaj’s, by emphasizing his inability to support his family financially and by obscuring his comparative independence from oppressive ideology of patriarchy, companionship (he refuses to dance alone during Ratna’s pregnancy) and

commitment to his art, to the convenience and comfort of the ambivalent mainstream society.

Really poignant is the identity crisis which Jairaj undergoes. He falls prey to the dichotomy between his own chosen identity of a “dancer” and the forced but failed identity of “man” that precludes his former identity. The only time Ratna recognizes Jairaj’s masculinity is his capacity not to cry: “That is because you are a ...man!” (*Dance...*, 437).

### **The Two Worlds Meet:**

Often in our life the worlds meet; they merge, mingle, confront and collide. With introducing an apparently incompatible couple of Lata and Viswas, Dattani attempts to visualize any possibility of the coalition – both retaining and sacrificing something of their own while the dancer couple fails to resist the hegemonic values from spoiling their life and relation.

Viswas is awestruck of course at the lack of expected eagerness on part of Lata’s parents to meet their future son-in-law, but imagines their worry at the failure (“Excuse us, we must rush. We have a son-in-law to meet” *Dance...*, 388) and accepts their inability to show any hospitality resulting from some unavoidable crisis which he cannot understand. We see him trying to share Lata’s sentiment as she recounts her childhood days: when a little girl, she used to watch the “magic” of her parents dancing together. Beneath the jovial veneer we can feel the adjustment both are making on their part -- one with his socio cultural standard and the other with her passion and career. He of course

does not have the passion, but has the patience to sympathize and appreciate Lata's. Rather jokingly, he quickly adheres to Lata's request to let her come here after marriage to practice, since their "floor can't tolerate millions of addavuss". And almost in an unconscious strain of thought, Viswas was on the verge of agreeing to Lata's statement "And we won't have children" (Dance..., 389) and only stops just in time. Viswas can well visualize the reaction of his father – already quite disturbed at the event of his son marrying outside his caste --hearing the resolution of his future daughter-in-law. He wants many and Lata asks him to marry some one else and Viswas now settles for two at least. He even makes a funny suggestion of adopting one right now after their marriage and practicing the art of child-rearing -- a kind of dress-rehearsal, before having their own. Lata smilingly agrees on the number two -- one right away and another latter on, and earns Viswas's overwhelming gratification: "We might get twins. Love's labour saved" (Dance..., 390).

The simple incident of making a "Gujju" (Gujrati) leave the habit of tea appears cruel to Viswas. And, almost unknowingly he cracks jokes about Lata's mother being dominating. But Lata designates Viswas as "pliable" like her father but she promises not to take advantage. In the same light-hearted manner, Viswas acts the butler and announces Jairaj's unwillingness to sell the house in answer to the phone call from a promoter, but keeps open the offer after ten years when he himself will be able to do it. His opinion is different but he respects the other.

Various points of merging of borders are explored in the play. While Lata and Viswas try to strike an understanding based on each other's interest and faith in mutual trust and dependence in order to keep a balance between the demands of both worlds, Ratna and Amritlal collude to merge the interest of both art and hegemonic society so far it addresses the individual. A victim/agent of patriarchal values, Ratna internalizes the norms of feudal patriarchy and deploys art to forward her own interest. Her inability to accept her position as a dancer in the world of art makes her re-live her failures in memory whenever she is frustrated at any point. Jairaj refuses to stay in her room in such times and Lata is extremely unwilling to hear her misery and failure throughout the night: "That's one thing I'll never do. Bore my children talking about the failures in my life!" (Dance..., 404) We have a glimpse the hell Jairaj had undergone from the slipping remark, "You'll only hear them. I've lived through them" (Dance..., 404).

"...in the relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance... that reverses the situation", observed Foucault (quoted in Champagne, 5). A "resistance" is made by conceptualizing the possibility of the deconstruction of the monolith through Sankar (Lord Shiva – the god of dance and a classic Hindu symbol for androgyny): "Then when he (Sankar) grows up, I'll teach him how to dance – the dance of Shiva. The dance of a man" (Dance..., 441).

Here is an appropriation of an alternative Indian myth contesting the myth of effeminacy of male dancer. The myth also challenges the hegemonic appropriation of India's pluralistic religious tradition (accommodating tales of gender confusion through linguistic subterfuge and circumlocution) by leaders like Amritlal, who try to obliterate

deviants either by denial of difference or by foregrounding conformists. Jairaj dreams of teaching his son the *Tandaba nritya*, breaking the worn out establishment, the dance of the same god -- "...Nataraja, the god of dancers --, the god whose primal dance created the vibrations that set the world in motion" (Narayan, 198).

Interestingly, the highly loaded scene of Sankar's death is kept at abeyance until the last but one scene – practically the last of the real and mortal scenes. Apart from fitting in the schema of the discovery of the skeleton in the cupboard, the scene qualifies our response to the divine vision of peace and harmony which the ending otherwise aims at. The death of Sankar signifies the death of Jairaj's fantasy of teaching his son the art of dance, the "tandaba", the dance of the male dancing god. It may also have a fearful connotation of the impossibility of the idea of coherence/unity in the human world, a view supported by the post-mortem speech of Jairaj: "We were only human. We lacked the grace. We lacked the brilliance. We lacked the magic to dance like God" (Dance..., 447). The death also signifies the failure of Amritlal to perpetuate his authoritarian patriarchy (evident from his unusual concern for his grandchild) which faced a discontinuity in his son.

The third generation, however, takes a step farther to affiliate and conceptualize a new facet of the relation between the genres of "man" and "dance". Lata, herself a promising dancer and the child of the dancer parents, is, to some extent, able to balance her art and different gender roles. Secured and sheltered in history (faith in Jairaj's respect for her granddad and in her mother's selfless affection), confident in present (herself being extremely talented and her parents - especially Ratna - knowing the art of

“pushing”) and assured about her future (her husband showing respect for her artistic pursuit), she incarnates the happiest possible equilibrium in the world of this drama. In the course of the play, perhaps it is Lata, who valorizes Jairaj’s status as a “man”. By accepting Viswas as her suitor (though without a scrap of the understanding of the art), she shows her preference for the kind of masculinity embedded in the image of her father: “daddy is a bit more ... pliable than usual. Like you” (Dance..., 392).

The impression is also strengthened by her commendation of Jairaj’s “courage” to choreograph the ‘Asthapadi’ for her mother thirty years ago. It almost validates a more desirable version of “man”hood, embodied in the male dancer, more conspicuous by its absence in Viswas, the otherwise “normal” man.

Viswas, belonging to a newer generation, provides a fresh “man”ly outlook of the art of “dance” as the layman husband of a talented dancer and the son-in-law of dancer in-laws. A bit antic but sensitive, not of much deeper understanding but patient with the “different”, he maintains a strange relation to the art and artists. Here Viswas is confronted with a different value system, even a set of different socio-ethical criteria of judging “man”. He of course lacks both the deep emotional attachment to and the intellectual understanding of the art. Being a complete stranger to the world of performance – except for the role of spectator --he fails to share Lata’s imaginative identification with her world. Viswas’s conventional status of “man” is accepted by giving him the power to “let” his wife dance. But at the same time, he is restricted by the condition. A variant of priority/preference in constructing the idea of masculinity is

sought: “[a]ctually they [the parent] couldn’t care less who or what you are. As long as you let me dance” (Dance..., 388).

Viswas of course shares the uneasiness about the covert “too erotic” connotation of the reviews, proliferating praises like “tenderly intense and intensely tender”. Instead of valorizing his “man”ly possessiveness about his wife’s sexuality, his inability to accept the display of the eroticism, necessary to the artistic purpose, is discouraged as a lack of courage, at least in comparison to Jairaj encouraging -- thirty years ago -- his wife to perform the same numbers from “Geetagoindam”.

Though Viswas is presented as, Ghosh remarks, “parodic version of what Amritlal might have looked for in a son – a comfortable financial position, immense property and complete innocence about the arts” (Ghosh, “Form and Content”, 299), his honest flexibility gains a visible advantage over the rigid orthodoxy of Amritlal. He shows sincere respect for Lata’s passion, and is reciprocated equally sincerely by Lata’s promise to sacrifice her career for a time being to fulfill his dream of having one child “right away”. It is through this couple that a compatible, though not complementary, partnership is projected.

However, the mastery of Dattani is visible in working out the open-endedness of the meaning the play tries to produce. Jairaj’s suspicion that Ratna might have died out of boredom throws some doubt whether Lata was compelled to compromise with her artistic pursuit since it is her career which kept Ratna so much busy in her old age. Doubts arise whether really Viswas’ mother will inspect Lata’s leg to verify whether she wears skirt, or Viswas will be comfortable with Lata’s erotic numbers and Lata will be

able to live a schizophrenic life (Ghosh, "Form and Content", 300). With another parody/irony, unlike the first born of Jairaj and Ratna -- embodying the fantasy of male dancer -- who fails to survive, the first born of Lata and Viswas articulated his first word which sounded like "jalebi" (a dessert). A fear creeps in, as Ghosh observes, "The art may be lost but peace will remain, at least on the surface. If not, the plot becomes cyclical suggesting that we are doomed to live out our miserable lives again and again through the succeeding generations in a kind of frozen catastrophe, because we are 'human' and not 'God'" (Ghosh, "Form and Content", 301).

"The grace" unattainable in this world, is dramatized through the vision of the dramatist -- never aiming at the impossible realism but exploring all possibilities that the fictive mode provides to address reality. Finally, the play conjures up a vision of the dancer couple -- both male and female --complementing each other as they "dance perfectly. In unison" (Dance..., 447). The demolishing of the house, especially the older portion, envisages a possibility -- if not actuality -- of bringing a new order which is less oppressive and less hegemonic. The epiphanic vision of the couple dancing together in perfect unison "Not missing a step or a beat" (Dance..., 447), gain a greater dimension when it becomes metaphorical of life in the way Shakespeare metaphorized the stage as an equivalent of life itself.

## **The Gendered Subject: *Tara***

As usual with Dattani, the present play *Tara* is also multilayered and explores as well as discovers multiple facets of curtailed issues -- some discerned by the author, some to be discovered by the readers. Here is an investigation into the meanings, motives and significations encoded in our unintended even unconscious “normal” behaviour. Dattani’s commitment towards and focus on the specific issues that are gradually coming out of the closet and influencing our time, found gender a potential site for exploration; but the prominent issue of disability complicates the subject yet further by adding another dimension to the play. 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 another, sometimes making one the metaphor for the other -- both ways undermining the individuals outside the matrix of “mainstream” constituted by “patriarchy” and “able-bodied”.

It is in this specific point, where both discourses of disability and femininity intersect, lies the special charm of Dattani’s play. Both gender and disability are the conceptual frames which give meaning to the body. For years, biological destiny was the accepted rationale behind the exclusion of women, coloured and disabled people from the life they desire and deserve, and, compelling them to a particular social role as subordinate and dependent. The same mechanism that fits biological sex to social gendered role renders the atypical body of impaired people invisible or assigns

oppositional identity (outsider). The mass identity imposed on women showing a strong disbelief in their individuality is replicated in the identical historical response to the physical impairment and cognitive, emotional and psychiatric disability. The same mechanism that holds women physically, intellectually and emotionally frail and weak to have the control over property and custody of children, certifies disabled persons biologically too inferior to execute responsibility and therefore unqualified to enjoy privileges of citizenship and perform reproductive role. Hence, impairment turns out to be no more neutral than the sexual characteristics by which our consciousness of the world gets permeated.

The issue gets farther problematized by the gender role which becomes the site for contestation between patriarchy and various feminist groups—the very role deterring the disabled women from entering within its ambit. The traditionally dependent position of disabled persons excludes women from the role of care-giver and men from the domain of masculinity making them feel feminized. Here Dattani's concern is not to prove that some disabled people are as productive as the able-bodied, valorizing health over illness (illness is an undeniable factor of the life of many impaired people), and autonomy over dependency, but to challenge the biological determinism without devaluing or obliterating the biological difference.

At other levels, the concept of colonization ranges 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 and many more. However, this is also a story of resistance, a tale of the circular flow of power, a narrative of

harmony. Notably, as a contemporary dramatist --with his focus on urban India --, Dattani precisely deals with the workings of the issues fabricated within the “complicated dynamics of modern urban family” (Mee, “A Note on *Tara*”, 319).

Moreover, as queer theorists hold, the people deviating from the specific typicality are undermined by being excluded from the usual epistemic standard of knowing. The non-disableds’ diagnosis of difficulty in disabled people’s life is also prioritized over their own account, ignoring the normal standard of epistemic expertise. Dattani, by making Dan acknowledge and voice his own disability, challenges normative criteria and by dissolving the author into the text, subverts the aesthetic standard of artistic representation.

### **The Aesthetics**

“From the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing can ever be made”

--Immanuel Kant (quoted in Silvers, “The Crooked Timber of Humanity”, 228).

“Beautiful art ... describes as beautiful things which may be in nature ugly or displeasing”

--Immanuel Kant (quoted in Silvers, “The Crooked Timber of Humanity”, 231).

The paradox which remained unresolved for centuries of aesthetic history is that, while disability has always been thought as undesirable, abnormal, unacknowledged and repulsive in real life, it has been a frequently explored subject for artistic representation. In fact, the normal holds so much less sway in art than in ordinary life, that it often failed to evoke the sense of shocking novelty which is so much valued in art. The sociocultural narrative of practical life is disturbed by anomaly, whereas in art, the shock awakens the blunt sensibility of the observer to new understanding of aesthetics, and helps the work to be popular by creating gimmick and sensation. While the lesser artists find photographic limitation in the depiction of “normality”, the regime of disability offers vast scope for imagination and representation. Interestingly, however, the representation omits the disagreeable aspects of the original, obscures the experiences of persons with disability and uses disability as the signifier of something beyond and besides itself. Thus, while feminists complain of omitting the writings by female writers from canons, disabled artists from Homer to Vangogue have always been highlighted specially and held unusually/unexpectedly talented as opposed to the other talented mortals.

Transformational art, thus adding significations to the phenomenon of disability transcending itself, reinforces the metanarrative that dictates knowledge by leveling terms to the veiled, undervalued and ignored. The level of deviant and other authenticate the ontological validity of the superiority of the mainstream and “normal”. By associating it with destiny, and making it represent incompetence, sin, moral depravity, burdensomeness etc, the discourse colonizes impaired people and exploits their image to nourish non-disabled’s fiction about their own perfection. The very image of helplessness

and dependency is instrumented to test the nobility and grandeur of humanity. With another fine paradox, the aesthetic of disability conceals disability by mirroring it within discourses of attractiveness; the act of borrowing something from the “beautiful” normal world to be agreeable and pleasing, helps the “normal” to bolster their confidence about their superiority and completeness.

Postmodernists have used freakishness to undermine the prevalent practice by foregrounding obscured and undesirable areas as well as to celebrate difference and exalt deviation to undermine power relation, from which aesthetics draws force. In spite of their claim that fidelity to nature is no criterion to judge the work of art, the practice remains no more natural or no less social, and participates in the history of “metaphorical opportunism” (Mitchell and Snyder, 17).

Though projected frequently as an artistic object, the corporeal and cognitive anomaly poses a threat to the non-disabled audience unless presented as frail, weak and dependent. Thus, impairment becomes palatable and veiled by being broadly symbolic. As Mitchell and Snyder put it, disability is embellished until it is the generalized symbol for undeserved misfortune. The image serves self-congratulatory for non-disabled and acquires appeal absent in the original, which they called the “representational double bind of disability” (Mitchell and Snyder, 6). The ignoble cultural predicament excludes disabled people, especially women (even the representation) from the belittling role of sexual and maternal role assigned to the black women.

Uniqueness, rather than typicality, holds the gravitation of attention: Uniqueness emancipates imagination and frees the exceptional individual from expectation to which

the group is held. For example, in Harriet Martin's "Life in the Sick Room" and Charlotte Young's "The Clever Woman of the Family", confinement to the couch rather empowered the women than limiting, freeing them from the reproductive role and therefore, redefining their productivity as intellectual. Hence disability becomes both liberating and exclusionary means, either way performing instrumental function which shadows the relational aspect of art with the real.

Beautiful work of art has been produced by using the expected properties of disability from time immemorial. This is precisely what Dan aims at in the beginning but a counter discourse comes into play and he fails. Thus Dattani attempts to set a different aesthetic standard for the representation of people whose actual appearance is repulsive by subverting the reading of the fact and turning the direction of the mirror. The lack of stability and coherence in Dan's narrative and various ideas rallying to decentralize his focus prove that renovation and revitalization of our moral and aesthetic criteria and the standard of knowing is possible. Finally, Dan discovers his inability to conform to any totalizing idea, any static and categorical metadiscursive commitment.

### **The Author**

Smith observed, "Hegemony does not take the form of brute domination; it entails instead the delimitations of the intelligible... To fail to achieve an adequate fit within an officially recognized position is to be de-authorized – to be denied recognition as an

author of the text and to have one's text dismissed from the start as incoherent, illegitimate or unbelievable" (quoted in Ghai, 95).

Since the play attempts a re-reading of the aesthetic representation of the sister issues of gender and disability, it is very much in consonance that the only realistic level at which the play operates, is that of the attempting-to-be-an-author of the play *Twinkling Tara*. A generic destabilization is under process as the author's control over the text gets nullified dissolving the author himself into the text. The act of writing becomes a search for Dan's own identity which is incoherent, fluid, unstructured -- a "freak" (*Tara*, 324).

Dan consciously refuses to be the oriental writer which would have ensured a publication of his *Random Raj* (*Tara*, 324) had it been selling dowry, suttee or other oriental products to the Western customer having a preference for oriental flavour. Yet he had flown to London for two years and refuses to come back to India: "I don't think I can face life there any more... there's nothing left for me to come back to..." (*Tara*, 372). To be disabled in India has specific context, meaning and implication which he feels himself unable to be up to without Tara, the sharer of his identity, whom he tries to rejuvenate by writing. The Indian deterministic framework allows very few to escape the "erosion of agency", and hesitates to accord a disabled person "expert status of either his or her own life, or that of the dominant group" (Ghai, 95).

But Dan fails to give coherence to his narrative. He tries to locate the cause -- "In poetry, even the most turbulent emotions can be recollected when one is half asleep. But in drama! Ah! Even tranquility has to be recalled with emotion. Like touching a bare live wire" (*Tara*, 323). For him the act becomes all the more problematic since here

Dan's challenge is not to hold himself upright without losing his direction in the face of the stormy emotions hitting from outside, rather they emanate from within, putting his unified self in topsy-turvy.

Dan's failure of distancing himself objectively from his subject matter, questions the generic validity of his work, namely, drama. Of course, he took up his project of producing a play about Tara, his twin sister, as an omniscient "god", a narrator treating his subject matter objectively. But the project gets dumped as he finds it impossible to extricate himself from one "lying deep inside, out of reach" (*Tara*, 324), not as a component part of his existence and experience, but organically related. Consequently, the hitherto objective subject matter demands complete subjection of the subject-author to an authorless narrative with no narrator to "make" a story to edit, to interpret, and hereby, construct the "experience". Caught in the web of memory and experience, the act of writing dissolves into an act of remembering.

With a fine miming Dan removes the neatly arranged masks of that of the "handicapped intellectual", "the desperate immigrant" and the "mysterious brown with the phony accent" (*Tara*, 324). The mask falls off the omniscient author who "know'st", and who "from the first / Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread, / Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss, / And mad'st it pregnant" (*Paradise Lost, Book I* 1). Materials gets scattered, focus off-centered: "The mind wanders too much. Unnecessary details, irrelevant characters..." (*Tara*, 330). His attempt at stereotyping -- representing Tara, the heroin, as "Kind, gentle, strong" (*Tara*, 330), their mother as all loving and nurturing mother-earth, father as a typical patriarch, the fount head of the flow of power ,

fail. His inability to narrativise the story, of giving an objective perspective to a subjective tale, transforms into the death wish at inception of both the author (Dan) and the text (Tara): “We were meant to die and our mortal remains preserved in formaldehyde for future generations to study” (*Tara*, 330).

The generic destabilization gets unavoidable when Tara, as a text, promising an effect of “high tragedy and romance, youth ready to burst forth into the world with spring-like freshness”, withers away. The unreliability of the metanarrative provided by science proves the point of failure in any attempt at a grand narrative -- sometimes it is fraught with pain (as Chandan’s) or guilt (as Bharati’s) or deployed to assert control (as Patel’s) or motivated to hold at the centre by marginalizing other (as Roopa’s) or securing practical advantages (as Dr Thakkar’s). Hence Dan discovers himself unequal to the role of the self-content author, but rather, a mere functionary trying to organize the materials with his artistic “craft” (*Tara*, 379). Here we have a conscious rejection of any “story”, resisting of the temptation of taking “something from Tara -- and give it to myself” (*Tara*, 379) like Dr Thakkar to “make” “capital” of his “trauma” and his “tragedy” (*Tara*, 379) in order to capitalize her to farther his own interest.

This is a regression from the act of “writing” to the oral rendition of stories leaving only the voice in a primitive manner, a voice that may be imitated, interpolated, edited, omitted, given different meanings and interpretations like that of the older bards. This is an attempt to obliterate the conscious controlling of a unique -- therefore free -- individual: “The voice is all that will remain. No writing...that once belonged to an object. An object like other objects in a cosmos, whose orbits are determined by those

around. Moving in a forced harmony. Those who survive are those who do not defy the gravity of others” (*Tara*, 379). The ego withdraws into the domain of personal memory and fantasy. The boundaries break; the authentic/hyperreal world of science cooking up a fantastic tale, the real proves infertile. Chandan produces only another title sheet with a changed date. As the memory proves too realistic to be structured in a story, fantasy metaphorizes the real: the twin, the voiced Dan/disabled, scared Chandan and the rebellious, assertive Tara/ disabled, oppressed feminine hug and complete each other without a limp, ignoring the forces to separate them.

### **The Narrative**

The play endorses a sharp disbelief in any neutral narrative and explores points of conjunction and disjunction of various narratives challenging, omitting, destabilizing one another. The forced disjunction of the siamese twins through surgery is ironically contrasted with the forced united existence of their parents -- at every turn confronting each other with a different narrative for the children. From the very beginning we find Bharati as an over-caring mother nervously eager to procure nourishment for Tara, even denouncing Patel’s reasonable leniency for her strict diet. She is even unwilling to accept that Tara is growing up steadily and gets irritated at the hint of unusual/beyond-expectation in the “surprise” (*Tara*, 326) showed by the doctor at their progress. Their narratives differ even in regard to the trifles like willingness for using the brass tumbler of Bharati’s father as well as the important issue of using his house-- each claiming the other to be reluctant.

The narrative of course becomes a powerful tool for exercising power. Bharati, unable to regulate the situation according to her will, finds it an effective means of confronting her husband: "I will tell her. I will tell them everything" (*Tara*, 345). An immediate and spontaneous reaction to the threat comes in the form of Patel's slapping Bharati on the face (which is not a usual trait in his character); the look of triumph in latter's eyes confirms the explosive potency of the hidden story. After the initial stimulus to overcome the fear of disclosure of the "fact" by violence, Patel recurses to other more effective modes of silencing like appealing to her motherhood, pleading for the cause of the welfare of children themselves: "You wouldn't dare tell them. Not you...Not yet" (*Tara*, 345). At last he determines to have the full control by taking up the role of narrator himself conveying the fact: "If at all they must know, it will be from me. Not from you" (*Tara*, 345).

Throughout the play, we have myriads of master strokes of interweaving of counter narratives, one disqualifying the other. In the implied narrative of Bharati, her father was a loving influential grandfather who left enough money for both his grandchildren while Mr. Patel is only bothered about Chandan's future making plans for his education and career. But Patel's tale proclaims that "nothing" (*Tara*, 360) of their grandfather's property was conferred on Tara. He even claims that it is Bharati, who "make[s]" him -- by positioning and representing -- a "liar", "wife-beater", "child abuser" (*Tara*, 353). As the counter move of Bharati's attempt in creating a loving corner to shell the children from the roughness of the outside, Mr. Patel reacts against the cocooned existence into which they are gradually getting withdrawn: "You are turning them against the whole world" (*Tara*, 352).

In a like manner, Mr. Patel's pathetic appeal to Tara to believe his concern for her ("I love you very much and I have never in all my life loved you less or more than I have loved your brother", (*Tara*, 354) is countered by an almost hysteric/beatified devotion of Bharati to Tara to make her remember that "You are my most beautiful baby! I love you very much" (*Tara*, 355). She remains always preoccupied with cooking her favourite dishes, fretting about her hygiene, buying friends for her, appealing to Chandan to take care of her, countering the insensitive attitude of the world by lavishing her care and pride ("my most beautiful baby", *Tara*, 355), even making up for her father's tyranny of indifference by unusual show of care -- thus building a protective shell of love around her because "Love can make up for a lot" (*Tara*, 349). However, a covert but constant working of a motive becomes unmistakably obvious behind all Bharati's projection (action and narration), that of proving to Tara that she is not only "loved" but is "loved" by her mother, and her mother alone, and convince her of her father's lack of affection.

The labyrinth of contesting narratives terminates on a dead end with the disclosure of a long-hidden history. The secret explodes with all its force shattering the microcosmic universe of the family. The authentic narrative of science is superseded by a different story told by another, whose authenticity/authority is assured by the suppression of the dissenting voice of the projected victimizer. The fact of the existence of a third leg, veiled under secrecy so long, is now revealed. As Mr. Patel recounts it, the twins were born with three legs, each having one and the third one having grater supply of blood from the girl. The obvious, ethical and medically feasible choice of providing the third one to the girl was dumped to create an unethical and improbable alternative in the interest of the power holders. A secret nexus between their grandfather and Bharati and

Dr Thakkar, decided that the leg should be given to the boy. In exchange of three acres of state land for the nursing home as a gift from the influential industrialist and MLA, science was socialized to deviate from its course. The leg clang to Chandan like a dead cell for two days and it had to be amputated by representing it as a “natural rejection” (*Tara*, 378).

The narrative of the beatific devotion of Bharati to Tara gets different layers of interpretation (“she called me her star!” -- *Tara*, 379). The whole universe of Tara falls apart, as the gravitation provided by the love of her mother, the refuge for all her humiliation, pain and loss, compensation for all wrongs done to her by nature and the society, shelter from all fears, get removed throwing her into a void -- dark, unknown, unsympathetic. The structure of her experience, Thought and vision by which she could interpret, participate and belong to her little world was gone; she loses all will to live and face life itself. The twinkling Tara withers into a shooting star.

Interestingly, the catastrophe of the play follows no action, rather, like *Oedipus Rex*, it results from the anagnorisis itself -- narration of a long-hidden secret -- and like it, the present play also turns out to be a tragedy of knowledge. However, unlike the Greek one, the revelation of “truth” does not come from Delphi, standing naked in the open day light, rather, the narrator here reveals the dark secret to submerge a dissenting voice having the potential of giving another version of truth. Remarkably, Mr. Patel only dares to reveal the truth when Bharati is told to have reduced into eccentricity for having suffering from a nervous breakdown. Perhaps there was reason enough in her speech which Patel could not risk passing as lunatic incoherence. The zeal of “telling” himself

on part of Patel and the hints dropped in words like having “satisfaction” and “confession” (*Tara*, 344) in relation with Bharati, supplemented by the meta-narrative by Dr Thakkar lead to an open ended perennial confusion about the actual fact.

The narrative sets devastating forces in motion, opens up destructive possibilities, inspires plethora of questions unresolved. It cannot explain why Bharati could have an upper hand over Patel by offering to disclose the truth (I will tell them”), why Patel pleaded pathetically and oppressed violently and always anxiously guarded the secret, why did he prohibit the children to see their mother on their own, why did he fear a “confession” by her. It remains unanswered whether the arrangement of a donor was an act of expiation on his part because of which he could not allow his wife a grater and more effective penance that may unstable his position or may be it would amount to Bharati’s getting cleansed off the guilt and cementing her bond with her children -- himself loosening his grip yet farther with no hope of recovering it by disclosing the secret. The secret was a powerful weapon for Bharati to challenge his authority and he almost obtains a sadistic pleasure in using the story to assert it. Or it may be, to eradicate any farther possibility of being overridden he places his final card to ensure his centrality for ever.

### **The Science**

While on the realistic level, Dan grapples vainly with the very possibility of losing control, a coherent narrative is provided by Dr Thakkar on a hyper-real level. The sheer god-like presence of Dr Thakkar itself is a powerful signifier of the absolute supremacy of science (ousting religion in a modern secular world) that alone can attest the authenticity of fact/truth.

The facts recorded from the medical bulletin may be catalogued in following manner:

Generally, when one fertilized egg instead of developing into two different embryos, “fails to do so fully” (*Tara*, 331), a Siamese twin is born

Naturally, the twins are almost “invariably of the same sex” (*Tara*, 332).

Rarely, one in a fifty thousand twin conception becomes conjoined.

Very rarely, as in this case, the conjoined twins are of different sex.

The twins were conjoined from the “breastbone down through the pelvic area” (*Tara*, 331).

Only seven such twins were recorded to have survived through birth.

“In all cases, so far, one twin has always died by the age of four” (*Tara*, 332).

Unprecedentedly, the twins are still alive in their teens.

Separation of the twins through “surgery was their only chance of survival” (*Tara*, 331).

The operation was conducted for the first time in India under the leadership of Dr Umakant Thakkar in Queen Victoria hospital in Bombay.

They will be completely sterile.

Extreme care was taken and repeated rehearsals were conducted (though parents were warned against the worst) since the babies were only three months old and the surgery was very complicated. It was expected that I. each would have one kidney, II. The only bladder and rectum belonged to the boy (the girl's would be developed artificially), III. The boy's lungs was weak, IV. Conjoined livers were to be separated without hurting the bile ducts.

“The Patel twins made medical history today by being the longest surviving pair of Siamese twins” (*Tara*, 355).

“Nature wanted to kill her. We couldn't allow it” (*Tara*, 376). Consequently, the girl is undergoing her seventh prosthesis and kidney transplantation at the age of sixteen creating a history of the longest living Siamese twin in India.

Thus, in some areas, medical science like an equal-footed partner finishes off nature's “near-complete job” (*Tara*, 356). But in some other, it took up the challenge and turned victorious by performing the “marvels in the world of medicine” (*Tara*, 330). However, the complications climaxed in regard to saving the life of the girl child “unless this miracle” had “might”, (Shakespeare, sonnet no. 65) -- by a classic peripeteia -- to

reverse nature's intension, it would have completed its "unfair deal" (Cf. "Even nature gave her a raw deal", *Tara*, 356). However, the newspapers and daily journals supplement the medical journal by shifting the focus on to the psychological factors: "the will to survive has proved to work more miracles than the greatest of science" (*Tara*, 356).

### **The Gender**

Butler rightly observes that the disciplinary society in its production of normalized subject attempts to affect "a false stabilization" by making biological characteristics determinates of fixed gender role and privileging a gender role over the other (Butler, 125). Gender politics of course varies with specific sociocultural contexts. Multiple ways of oppressing women are visible issues in rural and conservative India, but in the "complicated dynamics of modern urban family" the issues work in far subtler ways as underlying motives of many of our common behavioral patterns. Primordial practices, mentioned jokingly in the commentslike , "Men in the house were deciding on whether they are going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave" (*Tara*, 328), or in reference to incidents of killing girl babies by drowning them into milk, have got refined through the complicated sensibility of an upper middle class family.

Gender categorization works through the father's indifference to the daughter's career as a businesswoman who might have proved smarter and more intelligent than her introvert brother, already privileged by the sole inheritance of his grandfather's property.

Mr. Patel shows strong inclination towards Chandan's coming to the office with him to have a feel, but finds no word of encouragement for Tara's prospect of joining him: "You may both come -- if you want to" (*Tara*, 328). He insists on Tara's filling in the form for college, only because "Chandan refuses to join college without you" (*Tara*, 360) and makes plans for the former's career and arranges for sending him abroad.

Following the discursive practice of dividing the domain of power between outside and inside home, Mr. Patel asserts his authority outside home: he decides Chandan's career, makes arrangement for the donor and Tara's surgery and withholds his wife to "have the satisfaction..." of donating her kidney to Tara with as much zeal as she wants the contrary. He exhibits genuine care and concern about Tara's health whether by responding to the emergency or by continuing prolonged treatment. But when it comes to the plan about her career, he shirks away from his responsibility by accusing his wife: "When have you ever allowed me to make any plan for her?" (*Tara*, 352). It is this lack of liberality of accepting any alternative gender role that makes him shudder at the sight of Chandan's helping his mother to disentangle the knitting: "But you can think of turning him into a sissy – teaching him to knit!" (*Tara*, 351)

However, the delicacy of Dattani as a chronicler of a modern urban Indian family gets evident in points where patriarchy is exposed to operate by making the victim its agent and vice versa. The duplicity negates the fixity of the role of "man" and "woman", makes their position unstable, but always ensuring the stability of heteropatriarchal ideology. The woman incorporated into its network is made a party to the ineffectual decision of grafting the third leg of the twin onto the boy, while in the

girl's case it had greater possibility of survival. Lacking in the marker of masculinity -- in the present case -- the financial self-sufficiency or superiority to his wife, Mr. Patel is reduced into nonentity with no opinion in matters of his children.

Most importantly, the play is a story of the forced separation of the feminine and the masculine self resulting in the symbolic lopsidedness, about the “gendered self, about coming in terms with the feminine side of one's self in a world that always favors what is ‘male’” (Dattani, quoted in Mee, 320). Tara wastes away after losing her tie with Chandan. Chandan, the dramatist, of course tries to make “capital of” Tara as “subject matter”, but fails to create the objective distance from his own feminine self, “lying deep inside out of reach....” However, Dattani's comic vision of the cosmos envisages a possibility as the play, to follow the playwright himself, “...ends with them [male and female] sort of dissolved into the cosmos and in a cyclical sense finding union again” (“A Dialogue...” 130).

### **The Freak**

The cultural discourse celebrates the centrality of the “normal” body by marginalizing the atypical disabled body in various ways: artistically devaluing it into negative symbols, politically making it “invisible” and socially Otherized -- yet never absents it from its narrative. It acts as a depository for the centre to expel its anxiety, irrationality and contradiction unto the subordinate, filling it with the antithesis of its own identity. Hence, the other represents what is deeply familiar to the centre but projected outside, leading to

antagonism and aversion. Thus “[d]isability is more than a background ... it is ... the basis on which the ‘normal’ body is constructed... disability defines the negative space the body must not occupy” (Davis, 68). As Thomson observes, the “subject position of cultural self [is] the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate’s boundaries” (Thomson, 7). Normal body, conceived as unified and consolidated whole, is foregrounded by its oppositional relation to the shattered, limited and anomalous. Hence normalcy is dependent on the discourse of Disability. While the privilege of normal is to have commonness respected, the privilege of Disabled is the acknowledgement of pain and to have difference respected (Silvers, “Disability”, 415-27).

Our culture valorizes perfection, rendering the impaired body unnatural, inherently deficit and lacking. In India, disability is seen as personal tragedy and levels like “bechara” (poor thing) accentuate the victim status. Having strong foundation in the theory of destiny, it is either seen as resulting from wrath of fate and consequently beyond redemption, or as the retribution of past Karmas, in both cases, essential and individual. Hence, the reaction ranges from pity, charity to hostility, anger, banter and ridicule.

Indeed a paradigmatic shift came with the medical explanation of the phenomenon of disability, but it continued to replicate its predecessor in recognition of it as “disease”. Naturalness gained sanction as “[m]edical constructions encouraged cure/overcoming theories” (Ghai, 91). Consequently, excessive reliance on medical explanation tends to disregard the disabling non-pathological factors like self-abnegation,

mental stress and the social and culture-relative role allocation. It justifies the predominance of health professionals, rehabs and support needs ignoring the importance of culture's power mechanism. The stress on biological destiny also holds environment neutral in abnormalizing impaired people.

In the play, the collapse of the escape cum defense mechanism of Dan, consequent upon the recognition of the oppressive strategy of capitalizing the freakishness of Tara, which leads to his discovery of himself as a "freak", (*Tara*, 324) also powerfully interrogates the representational strategies by which disabled persons are identified in society and art.

On realistic level, the freakishness/disability of Chandan and Tara is introduced against the backdrop of a so-called "normal" world represented by Roopa. A dialogue between the centre and the margin commences from the very beginning, redefining and readjusting their respective positions. The short colloquy between Roopa and Prema's mother sets in motion the workings of feelings like mutual betrayal (both friends blaming the other for provoking to see "Fatal Attraction"), falsehood, selfishness (Roopa avoids seeing Prema in fear to catch cold), hypocrisy (Roopa's pretension of cordiality by using broken Gujarati "Kem chcho", "Majhja ma", *Tara*, 327) etc and so on. And yet the bonding of normalcy, ensuring superiority, keeps them tied together. However, the instability of any given position gets apparent when, in order to belong to the superior class -- sometimes with intelligent Tara excluding Prema and Nalini and sometimes to that of able-bodied society of the latter two excluding Tara and Bharati--, Roopa uses the word "wandu tarah"/odd type (*Tara*, 340) as the most humiliating term.

The individuality of Dattani is stamped on his treatment of the issue of disability. He takes a different course from representing them as the innocent-helpless-victims of fate and “bad” elements of society or the grateful recipients of the noble charity of the able-bodied, in both ways passively confirming the latter’s superiority. Rather, a Foucauldian mechanism of resistance is at work. It is at work in the acknowledgement of the comparative dullness of Roopa (evident in her calling “ogres” as “oglers”, *Tara*, 329) as well as her infatuation with monster story rather imbecilic for her age), Tara’s declamation of herself as “[s]trong. Healthy. Beautiful” (*Tara*, 329), and Chandan’s assertion of including Roopa in his story as an “ogler” (*Tara*, 329) and like trifles. However, every act of resistance is a painful reminder of being marginalized: Tara boldly pulls up her trouser to show the artificial leg to the curious peers to satisfy their pleasure of oddity and mocks their idiotic gaze with a laugh, but feels a sharp anguish and pain for being compelled to display herself as a look-at-able object. She becomes aggressive and calls them ugly, “frightful” and “duckling” (*Tara*, 335). Her defense mechanism includes the tool of “exaggeration” as she herself offers to show her Jaipur leg, thanks for admiring them, shows even Chandan’s, and as if to revert the object of shame into that of pride, advertises it “the very best of Jaipur, made in Paris”; and finally makes Roopa feel not up to the joke of two Ps in a pot.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the body is a “grouping of lived-through meanings which moves towards its equilibrium” (quoted in Iwakuma, 78). Therefore, by embodiment i.e. the extension of bodily synthesis, the body extends to an object absorbed

with environment/umwelt. By the same process, the artificial legs become the part of the twin's body. This search for equilibrium forms the core of adjustment for the disabled persons which does not pose much problem for them since they get accustomed to it from their very childhood. They develop a love-hate relation with the prosthesis.

In the private sphere, the embodiment gets completed and the twins enjoy the consciousness of a healthy body image; but the public gaze separates the aids from the unconscious body image and qualifies the body as incomplete. When alone, they usually remain as indifferent to the extensions as any other body parts, but in public, that body is no longer taken for granted, axiomatic or implicit, and the focus is shifted. The whole body reduces into the extension, which becomes the object of conscious thought, focused, therefore meaningful. Tara's encounter with the girls in the street, curiously gazing and knocking at her leg, is a fair example in point. Even their father Mr. Patel thoroughly fails to understand the issue and blames his wife for "turning them against the whole world" (*Tara*, 352). The twins keep alive, jovial and absorbed in adolescent pleasures in the private circle. But in public sphere whether in the company of Roopa, Prema and Nalini or the physiotherapist, they become shelled like Chandan or bleed like defending/offending and resisting Tara.

