

**MYRIAD MODES OF SUBALTERNITY: A STUDY OF SELECT  
PLAYS OF MAHESH DATTANI**

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award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in English

By

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14<sup>th</sup> December 2017

### **SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Myriad Modes of Subalternity: A Study of Select Plays of Mahesh Dattani** is a bonafide record of research work done by Ms Bambino Swu, Regn No. 3/2016, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2015 - 17. Submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English, this dissertation has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or other title and the thesis represents independent and original work on the part of the candidate under my supervision.

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## CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I, **Bambino Swu**, hereby, declare that the dissertation entitled **Myriad Modes of Subalternity: A Study of Select Plays of Mahesh Dattani** is a bonafide record of research work done by me, under the guidance and supervision of **Dr Lemtila Alinger**, Associate professor, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema, during the period of my research (2015-2017), and it has not been submitted, either in full or in part, to any other university or institution for the award of any degree, diploma, or title.

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## Chapter –I

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION: MAHESH DATTANI- THE DRAMATIST

Mahesh Dattani who prefers to be called a dramatist rather than a playwright was born in Bangalore on 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1958. He studied in Baldwin’s High School and St. Joseph’s College of Arts and Science, Bangalore, Karnataka. The dramatist who wanted to be an actor was exposed to theatre when he was twelve. Eventually, he took to directing rather than acting. In a seminar held on 9<sup>th</sup> February, 2013 at St. Mira’s College for Girls, Pune, Dattani said that he became a playwright so that he could translate Hindi theatre (play) to English with satisfaction but was not satisfied with one of the Hindi plays which was translated to English. In 1986, Dattani wrote his first play, *Where There’s a Will*. As a dramatist, he says that he loves writing more than acting and organizes workshops for actors and directors. His theatre group ‘Playpen’ was formed in 1984 and he has directed several plays for them. Dattani has also worked as a copywriter and helped his father in the family business. He is a multi- faceted personality who appeared on the horizon in the 1980s and revolutionized the Indian English Drama and theatre. Dattani being more interested in theatre than in the text lays emphasis on production of the play. “I write for my plays to be performed and appreciated by as wide a section of the society that my plays speak to and are about” (Dattani xi) says Dattani in his ‘Preface’ which he achieves in doing so as Sita Raina, the director of *Where There’s a Will* says, “to be the watcher of one’s self is to make intelligent changes in this life” (Ibid 451). As one watches Dattani’s plays, there is much satisfaction for in his plays “are a true reflection of my time, place and socio-economic background” (Ibid xv) not only limited to the Indians but worldwide for he takes bold moves by creating a work of art of “a country that has a myriad challenges to face politically, socially,

artistically and culturally” (Ibid xv). He has great potential in “carrying on with the business of holding a mirror up to society” (Ibid xv) especially of the issues which are often less talked about. His impressive techniques can be seen in his split- stage technique, flashback technique, thought technique and the appearance of the ghost of Hasmukh in *Where There’s a Will* speaking directly to the audience.

The multi-talented dramatist, a director, actor, dancer, teacher and writer has been described by Alexander Viets as “one of India’s best and most serious contemporary playwrights writing in English”. Mahesh Dattani is also the first playwright in India to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi. Mahesh Dattani in his plays does not use high bombastic English but his characters speak English like that of any middle-class Indian. He is one of the first Indian Drama in English (IDE) playwrights to successfully negotiate with his Bangalore audience in the late 1980s and 90s, and subsequently with national and international audiences. He brings about the social issues in Indian society which has a universal appeal and not just limited to the audience in India. Dattani appeals his audience by juggling his themes where one fits himself into. The critics, to Dattani, are a mirror image of himself judging of his weaknesses towards his own plays which he could have done better. Critics’ comments do not waver his passion to write instead boosts his confidence to do much better on his next work of art.

Bijay Kumar Das says that the earlier plays written in English in our country “have not taken roots in our soil due to the lack of production and performance” (Das 3). Drama has always been considered as a poor genre in the house of Indian English Literature. Indian English Drama has never had had a high place in Indian Literature like that of poetry and fiction. Indian English Drama seems to have been neglected and unexplored because of its place in English. But with Mahesh Dattani, tables are turned against the notion of Indian English Drama as being a lower

form of Indian literature. Dattani brings to limelight his uncanny and quite disturbing habit of talking about issues in contemporary Indian society, which people tend to be silent about. Dattani presents us with the glimpses of reality of social issues that lingers in India. He fascinates his audience by playing with his themes which are realistically presented. Dattani says that one should not have a static view and his preferences for multiple perspectives are, indeed, clearly depicted in his works.

## **1.2. THE SUBALTERN PERSPECTIVE**

Subaltern refers to the population who are socially, politically and geographically considered low. According to Italian Marxist and Communist, Antonio Gramsci, subaltern refers to any person or group of inferior rank and station whether because of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion. Subaltern refers to the subordination in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language and culture and first came to be used in the writings of Antonio Gramsci. The subaltern studies began in the beginning of 1980s which aimed at the study and discussion of the subaltern themes in South Asian Studies. It gained momentum as a corollary to globalization in the Third World countries. “Subaltern drives its force from Marxism, poststructuralism and becomes a part of the postcolonial criticism” (Vallath127).

Subaltern Studies emerged as a series of journal articles by a group of Indian scholars to reclaim their history and retake history for the underclasses, for the voice that had not been heard previously. These subalternists claim to have unfolded the incapacity of nationalist and elitist historiography to incorporate the voices of the weak into the project of history re-writing. Subordination in its various forms has always been the central focus of the subaltern studies. It

also makes an effort to see and rethink history from the perspective of the Subalterns. Subaltern history became equally important in understanding the need to document the lives of the oppressed people, like peasants and workers, tribals and lower caste women and dalits, whose voices were seldom heard before in history. Thus subaltern history will help to lay bare preciously covered histories, ignored events, hidden secrets of the past. Subaltern studies is in fact a critical history from the beginning. Subaltern studies came about with the ignorance of the Marxist school of thought that ignored the ideology of caste and religion as a factor in Indian history. Therefore, subaltern historiography tried to establish the voice and contribution of marginalized sections of Indian society. Gayatri Spivak is one among the famous scholars of subaltern studies whose essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" gained prominence and currency which was a commentary on the work of the Subaltern Studies Group, questioning and exposing their patronizing attitude. Her critical discourse raises the issues of marginal subjects such as the place of the subaltern women in the society and their empowerment. The essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" discusses the problem of widow sacrifice in great detail and Spivak reiterates her standpoint that the subaltern cannot speak and within it the condition of the woman is even more complicated. Though women obeyed the whims and fancies of their men, they had a voice within themselves, a voice of dissent and disapproval. All women who became victims of patriarchal violence and atrocities had something to say or they wanted to make their position clear whether they were for or against a proposition. The historian failed to record the voice of dissent and especially that of the subaltern women. "It is impossible to recover the voice of the subaltern, hinting at the unimaginable extent of colonial repression and its historical intersection with patriarchy- which she illustrates with particular reference to colonial debates on widow immolation in India" (Vallath 128).

Kalyani Vallath writes about the Subaltern as “a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern class may include peasants, workers and other groups denied access to hegemonic power” (Ibid 127). Mahesh Dattani as a dramatist holds up the mirror to society portraying a “true reflection” of Indian society, revealing issues of “a country that has a myriad challenges to face politically, socially, artistically and culturally” (Dattani xv). Dattani deals with the issues of the subalterns; he brings out the suffocation and the exclusion the subalterns have to go through in a society like India.

### **1.3. THEORIES ON SEXUALITIES**

Queer is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities that are not heterosexual. Queer, originally meaning ‘strange’, ‘peculiar’, ‘strange’, ‘odd’, ‘eccentric’, came to be deployed pejoratively against those with same sex desires or relationships in the late nineteenth century. Queer may also refer to a person with mild derangement or who exhibits socially inappropriate behavior. Queer theory is a field of post-structuralist critical theory that emerged in the early 1990s out of the fields of queer studies and women’s studies. Queer theory is a theory that takes into accounts all of the marginalized sexual identities that exist and gives permission for them to be acknowledged as a legitimate alternative to traditional sexual identities. Queer theory rejects the idea of sexuality as a stable concept and of heterosexuality as a norm. Judith Butler, a leading theorist in the fields of feminism and queer theory is of the view that gender is constructed by society and that female or male identity is constructed by society rather than inherent to an individual. She is of the view that people perform their womanness or manness through behavior,

modes of dressing, activities, etc. Nikki Sullivan also suggests that sexuality is not natural, but rather, is discursively constructed and that sexuality is constructed, experienced and understood in culturally and historically specific ways. Heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality, according to her, which are categories for defining particular kinds of relationships and practices are culturally and historically specific and have not operated in all cultures at all times. Queer theory is not simply the study of non heterosexuals' modes of being but also poses questions to a literary text about what the work reveals about sexuality and often the more marginalized modes of sexuality in a given social or literary context. It explores how questions of sexuality inform the literary work and how these questions can help us think more deeply about society.

Beginning in the late 1980s, queer scholars and activists began to reclaim the word to establish community and assert a politicized identity distinct from the gay political identity. "During the 1980s critical theorists became increasingly fascinated with the notion of ambiguity and, in particular, with bodies, genders, sexualities, and practices which appeared to defy traditional forms of categorization" (Sullivan 99). The term 'gender' as one understands, is actually more complex than what most people think. To understand the term 'gender' is also equally important to understand the term 'sex'. Sex refers to the biological male or female or intersex category defined by our internal and external reproductive organs and chromosomes. Gender, on the other, refers to socially created roles, feelings and behaviors deemed appropriate for men and women by society. Judith Butler says that when we're born, we are typically placed into one of two distinct categories: male or female and that these categories define how we behave. Queer identities may be adopted by those who reject traditional gender identities and seek a broader, less conformist, and deliberately ambiguous alternative to the label LGBT. Nikki Sullivan writes about queer theory,

While Queer Theory may now be recognized as an academic discipline, it nevertheless continues to struggle against the straitjacketing effects of institutionalization, to resist closure and remain in the process of ambiguous (un)becoming. Queer Theory does not want to ‘straighten up and fly right’ to have the kinks ironed out of it: it is a discipline that refuses to be disciplined, a discipline with a difference, with a twist if you like. (Ibid v)

Queers of various sorts have existed throughout history and that there has always been some form of sexual activity between men and between women, though how that activity manifested itself and the ways in which it was socially castigated or tolerated have varied greatly. Queer continues to be problematic concept. “One of the most useful insights of late twentieth-century critical theory and reconceptualizations of historiography is that “history” is always an artificial construct, one that depends upon numerous acts of interpretation, exclusion, and information shaping that reflect inevitably and indelibly the beliefs and biases of the historian and critic... queers have lived often in ignorance of each other and of queer-relevant historical information from the near, as well as distant, past” (Hall 21).

“It was not until the late 1960s- and most memorably in 1969 with the famous Stonewall riots at a New York gay bar- that “Gay liberation” became an open public issue” (Panja 119). “Gay represents a modern stance concerning a well-formulated, highly politicized sexual identity. Some have argued that it is most appropriate to see “gay” as a late twentieth-century identity label; others have traced its usage back to the last decades of the nineteenth century” (Hall 23).

Homosexuality is mostly a taboo subject in Indian civil society and for the government. Homophobia is prevalent in India. Public discussion of homosexuality in India has been inhibited by the fact that sexuality in any form is rarely discussed in openly. In recent years, however, attitudes towards homosexuality have shifted slightly- there have been more depictions and discussions of homosexuality. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code makes sex with persons of same gender punishable by law but on February the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, the Supreme Court agreed to reconsider its judgment, stating it would refer petitions to abolish section 377 to a five-member constitutional bench, which would conduct a comprehensive hearing of the issue.

Anupama Mohan says that

We live in cultures where the imagination is willy-nilly “homophobic”. The homophobic imagination deems any non-procreative form of sex in general as aberrant, deviant, and unnatural. Defined as a fear of homosexuality, homophobia is the condition in which a person or a group of persons predicating themselves on heterocentric assumptions marginalize gays and lesbians as freaks and deviants, and practice active/passive discrimination. Homosexuality in a majority of countries across the world (including India) is still synonymous in legal parlance with sodomy (regardless of consent among adults) and is a crime punishable under law. Widespread and vociferous religious condemnation of homosexuality is also a strong factor that has reinforced it in the popular mind as abnormal and aberrant. (Panja 120-121).

## 1.4. THEORIES ON FEMINISM

Charles Fourier, a Utopian socialist coined the term feminism which has its origin from the French word “feminisme” and was first used in English in the 1890s in association with the movement for political and legal rights for women. Feminism comprises a number of movements- social, cultural and political, theories and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women. Feminism as one understands is a theory that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially. Some tend to misunderstand the concept of feminism as feminists trying to outshine men by trying to gain the higher power but this should not be mistaken; feminism is a concept where women try to bring out their strength; to have the equal rights and freedom like that of men. As a social movement, feminism largely focuses on limiting or eradicating gender inequality and promoting women’s rights, interests and issues in society. “Feminism asks for a change of perspectives, it asks for an opening out of concepts and values to a variety of viewpoints and attacks all hegemonic and monolithic values, viewpoints and structures” (Jain, Singh 10). Gloria Steinem, a feminist, writes that, while she supports the right of individuals to identify as they choose, in many cases, transgender people surgically mutilate their own bodies in order to conform to a gender role that is inexorably tied to physical body parts. She expressed disapproval over transgender but apologized in an interview in 2013 for her views against transgender and stated that transgender people are living real, authentic lives and that those lives should be celebrated and not questioned. According to Marcie Bianco, feminism is about the celebration of diversity and the advocacy of the legal equality for all people; feminism does not believe difference equals discrimination. Archana Kumar in her essay “Identity and its Representation in Western and Postcolonial Feminism” states her views on feminism as,

Feminism as a term emerged long after women started questioning their inferior position and demanding amelioration in their social position. The term was coined quite early but it came to be identified with those campaigning for women rights much later. It is not easy to define feminism in terms of a set of more concepts; it can be best understood in terms of its historical origin and development and its assimilation of insights from various theoretical formulations. Feminism may be broadly defined as a political perception based on two fundamental premises:

- (a) Gender difference is the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men by which women suffer social injustice;
- (b) That the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by the cultured construction of gender differences. (Kumar 27)

Feminist criticism opposes patriarchy and all the male-centered and male-dominated critical theories so as to reject reigning patriarchal ideology as superior. It believes that concepts of gender are cultural constructs; they are not a product of nature as quoted by Simone de Beauvoir, “one is not born a woman, but becomes one” (Waugh 23). Feminism has been divided into three waves: the first wave in the nineteenth and early twentieth century which primarily focused on gaining legal rights, political power and suffrage for women; the second wave in the 1960s and 1970s encouraged women to understand aspects of their own personal lives and also to end their discrimination in society in education and in the work place; the third wave arose in the early 1990s as a response to perceived failures of the second wave and a response to the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the second wave feminists. The third wave feminism is also a continuation of the second wave.

In the 1960s and 1970s, feminism was largely concerned with problems found by western white middle class women who also claimed to represent all women. Women of colour expressed their distrust of the white feminist focus on gender, claiming that politically and socially they had as much, if not more, in common with the struggles of men of colour than with white women. With time, feminist activists emerged from diverse communities. Feminism, now, is not confined to a particular nation or continent but is a global phenomenon. With the rise of feminism all over, a new kind of Indian feminists emerged. Feminism in Indian literature is a by-product of the western feminism but though all nationalities share the basic paradigm of feminism, Indian feminists have been conscious of their own identities independent in their own respective ways. Like their feminist counterparts all over the world, feminists in India seek gender equality: the right to equal access to health and education, and equal political rights. The history of feminism in India can be divided into three phases: beginning in the mid-eighteenth century is the first phase when male European colonists began to speak out against the social evils of sati; the second phase, 1915 to Indian Independence when Gandhi incorporated women's movements into the Quit India movement and independent women's organizations began to emerge; third phase, post-independence, which focused on fair treatment of women at home after marriage, in the work force and right to political parity. Contemporary Indian feminists are fighting for individual autonomy, political rights, social freedom, economic independence, end to domestic violence, gender stereotypes, discrimination, sexism, etc. The Indian feminists have a strong desire to fight against injustice and oppression suffered by women in India. India is an emerging economic power with modern institutions and legal systems deeply rooted religious traditions. Contemporary Indian women are caught in the flux of tradition and modernity. They are burdened with the practices of the past. The "Vedic war-tribes also practiced Sati and female

infanticide in order to destroy the excess number of females considered worthless for the Aryan war-machines... Women are consistently demonised and compared to animals in the ‘sacred’ Vedas”. (Tomar 71) The role of woman in Indian society has been regulated and determined by age old conventions. Reshu Shukla in her essay “The Journey of ‘Woman’ from Pre-Independence to Post-Modern Indian- English Drama” writes about the Indian woman,

The concept of Indian womanhood is based upon the mythic models from the Ramayana and the Purana. The whole image of the Indian woman has been personified by the character sketches of Sita and Savitri. Following the pattern of these ethical models, a woman can be justified as the earth mother, a silent sufferer and forbearance personified. In Indian society women are supposed to decorate their personality with the echoing features of these ethical symbols, and they seem to be incarnating the virtues of devotion and dedication as the essential features of their personality. They patiently play the role of earth mother and of the protector. The primordial myths of womanhood established by these legends have carried out an unshakable implication of woman’s image in life and literature for centuries. However, going back to the Vedic age, we see that women enjoy the extraordinary position and honour. In Vedic age women were elevated to the height of Goddess, and it has been an accepted perception that a high idea of womanhood prevailed in Vedic India. Despite the fact, the social law has always maintained a double standard for man and woman from the Vedic age to the electronic age. Therefore, we find a severe contradiction regarding the position of the woman in the society. There is one section in which the presence of women seems to be the unique source of bliss, while in another woman are

despised and condemned to lower status in the society. From the glorified past to the diplomatic present, the position of women mostly belongs to the second category of the society. Moreover, most of the legendary symbols designing the canvas of Indian womanhood, paint the whole picture with one highlighting colour which determined the complete surrender of females to male-dominated society. The mute acceptance of the norms made but the men is considered the most appreciative quality of a woman, who is expected to represent Sita and Savitri in her every step moving ahead towards life. Under the impression of these legendary symbols, woman has no right to establish her individuality, rather her existence finds its shelter under the shadow of her male's personality. (Shukla 218-219)

“The image and individuality of Indian Womanhood are embedded and clearly laid down at the bottom of traditional beliefs, and mythology. This is the basis of the status of women in India” (Kunjakkan 3). Neelima Yadav writes about tradition in contemporary India:

Tradition has become a prized commodity once again in India, and women are seen as its carriers and men as its defenders- both rigid conceptions. Whether liberalism will liberate woman and men, or indeed trap them even further, remains to be seen. Women seem more visible in all sectors of the economy and society than ever before, but appearances hide wide variations along caste, region and religious lines. (Yadav 4)

The present condition and status of women in India has its roots from ancient practices as discussed by Dr Priyanka Tomar,

In the Vedic age the women were declared to be innately unfit for independence. Manu said, 'father protects her in childhood, husband protects her in youth, sons protect her in old age, a woman is never fit for independence'. In Hindu Dharma Shastras the women were treated as slaves like inferiors. For centuries, they have been subject to torture, ill treatment and all sorts of condemnation. They were compared with Shudras. (Tomar v)

The code of Manu was so strictly observed that the role of women was confined to the family, and they were denied the rights equal to men. The law of Manu stipulates that:-

1. No woman deserve freedom.
2. No woman, whether she is a young girl, young woman or an aged one; she must not do anything independently even inside her own house.
3. In childhood a female must be protected by her father, in youth by her husband, and in old age by her sons and a woman should never be independent.
4. A faithful wife should constantly worship her husband as God even if he is a destitute, devoid of qualities or seeking pleasure elsewhere.
5. By violating her duties towards her husband, a wife is disgraced in this world and after death in other world she will enter the womb of jackal and tormented by diseases as a punished for sins.
6. She who controls her thoughts, words and deeds, never slights her lord, resides (after death) with her husband (in heaven) is called a virtuous (wife)

Indian men expect so much from their women that they become blind to their need for freedom. They are instead expected to be home bound and be a good woman and a wife to the men. Dr Priyanka writes about the Hindu women,

The Hindu woman must constantly worship her husband as a deity. The philandering homosexual, incestuous and bestial Hindu male is for her a god, no matter how much he fornicates with other women, rapes her or mistreats her. Even if he treats her like an animal, insults her in public, forcibly sodomises her... he is still a 'God'. (Ibid 82)

Women in ancient India were kept subordinate to men. "In modern times the degradation of women's status is related to the rise in Hindu Fundamentalism. The extremist organizations that comprise the Sangh Parivar are reviving the practice of Sati, dowry, female infanticide etc. in various parts of India. Thus, in modern times the status of women has declined sharply due to the activities of Hindu Fundamentalist organizations" (Ibid 78-79). The Sangh Parivar continues to invoke citations like- A woman is protected by her father in her childhood, by her husband in her youth and by her son in her old age. A woman does not deserve to be independent- as propounded in the Manusmriti to restrict women's social space, limit their choices.

