

Chapter – II

Gender Discrimination

This chapter aims to interpret and analyze the plays of Mahesh Dattani from Gender perspectives. Almost all the plays of Dattani deal with Gender issues. The term ‘Gender’ comes from a Latin word ‘generate’ which means ‘to beget’ and the latin stem to this word is ‘genes’ which means ‘race or kind’, an absolute English meaning is ‘Concept of Sex’, or ‘Sexual differences’. The word ‘discriminate’ originated from Latin word ‘discriminate’, According to Oxford English Dictionary its meaning is “the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different of different categories of people or things, especially on the grounds of race, age or sex”. Everyday, there are several news in print or electronic media, about the atrocities against women, girl or even infants and transgenders. This chapter is written with the perspective of Gender discrimination in the plays of Mahesh Dattani.

Gender is one of the important factors of our lives. The concept of ‘Gender’ is developed by feminists to contest the naturalization of sexist culture that lays bare the hierarchy and antagonism inherent in it. It is about power relation between men and women, it affects whole life. Gayle Rubin defines genders the “Socially imposed division of sexes” (Rubin, 179). Since gender is social, it is thought to be alterable. Feminism should aim to create a ‘genderless (though no sexless) society, in which one’s sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does and with whom one makes love” (Rubin, 204). In most commonplace sense, gender is a grammatical commodity. There are three kinds of gender in most of the languages based on objects division as masculine, feminine and neuter. Every language has its own convention to

this. In past sex and gender are considered complementary to each other. Nicholson calls this ‘the coat-rack view’ of gender: our sex bodies are like coats and racks and provide the site upon which gender is constructed. According to this interpretation, sex is considered as a fact. One is born either with male or female genitalia and Gender is considered a social construction on – it grants meaning to the fact of sex.

According to Joan Wallach Scott, “Gender is a constitution element of social relationship based upon perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is primary way of signifying relationships of power.” (Scott,1067)

Elaine Showalter upholds the same view regarding gender as a category in the process of constructing power relations:

Thus gender should not be treated as an isolated category with in a purely psychoanalytic framework, but should rather be seen as a part of a process of social construction. Furthermore, gender is not only a question of difference, which assumes that the sexes are separate and equal; but of power, since in looking at history of gender relations, we find sexual asymmetry, inequality, and male dominance in every known society.(Showalter,4)

Andrew Edger and Peter Sedwick have given difference between ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ in their book *Key Concept of Cultural Theory* in following words:

The concept of ‘gender’ is typical placed in opposition to the concept of ‘sex’ while our sex (female/male) is matter of biology, our gender (feminine/masculine is matter of culture). Gender may, therefore, be taken to refer to learned patterns of behaviour and action, as opposed to that which is biologically determined. Crucially, biology need not be assumed to determine gender. This is to suggest that while what makes a person male or female is universal and grounded on laws of nature, the precise ways in which women

express their femininity and men express their masculinity will vary from culture to culture. Thus, qualities that are stereo-typically attributed to women and men in contemporary western culture (such as greater emotional expression in women; greater tendencies to violence and aggression in men) are seen as gender, which entails that they could be changed. (Edger & Sedwick, 158)

Beauvior's claim that one is not born but rather becomes woman shows that masculinity and femininity are thought to be the product of culture. Kate Millett seems to support this view when she says that gender difference have "essentially cultural, rather than biological bases" that result from different treatment (Millett, 28-9). For her gender is "the sum total of the parents, the peers, and the culture's motions of what is appropriate to each gender by the way of temperament, character interest, status, worth, gesture and expression" (Millett, 31). As a result, women are socialized into subordinate roles: "they learn to be passive, ignorant, docile, emotional helpmates for men (Millett, 26). However, since these roles are simply learned, we can "unlearn". Catherine MacKinnon in her book *'Towards a Feminist Theory of State'* develops a theory of gender as a theory of Sexuality. According to her gender is created by sexual objectification of women where women are viewed and treated as object for satisfying men's desires. She defines masculinity as sexual dominance and femininity as sexual submissiveness. In her view, genders are "created through eroticization of dominance and submission" (MacKinnon, 113). According to her; if sexuality ceases to be manifestation of dominance, hierarchical gender will cease to exist. Nancy Chodorow opines:

Gender is a matter of having feminine and masculine personalities that develop in early infancy as responses to the prevalent parenting practices. It is

because mother as care taker, encourages her son to psychologically individual himself from her hereby prompting him to develop well defined and rigid ego boundaries and unconsciously discourages the daughter from individuating herself thereby prompting the daughter to develop flexible and blurry ego boundaries. Feminine and masculine personalities play a crucial role in women's oppression since they make females overly attentive to the need of others and males emotionally deficient. In order to correct the situation, both male and female parents should be equally involved in parenting. (Chodorow,214)

Sally Haslanger argues that gender is a matter of occupying either a subordinate or privileged position. According to her societies in general “privilege individuals with male bodies” (Haslanger, 38). So that social positions they occupy are better than the female bodies.

A glimpse of the past status is essential for understanding the contemporary status of women in India for several reasons. The social system and the culture of any given time of any given society bear the mark of its preceding social system and culture. In India, the position is not very different from any other part of the globe and Simon De Beauvoir defines it:

The laws of Manu define women as a vile being who should be held in Slavery. Leviticus likes her to the beasts of burden owned by the patriarch. The law of solon gives her no right. The Roman code puts her under guardianship and asserts her ‘imbecility’. Canon law, regards her as “the devil’s doorway”. The Koran treats woman with utter scorn. (Beauvoir,80)

The representation of women in literature, in ancient Indian scriptures like *Manusmriti*, *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabhart* etc. is felt to be one of the most

important forms of 'socialization', which provide the role model for men and women, which constituted the acceptable version of the 'feminine' and legitimate feminine people and aspirations. Aristotle asserts, "The female is a female by virtue of certain lack of qualities; we should regard the female mature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness." (Beauvoir, xxii)

These lines expose what might be called the mechanisms of patriarchy, that is the cultural 'mind set' in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequality. Typical images of women are constructed by the male writers. Identity politics is not a new phenomenon within the feminist moment. Identity politics is surrounding feminism and feminist Solidarity, which is not limit to particular geographical location, but it is global. It is a shaping factor for woman realities across the world.