The girls' interest in Tara's leg almost replicates Roopa's avidity for the stories of monsters -- beings outside the ambiance of "normality". Feeling cornered, Tara craves for identity and passionately urges Chandan to turn of Brahms's concert only because it is not by Beethoven -- the disabled musician. They find only shelter in the world of the two guarded by their anxious parents. . Bharati's desperate attempt to find a friend for Tara by

seducing Roopa with her adolescent infatuations, snatching a promise by making her recognize Tara's companionability and even by hysterically pressurizing for it, is foiled by the indifference of Prema's mother (the mother of a "normal" child) to the extent of accusing Roopa of spoiling her child.

The exclusion from "normalcy" operates in the regime of sexuality acting through a dichotomy: either the able-bodied regards the disabled as asexual or, more often, thinks it convenient to develop a sexual bonding but finds it more suitable either to hide it or represent it as a mark of their charity and large-heartedness. Roopa, herself infatuated with Chandan, provokes and indulges him and pretends to be hurt. The latter's claim that she has led him on, undermines her centrality, both as the able-bodied superior and the feminine privileged to be bending graciously to the prayer of the crazy male (to perform gendered role secures normalcy). Being injured, the mask of the pitiful giver falls off: "You actually believed that I would want you to... You have some hopes! ... personally I don't think we are -- ... combatable" (*Tara*, 367). As it nullifies her gesture of stooping out of pity, the wounded pride asserts itself by a contrary move: the "transferred resentment" works its way by exhibiting the sheer incompatibility of the "normal" and the "abnormal" and thus trampling down Chandan's self-respect.

However, the power flows the other way, as Tara turns to hit back, first with mocking Roopa's Malapropos use of the "combatable" and then bringing into use the tool often used against them by the disablist society: "It's good to know what hurts other people...Knowing their secrets is useful" (*Tara*, 369). She tells the tale of building up of a relation of best friendship with Deepa, a girl of her former school. Being compelled by

the class teacher to be paired off with Tara, with whom she never spoke in spite of sitting next to her for so long, Deepa got to take Tara to her home. The latter discovers a rubber cloth under her bed and laughs loudly at her habit of wetting her bed even at thirteen. Since Tara did not tell it to any one and since she could tell it at the slightest provocation, Deepa becomes her friend.

As Gilman identifies beauty with politically constructed ideals that are meant to be exclusionary, Tara, being a desperate resisting instrument, recurses to the discourse which has remained powerful in hands of dominant group. Now Tara points out the uneven tits of Roopa and threatens to show how ugly she looks if seen from a certain angle to her friends Prema and Nalini: "I'd sooner be one-eyed, one-armed and one-legged than be an imbecile like you ...with uneven tits ...They are going to look at your tits the same way they looked at my leg!" *Tara*, 369) Struck at the face back by the margin, the venire of civilization falls off: Roopa shouts at Tara, calls her names and pastes a poster with the words: "'We don't want freaks'" (*Tara*, 378). The act shows how it bleeds and how barbaric and rude one becomes at the slightest possibility of losing the centre of being "normal".

The dialectic between the centre-margin apart, various other issues come under the impasse of the discursive practice which subordinates disabled persons. The oppressive mechanism of homogenization of a marginalized community has operated historically through an identical response to the physical, emotional, cognitive and psychiatric disability. The concept of biological separatism is at work in Roopa's comment: "If you really want some who is -- you should meet Freni Narangiwalla. ...

She is mentally retarded!” (*Tara*, 367) A sharp retort comes in the form of Tara’s ironic correction of the Malapropism (“very much combatable”) as well as Chandan’s retort to the physio-therapist’s observation on her previous experience of working with “mobility impaired” (*Tara*, 358) children: “I haven’t worked with brain cell impaired people...we cannot have a true cultural exchange” (*Tara*, 359).

The overwhelming clinical focus in the twins’ life and in media representation, tries to neutralize these sociocultural factors regulating their existence. We feel an all-pervasive presence of medical paraphernalia in the daily course of the family (doctors and medicines are painful realities in their life). But with the exposure of medical science as serving the need of patriarchy through the impairing of Tara, that marks the cultural subordination of the impaired into “disabled”, we feel a pressing need of a different reading of the phenomenon of disability.

Notably, in practical life, the Jaipur legs effectively aided the independent mobility of the twins, but the peculiar manner of walking with the limp categorizes them as “mobility impaired” by the socialite lady and “horrible crippled thing” by more coarse Roopa. Hence, while impairment, to some extent--Tara’s case proves otherwise, so do other instances of hygienic callousness of the state--results from physio-psycho anomaly, disability results, to a large extent, from the socially constructed attitudinal, physical and structural barrier created by dominant ideology of the disablist society. Thus, by a different representation of the construct of disability, Dattani poses a challenge to the categories of disabled and able-bodied as fixed and permanent, or internally homogenous and oppositional.

## The Intersection

Dattani exhibits a rare insight into hidden areas of subordination where both the gender issue and the issue of disability merge with and intensify one another. Complications arise from the dynamics of gendered role allocations. The patriarchal logic of the grandfather which holds women too frail and unproductive (though reproductive) to inherit property and excludes Tara from his inheritance, is replicated in the twins' expulsion from normal intercourse with the able-bodied world assigning even the male the victim position: "You are afraid ... of meeting new people... who won't know how clever you are... They won't see beyond your..." (*Tara*, 361) In the same manner, women with disability are excluded from the gender role of care-giver adapted by their sex. Great value is placed on womanly art of giving care to the dependent, but the traditionally dependent position of disabled women prevents them from perfecting this art. The assumption, however, follows not from any particular case where the function is deterred due to specific reason, but the assigned alternative social role makes nurturing virtually inconceivable for them. And it is the much lower rate of disabled women's socio cultural participation than their male counterparts that makes Bharati shudder: "The world will accept you – but not her! Oh, the pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable" (*Tara*, 349). On the other hand, as Silvers points out, men and women with disability react differently when it comes to the point of having denied access to certain performances: when gender and disability

intersect, women generally deny gendered identity, but men feel feminized (Silvers, “Disability”, 415-27). Hence, while Tara finds it incumbent to cross the boundary of submissive femininity and face and fight the outer world, Chandan feels scared to do the same without his sister and prefers an existence cocooned in his world of writing.

The gender issue gets entangled with the disability in yet another way. The adaptive functioning of the artificial body parts, which is disruptive to the valorization of the wholesomeness and autonomy of “normal” body, as well as culture’s fear of prosthesis, gets another dimension when it threatens to make male body “imperfect”. Consequently, medical treatment intervenes “in their bodies to eliminate or discipline (to use Foucault’s term) those parts that mark their identification with a purportedly inferior group” (Silvers, “Disability”, 423); and given choice (though Tara was nature’s own selection), attempts were made to complete the body image of Chandan, the male.

The rhetoric of marginality brings the issues yet closer as both the women characters in the play finally come under control of the agents of patriarchy. The imbalance of power in the asymmetric relation between the care-giver and the receiver, which may breed oppression by giving the help-giver a choice that the receiver cannot enjoy, gets farther complicated by the intervention of patriarchy. Here both Bharati, the care-giver and Tara, the care-receiver, (“Do you really want to do that... Because you love me so much”, *Tara*, 355) are controlled by Mr. Patel who, to keep up the delicate balance of power intact, rather finds a donor even at a great expense., Interestingly, both of them become subject matter to be narrativized by their male counterparts. The story line of the play ends with a complete marginalization of the two female figures -- Tara

(breaking her off from the greatest bonding of love with her mother and the normal society/Roopa rising in violent humiliation) and Bharati (robbed of her power to “tell” them). The former offends Roopa by choosing not to acknowledge the superiority of the giver and the latter infuriates her husband by trying to interpret history in a different way. As Silvers observed, “non disabled people relate to disabled people primarily by caring for them, it becomes socially incumbent upon the former to profess incompetence even where they are more competent than the latter... It was not too long ago ... when all women were expected to dissemble this way to make men more secure in their masculine role” (Silvers, “Disability”, 420).

### **Conclusion**

The play thus becomes a process of deconstruction of the absolute justification of the position of both disability and femininity. Disability, like gender, is exposed as social construction -- a representation and cultural interpretation of physical transformation or configuration. Apart from structural and institutional relation that restrict opportunity and material resources to the impaired people, cultural imperialism denotes a form of social oppression in which a group experiences symbolic devaluation in ways that set them apart as other, submerged in negative stereotypes. Historically medical discourse has been preeminent in redrawing boundary between able-bodied and disabled others and the otherness has been exploited as a source of entertainment as well as to steer the sphere of emotion of non-disable population. Though dangerous diseases like tuberculosis, got

romanticized being associated with artistic sensibility, disability remained fundamentally alien and present in stereotypical ways.

Tara's declared preference for being one-legged and one-eyed over the ugliness of Roopa is a subversive effort of justifying the wholeness of the disabled body by proving the incompleteness of the "normal" body if it is seen from a "certain angle". Patel's narrative replaces Tara's position as biologically impaired body with artificially disabled female, and, the image of Bharati as the possessive mother making up for all unfair dealing from society and nature with the agent/victim of patriarchy, expiating her own guilt. Thus characters turn out to be not the unified individual self, but the indeterminate subjects constituted and reconstituted by multiple ways.

It is expected that the crippled, unable to create a self, must accept definition from outside the boundaries of his own existence. Media represents a one dimensional life as dependent, unproductive and in need of care. Dramatic focus is centered on their interaction with health, care or welfare professional. The tenets of ordinary life like love, romance, sex and other such common emotions are largely absented from the story of their personal tragedy, in programmes on special achievement evoking pity, fear or admiration. In artistic sphere, the voyeuristic gaze maintains the rhetoric of insider and outsider of culture.

Therefore, Dan fails, concepts and memories lapse into artistic tantrum, narratives break into voices; because he wanted to write something nonconformist and non-committal to the regime of artistic representation of the "freak", and because, lineage determines normalcy. However, we may conclude by saying that, the narrative of the play

itself succeeds in refuting biological determinism without obliterating biological difference and at least creating a possibility of interrogating as well as redefining the relation of the centre and the margin.

## **Beyond Female Stereotypes: *Bravely Fought the Queen***

### **Introduction:**

Once Dattani observed, “Theatre has always been a mirror for man, a reflection of his world, of the eternal conflicts that plague him, through which he has experienced the gamut of human emotions” (“Contemporary Indian Theatre and its Relevance” 1). The stress on “reflection” definitionally precludes possibilities of resolution of conflicts, reversal of situation or complete rejection of the existing reality, neither of which happens in the play *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Yet, the play has enjoyed a phenomenal success both on stage and pages since its appearance in the arena of Indian English theatre, abroad and at home. The play is not the work of a visionary, but this is not an “imitation” of the reality; rather it is a “representation” of darker realities by centering the pool of light on a bleaker reality that very few creative writers have ever endured to acknowledge. What is envisioned is not a revolution, but a revelation of multiple truths by the performance/enactment of the history (to the audience and even to the appropriators of the horror themselves) keeping deliberately the consequence outside the ambit of the theatre -- both literally and metaphorically.

The patriarchy reinforces itself by privileging a habit of seeing, a way of looking at life using men's experience as standard to judge the experience of both the sexes and thereby ignoring woman's take. We meet a set of people programmed to see life with internalized patriarchal norms and values. The play attempts to exhibit the culture specific variation of the operation though on a deliberately maximized screen. Here Dattani presents a critique of what is passed as "Indian tradition" and exposes its inherent contradictions, and the different ways the discourse is used to perpetuate hetero-patriarchy which is nothing but a colonial legacy. "You can't talk about a middle-class housewife fantasizing about having sex with the cook or actually having a sex life – that isn't Indian either – that's confrontational even if it is Indian" (Mee, 319). The aesthetic product cannot provide any resolution, but it at least re-problemetizes the dominant social and political statement.

Hetero-patriarchy is an overarching system of male dominance through the institution of compulsory heterosexuality. Wilton (1996) observed: "This heteropolarity is necessary for patriarchy, for it must be possible to distinguish men from women in order to institute and reproduce a power differential that is (precisely) predicated upon that difference" (quoted in Yep, 31). The oppressive hetero-patriarchal power is visible in various ways- forcing unwilling woman into a marriage of humiliation, physically assaulting the pregnant wife leading to the birth of a spastic child, tricking the ignorant woman and the gay man into a marriage of convenience, defining women as sex object and marketable commodity and so on.

*Bravely Fought the Queen* is essentially a domestic play confined within the campus walls of the Trivedi household – the office of the brothers being an extension of the family drama allowing no outsiders except the Sridhar couple who acts as a catalyst. Dattani chooses this smaller arena of Indian family to show how power functions at the micro level, instead of turning the family situation outward. He means to turn the social system inward in order to see how individuals and homes are mediated and even constructed by the system of which they are but part and how they in turn are conditioned to perpetuate the so called Indian tradition. Here is a traditional, joint, Indian patrilineal family unevenly constituted, subjected to a process of constant reconstitution, manifested differentially in the collision of ancient cultural mores and present/emergent realities. Karlekar points out, “[I]nequality is embedded in oppressive structures of a family ideology committed to an age and gender hierarchy which is worked out within a household” (quoted in Ghosh, 58). Yet individuals keep changing roles within the power structure. The play is a powerful subversive re-reading of the popular television serials nursing the hearts of Indian viewers which are nothing but the variants of the “eternal” family saga, with a family at its centre presided by a Babuji (father) and Maji (mother), going through trials and tribulations, followed by the eventual triumph of, to use the blanket term, “Indian tradition.” The present family drama poses a potential threat to the manipulated patriarchal project of reinforcing the gender stereotype and gender hierarchy.

In the play, Dattani takes issue with the Indian custom of arranged marriage that privileges family prestige over personal choice, subordination of bride's family, validation of heterosexual relationship as only "normal" and continuance of women in a tortuous and violent marriage without any possibility of finding any support system outside the sanctity of matrimonial relation. The brother, strictly protecting his sisters from "men", marries one to a "leech" and the other to his former gay partner. Both sisters suffer for the suppression of their stigmatized family history by the same brother and the brother himself forwarding all kinds of compensations in form of humility, appeal and even huge sum of money.

The power-and-control-way involves a patterned process of coercive and controlling behaviour. With increasing institutionalization and globalization and the consequent shift in gender relationships and gendered identities, domestic violence has appeared as an emergent discourse. Ghosh argues that the focus on the "apparent manifestations of violence officiated the banal and every day form of violence against women in home" (Ghosh, 51). Dattani touches upon the issue in its varied facets such as violence against woman, same gender violence, multiplicity of masculinity, violence against women manifested through isolation, beating, sexual abuse, abuse by verbal means and gazing and potential threat, emotional torture, threat and intimidation, shifting blame, humiliating woman's natal family to draw money etc.

The over-arching patriarchal ideology which informs the family discourse gets reflected also in the commercial/market value system directing the business strategies taken up by the brothers who are the co-owners of an advertising agency. It mobilizes its

capital by exploiting the bride's family, uses women's product (nightwear) to make profit and targets male consumer cult de-legitimizing non-buyer female preference.

Dattani presents a slice of "sick society", out to oppress the minoritized entities like women, gays, subalterns, employees and even persons with dark complexion. No reform is envisioned, audience/reader is simply awed by the magnitude of pain and terror lying behind the facade of ordinary goings of an unacknowledgable commonality in a banal household. As Anindya Sen observes, "The rebellion finds its substance and meaning neither in the result nor in the course it takes, but in the 'cause' inspiring the rebellion, the ideology informing it and the 'power' against which the rebellion is directed" (*Sen*, 321). The play explores what lies under the facades which "characters and families put up to befool the world, revealing the "essential loneliness...the emotional price they pay for successful appearance in their need to belong" (Meena, 8), and cope with the social vigilance. A deep sense of unbearable reality almost makes protest structurally impossible, yet utopia becomes really inspirational and effective in this apparently defunct world.

The play tells, both through its words and performances, a story of repression in its microscopic multiplicity, and attempts at resistance and achievement of success similar to the growth of the bonsai into its bizarre maturity with all its roots and branches wired. The first act "Women" plunges us into the claustrophobic world of women trying in vain an unsuccessful escapade from the male pressure, the second "Men" gives us glimpses of the world of business excluding women from agency and continually controlling the preference of the women in macroscopic ways and in the third "Free For

All”, both worlds clash and collapse and get exposed. Memory carries back and forth in time frame. The repetitive performance of what is already ensued undercut the issue itself and reveals the façade and only the façade itself. The very slow building of resistance survives the shock that threatens the women’s world; and with the table turned, the world changes and the balance is shifted if not altogether tilts the upside down.

Thus the theatre becomes a lively representation of social dynamics, more importantly, of the “individuals who are exhausted“, dragged into darkness, perpetually bearing in silence the burden of oppression of the “hegemonic elite” (Chitra and Reddy, 30). “The clash between individual’s commitment to social order and one’s personal drive makes life intolerable. Dattani shows an exceptional vehemence in such situations” (Chitra and Reddy, 31). “This is itself a political and social statement of astonishing force” observed Walling (quoted in Chitra and Reddy, 31).

### **Repression:**

Our experience of watching the play *Bravely Fought the queen* chiefly constitutes an overwhelming consciousness of the oppressive mechanism of hierarchy which is operational in every sphere of our life - -giving a sense of helpless suffocation. Yet we fall back upon the play during our reminiscence unlike with the horror films which we prefer to evade. Because contrary to the latter genre which achieves its effect by producing an unalterable sense of terrible pleasure, Dattani designs his dramatic materials to open up scope of critiquing the imaginaries which seemingly foreclosed the possibility of analysis as institutions. What we do along with the characters is the recognition of

truth -- the first step towards any possibility of refusal to be ruled by the power of knowledge and categorization.

The functioning of power is shown in the context of a family extending its ideological moorings to the world of business by its male members. This is an Indian patrilineal family -- a hetero-patriarchal, upward mobile, semi-feudal and semi-colonial unit trying to adjust its traditional ideologies with the emergent westernized social context. Naturally, it maintains the traditional family structure even though two brothers have two separate houses: the eldest male member Jiten is the fount head of power, the family shares legal rights over ancestral property and acts as a unit in production and consumption, women are restricted in domestic sphere and consanguine bonds are given preference over conjugal bonds. Consequently, the world is looked at, interpreted, invested and controlled by the bourgeois-hetero-patriarchal matrix of meaning which subjugates the others.

### ***Violence Against Women:***

In a hetero-patriarchal society, a social hierarchy -- based on gender securing male domination and female submission-- is maintained as a fundamental feature of social life. It works through the principles of heteropolarity which is a social construction founded upon presumed complementarities between women and men. In fact, as Kitzinger and Wilkinson point out, the compulsory heterosexist society maintains the rubric of gendered (the “natural fit” between penis and vagina) identity to secure its own interest of subjugation and invasion of women body and labour and encourages an otherization since “hetero’ means other, different [and] ‘heterosexuality’ means sexual involvement with

one who is other, one who is different – man with woman, woman with man. The otherness of the ‘other’ sex, the ‘difference’ of man from woman, is thereby immediately reinforced” (quoted in Yep, 31).

Yep observes, “As an institution, heterosexuality is rooted in gender hierarchy and is manifested through its central mechanism, marriage” (quoted in Yep, 29). Implicit in the marriage contract is men’s appropriation and exploitation of women’s bodies (e.g., sexual, reproductive) and labor (e.g., domestic, emotional) (Yep, 29) Communication 29). Like Cinderella or Parul (a character in Indian fairy tale), woman must be submissive to familial exploitation or like Snow White lie asleep/dormant and wait patiently for male rescuer and view marriage as the only desirable reward for “right conduct” till the prince charming -- wealthy and dashing rescuer -- should come as the super provider. Unfortunately however, even after conforming to the gendered subjugated position recommended by the fairy tales, so many marriages turn out to be the institution in which women are colonized, physically assaulted, used as a bet; even deceived into illegal marriage that conveniently delegitimises the woman as a wife. In other kind of marriages, Ghosh observes, “in most Indian marriages women enter as strangers into an already structured world, the creation of a permanent inequality in the relationship of the natal and conjugal homes, and over-arching domestic ideologies that legislate gender status and role” Ghosh, 58). Liberalization, privatization and globalization disempowered women as economic being. As a result, women continue in the abusive environment due to economic vulnerability, lack of support structure outside home and family. Most threatening is the fact, as Hossang puts it, “...most homosexuals get married due to social

pressure.... Most adjust to a double life. So do their wives.... There is no greater misery in such marriages than in most Indian marriages which are arranged” (Merchant, xvi).

Flavia Agnes argued, by “placing dowry violence on a pedestal” in their movement, Indian feminists got incorporated into conservative agency of counting gender violence more as exceptionalism than as the defining context of woman’s life (quoted in Ghosh, 51). In the present play, Dattani chooses to present how the violation of woman’s basic human rights continues to be the pervasive and endemic realities in their life. Two sisters get married to the two Trivedi brothers according to the norms of fairy tale and the sanctity of marriage. Since men sleep with bad girls but don’t marry them, Praful, the brother, maintains a strict supervision on his sisters’ conduct and tries every measure to correct Alka’s propensity to impropriety. One day when a neighbor boy left her at their door step, Praful felt it useless to expend inadequate speech on the sinner, and took the school girl to the kitchen, placed her face in front of the burning stove carefully so that her face does not get burnt (it may devalue the marriage product) but allowed to burn some of her hairs (“I can still smell my hair on fire”, *Bravely Fought...*, 257). The semiotic part of the threat over, he cautions: “Don’t you ever look at men” (*Bravely Fought...*, 257). In due time -- to use Colette Guillaumin’s words --, he gives away his property (both the “good” girl Dolly and the corrected “bad” girl” Alka) to Trivedis in marriage. The play enacts the unfolding of the fissures and fractures hidden beneath the venire.

In the Indian variety of meritocracy the husband and his family top the pyramid and the bride and the bride’s family occupies the lowest stratum, and the relational

importance gets complicated if the bride's family holds remarkably greater property and prestige. In the play, as the brother of the brides, Praful is placed in a victim's position in the typical Indian sensibility which subordinates the bride's family: he gets humiliated by the three members of her in-laws family for Alka's intoxicated protest against Baa's indecent remark about their family. Alka is thrown out of the house by Nitin and only gets admitted after repeated pleading on part of both Praful and Dolly to Nitin and Jiten respectively and offering sufficient pecuniary penalty. The same exploitation continues also in a subtler and perpetual manner.

Patriarchy also works by confining its victims in isolation. The brothers' twin houses in "nowhere" (Lalitha can't leave the place due to unavailability of any auto-rickshaw), deprive them of any neighbor, themselves being busy in the office leaving the two sisters cum sisters-in-law and Baa (mother-in-law) to keep and detest each other's company. The pressure of confinement becomes evident the way both sisters desperately want to go out (Alka's appeal to go for a drive with her husband alone and Dolly's urge to be out for a dinner) and at the rigor with which they are frustrated and advised to keep Baa Company and nurse her well. The concept goes well with what Guillaumin calls "sexage" -- appropriation of women's time (Baa continually demanding the attention of her daughters-in-law) and the care to be taken in the family of whoever can't take for themselves and the healthy male members (Referred in Tyson, 99).

The play explores the workings of hetero-patriarchal norms of domination at micro level of family ranging from regulating the daily living of the women members according to the need and will of men folk to gross instances of domestic violence. Jiten

does not care to ask Dolly's permission for inviting Lalitha to talk to her and even does not bother at least to inform her. The lack of identity of women -- non-referential to her husband -- becomes evident in Dolly's desperate attempt to locate Lalitha as "somebody's wife". Lalitha comes as the emissary of male world and remains intent upon discussing the masked ball --a male project. Dolly for sometimes wards off the pressure of male world and remains absorbed in her own and expresses her desire to communicate with Lalitha in other matters closer to her heart and concerns. Unlike her companion, even her sister Alka, Dolly remains completely ignorant about the business and official (outside home) world except for going to the office parties as a beautiful living decorative piece. It is the same sense of prestige for possessing a precious object which makes Jiten brag of Dolly's knowing tailoring among his office subordinates, but makes him careless about mentioning their only daughter Daksha (a spastic child) - a black spot in his career - though she is mentioned compellingly by her mother to brag of how many prizes she had won in her school where the prestige is integrated with the fact.

Patriarchy successfully prevents any grouping among its victims. Lalitha's observation that to have one's sister as next door neighbor is a "fantastic" idea is not readily appreciated by Dolly neither is she pleased by Alka's implying that she got a better deal than her. Dolly even blames her sister for making Praful ashamed of coming over to their house by her incoherent speeches which resulted in his utmost humiliation and for situating him in many compromising dealings. Patriarchy keeps its vigilance even through another woman. Baa keeps constant control over the lives of her two daughters-in-law even in her bed-ridden condition. With coming of the news that the party has already been cancelled without even informing the women getting ready at home to go

out and Praful's coming over to the office without visiting his sisters, the breach between the sisters becomes clearer. But fallen back upon one another, gradually a woman-only-group gets formed. Lalitha, the interlocutor, also feels involved. But the constricting presence of Baa keeps reminding of the vigilance as she persists to ring the bell fracturing the slowly evolving intimacy among the women. The loud bell even penetrates the wall of Dolly's house to reach Alka next door pronouncing the access of power extended from Jiten – the fount head and the perpetrator. She even exerts her domination by complaining of negligence to the power holders.

The victims are farther weakened and brought under control by deprivation of knowledge of the fact and misrepresentation of the situation. Praful's refusal to come over to the home of Trivedis on the excuse of it being "too far" while he is in the town doing business with the brothers is a blatant lie served by Jiten to Dolly. It creates a misunderstanding among the siblings and even a direct confrontation between Alka and Dolly pushing them farther from the source of their strength and resources. The brothers collude also to cook Praful a lie that both sisters are away in Ooty for an outing to overcome Alka's usual bad temper. It helps both to hide the fact of the latter's helping them out with enormous finance that might provide a strong ground to the sisters against all the domestic violence they are regularly subjected to and to remind the brother of his own vulnerable position owing to his sister's past misconduct.

The play also explores a rather less admitted and exposed (perhaps the cruelest) area of patriarchal domination -- the exploitation of women in their parental house, leaving them nowhere to turn to. Almost from the beginning, the play is pervaded by the

invisible presence of a character, Praful - the brother/representative-of-parent of the sisters. For some untold reason, Baa continuously remembers him in her blabbering. He comes to the Trivedi office for business but refuses to come over to the house to meet his sisters -- news conveyed by Jiten and remembered by the sisters in their different ways of love, anger, idealization, pain and passion. Praful appears in Dolly's account as the victim of the hierarchical structure of patriarchy (pyramid), compelled to bear the burden of Alka's misbehaviour towards the higher authority, Baa, and undergo the humiliating chain of pleading and getting insulted to acquire the permission for her sister to live in her "own" house because otherwise Alka would not have been accepted" anywhere else". He appeared to be pressured by society for performing the role of a responsible brother by getting his sisters married - the task farther toughened by the stigmatized history of their family as well as Alka's lifestyle which is rather unbecoming of a "woman". However, if the consequence of one drunken fit of Alka constructs him as a suffering hero, another fit reveals a ghastly face of the sufferer. The loving brother is shown to teach the lesson to his school-going sister of not looking at men to secure his family prestige which he prefers to secure by lying to his sisters' in-laws and thus plunging them into an eternal pit of humiliation and torture. How the patriarchal norms get encoded into morality becomes evident as Alka, with all her rebellious spirit, refuses to go to Kanhaia - the clandestine lover of her sister - and sobs pathetically: "Praful, your sister is good" (*Bravely Fought...*, 263).

"A more or less secret sympathy with heterosexual male misogyny carries with it the narcissistically gratifying reward of confirming our membership in (and not simply our erotic appetite for) privileged male society (Bersani, 42). Glimpses -- though very

distant -- were found by the unconscious dropping of words of some closely guarded secret. It remains unexplained whom Alka mentioned as “staring at each other at the table” (*Bravely Fought...*, 256), an act, which infuriated her to insult her in-laws, why Dolly warns Alka referring to Praful and Nitin as very close college friends and where lies the truth behind Alka’s mocking reference to Praful as “saint like my husband” (*Bravely Fought...*, 257). The fact of Sridhar’s seeing an auto-rickshaw outside the office and the driver being inside the campus yet not coming up while lights were on since Nitin was at the office, remains unexplained. Sridhar’s wife gets equally puzzled when she discovers the driver of an auto, parked outside the Trivedi house on the outskirts of the city, scaling the wall of the servant quarter at night. The uneasiness increases with Alka’s strange comment that Nitin would take Baa’s permission to have children and “by God, you won’t give it to him” (*Bravely Fought...*, 284). However, the terrible truth stares naked at our face when by the end of the play Nitin soliloquizes with only sleeping Alka to bear witness, and confesses to be a confirmed gay man - a former partner of her brother Praful. The spectator/reader shudders at the terrible conspiracy by which the saintly brother tricked his sister into a marriage with his sex partner by alluring him with increasing possibility of their intimacy and assuring him that Alka knows everything and what she bothers is the security of marriage. Yet while Alka continues her existence in her unredeemable hell only finding relief in alcohol and parties adding up to her own undesirability, Nitin finds a way out. Taking advantage of Alka’s heavy sleep -- a metaphor for her attempt at oblivion --, night after night, Nitin met Praful while at their house, still continues to meet the autorikshaw driver with “powerful arms” at the office,

and will go on from now onward at the out-house: “Don’t wake up. Stay drunk. You mustn’t watch” (*Bravely Fought...*, 315).

Even after all that, Jiten so easily commands his brother to throw his wife out of the house that will save them the humiliation of taking money from Praful because it will recover Nitin’s place in Baa’s eyes and she will give her house to him. Neither does he hesitate to deprive Daksha, his own daughter, for whom Baa has secured it and plans to sell the property at one and half crore: “She is a drunkard. An alcoholic. Your wife is a boozier and you still keep her? What kind of a man are you?” (*Bravely Fought...*, 290)

The mother of Dolly and Alka wanted to pursue the art of music in a society where art resides in a precarious zone of threatening social hierarchy. The women who attempt to pursue it are easily categorized as prostitutes because that would otherwise destabilize the pattern of subjugating women’s identity and domesticating her labour. The woman was entrapped by subterfuge of false marriage. Not that she would have escaped the predicament, but her inclination towards art makes her easier prey and more vulnerable to society’s judgement -- already saturated with patriarchal ideologies. Long after her marriage with the person she loved, she comes to know that he already has a family consisting of a wife and four children. Enjoying the privileged position of being the only shelter of a woman of injured repute – though himself being the doer -- he returns to his respectable position of patriarch of a socially certified household. The marriage getting void, the woman’s position as a wife gets delegitimized and she is categorized as the “mistress” as Baa prefers to call her. She is compelled to live a life of shame, lying to the neighbor that she is a widow, her daughters are married under same

deception (though themselves ignorant) and her “sin” visits her daughter in form of a hellish life of humiliation and even physical torture.

The history also works the other way turning the oppressed into an oppressor, the victim into an agent. The past revisits the present through the delirious recounting of long-silenced history of oppression by the ancient woman. In Baa’s nightmarish reverie, we have a glimpse of the day when a fair and beautiful woman of musical talent from a decent family gets married to a dark, dominating man of little refinement against her will. She had a lovely voice and used to sing bhajans before marriage, but afterwards she was prohibited to sing before others except her husband, her lord. Simone de Beauvoir observed that women invest their meaning in their husband and son through marriage because they try to escape their freedom to realize their full potential in the world since it is frightening, it does not guarantee success or wellbeing (Referred in Tyson, 97). But in a middle class milieu in India in 1950s (presumably), there was hardly any option for a woman to live outside family, her natal family being unwilling to take the social stigma of fostering an unmarried woman. A tyrant, her husband was an autocratic father and a torturing husband. She fought her battle with the power of the huge dowry in form of money and house -- though now in possession of her husband - and her two sons, especially her favourite beautiful Nitin. She voiced her protest against torturing their children and living a low life in spite of getting hit time and again even in front of her boys. However, the social code which makes the woman ashamed of violence inflicted upon her makes her plea pathetically: “Not on the face! What will the neighbor say?” (*Bravely Fought...*, 278)

The informing oppressive ideology works in a more dangerous way than inflicting abuse (except extreme cruelty) -- by the way of co-opting women themselves in that project, both by creating their consent and making them the tool to carry out its programme. It is not simply the story of oppressing men and victimized women, but since family constitutes the site of struggle for resource and power, women members are inserted in hierarchy based on marriage, maternal status, age, ranking among daughters-in-law and so on. The perpetrators of violence easily find women's complicity and active participation in inflicting abuse on other female members. The differential access to power and resource leads to re-division of household works, antagonism among relations, re-entrenchment of patriarchy etc as the more privileged women become or act as surrogate or violent agent of male hegemony and control. The possibility of women collectivity remains unrealized and even in the non-nuclear Trivedi family women members feel isolated. With an unfortunate twist, the person whom the rebellious Baa dislikes most is Alka, the rebel. In lieu of her husband and in absence of Jiten, it is she who becomes the most appropriating authority of patriarchy. She uses the bell to ring all day to keep awake/vigilant and goes on regulating the times of her daughters-in-law, complains of negligence to his sons, even uses her illness as she threatens Alka "If you don't, I will vomit and you will have to clean it" (*Bravely Fought...*, 283).

An analysis of Indian male psyche reveals that it is the obsession with mother image combined with mother's erotic transference of affection and expectation on to the favourite son that make men often fail to communicate with wives. Baa fails to resist Jiten to become like his father -- both in complexion and in character. But Nitin with his fair complexion, in her subconscious, becomes a perpetuation of her paternal heritage

(“The younger one is beautiful, like my father! He has my blood”, *Bravely Fought...*, 288) and she reserves Nitin for herself. He becomes her greatest instrument of resistance not as a protector but as a reservoir of qualities she is fond of: “I had to live up to her expectations” (*Bravely Fought...*, 289). Consequently, she could not tolerate a woman in the life of her son/man-of-choice especially when she is so much like herself.

With another twist, Baa uses Jiten as the chief instrument of perpetuating the same ideology and means of implementation of rule which tormented her so terribly and which she fought so hard against. Instead of sympathizing with the cause of the mother of her daughters-in-law deceived painfully by the man she trusted and loved, she throws the blame on her and blatantly categorizes her as a “whore”. Baa turns out to be the loudest mouth piece of delegitimacy of the women with such history to enter a respectable family. In her repeated verdict “throw them out, Jitu”, she even instigates her son to hit his pregnant wife. However, a consciousness of her blood (the baby in the womb) being injured, makes her insist to hit on the face instead of the tummy -- a warning goes in vain since the inhuman rage got released to hit Dolly bitterly leading to the birth of the premature baby with the cord around her neck. The spectator is simply shocked to see the woman who was so proud of coming from a “decent family” where men do not hit women, provoking her son to perpetuate their father’s tradition -- “what ‘man’ made of a ‘woman’”.

SNDDT (a Mumbai based Research Centre for Women’s Studies) Mumbai defines domestic violence as referring to “all acts perpetrated in the private domain of the home to secure women’s subordination; and which is rationalized and sanctioned by the

prevailing gender ideology” (quoted in Ghosh,53). The play exhibits in the pan behavioural patterns the workings of patriarchy inflicting violence on women positioning their security, dignity and integrity in a perpetually precarious position.

### ***Troubled Childhood:***

The play centers the pool of light on the issue of gender violence, but it offers a side-glance at the spectacle of oppression at another level -- the abuse of children maturing them into the agents of abuse as adult. The theme is not dealt with directly, only hints are dropped. But the suggestions sufficiently point towards the forces working behind the perpetuation of a sick society of which they are the victims.

Feminists often argue that maternal instinct is not a peculiar in-born quality in women; rather it is a natural urge for all members of the species. Patriarchy programme the women in a manner that women learn to believe that their womanhood is unfulfilled without motherhood, because, otherwise the investment of women to the husband and the son would be lost (Tyson, 96). A closer reading of the play may bring out the truth of the contention at least in the case of Baa. With all her love and concern for her children Jiten and Nitin, the suffering woman locates in her children something more than filial affection.

For Baa, the children were her tool of resistance against gender violence, which in turn, was itself gendered since her strength was hidden in the fact that both children were male -- “I have given you two sons!” (*Bravely Fought...*, 288) The pride was again programmed by another dominant ideology of class consciousness. Jiten being dark in

complexion like his father, was never favourite with his mother (“I don’t love Jitu”, *Bravely Fought...*, 305). A very subtle sense of identification with his father and distanciation from his mother (femininity) -- obsessed with her fair complexion --, led Jiten farther to the process of homo-sociality and he adapted the characteristics of his tyrant father who avenged his untamed wife by imprinting himself on his child -- “Jitu is so much like his father”. The child got hardened through time enough to declare callously “I don’t bother” to Nitin’s observation that he is Baa’s favourite, but the hard days could not be lost in audience’s imagination. His stand with the old house which symbolizes the past gives a clue. While Nitin is unwilling to sell it because of “too many memories” (*Bravely Fought...*, 277) perhaps he could cherish and could return to, Jiten is aggressively eager on the contrary because of the same reason -- “too many memories” (*Bravely Fought...*, 278) from which he wants to take flight. Only a glimpse of the terrible time could be found in his pathetic appeal following a physical threat to Dolly to stop mentioning Daksha’s predicament and retelling his own share of guilt. Her miming the in coordinate gesture of a spastic child breaks him down painfully. The violence turns into cowardice, he helplessly wants to transfer the responsibility of his violent beating of his pregnant wife on to the instigation of Baa (“Baa provoked me”, *Bravely Fought...*, 310) which goes far beyond the mere means of escape. Dolly is of course right in saying that he can’t get away so easily because it was his hands that were hurting her, but the tear in his eyes and the gruesome deed of running over and over an old beggar woman may be an attempt to snap the bonding with the unloving maternity that contributed something to his make up.

The troubled and maimed childhood stunted the natural growth of Nitin in another way and he was also shaped according to the will of the powerful controlling hands. Even when a boy of ten years, as Baa recounts, Nitin was afraid of darkness and his father “as black as night” (*Bravely Fought...*, 272). A delirious re-living of past reveals the traumatizing process by which a child is compelled to reject a part of his own identity. Through a regular programming, the mother taught her son to hate his father. His fair complexion made him favourite with her both for being unlike her husband and being like herself and her “blood” with which she could identify alone. Now begins the emotional, intellectual and personal distancing: “Nitin? Do you like your father? ... Go away! You are not my son! You are bad, like him!” “ (*Bravely Fought...*, 302) She made him carry the burden of her expectations, live her life through him making him the reservoir of all her desires: “And you wanted to make sure Nitin would be different” (*Bravely Fought...*, 284), says Alka. Living a shadowed life, he matures into a parasitic being, pathetically dependent for the decisions in his life on his former lover Praful or his brother Jiten.

### ***Minoritizing Homosexuality:***

As a patriarchal institution, heterosexuality privileges, elevates, and maintains the dominant social and material status of men at the expense of women and sexual others, and the anxiety of proving manhood conceals or banishes unsanctioned sexuality that might de-stereotype the gender performance. It invests penetration with social meaning since wrenching penetration out of a heterosexual matrix of meanings deprives it of its symbolic power. Following the logic, to be penetrated is to relinquish power. Naturally,

hetero-patriarchy levels homosexuality as womanish. Though Dattani chooses to be rather less attentive to the issue in the present play, closeted homosexuality -- specially making scapegoat the unsuspected woman -- is shown to be a potential site for repression.