Religion is an important part of Indian society and has recently become an increasing part of Indian politics. Women are particularly affected by religion. Seen as the bearers of religious tradition, there are often restrictions on their public and private roles in the name of religion... biases within religions towards men are some examples of how religion can affect women's development. (Yadav 2)

India remains a telling example of the trend of discrimination, subordination and marginalization of women. “The institutions, structures as well as the very cultural milieu continue to be pervaded by a patriarchal ethos which reinforces the discrimination” (Kaur, Sultana 11). Manu’s concept that woman must always be under the control of a male continues to be practiced today wherein “discriminatory attitudes towards woman and girls as well as negative stereotyping of girls and boys, the heavy burden of domestic responsibilities on girls, inadequate nutrition and access to health services have contributed to lack of opportunities and possibilities for girls to become confident, self-reliant and independent adults” (Ibid 22). Discrimination against women may be traced to a culture which disregards and belittles women reflecting patriarchal ethos wherein son preference is encouraged and valorized, and women and girls are degraded, objectified and commoditized. “Women are also thought of as having a corrupt influence on men. Woman is one of the important impediments preventing a man’s smooth spiritual journey. The impediment does not rise because of anything a woman does directly, her sheer presence has a corrupting influence on man’s spiritual nature. Sex is something that veers a man away from his path toward spiritual enlightenment; woman is the personification of sex and therefore a temptation to man” says Kunjakkan about his views on women. The title *the second sex* sums up De Beauvoir’s argument that society sets up the male as a positive norm and ‘woman’ as the negative, second sex, or ‘other’. *The Second Sex* works through biological, Marxist, and psychoanalysts theories to show how all aspects of social life and thinking are dominated by this assumption of woman as ‘Other’ which, De Beauvoir claims that society sets up oppositions such as culture/nature; production/reproduction all of which combine to place woman in an inferior position. Feminism springs from the fountainhead of the human desire to be treated

fairly and judged equally. It relates to accessibility to equal opportunities, equal responsibilities, and equal treatment to men and women.

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## Chapter –II

### “I WOULD NEVER BE HAPPY AS A GAY MAN”- THE ISSUE OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN *ON A MUGGY NIGHT IN MUMBAI*

#### Homosexuals as a Socially Ostracized Group

“Gender relationship based on sexuality causes social exclusion becomes a prime concern for him in some of his plays”, says Bijay Kumar Das (Das 83). Social exclusions on the basis of gender is what is most observed in the plays of Dattani- *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Do the Needful*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Tara* are some of the plays. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Dattani portrays the pathetic condition of the Hijras in Indian society. It can be seen

as a protest play against the injustice meted out to the downtrodden in a society. Dattani is questioning the age old belief of marriage being based on heterosexual relationships. He seems to say that homosexual and lesbian relationships being as natural as heterosexual relationships, same- sex marriage should be permitted in India. (Ibid 85)

The play is an unusual love story which is unacceptable in Indian society as it involves the secret marriage of a eunuch with the son of an MLA leading to a fatal death of the eunuch, committed by none other than the groom’s father. Subbu’s father, an MLA, can be categorized in this group who with furious rage orders the death of Kamla, the beautiful eunuch bride. In this play, the marriage of Subbu and the eunuch is considered to be even more punishable a crime than a murder. The murder of Kamla is not thoroughly investigated as it ought to be only because

of her gender as a eunuch. It is through Uma, a Ph.D scholar in sociology, the truth about the murderer is revealed to the audience. The eunuchs in *Seven Steps Around the Fire* are given no identity and are often regarded as 'it' instead of 'she'. They live in their own community and not with the other groups of society because society rejects who they have become, who in reality have become who they truly are. They are seen as different groups of people though they maybe Indians. The selfish and hypocrite motive of Indian society can be seen when blessing are sought from the eunuchs or hijras on wedding or birth ceremonies but are discriminated or exploited on any other usual days. When Indian women suffer cruelty and dejection, the hijras' lives are worst. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, "Uma, daughter of the Vice Chancellor of Bangalore University, is married to Chief Superintendent Suresh Rao" (Dattani 3), a postgraduate student of sociology, working a case on eunuchs, gives a brief note on the popular myths on the origin of the hijras,

The term hijra, of course, is of Urdu origin, a combination of Hindi, Persian and Arabic, literally meaning 'neither male nor female'. Another legend traces their ancestry to the Ramayana. The legend has it that god Rama was going to cross the river and go into exile in the forest... He said, 'Men and women turn back.' Some of his male followers did not know what to do. They could not disobey him. So they sacrificed their masculinity, to become neither men nor women and followed him to the forest. Rama was pleased with their devotion and blessed them. There are transsexuals all over the world, and India is no exception. The purpose of this case study is to show their position in society. Perceived as the lowest of the low, they yearn for family and love. The two events in mainstream Hindu culture

where their presence is acceptable- marriage and birth- ironically are the very same privileges denied to them by men and nature. (Dattani 10-11)

Dattani's *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* deals with gays. Characters like Kamlesh, Sharad, Deepali, Ranjit, Ed and Bunny are all gay personalities. Gay themes may seem unusual in the Indian context but Dattani through this play brings reality out on stage. Homosexuals are very much present in India but do not really reveal their true identity because of the fear of rejection and society's intolerance over homosexuality. The degree of repression in society is reflected by how homosexuals in India hide their true self and pretend to be straight by marrying so as to be accepted by the millions as in the case of Bunny. One's true identity becomes a secret as Ranjit says, "well, this is the price one pays for living in India." (Ibid 70)

In Indian society, the practice of homosexuals or lesbianism is not tolerated. It is a criminal offence under section 377 of the Indian penal code- carnal acts against the order of nature. As per the law, whosoever 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 or liable to fine. Chatterjee Subhrajit writes about LGBT,

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are more likely to experience intolerance, discrimination, harassment, and the threat of violence due to their sexual orientation, than those that identify themselves as heterosexual. This is due to homophobia (the fear or hatred of homosexuality). Some of the factors that may reinforce homophobia on a larger scale are moral, religious, and political beliefs of a dominant group. (Subhrajit 317)

Vatsyayana, author of *Kamasutra*, devotes an entire chapter in his treatise to the art of homosexual love. He could have not done this if Hinduism prohibited homosexuality. Religious values prohibit homosexuality and therefore people who are committed to religion tend to be homophobic. “LGBT people face tremendous difficulties growing up in a society where heterosexuality is often presented as the only acceptable orientation and homosexuality is regarded as deviant. They continue to face discrimination and exclusion across the world in all spheres of their life” (Subhrajit 318). Joji Johnpanicker writes that sexual minorities are epistemologically constructed as the other to the dominant heterosexuality; that is, the construction of both heterosexuality and homosexuality is contingent upon a binary relationship that upholds heterosexuality as the only way of knowing the world. The strong taboo against any form of sexuality which is outside the limits of heterosexuality prevents writers from addressing such issues. Daring steps were taken by the Indian English writers to bring out the latent realities in the Indian society and presents sexual behaviours that breach the heteronormative social or symbolic boundaries.

### **Plight of the Homosexuals in the Play**

Dattani is amongst the group of writers who turned to literature as a source of substantiating same sex attraction that is very much existent in Indian society. The play mirrors the psychological stresses and alienation suffered by the gay community as they confront such challenges as prejudice, denial, suicide, persecution and other such obstacles. Dattani through this play seeks to make the issues of homosexuality visible in mainstream society. Mahesh Dattani in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* portrays the life of gays and lesbians and how they struggle and cope to live a life in a homophobic society like India. He portrays society’s most insidious violation of its assumption of heterosexuality as the norm, and the equation of

biological men with masculinity and biological women with femininity. The consequences of these assumptions are isolation and fear for those who recognize themselves as outside the 'norm'. They experience the constant pressure of hiding the truth about themselves and live with the sense of being the only one who feels this way as portrayed through his characters in the play.

As heterosexual culture is the universal norm by which everyone's experience can be understood, it renders the lesbian and gay experience invisible and hence homosexuals suffer the political, social and psychological oppression as minors of sexual minority which leads them to suffer from psychological disorders and alienation. In *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Dattani dares to be vocal about a group of subalterns who are normally repressed in society, that is, the gays. In this play, Dattani examines the unusual love relationship among individuals both at psychological and physical level. He discusses openly about the issues of gays and lesbians, issues of husband- wife relationship of the Indian middle class society.

Sexuality in India, particularly in the urban, middle class context, is not discussed, or else discussion of sexuality is linked to gender (women) and restricted to reproductive health (primarily birth control) and sexual violence (primarily against women). It is not surprising, therefore, that non-normative gender/sexual expressions (e.g., same sex sexual expressions) are largely invisible, and the issues related to these expressions are declared unimportant- even in the face of severe and wide-ranging human rights violations. (Sharma and Nath 83)

Ethical and moral values are the base of Indian culture and tradition and therefore, the concept of homosexuality becomes unacceptable. He is a dramatist who studies social problems

and presents it in his plays, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* being one amongst his plays representing homosexuals as subalterns struggling to cope with life in a society which alienates homosexuality. Male and female are the only sexual categories which have secured social existence and society's approbation and therefore the characters in the play struggle with their identity.

The most insidious violation is the assumption of heterosexuality as the norm, and the equation of biological men with masculinity and biological women with femininity. The consequences of these assumptions are isolation and fear for those who recognize themselves as outside the 'norm'. They experience the constant pressure of hiding the truth about themselves, and live with the sense of being the only one who feels this way. (Ibid 83-84)

Dattani through his play projects the crisis that gays face as they are torn between their true self and what the traditional Indian society thinks and expects of gays. Their hidden fears and feelings are carefully exposed by Dattani, within the framework of dramatic structure and he tries to investigate the identity crisis of the gays, who occupy no honorable space in social order. The play does not deal with one individual who is a homosexual but a community of homosexuals and their psychological traits. "Of the characters, Sharad and Deepali are comfortable with their sexuality, and have ways of being gay. Sharad is camp, flaunting; Deepali more restrained, perhaps more stable. Kamlesh is anguished, and Ed the most obvious victim of his own securities. Bunny, the TV actor, is a rather more traditional Indian gay man- married (he would say happily) while publicly denying his own nature, and Ranjit has taken an easy way out by moving to Europe where he can 'be himself' more openly" (McRae 45). The characters in the play "are a carefully balanced range of individuals with a depth of experience that exceeds

traditional expectations. They are brought together in such a way as to bring out the conflicts, repressions and past secrets...” (Das 19)

### **Portrayal of Homosexuality in the Play**

The play opens with Kamlesh and the security guard conversing in Hindi who is seen stepping out of the bedroom into the living room.

KAMLESH. Tum, kya... yeh sab... paise ke liye karte ho?

GUARD (*shakes his head*). Nahin. (*Realizes the implication of what he said. Hastily.*) Hahn! Hahn, main paise ke liye hi to karta hoon sab kuch!

KAMLESH. You do enjoy it. What you do to me, what I do to you. Don't you?

GUARD (*a little nervously*). Ab main jaon?

KAMLESH. But we will have to pretend you do it only for the money! (Dattani 51)

This very conversation between Kamlesh and the Guard reveals their homosexuality but the guard denies his self by saying that he does the things he does only for money. As Kamlesh points out, pretention is what they have to do to cope with the expectations of the society. The conversation then shifts to Kiran and Ed who are seen with “airline boarding passes and baggage tags” (Ibid 52). Kiran “is extremely attractive, in her late thirties” (Ibid 51). Ed “is in his early forties but looks younger... His manner and style are quick and assertive which is sometimes misread as aggressive” (Ibid 51-52). Then we are introduced to Sharad who is camp and flaunting and is comfortable with his sexuality. He adds humor to the play and is a “drama queen” (Ibid 55). As the play progress, the audience comes to know of the relationship that

Kamlesh and Sharad has had as lovers and also that Kamlesh was still in love with his ex- lover, Prakash whom he knew before Sharad.

SHARAD. Oh! Spare me the lies! You could never love anyone because you are still in love with Prakash! (Ibid 56)

Bijay Kumar Das writes, “Since love is more in the mind than in the body, the attitude to sex varies from person to person. No doubt, society imposes restrictions on individuals as to how to gratify their sex. But individuals are individuals- they find a way out to fulfill their love and sex” (Das 18). Homosexual love as one observes in the play is no different from heterosexual love. “Same- sex love could be as demanding as heterosexual love relationship. It also arouses jealousy” (Ibid 19).

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

KAMLESH (*in a matter-of-fact manner*). Then why did you walk out on me?

SHARAD. You were relieved when I did.

KAMLESH. I am sorry...

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

KAMLESH. I tried, Sharad, I...

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

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

SHARAD. But you couldn't.

KAMLESH. I do love you

SHARAD. Oh! Spare me the lies! You could never love anyone because you are still in love with Prakash! (Dattani 56)

Chatterjee Subhrajit writes about LGBT- individuals who basically have different sexual orientation, face discrimination, exclusion from the society, thus quite often, meet with obstacles to satisfy their needs. This exclusion and ostracism could vary from the simplest personal relations to the most general social ignorance, exclusion, ostracism, violating even the rights of life. These groups of people are marginalized and are at the core of exclusion from fulfilling the individual's interpersonal and societal lives. People who are marginalized have relatively little control over their lives; they may become stigmatized and are often at the receiving end of negative public attitudes and are also likely to face social or religious oppression. They may develop low self-confidence and self-esteem and may become isolated as seen in the verse sung by Sharad,

SHARAD (*singing*).

So many times we have to pay (*urges Kamlesh to sing along*)

For having fun and being gay... (Ibid 56)

The homosexuals in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* find comfort and can be themselves in the company of each other. Kamlesh's flat becomes a space for the group to be who they actually are. They do not have to worry about being judged or discriminated by the world. As Sharad opens the door and lets the guard in, he goes to say,

SHARAD. ...

yahan kuch bhi bolne mein ya karne mein sharam nahin rakhte.

GUARD. Ji.

SHARAD. Hum log sab bahut besharm hain.

*The guard laughs with embarrassment.*

Tum bhi besharm ho jao. (Ibid 60)

Sharad accuses Kamlesh for exploiting the guard and having “used him as a sex object” (Ibid 63) when he noticed the guard’s neck. Kamlesh clarifies saying that “he is not married. He’s gay” (Ibid 63). The consciousness of the guard in replying Kamlesh at the beginning of the play suggests that he is also a gay but is ashamed to admit the fact. The guard knows that if he proclaims himself of being a gay then the heteronormative society will not accept him. In order to survive he has to construct an identity for himself. He has to pretend, living in half-hiding to escape the horror and prejudice meted out towards homosexuality.

Sexual topics of any kind are avoided in polite conversation and any talk concerning homosexuality is altogether a taboo. Homosexuality is basically as old as humanity, but what is comparatively new and urgent, is the need for contemporary society to come to terms in its thinking and its law making, both with psychological knowledge and human behavior. Dattani as a playwright writes, “I am certain that my plays are a true reflection of my time, place and socio-economic background” (Dattani xv) and hence he explores the theme of same-sex relationship in his plays, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* being one of such plays, he represents not one homosexual but a group of gay personalities. He “examines the psychology of persons who are by nature ‘gays’ or ‘bi-sexuals’ and the desire on the part of some of them to turn heterosexual...

in real life such characters do exist. Hence, Dattani has re-created the characters in their own situations” (Das 87). Dattani does not deviate his audience from the Indian context as his characters continue to speak in Hindi, “the play begins with a conversation between Kamlesh and the guard in Hindi. Dattani without translating their conversation into English, takes recourse to transliteration” (Ibid 17)

### **Marriage as a Way of Escapism**

DEEPALI. If you were a woman, we would be in love.

KAMLESH. If you were a man, we would be in love.

DEEPALI. If we were heterosexual, we would be married. (Dattani 65)

This very conversation between Deepali and Kamlesh reveals their sexuality and their preference and interest for the same sex. In a society like India, marriage plays a significant role because without marriage, there is no social status. Among the group of homosexuals, Bunny, the TV actor, is married and lives a pretentious life so as to be accepted by society. He suggests Kamlesh to get married when the latter requests his friends to help him.

BUNNY. Since you want us to help you- let me give you some advice. You are looking in the wrong places to forget your Prakash. Get married.

...

BUNNY. Find yourself a nice woman. You can always have sex on the side.

SHARAD. And pretend to be straight like you.

BUNNY. What's wrong with that? Huh? Do you think I will be accepted by the millions if I screamed from the rooftops that I am gay.

RANJIT. Yes, but you do scream from the rooftops that you are straight.