Valentine Moghadam, a prominent scholar of Identity politics notes that Identity, in a post-structural cultural analysis, are products of Historical and discursive practices, primarily influenced by culture, the state, mass media, religious bodies and educational institutes. She asserts that identities are neither fixed nor primordial, but instead fluid inter-sectionalities that are shaped by social and cultural surrounding and 'reflect the symbiosis of the economic, cultural and political, in both national and international context' (Moghadam, 9). Dualism and binary opposition are political tactics fostered by those in power to maintain hegemonic control and support. Diana Bell provides a helpful conceptualization in warning, "Beware of binaries The juxtapositions are not a matter of simple opposites but rather masks the power of one side of binary to control the other" (Bell, 433). Identity politics has its root in a very important tenet of equal but different, not the same; it resists the power structures of caste, class and gender within the progressive politics. In

fact, it often seems to have become a peculiar form of wielding power: as if now your box has been recognized, you dare not leave it. Religious fundamentalism has been an equal threat to women identity. Concept of 'otherness' is struck to women from ancient times to present time in spite of their career growth in public life. She has always been last to be hired and first to be fired in public or private life. This differentiation is very well described by the Simon D. Beauvior in *The Second Sex*:

She is simply what man decrees; thus she is called "the sex", by which meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being, no less. She defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; She is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute – She is the other. (Beauvior,xxii)

In all cultures and races, women's position is recognized with fundamental identities like 'feminine passive' and 'masculine active'. Traditionally, the inferior words used for women are conjugal, passive, forbidden, doomed, abused, slavery, annihilation, servant, trapped prey domineer, helpless, imprisoned, tyranny, devaluation etc. and for male it has opposite vocabulary like free, busy, active, proud, arrogant, master, existent, liberty, adventure, daring strength and courage.

Indian women are credited with having resisted patriarchal oppression for more than two thousand years. Since the time of the first settlers in India, women were assigned a sub-ordinate role within family, irrespective of wealth and condition, were denied the political and civil rights enjoyed by men. The history of Indian civilization has been a history of alienation of feminine world from masculine world. Before the advent of Vedic Aryan, there was pre Aryan Dravidian civilization in India, which came into light after the excavations of Mohanjodaro and Harappa, now

known as “Indus Valley Civilization”. After having a close look at the figurines, we came to know that there was matriarchy at time and the status of women was higher. The Advent of the ‘Vedic Aryan’ (4000 to 1000 B.C.) seems to have over turned the feminine ideal of pre-Aryan, Indus Valley civilization; the matriarchy was replaced by Patriarchy. After the victory, Aryans introduced slavery in northern India. The seeds of inferiority of daughters and worth of sons were sown, during the Vedic period. According to them, there were certain duties defined for sons by ‘four Vedas’, which they brought with them. The conquered women, who were taken as wife by Aryans, had no knowledge of the Vedic culture/rituals further degraded them. Since Aryans were invaders, nomadic tribes who did not know writing whose economy was pastoral, where dominating Gods are all male.

Although, the Vedic period is said to be the most honoured period of women where they distinguished themselves in learning, possessed and inherited property, participated in assemblies and occupied central place in the domestic domain, but it is not sure whether all women enjoyed the same rights. In post -Vedic-period near about 300 B.C., the position of women began to be more and more degraded and continued to be demeaned.

In the epic period, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the great epics were created and they played a vital role in shaping our attitudes towards women. There are full of instances of gender discrimination in them. Draupdi in epic *Mahabharta* is treated as a commodity by Pandavas and Kaurava. Right from the days of Draupadi in the court of Kauravas, the desrobing, dishonouring of women in public has become a time honoured custom for us. Sita made to face the ordeal of fire to prove her purity by her husband Rama, the propagator of virtue and morality. Even today, women are expected to emulate Sita, Savitri and Draupdi projecting them as role models.

In the following periods, Brahmanism & Jainism also discriminated against the women and regarded them, to be weak-minded, fickle, treacherous and impure. However, Buddhism treated women as equal to men. It was during the age of Dharamshastras that women were excluded from social, economic and religious spheres. Child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage, killing of female infants, the practice of Sati- all these had practices were encouraged due to the code of conduct prescribed by Manu, the progenitor of Hindu Dharamshastra . As Mrinal Pandey writes:

...to control women, it becomes necessary to control the womb and so Hinduism, Judaism, Islam & Christianity have all stipulated, at one time or another, the whole are of reproductive activity must be firmly monitored by the law and law makers. (Pandey,7)

Thus the women become a mere “reproductive machine” since Manu’s time (Nubile, 3). As soon as she gets married, she is expected to have a child. Vrinda Nabar states that “a woman in India is morally obliged to bear a son” (Nabar,52). As a result, childless women are often marginalized and stigmatized.

In Muslim period, the women witnessed their worst days. The Hindu women were frightened by the Muslim invaders. All sorts of vices such as child marriage, purdah system, illiteracy and other became rampant. Therefore, the expanding frontiers and conquest of Muslims made Indian civilization essentially male. According to Altekari:

Thus, for nearly 2000 years from 20 B.C. to 1800 A.D., the position of women steadily deteriorated though she was fondled by parents, loved by her husband and revered by her children. The revival of Sati, the prohibition of remarriage and spread

of Purdah and greater prevalence of polygamy made her position very bad. (Altekar,34)

Bhakti movement did try to improve the condition of women and the downtrodden. The Renaissance of Indian women began with Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774) in West Bengal during British period. He opposed the social evil of Sati, polygamy and encouraged widow remarriage. It is the effort of him and other like Davendera Nath Tagore (1817), Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820), Rabindra Nath Tagore (1861), Swami Vivekanand (1863), Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824) etc. that enlighten Indian public opinion. Significant legal reforms were made like abolition of Sati (1829), widow re-marriage act (1856) etc. during the British rule.

In the national movement, Gandhiji and Nehru drew women in the struggle of freedom, which created awareness among them towards rights and status. But this was the independence movement and not the women's movement and hence it was relatively less fortunate for women. Ideologically, women are considered as completely inferior species than male. Due to the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi and other social reformers Child Marriage Act (1929) was passed that fixed the minimum age at marriage for girls as 14 years and for boys as 18 years. Mahatma Jyoti Ba Phule, who dedicated her whole life for the cause of women, opened a school for girls in 1848 at Pune and first school for dalit girls in 1852.

It was only after independence, the constitution of India laid the foundation stone of just and equal society by giving equal status of every one on secular notes. The article 14 of the constitution of India gives equal rights to men and women. The article 15 (1) prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the basis of sex. Besides these constitutional rights, Govt. of India passed several other laws for the liberation and emancipation of women as The Hindu Marriage Act (1955), The Hindu

succession Act of 1956, The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, Equal Remuneration Act of 1976, the reservation of 33% seats in Panchayat, Panchayat Samitis and Jila Parisads and in local urban bodies to make women politically empowered. Due to all these constitutional provisions women are now setting out of the house and participating in all social, political and economical activities. Equal opportunities are being provided to them in every field. Sarojni Naidu, Vijay Laxmi Pandit, Indira Gandhi, Medha Patkar, Mis. Subhalaxmi, Lata Mangeskar, Madhu Bala, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Kiran Majumdar Shah, Kalpana Chawla, Sunita Williams, Chanda Kochar, Indira Nui, Sania Mirza, Saina Nehwal, P.V. Sindhu, Shakshi Malik, Deepa Karmakar, Rani Rampal, Deepika Rani and P.T. Usha – these are some of the role models before Indian women.