A feel of something untold creeps into the play by Nitin's excited and fascinating account of the encounter with the driver of the autorikshaw as he was describing to Sridhar an event of their car hitting the auto owing to Jiten's rash drunken drive. As Jiten hit the vehicle, the man rushed to them and opened the car and as Jiten started to accelerate, he clung to him even when it was on first gear only allowing Jiten break free when the truck from the opposite side was almost on top of him. The narration makes Nitin almost entranced with the charm of the "violent looking man and horror of the nightmare at the possibility of the accident and like the spectator Sridhar gets puzzled by the mesmerized confession of the narrator: "I still remember the strong black arms" (*Bravely Fought...*, 281). The recollection gets an uncanny dimension as it alludes to Dolly's enchanted recounting of "two powerful black arms around me" (*Bravely Fought...*, 262). The veil is uplifted when at the end, Nitin confesses himself to be the former lover of Praful. It was Praful who tricked him into the marriage by playing the game of making Nitin ashamed of what he is ("He made me cry each time!" *Bravely Fought...*, 314) He continued to offer Nitin an opportunity to meet him whenever they (Nitin and Alka) went to their place and the whole house including Alka was fast asleep. The deception went farther as Praful provided him with a completely false version of the story as he claimed that Alka knew everything, but she did not care since what she alone

bothered about is the “security of marriage”. Thus, as an agent of patriarchy the man gets privileged at the expense of both the woman and the minoritized sexuality.

“In his desires, the gay man runs the risk of identifying with culturally dominant images of misogynistic maleness” (Bersani, 42). Both Praful and Nitin the gay partners show a strong antipathy and callous selfishness towards women. The mutual exclusion of the two oppressed groups from each other’s sympathy is also evident in Alka’s codification of “competent husband”. However, Nitin chooses to satisfy his sexual need as a closeted homosexual (as he confesses to be going for meeting the driver in his outhouse) under the fold of heterosexual marriage, the kind of intimacy which “receive social benefits, juridical/administrative recognition, symbolic esteem, social legitimacy, and a normalized, morally valued status” (Seidman, 211). And since the heterosexual imperative centers around reproduction, the non-reproductivity of the marriage is easily blamed on the sterile woman.

Another dimension of latent homophobia and the fear of being perceived as womanish come out with Jiten’s brand of masculinity as the fear becomes the central organizing principle of the cultural policing of manhood. MICHAEL Kimmel observed, for men like Jiten “Fear and shame are sites of psychic violence” and “[t]he fear of humiliation and emasculation keep “real” men afraid, ashamed to be afraid, and silent about their own fears” (quoted in Yep, 19). The self-inflicted violence against one’s own self gets the form of outward manifestation through the oppression of the mirror image -- the Otherized part -- of one’s own identity.

*The gendered and classist market:*

“[I]n practice, the public and private not only interpenetrate, but are produced together in varied and often systematic ways connected by condensation and displacement ...” (Sangari, quoted in Ghosh, 57).

The hetero-patriarchal norms that are functional in the world outside home, now get complicated farther by the factor of resources. As in home, Jiten is always sure of Nitin’s consent since in a patrilineal family of India, the authority rests with the eldest male member and his decision is generally not open to dissent and also because Nitin lacks the so-called dominating masculinity of his elder brother. The Trivedis put up the false façade of success and stability in the market while in actuality their advertising agency is running through a bad time. In order to pull it out of huge debt in the market, they need a supply of a large sum of money which they could not arrange except from Michani at the impossible rate of thirty-six percent interest since banks and financial organization refuse to lend them any further credit.

Jiten brings a very innovative and effective plan into action -- not by his efficient management but by dint of the hetero-patriarchal privileges. He finds some one, to quote Nitin, the “joker” (*Bravely Fought...*, 267), who will lend them money without demanding a partnership, without interest, without asking for any favour, without any specific time limit for returning the sum and even without the knowledge of the world -- almost in fashion of blackmailing. He is none other than Praful, their brother-in-law - “the sentimental fool” (*Bravely Fought...*, 267): “When it comes to his sisters, he can’t think straight” (*Bravely Fought...*, 267).. Initially Nitin freezes to hear the suggestion

almost shuddering from the implications and consequences like giving Alka an upper hand over him, giving Praful a chance to exhibit the fact that he is a “better human being” (*Bravely Fought...*, 267) who in return of their treating him like a “sheet” helps them out. The constructed nature of all the social ethics and morality gets exposed when the “normal” moral codes get inverted by the very fact that Praful belongs to the lower stratum of the social pyramid being the bride’s party: “I can take his money and still treat him like crap...He is so inferior that he has to prove himself by loaning us ten lakhs!” (*Bravely Fought...*, 267) By another inverted code, Jiten increases the money up to twelve lacks, reminds him of Alka’s frailty of character with a lie that the sisters have gone to Ooty to prevent him coming home, tactfully refers to his stigmatized family background (“She shouldn’t keep bringing up your background ... But you know how old people are”, *Bravely Fought...*, 268) and very diplomatically makes it clear to him that by lending money he is actually compensating for the blemish caused by his family and purchasing the happiness of his own sisters at a very meager amount.

The power derived from the gender hierarchy is reinforced by class hierarchy. Jiten’s attitude and treatment of Sridhar lacks the minimum respect or concern for the subordinate. For no reason except for his baseless sense of dissatisfaction, he unhesitatingly scatters Sridhar’s papers on the floor and it is only with the chance arrival of Sridhar in time that the bonsai is saved. The boss would make authoritative demand that his subordinate should be accountable for the losses his company is running through (“That’s what Sridhar’s there for. To see that we don’t lose it” (*Bravely Fought...*, 265), but would not follow Nitin’s advice, “Then I think we should leave it all to him instead of interfering with the campaign” *Bravely Fought...*, 265. The urge to assert absolute and

tyrannical authority makes Jiten continue to interfere and hold the rein so that Sridhar cannot enjoy the full “masti” (joy – by implication - liberty).

The advocates of sanctified womanhood have a large sensuous photograph of a model hung on their office wall. The treatment of his models as sex objects rather than employees is obvious in the way Jiten looks at Shirley: “She is modeling undies. Who the hell will notice her face?” (*Bravely Fought...*, 265).

Though the plan of launching the Re Va Tee colour-coordinated nightwear and underwear got approved by the client, the concept of the advertisement did not work out with the directors and they outright rejected it on the ground that, to quote Sridhar, “we ...haven’t understood women“(*Bravely Fought...*, 273). As he summarizes, the advertisement aims at justifying why the product -- with all its colour coordination, exclusive design, and exclusive market and like qualities -- would be purchased by women at such high price, and locates the answer in sex. So far as the agency owners are concerned, they think that the commercial precisely aims at that. The poster presents a woman in Re Va Tee wear invitingly lying on the bed with the signature “Light his fire with Re Va Tee” (274). And the story runs like -- the woman watching her husband or lover coming from the window rushes to change into Revati wears and lies on the bed as he opens the door with the same signature. A market survey among twelve women across the upper middle-class, upper-class and stinking rich revealed that all of the interviewees found it “offensive” in their various ways: one thought it fails to enter a woman’s world”, another found “[t]here was nothing personal or realistic about it”, some found it “tasteless and degrading”, another observed “despite its Westernized treatment, it upholds the

silliest of all Indian notions that woman exists to please man” (*Bravely Fought...*, 279) and other like. For professional reason Sridhar tried hard to get their client convinced about the effectiveness of the concept forwarded by his employers: he argued that the formal response may not be candid, consumer’s response often have layers of complexities, the test group might not be representative enough and most importantly the ad aims to appeal to the latent libido unregulated by the “superficially and culturally informed self”.

The professional approach of Sridhar is sharply countered by Jiten’s masculine corporate norms. He altogether dumps the idea of conducting the speculation campaign among women and sets men as the proper target group – the buyers: “Men would want their women dressed up like that. And they have the buying power” (*Bravely Fought...*, 276). He even mocks the pretensions of the “screwed up” (276) women who feign to feel offended at being treated like “sex object”. Stubbornly he refuses to hear Sridhar’s research of the market survey and his persistence with the suggestion of considering the consumer’s need and revise the presentation in a week ends in his being threatened to get fired. It is only to keep his job (“Wait! We are saving to buy a flat”, *Bravely Fought...*, 280) that he ultimately agrees to push the client following Jiten’s view point in spite of himself being rather unconvinced (“So long as you sound convincing”, *Bravely Fought...*, 285). Sridhar warns against the suicidal proposal that the client should take it unchanged or shove it. During the following altercation, Jiten reveals a more-than-professional reason to take up the office at the particular place and the business itself. In response to Sridhar’s observation that the brothers do not have the expertise in handling the particular field and they need someone really professionally trained, Jiten forwards

the following argument for taking up the particular business venture: “No checking into seedy hotels in City Market. Just drive down Lavelle Road and pick one up. Bring her here and pack her off in half an hour” (*Bravely Fought...*, 286). Having the sole power to sack him and trouble his financial life, he even orders bewildered Sridhar to pick a professional sex worker for him in the office and compels Sridhar to undergo the humiliation of working a pimp for his boss.

Thus we have a business discourse in which the men -- both as seller and consumer -- are independent subject of free will and can act upon, change and give meaning to the world while women and male subordinates are contingent, dependent, controlled by situation and have meaning only in relation to men/boss. However, by the norms of corporate masculinity, the working class/employees are effeminized and their labour is appropriated to secure the interest of the superior.

***Subaltern:***

Only a corner of the veil is lifted from a sprawling dark area of Indian socio cultural arena in the play which is that of exploitation of the subaltern. The topic is given a passing attention and does not provide much space for analysis, yet through its narrow chink, the light falls on the hidden area covered under “normality”

Like other oppressing ideologies, whiteness encourages historically systematic promotion of a subject who is superior, privileged and raceless. It entails an effortless superiority, a moral rectitude, a defeat of the emotional and the neurotic by the power of conscious self. The fair lady incorporated in an unwilling marriage, never accepts a

“dark” man as her husband. She develops a physical hatred for a man coming from a lower stratum of society whose habits and habitation could never match her upbringing and expectation. The wife keeps the husband reminding of his lower status: “Oh, the whole house smells of you! I have married such a villager! Aah... The men in our family are decent” (*Bravely Fought...*, 288). *Bravely Fought...*). She even can’t love, and can hardly tolerate the son who resembled his father in appearance and is so prominent in her loud proclamation of her love for her fair son carrying her lineage, “blood”. The unloved child adopts the identifiable inheritance, and the loved one is used to reproduce the ideology of otherizing: “You don’t like your father” (*Bravely Fought...*, 302). An analysis by S. Anandhi, J. Jayaranjan and Rajan Krishnan in their paper “Work, Caste and Competing Masculinities: Notes from a Tamil Village” shows that, the low caste people who in previous days felt emasculated by the upper class, after getting social respect and reservation, often show hyper masculinity syndrome dealing both with women of their own community and oftener the upper class women (referred to in Ghosh, 62). Interestingly, the only means Baa’s husband adopted to fight his battle resisting his inferiority is physical violence. He became a habitual wife-beater, without controlling himself even before his children. With Baa’s urge if Nitin learned to fear, rather to hate, the demon – his father --, Jiten adopted its qualities to express his masculinity.

Another figure that remains an invisible but disturbing presence -- not by action but by existence -- is that of an old beggar woman who comes to the compound of the Trivedi house everyday at night and leaves the place early in the morning.

Dolly suspects the sympathetic watchman to have opened the door for her. The presence somehow ruptures the elitist show of the Trivedi household and she is ordered to be expelled by the memsahib. Dolly with all her frustration could never sympathize with another woman belonging to a different class. She orders to make it sure that the woman does not go to Alka's house. A bleak reality stares at our face as we identifiably watch three women sitting comfortably in the well furnished leaving room enjoying the rain and the other woman -- though old and bed-ridden --, by virtue of belonging to an upper class, reminisces about smell of mud during rain, another old woman was lying under the sky outside with a tarpaulin to save her fragile body from getting wet. The deliberate attempt to remove the disturbance by the women is enacted on a level of terror and horror by the sahib who, in an attempt perhaps to snap his bonding with Baa, runs her over repeatedly until she turns into a spot on the ground. Only the Sridhar couple shudders at the repelling act, while other characters remain callously unconcerned, absorbed in their own worlds.

### **Defense cum Defiance:**

No ideology is closed to challenge or without contradiction or incoherence. Naturally in the present play too, resistance builds up destabilizing the linear flow of power and rubric of monolithic network of oppression. However, here resistance comes more as defense and defiance that are contingent upon the oppression inflicted, rather than as a positive force.

Utopia has remained inspirational and instrumental for women in fighting the suffocating oppression they are subjected to -- endemic to their daily existence. In

Dattani, when a need to belong makes direct resistance rather difficult, the characters develop a private world beyond the surveillance of “reality”. The present play also contains such operation of resistance. We first meet Dolly lost in the Thumri by Naina Devi playing on the stereo. She is lost in the music as it creates for her a world of fantasy. Her preference for a self-absorbed existence is evident in Alka’s complaint that it is Dolly’s unsociable nature (“you...speak when only spoken to. You refuse to mix, you refuse to be interesting”, *Bravely Fought...*, 247) that makes them further aloof from society. Dolly chooses to live in a make-believe world where she does not want to remember her banal frustrated survival. It offers a world of wish fulfillment.

Tremor is felt even in the silent and apparently immobile world of Dolly. As Alka narrates the love saga to Lalitha with Dolly’s consent and participation, colour returns to Dolly’s world of fantasy woven by the musical fabric of Naina Devi. The story goes like this: when Dolly is left alone at nights with her daughter in a special education school, her mother-in-law at last asleep relieving her of the whole day long servitude, male folks at club, and the watchman fast asleep in his quarter only to be awakened by the Sabs’ honking, she goes for her rendezvous with the nineteen-year old “beautiful Kanhaia” (*Bravely Fought...*, 261) -- a replacement for the permanent old cook holidaying in his village. Coming out of her shell of passivity, she provokes, proposes and pursues her object of desire and gets lost in the world of the “two powerful black arms around me and the beautiful sound of the heart beat of a warm gentle soul” (*Bravely Fought...*, 262). Thus she performs a magnificent appropriation of her almost solitary confinement in her loneliness – literally and metaphorically.

Under hetero-patriarchy, the language of eroticism is man's language. In everyday discourses of sexuality, female sexual agency and female sexual pleasure are largely absent. Women do not have an adequate language to assert, articulate, and share their pleasures. Yet, as Luce Irigaray argues, women's sexual experience is "far more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined" (Irigaray, 28-3). In this scenario, the wife's fantasy of sexual liaison is a potential appropriation of the husband's disapproving behaviour (his regular visiting of prostitutes) as well as her own sexual starvation, since in typical hetero-patriarchal monolythicized Indian tradition, sex is practiced with wife only for vegetable procreation. This is sex for procreation, and the sex for pleasure is kept withdrawn from her; males enjoy it with prostitutes. The re-inscribed fantasy of Dolly's sexual adventure uncovers the repressed sexual life of many urban housewives.

The make-up mask Dolly wears is used metaphorically. She is unable to laugh in fear of cracking the mask which, in effect, will spoil her appearance so carefully done up. The emphasis -- both in stage direction and dialogue -- to the minutiae of make-up indicates an urgent need to hide the real face/self. Dolly pretends to know Lalitha's name, recognize Sridhar at office and to have been told about the ball by her husband only to cover up the extent of being neglected and ignored by Jiten. As Alka points it out, she even manages to forget or not to believe that the outing which they looked forward to for so long was cancelled. However, later we come to know that she already heard Jiten canceling the outing, yet decided to pretend not to know, undergo the tedious process of facial, filing, elaborate make-up and dressing and waiting for it in a desperate attempt to ignore the life of extreme humiliation.

The psychic presence of some one like Naina Devi, whose cultural pursuit situated her in the precarious zone of improper womanhood and who was designated as Tawaif by the patriarchal code of morality, brings in a stream of possibility of resistance. As Dolly recounts, she was a queen, but her marriage into royalty and obvious glory of living a life of a *rajmata* (the royal mother) could not wrench from her the impossible longing to sing -- an act in which she was inspired after listening to a tawaif in her youth. She was possessed and her husband came forward to support her, rebelling against the oppressive mechanism. Hence, she sang thumri -- the love song --, and as a consequence, was often identified with a tawaif, but it did not matter to her “because she could sing”. Now she is known as the queen of thumri. The double standard maintained in the world of culture to keep up patriarchal surveillance encodes the cultural pursuit of a woman as prostitution. Another queen is also remembered -- the “manly queen” who out stepped the socio cultural boundary restricting women and fought against colonial oppression which is another patriarchal machinery. However, the impossibility either to refuse or situate her position, compelled the dominant ideology to categorize her as a “manly queen” -- as brave as a man. Since valor is strictly a masculine quality, she is incorporated into man’s world. The elimination of the central metaphor -- though in a rather casual manner --, by the three women, releases immense potential.

If Dolly resorts to withdrawal, Alka chooses yet another way of flight -- to get oblivious of her stifling surrounding and to take shelter in alcohol. It gives her strength enough to protest Baa’s indecent and humiliating remarks about her parental family (“Do they have different fathers?” *Bravely Fought...*, 256), put up with the disappointment of being neglected, fight her sister’s accusation of misbehaviour and both to forget and

Alka speaks out the tortuous treatment she received from her glorified brother. It gives Alka the courage to defy oppression and react naturally to a situation unguarded by unnatural self-surveillance and suppression which made her rather submissive during her sober condition. It is the same yearning to flee that makes her plead with Nitin for a long drive and to shut her ears up by her hands. Unable to bear the sharp sound of the bell of vigilance, she rushes out of the front door.

In our first meeting, Alka, to echo Dolly, seems to “strike a better deal”. Even though like her sister, she gets to know that the outing has been cancelled only when she herself calls the office to hurry off her husband after getting fully dressed for the purpose, Nitin at least bothers to answer her phone immediately and find an excuse of being sure of his brother’s informing Dolly early. Unlike the aloof, down, morose and self-absorbed Dolly, Alka is rather jovial, active and sociable. She quickly recognizes Lalitha, converses rather candidly, offers her a drink, strikes a conversation about her personal life and a bit about Lalitha’s own, and gets intimate enough to share hard drink (though mistakenly) and maintains a conspiratorial silence about the outing being cancelled to Dolly until she herself finds it out. Dolly accuses Alka even of “bragging” of Nitin’s keeping her better company and better informed than Jiten does to his wife. . She also boasts of living an excited life in the world of “so-and-so” and bottle. Under the veneer of jovial party-goers mask, we meet a woman, needing the help of alcohol to overcome her nervousness and deep sense of insecurity as well as the memory of being cheated by her closest ones without having the power even to articulate the guilt in words.

If fantasy offers liberty and solace leading the oppressed out of the oppressors' reach, the blasting of some of it that situated patriarchal functioning in a comfort zone, gives relief. The pretence of welfare of women folks stands naked as Alka's comment explodes the shell of hypocrisy sheltering their brother, warning women against men like Jiten who ends up by marrying his sister to a leech, the kind of men he cautioned his sisters against ("The saint gives his sister to the sinner and disappears!" *Bravely Fought...*, 300) He has yet another sister whom he brings to the right track by his violent correctional methods and gives to the "sinner's brother" who is his "best friend".

***The ball:***

The proposed mask yields tremendous potential to destabilize the normative category by opening up a possibility of transgression. The ball becomes a fit metaphor for the thematic design of a play where the main characters live a subterranean life under the veneer of "something you are not" (*Bravely Fought...*, 297). Several costumes are suggested for the invitees.

Women decide that Dolly should come to a *muzra* outfit in the ball. Though one is expected to wear the costume of apparently what s/he is not, the very proposal denotes the transgressive fantasy that blasts off the myth of sanctified womanhood. By choosing to perform "tawaif", Dolly chooses to repeat her husband's promiscuous adventure, to conform to his conception of woman and to expose the double standard for wife and mistress. The impurity of her transgressive desire discloses the impurity of dominant forms of identity. Alka's pleading to wear the outfit of *Jhansi ki rani* made of "joddi"

(golden thread) and silk with a cut board sword is a pathetic urge to imitate at the micro level the valorous act of rebelling against colonization.

### ***Grouping:***

The most important deterrence about women's consciousness of collectivity is that, unlike other oppressed groups, women don't have any shared tradition, and consequently, their stories are "written out of history" (Tyson, 97). They live dispersed among men in firmer bonding with men than other women. The lack of history of common cause, fight over resources and other subjugating strategies keep them apart. In isolation, many women live submissive and silent existence. Dattani envisions a possibility of women integrity in the play by providing a space for themselves almost in a manner of woman-only group. If the first act exhibits the woman's world as oppressed, maimed and isolated by the various apparatus of hetero-patriarchy, the third act detonates the possibility of resistance. The mutual distrust and accusation between the sisters is now replaced by the restoration of sympathy. Dolly wakes Alka up from her alcoholic stupor to see the rain and teases her with a fantastic idea of loving to dance in the rain in tune with filmy numbers all wet. Both joke at the game they played before Lalitha about Kanhaia making her guess even wilder which creates momentary breach, but companionship of common pleasures is quickly restored. Alka's plea to play the Jhansi ki Rani and miming the swishing of the sword in the air may appear light, but the laughter following the show melts the ice and lightens the gloom that was pervading the atmosphere from the beginning.

### ***The Appropriation:***

Rain pours first as puddle and then heavily, thunder bolts and the cosmic turmoil washes off false make-ups and breaks off the glass ceiling. Alka, suddenly seized with a sense of freedom, tries to concretize Dolly's fancy about her and rushes into the rain to dance a liberating dance. She falls off, yet she tries again and the others enjoy and laugh until suddenly the light of the car is seen.

However, the dam was broken and the flow could not be stopped at least for some time. Bravely tries the queen to fight. The brothers get upper hand for a moment – Jiten commands Alka to change clothes, Nitin asks her to wash her face and leave Dolly's house to have a discussion and at latter's scared plea to remain for a while, forces her to the point of Alka's falling on the coffee table. But now she answers back and draws Nitin's bewildered agreement on the fact that sometime we do things when “you don't know what you are doing” (*Bravely Fought...*, 300), ironically proving him “understanding” and reacting against Jiten's staring at her in this indecent state. She at last gathers sufficient courage to voice the long long-hidden wound with a threatening possibility. The hetero-patriarchy that tricked Alka into a marriage with a confirmed gay man is appropriated in the threatening significance of her statement: “... I haven't been an ideal housewife. And you haven't been a ...well, a competent husband” (*Bravely Fought...*, 300). The encoded immorality of which she was alleged so long as “shameless”, “whore” etc is repaid destabilizing the unalterable rubric of unopposed patriarchy: “Dolly, I feel sorry for you. Having a lech for a husband. A saint for a brother” (*Bravely Fought...*, 300).

The small rupture multiplies. Nitin breaks the oath of secrecy and reveals the truth of their plan to borrow money from Praful and stopping him to come to their house in an uncommon urgency not to take his money. He even goes farther to stop forcibly his brother from declaring Alka's predicament of being thrown out with a decision hitherto absent in him: "Not now". Shaken by the sudden change, Jiten expresses his shock: "You raised your voice at me?" (*Bravely Fought...*, 301)

Now the most oppressed, submissive, silent and withdrawn Dolly gets vocal, breaking the silence. She sharply reacts against Jiten's impolite behaviour towards Lalitha and challenges his authority to decide his wife's fate as Jiten tries to establish his greatness in not throwing her out: "You won't. You can't" (*Bravely Fought...*, 308). She demands explanation for stopping Praful from coming to their house as well as for threatening to throw Alka out of it. Driven by old habit, she of course once pleads with him for not letting Nitin to do that, but finally takes the decisive move to change the rhetoric. She makes it clear that Jiten can't drive her out. He of course retorts in his manner not to care a hang for it. Dolly accepts that even after all this her husband can pretend that he "does" not throw her out while she cannot feign that she can leave and he wins.

Yet, now Dolly snaps the tie with silence and decides to re-"tell" the history -- "her" story of victory: "once I did. When I became a mother" (*Bravely Fought...*, 309). This is a powerful subversion of the hetero-patriarchal eulogization of motherhood which glorified Baa for giving two sons to carry on the family name. Breaking the lineal time frame to make the past and present stand together, the playwright enlivens the memory of

fifteen years back (Past Baa and present Dolly and Jiten). On that evil day, Praful came to meet his sisters and Baa received the letter from her relations at Ahmedabad informing about the family history of her daughters-in-law. Baa's version of their mother being a mistress of their supposedly dead father who lives with his wife and four children smudges the story of another deception committed by a man who built up a relation with a woman -- ignorant of his former marriage. This was of course a defense mechanism for the oppressed against the ideological machinery which stigmatizes the victim instead of the victimizer, to tell that their father was dead, but the sisters did not know that Praful had suppressed the truth even to the family they are getting married into. Like their mother, the ignorance brings about their fall and they are punished for the sin of their father, which by the diplomacy of the dominant class, acquires the status of their mother's fallenness. Baa called the sisters whores and commanded her sons to throw them out of the house. Interestingly she did not prevent Jiten from hitting his wife, but made it precise to hit in the face since otherwise it might affect the blood of Trivedi family Dolly was carrying during her pregnancy. But the daemon was let loose and he slapped and kicked the pregnant wife. The injury was explained in the hospital as due to fall from the staircase and the offense remained outside the ambit of legal penalty, but the horror got its shape through the birth of a two month premature spastic baby Daksha with the cord around her neck.

Julia Kristeva holds that by having an access to the semiotic dimension of language, we can go beyond the patriarchal language (Referred in Tyson, 103). Denying the pleading and threat from her husband, the long latent volcanic eruption of fuming emotion of Dolly leads the language to the more dangerous and neutral pre-cognitive

gestures. She moves her hands and neck incoordinately with dilated eyes and meaningless smile in the fashion of physiotherapy Daksha is undergoing in her special school. Jiten of course tries to unburden himself of the guilt by accusing Baa, but Dolly won't let him go so easily. Mimicry brings in the recognition of the fount head of sense of guilt outside oneself. Alka's liberating dance in the rain and Dolly's mimicry of the physiotherapy -- as she dances "disjointedly, wildly, with ever-increasing frenzy" -- unleashes tremendous destabilizing power.

The explosion proves too much for Jiten to stand. He cries and pleads for silence, appeals for Lalitha's exit and even threatens to hit Dolly. He tries to absolve himself by repeating his plea as not-guilty since it was Baa who instigated and provoked him, since he was drunk and was angry with Praful, but Dolly makes it clear "They were your hands hitting me! Your feet kicking me!" (*Bravely Fought...*, 312) Overwhelmed with guilt, he appeals to bring Daksha home ("I want her home", *Bravely Fought...*, 312). Unable to write off the guilt, he rushes out of the door. Next moment he is reported to be running the car violently over a beggar woman lying outside and driving recklessly in the dark symbolically annihilating the bond with Baa.

Patriarchy supposedly casts men as rational, strong, protective and decisive as opposed to women who are irrational, emotional, weak, submissive and nurturing. Jiten's aggressive behaviour which blocked the fear and pain so long, now violently gushes forth through the irrational gestures akin to womanly hysteria in the same manner as his pathetic escape exposes him to be a weakling literally rushing away from the confronting

truth. Victim of his own rage and repression, Jiten, finally enters in to the public regime of legal crime.

A more complicated resistance/appropriation comes into being in the region of Baa. For some strange reason her constant enquiry whether Praful is coming to her daughters-in-law turns into a positive order to Nitin to call him. She does not change her approach to Alka of course and Nitin tries to encash her feeling of hatred towards his father to ensure the possession of the old house and even asks whether she will give him the house if he drives his wife out of the house. A history of perverted resistance is revealed as the timeframe merges in her incoherent speeches. The child Nitin is compelled to change his answer from a spontaneous “yes” to a rather laboured “no” to Baa’s query whether he likes his father prompted by the fear of losing his mother’s affection. With an overwhelming emotional pressure, Baa also makes him assert his hatred for his father followed by applause: “You are my prince!” (*Bravely Fought...*, 302). The child’s urge to secure mother’s affection now changes into something more -- an urge to possess the property and even more to free himself from Praful whose money he must accept otherwise: “Do what you like with your property but don’t let him run my life!” (*Bravely Fought...*, 305). The final jerk of the play comes in the form of the disclosure of Baa’s decision to make Praful the trustee of her house which she will leave for Daksha. The very feminine reason she forwards defeats all the patrilineal norms of social ethics: “Praful loves my Daksha! Praful will look after her” (*Bravely Fought...*, 305). It was the same house which Baa claimed to be “my house” against her husband, the house which she wanted to leave for Daksha - a security for her, compelling all the

members of the family to look after her (“This is Daksha’s house”, *Bravely Fought...*, 305) - thus assuring an unexpected agency.

A covert appropriation also takes place at yet another level. Dattani carefully chooses the name Kanhaia for Dolly’s imaginary lover, the “temporary cook”. Kanhaia is an affectionate adoption of Krishna, the universal lover, whom DD Cosambi portrayed as a dalit leader – a black or deep blue man coming from a backward community. The fascinating image of the “powerful black arms” becomes almost a leitmotif in the play signifying liberation of suppressed sexual and emotional life. It belongs to the fantasy lover of Dolly, the mesmerizing auto-rickshaw driver and most interestingly to Nitin’s father coming from, as Baa claims, the lower stratum of society. Dolly’s fantasy counters her apparent frigidity and Nitin’s fascination resists both heterosexism and his mother’s oppressive demand to hate blackness. However, Indranee Ghosh observed, without the idea of the specific myth, “this involved symbolism can hardly be realized in performative circumstances” (Ghosh, “Dattani and the Drama of the ‘Babalog’”, 58). She also complains that Dattani shows a strong propensity towards portraying upper or upper-middle class men having homosexual relation with people coming from the lower class and the “subtext of such depiction is that this is a sick relation, shameful act, involving only the servant class who are bound by their economic condition” (Ghosh, “Dattani and the Drama of the ‘Babalog’”, 59). However, it must be admitted, though unaware of D. D. Kosambi’s representation, the audience -- well acquainted with the myth of Krishna, compellingly conscious of an overt hatred for the dark complexion advocated by Baa and an equally vocal fascination of Dolly and Nitin, and at the same time, knowing full well that both the imaginary and real lovers belong to the repressed class -- can easily

appreciate the subversive possibility. Moreover, by introducing a clandestine affair for both heterosexual and homosexual relations, the playwright refutes the second allegation. It also should be remembered that the sexual imaginary here acts as a tool of de-stereotyping a lifestyle, a destabilization of normative structure of knowledge and understanding. Hence, by introducing layers of non-normative significations, Dattani enriches the process.

### **Stunted Resistance**

Foucault observes: “We are never trapped by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy” (quoted in Champagne, xxiii) What distinguishes the present play *Bravely Fought the Queen* from others by Dattani is perhaps a sense of inexorability of circumstances, complete irrefutability of certain forces and impossibility of absolute freedom from the oppressive mechanisms. Here he deals with a bleaker reality than is redeemable, but by refusing to accept the version offered by the oppressor to the world (represented by Sridhar couple) the characters at least enter the regime of truth. Hence the possibility, though limited, does not get closed altogether.

### ***The Other Way:***

Dattani introduces Lalitha and Sridhar almost in the choric stature -- participating in the drama to bring about action, but themselves remaining unchanged like catalysts. They represent the mediocrity by which the pitfall of the characters' habitat is judged. The play envisions a possibility of a lifestyle which yields moderate space and respect for the members of a family without having any need for violent defiance or defense.

We meet Lalitha in the very first scene (even before Alka) as she enters into the self-absorbed world of Dolly entranced in the thumri of Naina Devi and filing her nails absent-mindedly. Ripple is felt in the still water as she comes like a fresh breeze with her easy attitude and outlook of life, sense of humour and confidence in mutual reciprocity with her husband with whom she shares both the domestic and official concern. The Sridhar couple is not an outright non-traditional one. Sridhar prohibits Lalitha's moving in the area of Artinagar at night due to its lack of safety and Lalitha, though reluctant, does not refute his truth or nor does she object to Sridhar's preference to have her drink in his own presence. This sharing of opinion in small matters extends to joined interests. During her description of the masked ball to launch the Re Va Tee brand, proposed by her husband, she unconsciously switches from "he" to "we" and "our". Unlike Dolly, the mistress, whose husband is going to launch the brand and who herself is supposed to advise the design of the costume yet ignorant of even what Re Va Tee is, let apart the plan of the party, Lalitha is well-informed about the whole thing and comes to meet Dolly after a good piece of homework.

In sharp contrast to Dolly's absence from any participatory role in decision-making either in conducting social life or even family life, Lalitha is an equal sharer of the anxiety and toils of her husband, and the family planning of having no children right now since "We are saving for a flat of our own" (*Bravely Fought...*, 243). Apart from sharing common areas of concerns and knowledge, Lalitha has carved a niche for herself: she is an occasional freelancer, woman columnist, does meditation, writes poetry for herself and grows Bonsai and does things to keep herself engaged in resourceful activities. In sharp contrast to the Mrs. Trivedis' incapacity to take a single decision

without their husband's consent or wish, Lalitha seems to influence her husband's decisions like whether to go for a holiday or to get cash instead so that she might not leave her bonsai to her neighbors.

Sridhar's professional ethics of preferring the consumers' point of view over gendered market policy of Jiten breathes a healthy air in the stifling atmosphere. The possibility of multiple masculinities replaces the violence-based or hegemonic masculinity with peaceful masculinity based on egalitarian principles. Sridhar's concern about Lalitha's opinion on finding him with a prostitute as well as the anxious care with which he first saves the bonsai from falling down and later wraps the broken pieces in a paper renders the play a sense of normality. His protest against his boss's order to act as a pimp by having enjoyed sex prior to him to leave Jiten his "left over" may be the part of the fantasy schema of resistance adopted by the characters in the play. In the third act, Sridhar's sharp reaction at Jiten's nasty innuendoes towards Lalitha, the scuffle and Lalitha's shriek and appeal typify the protective patriarchy, but the small touches as his indulgence to his wife's request to stop to nourish her bonsai or to get answer from Dolly envision a streak of light against the dark dungeon. The ideal/destination - if any - was far away, but at least they got prepared to start their journey: "Come on! We have a long walk ahead of us!" (*Bravely Fought...*, 314).

### ***Bonsai:***

The bonsai in the play acts as a fine metaphor to exemplify the performative nature of so many of our natural or normal structures of behaviour and ideas. As Lalitha explains the making of the bonsai, "...it comes with a bit of practice. In the beginning, you will have a

lot of dead shoots on your hands. But then you learn and it ...comes.” (*Bravely Fought...*246). As she further narrates, bonsai could be grown by stunting the “natural” growth, wiring its branches, keeping it in a shallow tray so that the roots cannot find enough space, trimming continuously and shaping it by pinching or tying them.” The elaborate description of the bonsai also draws our attention to the acts of interference even in the area generally held as an act of nurturing like watering, applying fertilizer and pesticides, trimming and the paraphernalia of gardening. The treatment of the women in the play reflects the bulldozing of patriarchy to stunt the growth of personality, desire, opinion, and potential of women. However, by a reverse logic, the dwarfing may also hint at the possibility of resisting the so-called “natural” expansion of patriarchy itself by a bit of practice and patience.

***The Stunted rebellion:***

Unlike other Dattani plays, the present one does not visualize the possibility of any qualitative transmutation of the baser element, no substantial change following a dramatic conflict. When the third act accumulates its potential to create ruptures in the rubric, a group gets formed among women overcoming mutual distrust and accusation; the laughter breathes fresh air in the cell. However, terror creeps in; Dolly helplessly calls for Alka to caution her about the coming of the brothers, and getting terrified asks Lalitha to stop the music on the stereo that might stop her. Alka enters the room: wet, mudded and limping, perhaps exhibiting the impossibility of freedom.

With all the social, economic, moral/ethical, cultural, and institutional power in the oppressors’ hand (even in secret collusion with other male members of opposite

camp), the rebellion proves too fragile. Alka is extremely humiliated by nasty innuendoes of Jiten and his order to his subordinate to fix a drink for his boss's wife and the verdict of expulsion on Alka. Alka realizes that she will break down without the help of alcohol, shivering from both cold and absolute insecurity. Lalitha says, "It's the heat going out" (*Bravely Fought...*, 304). Jiten even overpowers Sridhar on physical level protesting the discourtesy shown to his wife.

***Title:***

The play *Bravely Fought the Queen* may be taken to be the dramatization of the act of eliminating the central metaphor, as suggested in the title, of the poem: "So bravely fought the Rani of Jhansi/So bravely fought the manly queen..." (*Bravely Fought...*, 296). the poem is a translation of a Hindi poem which runs like – "Khub lari mardani woh to jhasi wali rani thhi/ barsa dhal kripan katori uski hi saheli thi." Significantly, the allusion to the Rani of Jhansi and Naina Devi -- women figures, who out stepped the culturally fixed feminine role and identified as deviants like "manly queen" and "tawaif" -- operates at a meta-theatrical level. Lalitha remembers her school book reference to the translation of the Hindi, in connection to Dolly's describing Naina Devi as the queen of thumri, the song sung by the Tawaifs. As the three women recite in a jocular mode, myriads of meanings unfold before the audience. Dolly herself is fighting her battle to keep up her sanity in face of the deep sadness about her daughter Daksha (the spastic child who is a victim of her father's rage) as well as the terrible unfulfilments of her natural desire absent in the marriage of convenience by fantasy of dressing her daughter in a dance costume and the clandestine meeting with the temporary cook Kanhaia. Alka

fights her secret sorrow of an unconsummated and sterile marriage with her brother's former lover by her unwomanly aggressive behaviour and alcohol. Following the gay vocabulary, Nitin may also be designated as the "manly queen" fighting to assert and cover up his natural sexual bend.

However, Indranee Ghosh objects that in the play, "the title itself suffers from the division of language" (Ghosh, "Dattani and the Drama of the 'Babalog'", 57) while commenting on Dattani's lack of correspondence between the form and the content and the utterance and the intention and failure to produce meaning. Her objection is based on the fragile nature of the appropriation of the very myths of Lakshmi Bai and Naina Devi. She observes that the cut board sword of Alka is "a metaphor for herself, bold and dangerous looking from outside but soft and vulnerable from inside" (59). "a metaphor for herself, bold and dangerous looking from outside but soft and vulnerable from inside" (Ghosh, "Dattani and the Drama of the 'Babalog'", 59). The myth of the brave queen inspires Alka not to fight oppression but go to the fancy ball with her "tin plate armour" as Naina Devi inspires Dolly not to defy the world and follow her heart but construct a fiction of "Kanhaia". In a same vein, Anindya Sen portrays Dolly's struggle as "puny, abject, ineffectual and even pathetic" (Sen, 322). He further complains, it "never rises to the level of the battle of principle, it never moves towards an ideology of emancipation, never embraces any 'cause' apart from the very personal and therefore never becomes in any sense universal or exemplary as does Ibsen's [rebellion]" (Sen, 324). Action merges into the locus of Baa whose constant ringing represents an echoing pattern of behaviour and perpetuation of the stereotypes. "The play in its rapidly shifting values, structures the self who is the locale where the traditional and the contemporary clash but do not fuse to

give birth to a new environment. In this situation only the bonsai can thrive and that too by a great cost to itself” (Chitra and Reddy, 39).

Sen himself, however, locates the answer in the very structure of the play which makes the protest ideologically impossible and which we sometimes miss in the presence of the awful spectacle in front of our eyes: “Dolly and Alka especially have symbolized the modern woman’s struggle for emancipation against oppression and slowly and steadily have grown in stature to the point where the latent irony and cynicism of the playwright’s stand in the play becomes obliterated” (Sen, 320). Dattani intends to bring out the very futility and impossibility of the struggle of the women in face of the sheer brutality of Jiten and callous selfishness of Nitin. The viciousness is too undiluted for any rational protest. Hence the protest comes perhaps in a macabre manner. The tyranny of Jiten, Praful and Baa get symbolized by the sterility of one marriage and the birth of a spastic child from another.