BUNNY. Camouflage! Even animals do it. Blend with the surroundings. They can't find you. You politically correct gays deny yourself the basic animal instinct of camouflage. (Ibid 70)

Through the serial, *Yeh Hai Hamara Parivar*, Bunny has become an epitome of normal heterosexual union as Kiran exclaims, "you are an ideal husband and father! I can't imagine anyone else in that part" (Ibid 76). Society's perfect family consists of the husband, wife and the children and Bunny plays his role quite perfectly keeping his wife content. "Oh, he is a very good actor for sure!" (Ibid 76) says Sharad of Bunny. There is a sense of guilt in Bunny when he denies to Kiran of being gay, "oh no! I am not... well, like them. They are such intelligent people and good company. I am a very liberal-minded person" (Ibid 76). Dreading the social disapproval he adores his co-brethren to be secretive about his homosexuality.

Edwin Prakash Matthew is another gay personality in the play who like Bunny seeks marriage so as to hide his sexuality. He is engaged to Kiran, Kamlesh's sister, so that he can get close with him. Ed is furious when Kamlesh admits his love for Sharad in Act III.

KAMLESH. Yes, I do love him. I can be honest with him I don't have to deal with lies. And he has the courage to live with me, we both do- to live openly as two men in love.

...

ED. You fool. Can't you see? My marriage with Kiran is a start.

KAMLESH. What do you mean?

ED. Once we are married, I could see you more often without causing any...  
suspicion. (Ibid 104)

Ed abandons Kamlesh because he wants to hide his gay identity and therefore intends to marry Kiran so that he can be in touch with Kamlesh without having anyone suspecting his identity.

ED. Nobody would know. Nobody would care. (Ibid 105)

KIRAN. ... what more do you want? You will never be happier than this. You will end up being lonelier if you tried to be anything else other than who you are. And think of the poor woman you may end up marrying just as a cover-up for your shame. I know how it feels to be unloved. God knows I have suffered enough in my marriage. The scars are never going to leave me. But I am thankful now that I have Ed. And I wish the same happiness for my brother and you. (Ibid 102)

Ironically, Kiran becomes the very 'poor woman' who is simply a 'cover-up' for Ed. She is seen to be a pathetic character who had gone through a bad first marriage, and now is being used as a 'cover-up'.

KIRAN. ... When my husband beat me up, I truly believed and felt that he loved me. I felt he loved me enough to want to hurt me. Kamlesh helped me get out of that. But I continued being the same... woman. I wanted to feel loved by a man. In whichever way he wanted to love me. And I met you. And you did

show love. And you continue being the same... man... Typical, you said. You are right. If there any stereotypes around here, they are you and me. Because we don't know any better, do we? We just don't know what else to be! (Ibid 107)

Ed, as introduced in Act I is none other than Prakash, Kamlesh's ex lover. Ed, like Bunny tries to escape, living in pretence who is suppose to marry Kiran, Kamlesh's sister. Marriage becomes a way of escape for Bunny and Ed from society's suspicion on their identity as gays. Kamlesh says of Ed,

KAMLESH. He has changed. He says he is heterosexual now.

...

KAMLESH. He goes to church every week now. They put him on to a psychiatrist. He believes his love for me was the work of the devil. Now the devil has left him. (Ibid 85)

Ed, as a Christian did not have the courage to live as a gay because of the fear of rejection from his community and society. Religious values made him live in pretention to the extent of planning to marry Kiran so that he could see Kamlesh. Homosexuals like Ed and Bunny seeks marriage as a way to veil their true self in a country like India,

RANJIT. Yes, I am sometimes regretful of being an Indian, because I can't seem to be both Indian and gay. But you are simply ashamed. All this sham is to cover up your sham. (Ibid 88)

## The Psyche of the Homosexuals and Identity Crisis

In this play Dattani brings out the psychological pressures and fears, the real and the imaginary, gays have to live with.

KAMLESH. ... I came here to get over a relationship... We have all been through the pain of separation... As gay men and women, we have all been through that, I suppose... some of us several times...

...

KAMLESH. ... I would have understood it if he had left me for another man, but he left me because he was ashamed of our relationship. It would have worked between us, but he was ashamed... for the first time in my life, I wished I wasn't gay.

RANJIT. Oh, come, dear fellow. At some point or another we all wish to be something we are not.

KAMLESH. Of course I don't feel that way anymore. I realized where that feeling was coming from. The psychiatrist I was seeing.

...

KAMLESH. I was. Only a straight homophobic psychiatrist.

...

KAMLESH. ... he pretended to understand. Until he began to tell me about aversion therapy. For a while, I believed him. Because the medication helped

me cope with my depression better. Until he said I would never be happy as a gay man. It is impossible to change society, he said, but it may be possible for you to reorient yourself.

KAMLESH. I tried explaining to him that I needed his help to overcome my anxiety and fears, not to be something I am not. Could he help me cope with my loneliness and fear the same way he would help a heterosexual cope with his? (Ibid 68-69)

Homosexuals often face “particular obstacles, barriers, and challenges that frequently make it difficult for them to find and receive competent and affirming healthcare. Heterosexist assumptions can adversely affect the quality of treatment, and fear of a negative experience keeps many LGBTs from seeking help. Organizations and individual therapists are not always LGBT friendly, and some therapists may not even recognize their own heterosexism. Staff can be judgmental toward LGBT sexuality, or be misinformed/uninformed about LGBT resources” (Subhrajit 324) - as seen in the case of Kamlesh who has been wrongly treated by a psychiatrist.

He visits a psychiatrist for the treatment of depression which has gripped him inextricably who advises him to reject homosexuality and to reorient himself because the Indian society will never approve of such relationships as it is difficult to change deep rooted social norms. He sought the help of a psychiatrist to “overcome my anxiety and fears, not to be something I am not”. He longs to be treated as he is as a homosexual like how one would treat a heterosexual as he is. “I tried explaining to him that I needed his help to overcome my anxiety and fears, not to be something I am not. Could he help me cope with my loneliness and fear the same way he would help a heterosexual cope with his?” (Dattani 69) says Kamlesh. Even after

the treatment Kamlesh experiences poignant anxiety, fear and loneliness acknowledging that many times he brings home strangers who might help him overcome this sense of isolation.

KAMLESH. For the past week, I have been picking up strangers- bringing them over- hoping to connect. Strange men who will call me when they feel the same loneliness, when they grow tired of the pretence. Or when they need more money. (Ibid 70)

Kamlesh's desperation for help can be seen when he asks his friends to help him,

KAMLESH. Please! I am afraid! I need your help! I need you all. I am afraid.  
Frightened. (Ibid 68)

...

KAMLESH. ... Please help me! Who do we turn to except one another? (70)

Kamlesh is seen to be psychologically affected with loneliness, without Prakash in his life and has no one to turn to except for his friends who are equally homosexuals like him. He did seek for a treatment but the psychiatrist only turned out to be traitor who asks him to change himself of who he really is rather than treating him from his anxiousness and depression.

RANJIT. Well, this is the price one has to pay for living in India.

...

RANJIT. Call me what you will. My English lover and I have been together for twelve years now. You lot will never be able to find a lover in this wretched country! (Ibid 70-71)

Of the characters Ranjit has had a long term relationship and is not as worried as Kamlesh or Bunny because he found his way out to live in peace- away from his home, from his society which rejects homosexuality.

Deepali becomes the mouthpiece for every homosexual when she says,

DEEPALI. It's not shame, is it? With us?... It's fear... Of the corners we will be pushed into where we don't want to be. (Ibid 89)

Bunny who has been guilt ridden for having denied being gay to Kiran comes out clean of his true identity toward the end of the play.

BUNNY. I have denied a lot of things. The only people who know me-the real me-are present here in this room. And you all hate me for being such a hypocrite. ... I have tried to survive. In both worlds. And it seems I do not exist in either. I am sorry, Kiran, I lied to you as I have lied to the rest of the world. I said to you that I am liberal-minded person. I am not them but I accept them. Actually, it is they who are liberal-minded. They have accepted me in spite of my letting them down so badly. I deny them in public, but I want their love in private. I have never told anyone in so many words what I am telling you now-I am a gay man. (Ibid 102-103)

Dattani, through his characters in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* brings out that homosexuality is not an illness that can be cured or altered and that they are like any other human being who just happened to have an attraction or love their own gender. Ostracizing them only leads to a secretive life, marriage being the instrument to escape so as to be accepted by society. Society imposes one to be heterosexual and therefore, a homosexual has to garb himself with the veil of

being a heterosexual by totally defying all his wishes. As seen in the play, men with a preference for homosexuality enter heterosexual relationships to satisfy social expectations, and to save their family structure and social status.

“Mahesh Dattani, the most significant Indian English playwright of our country deals with the theme of social exclusion in his plays not on the basis of caste but gender. How gender relationship based on sexuality causes social exclusion becomes a prime concern for him in some of his plays” (Das 83). Dattani projects the crisis that gays face as they are torn between their true self and what the traditional Indian society thinks and expects of the gays. Their hidden fears and feelings are carefully exposed by Dattani. He tries to investigate the identity crisis of the gays, who occupy no honorable space in social order. Dattani feels the need to establish a firm connection between the possibilities of greater space for the gays from the affluent society. He chooses this untouched issue and gives the Indian marginalized class a voice to articulate, probably for the very first time in the Indian theatre through his plays like *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Do the Needful*, and *Bravely Fought the Queen*. The playwright chooses this off-beat theme of gay in the male dominated society for his first radio play *Do the Needful*, broadcasted on 14th August, 1997 on B.B.C. Radio 4. It is probably the first Indian play to be broadcasted by BBC, boldly dealing with the subject of homosexuality.

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## Chapter –III

### **“THE DOGS HAVE BEEN LET LOOSE”- THE EVER- PRESENT DEEP- ROOTED COMMUNAL CRISIS IN *FINAL SOLUTIONS***

#### **The Issue of Communalism**

In *Final Solutions*, Dattani brings out the deep- rooted communalism engendered by the Divide and Rule policy of the British which may be long gone but its impact still exists to this day. British rule and British policy hold a special responsibility for the growth of communalism in modern India. Communalism was essentially a product of British policy wherein “the British took advantage of it, encouraged it and helped it reach the monstrous proportions that it ultimately did in 1946-47” (Chandra 237). The selfish motive of the British for their own imperial purpose, by creating division in India, left a scar of communal disunity. Bipan Chandra writes,

The social framework for the growth of communalism was provided by the colonial economy and polity. Colonialism was the foundation of the social structure which generated and then propelled forward communal ideology and politics. While many other aspects of the Indian social condition helped the growth of communalism, it was the logic of the economic, political, cultural and ideological system structured by communalism that created the space for the growth of communalism. This logic was, of course, supplemented by colonial

policy, which in its turn fully exploited the conditions produced by colonialism itself as also other weaknesses of Indian society (Chandra 292).

The hostilities among the Indians began with the British policy of Divide and Rule which was adopted during 1905 to 1940. British rulers had established their empire firmly in India by taking advantage of the diversities and by playing them against one another. Religion became a major advantage for the British to disunite the Hindus and the Muslims so as to weaken the strength of the nation. Because of the disunity between the Hindus and the Muslims created by the British rulers, it brought about great downfall for the nation.

The British colonial authorities added fuel to the fire by creating electorates on the basis of religious affinity. “the numbers game”- the pursuit of votes and the mobilization of voters on the basis of communal slogans- was initiated consequently under the conditions of “colonial democracy”. The British liked to emphasize their merits in preparing the Indians for self- government. One such “merit” was to put into operation the mechanism of communal strife and the involvement of religion in politics. (Klyuev 74)

The minorities in these lands suffered enormously under the supremacy of the majority as portrayed in *Final Solutions*- Daksha’s family suffering in Hussainabad; Javed and Bobby as Muslims suffering in a Hindu majority community. Dattani artistically brings on stage that the common sufferings of these religious communities, who are bitter enemies against each other, are no different. The existing disunity disturbs the social life and is also a hindrance for the growth and progress of the nation. This very disunity continues to lurk in contemporary India. Communal disharmony has been an issue in India since time immemorial and still continues to

be one. *Final Solutions* deals with the religious riots between the Hindus and the Muslims but one can look at it in a wider perspective- a play bringing to life on stage the issues between classes, castes, races, minorities and majorities, religious sects, etc. It can be considered a problem play which deals with the communal tension between the Hindus and the Muslims; it is a play on communal hatred which is based on age- old suspicion and mistrust. Kenneth Pickering observes that

“Problem Play is that which explores a particular social problem, raising many questions about it and provoking the audience into finding answers. Such plays, sometimes known as, ‘thesis plays’ because they mount and work out an argument, may be tragic or comic in essence but their ideas constitute some issue of deep concern to the dramatist with which he wishes to engage the minds and consciences of the audience. (Kenneth 70)

Dattani says,

“The fact that I want my plays to be performed to large audiences doesn’t mean that I want to appease my audiences... assumptions galore that cityfied English-speaking people are all liberal-minded and villagers are communal and bigoted” (Dattani xi).

He writes so as to make his audience rethink of their profession as being “liberal- minded and secular!” (Ibid xi). The play was ready to be launched in December 1992 at the Deccan Herald Theatre festival, however, a riot broke out in December 1992 in several parts of the country after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, “and the organizers of the festival thought it prudent to ban the play” because of the sensitive issue that dealt with religion. The play was finally produced in

1993. The play, in a way, was like a prediction of what was going to happen. The riots in *Final Solutions* happen with the destroying of the Hindu chariot carrying their idols and the stabbing of the Hindu priest. Similarly, the riots in Ayodhya happened with the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 1992. Religious disharmony is an issue which one cannot get away with as Alyque Padamsee in “A Note on the Play” on *Final Solutions* opens with the lines, “The demons of communal hatred are not on the street... they are lurking inside ourselves” (Ibid 161). He couldn't have introduced us to the play in a better way. One may claim that he has no ill against any religious group but the truth is something else. The communal feeling within is brought out through the play where hatred and riots happen in the name of religion and how such incidence causes trauma in the individual; the Muslims as minority suffering in the hands of the Hindus who are at majority. The play is social and satirical. The enmity between the two communities as depicted in the play is a chronic problem. They never really settled because the hatred lurks within and is ever present and deep rooted.

### **Muslims as Subalterns in India**

Religion in India becomes an aspect of subaltern which is portrayed in Dattani's *Final Solutions*. Assistant Professor Ajay Gudavarthy of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in an interview points out that Muslims, as a new subaltern of the country are marginalized in all three spheres, social, economic and political. They remain socially ostracized, economically deprived and politically unrepresented. He goes on to say that Muslims are becoming easy target of even those who are placed at the bottom of Hindu caste hierarchy.

The problems of the Muslim community and its relations with the majority community are diverse and at times very acute. They are complicated by history-

both medieval and recent, and, in particular, the partition of British India in 1947, on a religious and communal basis, and the subsequent fierce clashes. The peaceful coexistence of the communities is often violated even in our time. (Klyuev 110)

Dattani in *Final Solutions* brings out the hatred that lurks within, even to the extent of bringing the two religious sects under one roof. Disharmony between the two religious groups has been an issue since time immemorial and continues to be a problem in contemporary India. The dramatist may have brought to light the Hindu-Muslim issue but he speaks much through his *Final Solutions* of how the subaltern sections of a society are discriminated and exploited which exists not only in India but worldwide which maybe in the form of racial discrimination, class conflict, majority versus the minority, language, culture, etc.

Dattani in *Final Solutions* brings out such instances where the Muslims are marginalized by the Hindus. In Act I, when the Muslim boys take shelter at the Gandhi house, Aruna's behavior towards the boys is that of disgust.

*Aruna goes to the matka and quickly pours out water into two glasses and places them very delicately in front of the two men. They both quickly gulp down the water. Obviously they were thirsty. Aruna is aghast. She was sure they wouldn't drink. (Dattani 185)*

Then,

*Aruna holds the glasses with her thumbs and index fingers, on the sides which have not been touched by their lips. She takes them away and keeps them separate from the other glasses. (Ibid 185)*

This shows Aruna's attitude towards the Muslim boys who considers herself superior and treats the latter as the lesser being. The glasses the boys drink from are considered to be contaminated and hence are kept separate from the rest of the glasses. Another incident of discrimination against the Muslim by a Hindu is seen in Act III of the play where Javed as a young boy is victimized. As he opened the gate of a Hindu to deliver a letter, the owner ordered him to put the letter on the wall. "The man came out with a cloth in his hand. He wiped the letter before picking it up, he then wiped the spot on the wall the letter was lying on and he wiped the gate!" (Ibid 200). These are incidents in the play portrayed by the playwright to show the sense of superiority felt by the Hindus over the Muslims which ultimately leads to disillusionment and the crisis in identity, and in Javed's case, the attitude of being repulsive. Bobby in Act III is as angry as Javed at the behavior of the Hindu but does not throw meat into the neighbour's backyard because he was ashamed of being himself.

BOBBY. Yes. Like being apologetic. For being who I was. And pretending that I was not part of my community. For thinking that I could become superior by not belonging. Nobody called me Baboon in college. I chose to be called Bobby. (Ibid 201)

Bobby in this play portrays the group of minorities who deviates from his own community and lives in pretention to feel belonged and be superior. Dattani through *Final Solutions* presents his audience to witness the impacts religious issues has on individuals.

### **Technical Use of the Diary in the Play**

The play opens with Daksha reading from her diary. Then comes Hardika on scene after forty years, who still has the diary and continues to write. Daksha and Hardika are the same person- Daksha, the young bride and Hardika, the grandmother. Hardika after forty years says, “things have not changed that much” (Dattani 167) which has much to do with communal riots and disharmony. Right from the time of the partition of India to this day, religious schism seems to never end. *Final Solutions* was first staged in 1993 but its communal issue still lingers afresh even when it’s staged in the twenty first century. Daksha becomes a memory for Hardika which makes her cautious of the brutality she has gone through in the hands of the Muslims. Daksha’s first writing on her diary dated “31 March, 1948” (Ibid 166) has also had a great impact on the fifteen year old young bride, whose exposure to the worst excesses of the nation leaves a permanent scar. As a result, her deep suspicion of Javed and Babban. Hardika was one among the millions of victims who was affected by the partition.