According to Marxist view of feminism, According to Karl Marx hierarchical relations (built on unequally distributed or owned source of wealth, including monetary and other resources) are seen as the source of coercive power and operation, which is root cause of all inequalities. Sexual oppression is seen as a dimension of class power. In this model, the earliest form of class division historically gave rise to male dominance, class oppression predates sex oppression and therefore class hierarchy, led to the treatment of women as property. Power is not associated with sex but with the imperatives of class, private wealth, property and profit. Like capitalism where product is not property of the labour but of the owner here women's reproduction is not owned by her. This shows male domination in patriarchy.

Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels (Marxist Theoretician) in the German Ideology had noted the sexual division was the first division of labour. Engels saw the family as the first product of totalitarian and capitalistic impulse in man, "within the family the husband is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat" (Engels, 65-66), with

women held as property and maintains the myths of domesticity must be shattered in order for all people to enjoy equality and freedom. He says:

The social institution under which men [and women] of a definite historical epoch and of definite country live are conditioned by...the stage of development of labour, on the one hand, and of the family, on the other.... The less the development of labour and the more limited its volume of production...the more preponderantly does the social order appear to be dominated by ties of sex. (Engels, *Introduction*)

Women's status in society is on the rise. However, in spite of the socio-economic and political changes initiated for the benefit of women in India, the people's attitude to equal status for women has still to be limited with the image of women as merely as domestic servant instead of earning counter part of the family. Women are still discriminated on the basis of gender. As Clara Nubile says, "gender discrimination begins in the womb it goes till death." (Nubile, 23)

Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1970) says that the essence of politics is power and therefore, all the cultures are saturated by male supremacy that affects all aspects of our lives from war to literature. She argues that Patriarchy as a universal mode of power relationship and domination for it penetrates class divisions among different societies and different historical epochs. It is the primary oppression due to its longevity. The dominance, which Millet defines as 'Patriarchy' constitutes perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides the most fundamental concept of power.

Simone De Beauvoir Sums up the hierarchal relationships between men and women assumed in concept of 'different but complementary', in these terms: 'He is

the subject, he is absolute – she is the Other, women is not so much second-rate men in this context as that which is ‘not man’.

In these Marxist perspectives, the history of the devaluing of Indian women can be summarized in three stages: historical, materialist and psychological. Firstly, there was the historical emergence and development of male domination through creation of epics, Vedas and other religious scriptures in ancient time. Secondly, division of labour based on these books (that is, to explore the ‘material – or create the structural body of social organization, which divides the tasks and activities on the basis of sex). And finally, recognition of deep rooted nature of male dominance is the very formation and organization of us (the psychological or unconscious internalizing of social patterns of social hierarchy). If one takes patriarchal government to be institution, where by that half which is male, the principles of hierarchy appear to be twofold: male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger. It is this psychological politics of ‘Private space’ which entrapped both male and female in present times, is represented by Dattani in his plays. Jacques Derrida understands Saussure, in his construction of structuralism, which shows the privilege of the oral over the written. In his deconstruction of Saussure expands his argument with dichotomous opposition similar to the pair writing/speech and inherent to the logic of this opposition is the subtle privileging of one and the regression and subordination of other. Although Derrida is confined to Western logic, but similar prioritized dichotomies can be found in traditional Indian value system.

Gayatri Spivak in ‘*Can the Subaltern Speak?*’ analyses the question of female subaltern. When she describes women as doubly marginalized subject in colonial and post-colonial discourses with the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly affected. It is rather, that, both, as object of colonialist

historiography as a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominate, if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the female as female is more deeply in shadow. Spivak quotes female subaltern as “doubly effected”, the “otherness” of post-colonial literature.

Patriarchal society is pre-capitalist social formations that have historically existed in varying forms in Europe & Asia in which property, residence and descent proceed through male line. In classic patriarchy, the senior man has authority over everyone else in the family, including younger men and women are subject to distinct form of control and subordination.

In a patriarchal context, women are considered as form of property and ever their children or rugs are not considered their property but those of patriarchal family. Their honour by at large extension, is the honour of their family and depends in great measure on their virginity and good conduct.

The patriarchal belt is characterized by extremely restrictive code of behaviour for women, rigid gender segregation and powerful ideology linking family honour to fewal virtue, as Kabeer notes:

Men are entrusted with safe guarding family honour through their control over female members; they are backed by complex social arrangements that ensure the protection and dependence of women. (Kabeer, 95)

Nevertheless, the patriarchal family and patriarchal ideology persist in India and all over the world. Patriarchy’s chief institution is the family. It is both a mirror of and connection with larger society; a patriarchal unit is within a patriarchal whole. The family effects control and conformity between individual and structure.

The family not only encourages its own members to adjust and confirm, but act as a unit in the government of the patriarchal state which rules its citizens through family heads. The eldest male parent is absolute supreme in the household. His domination extends to life and death. In the private sphere of household, the head enjoys arbitrary power over all his junior males, all females and all children. In the public sphere, power is shared between male patriarchs. Perhaps most, men expect to be patriarch at some point in their life cycle but no female holds any formal public position of economic, ideological, military or political power. Indeed, female are not allowed into this public realm of power. In patriarchy, there are two fundamental nuclei of stratification; the household/ family/lineage nexus and dominance of male gender.

According to Lacan, “Civilization’ itself is the ‘Law of the Father’. The self and sexuality are socially constructed in that there can be no (sexed) self—no masculine or feminine person—prior to the formation of the subject in language. For Lacan, each person becomes a person, enters human culture, by internalizing society’s communicative rules or Symbolic order. This occurs through the formation of a separate and sexually specific (unconscious) self in the process of learning language. Individuals can only speak in the tongue of the symbolic order but that order is viewed in psychoanalytic terms as the ‘Law of the Father’.

Derrida proposes that meaning in the Symbolic order is not inevitable or intrinsic, but constantly being culturally and linguistically produced through a process of hierarchal differentiation. Therefore, these critics are concerned with the deconstruction or unpacking of the cultural/linguistic assumptions regarding the fixity and inevitability of forms of power categories like sex, class and race/ethnicity with the aim of opening up alternative possibilities. Therefore post modern/post-

structuralists feminists are critical of universalizing/normalizing procedures, they question any identity typically conceived as based in a universalized experience of oppression.

In the present times, the identity politics is playing an important role in new global order, which portrays women's struggle for power, which is relevant in all the plays of Dattani. The binary opposites continue to tear us apart: personally and politically, which is also posing a threatening challenge to women, who are lost in the sea of identity politics.