Hence, the only person who escapes the social constructionism and remains beyond the reach of structured violence -- though taking birth from it -- is Daksha. Even in her fourteen, the spastic child communicates with gesture, body language, sound, rhythm and other semiotics of language to express her feeling and bodily drive. Refusing to enter the symbolic of the speech of patriarchal language, she still continues her existence in a precognitive preverbal world. Her very existence destabilizes the normative “family” and notional “Indian tradition” which are accorded dignity and honour by obliterating all the variants of a richly pluralistic culture. Willingly or unwillingly, the perpetrators own the guilt: “Your mother loved her more than was natural! Praful loved

her. More than was natural. You love her. You love her more than Baa or Praful! Because you feel the most guilt!” (*Bravely Fought...*, 312) Baa defies the code of patriarchy which she internalized so completely both in detecting the motive and consequence of her action of leaving her house to Daksha. Perhaps the only person, whom Praful loves in the world unselfishly, is Daksha -- as testified by Baa and Dolly. And it is Jiten’s inability to tolerate the manifestation of his demonic violence that makes him cry like a child and prompts him into an action which finally brings him under the impasse of legal crime.

## **‘Transformed Resentments’: *Final Solutions***

### **Introduction:**

Oliver Kenneth observed that ‘problem play’ is that “which explores a particular social problem. Such plays are sometimes known as ‘thesis plays’ because they mount and work out an argument...their ideas constitute some issues of deep concern to the dramatist with which he wishes to engage the minds and consciences of the audience” (quoted in R. Manjushree, 203). Written in 1991, Dattani’s *Final Solutions* was first performed in July 1993, when India was undergoing perhaps the greatest threat to its integrity and secular image after the British-sponsored partition riot, following the demolition of Babri Masjid (mosque) in 1992. In an analysis of Miller’s *Incident at Vichy* and Dattani’s *Final Solutions* Sengupta remarked, “they each deal with a historic moment that demonstrates contextually how violence can be common to racism, (organized) religion, and national imagining” (Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion...”, 215). Hence, the play seeks to address the colonial legacy of communalism working its way through the binary opposition between “we” and “they” and the logic of mutual exclusion. The consequence is not limited to the visible performance of communal riots. The present play concentrates on uncovering the invisible channels through which the wounded feelings are transformed into, to echo Alyque Padamsee, “resentments” (Padamsee, 161).

Religious attitude proves to be the product of history and religion is the key determiner in imagining the nation founded upon the “two nation” theory. The sense of history mingled with religion on the execution of the policy of divide and rule, and the separatist forces circulated through the entire body politic of the rubric of colonial and postcolonial state. Naturally, in the play history emerges as an active participant in changing societal pattern. As Angelie Multani rightly points out, “History is evoked and used by almost every character as a justification/rationale/excuse for each fresh outbreak of violence” (quoted in Banerjee, 281). Negotiation with history is made through diary and other various devices. The playwright uses a technique akin to the Stream of Consciousness.

The private and the public level compliment and overlap each other: “The mob in the play is symbolic of our own hatred and paranoia” (Padamsee, 161). The manipulation of past and present symbolizes a larger process. Anxiety and fear of one community- “Must we lose our identity?” (*Final Solutions*, 208) - Is countered by the sense of insecurity of the other – “Thwart them. So we may live in peace” (FS, 181). As Banerjee pertinently remarks, “... the theatrical gesture of the continuous stage of the Mob/Chorus in stylized and ‘becoming’ postures suggests extended selves of the characters that are stripped off of cultural restraints as fluid locations where communal hatred reigns” (Banerjee, 282). The facelessness of communal rioters can well be discerned in the quoted lines from *A Bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgonkar: “The sound in the far distance was only too familiar. It was the war-cry of a mob on the prowl, something like the roar of a distant sea. It was always the same, whether Hindu or Muslim...” (Quoted in Ketaki Datta, 276-7)

Dattani introduces a family to show the working of the emotions at a micro level. The narrative of national independence is interspersed with that of the colonization of a young girl through marriage. The subtlest way she is subjugated is, through an interpretation of her experience, locking her up within the boundary of a knowledge that serves and perpetuates her colonizers' interest: "she", as Padamsee observes, "builds up a hatred for Zarine, her best friend, and her community because she herself can't stand up to her own in-laws" (Padamsee, 161). Aruna, confident of her "samaskara" and protected by a history/myth, finds it natural to avoid a touch of the other community and claims, "If they cannot respect it, they must learn to tolerate it" (FS, 210). Ramnik's apparent liberalism and resentment of orthodoxy, motivated by the knowledge of sin committed by his forefathers and based on majority's sense of security, disappears at the slightest provocation.

The minority is not whitewashed, but a reexamination is made of the so-called natural attitude that thrusts a Muslim boy into a corner where he finds nothing but "myself and my faith" (FS, 198), to take pride in, to identify with and to give meaning to his existence. The identity based on logic of exclusion, asserts itself by violent negation of its other to escape anxiety of extermination.

The play touches a highly emotional chord as the Muslim boy Bobby holds the idol of Krishna in his hand: "I hold Him who is sacred to them, but I do not commit sacrilege" (FS, 224). It is not the denial of experience, rather a relocation of it; and the recognition of the point in which "... past has to be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present" (Nietzsche, quoted in Champagne, 129), that might envisage

a possibility of dialogue: “If you call them they will come. But then again -- if it’s too late -- they may not” (FS, 226).

Alyque Padamsee sees *Final Solutions* as a play of “transferred resentments” (Padamsee, 161) -- be it Ramnik’s resentment of orthodoxy motivated by the sense of guilt and impossibility of escape from the sin committed by his forefathers, or Hardika’s rage against Zarines (Muslims) and their “wretched pride” (FS, 172) resulting from her inability to question the authority of her in-laws to insult her and incapacity to have an access to the truth and to question the hegemonic authority. The play is also remarkable for an innovative use of chorus which exhibits the way paranoia hardens doubts into conviction and drowns individual voice into mob hysteria.

Commenting on the title of the play, the playwright himself remarked, “The title is in the plural [*Final “Solutions”*] to suggest that Hitler’s pogrom . . . can [recur] and *has* recurred in different ways .... Bigotry and nationalism need not go together, although that is what both Nazism and the . . . Hindutva movement were trying to do” (quoted in Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion...” 216). The hate campaign is projected through the framework of history while the potential of theatre is explored to promote tolerant togetherness which alone can interrogate the stricture of exclusion and inclusion. However, the multiple “solutions” subverts the possibility of any finality and “The title of Dattani’s play on communal violence and tensions in contemporary urban India itself calls to attention the apparent insolubility of this situation...It is, indeed, this very search for a final solution, which in many ways perpetuates the cycle of violence and hatred” (Multani, quoted in Banerjee, 286). The plurality resists monolithic absoluteness of the

“solution” which remains open ended. As Shanta Gokhle comments: “What saves Dattani from the pitfall of equilibrium, from the deadening effect of symmetry, is his historical vision. He shows that communal attitudes have evolved over a period of time and are often based on ignorance” (Quoted in Banerjee, 280).

### **History:**

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future

And time future contained in time past. (Eliot, 2).

The narrative of the play builds through the reworking of a historical process which is the architect of the attitude of today, and the locale where both the public and private merge, creating tension and interrogating the validity of things unquestioningly accepted. Dattani deploys a very effective means of condensing the huge time span of almost sixty years in a manageable miniature frame through the character of Daksha/Hardika. We view the play through her eyes -- both literally and metaphorically, and as a consequence, she assumes almost the status of a narrator, dominating and dominated by the textual politics beyond her control. The co-existence of Daksha, the fifteen year old self of Hardika and the aged matriarch is made convincing and convenient to achieve dramatic effect by positioning them on a higher level -- indicating a hyper-real and cross-time existence.

Since the play is presented as a part of an act of writing a diary, the essentially subjective nature and interpretation of the experience and events put down by the narrator

as well as the instability and “made up” character of the very subject is pointed out time and again. Interestingly, the diary comprises “A dozen pages before. A dozen pages now. A young girl’s childish scribble. An old woman’s shaky scrawl” (FS, 167) -- both the periods excluded from the centrality of mature/adult/authentic knowledge, and thus, giving an alternative view point of the world mediated through their feelings. Sometimes, the diary assumes the form of interior monologue -- spontaneity struggling with propriety like the ink coming out too thick from the discarded fountain pen, smudging the emotions and the words, some times the controlling intellect of the chronicler striking off the irrelevant details (“There is no need to be that honest”, FS, 166)--, yet the diary remains a close confidante sharing the lonely girl’s innermost feelings. The narrative consists of the written words and the unwritten recollections, physical facts as well as psychological realities, private experiences and public dimensions. One adheres to it as a testimony to truth like Aruna (“She will tell her what happened to her”, FS, 172), some challenge its authenticity like Ramnik (“Baa does not know. Or she pretends she does not know everything”, FS, 172), and the meanings hidden between the lines remain open ended.

The play opens with the delirious young girl’s fifty-six line long address to the “dear diary” recording the turbulent time. The narrative of national independence loses coherence and a monolithic structure emerges as it gets interspersed with the colonization of a young girl by both post and neo-colonial forces, by implication an extension of the larger society. An open mind capable of being angry at the lack of liberality of her own freedom fighter father in regard to his attitude towards the Muslim community -- “my friends’ fathers” (FS, 167) -- (“They had let loose the dogs”, FS, 167), gets contaminated and channelized in the similar flow of thought with the elemental fear of being

exterminated by the inhuman forces released from the mutual hatred between the communities: "I knew that I was thinking the same, like my father" (FS, 167). The scared girl of fourteen, maturing into an old woman recollects and recoils as she cannot get rid of the fearful hatred even after the change of status from the potential victim and victimized to potential benefactor: "...those two boys running away who frightened me...Asking for help makes them feel they are lower than us" (FS, 172). What she fears most is the "wretched pride" (FS, 172) in their eyes.

A subtle form of the colonizing of a married woman obliterating any identity other than her husband's and a counteraction is evident in the subsequent narrative. It works through the process of renaming: Daksha is renamed as Hardika to match with Hari while Daksha renames her in-laws, such as, her mother-in-law as Gaju (abbreviation of "Gajanand", the elephant) for her bulky body and grand bathing, her father-in-law as Wagh, the tiger, for his snoring. The act of writing becomes a means of resistance as she creates a private space for herself -- a space where she enjoys an independent identity: she retains her original name, throws away her "pallav" (veil), calls her husband by his own name Hari and even, declares "...my lord and master has the brains of a silly goat" (FS, 175). She wishes desperately to live a life outside her home through Hari recounting the stories in his college. She tries her best to retrieve Hari's decision to leave the college, "There must be someone who is thinking about the country's future" (FS, 196). It is the diary which bears witness that the girl of fifteen still retained a sensitive mind independent of the communal hatred enough to be exhilarated at the possibility of befriending a Muslim girl Zarine and her family, even though she could not remember

the “unmentionable” (*FS*, 175) things , probably beef, they used to sell in the market without disgust.

Any kind of artistic pursuit or love for it was stigmatized as an act of transgression of the boundary of a “proper” domestic womanhood so far as to prohibit Daksha to hum a song to her husband behind the closed door. This is a domestic replication of shattering of the dream to sing, of a girl of fifteen (“I can never be a singer, like Noor Jehan” (*FS*, 166), by silencing her in a manner the mob violently shatters her gramophone during the communal riot just after independence. However, this zeal for the song becomes an important bonding between two girls of the same age group from different religions. The ghost of past memory haunts the old woman continually as here she is again brutally shaken: the betrayal felt by the young girl (“Oh God! Why do I have to suffer? I just wanted them to be my friends”, *FS*, 223) ruins the faith of the old woman forever.

The slow but steady process of injecting the venom of communalism could be traced to Daksha’s narrative as she is informed by her husband that “all the bad people have left for Pakistan” (*FS*, 196). Still she was clever enough to interpret her father-in-law’s patronage of the “sants” (the spiritual healers) as a way of proving himself “somebody” (*FS*, 197) rather than any sign of devotion and feeling. But she fails as she starts believing in his concern about the financial loss Zarine and her family must have been undergoing following the disaster fell upon their house, and gets incorporated in the history of hatred.

If subalternity is situational, the history of the family exercises and validates the hetero-patriarchal domination by subjugating women until they begin to participate in its perpetuation and acquires a position of an agent. Daksha is informed that her in-laws exhibited a rare piece of liberalism in offering a job to Zarine's father in their shop after the latter's shop got burnt down, but it was rejected on account of lower salary. Though disheartened at the loss of possibility of playing the "shethani", she cherishes an attitude of love mixed with gratefulness from her cherished idol Zarine. Daksha is smoked out of her hole of fantasy by the rude and humiliating behaviour she receives instead--which, she interprets to be a consequence of Zarin's false ego -- followed by the treatment of being physically hit and locked up by her husband and losing her honour in her family forever. She is however promoted to the position of the mainstream consequent upon her incorporation into the narrative of minority discourse propagated by her family. In the same manner, Aruna suffers as a subaltern by her husband's constant disgust with her standing with the upholders of communal sanctity and superiority. Interestingly, he does never try to enlighten her, rather he enjoys a sadistic pleasure by proving his wife inferior in understanding, which turns out to be a way of re-negotiating with his own sense of shame at the doing of his fore-fathers and his own inability to come out of the prejudice in spite of all his superior knowledge ("Your life is based on violence", *FS*, 198). Smita also, in her turn, suffers a marginalized position for being actually and unconditionally a proper liberal human being. She is torn between her lack of belief in all the elaborate rituals her mother compels her to perform and which she performs only out of love for her and her own capability of free thought process -- somehow akin to her father --, which she cannot exhibit in fear of cornering her mother as it would strengthen Ramnik's

camp. She feels suffocated and assumes a diminutive status within home which she shakes off once outside home: “Maybe we should all run away from home like Javed. For five minutes every day” (*FS*, 219).

Thus, the mechanism of subsuming and the simultaneous attempt to resist appears to be a recurrent motif in the play. Past shapes the present and present relocates the past and brings in new potentials for future: “It represents flux of contemporaneity, the constant efforts to come to terms with history and vice versa” (Banerjee, 280).

### **The Mob**

The technical excellence of Dattani reaches the high watermark with his use of the classical device of the chorus so effectively in modern contexts -- synonymous with the mob -- in the present play. Unlike the classic united self, here is the unstable, fractured and incoherent self although any potential rupture or dissenting voice gets drowned by the louder voice of the mainstream/majority. The stage direction shows how the individuality is obliterated by the faceless mass identity represented by masks instead of any unique entity acted out by a player. The sticks, upon which the masks are set, might be a modern equivalence for the scepter – a symbol for hegemonic control, a phallic sign of masculinity and instrument of violence against the violators. The mob thus is present as a mechanical, gigantic, thoughtless force instrumented to institute violence by the chorus’ vacillating preference for Hindu or Moslem cause indicated by their wearing respective masks otherwise donned in black.

A reference to the mob hysteria is found in the diary of Daksha, a girl of fifteen, recording her impression of the euphoria that followed the independence: “And they are rushing out and screaming and shouting and fighting” (*FS*, 166). The euphoria was channelised yet in another way leading to the blood bath of the riot of 1947. The violent mob shattering the house of Daksha in 1947 was now getting prepared for a fresh hunt after fifty years of independence.

The traditional function of the chorus to provide the background information necessary to set the play in motion is given an added dimension. We come to know that the ratha was stoned and the pujari was stabbed to death while passing through a Muslim populated gully. However, what is more important is the stylized manifestation of the process by which the event gets interpreted and interacted with, and influences the interpersonal relation. The presuppositions upon which is founded our attitude and behaviour come to the surface with the provocations: “This is our land” (*FS*, 168). The binary between “we” and “they” and the knowledge that it is the outsiders who are enjoying the privilege of living in “our” territory gets encoded in the apparently neutral innocent behaviour. The demands come to “send them back” (*FS*, 169), to “drive them out” (*FS*, 169); and the doubt exhibited by the chorus 4 and 5 -- dramatically presenting the statement in interrogative mode --, gets overlapped and overwhelmed by the conviction stated firmly by chorus 1, 2 and 3. Any attempt to probe into the matter (“For forty years our chariot has moved through their mohallas... Why did they today?” *FS*, 168) is thwarted by the imposition of decided criminality suggested by the hint of transgression: “How dare they?” (*FS*, 168) In the same vein, any possibility of

misinterpretation is overthrown by the conviction in the contrary that calls for a suitable revenge.

The wounded pride leading to the rage of the Hindu mob is paralleled by the tone of mockery and disrespect for the other by the Muslim chorus: “Doesn’t their God have a warranty? We are neither idol makers nor breakers” (*FS*, 171). While the shocking surprise at being targeted in general as responsible for the offence leads to wrath in chorus one, two, three and four, in chorus five it breeds pain. In the same manner, the angry declamation of the former group, “Let them send us back” (*FS*, 171), is counterpoised by the latter’s helpless anxiety – “where?” (*FS*, 171) The next point where the chorus picks up, it wears the Hindu masks and demands that “they” should go back to “their land”, because “their hearts belong there” (*FS*, 176). The weak apology offered by the meek “minority” represented by chorus five alone (“They are few. They can’t do much harm”, *FS*, 176) is ruled out by the joined forces of the rest: “Time will tell who they are. Whether they mean harm” (*FS*, 176). The chorus, as a Muslim mob, takes up the challenge – “We are few! But we are strong!” (*FS*, 179)–, and their threatening confidence is interspersed by the pleading of helpless individuals (“Please don’t throw us out!” *FS*, 179).

The mob assumes their real identity as the plunderer when it becomes faceless - - symbolically putting off all masks -- and snatches away the watch and other possessions of the two passers by; and it is only afterwards that they gradually wear the mask of Hindus discovering the prayer cap and the knotted handkerchief which identify their prey as Muslims. The predicament of the individual following the revelation of identity as well

as the individual's attempt to obscure it is countered on a public level by the chorus' determination to uphold its existence in face of anonymity.

At the same time, the lack of real stability and fluidity of identity they assume, during their threat to Ramnik Gandhi for betraying his own community and echoing Javed's sentiment, and changing masks on ritual level, emphasizes the becoming as different from being. Javed's declaring himself to be part of the mob doing the same thing on different streets and the constant presence of the two boys on stage corroborates the connection. The presentation of the chorus may be called "realistic stylization," since, as noted down by Arvind Gaur, they are "psycho-physical representation of the characters and also provides the audience with the visual images of the characters' conflicts", since "communalism has no face, it is an attitude and thus it becomes an image of the characters" (Quoted in Datta, 265). When reflecting the character's attitude, the group assumes the role of the chorus, while it represents its own, it becomes the mob. The Chorus acts both as the oppressed and the oppressor.

### **The Problematics of Communalism**

"Communalism being the worst form of materialism divorced from being anything that is sacred and oriented towards worldly wealth and power, can truly be combated by a higher form of the sacred that combines the secular ideal of human equality, democratic awareness, identification with the suffering, alleviation of poverty ... and belief in the holiness of all forms of life..." (Satchidananda, quoted in Manjushree, 208).

The play may be read as an exploration of some areas of our experience which are potential sites for the workings of neo-colonial forces -- a legacy that was inherited by the post-colonial India-- and have been internalized by us so far and intricately fabricated in the collective unconscious.

The impact of the fear psychosis works in varying degrees in case of various characters in the play according to their being positioned in different situations leading to misinterpretations of facts and events. The horrible consequences of the independence which was immediately followed by the communal riots, could be gauged by the experience of millions like Daksha, a girl of fourteen who lost her father --, for whom independence becomes nothing more than “a most terrible thing [that] happened to our country” (*FS*, 166). A terrifying sense of imminent danger converts a sensible mind nourished by fellow feelings into a believer of the creed of separatism. The disgusted distrust towards the other community exhibited by Hardika and Aruna is replicated by Tasnim’s parents. The grateful acknowledgement of the kind gesture shown by Ramnik of giving unasked relief to them concerning their daughter, turns instantaneously into ungracious discourtesy recognizing their well-wisher to be a Hindu (“You weren’t cut off. He disconnected while you were talking to him” (*FS*, 171). It is the same sense of insecurity that makes Tasnim so panicky and Smita so concerned that they fail to analyze the situation and react to the throwing of a soda bottle at the hostel of Muslim girls . The panic spreads rumor and initiates counter attacks and this is how the things get started.

The manipulated indifference of the state is finely manifested by the inaction of the police: the police do not come at the call of the matron of the Muslim girls’ hostel;

they don't answer the phone of Aruna. The disbelief in the assurance of protection from the authority ("They will lock us up! Not them" (*FS*, 180) breeds law breakers. The dubious nature of its function is underscored by the information that Javed and Bobby were brought to street by their vans.

The theme of communalism is played on fine concord as the private and public sphere interact and intersect sometimes in unison sometimes discordantly. The helpless pleading of the individual with a bloodthirsty mob at their heel, "Please don't throw us out!" (*FS*,179), is sandwiched between the proud declamation of challenge thrown by the Muslim chorus, "They want to throw us out!" (*FS*, 179), and the spiteful demand of a murderous crowd, "Throw them out!" (*FS*, 180). The humanism of the determined individual Ramnik fights both the self-protective measures of the panicked Aruna and the violence of the crowd maddened with hatred and sadistic pleasure of torment. Each of the party claims an exclusive access to the regime of truth: Aruna suspects that "They must have done something wrong" (*FS*, 180), while the mob bases the validity of their identity by expelling the other from it: "They who are wrong. Since we are right. And they oppose us" (*FS*, 181). The weakness of the conviction is however exposed only to be of conjectures born out of insecurity as well as the zeal of centrality, forwarded to prove the "rightness" of the action: "Set an example. Stop them. Before they do harm. Tame them. Before their passions inflame" (*FS*, 181).

Anxiety builds around the dialectic of "we" and "they" on a subtler level. Both Aruna and Hardika react sharply at the idea of being leveled as "all the same" (*FS*, 183) though they themselves forget to mention their levelers as individuals instead of as a

mass entity -- “they”. The same consciousness that makes Javed and Ramnik confident about the safety of the protectors even after being called “traitors” (181) and threatened to be killed, makes the former apologetic at calling their chasers bastard in front of their protector who risks his life and reputation for them, “Those are your own people” (*FS*, 191). The privilege and the pride to which the benefactor is entitled, is lightly touched in Daksha’s elation at the news that Zarine’s father came to ask for job to her father-in-law since it would enable her to play the “shethani” (rich mistress) and demand friendship, gratitude and right to listen to Noor Jehan.

The play exposes how the manifest violence of the performance of riots has its root deep in the innocent attitude and behaviour of the harmless common mass nourishing and validating the violence, mutual sense of insecurity and distrust, terror and extermination. The well-meaning, “samaskari” (with commendable household values) housewife is aghast at the possibility of actually offering water in her house to the two Muslim boys and is shocked at it being accepted. Aruna’s behaviour is quite in consonance with the “purity/pollution syndrome” of “Brahminical Hinduism”: she “demonizes her (religious) Other, although she cannot think of killing the tiniest creature in real life or of being disrespectful to any other faith” (Sengupta, “Of Race/Religion...”, 226). Ramnik also confesses his inability to belong less, because of any secular make up of mind, more because, it connects him with shameful memory of his family history. The disgust of the conservative apart, the liberalism of the civilized also turns out to be indifference to dumping humility: Ramnik’s insistence to give them food and shelter to reluctant Aruna when the receivers are in no position to refuse them, adds to greater humiliation. Bobby appeals almost in tears “Well, I didn’t want to create an awkward

situation where we wouldn't be served water..." (FS, 185). Ramnik's gesture also manifests power both in exerting order and instituting violence and exhibiting the pride of being the benefactor protecting and forgiving the arrogance: "It must feel good. Being the majority" (FS, 192) The pride of protection is exposed yet in another way, protecting the victim from the victimizer's "own" people.

Ruptures and discontinuities run parallel to the homogenous groups. Javed is thrown out of his house for his alignment with antisocial elements hiring thousands like him to create trouble. The communal betrayal of which Ramnik is accused, and which makes him "traitor" is replicated in micro level as Smita, in a fit of excitement betrays Tasnim's confidence about her brother and earns the name of "traitor". Hardika cannot identify herself with the Hindu mob in spite of her personal prejudice and spite for the Muslim boys under their roof in particular and the community in general: "Where were our own people when we needed them?" (FS, 191) Bobby admits his uneasiness with his identity, not because he doubts its basic tenets but it makes him different, and he changes his name Babban into Bobby only to obscure his Muslim identity — "I could become superior by not belonging" (FS, 201). Smita as well as Bobby claims a space for their identity, a right not to be categorized, and a choice of an alternative which is denied by their immediate religious guardians.

Dattani, however, makes the assurance of belonging problematic as the ages of alienation and feelings of otherness find voice. Though cornered, Javed takes pride in his own creed even at the cost of risking safety. While Bobby is hesitant to give away his own identity and denies the knot of the handkerchief to the searching crowd, Javed wears

his prayer cap with dignity in front of the murderous chorus. It is he who points out to their protectors that they are protecting them from the violence of their own people. Over sensitive, he takes a wrong cue to Ramnik's statement about his meeting his sister and blurts out at the prejudice against his community of being the lovers of their own brothers and sisters, and puts a blaming finger on a counter prejudice: "We do love our own blood. Unlike you who treat your own like shit which can't be touched" (*FS*, 190).

The master stroke of the playwright comes with the highly charged moments in which the identity/position of the liberal protector and the orthodox conservative, the offender and the victim, the violence-monger and the peace-loving common man interchange and are exposed to be constructed and reconstructed at the slightest provocation. The apparently absurd attempt of shifting the responsibility of throwing the first stone at the neutral ordinary being is re-examined. At the slightest provocation, the civilized host, protecting the refugees from the angry mob and providing shelter and food ignoring the family pressure, even offering job ignoring the unknown possibility of betrayal from a person thrown out by his own family, blurts out: "Your life is based on violence. Your religion is..." (*FS*, 198). Infuriated with self exposure and recognition of an undesirable identity, he becomes violent and slaps Javed at the face. Mask of tolerance falls off. Another story fits into the scheme: a lively teenage boy, the hero among the neighbourhood children, is requested by the postman to drop a letter. The house owner commands to put it down on the wall, wipes the letter before touching it, the wall and the gate, and thus, changes the world for the boy for ever: "We all heard a prayer bell, ringing continuously. Not loud. But distinct" (*FS*, 200). Fallen in his own eyes, the

cornered boy -- turned to himself and “my faith” to take pride in --, throws meat and bones in his courtyard and finally the stone at the chariot starting the violent riot.

With a fine irony, Javed meets his mirror image rather in Aruna, firm in her belief, rigid in her prejudice, solid and invincible in her faith and proudly convinced in the impossibility of existence of any other “truth” than her own: “If they cannot respect it, they must learn to tolerate it” (*FS*, 210).

However, all arguments apart, the play touches real emotional chords like anxiety, insecurity, pain, betrayal, shame as well as love in describing the inception of the communal riot. In spite of Javed’s claim to belong to the mob, and pride in upholding his religion and working for its cause, he finds himself alone in his own world of memory and fear. Intoxicated by something to turn back upon with pride and a panacea for all the bruises and burns, he used to attend the meetings propagating and injecting the dreams of “mother land and fighting to save our faith and how we should get four of theirs for every one of ours” (*FS*, 205). The dozes were sufficient to bring him to the city, to make him play the fighter fighting for the cause of his “own” people. He throws the stone supplied by someone in a trance. He is even supplied with a knife by that invisible anonymous hand holding him. The pleasure and intoxication born out of pain and wounded sentiment and humiliation are gone and the root cause returns: “crashing down” (*FS*, 208). He cries helplessly like a child innocent of all the evils dumped upon him by his own orthodoxy and other’s opportunism: the knife let off. However, the knife is taken up by another under control of his/her own cycle of pain, fear and anxiety and the “pujari” (priest) is stabbed.

Hardika also finds a way to come out of her private cycle of joy and fear. Daksha was so happy to find an excuse to go to Zarine's house and enjoy the cordial and friendly reception which she found there while, all of a sudden, her happiness and dreams are crushed down, and independence and respect are lost in a moment when she is invited to their table and offered food with the specific purpose to insult her. Unable to bear the smell, she throws up and Zarine, her dream peer, screams at her furiously. As a consequence, Daksha is locked up as a punishment, her movement is restricted, she is hit by her husband, loses respect in her husband's eyes for ever, and most importantly she gets incorporated in the narrative -- Zarin's father asked for more salary than he deserves from Wah and rejected the benevolent offer. And it is their "wretched pride" (*FS*, 172) that made them mistreat her so cruelly and humiliatingly spoiling her life for ever. She lives with the memory for so many years until now the hateful secret is exposed. The veil of darkness of ignorance lifted, Hardika calls for the two boys: "If you call them they will come. But then again -- if it's too late -- they may not" (*FS*, 226).

Ramnik's obsessive liberalism and hateful mockery of Aruna's prejudice and intolerance is also exposed to be motivated by another private cycle of shameful memory. He knew that it was his forefathers who burnt the shop of their Muslim neighbours -- assured of the support of their community --, to obliterate their business rival in name of communal cause and acquired the shop at half its price: "...it wasn't that those people hated you. It wasn't false pride or arrogance. ...It was anger" (*FS*, 226).

## The Idol

In the present play, the idol of Lord Krishna plays a vital architectonic role. It becomes a potential site for contestation of conflicting forces endowing it with multiple layers of significations. With the progression of the play, it transcends its symbolic significance and acquires greater representational value.

A passing reference is made to the idol of Krishna as Daksha recollects the terrifying day at Hussainabad, with the blood-cuddling crowd throwing stones at her house in her father's absence, and her mother clinging to the idol praying for his safety. The impact of extreme fear and helplessness breeds contrary reactions: it strengthens all the more the faith of the firm believer (her mother) and turns the impressionable teenage girl into an atheist who finds the idol "a painted doll. A doll no different from the ones I used to play with and think it was a real person" (*FS*, 167). Yet, well-trained in the age-old belief system, the newly converted blaspheme recognizes the breaking of the gramophone -- "what I loved most" (*FS*, 167) -- in the next moment as an apt visitation of god's wrath and the fear -- if not respect -- is restored: "Krishna slapping me in the face..." (*FS*, 167). The idol and the faith it inspires becomes a site for conflict between Ramnik and Aruna, and Smita becomes the apple of discord. Aruna's obsession with pujapath and the elaborate care she takes of the lord who "will protect us" (*FS*, 174) is countered by the anxiety of Ramnik exhibited through exaggerated blasphemy: "Who do you think is creating all the trouble?" (*FS*, 173)

A moment of relief and grace comes when the three youngsters – Smita, at last relieved of the burden of prejudice of her mother, Bobby, confessing his own escapism, and Javed, coming out of his nightmare of humiliation --, joke and splash water, purifying the torpid ambience with a life-affirming promise. The play climaxes with Bobby holding the tiny idol of Lord Krishna which he shows to the world in general and Javed in particular: the tolerance and love emanating from the religion itself which gets contaminated by “our trivial pride”. The idol sits comfortably and gracefully on his palm enjoying the “warmth” of a human being who knows this much that “I don’t believe in Him but He believes in me” (*FS*, 224). Overpowering the pounding sticks and violent threats, Bobby’s voice reverberates: “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).

### **Conclusion:**

Georg Brandes once observed: “What shows a literature to be a living thing today is the fact of its subjecting problems to debate” (quoted in Datta, 264). The stylized presentation of the discourse of communalism and the attempt to conjecture its solution in the play highlights the reverberated echo of mutual accusation and distrust, replicating one another – the Otherized entity turns out to be the projection of the self itself. Hence, the solution lies not in the stricture of exclusion and inclusion, but in acceptance of the variety and multiplicity.

Conveyance of a 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 religious-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).

## **Coming out of the Closet: *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai***

### **Introduction:**

I see hatred

I am bathed in it, drowning in it

since almost the beginning of my life

it has been the air I breathe

the food I eat, the content of my perceptions;

the single most constant fact of my existence

is their hatred...

-- Judy Dothard Simmons (quoted in Yep, 16).

“Sex has always been the forum where both the future of our species and our ‘truth’ as human subjects are decided” (Michel Foucault, quoted in Yep, 11).

In spite of the preeminent role of sexuality in the formation and constitution of human subjectivity and experience, it has been, in post-ancient India until recently, largely a neglected area of inquiry and conscious cultivation in mainstream discourse.

The forces are rather at work to keep it left out, silenced and suppressed. Naturally, the body of literature centered on and obsessed with romance and erotica uncritically accepted heterosexuality as default identity and thus, mandated and institutionalized what Elizabeth Grosz calls 'heterocentricity' (quoted in Tamsin Wilton 513). It is really reprehensible that authors of human sexuality and interpersonal communication texts have not thought of challenging the pervasive heterosexism and almost always tended to treat gender and sexual identities as fixed, stable, and contained. Through such fixed conceptions of identities and a minoritizing view, these studies normalize and perpetuate the current homo/heterosexual binary and promote hetero-normativity as superior. Their strict adherence to the discursive parameters of hetero-normativity makes the texts misrepresent or apologetically present the non-normative sexuality or absent it altogether and even downplay the heterogeneity of heterosexuality itself. Dattani emerged as one of the very few voices in India breaking the silence, and his voice was heard rather clear and bold. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is a confident exploration of the uncharted region.

An important reason behind the erasure or silencing of homosexuality and other sorts of non-normative sexuality may be traced to the fact that heterosexuality is not only sexual but social. In fact, "It is simultaneously marked as a natural and given category and unmarked as a ubiquitous and invisible force permeating all aspects of social life" (Yep, 12). The pervasive presence of heterosexuality is felt as an institution, as identity, as practice and as experience. Naturally any discontinuity in the regime of sexuality poses serious threat to the centrality and naturalness of all sorts of hetero-normativity. Sedgwick proposes a radical distinction between sexuality and gender, arguing that "whereas gender illustrates the normative and Oedipal structures of power in

our society, sexuality figures a more radical and fluid performativity, through which historically silenced and abjected identities can speak” (quoted in Campbell, 158).

“The elaborating of erotic preferences into a character—into a kind of erotically determined essence—is,” as Foucault forcefully argues, “inherently a disciplinary project”(quoted in Bersani, 39). Following the process of de-naturalizing and de-familiarizing the identity-disturbing phenomenon of homosexuality, the centre accelerates the mechanism of marginalizing the Other and tries to remove any threat by particularizing and peculiarizing the identity into mere sexual preference which in turn designates heterosexuality as natural and essential. “The authority, position, and power of such a center are attained through normalization [which] ... is the process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant cultural values” (Yep, 17). The process of hetero-normalizing functions through symbolic annihilation of gay and lesbian. The promotion of the unfavourable specificities of homosexuality helps to project it as dangerous, both culturally and politically. Homophobia and the fear of being perceived as gay or lesbian/not-woman become the central organizing principle and the cultural policing of manhood and womanhood.

As Steven Seidman rightly observes, “...science's claim to truth carried a social authority that made it productive of forms of personal and social life”. He farther adds, “Science had not only helped to create a polluted homosexual identity but also had helped to bring into existence an elaborate apparatus of homosexual oppression...I knew that

many brave souls had campaigned under the banner of science for social respect and rights for ‘homosexuals’” (Seidman, 199). The policing of science ranges from pathologising the homosexual orientation as a “disease”, suggesting cure, inventing therapies, promoting medical surveillance and control, detecting and identifying it with source of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases -- by implication -- criminalizing it. Psycho-analysis remained particularly effective in promoting homophobia in spite of its many conscious contrary moves. Freud was particularly definite in his denial to diagnose or treat homosexuality as a disease. Yet the fact remains, some of its basic assumptions like “unconscious” discourage any non-normative or out-lawed psychic or sexual orientation on the ground that it may lead the individual to the alone-ness of his/her narcissistic self. We may draw support for the view from Jan Campbell who, in his introduction to his book *Arguing with the Phallus* noted, “The unconscious desire that underpins or, more accurately, deconstructs our postmodern identities is a psychic negativity revealing the narcissistic, divided and alienated roots of contemporary being. It seems then, for psychoanalysis, that the only positive alternative to our unconscious negativity is the law. Return from abject narcissism and borderline psychosis means the upholding of oedipal law and the ethical and religious principles that accompany this kind of patriarchal and colonial society” (Campbell, 1). The socializing and mainstreaming of science encouraged pseudo psychiatry enormously to disseminate homophobia and aversion as well as therapeutic possibility.

Perhaps the deepest anxiety of hetero-normativity lies in the arena of heteropatriarchy which perpetuates itself through gender categorization and reproductive normativity. In fact, “Heteropatriarchy is an overarching system of male dominance

through the institution of compulsory heterosexuality” (Yep, 30). It relies heavily on and seeks to maintain the gender division of labor, distribution of resources, and the patriarchal relations of production. The hyperbolic version of “man” and “woman” is critiqued aptly throughout the play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. Since the rootedness of heterosexuality in gender hierarchy gets manifested through its central mechanism, marriage, the present play naturally addresses the gender issue and the desirability of its realization through the institution of marriage -- often reduced into nightmarish domestic violence, into hushed up betrayal as one homosexual (not bisexual) partner lives a double life without the knowledge of the other and makes both suffer.

Thus heterosexism banishes the non-heterosexuals from the outer limit of the charmed circle to prevent them from entering the ambit of civil rights like marriage, adopting children, inheriting parents’ property, and protest against discrimination and so on. If at all recognized, it is quarantined within the subsections of social issues. The hegemonic form of erotic is produced “the ways in which particular discourses of the erotic have been produced by and in the interests of the class-group which has oppressed them” (Wilton, 508).

However, an interesting observation by Katz reveals “heterosexuality” to be “painstakingly dependent on homosexuality to maintain and reproduce its master status” (quoted in Yep, 11). The homosexual identity as an emerging socio historical event has been able to expose the heterosexuality as an unstable, contestable institutional and discursive production. The construct of homo/hetero binary challenged the autonomous existence of heterosexuality itself defining its contour, rightly detected by R. Johnson,

“...from homosexual invasion and infringement, heterosexuality erects heavily policed borders. Such borders are closely watched and carefully defended because they are points of danger for one or the other or both identities involved” (Quoted in Yep, 27). Apart from the definitional anxiety, the fixity to a particular brand of sexual behaviour appears limited and narrow, suppressing a wide range of pleasure, possibility and freedom of choice. As Wilton puts it with positive jubilation, “Set against anxious mainstream heteronormativity, the hedonistic pluralism of queer counterculture is, truly, power play” (Quoted in Yep 15).

Unfortunately, though ancient Indian culture was inclusive enough to embrace multiple variations of the heterogeneous heterosexuality and various kinds of alternate sexualities, in modern India, homosexuality did not enjoy any official disciplinary existence before the introduction of the antisodomy act in 1861 by the colonizers (non-recognition does not imply non-existence). The disciplinary production of sexual subject continued to confine within the patrolled border knowledge and desire as well. Even after independence, various post and neo-colonial forces went on to define a colonial code as “Indian tradition” and posit the civil rights of homosexuals as elitist mimicry of the west and the neo religious dogmas closeted the practice. “...the right-wing Hindu Sangh Parivar celebrates a past that stabilizes homogeneity and externalizes difference, as opposed to staging it as constitutive of Indian history” (*Anjali Arondekar*, 121). Suparna Bhaskaran argues in her paper “Politics of Penetration”, “heteropatriarchal ideology of shame and duty coupled with cultural and structural violence continued to be powerfully articulated by the post and neo-colonial forces of homophobia” (Bhaskaran , 27). The colonial act was included in IPC as article 377. Thus in India legal bias went on

legitimizing the exploitation of the myrmidons of law, psychiatry designating it as gender identity disorder, medical science diagnosing the homosexuals as carrier of HIV -- leading the Ego alien individuals to marry and live a double life or commit suicide.

The petition filed by NAZ foundation in 2002 to abolish section 377 of IPC was initially rejected on technical grounds. But when it was again taken up in 2009, the judiciary prohibited any legal steps against the accused under this article; but again the verdict was withdrawn by the Supreme Court in 2013. However, Indian intelligentsia and the youth upheld significant protests. Amartya Sen remarked, the “criminalization of gay behavior goes not only against fundamental human rights, but it also works against the enhancement of human freedoms in terms of which the progress of human civilization can be judged” (quoted in Arondekar, 120). However, the contestation of the allegation of westernization brought into play the concept of trans-nationalism, breaking the boundaries of different temporality and spatiality. As Anjali Arondekar puts it, “‘transnational turn’ instantiates a powerful political metaphoric, a vigorous corrective to the hegemony of national and temporal boundaries, particularly in an era of increased surveillance and U.S. ‘imperialism’” (Arondekar, 114).