Dattani’s stagecraft takes the audience to the year 1940s when India was at a point of being independent from the British-

On another level is a room with a roll top desk and an oil lamp converted to an electric one, suggesting that the period is the late 1940s. This belongs to the young Daksha, who is in fact the grandmother, also seen as a girl of fifteen. There are several instances when Hardika, the grandmother, and Daksha, the young bride, are on this level at the same time, although they are the same person. Hardika should be positioned and lit in such a way that the entire action of the play is seen through her eyes. (Ibid 165)

The young fifteen year old bride, Daksha is seen to be reading from her diary. Her diary becomes a source of revelation of what happened then. Daksha's scribbles dating "31 March 1948" (Ibid 166) indicates history committed to paper a year right after Indian independence, 1947. As she reads from the pages of her diary, it becomes clear that it sure was the first time for the young bride to be writing on a diary, especially of her "innermost thoughts" and "secrets" (Ibid 166); the first being the disapproval of her singing film songs by her in laws, Hari's parents which makes her feel that all her dreams to become a singer has been shattered. Then she goes on to

"talk about more important things. Like last year, in August, a most terrible thing happened to our country. We... gained independence. You should have seen it. Everyone was awake waiting for midnight\_\_ like children on the last day of school, waiting for the last bell of the last class before vacation. And their rushing out and screaming and shouting and fighting." (Ibid 166)

All of these events are committed to Daksha's diary and as the description is made and read out, the audience gets a picture of what it must have been like. The excitement equaled to that of the school children has much to say of the delightfulness of gaining independence and freedom from the British. Daksha goes to say that her father like all other fellow Indians had fought for that hour and that he was happy that the Britishers were rid off. She goes on saying,

He also said something I did not understand then. He said that before leaving, they had let loose the dogs. I hated to think that he was talking about my friend's fathers... But that night in Hussainabad in our ancestral house\_\_ when I heard them outside\_\_ I knew that they were thinking the same of us. And I knew that I

was thinking the same, like my father. And as their voices grew louder, I blamed them more and more for my father's absence. (Ibid 167)

Dattani underlines the idea that the festering emergence of communalism has been a political construct of the British. "Let loose the dogs" refers not to the Hindu or Muslim community in particular but refers to the very reason of communal hatred created by the British bringing about enmity in India. The sense of brotherhood no longer exists because of religious differences. The reason for people who had been living together for centuries becoming blood thirsty and bitter enemies of one another in the name of religion is tenuous if not for the British hand.

Dattani in *Final Solutions* takes his audience to the time when India won her independence and depicts the fear the British had created. Through Daksha's diary, the feeling of superiority leading to enmity between the Hindus and the Muslims is being revealed. The audience is made to reflect how nothing has changed over time with communalism. No matter how progressive India has become, religious differences never ceased to fail. Killings, riots, assaults continue to exist to this day in the name of religion.

### **Communal Problems and its Effect in Familial Relationships**

Dattani dramatizes the communal issue by bringing in the two religious groups- Hindu and Muslim under one roof. It is at this very juncture the Gandhi family exposes their emotional sentiment of kindness on the part of Ramnik and Smita towards the Muslims and that of resentment on the part of Hardika and Aruna. Ramnik's kindness towards the two Muslim boys brings tension in the Gandhi house, especially to Hardika and Aruna. Hardika, in particular is furious. She says, "Couldn't he see there was more than violence in that boy's eyes, than those stone throwers' threat?" (Dattani 191). Hardika did not really know Javed but his religious

identity as a Muslim made her assume Javed to be dangerous. The suspicion and doubt that Hardika has towards Javed is as common and as unfamiliar a feeling that one has towards any other religious faith than one's own. Dattani's creativity can be seen in the house when the two religious groups, apparently arch enemies at that very juncture, are placed together. The playwright creates tension and curiosity in the audience for such incidence for a Muslim and a Hindu under the same roof is a rare occurrence in reality. Bijay Kumar Das says, "in *Final Solutions*, Dattani depicts the communal tensions and riots with insight and objectivity" (Das 100). Dattani, however, had to face with obstacles while producing *Final Solutions* but persevered against all odds. Radha Ramaswamy writes,

The script of *Final Solutions* was ready in 1991. Dattani reserved the rights to do the first production in his hometown, and was ready to launch it in December 1992 at the Deccan Herald Theatre festival, the platform for all his productions until then. However in December 1992, riots had broken out in several parts of the country after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and the organizers of the festival thought it prudent to ban the play. Dattani came out strongly against the ban. He had earlier been accused of writing in a language that was not Indian and about issues that were not Indian. And now he was being punished for being too Indian! Disappointed Bangalore audiences were finally able to see the production in 1993. (Dattani viii-ix)

Dattani brings out so much of the complexity of India in his drama, especially of sensitive issues which are deeply rooted in the Indian society. The new generation feels suffocated by deep-rooted traditions that they never really expose their true self and tend to burst out only when situations get extremely out of hand as seen in Smita's reaction over her mother's

belief in religion. Smita is not as superstitious as her mother, Aruna, of the beliefs which are prevalent in Hindu religion and is bold enough to let out her voice as seen in their conversation,

ARUNA. ... Don't you have any respect for who you are? I shudder to think what will become of your children. What kind of sanskar will you give them when you don't have any yourself? It's all very well to have progressive ideas. But are you progressing or are you drifting? God knows, I don't want all this violence. How can I, when I won't even harm a goat or a chicken? But to throw everything away just like that? Doesn't it mean anything to you? For so many generations we have preserved our sanskar because we believe it is the truth! It is the way shown to us by our saints. We must know no other path. And I will not have it all perish to accommodate someone else's faith. I have enough faith and pride to see that it doesn't happen. I shall uphold what I believe is the truth. (Ibid 210)

Smita reacts immediately against her mother and goes to say,

SMITA. How can you expect me to be proud of something which stifles everything else around it? It stifles me! Yes! Maybe I am prejudiced because I do not belong. But not belonging makes things so clear. I can see so clearly how wrong you are. You accuse me of running away from my religion. Maybe I am... embarrassed, mummy. Yes. Maybe I shouldn't be. What if I did what you do? Praying and fasting and... purifying myself all day. Would you have listened to me if I told you you were wrong? You will say yes, because you are certain I wouldn't say that then. All right, so we both are

prejudiced, so what do you want to do? Shall we all go back to sleep? (Ibid 211)

Aruna is seen to be a strong believer in her religious practices and respects much of the 'sanskar' that have been passed on for generations. She is Kunjakkan's woman who "observes all the religious and family rites, vratas and prayers for getting a good husband, to be a good and chaste wife, a loving mother and a respectable mother-in-law" (Kunjakkan 17). She sees Javed and Bobby as a threat to their beliefs and practices when Javed offers to help to fetch the drinking water. She says to Javed, "We don't allow anyone to fill our drinking water. No outsiders" (Dattani 209). Javed and Bobby, as Muslims, are "outsiders" to Aruna and makes sure that the Gandhi's family faith of being a Hindu does not "perish to accommodate someone else's faith" (Ibid 210). Smita is seen to be annoyed with her mother's comment for which Aruna tries to justify by saying, "We bathe our god with it, Smita. It has to be pure. It must not be contaminated" (Ibid 209). Aruna considers other religious faith as being impure and hence does not allow the two Muslim boys to participate in any of the household activities or chores, to the extent of not allowing the boys to even fetch the drinking water believing that the pure water would be contaminated. The conversation between Smita and Aruna reveals that Smita is not stifled on being a Hindu but is stifled living with one, i.e., her own mother for she strongly believes even in the superstition of beliefs which makes Smita suffocated. Dattani's creativity in bringing the two religious communities under one roof is further revealed in Smita's speech in Act II,

SMITA. ... Do two young boys make you so insecure? Come on, mummy. This is a time for strength! I am so glad these two dropped in. We would never have

spoken about what makes us so different from each other. We would have gone on living our lives with our petty similarities. (Ibid 211)

By bringing in the two Muslim boys at the Gandhi house, Dattani brings out the truth of each of the members of their emotional state of mind which has long been hidden until the riots. Aruna and Hardika are seen to be not as liberal as Smita and Ramnik when it came to helping the Muslim boys from the angry Hindu mob. They instead insist Ramnik to hand over the boys to the mob without having the slightest sympathy that they might be beaten to death. There is so much happening in the Gandhi house with religion even amongst the family members. The Gandhi family actually lets out their suffocation only after the two Muslims are offered safety in their house. The tension between Aruna and Smita seems to grow even more,

ARUNA. Does being a Hindu stifle you?

SMITA. No, living with one does. (Ibid 211)

Aruna is taken aback when Smita comes out boldly to confess what she had felt all these years. She voiced out because she could no longer tolerate her mother's behavior towards the two Muslim boys. Smita is seen to be not sorry at all for what she said for which Aruna is offended and turns to Javed and Bobby and says, "Are you happy?" (Ibid 212), trying to blame them for what just happened between her and her daughter. She does not think for a moment that she could be wrong and that her daughter could be right instead makes the two boys a scapegoat of the insecurities happening in their family. Aruna is so much consumed and engrossed in her religion and practices that Smita had to make her mother realize saying that she felt threatened of the Muslims.

SMITA. Because you know they don't believe in all the things that you feel are true. Doesn't that make your belief that much more weak? (Ibid 211)

Smita in these lines talk sense and conveys a message to the audience irrespective of the difference in religion. One becomes so much preoccupied in his religious practices that other religious forms and practices are nullified. Aruna is seen to be one among this group of people who is unwilling to believe in other religious beliefs. The relationship between Aruna and Smita also portrays the vast difference between the orthodox and the unorthodox, the conventional and the contemporary, the conservative and the liberal and vast difference of the older generation and the younger generation in matters of faith. Bijay Kumar Das points out,

“In matters of faith it is difficult to say which is right and which is wrong, or rational or irrational. Either one believes or does not believe in a faith. It is a matter of individual perception or belief”. (Das 79)

Smita representing the liberal mindset group of people is unable to breathe in her own home because of her family's view against the other religious group, except that of Ramnik's. Dattani in *Final Solutions* also portrays how communal problems in the society affect family relationships as seen in the Gandhi family. The play also conveys the hard questions each religious group has to ask itself in order to unravel the communal issue.

### **Trauma in *Final Solutions***

Roger Luckhurst in his essay writes of Freudian 'trauma', especially of those affected with the war, “these men not only suffer memory gaps, but also repeatedly re- experienced extreme events in flashbacks, nightmares, and hallucinations months or even years afterwards”

(Luckhurst 500). Hardika was among these men affected with trauma clearly narrated in her speech in Act III

HARDIKA: he was beaten up on the streets! While we were waiting at home for him to take us away from the hell, he was dying on the streets! (Dattani 222)

The death of her father in Hussainabad was a traumatic experience for her. Why she had so much hatred towards the Muslims, suspicion and fear towards Javed and Babban is revealed when she says,

Couldn't he see there was more violence in that boy's eyes than those stone throwers' threat? (Ibid 191)

“I cannot forget. I just cannot forget” (Ibid 223) exclaims Hardika of the traumatic experience she has gone through as a young girl of fifteen. The incident had made her so much vulnerable towards the Muslims that she couldn't consider helping the young Muslim boys. Ramnik's consideration to give shelter to the boys made her all the more nervous. Angelie Multani points out,

although there have been several literary representations of the violence, of this traumatic severing of countries on religious and ethnic lines, there has been very little attempt in literature to link what is now obvious to most sociologists and even to the layman. Namely, communal tensions and fault lines in contemporary India have their origins in the trauma of partition as well as the lack of resolution or forgiveness. Mahesh Dattani's play *Final Solutions* is a rare literary/dramatic text that connects our contemporary context with the unforgiven trauma of 1947 (Multani, 43).

While she has her reasons of communal hatred towards the Muslims, Javed has one of his own. Javed's hatred for the Hindus started when he was a young boy as Bobby narrates in Act III,

BOBBY: A minor incident changed all that... We were playing cricket on our street with the younger boys. The postman delivered our neighbour's mail. He dropped one of the letters. He was in a hurry and asked Javed to hand sthe letter over to the owner. Javed took the letter... and opened the gate. Immediately a voice boomed, 'what do you want?' I can still remember Javed holding out the letter and mumbling something, his usual firmness vanishing in a second. 'Leave it on the wall,' the voice ordered. Javed backed away, really frightened. We all watched as the man came out with a cloth in his hand. He wiped the letter before picking it up, he then wiped the spot on the wall the letter was lying on and he wiped the gate! We stared at him as he went back inside... We all heard a prayer bell, ringing continuously. (Dattani 200)

Javed thereon turned into an arch-enemy of the Hindu community. As a form of revenge he "dropped pieces of meat and bones into his backyard" (Ibid 201) making the neighbor "furious, tears running down his face" (Ibid 201). Bobby knows that Javed expressed his disgust for the Hindu concept of contamination through retaliation. Javed is another victim of trauma like Hardika making him turn into a hooligan. *Final Solutions* is an exploration of growth of religious fundamentalism in India.

## Symbolism of the Mob/Chorus

Dattani represents the mob/ chorus without any specific characterization because communalism has no face. It represents the conflicts of the characters and provides the audience with the visual image of the characters' conflicts. It also forces the audience to look at themselves in relation to the attitudes that persist in the society. The dramatic tension in the play is orchestrated by the chorus in the play

Dattani in *Final Solutions* employs

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

The masks reveal their difference of nature. The chorus represents both the Hindu and the Muslim mob. The Muslim mob blames the Hindus and justifies their own position. On the contrary, the Hindus blame the Muslims and support their own views. In Act III, we find the Muslims asking in unison,

CHORUS 1: What must we do? To become more acceptable? Must we lose our identity? Is that what they want? Must we tolerate more? Does our future lie in their hands? Is there anyone more unsure more insecure than us? Oh what a curse it is to be less in number! (Ibid 208)

These lines clearly declare that the minority is always at a point of exploitation from the majority and that they are always outnumbered. The play portrays not only of Hindus and Muslims but to the minorities all over. Minority, according to M.N. Srinivas commonly refers to religious or ethnic groups which are numerically small vis-a-vis other similar groups, and it is implied that 'minority' consciousness is usually confined to a section and not widespread... there are not only Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Sikhs and Jains, but also Anglo-Indians, tribals, speakers of non-Hindi languages, and so on; and that even these groups are fragmented into tiny, endogamous and named groups. Since minority consciousness always manifests itself in a negative context, innumerable groups all over the country have a feeling that they have not had a fair deal.

Mahesh Dattani's Mob/Chorus is a symbolic way of expressing our own hatred towards another community. The Mob or Chorus in the play stands for the resentment of the people. They express their feeling in unison as a group that cannot be told individually. Through the Mobs, the dramatist depicts the inner feeling and thought of the people. The Hindu chorus thinks about the temple and the Muslim chorus about the mosque which ultimately leads to strong feeling of antagonism against each other. They forget the true spirit of humanity, brotherhood and of religion. Dattani brings out the anger in the Hindu Mobs as seen in their protests,

CHORUS 1. The procession has passed through these lanes Every year,  
For forty years!

CHORUS 2,3. How dare they?

CHORUS 1,2,3. For forty years our chariot has moved through their mohallas.

CHORUS 4,5. Why did they?

Why did they?

CHORUS 1. How dare they?

CHORUS 2, 3. They broke our rath.

They broke our chariot and felled our Gods!

CHORUS 1, 2, 3. This is our land.

How dare they?

CHORUS 1. It is in their blood!

CHORUS 2, 3. It is in their blood to destroy!

CHORUS 4. Why should they?

CHORUS 5. It could have been an accident.

CHORUS 2. The stone that hit our God was no accident!

CHORUS 3. The knife that slit the poojari's stomach was no accident!

CHORUS 4, 5. Why should they? It could have been an accident.

CHORUS 1 (*pounding with his stick*). Send... them... back.

*Pause.*

CHORUS 4 (*questioning*). Send them back?

CHORUS 2 (*pounding with his stick*). Drive... them... out.

*Pause.*

CHORUS 5. (*questioning*). Drive them out?

CHORUS 3. Kill the sons of swine! (Ibid 168- 169)

The protest reveals the strong agitation of the Hindus against the Muslims suspecting them for having felled their Gods. The Hindus have built up so much hatred in them that they now cry out to send the Muslims back and to drive them out. Chorus 4 and 5 are seen to be questioning and are doubtful of the act saying that it might have been an accident. However the majority, that is, Chorus 1, 2 and 3 stands firm in their agitation against the other community and that the incident was no accident. “Chorus 4 and 5 get more aggressive till their questions become statements. By the end of it, they are an unruly mob crying out for blood.” (Ibid 169)

Communal violence is bad in itself, but its worst aspect is not the consequent loss of life and property. The real harm is the spread of communal ideology in geometrical proportions. Furthermore, it forces even secular persons to join hands with or even depend upon communal forces to defend their lives and property... one is forced to contribute to the organizers of one's defence or even to join them in self- defence, volunteer efforts and organizations. In fact, the major purpose of those who inspire and organize communal violence is not to attack members of the opposite 'community' in order to reduce its numbers, but to create situations which communalize secular- minded people. (Chandra 333)

As pointed out by Chandra, we see that Chorus 4 and 5 are no longer liberal but join forces with the majority against the Muslims. Their views on the Muslims as being innocent change drastically and protests against them along with chorus 1, 2 and 3 and are seen to be blood

thirsty. Dattani also uses images of animals such as pig, swine, mouse, rat, lizard, etc. hinting his audience on communal hatred and contempt towards the other community; these arrogant remarks depict the bitterness between the two largest religious groups in India and how such abhorrence spread like wild fire causing chaos among the people living in one land.

ARUNA. A lizard! It fell on the milk vessel. We will have to throw the milk away.

RAMNIK. Didn't you put the lid on it?

ARUNA. It hasn't fallen inside. It's gone. But still it's bad enough...

RAMNIK. Don't you dare throw it away.

ARUNA. I- I just can't drink it now... knowing that ugly creature was so near it. You drink it. I will get some from Shantaben's house tomorrow for Smita and myself. (Dattani 173)

This very conversation between Aruna and Ramnik shows the difference in their approach towards life clearly portrayed by Dattani in their behavior towards other religious groups as seen with the Muslims- Babban and Javed. Aruna is so much induced in her religion that she considers the two Muslim boys to be impure and does not allow them to carry the holy vessel when they offer to help. The Muslim boys to Aruna are like the lizard who are ugly creatures, that's bad enough to be in their house seeking shelter.

*The light cross-fade to the Mob/Chorus. They now have on Muslim masks.*

CHORUS 1. Their chariot fell in our street!

CHORUS 2. Their God now prostrates before us!

CHORUS 3. So they blame it on us?

CHORUS 1. Was the chariot built by us?

CHORUS 2, 3. Blame the builder of those fancy thrones.

CHORUS 4. A manufacturing defect!

CHORUS 5. Doesn't their God have a warranty?

*A slow drumbeat. The Chorus gathers.*

CHORUS ALL. We are neither idol makers nor breakers!

*Breaks away.*

CHORUS 5. But they blamed it on us!

CHORUS ALL. Why did they? Why did they? Why?

CHORUS 5 (*emotionally*). Why?

*Pause.*

CHORUS 3. They say we razed their temples yesterday.

CHORUS 2. That we broke their chariot today.

CHORUS 1. That we'll bomb their streets tomorrow.

CHORUS ALL. Why would we? Why? Why? Why would we?

CHORUS 5 (*emotionally*). Why would we?

*Chorus 1, 2, 3 and 4 spit.*

CHORUS ALL EXCEPT 5. Let them send us back.