One should keep in mind that it is not only men, who play fundamentalist role, but that 'women are also fundamentalist policy- leading characters, acting as spokes persons in the defense of family, morality and decency' (Correa, 2). There is yet another aspect of control over female sexuality. Since in the patriarchal society is not about the domination of men over all women but also of some men over others. It is a way by which, domination is ensured by superiors, to denying access to women or withholds women from junior men. Men too suffer under the repressive burden of fixed gender identity and roles. This chapter discloses this sophistication in every modern family in India by every member of the family, whether male or female through the plays of Dattani. It portrays their strife and struggle to come out from gender subscribed roles.

Dattani like Gandhi wishes to displace the gender identity and stereotypical ideologies of our society belonging to 'male' and 'female' as it exists in the civilizations of the whole world. He uses his pen as an instrument to demolish male authority and the hierarchical power structure. He represents a vision to understand the world realities, a positivist holistic approach to life, which is a step towards sanity

in human relationship and perhaps the only way to preserve the human existence on the earth.

There is no gendered 'reality', the words 'man' and 'woman', 'female', and 'male', 'feminine' and 'masculine' are socially determined signifiers, which have their roots in materiality and mythology of history. Dattani leads to the deconstruction of opposite binaries of traditional masculine' or traditional 'feminine'. He says in an Interview to Laxmi Subramanyam: "Men and women are the biggest stereotypes in the whole world. (Subramanyam , 131)

Dattani aims at creating awareness in the whole culture, belief and attitudes, right from childhood, held in perpetuating an inferior position for women which are defined as gender roles in text and religious books, unequal pay for equal work and the traditional divisional of labour with in the family. He envisages ample changes in traditional social structures such as family, in the economic role and power of women and finally in the fundamental attitudes and personal relationships, leading to a just social order.

Dattani identifies post-modernist in the rejection of the notion of foundational truth or essence in the favour of recognition that meaning/truth in not eternal or impartial but constructed, through exclusion and repression. He urges the abandonment of any notion of identity, including sexual/gender identity. Therefore, his plays cannot be said to represent 'identity crisis'. Rather they exhibit a complete deconstruction of identity and this freedom raises his characters to be alive and an elevation from deadly old customs and beliefs.

In the view of Judith Butler: 'there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender, the identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' they are said to be its results.' (Butler, 80)

Butler opposed the notion of essentialist concept of feminine identity propagated by the feminist movement. She elaborates the view that fundamental features, which defines gender is a social and cultural product that produces the illusory effect of being natural. Butler proposes that we consider gender as a ‘performative’ that to be masculine, feminine or homosexual is not something one is, but a pre-established conditions that one repeatedly enacts.

In the plays of Dattani, the characters are always behind some visible of invisible mask to play the gender roles, provided by the traditional mindset, as it really happens to everyone in society, consciously or unconsciously. All the activities in our life are a kind of performance to hide the real inner self behind the hypocritical faces, which is necessary to live in harmony in the hypocritical society. Therefore, ‘the stage is the world, and the world is the stage’, for Dattani. As he puts it.

I am so used to creating imaginary circumstances for imaginary people to act upon, putting illusive mask of reality. Now the mask is elusive. It’s all got to be real. I don’t have my characters to hindbehind; prodding them to say things. I would not say and do things that I dare not do. (Dattani, 2005)

The three plays, discussed in this chapter are *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Tara* and *Seven Steps Around The Fire*. These plays show that how the discriminative attitudes of the society operate towards the women, girl and eunuchs on basis of their gender. Thus, the plays of Dattani redefine gender issues in theatre as not only problems of suppression and discrimination, but effort to employ theatre as an instrument of change the Indian concept of gender issues. It is rightly said that society is like a masked ball, where everyone hides his real character, and reveals it by hiding.

Dattani’s presentation of women in a fractured social space that constantly shifts them to a patriarchal space of control is interesting. He has a keen and astute

insight into the position of women in a middle class domestic household as ‘marginal’ is worthy of appreciation. *Bravely Fought the Queen* presents the ways, in which exploitation is now couched in terms of culture and refinement. Act One begins as comedy of manners, in a hypocritical illusory surface of the mask, on a fashionable but ill-maintained living room of Jiten and Dolly Trivedi (locked in a loveless marriage with an uncaring husband). The audience is ushered into the women’s world, with the mellifluous thumri by Naina Devi in the background and the focus is on Dolly who sits filing her nails abstractedly and having a mud mask (symbol of pretence and falsity) on the face. Alka, her sister, enters with full make-up and sari – a preparation for going out for the evening with her husband Nitin, for which Dolly is also getting ready. This is a projection of image of the housewives in a stereotypical manner.

The action starts with the arrival of an unexpected visitor – Lalitha – who says that she has been asked by Jiten Trivedi, the boss of her husband Sridhar, to meet Dolly that very evening to discuss the masked ball where “everyone will be in costumes! And will have masks on!” a new range of colour coordinated nightwear and underwear for women”. This again is a symbolic representation of society, where everyone will be no costumes and masks to live in the forced harmony of stereotype societal ideologies. And with this revelation, the unusual change of plan is introduced that the dinner is called off and it is announced by Lalitha. So later on when Dolly and Lalitha discuss the masked ball, the connotations of the mask are impossible to miss – the introduction of the world of make-believe of untruths, of paste-on realities and of the need to hide behind a façade to survive in the hypocritical world by their false performances. As Michael Walling puts it:

This is a play about performance; and uses the theatre to demonstrate how, in a world of hypocrisy, acting becomes a way of life. Paradoxically, it is only by the overt performance of the theatre that such acting can be exposed for what it is. (CP-I, 230)

With this revelation, the whole act of becoming suitable for the role of a wife is ridiculed by Dattani, and the dark secrets under the surface level begin to be unfolded, even after the continual negation of revealing her personal tragedy by Dolly as she wants to fit in the social identity given to her which keeps her to be always masked.

LALITHA. Afraid?

DOLLY. Afraid I would crack my mask. (CP-I, 234)

But Dolly could not prevent the cracking of mask of happiness and harmony that social order ensures for patriarchy to continue for a long time as like other women she also used to be afraid of her husband, afraid of being tortured by him. We can recall Germaine Greers comments and correlate them with the women of Indian families:

Women are afraid of man. Women can be routinely insulted and humiliated for years on end, repeatedly raped and sexually abused and yet keep silence, made to endure a life of kicks and blows from a husband, because they are afraid. They endure unending agonies, because they have been made to believe that if they run away, they will be followed and much worse will be done to them and to their children. The beaten woman does not call the police because she knows that sooner or later, once the police have finished with the man who is oppressing her, he will return and do something unimaginable worse than any of the abominable things he has already done. The woman paralyzed by terror exists in her own mind as well as that of her

abuses to be abused. She can see no way out, no possible rescue, because fear blinded her. (Greers, 272)

Being neglected by her husband Jiten, Dolly tries to fulfill her desire for love and care by a secret lover in Kanhaiya. Kanhaiya (who may be illusory or real) is a nineteen year old grandson of a friend of the vacationing cook, who stays in the servant's quarters outside the house and who comes for clandestine trysts in the kitchen. She is taught to bear up every humiliation, beating, and molestation; thus she does not speak and stays as a slave in the family. And thus she becomes very vulnerable to violence and a victim of humiliation, torture and exploitation within the four walls of her house away from public gaze. The most tragic thing in her life is her own daughter Daksha, whom she delivers prematurely, beaten by Jiten while she was pregnant, the child is mentally retarded.