In the present scenario, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* “is not simply the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal. It is a play about how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates” (McRae, a Note, 45). Dattani takes up a daring project to offer a glimpse, not into but, from a world of different reality, into that of “normality”, of “those heterosexuals” (*On a Muggy...*, 53), which , in

reference to the former, appears equally constructed, contestable and complicated, and seeks to assert an equal status of “normal”.

### **Policing**

“...Sexuality has become a point of entry to the psyches and lives of individuals and to the life and welfare of the population as a whole” (Weeks, quoted in Yep, 37).

The rubric of the power structure gets shaken in any possibility of discontinuity in the realm of sexuality and naturally, it mobilizes every possible hetero-normalizing measure both at micro (homophobia) and macro (heterosexism) level. The normalization almost inevitably becomes the site of violence: “Normalization is a symbolically, discursively, psychically, psychologically, and materially violent form of social regulation and control” (Yep, 17).

In India, policing takes the form of the de-westernization/purification of Indianness, which is in fact a reproduction of the colonial legacy of hetero-normativity. It seeks to obliterate both the richly pluralistic and inclusive Indian past (both ancient and medieval Islamic India) and the emergent transnational sociocultural reality. The “normalization” takes various forms of institutionalized affiliation and sanction. The institutional vigilance of the legal system is perpetrated and perpetuated by Section 377, the antisodomy statute of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which is in fact, an uncritical appropriation of a colonial statute formed in 1861. The section reads:

Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine. Explanation: Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section. The offence made punishable under this section requires that penetration, however little, should be proved strictly. Thus an attempt to commit this offence should be an attempt to thrust the male organ into the anus of the passive agent. Some activity on the part of the accused in that particular direction ought to be proved strictly. A mere preparation for the operation should not necessarily be construed as an attempt. Emission is not necessary.

<http://indiankanoon.org/search/?formInput=section%20377>)

In 2001, NAZ Foundation, a Delhi-based HIV/AIDS prevention nongovernmental organization, with the assistance of the Lawyers Collective filed a petition against the Union Government seeking to declare the section as violative of the right to equality (Article 14), the right to freedom (Article 19), and the right to life and liberty (Article 21) of the Indian Constitution. The petition strategically referred to the global discourse of gay civil rights, relationality between sexual acts and civil rights, defense of a citizen-subject's privacy, removal of a major obstacle to HIV/AIDS prevention programme for the underground sexual practice outside the reach of safe-sex interventions etc. In order to break the stranglehold that homoeroticism is produced by the western temporality and spatiality, the petitioners made presentation of the indigeneity of the discourse defying the colonial figurations of ontological perversity

(Arondekar, 113-128). The logic of historicity was based on the assumption that “to criminalize sodomy is to embrace a judicial Westernization” (Arondekar, 117). The dismissal of this petition in 2004 on the ground that a PIL loses its validity without a victim came as an enormous blow to the Foundation and members of the Lawyers’ Collective. Indian intelligentsia from multiple fronts actively protested against the judicial move. “Amartya Sen remarked that the Civil War in the United States began the same year as the establishment of 377 (1861) and that while the United States had managed to abolish slavery as a result of the war, the Indian state had, as yet, not stepped up to its promise as a modern democracy by refusing to abolish Section 377” (quoted in Arondekar, 120).

In 2009 Delhi High Court declared its verdict de-criminalizing homosexuality. It was a moment of jubilation for the petitioners, the closeted minority, and persons of sensibility, taste and open mind. However, sharp reaction came from the conservative circle both at individual and group level. But the revocation of the verdict by Supreme Court in 2013 was a backward move to an oppressive legal domination and violence. The overt emphasis on penetration -- which constitutes the heterosexist centre of sexual activity -- in the section, also tends to overlook the other kind of sexual harassment which is not hetero-sexual.

The neo colonial forces also operate through surveillance in the regime of religion. The deeply patriarchal bias of Islamic religion maintains highly policed border to repress any potential rupture in the narrative of heteropatriarchy and the status quo of gender categorization. Neo-Hinduism, in the guise of reclaiming identity, distorts its past

of rich and productive variety and tries to reduce it into a monolith. "...the right-wing Hindu Sangh Parivar celebrates a past that stabilizes homogeneity and externalizes difference, as opposed to staging it as constitutive of Indian history" (Arondekar, 121). Christianity continues to uphold the Judeo-Christian frame of temporality and morality that condemned not only "unnatural acts" but also a range of other native sexual and social behaviors to promote a heterosexual, marital and reproductive relation as "blessed". If neo-Hinduism imposes itself by validating and exaggerating heterosexual marriage, Christianity complements its workings by exorcising homosexual desire. The play shows how an educated man such as Ed develops the habit of going to church every week to be exorcised and gets impressed that his relation with Kamlesh was the "work of the devil" (*On a Muggy Night...*, 85).

Even science, with all its claim to being founded on impartial "truth", perpetuates the discursive parameter of heteronormativity and fortifies the hegemony. "Its power lay not only in its capacity to rationalize the denial of moral legitimacy for same-sex desire or to justify the denial of civil rights or claims to social inclusion. Through its cultural and institutional authority, science could inscribe in our bodies and minds a sexual/social regime - one that made desire into an identity, one that made gender preference into a master category of sexual and social identity, one that made hetero/homosexual identities mutually exclusive, and one that purified a heterosexual life while polluting a homosexual life" (Seidman, 199). It is science that is used to justify incarceration, medical surveillance and control, curative therapies that aimed at great psychic alteration.

In the play reference is made to the psycho therapists who suggest aversion therapy and make a gay man feel ashamed of “what” he is. In a primitive manner he wants to reorient Kamlesh’s sexuality – by implication – making him afraid and ashamed of himself instead of redeeming his incompatibility with the circumstance of being ditched: “‘It is impossible to change society’, he said, ‘but it may be possible for you to reorient yourself’” (*On a Muggy night...*, 69). Kamlesh stops seeing the doctor, but such yellow-page psychiatrist succeeds in developing an ego-alien anxiety in persons such as Ed. The aversion therapy averts them against themselves. The play finally institutes a superb lampoon on such pseudo sciences by Sharad’s brilliant mock-demonstration of the methodologies followed by the “behavioural model”. He performs/parodies the various stages like how to sit without your legs crossed, keep two legs wide apart, walk “as if a cricket bat between the legs”, talk in a base voice -- at all cost occupy space in a macho fashion.

Ed is a fair case study in victimization by cultural, social, religious and scientific policing and self-abnegation leading to self-negation and self-annihilation. Born in an orthodox Tamil family he fails to co-relate his sexual preference with that of the “world”, pervaded with sense of guilt and isolation, surrenders to suicidal provocations. The victim becomes victimizer exploiting Kamlesh emotionally to leave him with an acute depression disabling him to develop any farther relationship and tries to deceive Kiran into a marriage that will cover up his relation with her brother beyond social surveillance. Frustrated in his plan to live a double life like Bunny Singh -- the media face of happy middleclass heterosexual family man and a private gay man --, he falls a

pathetic victim to the devastating pervasiveness of hatred and violence in daily life based on being seen, perceived, labeled, and treated as an “Other.”

### **Alien**

“...we are everywhere impelled to confess the truth of our sex, which we have been taught to see as the truth of ourselves” (Foucault, quoted in Wilton 516).

Our confessional consists chiefly in our adherence to the discursive parameters of hetero-normativity. Caught in the web of multiple identities, we try to discard, hide or suppress the identity at variance with the “panoptic vision [which] depends on a successful immobilizing of the objects it surveys; [because] only then can behavior be transformed into manipulatable characterological types” (Bersani, 39). If the flight becomes painfully unavoidable, the individual suffers from a terrible sense of alienation and tries different strategies to address the situation. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* offers interesting variations of the ways some minorities and closeted individuals find to cope with their status as the Other.

Kristin Ross once observed, “The moments when everyday life becomes most vivid or tangible are the moments when most people find themselves living more than one life” (Quoted in Yep, 170). This is the face Bunny Singh tries to “become” and the fate he is compelled to carve for himself in order to belong to the “characterological type” of the mainstream. He is a well known media face, mobbed in any gathering, famous as a character in a family drama playing the role of the middle class, middle aged,

head of an ideal family constructed by the heterosexual marriage and based on reproductive principle. In his real life he is happily married to a woman and has children and having a clandestine gay sexual life avoiding only the gay life style. He thus finds a way of resolving the paradox of being a homosexual and a middleclass Indian man by the strategy of “camouflage” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 70). Bunny Singh operates in an in-between-ness which reinforces Butler’s challenge to the obviousness of “fiction/truth” and “fantasy/reality” as symmetrical binaries (Butler, 6).

Yep farther observes, “heterosexuality must anxiously, repeatedly, and persistently set about trying to affirm itself, assure itself, defend itself, and insist on itself” (Yep, 14). The anxiety of keeping up a confirmed heterosexual image and the gender structure it maintains, make Bunny Singh wish the children “Mard ke puttar bano! Be brave! Be like your father!” (*On A Muggy Night...*, 66). It is the same anxiety which makes him act as some one not really belonging to the minority group even at the cost of offering himself as typically Indian unaccustomed with “witty remarks in foreign context” and warning Sharad not to behave “camp” before his invitees. He even goes so far as suggest Kamlesh should marry a “nice woman” and “have sex on the side” that will help him to get rid of the sense of insecurity and loneliness. He adopts every gesture proving himself to belong to the majority, to be straight only by not screaming from the roof top that he is gay, which, seen from a different view point, may appear, as Ranjit puts it, “But you scream from the roof top that you are straight”. Bunny however defends himself by claiming his right to the basic instinct of self-defense by adopting another instinctive mechanism camouflage (“be matched with your surrounding and no one can find you”).

A dreadful reality stares at our face -- how the fear of being marginalized breeds hypocrisy, betrayal and self-alienation. Pathetically, he clings to the disguised identity in front of Kiran and takes pains to stress his condescension in giving a “liberal-minded” indulgence to the minoritized group of homosexual friends and himself being “not like them”. Yet with all his parading of being on the side of the majority and maintaining a successful life, the loneliness and discontentment could not escape the audience both in his insistence on being certified a “happy” man and stressing the obvious repeatedly: “I am very happy” (*On a Muggy night...*, 84). The alienation gets evident also in the chance remark: “You cannot make me an outcast both inside and out” (*On a Muggy night...*, 89). Apart from the deep-seated sense of guilt and loneliness produced by hetero-normativity, a material fear of losing his job as a media face also acts as a constant threat.

Thus, the disguised/camouflaged identity of Bunny Singh exposes the constructed and performative nature of heterosexuality itself. He may be a fine illustration of Yep’s proclamation – “We all have heard of individuals who are heterosexually married, with children, and fully participating in heterosexual practices, institutions, and rituals, who confess that they have been ‘living a lie’ all along and proclaim that they have always really’ been lesbian or gay all their lives. Precisely because it can be “faked” ( Yep, 12).

The widespread reluctance to accept homosexuality as part of Indian identity and promotion of its Western origin -- encouraged by the on-going movements in various European and American countries -- make the individuals alien to the national identity. From the very beginning, Wagner’s music on the stereo exudes a slightly Europeanized

cosmopolitan atmosphere. The reference to the “What Makes a Man a Man?” as gay anthem refuting *Jana Gana Mana* gives a sense of not belonging—a sense of being Otherised.

Men like Ranjit find themselves lurking in a zone of liminality, carrying hyphenated identity and without ever inhabiting any one place. An inability to identify with so-called “Indian” sensibility makes him feel foreigner in his own country. The incompatibility of Ranjit with the hot and humid Mumbai weather and the turns of phrases he uses point to a deeper sense of alienation he feels from his surrounding. He finds a ready solution to resolve the paradox of adopting mutually exclusive identities like Indian and gay by denying his former self. Beneath the humorous effrontery of Sharad about Ranjit’s being “brown from outside and white from inside”, like a “coconut”, lies a deeper sense of being repulsed by a part of his own identity. Ranjit fails to connect with his own sexual orientation to the monolithic reduction by neo-colonial forces of a multicultural multiethnic country like India: “Well, this is the price one pays for living in India”( *On a Muggy night...*, 70).

Ranjit is also faced with his incapacity to come to terms with the co-existence of suppressed facets of identities as Bunny Singh points out: “You can leave the country, but you can never run away from being brown...” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 88).But his admission of the fact -- “I can’t seem to be both Indian and gay” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 88)-- heightens only the workings of the post and neo colonial forces acting as complementary to each other. In the same manner, his impatience with the hot air pouring from outside as well as his irritation with the whole business of marriage itself since it

tampers with the electricity supply of the air conditioner, may appear slightly funny and the exaggeration leading to imagining to have a heart attack gives him a comical dimension, but it makes us see the other side of all our performances which are generally lost sight of in the normalizing process of heteronormativity.

The internal injuries like what Yep calls “Soul Murder” and “Internalized Homophobia” (Yep, 20) that individuals inflict upon themselves tell heavily upon Edwin Prakash Mehta who, from his very childhood, was taught to interpret his orientation as “anxiety-ridden, guilt-producing, fear-inducing, shame-invoking, hate-deserving, psychologically blemishing, and physically threatening” (Yep, 20). In order to liberate himself from the anxiety of losing himself in shameful anonymity, he takes recourse to “the process of coping by repressing the pain and identifying with the perpetrator [which] is ... a powerful mechanism for heteronormativity to perpetuate itself in current forms of social organization” (Yep, 18). An interesting dramatic design comes into play as Dattani introduces him with a double identity – Prakash for Kamlesh and Ed for Kiran –the enigma resolved only by the end of the play. We first meet him in the imaginary/psychic space called “shunya” (empty space), a place signifying the decontextuality of his position in an orthodox Tamil Christian Indian family/society as a gay man. Prakash meets Kamlesh in a park haunted by his loneliness and the devastating pervasiveness of hatred and violence in daily life based on being seen, perceived, labeled, and treated as an “Other.” The meeting with someone who “listen[s]” to story, sympathizes with him and takes a similar kind of liking for him saves his life in the “blessed” evening that might otherwise end by concretizing his plan of jumping from the balcony giving the impression of a case of death by being a bit intoxicated to the world. Kamlesh makes him

see, “how beautiful we are together” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 81), and redeems him momentarily from the bottomless pit of self-abnegation.

But the discursively permeated subjectivity/identity fails to cope with the marginalized position, and the workings of heteronormativity prove so powerful that “its regulation and enforcement are carried out by ... through socially endorsed and culturally accepted forms of soul murder” (Yep, 21). The self-surveillance of the penetrated subject only accelerates self-hatred and self-destructive behavioral pattern. Finally the victim gives way to the rigorous process of normalization, which Foucault terms as a “process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant cultural values” (quoted in Yep, 17). Prakash visits psychiatrist, practices therapeutic and “behavioral” model and tries every measure to become straight. He develops the habit of church-going every week and is almost convinced that his relation with Kamlesh is the “devil’s work”. The more religious he feels, the more his sexual expression is tied to what is sexually permissible within the context of his religion. With a firm faith that heterosexual, marital, and reproductively bound couples are the most blessed, he attempts to reorient his sexual preference by developing a relation with Kamlesh’s sister Kiran, a “real woman”.

A master stroke of dramaturgy comes into play in the presentation of the procedure of the breaking up of the relation of Prakash and Kamlesh and building up of a parallel one between Ed and Kiran, both presented in a manner of point counterpoint. Ed’s coming out as a macho man -- protective, daring, assertive -- helping Kiran

overcome her depression and shame of the stigma of divorce is punctuated by Kamlesh's attempt to convince Prakash of the possibility, practicability and pride in a partnership between them. The cacophony gathers to a crescendo as Ed comes with a pack of lies (that he met Kamlesh at Sushma's party not in park, the latter thought him a gay, he is sympathetic to Kamlesh's cause, he is helping him to come to terms to the world etc), puts on the mask hiding the face, fleeing from the truth of his own preference and commitment (his homosexual relation) and exhibiting his daring of the remarks of others (being seen with Kiran), declares his decision to be like the "rest" not himself and finally blurts out that though he once needed Kamlesh but now he thinks it to be "filth", "not working out" and he does not want to come out. Kiran's embarrassed but happy plea "Ed no please" at being pushed forward by him to go onto the stage to receive the award of "best couple" on the dancing floor -- by implication -- the "normal couple" is cruelly and pathetically punctuated by Kamlesh's helpless appeal being pushed aside by him, "Prakash! don't leave me now! I need you!!!" (*On a Muggy Night...*, 93). Finally being exposed as well as both his plan of leading a heterosexual partnership as a cover for maintaining a parallel homosexual relation with Kamlesh being frustrated, the suicidal instinct returns and he attempts to jump from the window. He leaves the play dilapidated, degenerated, staggering to a void losing both the worlds.

If Ed is a victim of internalized homophobia, Kamlesh is victimized by its externalized form and the hetero-normative violence instituted by institutionalized heterosexism. Though unashamed and assured about his own orientation, he is bound to maintain a closeted privacy to encounter the institutionalized oppression.

The short encounter between Kamlesh and the guard in his bedroom in the opening scene of the play has multiple significance and potential for suggesting many emotional tenets. The bedroom itself, hidden by the partition wall as hinted at in the stage direction, breathes an air of secrecy rather than privacy. Kamlesh, in his dressing gown and enjoying his cigar in relaxed observation of the guard putting on his Khaki uniform, sufficiently suggests a foregone sexual intimacy and prepares us for a story of non-normative relationship. The offer and acceptance of money brings in a host of possibilities of meaning: The guard's involvement (in his uniform,) in an act of legal transgression is a minor rupture in the wholesomeness of authority; it also points to a class hierarchy in a capitalist society. However, both the clichés of homosexuality being an Europeanized upper-class practice and a person belonging to the lower stratum of society being exploited by an upper-class get complicated both by the gesture of sincere concern shown by Kamlesh's tying of the guard's shoe lace as well as the Guard's off-guarded answer "nehin" (no) (*On a Muggy Night...*, 51) to Kamlesh's question whether it is only a way of earning money on his part. This hiring of some one for sexual satisfaction for money is at once a replication and subversion of the practice rampant in the heterosexual world. The use of a "man" as a gigolo undermines the patriarchal privilege of using "woman" as a sex object. Yet at the same time, while in a heterosexual world love is professed to be an excuse to hide the motivating pecuniary consideration, here the guard reverses the priorities to confirm his cohabitation with the mainstream and thus problematizes his "exploiters'" position.

Like every interesting opening scene, it also holds the suspense as Kamlesh refers to “him”, some one whose memory hunts him and who also pretended not to belong to Kamlesh’s world. The very act of referring to him by pronoun instead of by his proper name even in a moment of joy shows the wound still bleeds. Rules were made not to mention his name in the house, his photos were destroyed but Kamlesh found a way to hide one photograph in spite of himself, as he confesses: “I tried but I couldn’t”. He gets irritated with Sharad’s obsession with the relation (“You know what your problem really is? You just don’t want to let go!”), *On a Muggy Night...*, 61) since it replicates his own inability to overcome after all his efforts. Kamlesh performs the role of Sharad’s lover to “forget” Prakash, but finds him no better than “a brother I never had”. All the attempts made by the latter seems to interfere with the private space to keep up the memory of Prakash, and found at last that he could not but feel stifled: “I wish you would stop rubbing it in people’s faces that you were once my lover who controlled and stifled me till I had to scream for some space” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 62). Kamlesh even consults the psychiatrists to get over the depression, but the “straight, homophobic man” tries to cure him of his own sensibility by reorienting his sexual choice instead of helping him to cope with it and thus increasing his sense of loneliness. The tranquilizing medications stopped, the fear of isolation comes back with double force and he dwindles into a recluse trying strong physical sensations only as a drug to have temporary relief: “It is a terrible thing you are doing -- to yourself”, says Deepali. (*On a Muggy Night...*, 63).

The break up proved even more humiliating telling upon his self-esteem since Prakash left him not for any other man, but because he was “ashamed” of the relationship. The self-abnegation in one breeds self-denial in another: “For the first time in my life, I wished I wasn’t gay” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 69). A fear of being alienated even from himself, yields almost a fear psychosis in him. Unable to fight the fear back of self-extermination (“I-I feel I cannot live without him. I am capable of doing anything”, (*On a Muggy Night...*, 70) he enters a dangerous game of finding strangers and trying to “connect” with them if they are “lonely”, “tired of pretence” or “need[s] more money”.

The gloom darkens farther with the shattering blow that comes with the news of Prakash seeing his innocent sister whom he loved so much and who had been happy in his company years after her broken “troubled marriage” and started to gather herself again. Instead of his friends’ persistent request to tell the truth to Kiran, Kamlesh tries to deceive himself with the comfort his sister derives and supposed to continue to derive from the relation. In an unprepared moment he even confesses his own disbelief of the idea of any possibility of Ed’s being able to change his sexual orientation, yet pathetically he finds his hope of the latter’s homophobia and zeal to undergo hetero-normalizing successfully and goes on dismissing any idea of making Kiran suffer for a second time: “And I would pray that she would not fall apart again” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 86). He pretends to continue the relation with Sharad in front of Kiran and, maddened with the suspicion that Sharad would reveal the truth, almost drives him out from his house. His conviction is farther strengthened by innocent Kiran’s own confession: “I feel like a complete woman with him” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 104). But actually, Kiran is only entering into a social drama going on in Indian maritocratic arena well substantiated by

Hossang's remark, "...most homosexuals get married due to social pressure.... Most adjust to a double life. So do their wives..." (Merchant, XVI). However, Kamlesh's final blow comes from Prakash's proposal to continue his relation under the guise of heteronormative relation of brother-in-law which also acts as magnificent therapy for his depression and cure for fantastic idea of Kiran's happiness.

"The language and law that [regulate] the establishment of heterosexuality as both an identity and an institution, both a practice and a system, is the language and law of defense and protection...." (Yep, 12). Those who are subsumed within its rhetoric willingly or unwillingly are thrown away from the fold of protection and security. The play in fact brings out a host of individuals trying to readjust their position in their various ways of combating the symbolic, psychological, discursive and material violence of heteronormativity. As Deepali properly points out: "It's not shame, is it? ... It'S FEAR... Of the corners we will be pushed into where we don't want to be" (*On a muggy Night...*, 89).

### **Positive Resistance**

In a 1982 interview for the American magazine *Salmaqundi*, Foucault said: "I think that what most bothers those who are not gay about gayness is the gay life- style, not sex acts themselves. . . . It is the prospect that gays will create as yet unforeseen kinds of relationships that many people cannot tolerate" (Quoted in Bersani, 38).

The play is not merely the story of injury, but rather it also is an enactment of the drama of resistance, resilience and healing. This is an assertion of an identity which is different but not different from or subservient to the hetero-normative world of mainstream. The prime task Dattani takes up in the play is perhaps to provide a subjunctive autonomy to an alternative discourse of relationship, a complex fabric of love, hate, betrayal, jealousy and thousands emotions woven out of the texture of the life of a handful of individuals building and rebuilding “unforeseen kinds of relationship”.

Since biologistics of reproduction is the keystone of the heterocentric world, “...it is precisely the non-reproductive nature of homosex which, within the terms of a reproductive heteropolarity discursively produced in religious, scientific and juridical terms, requires its extermination” (*Wilton*, 518). We meet a group of individuals who, rejected and repressed by their kith and kin or voluntarily walking away from their family to spare them the knowledge or the humiliation, develop a different kind of family. The “family of origin” is replaced by the “family of choice”. The new variation produces a potential for restructuring the institution of family which is synonymous not just with heterosexuality, but with a very specific brand of heterosexuality, which ideally involves marriage, baby making, monogamy, ownership of property, espousing middle class values, gender discrimination etc. Deepali and her absent “significant other” Tina provide an alternate family structure which undermines the typically heteropatriarchal one by appropriating it the other way round. The parenting of Deepali’s niece itself challenges the concept of reproductive normativity as the chief justification of a family. Like family members, the friend circle is sensitive to detect a disturbance in Kamlesh, concerned to try to help him out and not to bring up the subject that might hurt him and

precise in trying to divert him. Deepali's assurance of her identity and desire ("If we were heterosexual, we would be married", *On a Muggy Night...*, 65), and confidence in her womanliness, "Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am a woman", (*On a Muggy Night...*, 66) expose the heterosexuality to be a performance and desire constructed.

Leo Bersani rightly observed, "A more or less secret sympathy with heterosexual male misogyny carries with it the narcissistically gratifying reward of confirming our membership in (and not simply our erotic appetite for) privileged male society" (Bersani, 42). Echoing the lesbian feminists, in the play Deepali challenges not only the practice of reducing lesbianism into a sexual identity, but also the reproduction of gender preference as master category and a male domination as well. Her sharp reaction to Sharad's jocular reference to a bitch defies the assumption that homosexuality is a primary sexual and social identity and other differences are submerged as secondary: "You can call yourself a dog, call yourself a pig, but never never insult a female" (*On a muggy Night...*, 59).

An interesting piece of subversion is proposed by Sharad with diverse potentials of the institution of marriage which is the foundation of the rubric of the heterosexist society. He proposes a disjunctive ritual to be performed as a mirror image of the heterosexual ritual performance of marriage -- the very site of power from which this minoritized group is excluded in our country. It is a powerful appropriation: if marriage is a "union pact" acknowledged as legitimate by the world, compelling the two participants to "stick" to it, the present ritual, in presence of the Society of Friends, will dissolve the bonding between Kamlesh and Prakash and ignore the existence of any such relationship

henceforth and the parties must abide by the law. The fire god is substituted by warm sea breeze and the “mantras” (holy chanting) by loud music. Sharad, like a religious agent, prompts the solemn vow: “As my friends, this city and God sre witness to my vow, I break all ties with Prakash” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 73). While Kamlesh hesitates about going on with the most troubled part of Tearing up the photograph, the chance arrival of Kiran spares him the task and he throws down the snap by the window undestroyed.

Dattani’s comic genius works wonder in the scene of exposition where the devices of subversion, mimicry and other resisting instruments come into play creating at once deeply emotional and superbly ludicrous effect. Deepali sets the motion by dropping the clue -- “...Sharad wants to be straight” (*On a muggy Night...*, 99) -- which is readily taken up by Sharad and Ed finds himself caught unawares. Ed’s defense of Sharad turns out to be self-defense: “It’s too bad for Kamlesh. I think it is better he comes to terms with it now that Sharad wants to be a man” (*On a muggy Night...*, 99). He gains a momentary upper hand as he preaches, as if from the pulpit: “Look around you. Look outside. ...There are real men and women out there! ...You don’t want to look at the world outside this... this den of yours. All of you want to live in your little bubble” (*On a muggy Night...*, 99). The audience, aware of the reality, could appreciate the ironic implication of every word he says -- the reference to “bubble” by which he alleges the so-called “unreal” existence of the gathering, best describes his own position of a convert to heterosexuality.

The pseudo-scientific method of yellow-page psychiatry is debunked with a hyperbolic demonstration of its favourite methodologies, refuting the claim of scientific sanction of a repressive mechanism. As Deepali mockingly points out, one should not go to the reputed psychiatrists who will either “they will make him come to terms with who he is, or worse -- tell him that he isn’t suffering from a disease that needs to be cured” (*On a muggy Night...*, 100), but should visit the lesser practitioners who may help to cure the “ego distonic homosexuality” in exchange of a huge sum. In a similar fashion, the discourse of “real man [hood]”, as upheld by Ed, is shown to be the perpetuation of the macho power in a patriarchal structure. The jocular implication of the simile “as straight as a rod” apart, the hypothesis denotes an authoritative regulation. The exaggerated exhibition of the desire becomes a positive resistance to the hierarchical structure of heteropatriarchy. The practice of heterosexuality turns out to be only a story of “occupying” space, “take room”, and thus to assert itself by pushing others to the periphery. As Sharad, the camp, puts it in his own way, to be a hero amounts to be the “marriage lord of the town”, to have a wife and children who would love him “only” because he is a “hetero”, to have “penis power” –at any costs to be the “king”. The margin thus levels back the centre reducing its identity to sheer sexual orientation.

The hilarious effect produced by the theatrical presentation of the privilege of heterosexuality by “wonderful” Sharad proves therapeutic to Kamlesh. The mimicry of an illusion accelerates the process of disillusionment; truth being obviated falsehood gets exposed: “The man I loved does not exist. You exist, Sharad and I love you” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 102). For the first time he really gets over the self-evasive illusion of

being in love with a victim of illusory world and self-deluding comfort of giving happiness to his dear sister. He recognizes his love for Sharad suddenly and surely.

The disillusionment also affects Bunny Singh with all the conviction of the impossibility of continuing an illusory non-existent world and sense of guilt of leading some one to live in it. The advocate of camouflage declares: “The people who know me are the people who hate me... I have tried to survive. In both worlds. And it seems I do not exist in either” (*On a muggy Night...*,102-3). He recognizes the treachery done to his wife only to cover up (“...the man whom my wife loves does not exist”, *On a Muggy Night...*, 102) and resolves to ask her pardon. He of course could not face the world with the truth about himself and cannot gather enough courage to leave the flat alone after the photo scandal, since he may be “appearing for nine hundredth time” on the serial, but at least he begins to face himself and admits: “I lied – to myself first. And I continue to lie to millions of people every week on Thursday nights” (*On a muggy Night...*,103).

However, the greatest resistance in the play instituted through the dangerously potential design of comedy shapes itself in the character of Sharad. His self-location as a camp queers the whole business of identity and defies self-naming as man, woman, heterosexual, lesbian, gay and like names of pre-queer rubric of identity politics. “This potential for a kind of transubstantiation of desires” which “endows queer theory with real intellectual and social potency”, also inculcates in him “the robust playfulness that is queer performativity” (Wilton, 507).

Sharad is the first to arrive at the party thrown by Kamlesh for his friends, and he strikes us with a positive open and confident candor until now absent in both the encounters: between Kamlesh and the guard, and Ed and Kiran. We first meet him imitating mad cap for Kishor Kumar's "Ina Mina Dika", then spying upon the diamond merchant couple with a binocular, and then trying to probe into the real cause of the arrangement. With putting the finger on the name Prakash, he opens up a deep wound inflicted upon Kamlesh by the break up and his inability to come out of the hang over as *On a Muggy Night...*, 64) yet. It affected his relation with Sharad and broke the one year of living together. The latter tried heart and soul to help him to overcome the obsession, but failed. For moments, the pain Sharad had to suffer and the concern he still feels for Kamlesh ("You Know I still love you", *On a Muggy Night...*, 56), surfaces from beneath the venire of jovial extrovert, the drama queen he loves to play.

Sharad's keenness of observation and caring watchfulness over Kamlesh is evident in pointing out the real cause of Kamlesh's anxiety as well as discovering his relationship with the guard ("love bite", ) and latter the hidden photograph. He is sensitive enough to react sharply at using some one for his poverty, but a sting of pain is not absent: "How dare you use ...." While Kamlesh uses the mechanism of suppression to cope with his sense of being betrayed, Sharad adopts that of exaggeration. He goes on stressing the obvious such as, reminding time and again that he was once a lover to Kamlesh, he knows perfectly well where things are kept in the house since it was he who designed the kitchen cabinet and also that Deepali is Kamlesh's guest, not "our[s]". He mimics the roles of the neglected house wife, dumped lover and other likes to apparently nullify their implications through parody, but sufficient hints are dropped how it bleeds:

“Spare me the humiliation of sitting through this... And I don’t need any farther humiliation by having you defend me!” (*On a muggy Night...*, 68). It is Sharad who points out the horror of the imminent wedding between Kiran and Ed putting it naked before Kamlesh’s face: “you want to rid yourself of his memories, but you sre ruining her life!” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 83). Latter’s feeble protest loses ground.

However, a serious purpose of challenging the very rendering of gender preference as a master category defining sexuality and social identity is served by the switching over from role to role. The camp, theatricalizes, demystifies and thus finally exposes the constructed nature of not only the identity but of desire itself by assuming the performative qualities of different gender roles ranging from Mina Kumari (the suffering or “dukhi” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 55) woman), Madhubala (the alluring femme), drama queen, the housewife who got a kick, the widow, (traditional feminine roles) to a bitch. In a post-feminist strain, he even declares his obvious right to choose gender role, though in a tone of mockery: “it is with great pleasure and pride that I equate myself to a bitch!” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 59). He has a ready answer to Deepali’s “Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am a woman” by “I thank God I am not pregnant” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 66) undermining the fixity of the role itself. He renames the characters in order to provide an alternate way of looking at them. He calls Kamlesh Kamla Bai with an appalling suggestion of prostitution (implied to both the parties), attaches “didi” (elder sister) to Deepali heightening her monitoring over the behaviour, and his reference to Ranjit as “coconut friend” alludes to the dual identity the latter carries on.

Thus, the resistance ranges from Ranjit's conscious jocularity in referring to Kiran as "he" supposing her to be Kamlesh's mistress to the exposition of a dangerous truth silently poisoning both brother and sister leading to their finding out themselves as independent individuals. It is the indeterminacy, the out of box/border nature and the refusal to follow the prescriptive norms of any fixed identity, which gives Sharad the charm, endows him with a *recueillement* (Yep, 48) and offers the most powerful resistance to the hetero-normativity the play aspires to combat.

### **From a different Perspective**

"...the ontologically valorized [heterosexuality] actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of [homosexuality]; hence... the question of priority between the supposed central and the supposed marginal category of each dyad is irresolvably unstable, an instability caused by the fact that [homosexuality] is constituted as at once internal and external to [heterosexuality]" (Yep, 11-12).

The master stroke of dramatic language in the play is constituted by Dattani with providing an inverted/subverted vision of the hetero-normative world that we accept and neutralize as "normal". A different perspective which endows the Other with a viewership and situates the self/center in the position of an object to be seen, challenges, changes, reinterprets and resignifies the socio cultural rubric. As a patriarchal institution, heterosexuality is exposed to privilege and elevate the dominant social and material status

of men at the expense of women and sexual others, but the anxiety of proving one's manhood and womanhood require concealment or banishment of unsanctioned sexuality, gender performance and pleasure. Butler calls this programme of re-elaboration and reproduction of itself ritualistically and continuously "heterosexual comedy". Being situated at the top of the erotic pyramid, it shapes, influences and constrains how women and men should operate and function in the social arena and transforms the performance into being. It is only through the "heterosexual contract", as Wittig puts it, that women are constituted as 'real' women and men as 'real' men" (Quoted in Yep, 31).

The presentation of a non-normative liaison – both in its sexual orientation and the authorized pattern of social relationship – in the opening scene is followed by a delineation of a short meeting of a "normal" couple. Interestingly Dattani situates the scene in a non-realistic area where the confrontation between the "real" "man" and a "real woman" appears inverted, unnatural and different. Like the previous scene, the male, the performer ("I can take care of you", *On a Muggy Night...*, 52), is assertive and very protective about the comfort of the counterpart. Kamlesh's gesture of putting the foot of the guard on his own thigh to buckle his shoe lace is replicated by Ed's "fussy" readiness to change the window seat with an isle one for Kiran who is scared of height, as is the guard's shock replicated by Kiran's embarrassment. But while the former recoils from accepting his spontaneous response of satisfaction by the convenient camouflage of prostitution, Kiran visibly enjoys being at the centre of Ed's caring attention.

“A certain type of heterosexual relationship style is often promoted as the best, most respectable and cherished sexual lifestyle that provides social currency and status (Note, Yep, Lovaas, and Elia, 59 ). This particular brand is promoted to the anchor or exemplar position by which sexual others are judged. Hence, the discursive centrality enjoyed by the institution of heterosexuality, authenticated by marriage providing legal, socio cultural and religious validity is zoomed in and put under scanner.

In the following scene, as Sharad enjoys the view of the merchant couple from Kamlesh’s window, the object status of the so-called “normal” world of heterosexuals is confirmed by the voyeuristic gaze concentrated upon “those heterosexuals”. The use of the binocular suggesting distance and reference to the blue films exposes the essentially performative nature of the practice and its perverse potential. It also subverts the mechanism of reducing non-normative sexuality into public spectacle packaged to titillate, captivate or debate.

The forced intrusion implied by the autonomous existence of the hetero-normative lifestyle which narrows the space of any alternative existence is suggested by the light strokes like the shrill noise of the band swelling through the window into the room where the party met as well as the traffic jamming the entrance of the apartment. The tampering with the electric supply causing load shedding and other discomforts exhibits our indifference to the way so-called “normal” activities usurp the legitimate space of others so casually.

“Implicit in the marriage contract is men’s appropriation and exploitation of women’s bodies (e.g., sexual, reproductive) and labor (e.g., domestic, emotional)” (Yep, 29). The rupture within the professed sanctity of the institution is shown through the predicament of the diamond merchant’s wife entrapped by a forced union with her husband (“She is gritting her teeth. She might throw up any moment”, (*On a Muggy Night...*, 53) by a capitalist heteropatriarchal society. Her situation well complies with the concept of “proper sex” which is “widely defined as a specific version of heterosexual intercourse in which the man’s penis penetrates the woman’s vagina; it starts with his arousal and finishes with his climax” (Yep, 30) and other sexual activities are presented as ancillary to the “real thing” effecting reproduction. As a relief, she of course enjoys a clandestine relation with a “doodhwala” (milk man) during her husband’s absence. But while with him, she has to suffer his company in whichever way her husband decides and he leaves her alone only to have the cathartic weeping to remove all the displeasures of the moments.

Once Kitzinger & Wilkinson remarked, “Compulsory heterosexuality creates the conditions by which ‘it never occurs to many women to be anything else’ but heterosexual” (Quoted in Yep, 18). Having no alternative, the women accept the gender-based violence and domination, psychic, emotional and economic suffering, diminished physical and mental health as the recipe of their daily existence and ignore them as normal. The cultural conceptions of a “good wife” or “good mother” create expectations and experiences and regulate women’s behavioral choices. Even when the sexual pleasure is concerned, Holland et al (1994) found that, in terms of sexual practice, sex is

still defined as “penetration for men’s pleasure in which women find fulfillment primarily in the relationship, in giving pleasure” (Quoted in Yep, 30).

The oppressive mechanism of the much coveted institution of marriage is laid bare with another story, that of Kiran. This is a story of “fight at nights”, of “nightmares”: the wife is brutally tortured day after day, beaten up black and blue, burnt with cigars. It is the same anxiety to belong to the category “normal”, woman, the internalization of the patriarchal values that made her cover up. Black eye is explained as heating the head, broken ribs as due to a fall. The institution of law fails to protect the victim and punish the grave offender as he is bailed out the next day; the institution of family could not offer her shelter in fear of being cornered and advises her to “adjust” to the dire situation.

Another horrible face of happy concept of marriage is unmasked when a gay man like Bunny Singh or Ed, in order to be a “real” man and accepted by the society, gets married. The women are duped by the hyperbolic enactment of manhood into a marriage where she remains actually unloved – sometimes suffering from unsuspected betrayal, sometimes from duplicity of relationship maintained (as Ed proposes to do), sometimes remained “contented” like Bunny’s wife: “She is contented and thinks Bunny a considerate husband” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 84). Kiran, so much dependent upon and infatuated with Ed, sounds really ironic when she tries to dissuade Sharad to marry a woman for a “cover-up for your shame” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 102).

Heteropatriarchy does not only subjugate women by confining them in specific gender role, but oppresses men by categorizing. To be a “real” man is an exhausting and unending performance, or as Michael Kimmel (2001) puts it, “that nightmare from which we never seem to awaken” (Quoted in Yep, 19). Given a different perspective, the heteropatriarchal image of masculinity appears as “obscene”, a way of “thrusting with power” – muscular, sexual, occupying power.