*They turn to exit.*

CHORUS 5 (*meekly*). Where? (Ibid 171)

Dattani through the Muslim Mob conveys to his audience how the minorities are easily made a scapegoat and how such accusations could lead to a great massacre. The Muslim Mob claim that they did no wrong and that they have been falsely accused; they proclaim that it must have been the chariot builders whose poor workmanship had lead to the fall the Hindu Gods and that unfortunately it had prostrated in their streets before them. The audience is made known of a similar outcry from both the Hindu and the Muslim Mob, “Why did they? Why did they? Why?” (Ibid 171)- A question which leaves the audience to ponder on. Both of these major religious groups of one nation know not the reason why such a chaos was created but they go on to blame one another ultimately becoming foes. The Muslim Mob is angered for being criminated that they “razed their temples yesterday”, “broke their chariot today”, “bomb their streets tomorrow” and question in unison, “why would we? Why? Why? Why would we?” This brings out that the Muslims have no intention of causing a drama or being rebellious against the Hindus but the latter goes on to make assumptions against the other because of the deep rooted hatred and the mistrust which they have against the Muslims. Bipan Chandra notes that,

The minorities in particular can live and prosper with full dignity and security without fear only in a social system in which they would not be permanent potential scapegoats for its failures. (Chandra 316)

### ***Final Solutions from a Humanist Perspective***

The play is all about religious riots and hatred and insecurities. Dattani does not keep his audience aloof from being optimistic. Now, looking from a humanist perspective, we sense a hope that the boys might return to the Gandhi house as hinted in the conversation between Hardika and Ramnik

HARDIKA. Do you think... do you think those boys will ever come back?

RAMNIK. If you call them they will come. But then again- if it's too late- they might not. (Dattani 226)

When Dattani brings in the two religious communities under one roof, we are made aware of the reasons for the hatred that the two groups have against each other. Hardika is also revealed of the deep secret which Ramnik had long been hiding from

RAMNIK (*looks at her pity*). It's their shop. It's the same burnt up shop we bought from them, at half its value.

(*Pause.*) And we burnt it. Your husband, my father. And his father. They had it burnt in the name of communal hatred. Because we wanted a shop... I can't take it any longer. I don't think I will be able to step on that shop again... when those boys came here... I hoped I would be able to... set things right. (Ibid 226)

Thereon, Hardika seems to have changed her views about the Muslims with the revelation. Another instance that brings in humanity is when Babban says

The tragedy is that there is too much that is sacred. But if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed. (Ibid 225)

He speaks so much for humanity that people are basically good, and have an innate need to make themselves and the world better and that human relationships and interactions are of paramount importance.

Some scholars of religion maintain that different religions are in principle united according to the formula “God is given many different names but the wise know He is One” and that religions bring people together, in their search for spiritual values. But even they have to accept that in the actual life of society, any religion, faith or cult inevitably gives rise to the opposition of “us” and “them”. Once a religion, community or sect has emerged, it tries to preserve its individuality and the cohesion of its followers by contrasting- either consciously or subconsciously- its holy books and ideas, its symbols and postulates, its Gods, heroes and martyrs, its liturgy and culture with all other religions, communities and sects. (Klyuev 29)

Ramnik as a secular and liberal individual didn't want his daughter, Smita, to be around his mother, Hardika, and be influenced by her as observed in the conversation between him and Aruna,

RAMNIK. I think Baa will be fine. There's no need.

ARUNA. She hasn't spent any time with Baa. She must learn to be with elders.

RAMNIK. Baa will ramble about old times and bore her to tears.

...

RAMNIK. I don't like her listening to Baa.

ARUNA. (*goes to the kitchen and begins cleaning up*). Why?

RAMNIK. Not now. Not when all this is happening.

ARUNA. Baa will tell her about her times. What is wrong with that?

RAMNIK. Baa doesn't tell her everything that happened.

ARUNA. Good. If she did, it will be ten times longer than the Ramayana.

RAMNIK (*seriously*). Baa does not know. Or she pretends she does not know everything.

ARUNA. She will tell her what happened to her. And that is the truth, isn't it?

RAMNIK (*angrily*). I don't want her telling my daughter that those people are all demons! (Dattani 173)

Ramnik knew that his father had committed the biggest crime and that the Muslims were made patsies. Hardika, without actually being aware of the truth had built strong feeling of resentment towards the Muslims for which Ramnik was not happy at all. He didn't want his daughter to be around Hardika for he feared that Smita might turn against the other community under the influence of the grandmother.

Misconceptions, traumatic experiences, religious wont, age old suspicion and hatred causes communalism as portrayed by Dattani in *Final Solutions*. Dattani in *Final Solutions* does not really bring out a solution but leaves it to the audience to probe and decide what the solution should be. It should come from within individuals and not through policies or Acts or norms that can define true secularism or communal harmony. To accept human as human first is what must be taught and not by religion, gender, class, caste, race or nation. The role of the mob becomes equally important for they represent two sides of the same coin. They represent both the Hindu and the Muslim mob. The mask that they wear is what makes their difference else behind the mask are human trying to live to the norms of the society. People tend to forget to accept each other as human first. The ways of God are many but all religion teach love which becomes the least of practices in all religious groups. Communalism has been and is a long-term problem in India. India consists of distinct religion- based communities which have their own separate and special interests which they do not share with each other and which often come into mutual conflict. Religion, caste, etc seems to make an identity of the human bringing about discrimination, inequality and disharmony which is clearly portrayed in Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*; Final Solutions and not Solution because there are a number of solutions which the audience can ponder on and each individual has one's own solution to finalize with with communalism.

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## Chapter –IV

### “THEY DROWN THEM IN MILK”- SOCIAL BIAS AGAINST THE GIRL CHILD IN *TARA*

“*Tara* was first performed as *Twinkle Tara* at the Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore, on 23 October 1990 by Playpen Performance Arts Group” (Dattani 321). Erin Mee says of Dattani,

Mahesh Dattani frequently takes as his subject the complicated dynamics of the modern urban family. His characters struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, cultural constructions of gender, and repressed desire” (Ibid 319).

*Tara* is one such play by Mahesh Dattani whose characters struggle for freedom and happiness in a society bound by traditions and the favoritism for the male child. It is a play which deals with multiple social issues that hogs the Indian Society. One of these issues is the discrimination against the girl child in India. Gender bias against the girl child has been existence in India since time immemorial as Roopa says,

ROOPA. The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies- you know dowry and things like that- so they used to drown them in milk. (Ibid 349)

Women have always been considered second-class citizens and is always situated as the other to man. Men are usually considered to be the bread winners, the head and the most superior

of all other family members. The role of a woman is simply to take care of her family. Women are perceived as subservient because of their role as care takers and homemakers, whilst men predominantly ensure the family's social and economic stability. Men are usually considered the main income-earners and hence the preference for male child is high in the Indian society. The woman is not who she really is but is a construct of society.

The worship of goddesses for the fulfillment of all the ambitions and aspirations of mankind have kindled hope in the form of worshipping women. So the Indian women are named after the names of various goddesses and named as *Devi*, signifying the veneration and respect bestowed on them by men. The word 'Devi' indicates a heavenly denizen as the gods and goddesses are supposed to be living in the heaven. So it is a fact of Indian life that women are treated here as goddesses or Devis. No other proof is necessary than this to drive home the point that women are worshipped in real life in Indian society. That is one of the facets of the image of Indian women. (Kunjakkan 15)

Kunjakkan says that "women are worshipped in real life in Indian society" and that she represents the image of a Goddess but the bitter truth is that her birth is considered a curse. As a matter of fact, a girl, in India is considered less important than the boys and because she is less important, one can do what one likes with her. Pre-birth selection also leads to numerous numbers of female infanticides in India. The historical tradition of patriarchy which has been practiced over the years in India has been embedded into Indian men and women; society's practices get embedded into the Indian mind set. "Society has created woman as the other, and the means by which this difference has been created must be exposed and discredited, so that women can achieve their full potential as the equals of men" (Waugh 323). Simone de Beauvoir argues that "woman is

always situated as the other to man. The man is always the subject- self, the 'I', whilst the woman is always the object, the other" (Ibid 321). Gayatri Spivak speaks on women as the 'other', a subaltern.

The concept of the 'other' is a universal phenomenon in which the self claims to be the subject and all the rest come under the category of the other. The term 'other' is highly relative and it goes on changing its significance according to the context. There is supremacy of the male over women in the society. The dominance of patriarchy has been achieved through historical forces. From the time immemorial, the male-folk went for work and they were the bread-earners of the family. Women were confined to the four walls of their houses, looking after their children and household duties. They never went out for anything and as a result they lacked vigour, vitality, exuberance and mobility. Physiologically a lot of changes do take place in the body of a woman especially when she bears a child in her womb. The bodily changes along with the strict restriction on movement resulted in the complete subjugation of women. This historical factor has paved the way for the treatment of women as the 'other'. (Spivak 129- 130)

References about the discrimination against women dates back to the Vedic age when women were considered inferior to men during warfare.

The horrible custom of female infanticide was widely practiced by the barbaric Vedic Aryan tribes who invaded India. It is these Vedic nomads who introduced this depravity into India. The Vedas prescribed an intense hatred for women, and female children were considered highly undesirable in the nomadic Aryan

patriarchal view. Indeed, so-deep rooted was the desire for male children that the Vedas prescribe numerous prayers for male offspring. (Tomar 87)

Indian society has made much progress and is developing with change in time. However, traditional values continue to be practiced in contemporary India. Manvinder Kaur and Ameer Sultana views about India towards her women:

More than half a century back, India 'awoke to freedom' and made a 'tryst with destiny'. To fulfill the dream which has provided sustenance to the freedom struggle. 'We the people of India' gave to ourselves a constitution guaranteeing liberty, equality and justice to ALL the citizens of India: men and women. Almost thirty years later, the report of the committee on the status of women in India revealed that the dreams had not yet become a reality for women in India. The constitutional guarantees remained 'de jure', while 'de facto' women continued to be the 'marginalized' citizens of the nascent Republic. (Kaur, Sultana 5)

### **The Girl Child, a Victim of Materialism**

Patriarchal society is one big reason for the low status of women in India. Dattani brings to picture the situation of women in our society. He deals with bias against the girl child in *Tara* and how it affects a society represented by the Patels. The girl child in any Indian family is given less importance and the discrimination is even more visible and intense when there is a male child in the family. *Tara* is one such play wherein the girl is often ignored by the father and also least cared for from the time the twins were born. Dattani in *Tara* intermingles the past and the present through Chandan's character also exposing the traditional preference for a male child

which continues to linger in the contemporary modern society, not only amongst the rural Indians but the urban Indians as well. Ranjan writes of the child,

The patterns of childhood in literature vary, but the portrayal by and large tends to be sentimental or romantic. The picture of the child in Indian literature is no exception to this. The child may appear as the embodiment of sweetness or the victim of a cruel world, the incarnation of joy or a passive witness, the symbolic abstraction or concrete image, but, whatever be the form, the basic mould remains romantic or sentimental. (Ranjan 138)

Tara in the play is an embodiment of a girl child victimized in a cruel world whose life is taken as a young girl. She fights to cope with society but Dr Umakant Thakkar is already seen to have taken the role of God in her life. The surgical separation of the Siamese twins conducted by Dr Thakkar and his team leaves Tara crippled for life. Here, the dramatist also exposes and questions the medical professionals who are corrupted by the interest of money. Mohinder Singh is of the view that,

Many people lose their judgment and discrimination when it comes to money matters. Each of us seems to be endowed with a Money Complex- an intertwined group of physical “weak spots” that, in various circumstances, erupt into seemingly irrational behavior. And this complex is formed, layer by layer, from infancy through adulthood.

Actually our money attitudes are not isolated psychic phenomena but an integral part of what we are. Someone who is withholding money may also be withholding

affection. Another one who is perennially anxious about financial status may be lacking in self-assurance. (Singh 97)

The doctor knew that the third leg belonged to Tara and that it would cost her life if it were given to the male child. However, he still carried on with the surgery under the influence of money.

Money has earned a reputation as the root of all evil. It drives mankind to fraud, forgery, theft and murder. It corrupts the young and bribes those in official positions. In some ways, it undermines every form of human decency. (Ibid 98)

The dramatist brings out through Dr Thakkar how a man of reputation and respect could stoop to the lowest driving himself to fraud and murder as seen in the case of Tara. Doctors are usually considered next to God for their ability to save lives but in *Tara*, Dattani brings out the corrupted officials being bribed for a life. The God-like figure in the play is seen to be driven by evil force in the form of money.

Professional success and status have their importance but what currently matters most is the acquisition of money. With the steady decline in other forms of distinction, money is now the chief maker and marker of status and power. (Ibid 98)

### **Exposing the Stereotypical Mindset of Contemporary India**

Bharati's father, an MLA, whose presence is felt much in the play plays the leading role for the pathetic condition of Tara. He is a man of power and status and hence has control over the Patels as well as the doctor. He is not seen in the play but his presence plays a major role for he becomes the very reason for Tara's death. He is a man of reputation in society whose position

matters most to him. He is so much consumed in the Hindu culture which has long had a patriarchal bias against women. He believes in the preference for son in Hindu culture which is largely based on the fact that men are better providers, and that sons are required for the proper performance of funeral rites and also for the inheritance of property. Simone de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* argues

that there was no such thing as 'feminine nature'. There was no physical or psychological reason why women should be inferior to men, and yet, throughout history and across cultures, women had always been second-class citizens. Even when worshipped and adored, they have no autonomy and received no recognition as rational individuals, any more than when they have been abused and denigrated... just as man considers himself superior to nature, so he considers himself superior to woman. (Waugh 320-231)

Bharati's father, who is also the grandfather, is expected to love his grandchildren equally but we see strong discrimination against the girl, Tara for which he becomes the sole decision maker that the third leg be given to the male child, Chandan. According to Mohinder Singh, "grandparents assume a vital function, providing a source of rescue or refuge for grandchildren". (Singh 164)

A person wishing to become a valued grandparent should learn to accept change, and should be able to relinquish the parental role with his children and enter into a new role with his grandchildren, a role that supplements the parental role and in no way conflicts or competes with it. (Ibid 166)

However, in *Tara*, the dramatist brings out the grandfather's strong belief in cultural practices wherein there is complete evidence in the discrimination against the girl over the boy. The grandfather was made aware of the risk it would take to give the third leg to the boy yet he stands strong in his decision caring least for the life of the girl. Dattani in *Tara* brings out the root of gender discrimination which the modern Indians cannot do away with. Although Bharati's father plays the part in this crime, it is Bharati who is made the scapegoat. The audience is made to view Bharati as responsible for her daughter's death but one cannot completely blame Bharati for she only listened to what her father decided a strong authoritative patriarch who is seen to take control over the Patel family. "To be a very good woman, an Indian woman must be more than ever the perfect daughter" (Kunjakkan 17) says Kunjakkan, which Bharati has been to her father ultimately leading to the death of her daughter, who in the long run, has to bear the brunt of the blame. The dramatist brings out the motive of crime lying hidden in the patriarchal system in our society, where women are considered inferior to men when the grandfather decides to let the boy inherit his huge fortune. Bias against the female finds its crux in *Tara*, where the male twin, Chandan, gets the privilege to live while the other twin, who unfortunately for the Indian family, is a girl, is left to wither away slowly. The dramatist mirrors the abominable traditional practice of preferring the boy over the girl, which lashes back at the stereotypical mindset of the Indian society and the consequences each of the family members have to go through, as Gajendra Kumar states,

Tara is not simply an exposition of dramatic contour and finesse but a critique of the complexity of human relationship in a society where life becomes chaotic and neurotic (Kumar 123).

### **Miserable Condition of the Female in India Portrayed in *Tara***

Mahesh Dattani through *Tara* presents reality of women in India. He brings out the sufferings a girl child goes through in her span of life, who unfortunately is also made crippled physically and mentally. Bharati is also made to feel guilty of the decision made by her father and is often criticized as a woman destroying another woman's life. Dr Priyanka Tomar expresses her views on such situation:

So complete is the discrimination among women that the gender bias is extended even toward the guilty. In a bizarre trend, the onus of murder is often put on the women to protect the men. (Tomar 21-22)

*Tara* “centers on the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins” (Dattani 319) -Tara and Chandan. Dattani has a way of bringing reality on stage portraying Indian society which consciously or unconsciously discriminates the female. The Siamese twins were surgically separated when they were only three months old, leaving Tara crippled for life. Sense of belongingness is devoid in the Patel twins in their very own hometown. The twins are seen to be taking great delight in each other's company and are inseparable though separated surgically. It is difficult for one of them to live without the other. The play opens with Dan on his writing table speaking to the audience about a play he is working on. A playwright who is now in London reminiscing about his childhood spent with his other half Tara who is now dead. He is tortured and haunted with guilt over the death of Tara and can share with none but commit to paper in the form of a drama. Dan is seen trying to concentrate on the typewriter in front of him, “he is typing furiously” (Ibid 323), but every time he thinks of writing, he is tortured by the past. He finally

succeeds in writing but at the end he tears everything that he has written, making Tara's tragedy his own and apologizes saying,

DAN. Forgive me, Tara. Forgive me for making it my tragedy. (Ibid 380)

Chandan, now Dan, is in London, "thousands of miles from home hasn't put enough distance between us" (Ibid 323). He continues to remember Tara, whose life has been pathetic as he says, "to masticate my memories in my mind and spit out the result to the world in anger" (Ibid 324), which speak much of the prejudice against the girl in India. He speaks directly to the audience. He reads from a sheet he has been typing,

Nothing changes- except the date. (*Reads from the paper.*) '*Twinkle Tara. A drama in two acts by Chandan Patel, 93 Fishpond's Road, Tooting, London SW17 7LJ.*' (Ibid 324)

"The date" as mentioned by Dan indicates a contemporary world which continues to follow and practice the age old traditions. He also speaks of "sati, dowry deaths or child-marriages" which does not exist in Western countries and are alien to them. However, in the Indian society such practices are deeply rooted leading to discrimination against women generation after generation. The goddess figure and the expectation Indian men have on their women makes her lose the freedom that has been granted to her. Kunjakkann describes how an ideal Indian woman ought to be.

Submission and docility, skill and grace in various household tasks constitute the virtue of a womanhood. The mother moulds her daughter to be a good girl, a good wife, a good woman, a good mother and a good mother-in-law. She instills in her young mind chastity, purity, dedication and devotion to her husband.