The play explores the psychological damage caused to women in the Trivedi household, by the prejudiced men who signify patriarchy. This is a play about sinners and their secret guilt; it is about violence against women, about exploitation of the weaker, about the mean, squalid corporate world. The play dramatizes the emptiness and sham in their lives of its enclosed women in rich families and self-indulgent, unscrupulous men, blurring the lines between fantasy and reality, standing on the brink of terrible secrets, deception and hypocrisies. Jiten, who had a very bad childhood, has turned into a demon of a man. He exercises control over the family, both as an elder son and brother. All the relations are maintained strictly under the dictates of patriarchy. Jiten dominates the scene with his overbearing, egotistical and corrosive presence. He is a violent, alcoholic, lecherous wife-beater inclined to kill at the slightest provocation. Jiten is shown to be a cruel, imposing and most discourteous

man, who does not have the courtesy to talk politely to a lady. His rudeness to Lalitha, Sridhar's wife is an example to support this:

JITEN. Screw your wife!

.....

SRIDHAR. Just don't talk to my wife, okay?

JITEN. I wouldn't lay her even if she got me the ReVaTee account. (CP-I, 306)

Jiten maintains a simultaneous life with prostitutes, whom he entertains in his office. Any opposition from his accounts officer Sridhar is met with threat to the latter's his job. Jiten, has a violent lecher's approach to business is a combination of brainless obstinacy and clumsy scans. His savagery, brutality and unfaithfulness is similar to Osborne's character of Jimmy in *Look Back in Anger*, who inflicts pain on his wife Alison and has an affair with Helena to fulfill his sexual libido. Jiten epitomizes male chauvinism when he says:

Men would want their women dressed up like that. And they have the buying power. Yes! So there's no point asking a group of screwed up women what they think of it. (CP-I, 276)

The suffrage of women is twofold here: The first is that, women experience a considerable number of 'hidden crimes' in the 'safety' of the home or in intimate relationships with men like their husbands. Violence is an essential component of the relations between men and women and it is used by men in a power relationship to control and humiliate the victim. Secondly, here is a link between the actions of the lust-crazed psychopath and those of 'normal' man that is Jiten here. The first idea is put forward by Liz Kelly(1988), that there is a sexual violence continuum. The continuum links panoply of abusive acts (rape, sexual harassment, domestic battery,

homicide etc.) with the everyday abuses and safety precautions in women's lives. Male control and domination of women's bodies expresses itself as aggressive male sexuality (and its converse, passive, masochistic female sexuality). Thus it is argued that acts such as violent rape, forced and consensual sex share common rituals of conquest and submission, which make it difficult to distinguish the 'normal' from the 'aberrant'.

Women, for him, are no more than sex objects, he does not even respect his old Baa and gets angry with Alka, Nitin's wife. When he learns from Nitin that Baa's ancestral house has been willed by Baa to Daksha, his own daughter, and pressurizes Nitin to throw out his wife permanently, so that Baa will be pleased and sign the property away to her sons. Baa, while describing Jiten says: "Jitu is just like his father. Just like him." (CP-I, 284)

The husband of the old mother was a cruel and a dark man who harassed her. The kind of cruelty perpetuated on Baa by her husband is brought to light every now and then in the play when she feels jittery even after so many years of her husband's death. In a series of flashbacks, Baa's tragic past is revealed and shows how she suffered being married to a dominating and violent man, who had not only prevented her from singing (her favourite hobby) in public, but also used to beat her up regularly and ill-treat her sons.

I have married such a villager! Aah! You slapped me?

Never, never slap me. Nobody has hit me. The men in our family are decent..... Wait! Wait! (CP-I, 288)

In her case the use of violence is wavering and dithering as she says:

You hit me. I only speak the truth and you hit me? Go on. Hit me again. The children should see what a demon you are. Aah! Jitu! Nitin! Are you

watching? See your father! (Jerks her face as if she's been slapped). No! No! Not on the face! What will the neighbours say? Not on the face! I beg You! Hit me but on ... aaaah! (CP-I, 278)

So, here we have two generations sharing the same experiences at the hands of their chauvinistic husbands and a yet to come third generation, Daksha who also experiences the maltreatment of her father even before her birth and is born as a disabled child. Dolly exposes Jiten's cruelty when she says, "And you hit me! Jitu, you beat me up! I was carrying Daksha and you beat me up!". (CP-I, 311)

The result of the violence on his wife is the premature delivery of Daksha, the disabled daughter of Dolly and Jiten. Baa and Dolly's abuse and maltreatment are somewhat alike, but it is Alka whose anguish and frustration is due to her husband's homosexual libido and her brother Praful's deceit of not revealing the reality of Nitin to her. The choices available to the sisters are either of resorting to subjection or suffering alienation. While Dolly had decided to remain within patriarchy all along, Alka tried to escape by finding solace in alcohol and always remain drunk to be in an illusory world. Violence is the norm with which the actions of the women are controlled. Alka is dominated first by her brother, Praful, on the name of living in a civilized society of a globalize world and then by her husband Nitin, a homosexual, who could not fulfill her desire of love. She infuriated both of them, and sarcastically says about Praful to Dolly:

...he is the descendent of a saint! A saint! (laughter hard) Like my husband. Such close friends! Friends from college. (Dolly gives her a look of warning). I didn't tell you. That time when you came home to... (pours herself a drink). Nitin and Parul were home, talking. I came home from school with the neighbour's son on his scooter instead of walking with you. I told him to drop me before our street came. He didn't

understand and dropped me right at our doorstep. Parul saw. He didn't say a word to me. He just dragged me into the kitchen. He lit the stove and pushed my face in front of it! I thought he was going to burn my face! He burnt my hair. I can still smell my

hair in fire – Nitin was right behind us. Watching! Just Parul said, "Don't you ever look at any man. Ever. (CP-I, 257)

Alka is passed from the guardianship of Praful to that of Nitin, a trusted friend, as if she is an animal or property to be controlled or watched over. Alka's oppression is so acute that she does not even have the right to express herself. The Trivedi household considers Alka an amoral drunkard. They mull over her to be a corrupting force, unable to be a mother and completely lacking in the values of a civilized family. She bears this humiliation, which is her husband's fault. Nitin's secret is that he is a homosexual like Alka's brother Praful and thereby prevents himself from exercising full control on Alka. Nowhere does he sympathize with her. When Alka dances in the rain, she is regarded as a drunkard and an immoral and uncivilized woman:

JITEN. Ask her what she was doing outside in the rain.