The play presents an occasion for re-evaluating the definitional correctness of typical man and woman defining their own identities in reference to other. Kiran loved to play the woman as much as Ed the man. First she accepted the tortures of her former husband as sign of love unless it ruined her life and then she enjoyed the male protectiveness and care ensuring the centrality as a woman unless it gets exposed to be sham. In the same manner, the projection of an ideal family man on Bunny Singh is exposed as much an illusion as the absurdity of society’s incapacity to come out of the fixed monolithic structural pattern valorizing sexual orientation over every other aspect of our identity. Thus, the play altogether presents a fair illustration of Butler’s assumption that the “...hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations. That it must repeat this imitation, that it sets up pathologizing practices and normalizing sciences in order to produce and consecrate its own claim on originality and propriety, suggests that heterosexual performativity is beset by an anxiety that it can never fully overcome, that its effort to become its own idealizations can never be finally or fully achieved, and that it is consistently haunted by that domain of sexual possibility that must be excluded for heterosexualized gender to produce itself” (Butler, 125).

## **Conclusion**

The experience of reading the play in the pages or watching it being performed on the stage, makes us view 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 sexist society creates a category of knowledge, a normative language which frames our knowledge of bodies, desires, sexualities, identities and also creates moral boundaries and political hierarchies. Patriarchy uses heterosexism as its prime tool to create and perpetuate the fixed gender structure. It strictly confines penetration within the boundary of a monolithic meaning because “[w]renching penetration out of a heterosexual matrix of meanings deprives it of its symbolic power” (Yep, 32). A penetrable body is a vulnerable body; to be penetrated is to relinquish power. Hence, here is a need to “challenge the regime of sexuality itself, that is, the knowledges that construct the self as sexual and that assume heterosexuality and homosexuality as categories marking the truth of sexual selves” (Yep, 37). Complying with the necessity, the play seeks to expand sexual choice and diversity, and to de-police desire and pleasures that are private and consensual. Given a different perspective to what is granted as “normal”, it achieves its meaning and significance by promoting the conviction, so beautifully worded by Leo Bersani, that “...the only way we can love the other or the external world is to find ourselves somehow in it. Only then

might there be a nonviolent relation to the world that doesn't seek to exterminate difference" (Bersani, 43).

## Understanding the Hijra Community: *Seven Steps Around the Fire*

### Introduction:

A gender blender I

A creature of illusion

Of genital confusion

A gorgeous butterfly”.

(Alistair Beaton and Ned Sherin)

Dattani, as a socially committed writer, continues with his mission to “delve into more mysteries, uncovering some of the hidden India” (Mortimer, 4) and problematizes our understanding of “truth” by subverting the genre of detective fiction in the whodunit, *Seven Steps Around the Fire*. The marginalized Hijra community is an unwelcome yet unavoidable presence in Indian society, and the play complicates our conception of the Third gender in India, questions the representation of Hijras as third sex and sufficiency of sexual politics and gender performativity as adequate bases of their identity and practices, obliterating other axis of identity such as religion, sect, kinship and blood and local moral and economic identity of “Izzat” (respect).

Ancient, medieval and colonial (still powerfully prevalent in postcolonial India) narratives, especially in literature, represented the hijra people through their own ideological agenda and framing premises, while the objects of representation themselves remained silent. Their sexual ambiguity incorporates both the ascetic and the erotic aspects. The pan-Indian acceptance of the thirdness of sexuality is evident in the convention of dividing humanity into three sexual categories -- man, woman and Napumsaka -- depending on presence and absence of certain physical features, procreative ability and Jain's differentiation between material or physical (dravyalinga) and psychic sex (bhavalinga) (Zwilling and Sweet, 365). In Islamic medieval India the focus was shifted on to the eunuchs in their important courtly and imperial role as political adviser and administrator, religious figure and slave -- specially recruited as protector of the female domain. Their social and embodied difference -- both for being imported from outside the boundary of the state and for the inability to perpetuate the lineage -- stereotyped them as clever, strong and loyal servants in a world of nepotism and shifting loyalty. Colonial narratives, however, repudiated their slave or third sex status and projected hijras as one of the castes or tribes - reducing them into a community stratified by gender and religion. Latter with the promulgation of the criminal tribe act in 1871, they were officially included in the list of criminal tribes, compulsorily under registration, surveillance and control. (Reddy, 25-30).

The mention of the figure of "sukumarika" in *Kamasutra* and other ancient Indian literature and even the reference to male and female napumsaka -- depending upon penetrative (masculine) and receptive (feminine) role -- in Jain exegetical literature bear witness to the affiliation of the erotic aspect of the third gender. In many Islamic

literatures offering of love to an idealized slave and representation of a desire of a free male to become the slave of his beloved (slave controlling the 'slave of love', his master) did not subvert the power structure.

With increasing colonial intervention, gendered, sexist and racist principles got functional: European travelers tried to explain the eunuchs's status in the oriental imperial and religious sector by referring to their not-man aspect, awarding them the duty to handle women without impropriety, and thus, sexualizing the role of eunuchs who were mostly African in origin. Citizens were encoded in gendered sexuality and all the previous discourses of active and passive sexuality that were accorded free and slave status were uniformly reinterpreted as masculine and feminine or natural and unnatural propensities. This secularization of the discourse of their religious responsibilities and criminalization of the love of the eunuchs resulted in an epistemic shift in the understanding of homoeroticism, social hierarchy and embodied difference. Male impotence was categorized as the defining feature of eunuchs, cross-dressing and performances like dancing of men in public place were prohibited, laws were passed criminalizing their body and proscribing their labour -- sexual or asexual work/occupation. The knowledge legitimized the moral condemnation and subjugation of the criminal castes by which these bodies must be servile, regulated and controlled, in effect, made docile (Reddy, 25-30).

Central to the colonial power and subjectivity was the homology the colonizers drew between sexual and political domination -- their essential masculine nature legitimized their colonizer position and subjugation of feminine subject (men minus

masculinity). The discourse of resistance upheld by Gandhi and Vivekananda highlighted the “dissident androgyny” (Leela Gandhi, 100) and celibacy and the concept of “god eunuch”, a position superior to both man and woman, and the principle of non-violence disabled colonial sexual binary by creating anti-colonial subjectivity.

However, neo-colonial forces continued to perpetuate the colonial code and hijras were removed to the status of outsiders. Consequently, though the concept of hijras as ‘neither man nor woman’ institutionalized their role of ritual performers, the erotic aspect threatens the normative reality of the gendered and sexist society of modern India. Though social prestige derived from Muslim court accorded them some respect in traditional society and Hindu mythic sanction of their alternative gender role of generating fertility validated their presence in ritual of marriage and birth, with the increasing rigidifying of sexism in society, only the ascetic aspect got privileged to the point of neutralizing and making derogatory the erotic aspect. The heteropatriarchal society feels it disturbing to allow the hijras the sexual role which is not only threatening to the male identity but is transgressive to the feminine image, since their mimicry of the image, to follow Homi Bhaba, is at once a resemblance and a menace.

Yet the fact remains, with the decline of their traditional role the hijra people have become a butt of sexual exploitation and prostitution has gained in importance in maintenance of the group, at least financially. However, secrecy permits the practices to slip easily through the moral net.

Any attempt to challenge the fixity of the specific structure which validates their “outsider” status or any act threatening to destabilize the discourse of marginality is

countered with institutional violence. The play, *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, exhibits how Subbu's (a normal man's) attempt to acknowledge the status of a Hijra as wife through marriage not only transgresses the boundary of gendered female identity but also destabilizes the concept of masculinity. It also puts under scanner the practice of freely exploiting an "invisible marginality" and dumping them as the "outsider". Naturally, the young, beautiful hijra, Kamla, is burnt down to exterminate any possibility of disruption.

State machineries like media, police, politicians and respectable families join hand to hush up the truth and defunct penal consequence of a guilt committed. Yet, a resistance is built in the process of saving the marginalized non-guilty by a subterfuge, a sisterhood developing between a respectably married woman and socially outcast hijras, a revelation of the truth at least to the seeker, a reclamation and legitimization of a non-normative relation through the violent yet resisting means of suicide.

### **Myth:**

The category of third sex has been part of the Indian world view for three thousand years. The mention of "kliba", "pandaka", "tritiyaprakriti", most popularly *napumsaka* in Sanskrit and Pali, provides historical evidence of a pre-modern concept of sexuality and a sexual thirdness in Indian consciousness. A pan Indian acceptance of third sex and variety of sexuality is evident in the abundance of transgender desire, same sex procreation and other non-normative fantasies in mythological, folk-lore, Vedic and Puranic literature and an extensive mythologic sanction of the origination and functions of the third gender. Apart from Brahminical and Buddhist literature, Jains offered most elaborate and thorough account about the third gender and transsexuals, accepting a

difference between “dravyalinga” (biological sex) and “bhavalinga” (psychological sex). The affiliation of the erotic aspect could be derived from the mention of figures of “Sukumarika” in *Kamasutra* as well as in the derogatory assignment of hyper libidinous nature to the third sex in exegetical Jain literature after fifth century B.C. The figure of “brihannala” -- a disguised identity of Arjuna -- in *Mahabharata* bears witness to the approval of their artistic pursuit. The concept of “ardhanariswara”, the hermaphrodite, is the religious icon for their specific gender status. An important icon around which they configure their identity is the renouncer, the “sannyasi”. Sometimes they project themselves as both male and female – “adha-dic” (half-in-the-middle) (Reddy, 117).

Among several myths of origin, the play refers to the myth mentioned in the *Ramayana*. When Lord Rama was on his way to his exile in order to fulfill his father’s promise, many of his devotees decided to follow him even in the forest. But the lord commanded the men and woman to return and some of the followers reluctantly returned to Ayodhya. However, there were few who, unable either to disobey or leave him, sacrificed their genitals and became hijras. Another legend reads when this earth got barren and the whole creation came to a halt, lord Shiva castrated his genital and threw it into the earth to make it pregnant. Thus many of the Hijras, professing to be asexual, “badhai” (emasculated) Hijras, undergo nirvana operation or emasculation to remove testis to achieve the power of blessing with fertility to the newly wedded.

Thus the traditional Hindu society found a place for the third gender in its cultural narrative as ritual performers validated by the mythical sanction of their role as the giver of blessing in marriage and child birth. In fact, the acceptance of the erotic

aspect of their specific gender role in the Hindu tradition is evident in their mythic association with the process of reproduction: the blessing conferred on his devoted followers by Lord Rama, with the power of instilling fertility in spite of their genital impotence, ensured their presence in festivals celebrating marriage and birth. This is of course an effective way to incorporate the minority into the society and institutionalize their presence in those social performances from which they are excluded. The castrated lord Shiva representing the principle of progeny accords them an alternate reproductive role. Interestingly, the image of hermaphrodite is an inclusive conceptual terrain which incorporates both the male and female principles, containing the potential of progeny.

The word 'hijra' which came into being after the Mughals, as Uma points out, is Urdu in origin. This is a combination of Hindi, Parsi and Arabic, literally meaning "neither male nor female". However, the term was not an unproblematic extension of the terminologies accommodating large variety of sexualities. The monolithic segregation based on sexual difference identifies a group as transvestite.

A paradigmatic shift came with the introduction of this concept of hijra, neither male nor female -- a negation, unlike the hermaphrodite including both the creative principles. Now castration instead of incorporation became the defining principle. The practice of castrating the male slaves to make them the protectors of harems fostered the non-erotic aspect despite adding to their social prestige.

The third nature of sexuality was hardly found in medieval India (eighth to eighteenth century), but an explicit reference to eunuchs was obvious in the courtly tradition of the Islamic world, especially in the Mamluk Sultanate, in Chinese and

Byzantine Empire and in India after the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Though social history tends to concentrate its overarching focus on their role in courtly and imperial sector, religious and slave status were equally important. Medieval foreign travelers were fascinated by the vibrancy and longevity of their presence and increasingly dominant role as political adviser, powerful administrator, chamberlain, trustworthy guardians of harems and inner female domain etc.

New myths were taking their origin due to their social and embodied difference. Apart from the fact of the eunuchs mostly being geographical outsiders and thus belonging to their owners, their physical difference imbued their body with moral worth. They were thought to be trustworthy and loyal subject in a world replete with conspiracy, shifting loyalty, nepotism and betrayal, bound by the perception of them as clever, loyal servants who had free spatial access to all segments of society. Shaun Tougher notes, the “condition of the eunuch as a castrated man” is what made them valuable commodities in the politics of empire building” (Tougher 152). As in ancient India, their religious importance is evident from the account of such travelers like Ibn Batutta and Ibn Jubayr who referred to holy eunuchs as the venerated guardians of treasury of prophet’s tomb at Madina and Kaba. In many Parso-Urdu literary texts, there had been a suggestion of love offered to an idealized slave by his master cum beloved. The representation of desire did not subvert the social hierarchy and threaten power relation. “This trope was the normative lens through which relations of love, both within and outside of the formal slave topos, was depicted” (Reddy, 25).

With colonial encounter Europeans rendered all sexual activities outside the dimorphic gender binary criminal and omitted the various topoi from social hierarchy. The pre-eighteenth century European interpretation held that it was the impotence of the eunuch which guaranteed their honesty; and afterwards their role was further sexualized and was proclaimed that their non-man aspect enabled them to handle any demonstrations where women were concerned. Men were encoded in gendered sexuality and all the previous discourses of active and passive sexuality that were accorded free and slave status were uniformly reinterpreted as masculine and feminine or natural and unnatural propensities. As Indrani Chatterjee holds, gradually the lens of gender and sexuality “displace[d] the lens of slavery in the language of the colonized” (Chatterjee, 67).

Since castes were the primary social category in the colonial imagination, hijras were categorized as a caste and further designated the status of criminal tribe with the promulgation of the criminal tribe act in 1871. The term eunuch came to encompass any male declared or medically proved impotent and the offences of the potential criminals were punishable under 377 of Indian penal code. The knowledge base of the classification and construction of criminal derived much from Victorian discourse of crime, deviation and degeneracy constituting the dangerous class encompassing unemployed, poor, vagrant, prostitute etc (Reddy, 27). The concept of indigent defect in character and hereditary predisposition towards criminality led to the myth of caste affiliation. A naturalization of sexual difference and centrality of defective body in the construction of identity rendered the body oppositional and diminutive status.

However, the formulations of Vivekananda and Gandhi evolved round celibacy and androgyny, which challenged the colonial construct of masculinity and domination. These two principles threatened the colonial homology of political and sexual domination and championed the non-violent means of combining activism and courage -- courage needed to rise above “kapurusatva” (cowardice) and to become “man” as the authentic man expresses the desire to be both sexes. Thus Gandhi’s philosophy creatively disabled the colonial sexual binary, inverted the turn of militant nationalist debate of reproducing imperial category by highlighting Indian virility and elevated femaleness with maleness to create the anti-colonial subjectivity as god eunuch (Gandhi, 100-1). The transformation of sexual energy into a higher spiritual power through disciplining of body and sexual renunciation adopted for the remasculinization of the nation was powerful concept in hijra ideology, identity and izzat.

But the hegemonic allegiance to the sexual dualism in the sexist society of modern India dominated with neo-colonial forces, with the motif of enjoying its discursive privilege, tends to oppress the erotic aspect of the hijra identity to the point of immorality and unnaturalness. Yet the sexual arousal and appeal of the sexual outcasts led to their sexual intimacy with so-called “normal” man. In this case, either the non-normative practice is kept under secrecy or the minority is cast out and even exterminated. The increasing regularizing of secular temperament corresponds to the weakening of the mythical sanction of their role as ritual performers leading to the decline of their ascetic importance.

The myth cannot hold the hijras any longer tied to the centre and the modern society/state/law cannot accord them a life of respect and security; they are pushed to the marginal position of the “invisible minority”. In spite of the fact that the origin myths repeatedly refer to the deepest bonding of love and loyalty as the point of their origination and function through relations like “dudh behan” (milk sister) and “dudh beti” (milk daughter”) (Reddy, 122) as well as various stories of fatal and impossible pregnancy, society continuously thrusts them outside the matrix of relationship and questions their fidelity to any relation: “there is no such thing for them” (*Seven Steps...*, 10).

An appropriation of myth helps the inclusion yet in another way -- an effective strategy of projecting the Other as the perpetrator and perpetuator of all our negativities. Culture’s fear of the sexual anomaly is manifested in projection of the antonymic identity of that of giver of blessing – the cursing evil. Various supporting “tales” complete the image of evil and undesirability. The potential exposure or revealing practice of their lack of genital acts as a source of their disembodied power and they use it powerfully to make people ashamed, and scare them of being cursed with infertility. In order to explain away the so-called shame of nonreproductibility, Uma’s mother declared that the hijras put curse on her and her husband for not allowing them to sing and dance in their wedding -- the reason for their adopting Uma. This proves a really convenient way to maintain the image quite suited to that of negating agency in failure, transferring their own anxiety of being marginalized for the discontinuity, to the already outsiders to culture. This is rather convenient in a society where recognition of woman’s gender status depends upon her

reproductive role and the third gender is precluded from their desired feminine role on the basis of their nonreproductibility.

Society's growing disbelief in the mythic association intensifies their self-abnegation. Anarkali mockingly observes, "As if god is on our side..." A terrible appropriation of the myth comes into being in the play as, by the end of it, the auspicious blessing conferred by the hijras on the house of Mr. Sharma ("May God bless this house with many children", *Seven Steps...*, 38), is realized by the death of its only son Subbu.

### **Gender Confusion:**

Butler rightly observes that the disciplinary society in its production of normalized subject attempts to affect "a false stabilization" by making biological characteristics determinates of fixed gender role and situating gender in the reproductive domain (Butler, 125). The uncomfortability of the mainstream in asserting the presence of another alternative in form of hijra people is evident in naming the category as "third gender" – the word "third" having a covert connotation of undesirable, transgressive, uncommon, unusual and abnormal. However, the word also carries potential resistance to the conceptual structure built upon the norm of duality.

Since heteropatriarchal society does not admit of male sterility in the domain of reproduction (evident in the normally married relation of Uma and Suresh), their not-man aspect is based on the lack of virility-- man minus man. Their not-woman aspect depends upon their exaggeration of the femininity to the point of "mimicry" and acting in sexually suggestive ways 'which would be considered inappropriate, even outrageous, for the

ordinary women in their significant traditional roles as daughters, wives and mothers” (Nanda, 35). They move a step farther even to attract the attention to their specific hijra identity in following manners: loud and abusive manner of speech, exaggerated feminine gesture and movement, loud clapping and demonstration of shamelessness signified by potential exposure of genitals (Reddy, 202-10.) Thus they are reduced to the marginal mockery of men, stigmatized but embodying the ambivalence of Indian sexuality and thereby presenting a portent and enduring identity in its cultural universe.

Apart from the threat to normate the body, the sexual discourse of Hijra people disturbs the normative structure in another way: their sexual cartography differentiates gender depending on sexual or gender performativity rather than anatomy. Centered on penetration in sexual intercourse, *pantis* refer to the penetrative masculine men and *kotis* to the receptive feminized men as well as *narans* i.e. all women. It also refers to the complexity and specificity of the configuration of gender identity that varies with the spatial, temporal and life/history positioning and could be contested, negotiated and reconstructed. The cartographic understanding which positioned their self-definition against the *koti-panti* spectrum, challenges the hermeneutical theorization of gender difference by showing the embeddedness of sexual difference in other differences and problematizes the construct of hijras as personification of third sex (Reddy, 74-7). In a research among travestis in Salvador Brazil, Don Kulick observed, that they have changed the man/ woman schema into man/not-man -- penetrator and recipient “into which both biological females and males who enjoy anal penetration are culturally situated” (Kulick, 579).

A very effective instrument by which the mainstream marginalizes the sexual deviants is a shift of epistemic standard of prioritizing its own experience over the lived experience of the people concerned. Their desire for and sense of prestige associated with femininity amounting to repeated claim to be counted as women by non-hijra people was mocked and rejected. In order to augment femininity they undergo “nirvana” operation (emasculatation), in order to intensify womanliness and beauty (sometimes under Dayamma multiplying risk factor), they take hormone peals, less harmful but equally tortuous erasures like twitching facial hair and bleaching, use whitening cosmetics, acquire feminine markers like growing long hair -- a mark of identity and status distinguishing them from kada-catla kotis (Reddy, 131) and sex workers --wearing sari and jewelry (except “munda”), the widow, even to the extent of flashing of genitals proving at least the not-man aspect.

Their enactment and production of the gender identity as woman depends on cartorial markers, performance of women’s task and various modes of beautification. The gender aspiration is fulfilled by the performance and development of various gender components. Their tailored identity accords prestige or “izzat” (respect) to them within. To echo Roland Barthes, if there is a difference between “innocent” and “intentional”, (quoted in Reddy, 132) they try to elide the difference -- using hormones for example. Hebbdige observes while “innocent” is “expressive of normality as opposed to deviance, i.e. [ensembles which] are distinguished by their relative invisibility , their appropriateness, their ‘naturalness’, ... intentional communication is of a different order... it is a visible construction, a loaded choice” (quoted in Reddy, 132). Yet they cannot unequivocally project themselves as women, their non-reproductibility virtually

preventing the identification, in spite of their strong desire to nourish a baby that gets expressed through different ritual performances.

To follow Judith Butler, our identity is gendered but it is performative and parody subverts both the category and the lived experience of the gender. Moreover, if discourse is the foundation and our body is the text, the nature of parody or subversion will depend on the textual surface. In that case, confusion arises whether the hijras performance is the subversion of the category or the resignification of the normative gender identity. While their sartorial preferences, use of hormone and cosmetic beautification appear to be an uncritical reinscription to the normative gender ideals, other performances problematize the categorization. The assumption of an identity located outside gender binary and other activities which focus on gender liminality rather than accentuating femininity such as the loud clap and lifting the sari to expose genitalia are performative correctors to an easy theory of mere reinscription. Their ambiguity defies both the structure of mere subversion and resistance and the poetically flamboyant feminine surrogate. In public space the disembodied exposure or revelation of the absence of genitalia inverts paradoxically the power in favour of hijras by exhibition of mutilation and implicitly incorporating the curse of infertility. Thus the people without “sharam” (shame) transgresses women’s domain by sheer shamelessness and mocks male power and procreative imperative (Kira Hall, 435-8). Moreover, these empowering stances encapsulate limitations of binary analysis by not taking into account imbrication of gender with or within the multiplicity of differences that constitutes an individual’s life nor adequately captures what Trawick calls “intentional ambiguity of Indian life” (quoted in Reddy, 141). Thus the clapping which they call “dedh tali” (Hall, quoted in Reddy, 138) signals the onset of the

discursive practice signifying both solidarity and authenticity of the group and a potentially disruptive social and physical threat to “respect” of the society.

The play explores how, in spite of all mythical and imperial sanction of the presence of hijra people in Indian society, our allegiance to the sexual duality makes us both scared and intolerant of any gender discontinuity and we learn to Otherize them to the extent of dehumanizing a section of humanity. The audacity to defy and mock their preference for feminine gender role is evident in the chuckle with which Munnuswami reacts to Uma’s calling the hijra Anarkali as “she”: ”She! of course...”(*Seven Steps...*, 7). Unable to categorize, he reduces the “she” into “it”, the neuter gender, robbing her of humanity itself: “I will bring it” (*Seven Steps...*, 7). Almost in the same vein we talk of taming down a disobedient animal, the constable decides to “beat it up if it doesn’t” (*Seven Steps...*, 7). This system of unhesitatingly associating them with animals is equally commonplace for Suresh -- the superintendent belonging to the blue-blooded bureaucracy. Suresh casually observes, “They are as strong as horses or easily says “They fought like dogs everyday” (*Seven Steps...*, 10).

The duplicity of the discursive practice addressing the Hijras -- denigrating them to animals, thereby, reducing them into the hyper-libidinous reservoir of animal/sexual instinct, and simultaneously, presenting them as hyper strong and too aggressive to be a woman -- accentuates their status as gender outcast. With a reversal of epistemic standard, as common with queer and disabled people, the heteropatriarchy refuses to register their sexual preference and always identifies them as “castrated male” instead of their repeated claim to be identified with woman. The designation serves dual purpose:

on one hand, with the castration of the phallus, any discontinuity does not disrupt the hegemony and autonomy of the male body; on the other, resisting them from entering the arena of female sexuality, it removes the threat to abnormalized dimorphic discourse of sexuality in which virility is dependent on desiring women as the object of sexual satisfaction. The play exhibits the fearful impact the conjecture may have through the housing of Anarkali with male prisoners. Brutal consequence follows: “after servicing all these sons of whores, my mouth is too tired to talk” (*Seven Steps...*, 8). We may recall how we shuddered at Droupadi’s predicament in Mahasweta Devi’s *Draupadi*, at once building up resistance against the frequently reported gang rapes by demanding more effective protection of law. But the legal system finds a collusion with the larger society in a nexus of indifference and silence when it comes to the assault of a hijra by refusing to acknowledge the phenomenal existence of the horrible fact.

This marginal entity is precluded from the mainstream by the sexist society to the extent, where even the academia is shut up for them. Papers and exams and other academic paraphernalia are as meaningless for them as other institutions by which the mainstream exerts, authenticates and justifies its power from which they are excluded as from marriage or family: “Shall I come to sing and dance when you pass exam?” (*Seven Steps...*, 12)

In India identity is relationally constructed and context-dependent in a different and greater degree than in the West. As Sudhir Kakar puts it, here “individualism stirs but faintly and [...] the subordination of the individual to the superordinate family interest and relationships is a preeminent value” (Kakar, 118). Hence in an Indian mode, the hijra

people try to situate their identity in relational and social context and position themselves in relational network of hierarchy and exchange. Apart from the guru-cela and Lashkarwala-Sheharwala (Reddy, 154) “riste” (relationships) that are prerequisite for kinship within the hijra community, other relations -- familiar as “Andhra riste” or “pyar ka riste” (relation of love) --are prevalent in the community. The latter category is neither as binding or obligatory nor legitimately ensuring lineage as the former nor is it restricted in the lineage or hijra house, but highly valued. These are the relations of “dudh behan” (milk sister, and “Dudh beti” (milk daughter) referring to the nurturing bond in which the mother nurtures her daughter with milk which, in turn, is shared by the sisters (Reddy, 165). These relations of care and tenderness embody Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of practical kinship. A psycho-analytical study of “koti” desire shows that hijras embody both the male fantasy of a cultural fusion with the maternal body and modal resolution of Oedipal complex and the female desire of “jodi” (pairing) by which they inscribe to the cultural construct of self and other, what Margaret Trawick calls “category mediation”: “If it is at all legitimate to think of ‘Indian culture’ as an organic whole, a system that can be moulded and described as such, then ambiguity must be a key component of that whole, a key feature of the communicative system by which that whole is maintained” (Trawick, 41).

The centrality of affective relation in the hijra kinship network and the assimilative procedures like symbolic performances of rituals and terminologies do not imply uncritical reflection of the consanguinal bonding in the non-hijra world. Neither are the relations completely counter procreative or counter-hegemonic, but as Reddy points out “a tension reflects through the polysemic body”. The architecture of ambiguity

central to their identity is at work here, mediated through their sexual difference and lived experiences. But our inability to conceptualize anything outside the regime of binary construct makes us deny any existence of relationship among the people located outside our structured universe.

However, the resistance gets built in both discursive/epistemic and practical level -- though on a minor scale. The constant denial of the hijra people's capacity to be in any relationship apart from materialistic consideration, is countered by Anarkali's explosive comments exposing the "immoral" and "abnormal" hidden pattern of sexual practice of which the outcasts like homosexuals and hijras are accused: "If you had a beautiful sister, you will give her a cigarette for a fuck, no?" or "You are not a sister-fucker?" (*Seven Steps...*, 11) The charity of normal person like Uma's mother is exposed as terrible deception and cruelty, throwing worthless coins to the beggars at signals on to the footpath and making them fight.

A more positive and potential resistance is effected by building up a subculture promoting an alternative method of creating bonding other than reproduction. Precluded from the specific regime, they seek for other -- "We make our relations with our eyes. With our love. I look at him, he looks at me, and he is my brother. I look at you, You look at me, and we are mother and daughter" (*Seven Steps...*, 11). However, Munnuswami anxiously rejects any possibility of any relation with a hijra, be it that of brother and sister. The absence of any security provided by the society in case of the outsider ("You see us also a society, no?" *Seven Steps...*, 23), is countered by an alternative socio cultural existence. Otherwise "invisible" as individual, they are visible

as a mass presence singing and dancing in a group. Lack of acceptance of their non-normate body makes their autonomous existence virtually impossible. This is the reason Champa fears Kamla will not be happy in the world outside who previously came here leaving her former parent whose photographs she kept with her; Ramu ran away from his home to live with them. Interestingly, while they are seen as neither male nor female, negativising both gender, Champa -- the head hijra -- becomes both Kamla's father and mother ("adha-dic", half-in-the-middle, that is, both male and female) and challenges the fixity of the oppositional gender construct. Uma also prefers to call them children "just children" (*Seven Steps...*, 18) defying Munnuswami's insistence on calling them hijra. They are denied even the privilege given to women (we may recall Kamla Das' *Introduction* where she rebels against growing up into a "woman" consequent upon outgrowing childhood) in their childhood when gender is subordinate to other consideration.

An ideological and emotional bond of sisterhood between the subjugated female and the degenerated male or Hijra develops beyond the society's area of surveillance. Suresh's repeated addressing Anarkali as "it" is orchestrated with Uma's recognition of her as "she" which is a minor denial to inherit authority's epistemic standard. A policy of subterfuge is at work as in front of the authority and allied margins hide their real rapport and instead of calling Uma sister, Anarkali salaams the Memsaab, the wife of superintendent saab (*Seven Steps...*, 16) in public. The alliance advances farther and Uma pays off the required money to bell out Anarkali. At least one person investigates into the matter and gains the knowledge of the actual fact outside the community.

## **Marriage:**

Dattani presents a powerful expropriation of the institution of marriage in the play with its specific focus on Hindu marriage. The play performs a circuitous journey, starting and terminating on marriage, unique in its kind that frustrates/fulfils union by the medium of death. It exposes the paradoxical and superficial nature of the arguments forwarded on behalf of tradition, religion, law, family and other like institutions by which society keeps up its surveillance.

Marriage has remained a powerful cite throughout the centuries for contestation for power between individual and society. Since this is held to be the foundation for building family, the primary unit of society which replicates and maintains its power structure as well as reproduces the replica of the species, it has always continued to be the prime interest of every society. From a very early period, in almost every society the divine sanction has been recourse to its validation and legitimization. Christianity holds that marriages are made in Heaven; Islam believes in the prevalence of the practice in “Jannat” (heaven); Hinduism invokes gods and goddesses to bear witness to and authorize the bonding for seven life cycles. With the passing of time, religious authority was replaced by the law of state as the exerting authority of hegemonic control. The heteropatriarchal society with its exaggerated obsession with the domain of reproduction, exterminates any discontinuity or disruptive possibility in the regime of sexuality.

The Hindu marriage act reads:

THE HINDU MARRIAGE ACT, 1955 ACT NO. 25 OF 1955 1\* [18th May, 1955.]

Conditions for a Hindu marriage: A marriage may be solemnized between any two Hindus, if the following conditions are fulfilled, namely:- (i) neither party has a spouse living at the time of the marriage 1[(ii)at the time of the marriage, neither party- (a)is incapable of giving a valid consent to it in consequence of unsoundness of mind; or (b)though capable of giving a valid consent, has been suffering from mental disorder of such a kind or to such an extent as to be unfit for marriage and the procreation of children; or (c)has been subject to recurrent attacks of insanity or epilepsy;] (iii) the bridegroom has completed the age of 21 [twenty- one years] and the bride the age of 18 [eighteen years] at the time of the marriage; (iv.) the parties are not within the degrees of prohibited relationship unless the custom or usage governing each of them permits of a marriage between the two; (v) the parties are not sapindas of each other, unless the custom or usage governing each of them permits of a marriage between the two (<http://indiankanoon.org/doc/590166/>).

The play opens with the utterance of holy “mantra” which sanctions/sanctifies a Hindu marriage. The incantation reaches an ominous crescendo, and contrary to our expectation of watching the holy fire/fire god bearing witness to the oath of eternal bonding, engulfs someone -- latter discovered to be the bride herself --, and the incantation drowns into the scream of death. What follows is a gradual unfolding of the layers of secrecy and falsehood by which society’s intolerance reduces any non-normative sexual practice into non-entity – both literally and metaphorically. Even after the affiliation is cancelled, the practice does not pass out of existence. The hijras are

regularly used as sex object with or without their consent, in exchange of money or following mutual consent, and the practice is either kept veiled under secrecy and non-recognition or the tool of entertainment is dumped after utilizing its full potential. Complications arise as Subbu, the so-called “normal” man transgresses the boundary of accepted “moral standard” and marries the young beautiful hijra Kamla whom he loved and courted for sometime.

The centre feels threatened at the possibility of any readjustment of its relation with margin. The rise of Kamla to the status of wifhood challenges the heteropatriarchal norms which fixes the position for a “normal” woman -- her womanhood certified by the reproductive potential. The social prestige of Mr. Sharma, the minister and his family, the validity of the “usage and custom” of the religio-cultural tradition of India and the concept of masculinity/virility which depends upon its sexual complementariness to female, come at stake. She is burnt to death and to “ensure him (Subbu) in a right track” (*Seven Steps...*, 37) his father arranges a proper marriage with a proper woman from a respectable family: “This is the happiest moment for any parent --watching their child perform this rites” (*Seven Steps...*, 37). This respect for “right” however assumes a dubious status as the previous rites , performed with similar piety, were de-affiliated straightway since one of the participants did not fit into the conceptual framework which gives meaning to the performance. The marriage taken place between Subbu and Kamla in a temple observing all ceremonies prior to this is violated violently. Ironically, a classic nemesis comes upon Mr. Sharma for disrespecting the “holy” laws and he loses his son at the very day of his second marriage, arranged by him, as Subbu commits suicide. The institution of marriage with its overt emphasis on reproduction/birth is hit

back as it turns out to be the grave of both the bride and bridegroom, concretizing the promise to the letter: “You can’t keep me away from Kamla” (*Seven Steps...*, 39).

The play also explores the “normal” married life of Uma and Suresh. The gender domination is at work in subtle ways: Suresh loves Uma but in his own terms. He imposes his will on her in trivial matters like which night dress to wear, “allows“ her to go on with her thesis and cares of course for her “soft heart” and tries to keep it under control and regulation (*Seven Steps...*, 10). Their incompatibility in intellectual sphere and area of sensitiveness is evident. Even after being a teacher at a university, Uma cannot mobilize enough money to pursue her wish to bell out Anarkali. She got to ask her father for it and the message is readily conveyed to her husband. The peculiar women’s sphere in which Suresh accepts Uma’s independence and even refuses to share the interest, is the domain of shopping, handling guests, playing hostess and other issues of maintaining social relation and decorum as opposed to the world of service, politics and finance. She is free to choose gift for Subbu. He even does not control her expense in this matter: and “Have I ever refused you any money?” (*Seven Steps...*, 32) but she has to account for her need for the money taken from her father.

The colonial code of sexuality held any man declared or medically diagnosed an impotent, as eunuch and expelled any possibility of nonreproductibility from the “male” domain. Hence, greater and subtler domination is effected in the domain of reproduction. Since the patriarchal society does not admit of sterility in “man”, the reproductive incapability is imposed on Uma instead of repeated clinical testimony on the contrary. She has to abide by the wish of her mother-in-law to accompany her to the doctor in

order to authenticate her potency, while Suresh determinedly refuses to see the doctor to have a sperm count: “I don’t have to.” We may recall the movie “Mrityudand” where the barrenness was projected on the deplorable and pitiable “banjh” (impotent) wife whose pregnancy replaces her status with that of another outcast, the “vesshya” (infidel).

Uma’s encounter with Anarkali and the other hijras problematizes her superiority as a normal woman (Anarkali observes, “May be you are more unhappy than I am”, *Seven Steps...*, 14). Uma’s attempt to explain the unspoken laws of the mainstream family which alleges any opposition to one’s husband as an act of transgression to someone unadept in the rhetoric like Anarkali (“You are the daughter-in-law of the DCP and you ask me what you can do to save your sister?”, *Seven Steps...*, 13), exposes the fiction of happiness and it also shows happiness in most cases depends upon subordination and compromise. It, however, triggers off her journey from “I don’t have any power” (*Seven Steps...*, 13) to “I have my resources to verify all this” (*Seven Steps...*, 41). She tries to define her identity beyond wife of the superintendent: “I teach at Bangalore University ... I teach sociology” (*Seven Steps...*, 12). Uma uses the patriarchal misconception of the natural gendered preoccupation with shopping of women and bells out Annarkali. Her story of resistance includes developing a bonding of sisterhood with another marginalized section, an independent investigation of the case using her position in the hierarchical power structure as boss’ wife and preservation of the right to secrecy if not revelation. By the end of the play Suresh at least condescends to mention a hijra as “she”. The marriage does not dissolve, nor the respective position, but with these small changes, Uma curves a niche for herself.

### **Hierarchy:**

The play exhibits the embeddedness of power relations in our every “innocent” behaviour and the hierarchical structure of power relations transmits power downward with a continuous process of transforming its victims into agents. Constable Munnuswami, who is almost in tears at the possibility of being transferred by his boss superintendent Suresh for bringing his wife in “such” place compelled by her order, exhibits his power on the male prisoners quietening them with only beating the bars with his stick. Empowered by the law, he threatens and regulates the behaviour of the criminals under his custody. Licensed by indifference of law itself, the prisoners in their turn find a gush of pleasure at being allowed to beat up the physically weaker hijra Anarkali whom they have already assaulted sexually. The replication of the exercise of power reaches high water mark of comic potential as Suresh’s stamping of his finger to command his subordinate Munnuswami to “take it away” (*Seven Steps...*, 16) is imitated instantly by a similar gesture: ‘snaps his finger’ (*Seven Steps...*, 16).

The supreme comic spirit of Dattani is called into operation in the representation of class hierarchy sometimes subordinating and complicating the discourse of gender. Male Munnuswami gets easily threatened by Uma’s warning and shows a ready obedience since she is his boss’ wife. His outright refusal to accept Uma’s request as contrary to Suresh’s order, alters into obedience. And as an embodiment of impersonal power, Uma, the female, becomes “sir” whenever the tone gets imperative. Thus power

gets embodied itself as masculine (boss' wife) effeminizing the male subordinate by implication.

The comic instrument of role reversal becomes for Uma a powerful strategy of resistance and it helps her to continue her investigation/research and discover truth located outside the boundary of the knowledge offered by the power holders. It occurs in the repeated vacillation between the address of sir and madam to Uma: when politely and softly spoken to, Munnuswami calls Uma madam and tries to impose on her the instructions received from his superior -- even his own attitudinal frame-- but unconsciously switches over to sir when the statement is presented in shape of an order and his official designation is alluded to ("constable Munnuswami"). Its mechanical and performative nature get hyperbolically represented in Uma's switching over to the masculine gesture of dispensing order whenever she feels it necessary to keep something hidden from her husband or make Munnuswami help her in some deed grossly violating her in-laws' sense of "right" and "proper". Such events range from replacing the cigarette in her husband's drawer which she gave to Anarkali, to make him follow her to Shibajinagar to meet hijra Champa.

If power threatens to dominate the subordinate, it also deploys the strategy of alluring. Suresh, the superintendent of police, who is promised with the post of deputy commissioner and the higher police officials are compensated "more than adequately" to hush up the murder case of Kamla.

Thus the problematization of gender relation with the introduction of class factor exposes patriarchy to be a performance as masculinity incorporates within its definitional terrain, the subjugation of the weaker. However, an alternative discourse of hierarchical structure could be traced -- though not fully explored -- during Uma's encounter with the hijra people. The potential heir to the headship Anarkali tries heart and soul even to the point of disfiguring Kamla, her more competent rival, only to save her life. The head hijra Champa, in spite of being highly offended with Anarkali, submits to a law greater than her personal interest ("She is my daughter") and bells her out and leaves the lineage to her. The same commitment to the ideal prioritizes the guru-cela relation in field of responsibility and lineage over mother-daughter having greater bonding of affection.