Only a good and obedient girl can become a good woman. And only a good woman can become a good wife. So the training given to the girl by the mother and her family members, the social tradition and the discipline inculcated in her life facilitates her to become a good wife. A woman becomes full when she becomes a wife. Marriage fulfills all the ambitions and aspirations of a girl/daughter. She is born and brought up to become a wife and then only the stature of womanhood is actually attained by her after marriage. Of course there are women who are not married at all. But according to Hindu tradition, only married woman can achieve the status and respectability of society, law, tradition, customs and conventions. (Kunjakkan 17)

The ideal of chastity and purity, unselfishness and service, simplicity, and modesty have been preserved by our women drawn by that vision of innate divinity. The Indian woman cannot jump out of this inheritance of hers, warned Swami Vivekananda more than 56 years ago: any attempt to modernize our women, if it is to try to take our women away from the ideals of Sita, is immediately a failure as we see every day. The women of India must grow and develop in the foot-print of Sita and that is the only way. (Ibid 19)

The women in Indian society are expected to abide by the values of the goddesses. They are taught at “home the ideal of chastity and purity, unselfishness and service, simplicity, and modesty” which is an inheritance drawn by innate divinity. She is raised in such a way that she fails to fight for her rights and even if she does so, she is considered a disgrace to society. She is made guilty even when she is the victim. A documentary on “India’s Daughter: The Story of Jyoti Singh” reveals how women are treated in India. A defense lawyer, M.L Sharma says of a

female that if she is put in a gutter, it is spoilt; if put in a temple, she will be worshipped. Perhaps Indian society has so much attributed its daughters the image of goddesses that they fail to teach them to fight against all odds even when put in a gutter. Gutter, ironically becomes representative of the society. India is emerging as an economically powerful nation; however, the deeply rooted traditional practices perpetuate dowry murders and female infanticide. Dattani presents Bharati's father as belonging to the group of people whose mind-set holds the traditional values as sacred. He is a man who believes that women do not have consistent rights to share in property; he is a man who believes that women have responsibilities while males have power.

Swati Shirwadkar says of the Indian family that in the traditional joint family the authority structure is organized in such a way that there would be neither revolt against it nor any violation of its norms. The Indian family values its traditions that even nuclear families are controlled by the older men as seen in the Patels. Angelie Multani says of Bharati's father that,

the absent grandfather and the influence his actions and legacy have on the family is another of Dattani's trademarks that signals how much the family rules us.  
(Multani 137)

### **Familial Relationship of the Gandhi Family**

The play is set in modern India. Patel and Bharati's marriage was a love marriage and an inter-caste marriage- Patel is Gujarati and Bharati is Carnatic who is also the daughter of a powerful MLA. Patel is the General Manager in Indo-Swede Pharmacia, the biggest pharmaceutical company in India. They belong to the middle class Indian family whose lives become chaotic with the birth of the Siamese twins, more so because the other twin was a girl. They live in modern India trying to make amends with traditional preferences over their children.

The nurture assumption places the credit and blame squarely on parents, in the process turning modern parenthood into a high-responsibility, high-anxiety undertaking. Those who fail to measure up to the strictest standards of supposedly optimal parenting often labour under a sense of guilt. (Mohinder Singh 160)

As stated by Mohinder Singh, Patel and Bharati are seen to be anxious over their children's condition, especially of Tara, and are also guilt ridden. Patel says, "Ours was a happy marriage. We were overjoyed when we came to know Bharati would have twins" (Dattani 377). Ironically, the birth of the twins only brought about strained relationship between the husband and wife.

*Tara*, as the title suggests is significant to the girl Tara who is feisty, bright, smart and witty who according to Chandan is "a little girl with a wild imagination" (Ibid 334). She is only thirteen but is mature beyond her age, "we women mature fast" (Ibid 333). Tragedy hits her life when she is denied to live only because she was a girl. Through her character, the dramatist also portrays the prejudice that the society has for the crippled. The twins were conjoined from waist down and had only three legs, so while one gets two legs, the other gets only one; their difference in their sex makes it even more complicated; Complicated more so because they were born to an Indian family who discriminates the girl child. Gender bias makes Tara lose the third leg even when it actually belonged to her, even when it was clearly supported and would be better off with the girl. The surgery is successful but the leg does not survive on Chandan and had to be cut off as a useless lump of dead flesh. Tara's life is also cut short and dies at a very young age.

Female infanticide is a practice found in India, especially in rural India. In *Tara*, the dramatist unveils that such practices do exist even in urban India amongst modern Indian families. "Female infanticide is the intentional killing of infant girls" (Webster University) and is most

prevalent in patriarchal societies in which the status of women is low and the preference for male child is quite high. It is also described as gender-selective killing or “gendercide”. The reasons behind such killing are almost always cultural. India being a patriarchal society has led to cultural bias against women contributing to frequent cases of female infanticide and because women are accorded such low value in Indian society, the female children who are allowed to live are at great risk of neglect and discrimination, exactly what Tara went through during her short span of life. The father, Patel is seen to be more interested in building a career for Chandan than of Tara. He wants to make sure that Chandan gets admitted to a good college and have a job however he is least interested about Tara’s career. Patel only asserts that Chandan would have a future but is not very sure about Tara’s. It is sad for Tara for she was not given the opportunity to choose to be born a male or a female. Patriarchy has a great role to play in *Tara*. Bharati’s father, an MLA, despite his death, his presence is strongly felt in the play which is an indication of the deep rooted patriarchal society for it was his decision to give the third leg to Chandan so that he can inherit his grandfather’s property. The status of women in India has ancient origins. In order to have a proper perspective on the conditions of women in modern-day India, it is essential to broadly review the ancient Vedas and Manu. The relationship between the ancient Vedas and Manu is vast and complex, but it is this relationship that has shaped the religious traditions and cultural norms that greatly affect the state of women in India today.

Dattani portrays reality through *Tara* the pre-modern practices of discrimination against the girl child continuing in modern India to the extent where even a man of high profession cares least for the life of the girl child. Dr Thakkar in the play is a God- like figure who is responsible for the lives of the twins, who has complete knowledge about the condition of the twins. It is he who performs the surgery. Doctors are often considered second to God because of their ability to

save lives but he becomes one among the reasons for the death of Tara. He clearly knew the risks that would happen to the girl if the legs were not given to her but money led him to do evil and he gave the legs to the boy anyway. Despite being a Doctor, his mindset was as traditional with regards to women status as being low. He says,

Our greatest challenge would be to keep the girl alive. Nature wanted to kill her.  
We couldn't allow it. (Dattani 376)

But ironically, nature wanted to keep the girl alive but the doctors didn't allow her to. "Women in India continue to labour under the brunt of oppressive traditions, exploitation, and lack of self-worth or identity. They are routinely subjected to violence even at home" (Tomar 199), as seen in the life of Tara. "Discrimination or rather neglect in health care cuts short the lives of unwanted girl children" (Kaur, Sultana 16), clearly portrayed in *Tara* wherein the innocent girl dies a young child for she is denied to live "denied the right to take birth, neglected in health care, subjected to all forms of violence, deprived of proper education, women in India, nevertheless carry a heavy burden of works- both within the household and outside" (Ibid 21).

### **Guilt and Fractured Identity in Dan (Chandan)**

Act 1 opens with Dan in front of the typewriter trying to write about his twin sister's story, Tara, who is dead but whose life continues to haunt him. He is seen struggling to remember the past as he says,

DAN. To tell you the truth, I had even forgotten I had a twin sister. (*Music fades in slowly.*) Until I thought of her as subject matter for my next literary attempt. Or maybe I didn't forget her. She was lying deep inside, out of reach...

TARA. And me. Maybe we still are. Like we've always been. Inseparable. The way we started in life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out... (Dattani 324-325)

The Patel twin's life is seen to be pathetic from the very day they were born making Dan anxious of his state of life as he says,

DAN. ... And what remains is what I intend making capital of. My freakishness. I am a freak. (Ibid 324)

Their birth is also considered rare as Dr Thakkar puts it,

DR THAKKAR. The twins are of different sexes. Very, very rare. (Ibid 332)

DR THAKKAR. Conjoined twins are quite rare. I think one in every fifty thousand twin conceptions could have a probability of containing this... defect. (Ibid 331)

This very comment of Dr Thakkar represents how society considers the crippled as 'defect'. They are devoid of community support and struggle to live a normal life.

TARA. They were all running across the street, laughing their ugly heads off over something. When they saw me get off the car, they stopped. They stopped running and they stopped laughing. And they waited, watching me get off and walk across the footpath towards them. Embarrassing me, making me go slower than I would. When I reached them, they grinned. Nalini whispered to her ugly friend. I knew what was coming. Might as well play along, I thought. I smiled and introduced myself. We exchanged names. Nalini and Prema. The other one just tittered. I

smile to her as well. Then I showed it to them. The duckling couldn't believe her eyes. She stared at my leg. She felt it and knocked on it. Silly as well as ugly, I thought. 'the very best from Jaipur,' I said. (Ibid 335)

Their crippled condition is what makes society define the person failing to see who the true he or she is. People who experience disability undergo stress; cope with life transitions, value changes, and experience disability issues across their life spans. They have to deal with family role, cross-cultural issues and adjustments, as seen in the twins who have to move to new places for their surgery- Bangalore, London, Bombay; consequences of negative demeanor's towards people with disabilities as a whole. Their system of life and living has to change in many different ways; they must endure a process of adjustment and self-evaluation. Disability does not change a person. Instead, disability threatens concepts a person has held about who they are. The birth of the twins brings about chaos in the Patel house, especially between Patel and Bharati for they are seen to be furious about everything. And from the very beginning of the play, Patel is seen to be more interested in making a man of Chandan than of Tara.

PATEL. I was just thinking... It may be a good idea for you to come to the office with me.

CHANDAN. What for?

PATEL. Just to get a feel of it.

CHANDAN. You can take Tara. She'll make a great business woman.

...

PATEL (*firmly*). Chandan, I think I must insist that you come.

CHANDAN. We'll both come with you.

PATEL. No! (Ibid 328)

...

TARA. ... Speaking of maturity, you better not skip any physiotherapy sessions.

Daddy wants you to be big and sturdy. (Ibid 333)

Dr. Priyanka Tomar is of the view that,

Families in India would go to any extent to have sons, particularly because they are regarded as a means of social security in old age (of the parents), and also because of the religious (Hindu) sanction that sons get to enjoy to perform the last rites (death ceremony) of their parents. (Tomar 203)

Tara also gives the audience a clue on the influence of age old traditions and culture as she says,

TARA. Not at all. The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave. (Dattani 328)

Indian women are considered the caretakers of home and are trained from a very young age.

The girl picks up the mandatory skill for house holding, cooking, and child care establishing her place in her primary world. These relationships and the tasks constitute the destinies of girlhood in India. The other woman in the family, her mother, grandmother, aunts, sisters and sisters-in-law are the Indian girl's

teachers and models but her allies against the discrimination and inequalities of that world and its values. (Kunjakkan 16)

Dan is seen unable to focus on the story he is writing on because he cannot bear to imagine the pain and sufferings Tara had to go through during her short span of life.

DAN. ... This isn't fair to Tara. She deserves something better. She never got a fair deal. Not even from nature. Neither of us did. Maybe God never wanted us to be separated. Destiny desires strange things. We were meant to die and our mortal remains preserved in formaldehyde for future generations to study. Our purpose in life was maybe that. Only that. But even God does not always get what he wants. (Dattani 330)

Tara's death has a great impact on Chandan's life. They are inseparable though surgically separated.

CHANDAN: don't be ridiculous. I just don't feel like joining without you. (Ibid 360)

says Chandan when Tara denies joining college. Tara and Chandan were

two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out... and separated. (Ibid 325)

Chandan is made a scapegoat and is guilt ridden over the death of his sister. He strongly believes that he being the male has snatched away the possibilities of a healthy life from Tara. He is incomplete without Tara and goes on saying, "maybe God never wanted us to be separated." Speaking to his father on a phone call he says,

It's just that I don't think I can face life there anymore (Ibid 372)

Because he is so much tortured and haunted by the memories he has had with his sister.

Those who survive are those who do not defy the gravity of others. And those who desire even a moment of freedom find themselves hurled into space, doomed to crash with some unknown force. (Ibid 379)

Says Dan towards the end of the play. And this is what Dattani deals with in his works, of those who seek freedom and goes against the society only leads to their doom and the survivors are those who never unveil their true self and live a life of pretention. *Tara* also portrays the gendered self where 'female' in a male or the female is always given the lowest priority. Society only gives privilege to what is male. Dattani through *Tara* also reveals the attitude of the society towards the physically challenged. Thus, the tragic element is accentuated to a great extent. Tara is, no doubt, a victim of the tragic consequences that keep happening around her both as a female and as a physically challenged child. Mahesh Dattani has very skillfully revealed the theme of gender discrimination in this play and also speaks volumes incorporating the element of tragedy and the playwright's concern for the disabled. The issue of cultural discrimination against women has been elaborately and comprehensively dealt with by Dattani in *Tara* wherein female is subjugated and underestimated by patriarchal society.

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## Chapter –V

### **“HE DEPENDED ON ME FOR EVERYTHING... HE SAW IN ME A WOMAN WHO WOULD FATHER HIM”- EMPOWERING WOMEN IN *WHERE THERE’S A WILL***

*Where There’s a Will* is Mahesh Dattani’s first full length play written in 1986. It is a play which presents the patriarchal Indian society described by Mahesh Dattani “as the exorcism of the patriarchal code” (Dattani 451) with the character of Kiran Jhaveri. The play opens with, “*The lavish house of Hasmukh Mehta.*” (Ibid 455). The play centers around “*three spaces: the fancy dinning-cum-living room, the bedroom belonging to Hasmukh and Sonal Mehta, and the hideously trendy bedroom of their son, Ajit, and his wife, Preeti*” (Ibid 455). “The tone of the play is from the beginning comic. The play itself could be called a comedy. The tense situations of the earlier plays do not appear here” (Joshi 194). Dattani uses satire with twists and turns in the play that completely subverts the existing stereotypes. We are introduced to five characters in the play. Hasmukh Mehta- the Indian patriarch, Ajit Mehta- the “nincompoop” (Dattani 458) according to his father, Sonal Mehta- the typical Indian middle class housewife who is dependent on her husband in every situation, Preeti- the pregnant wife of Ajit who is as “sly as a snake” (Ibid 456) who is after the money and Kiran Jhaveri- Hasmukh’s mistress and the trustee of his property. Dattani in this play probes into the deep rooted patriarchal code and exposes its effect on Indian families and society. Hasmukh is portrayed as any other Indian patriarch who is selfish, snobbish, pitiless, cunning and emotionless. The dominance of patriarchy also makes Hasmukh prefer a son when he says, “I actually prayed to get him” (Ibid 455). Hasmukh is a

successful businessman who dies at the end of the first scene but continues to control his family even after his death through a complicated will. Hasmukh lingers on in his family as ghost and becomes the watcher of his own dominance in the family. The play opens with Ajit on the phone and Hasmukh is seen introducing his family directly to the audience which signifies authority and power over his family. He acts as the narrator of the play. He is a self made industrialist who rules his household and has his final say in everything. His domineering figure can be seen in the play for he is the sole-decision maker of the family and does not bother about the opinions of his family. Even when it comes to new ideas proposed by Ajit for work, Hasmukh rejects it saying,

I didn't read it. I didn't need to, because the answer was no... I didn't like it because it was my money. (Ibid 456)

Hasmukh establishes his patriarchy purely through his wealth and cares least for familial relationships as Sonal clearly points in Act I (i),

SONAL. He wasn't like this before. He used to listen to me before. Money has made him stubborn. (Ibid 472)

He wanted to take control of just about everything, to "obey my orders" (Ibid 458) and fit himself in the "empty spaces" (Ibid 458) of Ajit is what Hasmukh's intention is.

### **Patriarchal Ego in the Play**

One conversation between Hasmukh and Ajit is what grabs the attention of the audience

HASMUKH. ... what's wrong with being me?

AJIT. And what becomes of me? The real me. I mean, if I am you then who am I?  
(Ibid 460-461)

This brings out the dominant Indian patriarch where the father expects his son to be just like him as Hasmukh has been to his father, an attitude that has been passed down through generations.

HASMUKH. I had the good sense to learn from my father...

He took great trouble to make sure I didn't turn out like my brothers. (Ibid 463-464)

Ajit struggles for his identity living under the same roof with his father who is a stern patriarch. He doesn't get to live his way or by his will but has to obey to his father's command which suffocates him. As a result, he rebels against his father but can do nothing about it for he was under his father who had all control of his money. Dattani exhibits patriarchy's control beyond death through the will which, even after Hasmukh's death, Ajit had to obey the rules set out in the will for if he disobeyed, he would lose the property that's in hand for him. He is left with no choice but to obey and follow the orders for he could not afford to lose the property.

The preference of the male is also seen in Act I scene (i) so that the son would grow out to be like him and "live life again through" (Ibid 475) the son which is typical of any Indian father. The value of marriage is made worthless as seen through the eyes of patriarchy in the form of Hasmukh.

HASMUKH. Why does a man marry? So that he can have a woman all to himself? No. there's more to it than that. What?... No. No, I think the important reason anyone should marry at all is to get a son. Why is it so important to get a son? Because the son will carry on the family name? why did I marry? Yes, to get a son. So that when I grow old, I can live life

again through my son. Why did my father marry? To get me. Why did I marry? To get Ajit. (Ibid 475)

From the very opening of Act I scene (i), Hasmukh is seen to be very protective of his wealth for which he is not ready to invest even in his son's interests. Hasmukh ridicules directly to the audience about Ajit as he speaks on the phone. Hasmukh's attitude portrays the patriarchal attitude towards innovation as an entrenched system insulated to change.

AJIT (*on the phone*). Five lakhs. That's all. Give me five lakhs and I'll modernize the whole bloody plant. That's what I tell my dad. I mean, come on, five lakhs is nothing!

HASMUKH (*to the audience*). My son, the business man. Just listen to him.

AJIT. I mean, it's not as if I want the money for myself. It's for his factory. But he just won't listen to me. I don't think he has ever listened to me in his entire life.

HASMUKH. Do you blame me for not listening to him? If I paid any attention to even one of his crackpot schemes, I wouldn't be around to listen to anybody.

AJIT. After all, I am the joint managing director.

HASMUKH. Believe me, appointing him as the JMD was a big mistake.

AJIT. And, after all, I am his son...

HASMUKH. That was an even bigger mistake. What makes it worse is knowing that I actually prayed to get him. Oh God! I regret it all. Please let him just drop dead. No, no. what a terrible thing to say about one's own son. Take it back. Dear God, don't let him drop dead. Just turn him into a nice vegetable so he won't be in my way. Ever since he entered my factory, he has been in my way. (Ibid 455)

Hasmukh Mehta is the type of man who wishes to rule over and has to have his way in every possible decision. He has not been satisfied with his brother and is not satisfied with his co-workers as well. As a self made man, we see that he is selfish even towards his own son and is not ready at all to listen to Ajit's idea and schemes. He only thinks for himself and is preoccupied with his money and focused in the betterment of his business. Ajit clearly says, "It's not as if I want the money for myself. It's for his factory" (Ibid 455). Ajit, representing the new generation is bold to take risks; is young and energetic and wants to bring about changes in his father's business which he would someday inherit but Hasmukh is too stubborn to listen to his son's projects which he considers as "crackpot schemes" and that it is only a wastage of money. Ajit is also a picture of who Hasmukh did not want to become. This brings out the insularity of the traditional way of life where age old customs and practices are unwilling to change and are not as flexible as the contemporary way of living. With change in time, society has to cope with it; not all traditions and practices can be done away with but there are certain cases where things have to change for the better and for the progress of society. Hasmukh does not like people being in his way for he wants to be the only boss and the only decision maker giving orders and wants none to take control of his decisions. Hasmukh unconsciously is a participant of the patriarchal

lineage that has been in his family. He goes on to talk about himself and his father whom he looked up to.