ALKA. I don't know! I don't know what I was doing outside. Aren't there times when you don't know what you are doing? (To Nitin) What's the harm in that? Huh? (Nitin doesn't respond) Tell me what's the harm?

NITIN. None. There's no harm in that.(CP-I, 299-300)

It is ironic, that a man like Jiten, who just passed his time with a prostitute in his office, tries to control Alka by the sweeping statements on morality. Therefore, both Dolly (who accepts domination and control) and Alka (who negates power and authority) suffer at the hands of their male counterparts. As Germaine Greer puts it:

A woman's body is the battlefield where she fights for liberation. It is through her body that operation works, reifying her, sexualizing her, victimizing her, disabling her. Her physicality is a medium for others to work on; her job is to act as their viceroy, resenting her body for their ministrations and applying to her body the treatments that have been ordained. If she fails to present herself, if she refuses to accept the treatment, she is behaving badly. (Greer, 106)

Hence, Dattani ridicules a society, which imparts rules, which are fair to one sex and are unfair to the 'other'. Alka faces the burnt of domestic violence as she is thrown out of the house and her sister has to plead to the decision makers in the house to take her back. This sheds light on the various aspects related to the position of women in an urban, bourgeois set up. In the so-called liberated atmosphere women are still judged according to parameters that are age-old but have now taken new form. As Dattani reveals, even in a fast developing society, a woman taking alcohol is a taboo, though it may be a social requirement. The two conflicting attitudes are reflected in a conversation between Alka and Lalitha.

ALKA. Oh. In that case... let me just add some in mine. (Pick up the bottle of rum and brings it to where her glass is.) I have an occasional one. It's good for digestion (*Pours a stiff one*).

LALITHA. I have not-so-occasional ones at parties. It's nice to get high once in a while.

ALKA. (guardedly). Your husband doesn't mind?

LALITHA. No. I don't think so. (*Drinks*) As long as he is around when it happens, he doesn't mind. You must do a bit of social drinking too. (CP-I, 244)

This exchange makes it clear the hypocritical stance of a patriarchal society and in the world of capitalism are also the illusions about the liberation of women. In

this conversation, it is obvious that like all other women, Lalitha too belongs to her man and she too has no freedom to do anything of her own free will.

It is made clear that Jiten has taken after his father, while Nitin is like Baa, in appearance at least. Nitin may be so cruel like Jiten, but he is the most deceitful character of all. He not only swindles his wife by hiding his homosexuality, but also tricks Baa by showering love and affection on her to be her inheritor. He is so hounded by money that he can even leave his wife for it, without any regret. This obsession is clear by a sequence of dialogue exchange between Baa and Nitin in her room on the upper level. We hear Nitin asking his mother, “Baa, this is important. Will you give me the house if I send her back-for good this time?” (CP-I, 302)

Afterwards, we learn that Baa has nominated Praful to serve as the trustee to the property, which she has willed to Daksha. The revelation makes Nitin burst out in anger and indignation:

What have I done to deserve this? Oh God! All my life I have listened to you and obeyed you. Only once have I gone against your wishes, and you punish me for that? But he is to blame. Praful tricked me into marrying him. I hate him now! Do what you want with the property but don't let him run my life! He is out to get us! Alka can stay here, or go away, or drink herself to death, I don't care. It doesn't make a difference to me! But get him out of my life! (CP-I, 305)

This is one level of patriarchal dominance over women by men, but the other issues are also raised to show another face of aristocratic set up in the bourgeois Indian society that is divided both at the level of class and gender. And in this sense, man also suffers from the hands of another man or institution to perpetuate these traditional settings. Jiten and Nitin, being the upper class males, have the prerogative of ownership in an advertising company. On the other hand is Sridhar, who is

struggling to come into his position, as an employee. In this case Dattani presents different layers of bourgeois society, a social system that gives power to those, who have property and capital, derogates the ones that are located in a position subservient to the ones in power.

For this, Dattani uses the ad-world as the private point of a capitalist system and facilitates its profit-making motive. Consumer interest is important to maximize sales and to enhance profits and not for salvaging the conscience of either the ad agency or the seller. The Trivedi brother continuously preside over Sridhar on working for an ad-campaign for the sale of ‘undies’, named ReVaTee, ladies undergarments and night wear for women. They transform women into brand slogans that will titillate the viewers and in turn promote sale. However, Sridhar who relies on consumer surveys, does not like that idea as it is offensive for women. He says:

They said we-haven’t understood women... I told you about the market survey. About a dozen women. Across-section of upper-middle class, upper class, and the stinking rich. We had given them a questionnaire each to fill up after seeing the AV.... I can tell you what the bottom line was. They all said – in different words of course – but most of them used one word to describe it – offensive. They all found it highly offensive. (CP-I, 274 – 275)

But all Sridhar’s idea and surveys are continuously condemned by Trivedi Brothers. He is probably torn between the two and is unable to gauge the nuances of the situation in which, like Dolly and Alka, he too is a puppet. So after a lot of discussions Sridhar dismisses his efforts of looking at this ad campaign differently and finally submits to the requirements of the employers just to survive in the world of buying and selling. But his heart bleeds and becomes furious, when he is ordered to bring a prostitute for Jiten, or else he will lose his job:

JITEN. You call yourself advertising professional and you don't want to pimp?

SRIDHAR. This is insane..... a man has his tolerance limit you know! And this is something – me pick up a woman for you!

(Jiten doesn't move his extended arm. Sridhar is fighting tears of humiliation. He snatches the keys and rules out). (CP-I, 287)

Bravely Fought the Queen focuses, therefore, on the advertising sector and its impact on class and gender relations as a patriarchal institution. Firstly, employees like Sridhar have to bow to it; secondly, its dominance overlooks the sensitivity of women, when it is decided that this campaign has to suit the requirements of the male customers, even when it is a product for women. But her views, her responses are neglected and negated. According to Jiten (an embodiment of the view of the dominant male-centric power structure), there is nothing wrong with his approach as the consumer is not a woman but a man. There are men who will buy this product for their women and so the ad-campaign should be seen from the perspectives of men and not that of women's. As Jiten says:

Yes! Men would want to buy it for their women! That's our market. Men would want their women dressed up like that. And they have the buying power. Yes! So there's no point asking a group of screwed up women what they think of it. They'll pretend to feel offended and say – 'oh, we are always being treated like sex objects'. (CP-I, 276)

The ad world is the pivotal point of a capitalist system. The play also presents the fictitious world of media and advertising to mislead persons and by presenting the women as 'looking glass' or having some great qualities; they make people believe

and follow these things as the truth and as a way of life just for the benefit of some money, they sell these humanity.

The process of the sisters Dolly's and Alka's dressing and making-up for an evening out is questioned by the very fact that we are adopting a feminized gaze at it; we see how far these actions are in fact conventional social performances, aimed at the male gaze; as a result we question these convention. This is why we talk about this play as meta-theatrical: the characters are men and women because they are playing roles.