### **The Narrative:**

The play, like many others by Dattani, may be seen as a generic experimentation, a re-reading of the fixed narrative structure by which events and performances get meaning. What we have here is the subversion of a whodunit in which the discovery of "truth", instead of getting publicized, is hushed up into deeper secrecy. The written official record as opposed to the unwritten statement of the "fact" -- the bed rock of history -- is exposed to be the fiction promoted by the allied forces of media, state (police and ministry) and social elites working in perfect collusion.

A very effective tool producing and produced by the marginalization is the outright expulsion of the other from the regime of truth. The play shows from the very beginning how the myth about falsehood being the natural element of hijra people is fostered and shared by the cross section of the society. Both Munnuswami and Suresh echo the generally held belief: “They are all liars...” Unlike detective stories, Uma, with no motive other than writing her thesis on a less explored area, let apart any search for truth behind the murder of Kamla, a hijra, puts her finger on the keyhole of a door hiding multilayered mysteries behind. Paradoxically, the functional value of truth proves illusory equating both its revelation and suppression with death: “They will kill me also if I tell the truth .If I don’t tell the truth, I will die in jail” (*Seven Steps...*, 14)

Uma, initially as a subversion of the position of a detective (since she is an academic research scholar), recoils from knowing the truth which may endanger her comfortable white colour status. Yet her intelligent, sensitive and searching nature gets her entangled with the trail. She at first cannot grasp the truth from the hints dropped by Anarkali: “...Selim’s wife put fire to her beautiful skin andd burned her to the other world” (*Seven Steps...*, 15). A false but flashy melodramatic narrative appears in its stead: if Selim used to come for Kamla everyday, then his jealous wife might have sufficiently convincing reason to burn her rival down.

However, Uma continues to delve deeper into the mystery by building and dismantling several hypotheses and possibilities: first she disbelieves Champa’s intention in regard to bailing out Anarkali; then having a hint of a competition between Anarkali and Kamla as potential successor to champa -- the head Hijra --, she holds Anarkali to be

the prime suspect. With Selim's appearance, the scenario changes as she discovers that Champa was at stake of losing an earning member of her family consequent upon Kamla's running away. The configuration changes once more as Anarkali gets cleansed since Kamla's elopement would have been favourable to her, and Champa comes under her screening net. Tension builds up as Uma gets gradually more interested in seeing the photograph of Selim's hunt, and the truth flashes on her that Anarkali might have removed it. Champa refuses to throw up the truth. A hint is dropped as Anarkali asks Uma whether she would be present at the wedding of minister's son, but aware of Uma's own danger, she takes the warning from Champa and pleads, "Don't put your own position in danger" (*Seven Steps...*, 35). Thus, the truth remains ever tantalizingly distant from her.

Following the trail, Uma reaches the house of Mr. Sharma in search of Selim's wife. Her hunt is frustrated with the unexpected presence of the minister supposed to be abroad -- a narrative covering up his presence from public --, and he condescends this much not to inform her father-in-law and take legal steps. Repeating the common conjecture -- "One of them must have done it" (*Seven Steps...*, 31) --, he dismisses her. Uma is however struck by the deep melancholia come upon Subbu regarding marriage which his father tries to explain away by referring to the fatigue of huge wedding preparation. The short colloquy in the day of wedding itself between Uma and Mr. Sharma is a masterpiece of dramatic device of equivocation with many layers of meaning. Mr. Sharma at once threatens Uma for her searching and warns her against his alert watch on her movement. He of course pretends to praise the "spiritual" (*Seven Steps...*, 37) look in her as well as the quest for truth, and illustrates it by referring to the

mask deer that seeks for the source of the heavenly fragrance emanating from its own body. The ultimate failure to find it out and the pathetic ending it meets due to the excessive of that ravishing smell is a covert threat to the possible ending which Uma's excessive thirst for knowledge of the truth other than the one manipulated and made official by legal investigation may lead to.

How truth and "right" are far from being stable, independent things in themselves, gets clear when Mr. Sharma openly avows that his truth lies in "ensuring [Subbu] on the right track." The "right" path (*Seven Steps...*, 37) is an amalgamation of maintaining a proper/heteropatriarchal household, to be married to a renowned family, and to normalize the wayward preferences by which the mainstream enforces its relational positive identity.

Ironically, in the present detective story, law takes its own course to decriminalize the offender and teaches a lesson to the margin trying to push the boundary towards the centre which poses a potential threat to the sociocultural framework of India. With a fine specimen of role reversal, instead of protecting the innocent, it endangers his position; in place of imparting justice to the victim, it punishes him as victimizer. The paradox is also evident in the dubious status of the minority who is "under" law but not "inside", therefore "unprotected" by law. The police superintendent openly admits, "We only arrested her because there was no one else. There is no real proof against her" (*Seven Steps...*, 33). The hijra people are well aware of the political nature of legal truth and distrusts Uma's claim that she will make her husband arrest the murderers because they are people whom "not even your father-in-law can put ... in jail" (*Seven Steps...*,

34), and also because as Anarkali rightly observes, “One hijra less in this world does not matter to your husband” (*Seven Steps...*, 35).

The truth comes out following the norms of a detective story quite unexpectedly, though not following any investigation. However, the truth is hushed up with greater enthusiasm than it was investigated into. The only evidence in form of a photograph is destroyed since “Mr. Sharma’s gratitude will be expressed in ways that will be, I am sure, more than adequate” (*Seven Steps...*, 42). All who knew the truth were either voiceless like hijras and Uma, sworn to secrecy like the wedding guests, obedient like Selim, or bartering Mr. Sharma’s gratitude like Suresh, the would-be five-car-escorted police officer and the media . Only the truth of the communion of love and commitment prevails relocating the oath of marriage and the pattern of the fairy tale despite all attempts of obliteration by the greater society.

Dattani’s dramaturgy works brilliantly in presenting a case study that finds out the subversive approval of the hypothesis -- “They are all liars” (*Seven Steps...*, 9). The widely held belief proves true since they never give out the truth and suppress it though they knew it all along. “The invisible minority” has no “voice”, (*Seven Steps...*, 42), their voice is hushed up by violence in manner of Kamla’s or kept outside the periphery like that of Anarkali and thus, they are absented from history except as the projection of our own opportunistic interest.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus, the play seeks to expose the Indian customs, which enjoy discursive privilege not by exterminating the other kinds, but in the way it naturalizes them and thus fixes other practices as oppositional, reinforcing the centrality of the ethos accepted as “normal” by India’s socio cultural milieu and respected as “sacred”. The play however tries, though on a rather minor scale, to liberate the identity of hijra people from divine, imperial or criminal signification and situate them in a modern context and explore their marginality. What we have is a group whose identity is crafted by various ethical practices, practices which do not only construct their identity as the mere sexual third, but generated through multiplicity of morally evaluated performances. The complexities and ambiguities in the hijra identity and its relation to the larger society make impossible any hegemonic theorization and the play resignifies the genre of the detective story as it seeks to relocate the truth itself.

## **Breaking the Silence: *30 Days in September***

### **Introduction**

Nero fiddled while Rome burnt for he obviously preferred the strains of fiddle to the logic that lay behind a city burning, but history didn't spare him...Responsible writer, standing at a turning point of history, should take a stand in defense of the exploited. Otherwise history would never forgive him.

(Mahasweta Devi, Foreword to *Agnigarbha*, IX).

The very last decades of the twentieth century opened up the flood gate of women's lib movement in India, and a socially committed writer like Mahesh Dattani felt upon himself the pressure of participating in the process by laying bare some of the issues wrapped in secrecy and silence for centuries regarding women's experience and "family's best-preserved skeletons from the 'khandaani closets'" (Virani, 46)." It well suited his brand of dramatic strategy of drawing the invisible issues from beneath the carpet. *Thirty Days in September* was a deliberate project commissioned by Anuja Gupta and Aswini Ilawadi of RAHI (Recovery and Healing from Incest) Delhi. As commissioners put it, the play "is part of RAHI's effort to turn incest or child sexual abuse from a private issue to public one and help women survivors come into recovery"

(Foreword, IX). But in order to be equipped enough to write a play on such a sensitive issue having such great consequence on the victims, required sufficient organized knowledge because as Pinki Virani observed, “Every child is vulnerable, dependent, innocent and needy, be it a boy or a girl. And so when it is sexually abused there is almost simultaneously the violation of its physical, emotional and mental state” (*Virani*, 64). Dattani got familiar with the whole process by his association with members of RAHI and even met survivors and all became participants of a journey -- the end product was the achievement of “the imaginative freedom allowed by a fictional form [which] would bring the subject alive” (Foreword, IX). Three major points were focused on – first, the play would articulate “how their (survivors’) lives and relationships are affected as a result of their abuse”; second, whatever be the case “recovery is possible when women begin to honour themselves and supportive spaces are provided for them to access”; and third the play should serve vital purpose of “breaking the silence and exposing the myth that surround incest, its perpetrators and its victims and survivors in our society”

The playwright had to undergo the full two years of travails and trials to grapple with the subject before giving it proper shape into a plot. He of course confesses, knowledge was “little and insignificant” (Note, XIX). He met survivors and hoped to meet even the perpetrators who might have come for counseling, but got soon disillusioned to discover that the “Abusers do not often seek help and would do anything in their power to deny their actions, probably even to themselves” (“ANote”, XIX). Acquiring some first hand knowledge, his next challenge was not to exhibit “insensitiveness” or not to appear “exploitative, looking for some dramatic material and

not really caring about their concerns and anxieties” (“ANote”, XX). However, Dattani found the six survivors and their two partners extremely frank and both eager and able to “articulate about their own feelings and thoughts in a way that the men I know seldom are” (“A Note”, XX). During the one week of documentation, he underwent a gamut of various feelings -- the “fear and isolation of victims, survivors and partners, the survivors’ struggles with their non-offending parents, their inability to develop intimate and stable relationships, the renegotiating of their boundaries with their abusers, their sexual liaisons and other compulsive and self-destructive behaviours” as well as the “incredible resilience and spirit, and the courage and hope with which they have rebuilt their lives” (“Foreword”, XIII).

The dramatist’s first reaction was a “deep feeling of anger. Anger that I felt in my earlier years whenever I saw oppressive forces at play in communities, families, relationships. I just could not understand why they hadn’t killed their abusers by now” (“A Note”, XX). Naturally the dramatist had to wait for the “anger” to subside, or at least to bring it “under control” to weave a plot that will meet the necessity of both life and art: “It had to be something that would do justice to each person’s journey and yet had to have a dramatic structure that would move beyond the realm of a slice of life” (“A Note”, XXI). It was a process of careful balancing between the subjective and the objective- - “I need to be objective to look at the material and say now that’s an interesting plot-line and work on a structure. But then I have to get subjective again to feel as these survivors felt and speak as they would” (Dattani, quoted in Bite, 6). He could not allow his “brand of humour” of his usual dramatic design to creep in since he could not see the “funny side of the situation” (“A Note”, XXI). Working on stark reality, it is one of the most serious of

his plays dealing with emotions ranging from betrayal, anger, guilt, exploitation of needs to be loved to recovery of love and healing of deep wounds.

Syedda Hameed in her opening address to the seminar “Recognizing Violence Against Children in the Private Sphere” said, “It can be a myth that home is the safest place for children” (quoted in Virani, 14). It remained so hard for us until very recently to accept that child sexual abuse exists in India, since it contains the potential of tearing up the façade of happy family of sacred India and exposing an “ugly India” (Virani, 53). The corner of the veil is lifted. The most striking feature about the crime is that the abusers are not dangerous or lunatic people; rather they are “respectable” men living in decent homes. Even after accepting the existence of the phenomenon in “Indian” society, the mainstream – chiefly constituted by upper and upper and lower middle-class – pushed itself into the shell of another myth: “...what happens among People Like Them, specially People Like That (Plat), does not touch, and therefore should not concern, People Like Us (Plus)” (Virani, 12). On the contrary, as Virani utters in the same breath, “...you need to know, especially if you are a concerned parent, that the People Like Them are not as much the People Like That as they are the People Like Us. The former do not have constant physical access to our children as the latter do” (Virani, 12). RAHI felt the precise need to shatter the fairy tale about the complex and silenced issue, since their precise area of working was the victims belonging to the specific group. Their motive coincided with that of the dramatist whose chosen arena is almost the same. The collusion worked together: “We felt he would be the right person to reach out to RAHI’s target group of middle and upper-middle class women” (“Foreword”, X). Hence on one level, Dattani wanted to “see the setting of *Thirty Days in September* as upper middle

class. I chose this setting because I did not want them to dismiss sexual abuse as something that does not happen to people like them” (quoted in Bite, 7). On the other level, he wanted to break the silence altogether because the hypocrisy entrenched with secrecy and secrecy with silence makes the abuse tell upon devastatingly on the victims -- “It’s the silence and betrayal of the family that affects me the most. Like in this case the mother knew that her daughter was being sexually abused by her uncle, but still chose to keep quiet. It’s this silence that makes the abused feel betrayed” (quoted in Bite, 12).

Every society has its own arbitrary criteria of defining the border between silence and speech into which experience is divided. Patriarchy maintains its centrality in both ways-first by its eloquence in condemning incestuous women and by implication, subjugating them to the privileged role of angel in the house, and, secondly, by its silence about men’s role in creating such deviants.

If the promiscuity of the adult could be safely deposited on account of the “bad” women, the child sexual abuse remains by definition/implication beyond the boundary of speech and society chose to live content with it unspoken. M. S. Raj Sree observes, “Given this cultural reticence, there existed no established language in which to narrate the experience of sexual trauma, and that absence itself circumscribed the possibilities for conceptualizing and representing any but corporeal injuries” (Sree,151). Hence, the present play attempts to move beyond the set border. It presents the promiscuous sexual liaison of Mala Khatri as a revictimization of her painful experience of being sexually abused as child by her uncle who strategically exploited the need of an emotionally insecure child to be loved: “I love you even though you are so ugly... you are good only

for this...”(*Thirty Days...*, 52). Her religion-maniac mother Shanta hysterically tries to “forget” the excruciating abusive experience of her own and that of her daughter and advises Mala to do the same (“No pain no pleasure. Only silence. Silence means Shanti. Shanti” (*Thirty Days...*, 67). The abuse in childhood once for all Damages Mala’s natural growth and deters her from getting along with any adult relation beyond the ominous cycle of thirty days (a repetition of her nightmarish childhood vacations). The mother, haunted by the “daemon” within her daughter, and the latter by a sense of being betrayed, fails to communicate with each other. However, both of them are tortured by the burden of contrary feelings towards the exploiter- a combination of love, anger, pity, dependence, and hate.

Once Judith Butler observed, “...there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body” (*Bodies that Matter*, 10). Mala’s female body is constructed and politicized as a tool to please and a single means to get anything she deserves. She becomes oblivious of the difference between “the everyday body as it is lived, and the regime of disciplinary and regulatory practices that shape its form and behaviour” (Butler, quoted in Sree, 143). She develops into an emotionally crippled woman with her butchered psyche continually bleeding by her mother’s terrible silence. Thus, we find how society turns the victims into either promiscuous or frozen – both categories detested by the same patriarchal society.

Dattani directs his dramatic enterprise towards the unwrapping of the issue of child sexual abuse from layers of further victimization, towards the reckoning of the fact that: “...I have nothing to hide. Because I know it wasn’t my fault” (*Thirty Days...*, 3).

Finally the voice of Shanta breaks out from the silent zone to confess: “I remained silent not because I wanted to, but I didn’t know how to speak” (*Thirty Days...*, 67). Mala, now “entitled to life”, completes her journey from “It’s not anybody’s fault, except my own” (*Thirty Days...*, 3), to the assertion: “I do not hesitate to use my real name now... There’s nothing to hide. Not for me. After all, it is he who must hide.”(*Thirty Days...*, 2)

The object towards which the artistic endeavour of Dattani moves is making the story of individuals into that of “us”, to see and incorporate the element of universal probability in it: “All of us were children once and all of us loved, respected and trusted the adults around us who were in charge of our lives. That love could well have been, or it might have been, or it has been, reciprocated with abuse. That is the story of us” (“A Note”, XXII). The extent to which the project was carried forward could well have been measured by an observation by Lilet Dubey, who was also the director of its first production --, “After every performance, women have come back stage with their own traumatic stories writ large on their faces, grateful for the catharsis the play offers, but even more, I think, for expiation of their own guilt which they have arrived as a heavy burden for so long...For through it they believe, their silent screams have finally been heard” (quoted in Bite, 15).

### **Child Sexual Abuse**

“[M]ore children are being buggered than battered” (Beatrix Cambell, quoted in Virani, 52).

This is a horrible truth from which we turned our faces away for so long leaving a significant portion of our society (the victims) to suffer humiliated, alone and silent. Freud was compelled to replace his observation about the root cause of hysteria among women being sexually abused in childhood with his theory of Electra complex due to extreme social pressure. In the same manner, Sandor Ferenczi (for his insight into CSA), John Caffey (for findings of internal injury of children due to sexual abuse) and others were shouted down. It is only with the publication of Henry Kempe's *The Battered Child Syndrome* in 1962, the phenomenon got accepted as an "in-family evil" (Virani, 44) -- though the victims continued to face denial and minimization of the abuse.

According to Driver and Droison, the definition of child sexual abuse includes "Any sexual behaviour directed at a person under sixteen years of age without that person's informed consent", and they further observed, "It must be defined by every circumstance in which it occurs: in families, in state-run and private institutions, on the street, in classrooms, in pornography, advertising and films" (quoted in Virani, 7). The specification of the age of sixteen is based on the world wide survey of the intelligence and emotional quotient, which show that the persons below sixteen are incapable of "informed consent". The concept of child sexual abuse include first, an adult exposing his or her genital to a child or persuading the child to do the same, secondly, touching the child genital or making the child touch the adult genitalia, thirdly, involving children in pornography including showing pornographic material, fourth, an adult having oral, vaginal and anal intercourse with a child, fifth, an adult making any verbal or other

sexual suggestion to a child, sixth, an adult making children to engage in sexual activity among themselves, seventh, inserting foreign object into a child's body for his or her own sexual gratification (Virani, 6).

As Doctor Shekhar Seshadri observed, the victims undergo the “survivor cycle” -- “The cycle continues, wheels within wheels, spokes of shame being added each time the child recalls the sexual abuse and the sense of powerlessness” (quoted in Virani, 65). The child is submerged into deep confusion about both the definitional and consequential implication of the happening, and a sense of helpless and wrong kind of silence along with betrayal accompanies her/his sharp physical pain if the abuser belongs to the closest circle. If the child is physically, mentally, emotionally and financially dependent on the adult, refusal becomes impossibility and acceptance becomes intolerable. Doctor Woods told Mr. Cambell “Don't assume for one minute that the children have told you everything. They always keep back the worst things” (quoted in Virani, 53). The survivor withdraws into the private dungeon and even if it gets vocal, s/he is either faced with humiliation or disbelief. Pinki Virani observes, “Ethics, thus, is what society can use as its framework of values and with which it can justify ‘interference’ in the private life of the perpetrator and his victims” (Virani, 43).

The impact of any one or more kind of abuse leads to disastrous effect on the victim and gets perpetuated through her/him to others. Various signs shown by a child include among others, temper tantrum and aggressive behaviour, depression, anxiety and withdrawal, sense of isolation, promiscuity etc.

Indian parents, after detecting the fact, concentrates on its physical aspects and social standing; the emotional feelings of the child being locked up, s/he grows up displaying the long-term “sleeper effects” (Virani, 64), such as, first, mental health problem, second, sexual traumatization including both sexual feeling and attitude shaping in developmentally inappropriate and interpersonally dysfunctional relation, third, problem in child rearing, fourth, stigmatization, fifth, social dysfunction, sixth, the feelings of powerlessness leading to actual inefficiency, various phobia, developing into an abuser to settle power issue, seventh, sense of betrayal and distrust in any relation (Virani, 64-6). As Virani puts it touchingly, “There is no law that can protect an adult from the childhood abuser. The crime is never punished” (Virani, 75).

The deafening silence maintained by the society, especially the upper and upper middle-class, the fugitive abuser, and the slow legal system and barred gates of home push the secret survivors to corner. The two major problems which the survivors face are to make the society accept CSA as real and then make it accept the survivors themselves. Nobody to listen to their story, they are bound to live through long “years of silence. Silence wrap around life like a cocoon...” (Daniaca, quoted in Sree, 150). Society tells them to “forget [it] as a bad dream”; they become the “secret survivors”, none to take their side or listen to them. This at least must be accepted now that the horrible thing is an irrefutable Indian phenomenon, and then the question arises, “Now do we still want to maintain this conspiracy of silence about what we are allowing to be done to our children?” (Virani, 30)

## Network of Abusers

Our experience of reading/watching the play may be described as an entry into, to quote Walling, “life denying structures” (quoted in Kumar, “Child Abuse and Its Psychological repercussion in Mahesh Dattani’s *Thirty Days in September*,” 81), a journey through its dark dungeon and finally a rejection of it to accept the world of light and life-affirming principles. The issue of child sexual abuse in the play is set in a larger frame of patriarchal power play. Patriarchy ensures its centrality by detesting the frozen and promiscuous women – both unable to satisfy the need of it and when exposed to be its author, tries to absolve itself by a simple formula of “she made me do it”.

Dattani uses the play to exhibit how gender issue cuts across the class. A man, by virtue of being a “man” alone, enjoys the patriarchal privileges of authority and determines meaning and defines phenomenon, controls and regulates action. The paper-wala in synthetic shirt and khanki sandals enters right into the kitchen of Mala’s flat without bothering to ask for permission or acknowledge any courtesy to Shanta -- a consequence perhaps she wanted to avoid by getting prepared with her notebook and the money to be given even before opening the door. He takes the charge of inspecting the gas on his own, not out of cordiality, but the authority he enjoys in the absence of a “man” in the house --“There is no man in the house, that is why. If there is a man in the house, what is my problem whether her gas is leaking or her terrace is licking” (*Thirty Days...*, 6). The very intonation of his speech and the posture of standing with his pelvis thrust forward towering over the mistress of the house make him the replacement of the “man” in the house who would control and protect the women folk. He refuses to grant

Shanta's accuracy of calculation of the payment of 630 and forwards the bill of 690, silences her mild protestation that she never forgets an entry, snatches rudely the book from her and finally threatens to take the money from her daughter demolishing her frail resistance.

The very construction of patriarchy is superbly captured by the dramatist with the simple gesture of Deepak's taking charge of the situation with the same posture of standing with his pelvis thrust and making it clear that he is not going to leave the house without serving his purpose of talking to her. Interestingly, the masculine gesture is able to acquire him the consent which he could not get with repeated request and pleading with Shanta. It proves an effective means to subdue the woman, even her fear, to the will of a "man".

The phenomenon of abuse and exploitation is not a one-way traffic, it gets built through a complicated network of the abused turned into abuser, the abused enjoying being abused ("use me"), the victim victimizing others sometimes with success, sometimes with getting further abused under the veneer of victory on the abuser's part and so on.

The man in the party who is easily seduced by Mala's inviting glances to dance with her and enjoys sexual pleasure planning for more behind his fiancé's back, does not hesitate to use and throw Mala at the slightest threat of breaking up of his sanctified and sanctioned relationship with Radhika. The sight of Radhika shocks the man out of his clandestine planning and he just dumps Mala to follow her in order to ask her forgiveness: "She was leading me on. I swear it was her fault" (*Thirty Days...*, 21). Mala

suffers the extreme humiliation, fights her tears and covering her face leaves the party. But the same Mala gets irritated at her mother's letting Deepak, her real well-wisher in her house.'

The action of the man in the party is not a stray incident, but a recurrence of history. When a teenager, Mala gets assaulted by her cousin of course with her consent, being recommended by her uncle ("I was uncle Vinoy's reference" *Thirty Days...*, 28). After molesting her, the abusive exploiter returns to his role of protective patriarch and confides his concern about Mala to her mother -- "that he was concerned about you, that I should not send you out of the house" *Thirty Days...*, 30).

However, as the play progresses, revelations are made about Vinoy, the great architect of the banishment of two women from the world of common humanity - making one a "whore" and the other "frozen" and compelling them live a life of confinement in their an "unreal" world where only the reality of trauma and self-abnegation exist. The man comes as the uncle for Mala and "bhaia" (brother) for Shanta – the only shelter and provider after Mala's father left them without any communication.

Uncle Vinoy is referred to in the play in connection with Mala's exposition of him as an abuser who molested her when she was seven and continued up to when she became eight, nine, and ten and stopped only when she was thirteen. During each vacation of thirty days whenever they happened to live together, she was molested every day and by some mysterious strategy he bought Shanta's silence and disbelief so that she never asked her daughter what happened to her, or may be, she knew it and only fed her to forget the pain. It vitiated the childhood of the victim. The pain and humiliation of

those childhood days apart, It maimed her growth, damned her soul, took away her self-respect and capacity to live life forever. The longing to be approved and needed turned her into a seducer at thirteen. We see the girl of thirteen trying every measure to provoke her uncle -- of course this time against his will -- to have sex with her, a teenage girl seducing her cousin. And when she grows an adult, she becomes a slot. Once for all she is categorized as a “bad girl” -- a category which she fits in for the people who knows her and her mother too, a category she fits herself in by following the norms of the role-playing by conduct and thought. Thus she finds fulfillment by playing the role she is “made for”.

Shanta flees from the world around her to take refuge in her worship (“I have my God and that is enough for me. Krishna knows what all I have gone through” *Thirty Days...*, 41) and manages to refuse everything as non-existent either by imagining they did not happen or more effectively by forgetting. Reality proves too much for her to accept as real. She fails to be normal wife to her husband and an affectionate and even an averagely responsible mother to her daughter.

The most oppressive face of the structure of patriarchy comes out when we find these women are helplessly dependent on the very abuser in multiple ways. The family, comprised of a housewife deserted by her husband without any provision for alimony and a minor child, is pathetically dependent on the “man” who acts as the provider in absence of the conventional one. The financial dependence apart, he is the “man” for the family to face the world in whose absence the paper-wala acts as the surrogate. However, the most pathetic is the emotional dependence/confinement which he imposes on them by cutting

them of from all source of love and affection and demolishing successfully the belief that they are at all worthy of it. Shanta requests him to be the man-representative during the meeting with Deepak and his family as the head-of-the-family and unfalteringly he agrees to play the “dutiful uncle” because “I have always been there like a father for her” (*Thirty Days...*, 50). Mala is haunted by the fact of her uncle’s leaving her disgusted with her behaviour which only cements her belief that she is unlovable except as a sex object. Even after knowing full well that uncle Vinoy was an abuser, she gets hurt at his addressing Shanta directly ignoring Mala; unable to resist herself, almost under breath she calls him and moves towards his proximity engrossed in his affectionate chit chats with Shanta in spite of herself until suddenly checks with much pain and leaves the place. Dattani shows his real mastery in introducing the short act, and the gestures make up for so many things.

The child of seven comes with her parent to her maternal uncle’s place to spend her vacation who turns to be a Hobsian figure out to satisfy his own need at the terrible cost of abusing a child. The girl is taken to a secret corner by her uncle to give her the birth day present for coming to the age of seven. She is ordered to pull up her frock and help his uncle to do whatever he likes in exchange for allowing her to come here to spend holidays. Farther more, she is asked to show her love to her uncle since she has expressed her affection in front of her parents and her refusal to do anything would be breach of trust and everybody would call her a “bad girl”. Moreover, the kid is almost converted to the belief that she is ugly and extremely unlovable: “Nobody will tell you how ugly you are” (*Thirty Days...*, 52). The belief gets farther petrified by the fact of her father’s leaving the family for another. The uncle however promises to love her if she obeys his

order. As a panacea for the physical pain, the "man" encourages her to remember her school activities, tell what she has learned in her school and go on singing the nursery rhymes. To add a little salt, the abuser also represents it as "our secret" (*Thirty Days...*, 51). After the deed is done, he orders silence and makes her convinced that she also enjoyed since she is only "made for it" (*Thirty Days...*, 3 being so ugly. A child with a rather uncaring father who sends his crying child to her mother for consolation and a mother who before asking her child the reason for weeping feeds enormously to stuff her mouth, she becomes pathetically dependent on her abuser who promises to love in exchange of sex.

The pedophilic never leaves the adult Mala psychologically even after being thrown away by her moralizing uncle who loses all sexual interest in her after she becomes thirteen. Mala sees him in every man, and having no other alternative to capture attention, the extremely lonely girl tries to provoke him with her sexual charms, and whenever anyone tries to come nearer her more than physically, she rejects him. As if to match with the holidays, she always prefers the affairs which last for thirty days. The uncle revitalizes Mala's childhood by his absent presence and assumes the mode to warranty his mastery. In every relation Mala wants to replicate the freeze moment of childhood. Even in the fold of love and security offered by her fiancé Deepak , Mala is haunted by the man and finds herself unable to strip her off: either she repeals the relation or sees the same man in him and offers what she has to give in exchange for approval.

The exclusive standards of morality by which the abusers measure themselves, not only find ways to keep themselves out of legal regime by silencing the victims in

numerous ways; in fact, they don't consider their act as crime at all. The indifference and complacency with which the abuser Vinoy carries his authority as the head/man of the family, do not show any lack of confidence in or doubt about his position. In the dinner he plays the most jovial, frank and dutiful guardian of the helpless women sponsoring the dinner as expected. He cracks jokes, appreciates Deepak, silences Shanta's objection of Mala's taking one more peg of wine and affectionately pats Mala being a big girl by now. He keeps unperturbed at the subtle hint of a threat "I have been a big girl for fifteen years, uncle" (*Thirty Days...*, 56). He criticizes councilors for creating trouble "where there is no problem" and for blaming parents as "exploit the fact that most people carry some kind of resentment against their parents" (*Thirty Days...*, 57) to earn their living. Very cunningly during his tirade against them, he introduces the fact of Mala's father's leaving his family as the presumed reason behind Mala's "depression" and suppresses Mala's protest with sufficient authority. However, faced with a tough opponent like Deepak who won't let it pass so easily, he resumes the real authority: first he demonstrates the care and protection he has always given unabashed ("I have only given her love and attention, right from the start" *Thirty Days...*, 58); then being even more pin-pointed in area of Mala's abused childhood, he brings in the strategy of pressurizing the weakest region and almost command Shanta to protest against his insult ("They are insulting your own brother and you keep quiet" *Thirty Days...*, 58); and finally, he acts the liberal well-wisher and both forgives and appreciates Deepak's concern about Mala and declares his faith in him as having potential of a "good husband for our Mala" (*Thirty Days...*, 59).

### **Defacement**

Terrified being faced with a horror which s/he can neither define nor deny nor deter, the victim of child sexual abuse “becomes a survivor through the process of developing defensive strategies which endeavour to protect her, his, inner core” (Virani, 198). Its whole being works to the only purpose of survival and s/he becomes accustomed to the coldly comforting zone – the survivor’s cycle from which s/he denies to move on. Helen Sheldon (quoted in Virani, 201) categorizes the symptoms of these blockers into three areas: first, depression, anxiety, sleeping disorder, eating difficulty, self-harm, and alcohol or drug dependency. Second, feeling of isolation, distrust, fear of men, difficulty in relation with own children, alienation, and repeated victimization in adult relations. Thirdly, avoidance of sex, promiscuity and prostitution (Virani, 202). Rani Raote, a Mumbai based psychiatrist summed up the problems when she observed, “The honest attempt should be to walk towards self-hood... they will cry and block themselves in levels though unflattering to them but they find it comfortable. These levels are familiar to them and that’s why comfortable” (Quoted in Virani, 200).

Dr. Shekhar Seshadri attempted to catalogue the various “survivor cycles” the victims undergo. They may be enlisted in following manner: first, s/he is plunged into utter “confusion” about her/his own identity (“I don’t like it, but I cannot stop it”), to whom to turn for safety since I cannot save myself, What actually happened may be wrong and so on. Secondly, it leads to self-estrangement (“I am bad, at least not normal. Why can’t I be like others?” Nobody cares about me, I actually don’t count neither I want to be”). Thirdly, the negative feelings lead to saddest part – the wrong set of survival. S/he tries to hide, protect the “real” me from being exposed. Fourthly, now the child gets trapped (“I am responsible for what happened to me because I did not stop it. I did not

tell anybody. I must keep the secret to survive. It is my fault”). Fifthly, all these lead to a negative image of the self (“I deserve it all. If they knew they will be disgusted with me. I am a bad person. Everyone is better than me”) (*Virani*, 64-7).

The child struggles alone to repress the crisis silently, but the stress takes shape in various deformities. The emotions being locked up, the survivors start to display long-term “sleeper effect[s]” like: I) mental health problem (anxiety, fear, depression, masked depression, suicide, alcohol, cigarette or drug addiction, self-annihilation etc); II) sexual traumatization (both sexual feeling and attitude shape themselves in “developmentally inappropriate and interpersonally dysfunctional relation”, such as, Prostitution, aversion to sex, confusion of sex with love and sexual identity with care giving and care getting, inappropriate sexualization, aggressive sexual behaviour, difficulty in arousal and orgasm, promiscuity, revictimization and so on); III) Problem in child rearing (the cycle repeats itself in handling own children in a sexual or non-sexual way such as over-protectiveness or fertility control); IV) Stigmatization (negative self-images); V) Social dysfunction (delinquency, criminal behaviour, violence against self or other); VI. The feelings of powerlessness (the child’s will, desire and sense of efficacy is contravened and it grows into anxious, inefficient and escapist. Other impacts include nightmares, phobia, becoming abuser to settle the power issue, eating and sleeping disorder, disassociation, employment problem, vulnerability to subsequent victimization); VII) sense of betrayal (generally harmed by close ones if not parent --, abused children lose faith in them and search some one to depend upon making themselves more vulnerable, create discomfoting intimate relationship, cause and suffer marital disharmony, choose wrong partners, show poor and even abusive parenting skill (*Virani*, 65-6).

If Mala's wound bleeds profusely, Shanta's blood freezes as a consequence of deep scar inflicted by a long and damaging sexual abuse which she experienced in her childhood by a very close family member. The resistance of Shanta consists of several escape routes like repression, denial, detachment and dissociation. Most frequently, she returns to self-abasement -- always ready to assert "it is always my fault" (Thirty Days..., 11) -- which becomes almost a leitmotif in the play reiterated by both mother and daughter. Her escape mechanism includes evasion of subject by taking refuge to physical discomfort and more strongly taking shelter in "praying" -- always seeking the security in the fold of her "puja" (worship). Another favourable device she deploys is replacing fantasy with truth and vice versa. Thus the real person in her keeps inaccessible -- her face covered with so many layers of deluding masks. The survivor cycle even sometimes denies access to memory of the very sexual abuse. Consequently, the most effective mechanism she brings into action is the loss of memory: she forgets every thing, everything that might disturb the make-belief world of "shanty" (peace).

"Adult women with a history of childhood sexual abuse show greater evidence of sexual disturbance or dysfunction, homosexual experiences in adolescence or adulthood, depression, and are more likely than non-abused women to be re-victimized" (Virani, 60). While Mala becomes promiscuous, Shanta is defaced the other way. Bite comments, "She lost all her sensitivity and sensation for love and sex. Sex was neither a thing of joy, nor pain for her" (Bite, 10). She could not bear the touch of a man, even her husband, without being a lesbian. She became sexually defunct, living a life of isolated

existence beyond sensory experience -- a life devoid of sensuous feelings. Most pathetically, she even fails as mother and proves ineffective in protecting her own child from meeting the same fate as hers. Mothers, who are sexually abused in their own childhood, often show Munchausen syndrome or experience “blinking out” from time to time, creating a space between herself and the child so that they cannot hurt it as she was by her adults (*Virani*, 56). She is unable to communicate her warmth and concern to her for whom she lives (“it is always my fault” (*Thirty Days...*, 11) and is incapacitated to help in her utter crisis, share her deepest sorrow, even understand her real self – only increasing distance.

We see Mala in a party talking to her colleague on her cell phone about an advertisement campaign on sanitary napkin. Here is a professional, sensitive, creative and intelligent worker. She is quick to detect the traditional gender construct in the picture of the mother skipping with her daughter, which goes against the ethos of the ad aiming at campaigning freedom and physical ease. She suggests rather changing it in a mother playing cricket with her husband and daughter, throwing the ball in the air while running within the house with the caption “free” and “A hit always” (*Thirty Days...*, 17). Her sincerity is evident in her attitude to the work and her capability is quickly recognized as the man in business suit identifies her as the architect of the “bronze beauty campaign” and goes farther to ad that certain advertisement planned by her deserves IAAFA award: “You are a genius” (*Thirty Days...*, 18).

But the same Mala appears with another face. She dresses provocatively, looks at the almost unknown man seductively, helplessly giving the impression of her

infatuation with the man and gets irritated at recognition of her work: “Shall we talk about something else apart from work?” (*Thirty Days...*, 18). The man cautiously introduces Mala to his fiancée Radhika and finds excuse to respond to Mala’s alluring proposal to dance together. He of course flirts with her by praising her and Mala leads him on and shows her satisfaction at being flirted with and more so when she knows that he is in the town for a month. She directly offers to be physically near: “Hold me closer” (*Thirty Days...*, 20). She agrees to his proposal to drink together but only wants it now while her partner wants to drop his fiancé first and then have his rendezvous. With obvious eagerness, Mala comes closer to invite a kiss. She goes on inviting his sexual proximity until she is thrown out by the user to satisfy his greater need of winning his fiancé’s confidence.

As Raj Sree noted, “the acts of violence render the victims helpless and they lose their sense of control, connection and meaning which is essential for a healthy life. These acts of violence leave the victims in a state of helplessness and thereby undermine their sense of personal efficacy, their relational capacity, and their ability to psychologically integrate the upheavals of life in meaningful ways” (Sree, 145). Being humiliated to the core, Mala stands for a while with her head down, like a school girl caught in the act and leaves the place fighting her tears amidst staring glances.

We see Mala from Shanta’s eyes – a girl of thirteen provoking her uncle, asking to kiss her, touch her, say things to her and “do things” (*Thirty Days...*, 30) to her. She receives pleasure also by her sexual partnership with her cousin. To repeat Shanta, she

was “an average child”, but one “had my brother and your cousins dancing around you” (*Thirty Days...*, 30). She attracted many more.

All the incidents are quite in tune with Mala’s own confession “I don’t know why. I just don’t understand ... why I do it... What I am doing is terribly wrong! But it means a lot to me. I like it. That is why I am a bad person” (*Thirty Days...*, 15). Thus Patriarchy successfully categorizes a woman as a “bad girl”, makes her conform to it, compels her belief that she is “made for it, which ultimately washes the abusers of their guilt (being led on) and use her for the purpose she is made for.

Mala flinches even from the relation with Deepak who is ready to show her the respect, love and trust and stubbornly refuses to continue the relation for which Deepak is so keen, parroting the same statement, “It won’t work between us (*Thirty Days...*, 34). While sitting in a restaurant together, she suddenly says to Deepak that the man sitting near is staring at her breasts, which infuriates him. To Mala’s utter dismay Deepak goes to the man and threatens him for the obscene behaviour which makes the man horrified (“she is mistaken or she is lying” *Thirty Days...*, 34). Mala tries to stop Deepak, and the moment he raises his fists, Mala confesses “I made it up” *Thirty Days...*, 34). She admits frankly that it is she who wanted it this way and declares that only this could satisfy her and this is the precise thing she wants from Deepak. She even offers her body to Deepak in return to the security and approval she claims from him.