HASMUKH. ... I am forty-five and look at what I have achieved. That is because I had the good sense to learn from my father. Now he was a hard worker, my father. He started his own industry when he came to the city. He came with his wife and two growing sons. I do remember my brother. He ran away to Goa with some hippies. It was the sort of thing youngsters did then... Where was I? My father. Yes. My father had only me to help him out. He took great trouble to make sure I didn't turn out like my brother. No more school. No more loafing for me. Hard work. And I am happy he did that! We made money! I remember we used to spend half the night going through our accounts and counting our profits. The other half of the night we would dream of being millionaires! (Ibid 464)

Through this speech, the audience is made to know that Hasmukh is the type of man who listened to his father; who really didn't have a say but followed his father's orders. He is the type of man who didn't go against his father's wishes which may also portray cowardice because his brother and Ajit were the type who enjoyed their own way of life. They did things that pleased their mind and soul and didn't bother much about monetary values. He was the one who helped his father build the present empire of the company and worked twice as hard to make it big. Because of the attachment, the sacrifices and the hard work that he has put into for the company, he is afraid that Ajit would fail him which might lead to a great downfall. He is ridden with power and his achievement for the company that he didn't know Ajit quite as well as a father is expected of one's own son of his abilities. Through their relationship, the audience is also made

aware of the collision of traditional values with that of the contemporary; contemporary trying to unchain itself from the stronghold of patriarchy. This generational face-off occurs between the father and the son when the son has his own schemes and projects which are in contrast with that of the father. Their perspective and approach towards life is quite different from each other and hence, Hasmukh couldn't rely on his own son and was blind to the capabilities and potentials instead he is terrified at the very thought of his company going bankrupt under Ajit's leadership. Because of their vast difference in views, arguments continue to erupt between the father and son,

AJIT. Daddy, you have no right to humiliate me in front of my friends!

HASMUKH. I am not trying to humiliate you. I am trying to put some sense into you. Trying to fill up empty spaces.

AJIT. There, you see! You are doing it again. This is unfair. You have no right!

...

AJIT. This is just the point! Anything I do is wrong for you! Just because you are a self-made man and had a deprived childhood, you feel that I am having it too easy. Nothing I do will ever seem intelligent to you. You are prejudiced. (Ibid 458-459)

“Trying to fill up empty spaces” (Ibid 458) indicates that Hasmukh was not satisfied with his son and that he was trying to fill himself, not in terms of familial bond but as an authority who would help Ajit be more sensible in business relations coming to agreeable terms with his father.

Ajit is furious and declares that his father had no right to do so. But Mr. Hasmukh Mehta stands strong against his son and declares authoritatively,

HASMUKH. Wrong! I, Hasmukh Mehta, have every right. It's my phone you are using in my house, and it's my business secrets you are leaking to government officers, and my typists your friend is flirting with.

AJIT. Don't I have any rights at all?

HASMUKH. You have the right to listen to my advice and obey my orders. (Ibid 458)

The audience builds an impression on *Where There's a Will* as a play representing the egoistic nature of the male section of the society, especially the head of the family who lives under the impression that without him, a family cannot function and that everyone and everything belongs to him; that he is the chief and no member is allowed to opine in any kind of situation. The only right the members were granted was "to listen to my advice and obey my orders." Hasmukh, consumed so much by authoritative power fails to see Ajit as a visionary who wants to bring about benefits not just to his family and company but also the entire community as seen in his speech on a phone call,

AJIT. Seventeen lakhs. Seventeen lakhs and government help is all I need to diversify into manufacturing electronic typewriters. I even made a project report for him. (Ibid 456)

Which Hasmukh didn't bother reading. Hasmukh is seen to be confident only in himself. He is not ready to invest even a little sum of money for his son's project. He is the kind of man who abides by his strict values that if his family did not play along, they will have no future.

HASMUKH. You are raw! Under all that pressure in the office, you will bend.

You will break. That's why I'm toughening you up. Somebody tough has to be around to run the show.

AJIT. Your show, you mean.

HASMUKH. Well, later it will be your show.

AJIT. No. it won't. That's what you're making sure of.

HASMUKH. What do you mean?

AJIT. I mean that you want to run the show, play Big Boss as long as you can. Or as long as God permits. And when all of a sudden, you are 'called to a better world', you will still want to play Big Boss. And you can do it through me. In short, you want me to be you.

HASMUKH. I should have prayed for a daughter. Yes, I want you to be me!

What's wrong with being me?

AJIT. And what becomes of me? The real me. I mean, if I am you, then where am

I? (Ibid 460-461)

Ajit is seen to be trying to make his father understand, however, Hasmukh is so much consumed in being authoritative; in playing "Big Boss" that he fails to understand his son's outcry. Ajit is

right when he says “and when all of a sudden, you are ‘called to a better world, you will still want to play Big Boss” (Ibid 460). Ajit does not allow his father to play Big Boss through him but Hasmukh does so through a will wherein his family had to obey his orders despite his physical absence. The dramatist also presents *Where There’s a Will* as a comment on the role of money in family relationships.

HASMUKH. ... if you are you, then you are nowhere. You are nothing just a big zero. No matter what you do, you’ll remain a zero. Over the years you’ll just keep adding zeroes to your zero. Zero, zero, zero. On their own, the zeroes don’t mean a thing. But if there’s a number one standing before all those zeros, then they really add up to a lot.

AJIT. And I suppose you think you’re the number one in front of my zeroes. (Ibid 461)

Hasmukh in this conversation tries to make Ajit understand the importance of money in the business and how the zeroes become a huge number with the addition of one before it and that Ajit cannot do it without the help of his father, according to Hasmukh. Dattani implies metaphor in this conversation revealing the status of Hasmukh who stands number one and that Ajit is a mere zero who cannot make it huge without his father; and that Ajit will continue to bear zeroes.

## The Stereotypical Indian Women

Women or wives in Indian society are considered to be homemakers, who take responsibilities in the kitchen; however they are still controlled over by their husband as observed in Hasmukh's behavior,

HASMUKH. How can I eat halwa when I have sugar in my urine? She knows that! One day she's going to kill me with her halwa.

PREETI. It's for Aju. He likes orange-flavoured halwa.

HASMUKH. So do I! But she knows I shouldn't eat it. Why should she bother making it? Tell her not to waste her time.

PREETI. It's ready. I'll tell her not to make it from now on.

AJIT. Why should you tell her that? I like it. I'll eat it.

PREETI. Well, if it's going to upset your father...

...

AJIT. This is too much! Why should you (*whispers*) bring some up to our room after dinner? It's halwa I want, not brown sugar!

AJIT. Sorry. I shouldn't mention sugar in this house (*mutters*) because my father has too much of it in his... (Ibid 462-463)

In this conversation, the audience is made aware that Hasmukh Mehta is the head of the family and that the house should run according to his needs, even to the point of what should be cooked

in the kitchen. He is furious to learn that Sonal is preparing 'halwa' for Ajit. Furious because he has diabetes and considers it to be disrespectful on her part to be preparing 'halwa' when he actually cannot eat it. He does not allow anyone to do things as they please; including his only son Ajit. He was a strict follower of his father's rules and expected the same from his son Ajit. He symbolizes patriarchal ego who believes in absolute power who wanted to dominate each and everyone in his family as well as his work place. In the traditional Indian joint family, the authority structure was organized in such a way that there would be neither revolt against it nor any violation of its norms. Has Mukh is seen to be one such type of a person who strictly follows traditions and expects his family to obey his orders.

AJIT. You will never be happy. Not until all of us dance to your tune. And I will never do that.

HASMUKH. Don't be so stubborn!

AJIT. You are stubborn too!

HASMUKH. I'm stubborn because I know I'm right. You're stubborn because you are a nincompoop! (Ibid 458)

He always considers himself to be right. He is the autocratic head who expects and demands unquestionable obedience from his family members. As a result, he tries to dominate and control his family even after his death through a complicated will. The dramatist through *Where There's a Will* probes deep into the roots of this age old tradition exposing its effects on Indian families.

## Discrimination against the Woman

There is also the issue of gender discrimination in the play *Where There's a Will* portrayed through Sonal Mehta, the wife of Hasmukh Mehta. Sonal is married to the Mehta family only to give birth to an heir for the family business. Hasmukh does not really love Sonal. He tries to blame her for his hypertension as he says to the audience,

HASMUKH. You think my son is the cause of my hypertension? Wait till you meet my wife. (Ibid 458)

However, *Where There's a Will* observes a complete different treatment towards women. The women at home are mothers, sisters and daughters. Women are bearers and carriers of her husband's progeny. Sonal is represented as one such woman who plays her role as the perfect Indian wife playing her roles accordingly. However, her husband seems to care least, instead goes on to say to the audience,

HASMUKH (*to the audience*). Sonal. My wife. My son's mother. Do you know what Sonal means? No? 'Gold.' When we were newly married, I used to joke with her and say she was as good as gold... I soon found out what a good-for-nothing she was. (Dattani 473)

He is also candid enough to admit the dissatisfaction of his conjugal life with Sonal and says of her that she is,

As good as mud. Ditto our sex life. Mud. 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. So what does a man do?... and what about my sex life?

Well, I could afford that too. Those expensive ladies of the night in five star hotels!... something between a wife and a pick-up. Yes! A mistress! It didn't take me very long to find her. She was right there in my office. An unmarried lady.”

(Ibid 473)

Unlike the Western family the Indian family is not centered around conjugal bonds and that the marriage system is a typical product of the existing social structure and the traditions of the society. When a man felt tired of the same woman, he wandered about into the houses of dolls as observed in Hasmukh when he no longer enjoyed his sex life with his wife. Abandonment and relief from the routine of home and hearth is prerogative of the men in Indian society. The women, on the other are preordained to stand on a pedestal, keep the hearth on or be a plaything.

The code of conduct expected from an Indian woman is a clear discrimination against women and Sonal is one of those victims. She has no freedom and can do nothing without consulting her husband. Sonal in *Where There's a Will* is representative of the traditional women in society who are nurtured and taught to be good wives.

An Indian woman's role is defined with reference to her relation to others. First as a daughter to her parents, second as a wife to her husband and the third as a mother to her sons. The traditional Indian woman lives in her family structure... Girls generally have their menstruation when they are between eleven and fifteen. The practical training for womanhood starts at about eleven... she begins to do all the household chores and in due course all the major responsibilities in running the house. This training of a daughter is considered of utmost necessity by every mother. The idea behind the training is that the daughter will soon become wife

and will go to live with a mother-in-law. No mother wants to be accused of not teaching her daughter everything there is to know for becoming a proper woman.

It is a family prestige. (Kunjakkan 15)

Sonal is not an educated person and her marriage with Hasmukh was arranged. Her character can be comical and hysterical, but it also evokes a sense to the audience of her eagerness to learn and make changes in her life. Hasmukh on the other is a hard working, self-made industrialist and a sophisticated person who is dissatisfied with Sonal and thinks her to be inferior to him in everything. Sonal is “an average Indian middle class woman has to put up with a dominating husband and the norms of a patriarchal society” (Bhattacharjee 50). She is representative of the type of Indian woman who bears “in mind, the duties of a wife to her husband to serve him in this life and in other without any question, his wishes are her wishes, the wife should always be under the care of and protection of her husband. Her husband is her God. She cannot go away from him. She has no life without him. One woman has one husband in her whole life. Such being the situation naturally the wife should be under his protection (Kunjakkan 14). Sonal is Simone De Beauvoir’s young married woman; “the young wife seldom admits her feeling to herself with such sincerity. To love her husband and to be happy is a duty she owes to herself and to society” (Beauvoir 462). Sonal is the kind of wife who

has no independent means of livelihood and no capacity to earn her own bread, she cannot look after herself. She will have to fulfil her homely and family obligations to herself, her husband, her in-laws and to the society and in such a situation she cannot think of maintaining herself. She will have to keep her chastity, virtue and celibacy as a wife. Only her husband can touch her body. No other person can have any contact with her. In that case, she will become impure

and hence unacceptable to her husband, to the family, and to the society. She will have to strictly follow her religious and social restrictions and rules. Hence she cannot escape from these conditions. (Kunjakkan 14)

Sonal is too good a wife who lacks intellectuality of which Hasmukh is not satisfied with. She didn't understand him as well as his business matters and kept pestering about everything which became intolerable for Hasmukh. Kunjakkan says that the personality of the Indian wife is identified by the ideology of *pativrata* (a faithful wife is a power to her husband) - "A *pativrata* is a wife who believes 'Pati Pratyaksha Daivatha' (husband is living god). A wife should be true helpmate to her husband. She will eat whatever is left after her husband has eaten, obey the commands of her husband without question. She should never be inquisitive or arrogant" (Ibid 19-20).

As defined, Sonal is seen to be a *pativrata* and yet Hasmukh is unhappy and dissatisfied with her. Their marriage as observed is not based on love but on basic necessity and hence Hasmukh finds himself a mistress,

HASMUKH. Yes. A mistress! It didn't take me very long to find her. She was right there in my office. An unmarried lady. Not an ordinary typist or even a secretary. A shrewd hard-headed marketing executive. If there was anyone in my office who had brains to match mine, it was her. She is now one of the directors of the company. Not entirely due to her shrewd head. She lives in a company flat in a posh locality. I won't tell you where. Well, it's walking distance from here. Convenient for me. All right, what's

wrong with having a bit on the side? Especially since the main course is always without salt. Okay, okay, less salt. (Dattani 473)

### **Patriarchy's Control beyond Death**

Dattani shows how patriarchy can have its hold beyond one life through the device of the will. Act I scene (i) ends with Hasmukh's death as the dramatist puts it,

*He coughs uncontrollably now. He puts his cigarette down on the ash tray but does not stub it out. He is now running short of breath. He tries to lie down on the bed, clutching his heart. His breathing becomes really heavy. Till at last he- yes- dies. But it appears as if he's asleep.* (Ibid 475)

His ghost is now seen to be lingering around the house.

*... After a while Hasmukh rises slowly, gets up and looks at his 'body' on the bed. Perhaps he moves behind the bed. He speaks in a natural voice, but much more calmly now.* (Ibid 476)

In Act I (ii), Hasmukh, apparently a ghost now, is seen to be enjoying his popularity. He says,

HASMUKH. ... you never really know how famous you are until you are dead.

Of course, it's at the bottom of page seven and it's only six lines. But look at the obituary page. Filled with my photographs. All inserted by different companies. All mine, of course. *(Throws the paper away.)* Now it's all over. My life is over and I have no business hanging around here. I should be flying to heaven on a buffalo. But what about the mess that's down here? What about all my money? Exactly. I don't think they deserve all

that money. None of them have worked for it, especially not my son. Neither he nor my daughter-in-law will get what they were after-my wife is also in for a great shock. You see, I have made a special will! (*Laughs.*) They are going to hate me for doing this to them! (Ibid 479)

Hasmukh as a plenipotent does not spare his family even after his death. His death does not lessen his control over everyday life in the household. His ghost is seen to be excited to watch his family's show when they find out about the will. He considers his family a "mess" who can do nothing without him. He is not worried about his family but is more concerned with his money; his money which, according to him, his family does not deserve. As a result, he made a will making his mistress, Kiran Jhaveri, the trustee of his property. His dictatorship is intolerable to all members of his family; his death worsens it with his complicated will.

SONAL. You should read some of these terms! Aju has to attend office everyday at nine a.m. and he can only leave at six p.m. He even has to have his lunch there.

AJIT. Imagine! He specified all that in his will. It also mentions that no new business project of mine should be sanctioned!

SONAL. And if we don't go by these terms and conditions, the trust will donate its funds to various charities. Charities approved and mentioned by him, of course! (Ibid 485)

The Mehta family has to go through the worst even after the death of Hasumukh. He continues to take control of his family through his will, worst with Kiran Jhaveri, Hasumukh's mistress, as the trustee of the Hasumukh Mehta Charitable Trust, which could be dissolved only when Ajit turns

forty five and then could manage the finances. The family is seen to be talking about Hasmukh who really hasn't been nice to anyone of them. He didn't love or care for any of his family members. From the very beginning of the play, he introduces them with ridicule to the audience. He never really had anything good to say about his wife, son and daughter-in-law. He considered himself the only sane person in the family who has made it big and that his family didn't deserve any of his property unless they obeyed and live by his rules. He left them with nothing, not even the house, after his death, but "terms and conditions" (Ibid 485) and that if they abide by it, they will be rewarded.

PREETI. How could he do this to us?

AJIT. Well, he's done it.

PREETI. It's all your fault!

AJIT. My fault?

PREETI. Yes. If you had been nicer, all this wouldn't have happened.

HASMUKH. Clever girl.

AJIT. I wasn't nice to him because he wasn't nice to me.

PREETI. So what? He wasn't nice to me either.

SONAL. And he wasn't exactly in love with me either. If I'd known he had a mistress, I would have left him. (Ibid 481)

The family is seen to be in a mess Hasmukh has created with his will. They are seen to be blaming each other for what had happened. Ajit as he, “*takes out a full-length photograph of Hasmukh and hangs it in a conspicuous place*” (Ibid 486), looks at it and says,

AJIT. Everything is going according to your plans. You really have us cornered.

You know I’m too fond of your money to give it all up and say to hell with you and your will.

HASMUKH. I was very sure about that. Why do you think I made the will?

AJIT. You must be happy now, wherever you are. (*Steps back.*) Ever since I was a little boy, you have been running my life. Do this, do that or don’t do that, do this. Was I scared of you! Then, when I grew up, I learnt to answer you back. And were you furious with me! I think it was worth disagreeing with you. At least I have the satisfaction of knowing that you were worried about me. (Ibid 487)

Hasmukh as a tyrant wants to bind his family members to his own wishes and tries to rule over his family even after his death through his will. Dattani, through his character exposes the extremes of traditional patriarchal family lineage, and through Ajit, a modern individual representing contemporary society who is desperately trying to defy and create a new empire.

### **Untying the Knot of Patriarchy through the Other Woman**

By a clever twist Dattani introduces the ‘other’ women as an answer to the problem brought out by Hasmukh, the now dead patriarch. We are introduced to Kiran, the mistress and the trustee of Hasmukh’s property, towards the end of Act I scene (ii). The family is grief-stricken and shocked over the deal of the will. The will was a way for Hasmukh to continue to control his family with the help of his mistress Kiran.