In *A Room of One's Own* (1992), Virginia Woolf advances the notion that while women are indeed the victims of men, they collude in their own domestic and professional victimization by acting as a 'looking glass' for the reflecting back to men of their desired image. Germaine Greer too endorses these views:

Women are illusionists. They fake light-heartedness, girlishness and orgasm; they also fake the roses in their cheeks, the thickness, colour and curliness of their hair, the thinness of their waists, the longness of their legs and the size and shape of their breasts. Men do not seem to have demanded this to them; rather women seem to have bedizened themselves in all-out last-ditch attempt to grab the attention of otherwise uninterested males. (Greer, 27)

Dolly and Alka, in the beginning of the play subdue themselves by imprisoning in the ideology of womanhood: the idea of 'the Angle in the House'. Thus, we are now leading towards a third face of patriarchal dominance, where not only male perpetrators in the name of upholding the 'honour' code from ancient times. They have committed this plight on Indian women, but also women equally internalize and continue this code, by men but also through torments of women egged

on by other women or by themselves in order to live in harmony in traditional stereotypical roles.

Baa is a representative of the tyrannical Trivedi brothers in the play, and even without coming out of her bed in the uppermost level of the stage, is able to condition and control the other women in the house. Dattani presents the insecure Baa exercising patriarchal control over the affairs of the family as being the legal inheritor of the family property after the death of her husband. Baa is not merely a woman; she is the patriarch in the guise of a woman. She too has been subjected to violence in the domestic life. A frustrated wife in such a family often seeks her husband in her emotional fulfillment in her sons. Baa sees the picture of her husband in her elder son, Jiten and thus automatically develops an affection and inclination towards her own self younger son, Nitin who resembles her a lot. The mother-son intimacy comes out in the following lines:

Baa. Nitin! You don't like father, no? he's not nice!..... tell me you hate him! He hits me! Nitin tell me you hate him! Say it!

NITIN. Yes! I hate him! (CP-I, 302)

Such a mother figure would obviously begin to feel insecure when the son gets married and the mother would certainly begin to feel that her domination over her son will be soon get over. This feeling of insecurity will lead the mother to torture her daughter-in-law and poisons the minds of both her sons against their wives. Freud considers this mother-son relationship very important for conjugal bliss as he writes in "Femininity": "A mother is only brought unlimited satisfaction by her relation to a son; this altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationship. (Freud, 187)

Baa provokes Nitin to get his wife Alka out of the house as she is good-natured and even instigates Jiten to beat the pregnant Dolly as a result of which her child Daksha is born spastic. Baa's intervention is negative and destructive. In making, Jiten beats up Dolly she vents out her frustration of earlier times. But the future generation (Daksha) has to suffer because of the conflicts and frustrations of the elders. The injustice to Daksha is revealed at the moment Dolly's challenges Jiten in utter frustration:

DOLLY. You were angry with Praful and you hit me?

JITEN. (almost, in tears). That was fifteen years ago! (310)

.....

DOLLY... Your mother loved her more than was natural! Praful loved her. More than was natural....

JITEN.... You know I didn't. It was Baa! Blame her but not me! She is my daughter! (Crying) Get her back! Get her from wherever she is. I want her home.

.....

She (Dolly) demonstrates a spastic uncoordinated arm and neck movement with her eyes dilated. Laughs and turns around.

.....

JITEN (sobbing). No! No. (points to Baa's room) She made me do it. She did it!

DOLLY. No! oh no! I will not yet you get away so easily! They were your hands hitting me! Your feet kicking me! It's in your blood! It is your blood to do bad! (CP-I, 312)

The pathetic stipulation of Baa in the family has only replicated itself in her daughter-in-law in a different form, whereas the sons have inherited the power to perpetuate violence by associating with the figure of the father. It is indeed one of the contradictions in the patriarchal set up that having been associated with the father figure, Jiten beats up Dolly at the behest of Baa. Consequently, the three generations share the same experience but the maltreatment of Daksha is even more malicious and atrocious as she gets the blot of her father even before her birth. The climax arises with its 'deep theatrical purity' as in the words of Michael Walling:

When Dolly reveals the fact that her child was seriously disabled at birth by Jiten's violence, she begins to dance as Daksha would dance-disjointedly, wildly, with ever-increasing frenzy, until at last she breaks down in a gut-wrenching grief.

.....

.... 'Isn't that the way she dances?' it seems an innocuous line on the page. But this writing is writing beyond words: this is theatre. (CP-I, 230)

Mahesh Dattani's next play *Tara* focuses on another contentious and highly relevant contemporary issue-the relative status of girl and boy children- but also extends it to engage with an interrogation of the feminine, as external or internal. *Tara* is enthralling in that it comments on a society that treats the children of the same womb differently and by making use of rather unlikely 'freak' case to lay bare the injustices in the conventional Indian family meted out to the girl child. Moreover, as always, like all other plays of Dattani, this stereotype comes too in a friendly garb, covering the ugly truths as Patels, parents of Chandan and Tara, look like the ideal parents but there are more things under this hypocrisy, which created havoc when revealed. The play explores more relevant issues besides exposing the typical Indian mindset of preference of boy child to the girl from time immemorial; it is the failure

of relationships in a hypocritical Indian family, comprising of a father (Patel), mother (Bharati) and two children (Chandan and Tara), and their neighbour (Roopa). It also unravels the trauma of disability, which the two children are facing in the play. As Mahesh Dattani exposed in an interview to Lakshmi Subramanyam:

I focus on cultural emphasis on masculinity and how all the characters are at conflict with that the parents, the grandfather, and the neighbour- they are all in that sense in tension with their own sensibilities as opposed to cultural sensibilities they may have knowingly or unknowingly subscribed to. (Subramanyam, 129)

Consequently, Tara is not the story of the protagonist of the play Tara only, but of every girl child born in the Indian family whether urban or rural. The situation is inflamed, when there is some mental or physical deformity in her-a really bitter example of child abuse present in the Indian societies, Dattani takes Patels, as the members of Gujarati community, to depict the whole world's situation, not only in India. In fact, sex tests are mostly availed of by middle and upper classes; and often in highly educated families in Gujrat. Indian couples living in the USA, the UK and other western countries also come to Ahemdabad for these tests because they are banned in the west. It was recently discovered in Britain that the highest usage of ultra sound sex test was among the Patel community from Gujrat, which has to face the burden of dowry even there. Anandi Ben Patel, the president of the BJP's women's wing now the Chief Minister says that because of the conservative nature of Gujrat and the prevalence of dowry system, particularly in the Patel community, female foeticide has risen to an alarming rate. As Roopa comments on this community:

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

So when people asked about how the baby died, they could say that she choked while drinking her milk. (CP-I, 349)