What we witness is a defaced face of a seven year old child in need of love and security from her adult and receiving instead terrifying sexual abuse, sense of guilt and horrible sin, callousness and willing indifference. Calendar moved rapidly from seven to

twenty seven faster than maturity. She went on repeatedly experiencing the nightmare whenever exposed to the object associated or reminded of that traumatic experience.

### **Solitary Cell**

Unlike some other plays by Dattani, in the present one, we encounter characters – Mala and her mother Shanta – suffering from the confinement in their respective solitary cells without any visible warden. The two women live in the flat with no male member to impose patriarchal authority or inflict violence or to protect and provide either.

The family does belong rather to an upper middle class with no financial anxiety or other familiar crisis such as disease, calamity, and social stigma or like. Yet when we meet Shanta for the first time absorbed in her puja room offering flowers, ringing bells and singing song to deity (“Mere to Girdhar Gopal, Dusro na koi”, *Thirty Days...*, 4), a sense of detached discharge of routine duties prevails instead of calm and peace. The doorbell rings without exciting any curiosity at the possibility of someone’s coming from the outside world. As the stage direction goes, she takes up the notebook before opening the door automatically without showing any feelings. The first glimpse of emotion is seen in the form of bewilderment as her pre-programmed action gets jolted by finding at the door step some one other than the paper-walla, some one whom she did neither expect nor recognize. She even does not readily recall Deepak until he repeated his previous conversation with her on telephone, his request to meet her and her consent in the matter. The immediate reaction at the recognition is that of rather uncivil and pathetic refusal to meet him. She asks him to come when Mala is at home, and when Deepak insists to talk to her in absence of Mala, Shanta gets scared about her daughter’s

presumed anger: “If she finds out you are here and I talked to you...” (*Thirty Days...*, 5). We come to know from the conversation that Deepak called her on the other day to meet her and requested not to let Mala know, the precise thing Shanta did. Mala got angry and warned her against any such meeting which frightened her so much that when Deepak rather impatiently observes, “She can’t kill you!” (*Thirty Days...*, 5), at her abnormal fear, she answers: “You don’t know her” (*Thirty Days...*, 5).

However, her resistance gets dissolved only after Deepak takes the charge of the space in a macho fashion like the paper-walla. She is pleased to know Deepak is colonel Vatia’s son and is genuinely happy to know Deepak and his parents are eager to accept Mala. From her unguarded remarks we come to know that the mother and daughter live like strangers. Mala keeps easy when absorbed with work or she goes out. But in the evenings when she is at home, she keeps restless and irritated throwing her anger on her mother. However, Mala also keeps on lying about her programmes to her mother maintaining a secret life: “Sometimes she repeats the same lies, as if she does not care if I know she is lying” (*Thirty Days...*, 13). . However, Shanta quickly recovers her self-composure and explains: “She is a very nice girl at heart. Sometimes she gets angry with me -- but ... it is always my fault” (*Thirty Days...*, 11). Shanta also has the strange habit to keep note of everything even the fluctuation of her daughter’s mood. She offers a calendar marked with a cross on last Monday, the precise day she refused Deepak, along with some other. She gets hysterically frightened as Mala calls home and comes to know that Deepak is there and threatens not to return: “Don’t say that! Come home! Mala please come home!” (*Thirty Days...*, 15).

Mala comes home and we witness the two tortured confined souls confront and inflict more pain on each other. Mala is restless like those days when she in querulous mood, Shanta requests her to have some food and is faced with sharp refusal of her company, but is immediately called back. Mala enquires about the meeting with Deepak and Shanta, as usual, avoids the question looking at the picture of Krishna and then by forwarding the excuse of forgetting. But Mala won't allow her to evade either with her head ache or forgetting: "You forget what you don't want to deal with (*Thirty Days...*, 22). She gets irritated with the painting of lord Krishna which has always been a hiding place for Shanta to hide from responsibility of addressing all unpleasant issues: "One of these days I will throw that picture out of this house" (*Thirty Days...*, 23). At last, unable to avoid, Shanta gains enough strength to utter the words – "He told me he wanted to marry you" (*Thirty Days...*, 23). Now it was Mala's turn to avoid the subject, but insisted on by her mother, she blatantly refuses to marry him. Shanta pleads her daughter to accept the proposal from such a nice boy and a family already familiar and even shows hitherto absent strength in her persistence: "I have always listened to you for everything, but this... You must say yes" (*Thirty Days...*, 23). Mala returns to her private confinement refusing to give any reason for her decision.

The volcano erupts as Shanta tries to comfort Mala offering to know and console: ("You can tell me what is troubling you. I am always there for you", *Thirty Days...*, 23). Mala sharply reacts at the empty solicitude and accuses her mother of never being available during her crisis. In her desperate attempt to flee, now Shanta ridiculously proposes to make "alu paratha" (potato stuffed chapatti) for breakfast which Mala likes so much. But the flow couldn't be stopped and a history of unredeemed pain reveals. As

Mala recounts, when she was a child, day after day, Shanta deployed the same strategy: whenever Mala came to her hurt, crying with pain, she used to stuff her mouth with the food and silence her. It did not lessen the pain but only blocked the way of expression. Gradually Mala learned to like them, enjoy the variety of food item as the panacea for all her pains. Now Mala wonders whether Shanta already knew what was happening to her daughter, but refused to acknowledge: “You knew. Otherwise you wouldn’t have been so prepared” (*Thirty Days...*, 24)

This time again, as Mala refers to her mother’s inattention to her pain, Shanta asks her daughter’s forgiveness for not asking her where it hurts, kissing her and lulling her to sleep with a “lori” (lullaby) instead of giving her sweet and going to puja room when she fell down from the stairs and broke her legs. Mala gets genuinely shocked to see her mother still failing to remember the ghastly memory of her child’s abuse – either deliberately or helplessly – and replacing the leg-breaking event for far more tortuous wound. Mala openly refuses the veracity of Shanta’s projected forgetfulness, but her wide-eyed innocence appears disarming. Desperately Mala tries to make her remember at least the experience she herself confided to her mother five or six years ago, alludes to the specific place and context and even Shanta’s own citations. Shanta stubbornly refuses to recall and instead, takes the blame on herself of both forgetting and saying some foolish thing which Mala took seriously. But Mala could not let it go so easily today: “I said something serious and you took it lightly” (*Thirty Days...*, 26). She repeats her horrible experience of being molested by her uncle Vinoy during a month’s time in every vacation she used to go to visit him or he come to live with her.

Shanta now takes recourse to the psychic mechanism of replacing fantasy with truth and vice versa. She plainly repeats what she did five years ago and says that it was all Mala's figment of imagination; nothing of that sort happened to her. For sometimes, Mala thought that it happened to her alone, she is made for that and perhaps she imagined things. But she could not avoid the reality: "I just have to learn to live with the pain" (*Thirty Days...*, 29). Shanta suggests forgetting everything as a "bad dream", to banish all bitterness into the region of oblivion. But Mala refuses to unacknowledged both the hellish pain and its cause and gets suddenly furious at the portrait which has always been a safe escape zone for her mother and for which she never bothered to probe deeper into her daughter's crisis: "I just have to learn to live with the pain" (*Thirty Days...*, 29). IN a violent gesture she takes off the portrait and in Shanta's utter dismay throws it out of door and it breaks into pieces. Shanta's inertia gets jolted as she rushes out and gathers the portrait and broken pieces of glass and Mala gradually returns to her composed shell.

But once pushed forcibly out of her confinement, Shanta takes the initiative and breaks Mala's tired silence: "I remember, but what I remember is not what you remember" (*Thirty Days...*, 29). She remembers not the child Mala but the adolescent one ("Not when you were seven but when you were thirteen" *Thirty Days...*, 29), when pushing herself on to her uncle pleading and forcing him to kiss, touch, make sexual advances, "do things" (*Thirty Days...*, 30). Mala shudders at the narration and cries to stop her mother. But she continues her story about Mala's affair with her cousin leading and enjoying: "I went to the kitchen to vomit. Then I prayed.....To our God, so He could send his Sudarshan chakra to defend you, to defend us from the demon inside you, not outside you" (*Thirty Days...*, 30) It is only another Looking out of the window of her

cell. Shantta could see only the face of truth facing her. She does not understand Mala's pain in making advances neither does she believe when Mala reveals that it is uncle Vinoy who bed her cousin who approached Mala with the words "You are your uncle's reference" (*Thirty Days...*, 30). Unable to fathom the depth, Shanta advises "And please don't talk about trying to forget the pain... Try to forget the pleasure" *Thirty Days...*, 31). She categorizes her daughter as a "bad girl" a favourite epithet of Mala for herself. Mala only weakly protests "The pleasure is part of the pain ma" (*Thirty Days...*, 31).

With the progression of the plot, we encounter layers of secrecy and walls keeping the mother and the daughter apart. Uncle Vinoy is coming to stay with them for two days and Mala, though hesitant, gives her consent. The casually alluded help which they got from Vinoy lights up another mist of history. Mala is disillusioned about her father being the provider for their daily living even after his departure. Unwillingly Shanta confesses that it was uncle Vinoy who was the very person while she went on giving Mala the impression that it was her father who cared to send money, extra for diwali and school-day celebration to show his concern in order to secure her with the feeling of being cared for by her father.

However, the revelation of the truth turns out to be another version of distorted reality. Shanta's attempt to show Mala her father's affection has also an element of indirectly impressing on her that he didn't care for her – at least Mala thought so. As Mala breaks the boundary of uncritical acceptance of fact and exclaims: "He didn't leave because of me. He left because of you" (*Thirty Days...*, 41). Night after night Shanta used to sleep with Mala to avoid his touch and prayed to Krishna to save her from the daemon.

Mala's father left with the words "I married a frozen woman" (*Thirty Days...*, 41). Mala, in her turn, confined in her cell, sees the specific version of truth and categorizes Shanta as "failure as a wife and a mother" (*Thirty Days...*, 41). They accuse each other and themselves only to spare the real abuser. Whenever Deepak has any hunch about her uncle or Mala herself slips any hint, Mala quickly alleges her mother ("It's not my uncle. It's my mother ... She doesn't want to see me happy" *Thirty Days...*, 48). And in a desperate attempt to avoid her brother's enquiry whether it is something about him, Shanta denies and quickly explains, "It's my fault. I should be more strict with Mala" (*Thirty Days...*, 49). Thus the mother keeps lamenting "I wish she could listen to me" while the daughter complains "I wish she wouldn't be so lost in her religion. I wish she had been there for me!" (*Thirty Days...*, 49).

Mala goes on accusing her mother for creating the hell for her where alone of the entire world she belongs, and the threat to be thrown out from this hell finally demolishes the walls of their respective solitary cells and they come out to see one another.

### **Partnership**

As Dr. Rani Raote found out from her activities in the field of child sexual abuse, "women, who have survived a dysfunctional relation, tend to react negatively when they enter into a functional one. They often try and spoil the thing for themselves by some psychobabble" (quoted in Virani, 198). Naturally much tension concentrates in the arena of partnership. The sexual traumatization leaves Shanta frigid and she fails to communicate with her partner/husband with any warmth, and victimized by a fear-

psychosis, always tries to save herself from the touch of the daemon. Her husband fails to delve deeper than the surface and trying for some times, leaves the “frozen woman” and their daughter.

The play is of course the tale of darkness, but not unredeemable; silver lining of love, dependence and trust appear around the dark cloud of oppression and the consequent deformity. We meet Deepak as he comes to see Shanta in Mala’s absence to discuss about her. He fixes an appointment with her on telephone and is rather refused an entry in her house impolitely. He pleads, tries to clarify his cause, takes the opportunity of Shanta’s moving from the door to enter right into the room, prevents her from calling Mala and finally, with no other way, he takes up the macho authority of gesture in imitation of the paper-Walla to have her talk.

The pains Deepak takes and the urgency and sincerity he shows are not the craze of the infatuated adolescent. Deepak shows real concern and respect for his partner and tries to address her crisis. They met in a party a month ago and danced, and arranged to spend the holli (an Indian colour festival) together. After this, they started to see each other everyday making Deepak quite convinced of his own serious involvement and Mala’s attachment: “I thought she loved me” (*Thirty Days...*, 10). Every thing was going well until last Monday Deepak told her that she is “most sensitive, intelligent and dynamic woman” when strangely Mala stared at him and suddenly declared “It is over” (*Thirty Days...*, 10). Curiously never did she give him any chance of feeling otherwise, did not accuse him of any act that might hurt or disrespect her, but only she avoided to take Deepak to her mother and did not tell anything about him to Shanta. Deepak is hurt

at the fact of her silence about him to her mother and rather bewildered at the strange conduct of Mala of giving her mother the impression that Deepak does not want to marry her as he is only interested in a casual affair: “That is the way it is with men” (*Thirty Days...*, 11).

However, Deepak does not lose hope or confidence in her. His hope or confidence is not built upon any fantastic idealism or exotic attraction; on the contrary, he offers sufficient hints at his guess on Mala’s whereabouts (possibly another relation) which he, instead of interpreting as feminine infidelity or promiscuity, detects as a psychological problem which calls for proper counseling. His honest and effective concern for Mala gets more prominent when set in sharp contrast to the man’s conduct in the party who is provoked by Mala perhaps in the same manner (“She smiled at me and wanted to dance with me” *Thirty Days...*, 14), takes advantage of the opportunity to enjoy the physical proximity of the alluring woman out of his fiancé’s sight as is evident from the stage direction which shows ‘the man exploring her back more with his hand when it is away from Radhika’s line of vision’ (*Thirty Days*, 20). As a partner the man acts dishonestly with his own fiancé and uses Mala to enjoy and also to ensure his position as a victim of her seduction. Men sleep with bad girl but don’t marry them. That is why, he does not hesitate to propose to spend night with Mala without the knowledge of Radhika since he is already aware of Mala’s reputation as an easily available woman (“you have been with him for sometime I think” *Thirty Days...*, 19) and dumps without a second glance to appease his would-be wife whom he betrayed few minutes ago leaving Mala bear the humiliating stare of all the people of the party.

Deepak does not only detect Mala's promiscuity as a crisis making her suffer too, something more than casual physical hunger, he shows a rare piece of understanding, patience and cooperation both in maintaining the relation with negative effort of Mala and giving constant company to her during the trials and tribulations Mala undergoes during her convalescence. He keeps offering his help and tries to understand even after repeated and rude refusal and searches after the "the real person in you" (*Thirty Days...*, 33).

It is only at Shanta's insistence (persuaded by Deepak) that Mala meets Deepak after breaking up the relation with no explanation and behaves in a detached formal manner in response to Deepak's affectionate approach. Disregarding all her mother's warning against telling anything about her fallen childhood, she honestly confesses everything about her present psychic deformity. However, contrary to Shanta's anxiety, Deepak appreciates this rare piece of honesty in his beloved – "You are talented, beautiful, intelligent, and honest. You have a rare gift of honesty" (*Thirty Days...*, 33). Yet Mala remains unperturbed and here the story turns a sharp corner from the romantic tales of fallen women seeking someone who will appreciate her inner goodness and overwhelmed at being appreciated, surrenders to the man, the angel. Mala sharply retorts that "It doesn't mean a thing to me" (*Thirty Days...*, 33) to her and she takes an innovative way to show what she wants. She accuses a man looking at her in an obscene manner, and when Deepak gets ready to take action against the man, she confesses that she has "made it up" (*Thirty Days...*, 34). She makes it quite clear what she desires is to be used as a sex object. At this revelation, Deepak is almost at the brink of despair and for moments he can't see any hope -- a view so strongly upheld by his fiancé: "I told you

so. I know it won't work between us" (*Thirty Days...*, 35). But Deepak can't let it go and he succeeds at least to convince Mala to see a councilor.

Deepak does not hurry, neither does he expect any miracle; rather he waits patiently month after month always assuring Mala of his presence by her side whether consciously invited or not. In the play when Mala rushes for help to his flat living through both a real and a psychological time together (as discussed in the section "Awakening"), Deepak appears to be a most dependable and loving partner almost glorified by the striking contrast to the "man" who haunts Mala's life like a Greek fury whenever she tries to land ashore. Literally and metaphorically, he extends his hands, pursues Mala to hold it, and offers it repeatedly overcoming all Mala's refusal and hesitation. Apparently Mala comes to call it off and like thousand times earlier, he comforts her. He offers his shoulder for her to cry and sincerely assures, "I am not going to harm you" (*Thirty Days...*, 51). Responding from her life of long past – of course unaware Deepak takes it to be her present reaction --, she pitifully offers her body most provocatively in return to his promise not to leave her – "I won't tell any body. Please don't leave me" (*Thirty Days...*, 50). With great care and honour, Deepak covers her body instead of using or chiding her: "Mala, you cannot abuse your body like this! I won't let you do it to yourself!" (*Thirty Days...*, 53).

Perhaps encouraged by the councilor, Deepak takes up active measure in digging out the long-hidden crime poisoning Mala's life. At uncle Vinoy's disgust with the councilor's job of creating misunderstanding among close relatives and in Mala's case creating grievance against her deserter father and mother, Deepak charges him of

excluding his own name from the list of possible wrong-doers. Mala and Shanta get scared and try to stop him, But Deepak's business is to bring the truth and he continues and even alludes to Mala being abused as a child: "What kind of attention did you give to Mala?" (*Thirty Days...*, 58). He persists even after Mala offers to leave the place and straightly says that he will take Mala's exit and Shanta's silence to be the ascent to his conjecture. However, he tackles the situation rather tactfully by assuring Shanta of everything being all right and striking an apparently cordial note with the uncle as before and avoids creating any scene in a public by apologizing after Shanta's denial of his allegation. However, Deepak gets sufficiently convinced of his hunch as he says to Shanta in private: "I wish you had remained silent" (*Thirty Days...*, 60).

Though supportive through her sexual adventures, Deepak is also affected by them and struggles with his own needs to be met. He sometimes gets frustrated struggling against Mala's reluctance to take him in confidence and her indifference about the relation. Deepak goes to Mala's councilor to know how to help her and we see him a fatigued man at the brink of losing faith in himself and any future of the relation. He admits his failure to win Mala's confidence – "She doesn't trust me, and I find that very tiring" (*Thirty Days...*, 54). Deepak does not hide his tiredness though he does not for a moment doubts Mala's honesty. He shows also real insight as he feels a strong hunch about her uncle instead of Mala's repeated refusal to tell anything about him. He is really hurt at the indifference he confronts regularly in Mala: "If I tell her it's off she would simply look at me. She may not say a word but her eyes would tell me what she is thinking 'See. I told you it won't work. You are wasting your time with me. Go away and leave me alone'" (*Thirty Days...*, 54) He even almost feels that "I don't even exist for her"

(*Thirty Days...*, 54). However, he is right enough to detect a deep craving in Mala for company; the desperation may lead her to offer sex in exchange. HE decides to give one more shot. The situation turns in his favour and the revelation becomes inevitable. Now Deepak offers finally to take her along with him in “our” home. Shockingly, even Mala refuses to accompany him since she cannot love “anyone ... else” (*Thirty Days...*, 66). However, by the end of the play, Shanta’s rude self-violence jolts Mala out of her own post-traumatic stress and we meet Mala confessing to her councilor her sincere and exuberant longing to “be” with her fiancé.

Tutun Mukherjee argued, “Placing the forms within the discourse of ‘gender as genre’ reveals the way [the] sex-gender system operates in the art and practice of drama and theatre and controls their cultural reproduction” (Mukherjee, 4). Dattani prefers to present a sensitive, metro sexual, modern man who believes in partnership than patronage or possession; and refuses the position of a conventional moralizing and condemning patriarch or a great, charitable man. Deepak recognizes the problem, hits hard, gets bruised in the process and finally unmasks the daemon.

### **Awakening**

Quite in his own manner, as Raj Sree rightly observed, “Dattani places the play in a structure of optimism where wrongs could be corrected, faith resurrected” (Sree, 152). Hence, by the end of the play, the ray of love, trust, companionship and peace disperse the mist of nightmarish days and darkness of the haunted nights of both Mala

and Shanta – the victims of terrible child sexual abuse. In the play written in collaboration with RAHI, Dattani gathered sufficient professional help in mapping out the journey of the survivors through the recovery process and, with the aid of his imagination, presents an appropriation of the genre of fairy tale where the woman and the man join hands to fight the daemon. Mala undergoes almost all the four major steps of exit cycle as enlisted by Dr Shekhar Seshadri: I) Empowerment: The victim gets aware that “It is not my fault”, “guilt and shame are his”, rather, “I am remarkable for enduring what happened and its consequence”. II) Survival skill: s/he got to choose between several survival skills regarding which ones are to keep and which to reject and be “myself to myself. III) Clarity: s/he must recognize that “I was victim of sexual abuse”, “I have personal right to enforce boundary between persons”, “I am not what I thought myself to be due to it”, “I am more than a victim of abuse or survivor” and hence, “I must trust my own perception”. IV) Self-awareness: s/he must realize that “I should value and use my thought and feelings” and “I like and appreciate myself”, All these lead to love and respect for oneself and give the feeling of deserving of love and respect by others (Virani, 192-9).

The play breaks the linear narrative and opens with the culmination of a journey taken up four years ago. The destination is reached by declining to own the destiny designed by the diabolic forces in the long-hidden past which hitherto deterred the workings of all the life-affirming forces in Mala’s life. This is an anagnorisis – of course not in the tragic sense --; not a rejection or refusal to recognize the past event, but a re-interpretation of it. The reversal of situation occurs as the sense of guilt is replaced by the self-respect, and the perpetrator of the feeling is reckoned as the abuser and criminal.

The play opens with Mala's final session with her counselor on the date twenty-ninth February in the year 2004. She begins a self-appraisal with giving her name, Mala Khatri unhesitatingly and declares confidently to the unheard counselor's question "Why not? I do not hesitate to use my real name now." (*Thirty Days...*, 2). As the playwright points out, she has an easy air about herself, "Why not? I do not hesitate to use my real name now." (*Thirty Days...*, 2). The growing assurance and the calmness of her position as a person who has overcome her hesitation are evident in the confidence to recognize, "It wasn't my fault". At last she is able to identify the guilty and unburdens herself, and unhesitatingly comes out in the open light leaving the life of the reptile -- burdened with the venom of self-abasement: "After all, it is he who must hide", "He should look the other way when someone spots him anywhere on this planet", "I have nothing to hide" (*Thirty Days...*, 2-3). As Anuja Gupta and Aswini Ilawadi observed, "Mala's compulsive sexual liaison are needed to be understood as the process of rivictimization whereby the victims consciously expose themselves to sexual situations which has the elements of exploitation. It is only when Mala is able to give meaning to her behaviour that she begins recovery" ("Foreword", XVI). With a growing sense of jubilation she asserts, "And I can make that happen. I have the power to do that now" (*Thirty Days...*, 2). She codifies the victimizer as abuser and brings him under the socio ethical surveillance by which until now she was alleged guilty. Coming under the preview of criticism, the uncritical ubiquitous presence of the controller, interpreter and monitor is defunct: "He is dead" (*Thirty Days...*, 3).

The time frame moves backward and forward and the final triumph is followed by the very counseling session that takes place on thirtieth of September 2001. The

contrast is too obvious. The easy confident manner of present Mala is at a polar opposite to the nervous, self-conscious, unsure and ashamed woman come to confess her sin without any hope of redemption. She refuses to give her name and tries to hide all components of her identity losing herself in the anonymity of sinners: "I don't think I want to say my name... I hope that is ok with you" (*Thirty Days...*, 3). Shaken with doubts ("I am not sure of many things", *Thirty Days...*, 3), she was confirmed of only one thing -- her guilt: "It's not anybody's fault, except my own. Somehow, I just seem to be made for it. May be I was born that way, may be ... This is what I am meant for" (*Thirty Days...*, 3). Unwilling to keep any record of her history, she is anxious to stop the tape recorder: "I can only tell you more if you turn this thing off" (*Thirty Days...*, 3)

The process of recovery continues by charting out the territories Mala explored in spite of herself. She confesses her habit of building up casual relation and shoving them up in certain time: "I don't know why. I just don't understand... why I do it" (*Thirty Days...*, 15). She provokes and pursues a man into a relation, continues it for a month's time -- preferably for thirty days -- and finds it unsatisfactory. She tries to interpret and define her act as a "game" first, then she corrects it and withdraws her overt control of the situation and levels it as "something which pleases", then accepts her helplessness at being pleased ("it means so much"), and finally locates the cause in her evil nature: "This is because I am a bad girl" (*Thirty Days...*, 12). She is unsure about why she does so: she blames it on her adoption of too much Western values and lacking in traditional ones. Interestingly, her sense of guilt, so clear from her categorization of herself as bad, brings out the latent sense of terrible sin. Yet she can't either explain it or stop it. The only point where she returns time and again is her mother -- she expects her mother to stop her,

perhaps subconsciously gives sufficient clues about her goings on, and getting frustrated on the quarter, she dominates her and blames her again for letting her do it: “the only person who could stop me, who could prevent many thing to happen is my mother” (*Thirty Days...*, 15). It is curious that she likes the affair should be packed up within a certain time period (thirty days), enjoys the physical part if the partner is older -- preferably much older than Deepak who is few years older than herself -- and enjoys to be used by the right kind of person: “I enjoy when they use me” (*Thirty Days...*, 12). She has a list of people. Though she mentions Deepak as her fiancé, yet can't get on with him and must move on like an automaton (as her mother) as if her action is beyond control surpassing her wish, and she can't help doing it.

Dattani plays a charming trick of presenting the base point of beginning the journey, its gradual progression and the triumphant arrival at the peak simultaneously to acquire splendid effect. In the first scene Mala is seen as completely cured of her nightmare which is immediately followed by the presentation of the first meeting with the counselor showing sharp contrast between the two persona almost in every point – e.g. Mala hesitant to give her name in the first session now confidently registers her name careless about the tape so different from the one so touchy about it. After leading us through the drama of her hellish existence, self-inflicted wounds and taking the first step to cure, the playwright again takes us back to the first scene interspersed with other scenes during her convalescence keeping them side by side. The thing becomes all the more real as the sessions are conjured up as playing the recorded version of Mala's speech.

Returning to the first scene, we recall the whole journey as Dattani repeats the selected portion of the first session taking the cue from “nothing to hide” (*Thirty Days...*, 37). He makes some part reverberate and overlap each other, such as, “name is”, “first time”, “my fault” etc to catch the basic tenets of the structure of her understanding and interpretation of the world around and herself, and which get transformed to occasion her liberation from her confinement. She holds herself guilty of seducing people and enjoying sex for a certain length of time and rejecting the previous one for another. Her father left Mala and her mother for another woman and although he kept on sending money for their subsistence, never cared to contact. She thinks that only had she been more lovable, he would not have left them. Mala goes on multiplying her faults as she confesses herself so bad as to seduce her uncle at the age of thirteen and then her cousin and other people available. Her uncle left her being disgusted with her behaviour. She is of course sure that her uncle was not a “bad person or anything” (*Thirty Days...*, 38), and shows reluctance to discuss much about him because she is concerned with her own evil nature for which she seeks the help.

Towards the end of her journey, Mala is thrilled at seeing a “whole new face” (*Thirty Days...*, 37) after getting severely bruised and living with bandages all over the face, “as if you didn’t have a face at all” (*Thirty Days...*, 37). Suddenly she finds all “bandages come off” with no sores left on it, with no sores left on it. This is a journey to discover her own self. She re-lives her childhood -- perhaps lives it for the first time--, “I can be a little girl, again. Not again, but for the first time” (*Thirty Days...*, 38). The euphoria contains the expression of boundless joy: she comes alive, enjoys ice creams, hankers after chocolate, deciphers between fairy tales, and listens to the sounds of bird

and the temple bells which did not exist for her at all for all these years. The whole world is presented with a fist for her senses -- perfumed, musical and colourful: “My senses are working again” (*Thirty Days...*, 38). This is not a relapse into childhood but a rejuvenation of a time which she never lived. . The so-called “bad girl”, the femme fatal, blurts out: “And for the first time I enjoyed sex. Truly enjoyed it for its tactile pleasure. Not as a craving for some kind of approval... for once I could look at Deepak in the eyes and say ‘I love you’ to him and believe it when he says the same to me” (*Thirty Days...*, 38). She feels the magic moments of love and really realizes “what it means to be really loved” (*Thirty Days...*, 38). Finally we meet a person “entitled to life” (*Thirty Days...*, 39).

The process of convalescence spans over years and takes several sittings. A most disturbing and challenging phase in the journey occurs when uncle Vinoy comes to live with them for two days. Mala’s previous love/hate, pain/pleasure return under the veneer of composed exterior. She almost craves for his attention and takes the move to interact uninvited and gets hurt being ignored. The day passes. But at night she get scared of her feelings of both attraction and repulsion and loses control over herself and runs like a scared child to Deepak’s flat in order to avoid going to her home (“Anywhere but home!”, *Thirty Days...*, 47). Interestingly, the first urgent appeal “Can I stay with you” (*Thirty Days...*, 45) is immediately followed by “let’s call it off” (*Thirty Days...*, 46). Deepak could guess the great emotional turmoil she was going through, though unaware of the exact reason, and patiently repeats his sincere attempt: “Help me connect with you” (*Thirty Days...*, 46). He appeals to give both of them a “chance”, the “only chance” Shanta could think of for saving Mala in her homestead at the same time.

We witness a rare piece of mastery in stage craft as Dattani plays two scenes simultaneously, as directed by him, ‘light will not be raised’ (*Thirty Days...*, 44), placing Deepak’s loving and caring partnership against the patriarchal construct of the first scene, the two faces of the same man is simultaneously visible through Vinoy’s interaction with his sister in present and his conduct to child Mala in past – protector and provider and cruel abuser. During the first half of Deepak’s conversation with Mala when the latter consciously seeks Deepak’s company to get out of her trauma, we find uncle Vinoy playing the dutiful brother to Shanta. He assures her of performing his duty as an uncle even “after everything” because Mala is after all like his own daughter, tries to lessen Shanta’s stress by reminiscing their childhood days when Shanta used to get lost in her own world, takes care of small matters like hanging the picture on the wall and so on. On the other side of the scene, Deepak is trying to make Mala believe in herself and him. Almost in a trance, Mala visualizes a “man” following her whom she herself attracted and provoked (“I am doing something that attracts them to me”, *Thirty Days...*, 47), and openly admits that she wants him come near her. Deepak tries hard to break this illusion and extends his hand instead. After urging her several times she holds his hand, but with an assurance of loving her on his part, Mala relapses into the memory of some traumatic remote past and every gesture of present Deepak brings some correspondent though contrasting experience with the “man”. Getting out of her present identity, she relives the life of the small girl of seven gifted with the “real birth day present” by her uncle. Against the backdrop of the adult Mala being offered the genuine love and confidence in her lovability, the small girl is given the false assurance of love and an effective sense of being repulsive otherwise. The cry of relief of adult Mala is hushed up by the memory of

the threat to the crying child that if anybody hears it or knows they will say she is a “bad girl” (*Thirty Days...*, 51). The fact of being “ugly” deepens and the dependence on the only person who loves her in spite of the fact increases and the child learns to offer anything in exchange of approval, of being loved. The adult Mala shudders at being left alone and screams “I won’t tell anyone. But don’t leave me alone!” (*Thirty Days...*, 53). She immediately gets ready to offer sex to prevent desertion and lies down and pulls her dress up to her head revealing and pathetically offering her body in the same manner the “man” used to hold the frock of the seven-year old child up her head and order her to remember her school, sing the song “thirty days in September,” not to tell anybody and not to cry. His hunger satisfied, he clothes the child along with the warning not to tell anyone as well as convinces her that she actually enjoyed it – interpreting the pain as pleasure by a fine linguistic strategy: “You like it! You enjoy it. After four years, you have become a whore!” (*Thirty Days...*, 52). The adult child proves luckier having someone clothing her body with care and respect not because she is unattractive, but honouring her for being beautiful, honest and extremely talented.

Deepak also takes the initiative to make Mala face the truth which is perhaps the most effective means to fight her self-inflicted torture. He directly accuses her uncle of having a considerable share in Mala’s malady and gives sufficient clue at the event of abuse. But Mala startles at the potential of the hint and tries to evade along with her mother and really gets horrified when it becomes rather clear though her uncle continues careless. Unable to check Deepak, two women take recourse to the blatant lie and at Mala’s insistence Shanta breaks her silence and gives clean chit to the abuser.

The immediate revelation is stopped, but it creates sufficient anxiety at least in Mala and Shanta as not to keep their lips tightly closed and stay composed any longer. It is shown in the hurry Mala shows to arrange a cab for Deepak to return in the rain. However, the victim over-acts the role and the constructed nature gets exposed. Uncle Vinoy prepares a dramatic suspense to present his master stroke. While kept waiting, Mala slips the comment unaware: “What do you think he wants now?” (*Thirty Days...*, 62). Deepak loses no time to point out the implication of the word “now” as opposed to “then”. Mala gets angry and sharply declares her decision not to visit her councilor farther. But the counseling started to have its effect imperceptibly and changed Mala from a silent submissive victim to a protester though not yet completely liberated from the entrapment. Uncle Vinoy offers the title deed of the flat as a present to Shanta in order to perform his “responsibility”, better to “showing my deep and sincere affection to you, my sister” (*Thirty Days...*, 62-3) and to acknowledge the “fond memories” (*Thirty days...*, 62) of the childhood days spent with his sister in their ancestral home. Shanta is moved, puzzled Mala mildly reacts and offers to pay the rent to which uncle Vinoy states the obvious fact of her soon leaving the house after getting married to Deepak. It acts as a detonator and the combustion could not be stopped any longer. Mala sees her deep-seated fear of being left alone getting realized. Almost hysterically she refuses to be thrown out: “You are throwing me out!” (*Thirty Days...*, 63). When Vinoy, in a most uncle-like affection, tries to console her by reminding her of becoming a “woman”, Mala finds her grip on the person losing away whose love she assured by offering her body -- “no good to you” (*Thirty Days...*, 64). He tries to lighten the fact by making it a fit of her “wild imagination”, but Deepak comes forward and encourages Mala to speak out. However,

her expectation of being protected by her mother gets frustrated again and she accuses her of letting this happen to serve her own interest: “He didn’t just buy a flat. He bought you!” (*Thirty Days...*, 64). The lava of burning memory comes out from the caldron of her secret despair and she recounts unabashed the “Fifteen minutes multiplied by thirty or thirty one” (*Thirty Days...*, 64) minutes of her childhood when the uncle used to close the door of their bedroom or find some secret places to damn her soul to banish it to “the hell for the rest of my life!” (*Thirty Days...*, 65). She accuses Shanta for creating the hell for her by her silence – not by her ignorance or indifference – because she knew full well what her child is undergoing.

The eruption over, the deep-delved frozen silence of Shanta was yet to be broken. Deepak now asks Mala to go with him to their “own home”, but the unexpected blow comes in form of Mala’s refusal -- “It can never be over. It won’t work between us” (*Thirty Days...*, 65). She now pleads with Deepak to leave her for his own sake to the “hell” she belongs to, because she is still haunted by the “man” and his memory never allows her to think of anybody else: “I can never be free of him. I am not so sure I want to be free of him. Even if I were, I am not sure whether I have the ability to love anyone... else” (*Thirty Days...*, 66) Aghast by the revelation, the uncle screams “I don’t want you. Think of your future” (*Thirty Days...*, 66), for the first time revealing his true face. Pathetically Shanta pleads to Deepak to take her with him “from this hell. There is no love for her in this house” (*Thirty Days...*, 66). With no option left to save Mala even this time, she breaks her silence. The words come out defying the warning for the first time which kept her mum in all manner for so many years; they come out disjointedly through broken half-formed syntaxes mixing “didn’t” and “couldn’t” replacing agency

with the instrumentation, subject with object -- all varying modes of speeches centering round the constant, unfathomable pain. She speaks directly to Mala as she admits that she did not save her because she could not, she could not help Mala as she could not save herself, and in her turn, Mala also could not help her mother. Shanta's mute existence gets eloquent: "No, Nobody saw anything. Nobody said anything. Not my brothers, not my parents. Only ... he spoke. Only he said, only he saw and he did" (*Thirty Days...*, 67). Shanta was robbed of her power to act or speak, she was got decamped even of the power of feeling – "I didn't feel pain, I didn't feel pleasure, I lost myself in Him" (*Thirty Days...*, 67). A terrible history of maiming the humanity of Shanta finds ventilation in the tortured expression: "I was six, Maala, I was six. And he was thirteen... and it wasn't only summer holidays. For ten years!" (*Thirty Days...*, 67).

"I remained silent not because I wanted to, but I didn't know how to speak" (*Thirty Days...*, 67), at last Shanta manages to articulate. She could not tell any one, could not shout, and could not even expect a word of comfort except from her Krishna who alone helped her by divesting her of any feeling. The dumb suffering she underwent is piercingly dramatized by making the "man" makes unintelligible sounds like "Uh, eh, oo, oo, aa, aa, aa..." (*Thirty Days...*, 68). As if unable to bear the unbearable pain, Shanta takes recourse to a grosser physical pain and jabs the sharp piece of glass in her mouth.

Mala screams out of her trauma witnessing the scene of suffering perhaps greater than her own. She rushes to her mother, presses the towel to her bleeding mouth, appeals to keep silent, holds her tight and warns their common enemy in clear terms "Don't you dare touch my mother!" (*Thirty Days...*, 69).

At the end of the play, we return to the first scene. Mala's session is over, she remembers her uncle but now with a radically different emotion. She only wishes him to be here not to seek protection but to tell him "...I have nothing to hide. Because I know it wasn't my fault" (*Thirty Days...*, 69). This is a sharp contrast to her desperate promise not to tell anybody so that this man does not leave her. Even after recognizing her abuser, she could not free herself from him and was spending life like a possessed. At last she is able to write off his influence, snap the bondage of the memory: "He is dead. Today, twenty-ninth February is my freedom day" (*Thirty Days...*, 68). Mala feels her bonding with Deepak with whole of her existence; she claims back her sense and soul that were the bonded labor to the dead "man" for so long. Mala proposes to celebrate her freedom with her fiancé waiting in a restaurant for the champagne dinner.

Interestingly, Mala for the first time faces the doll, because now she can face it from an objective distance, freed from its earlier status as an extension of her present identity. She detects what happened to her to be a real evil and almost visualizes it through a physical projection of a psychic process. The doll is an objectification of the grown body which is a psychological extension of the static childhood. Here we have a reenactment of the previous scene of exploitation and a recital of the nursery rime "thirty days has September. April, June and November. / February has twenty eight. All the rest have thirty one!" (*Thirty Days...*, 71). Dattani chooses the date twenty-ninth February to be the day of liberty. As Walling observed, "the trauma associated with past need continually to be revisited and reinvented to allow us to reinvent and so empower ourselves in the present" (Quoted in Kumar, "Child Sexual Abuse..." , 80).

However, most striking is the final union of mother and daughter, Shanta cannot talk physically and she is absorbed in her puja, but a beatific sense of peace and calm surrounds her. Mala moves forward. She is ready to listen to her mother and craves for a sign from her that she had forgiven her and finds the comfort that she already has. Shanta does not speak, but Mala understands. Mala learns to live with the glimpses of her nightmare along with life.

And thus, with the diminished stature of the “man”, the home turns from the claustrophobic cell into a private place of peace and freedom where human relationship can thrive.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus with rare intensity, Dattani handles “a story that is perhaps just beginning to be told” (“Foreword”, XVII), “undoing the layers of secrecy and denial with which incest is so tightly wrapped” (“Foreword”, XVIII). The play superbly survives the test – as put down by Anuja Gupta and Aswini Ilawadi: -- “We had a challenge to touch the issue without being offensive, disturb the viewers without being insensitive and offer some resolution without being simplistic (“Foreword”, XIV). The final message which RAHI aims at getting across through this project comes clear, while the playwright succeeds in making an aesthetic product a social statement: “she is not alone, she is not to blame and the road to recovery may be long but it starts with a single step” (“Foreword”, XVII).

## 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 complacence 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.

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