KIRAN. I am only the trustee of all his wealth. Not the owner... everything rightfully belongs to the three of you. Provided you follow his instructions. (Ibid 493)

The family has to continue to live by his instructions if they wanted to get hold of the property. Hasmukh seems to be enjoying the pathetic condition of his family with the will which he has improvised as Ajit says, “we are all living out a dead man’s dream!” (Ibid 501). As the play progresses, Kiran and Sonal are seen to be bonding as they sit and share about their lives which Hasmukh totally disapproves, who now has to watch as a ghost.

Sonal before having Kiran to live with the Mehta family was quite impractical. She is the kind of woman who depends completely on her husband and her sister Minal. She has no real friends and hence goes on to share things to her sister. She represents the typical Indian woman who takes complete responsibility of household chores and does not have much idea of the world outside of her family. Hasmukh goes on to say about Sonal,

I soon found found out what a good- for- nothing she was. As good as mud. Ditto our sex life. Mud. (Ibid 473)

But soon after Kiran comes to live with them, Sonal is seen to be seeing things in a more practical way. Kiran's incidents in life come to a point of realization for Sonal. Through Kiran, Dattani brings out reality revealing the sufferings an Indian woman goes through in her own family. Kiran's whole life has been miserable. She grew up in an atmosphere where she was affected both mentally and emotionally. She saw her father come home drunk, beating her mother eventually making her to serve more wine to her father so that he would be too drunk to beat her mother. Kiran shares much about her life with Sonal of how she managed her work, her house, her husband and also Hasmukh Mehta. Sonal presumes Kiran to be successful because she is educated and considers her to be lucky:

SONAL. You are so lucky. You are educated, so you know all this.

KIRAN. Wrong. I learnt my lessons from being so close to life. I learnt my lessons from watching my mother tolerating my father when he came home every day with bottles of rum wrapped up in newspapers. As I watched him beating her up and calling her names! I learnt what life was when my mother pretended she was happy in front of me and my brothers, so that we wouldn't hate my father. And I learnt when I kept my mother away from my father, so that in return he would remain silent for those three hours when he came home, and before he fell asleep on the dining table, too drunk to harm us anymore. I served him those drinks, waiting for that moment when he would become unconscious and I would say a prayer... Thank God he was too drunk to impose himself on us! Yes, Mrs Mehta. My father, your husband-they were weak men with false strength.  
(Ibid 508)

Kiran narrates how bitter life has been to her and how these experiences has taught her to be independent and practical. Kiran, like her mother had to go through her own mother's agony and pain all over again with her drunkard husband as she quotes,

KIRAN. Isn't it strange how repetitive life is? My brothers. They have turned out to be like their father, going home with bottles of rum wrapped up in newspapers. Beating up their wives. And I-I too am like my mother. I married a drunkard and I listened to his swearing. And I too have learnt to suffer silently. Oh! Where will all this end? Will the scars our parents lay on us remain forever? (Ibid 508)

### **Tyrannical Force of Patriarchy Defeated through the Strength of a Victimized Woman**

Kiran Jhaveri's life has been whirling in circles until she decides to step out of the box. She tries to better her life when opportunity in the form of Hasmukh Mehta came knocking on her door. She is ridiculed by society, especially by the Mehta family but she bears all these accusations. She is portrayed as an independent modern woman who is trying to survive the harsh realities of prejudice and condemnation. She may be in an illicit relationship but she is the only sane person in the play who acts according to the situation and does not make a fuss of things around her. Kiran is a fully conscious woman who uses the means within her reach to deal with life situations. She understands things happening better than any other character in the play. Kiran is a hard- working woman who has learnt a lot from life- "I learnt my lessons from being so close to life" (Ibid 508), a woman who has great patience and tolerance and brings out the truth to Sonal, "my father, your husband- they were all weak men with false strength" (Ibid 508). Dattani uses Kiran to voice out about the patriarchs, completely turning the tables around.

KIRAN. Hasmukh was intoxicated with power. He thought he was invincible. That he could rule from his grave by making his will. (Ibid 508)

And goes on saying, “will the scars our parents lay on us remain forever?” (Ibid 508) which is a question to whether the deep rooted practices on patriarchy will ever end. Kiran further reveals by saying,

KIRAN. He depended on me for everything. He thought he was the decision maker. But I was. He wanted me to run his life. Like his father had. Hasmukh didn't really want a mistress. He wanted a father. He saw in me a woman who would father him! (Ibid 510)

It is through Kiran Dattani reveals the major flaw of patriarchy- its weakness for being dependent, as evident in Hasmukh for he has been living under the shadows of his father, and in Kiran he saw a father figure whom he solely depended on which brings out Kiran's capability and reliability. Sarah M Grimke says,

Man has subjugated women to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort, but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind. (Grimke 14)

Hasmukh's intention in keeping a mistress was to satisfy himself which he didn't find in his conjugal relationship with his wife. Ironically, Kiran reveals the weakness of Hasmukh who was submissive to his father's whims, who obeyed and did what his father asked him to for he felt that it was the only right thing to do, eventually leading him to seek a person who would equal his father, to direct him and to understand him in business matters. No doubt his company

became prosperous through his hard work and commitment but sadly he was nurtured in his father's footsteps whose desires and aspirations were suppressed in fulfilling his father's dreams and not his. He never realized that he walked in his father's shadow until his death. He, unconsciously, was leading the chains of a strict patriarch who was dissatisfied with his family for they were not what he expected of the type of his family, as a result, the will. His will, however, would have not succeeded if it had not been Kiran. She is disgusted by the way Hasmukh

Attempts at ruling over you after his death, through his will, are pathetic. (*Hasmukh sticks his fingers into his ears and shuts his eyes.*) The only reason he wanted to do that is because his father had ruled over his family. All his life he was merely being a good boy to his father. (Ibid 510)

As a result of being a good boy, Hasmukh was carrying on the practices on to his son Ajit who according to Kiran has escaped.

KIRAN. He may not be the greatest rebel on earth, but at least he is free of his father's beliefs. He resists. In a small way, but at least it's a start. That is enough to prove that Ajit has won and Hasmukh has lost. (Ibid 510)

As Sonal and Kiran comes to a point of reconciliation, Hasmukh's ghost becomes outrageous,

HASMUKH (*to Kiran*). You are here to set my family in order. Don't forget your job.

SONAL. I feel sorry for you.

KIRAN. I don't need your pity, Mrs Mehta. I think we should save it for  
 Hasmukh.

HASMUKH. What? Pity? For me?

KIRAN. He was just like his father, wasn't he?

...

KIRAN. Hasmukh Mehta was living his life in his father's shadow.

...

KIRAN. He had no life of his own.

...

KIRAN. Where were his own dreams? His own thoughts?

Whatever he did was planned for him by his father.

KIRAN. Poor Hasmukh. At times I really pitied him. (Ibid 509-510)

This conversation brings out Hasmukh's weakness on being dependent on figures who will perpetuate the same ideology as his, like he has of his father's. Hasmukh, now as ghost, has to listen to truths revealed by Kiran and Sonal and is furious but can do nothing about it. He is angered by Kiran's behavior, which he considers a betrayal for she was the only one person he trusted. He was confident with his plans but is in disbelief with the reversal of fate that has been played upon him and is destroyed by his own evil plans. It was unbearable for Hasmukh to listen to the truth as he finally realizes,

HASMUKH. Is it... true? Have I merely been to my father what Ajit has been to me? Have all my achievements been my father's aspirations for me? Have I been my father's ghost? If that is true, then where was I? What became of me, the real me? (Ibid 511)

Dattani allows the realization of truth in Hasmukh in the after-life perhaps to state the difficulty in the real world to disassemble the power of patriarchy. Bound so much by greed and wealth, he failed to understand the importance of emotions and feelings. Hasmukh is a narcissist who continues to boast of his achievements, "Today, I, Hasmukh Mehta, am one of the richest men in this city. All by my own efforts. Forty-five years old and I am a success in capital letters" (Ibid 464). He failed to understand that,

Emotional attachments are far stronger than intellectual snobbishness in keeping the family together. It is not the head but the heart that rules in family-matter and human relationship (Das 118).

Which Hasmukh could not achieve, Kiran did in the Mehta family, that is, emotional attachment. The Mehta family, with the help of Kiran, came to a point where they no longer bothered much about the property. Without Hasmukh, they were more of a family. After having reconciled, they bring freedom and normalcy to life; they now stick together and try to strengthen their familial bond and rebuilt their relationships. The cutting down of the tamarind tree where Hasmukh rests is also an indication of the exorcism of the patriarchal rule. The family was in place with Kiran in their lives who has learnt much from life. She brings out the failure of Hasmukh who tried to establish supreme control over his family through money and his will.

SONAL. Oh, by the way, Aju, I wanted to tell you. Our neighbours complained today. Our tamarind tree is overgrown and obstructs their electric wires. Why don't you have it trimmed?

AJIT. As soon as Damodar comes back, I'll have it chopped off. I never did like that tree.

...

KIRAN. Did the baby move?

PREETI. It kicked! Almost as if it had... suddenly sprung to life.

SONAL. Oh, I think that's a good sign that all is well. (Ibid 515)

The light spirit in the Mehta household at the end of the play is suggestive of the reunion and harmonious relationship among the members of the family; the unborn baby of Ajit and Preeti is also suggestive of a new beginning as well as for a better future wherein they will no longer be in the chains of Hasmukh Mehta but will now embrace their newly found freedom and a new family to start with. Hasmukh's 'will' as the instrument of patriarchal dominance couldn't stand up in keeping the affection of the Mehta family together. The nurturing and practical qualities of women are seen as the antidote to the extremism of patriarchy; it is the heart, love and understanding that overcomes and brings the unity in the family. The 'will' as the title signifies refers to a legal document which Hasmukh had prepared with a view to control his family even after his death. It also has a dual meaning which denotes the desire and the will power to stand on one's feet as in the case of Sonal, Kiran and Preeti. The 'will' of Hasmukh symbolizes dominance whereas for the women it represents liberation from the shackles of male

domination. In the beginning of the play the women are shown as docile and passive subalterns who are suppressed by patriarchal code. However, they later become conscious of their capabilities to fight against exploitation and begin to utilize their capabilities to fight against exploitation and injustices. They finally earn their freedom by astute determination.

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## Chapter –VI

### CONCLUSION

Mahesh Dattani is a dramatist who tells his stories based on life around him as he sees it. He is a daring dramatist who takes the plunge to deal with themes such as homosexuals and on eunuchs or hijras in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Do the Needful*, *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*; problems of Indian middle class family such as marriage, inheritance, patriarchal authority, discrimination, communal riots are also assets to his themes. Dattani is capable of using the stage as a form of presenting the Indian society as a whole bringing to light the dark shadows that lurk within Indians and the sufferings of the marginalized sections. Drama is a performing act and Dattani's plays are primarily written to be staged which presents not a mere act but portrays the realistic picture of contemporary India. A study on Mahesh Dattani's select plays exposes the problems the subalterns have to face in their day to day life in a society like India. He reveals crisis faced by homosexuals in India in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, communalism and distrust over the minorities through *Final Solutions*, exploitation and discrimination against the girl child in *Tara*, the role of Patriarchy and its consequences in *Where There's a Will*.

Dattani's protagonists are victims of discrimination. They struggle against the oppressive and unequal nature of the social norms and rules which suppress their capability and existence. He also brings out traditional practices which continue to be prevalent in Indian society which in turn hampers the growth of the nation. He portrays people from real life in India focusing especially on the injustice and inequalities meted out towards the subalterns. As an Indian, he

reflects the Indian social background through his plays. His plays to his Indian audience are not alienated but there is so much connection for he mirrors India on stage. He presents society as he observes it and no one can disagree to his plays and say that it does not represent India. Raised from Bangalore, Dattani's characters speak English so much so like an Indian that the Indian audience do not feel disconnected.

The culture of modern India is a complex blend of its historical traditions. India is traditionally defined by a relatively strict social hierarchy that children are reminded of their roles they play in society at a very young age. Dattani as a dramatist portrays such issues in his plays wherein modern families and individuals in India continue to be bound by age old practices and how such issues affect them and society as a whole. India is known for her diversity and has inspired writers to pen their perceptions of the country's culture. These writings paint a complex and often conflicting picture of the culture of India.

“I write for my plays to be performed and appreciated by as wide a section of the society that my plays speak to and are about” (Dattani xi) says Dattani in his preface to *Collected Plays*. He succeeds in doing so for he brings out empathy in his audience towards his characters. His themes deal so much with the subalterns in India that it makes one reflect his own self or connect with his characters. Dattani does not deviate himself from the issues prevailing in Indian society and does not deal with alien themes as an Indian dramatist. Critical comments on his plays do not narrow his zeal but motivates himself to do better and “are pointing out something that I have wanted to say and have” (Ibid xi) of which he felt missing. His plays present not the villagers or rural India but middle class Indians who live in cities. He wants his plays to be performed to large audiences because he wants to reveal and make a realization that not all who lives in cities are liberal-minded. “Asumptions galore that cityfied English-speaking people are all liberal-

minded and villagers are communal and bigoted” (Ibid xi). Dattani exposes that even ‘cityfied’ people are not as liberal as they claim or profess to be as portrayed in his plays and wants to bring out a realization from his audiences too.

Mahesh Dattani is the first English language playwright to have won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998 for his *Final Solutions and Other Plays* which was published by East-West Books, Chennai. He is the first Indian dramatist who has openly handled “gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal” (Ibid 45) in Indian theatre through *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. The main themes that have found expression in Mahesh Dattani’s plays are same-sex love relationship, feminine identity, religion, communal tension, identity crisis. As dealt in the paper, Dattani exposes how the subalterns are exploited and discriminated in a society like India. Homosexuality in India is not alien but this group of people pretends to be straight because a society like India is homophobic and discrimination against them is very much present. Homosexuality was considered to be a punishable offence until recently. Dattani through *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* exposes the tholes individual as a gay or lesbian has to go through, who finds comfort only in each other’s company. Through Bunny’s character, the dramatist portrays how a gay has to pretend to be a heterosexual by marrying a woman so as to be accepted by society. “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” (Ibid 45). Deep-rooted communal hatred also finds its place in Dattani’s play *Final Solutions* where the minority group is often ostracized in society- Daksha’s family as Hindus suffer under the Muslim majority; Javed and Babban as Muslims suffer under the Hindu majority. Sensitive issues such as communal disharmony continue to exist in India and Dattani as a dramatist who mirrors society is bold enough to bring out the issue through this play. *Where Did I Leave My Purdah* is also one of

such plays where the dramatist hints communal tension between the Hindus and the Muslims. *Tara* and *Where There's a Will* are plays which deal with bias against women. But in *Where There's a Will*, Dattani brings in an interesting aspect which he describes it “as the exorcism of the Patriarchal code” (Ibid 51). Contemporary Indian women are caught in the flux of tradition and modernity. They are burdened with the practices of the past. In *Tara* and *Where There's a Will*, the middle-class women are fettered to their stereotypical roles of a daughter, wife and mother who feel smothered and helpless in a tradition-bound male-dominated society. Through Kiran in *Where There's a Will*, Dattani brings out reality revealing the sufferings an Indian woman goes through in her own family. Kiran's whole life has been miserable. She grew up in an atmosphere where she was affected both mentally and emotionally. Kiran, however, represents the modern Indian women are now aware of their status, identity, individuality, position and role in the family and the society who has learnt much from life. She is portrayed as an independent modern woman who is trying to survive the harsh realities of prejudice and condemnation.

Contemporary Indian writers are experimental and innovative in terms of thematic and technical qualities by reinvestigating India's history, legend, myth, religion and folklore. Like Dattani in *Final Solutions*, Chetan Bhagat, also brings about the issue of religion in his third novel *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, “a story about Business, Cricket and Religion” (Bhagat iii). A modern writer whose third book was published in 2008, but the continual issue on communalism is very much existent. His characters in this novel are young, ambitious and passionate and have the same moral, social and religious dilemmas as many of the young Indians today. Bittoo mama and Parekh-ji, in the novel, are fundamentalists belonging to a communist party bent on converting the young fighters in the name of Hinduism. Parekh-ji is seen to be educated and yet

his mindset is that of fight against the Muslims. He does not see Indians as one but labels people on the grounds of religion. Chetan Bhagat, like Dattani, through these characters brings out how even a highly qualified personality in a society could downtrod a person based on his religious identity and how religious riots hamper the growth of the nation.

Vijay Tendulkar, “attacks the hypocrisies of society. Thematically, his plays have ranged from the alienation of the modern individual to contemporary politics, from social-individual tensions to the complexities of human character, and from the exploration of man-woman relationship to reinterpretation of historical episodes. The themes of gender relation, sexual norms, institution of marriage and issues of conventional morality have featured prominently in his plays” (Chakraborty 6-7). In his play, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Miss Benare is shown to be an attractive modern woman who is young and economically independent, and Mrs. Kashikar is characterized as a contrast to the latter. However, both the women are trapped in the patriarchal order. Likewise, Mahesh Dattani presents women as trapped under patriarchy in *Where There's a Will*. He, however, turns the table by bringing out the “exorcism of the patriarchal code” through the character of Kiran Jhaveri (Dattani 451).

Mahesh Dattani is a contemporary writer who like the other Indian writers base their themes on gender relation, sexual norms, institution of marriage and issues and the quest for identity. However, Dattani's uniqueness lies in his representation of the urban cosmopolitan setting of modern middle class India where he exposes the hypocrisy of the Indian middle class reality, he creates questions which deals with issues that have been confronting human beings for ages, the significance of the family in the play, history as a lived moment in his plays, repositioning of the male- female stereotypes within patriarchy in *Where There's a Will* and also gives a voice to the female within the male, or the male within the female selves. Dattani's

trademark also lies in splitting the space of the stage into different levels and the psyche of the mob in *Final Solutions* which portrays its faceless identity and assumes and sheds different colors.

Dattani in his plays dramatizes the difficult questions and issues that arise in dealing with identity as tied with sexual identity, oppression and marginalization of minority communities and isms that are very much existent in India . His plays bring out not the answer but questions in all its complexity and bringing clarity to it. He is a playwright who portrays or reflects that which is related to him as he says that the purpose of theatre is to get close enough to proximity to one's own identity and reflect it like a mirror. Dattani's plays never resolves itself but leaves it hanging to the audience so that they could come with their own conclusions.

Mahesh Dattani is a dramatist who presents an outlook in every walk of human life, especially of the subalterns in a society like India. He proved that there is a great future as a playwright in the English language in India. He makes no exaggeration on portraying the socially ostracized sections of our society; he depicts society as it is. This research work has been completed focusing his concerns for the subalterns in Indian society. Dattani presents the real anguish, conflicts and sufferings of the marginalized sections of the society who also presents a broad humanistic outlook, "I am certain that my plays are a true reflection of my time, place and socio-economic background" (Ibid xv). He says that theatre offers human connections and therefore his realistic depiction of contemporary India "of holding a mirror up to society" (Ibid xv), especially of the situation of the subalterns in India, puts forward an eloquent message for the socially ostracized sections and also the whole humanity.

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