Our country has along history of female foeticide/infanticide and an equally long history of material discrimination against girl children, and women in general. The birth of a son was certainly preferred to that of a daughter. In the Rig-Veda's hymn, Indra is invoked to grant ten sons to the bride. We meet in hymns with prayers for sons and grandsons, male offspring, male descendents and male issues and occasionally for wives but never for daughters. Even forgiveness is asked for sons but no blessing is ever prayed for female issues. Sudhir Kakar, makes a very fine point when he says:

In daughterhood in Indian girl is a sojourn in her own family and with marriage she becomes less a wife than a daughter-in-law. It is only with motherhood that she comes into her own as a woman and she can make a place for herself in the family, in the community and in her life circle. (Kakar, 52)

Tara is a story of co-joined twins separated at birth, by a surgical procedure, intended to favour the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara). The play unwraps in London with Chandan, now a playwright, is reminiscing about his childhood days spent with his sister Tara, told through Chandan's reflections on his childhood memories. Tara's story is also a manifestation of the feminine struggle for expression both physically and emotionally in a patriarchal Indian family. Tara and Chandan are the two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities and for Dan to write the story of his own childhood, he has to write Tara's story too. His twin sister Tara, whom he had almost erased from his memory, "She was lying deep inside, out of reach..." (CP-I, 324). The young Chandan and Tara walk in here with Tara declaring that they have "always been inseparable. The way we started in life. Two lives and

one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out.... And separated” (CP-I, 325). This opening indicates that the play can be read at different and diverse level, as one about the femininity in men: the other side of gender that we all carry within us. Chandan, who is now Dan in London, write Tara’s story to rediscover the neglected half of him, as a means of becoming whole. He says: “I have my memories.... But now I want them to come back. To masticate my memories in my mind and spit out the result to the world in anger” (CP-I, 379). As Dattani asserts in an interview to Sachidananda Mohanty:

Tara is about a boy and a girl, Siamese twins. I have taken medical liberty over here because Siamese twins are invariable of the same sex and they are surgically separated at birth. It was important for their survival and the play deals with their emotional separation. (Mohanty, 171)

Through a series of flashbacks, we get an insight into their early life. The play revolves around the Siamese twins, Chandan and Tara Patel; an operation is done to separate the twins at birth which leaves Tara crippled for life. Tara, the protagonist of the play, fiights against the prejudices which, society has for the crippled,. Dattani mentioned to Lakshmi Subramanyam:

I see *Tara* as a play about the male self and the female self. The male self being preferred (if one is to subscribe to conventional categories of masculine traits and feminine traits) in all cultures. The play is about the separation of self and the resultant angst. (Subramanyam, 129)

The family of Patels is a highly conflicted one in which, like all other plays of Dattani, some dark secret is hidden behind the relationship of husband and wife, which results in hysteria in Bharati, and in making Mr. Patel abnormal. Bharati’s father although absent influences their actions. It is an epitome of Dattani’s excellence

in depicting how the family rules over us and how patriarchy dominates even being invisible. He was a wealthy man in politics and was very close to becoming the chief minister. He had been a consistent upholder of values pertaining to males. He further strengthened his indulgence for male grandchild by leaving his property after his demise to Chandan and not a single penny to Tara. His will is a testament that is meted out to girls in Indian society. Mr. Patel and Chandan's exchange of words reveals this prejudice:

PATEL. He (grandfather) left you a lot of money.

CHANDAN. And Tara?

PATEL. Nothing.

CHANDAN. Why?

PATEL. It was his money. He could do what he wanted with it.

(CP-I, 360)

Patel himself seems to be an emblematic and typical father, who tries to push his male and female children into separate grooves, into the stereotyped gender roles that would help them fit into society, at the cost of hurting them both, since their own preferences seem contradictory to these expectations. He wants Chandan to grow up like a 'man' and favours him for higher education abroad and a good career as he says "Chandan is going to study further and he will go abroad for his higher studies." (CP-I, 352) Patel tries to fetch him to office with him, but Chandan is not interested in business as he would prefer to be a writer, while it is Tara who seems more inclined to go into a career like her father's; but there are no such offers for her. Tara observes this game of patriarchy and says:

Men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to do hunting while the women looked after the cave. (CP-I, 328)

Patel is furious at his wife, Bharati when he sees Chandan helping his mother with knitting and loses his cool, accusing her of turning Chandan “into a sissy-teaching him to knit!” (CP-I, 351) Tara is discouraged frankly and overtly even when, she is more intelligent, sharp and witty and will perform well if given opportunity in life. Patel thinks of sending Tara too, to college only when Chandan refuses to go without her. Thus, together they struggle with their feminine aspects as after the physical division, the father wants to separate them emotionally too. Separately they experience society’s disapproval based on gender – defined roles, Chandan through his passive artsy male persona and Tara through her bold assertive female persona. Their understanding of this deep relationship is stronger in the later half of the play, when the siblings, who were surgically separated at three months, show their feelings for each other. There is an underlying sense of trust and closeness, that goes beyond the text, and the two character’s occasional ironies about themselves and others, Patel is not only prejudiced towards Tara but is also discourteous and authoritarian with Bharati too. His anger on her exhibits a streak of harshness, even heartlessness. At time, though he becomes a caring husband, but is often nasty to her. Even when he denies Bharati to donate her kidney to Tara, it was not because of his concern for his wife’s health, but it shows a cruel expression of his overbearing attitude: “Because I don’t want you to have the satisfaction of doing it.” (CP-I, 344)

Such instances are numerous, where his continual dismissals of Bharati’s opinions as inconsequential are evident; not paying heed to her expostulations on behalf of Tara. It represents him as a typical over-riding patriarchal husband.

Bharati supports Tara in the matter of higher education and other things too and protects her against all odds. Her emotional stress centers on Tara and her condition: anxiety about illness, death, her future, when she grows up and also worries

about effects on other children and on partners. The isolation of Tara is created by restrictive social and economic life. It is a potential source of disturbing strain for Bharati.

Besides subsequent problems may come to disabled children, for example, problems of adapting the disabled; emotional and behavioural problems in younger children; the special problem occurring in adolescence; stigma; social isolation; poor self-image; and reduced perceptions of control over one's life and environment. Chandan is more complacent with his handicapped life while Tara craved every moment for a complete and normal life. The awareness that she has a handicap and the humiliation which is meted out to her by Roopa and her friends, when she is forced to show her handicapped leg to them is like a dagger-jibe to her heart.

Dattani is successful in focusing the pathetic humiliation faced by a handicapped child; the condition becomes more pathetic if she is a girl, as being subordinated in both ways. Tara is hurt and in her moment of deep hurt and the resentment caused by the 'normal' world, she wants to hear only Beethoven. She identifies his greatness in spite of being unable to hear his own creations. Though, in the company of Chandan, she feels herself complete and cope with the problems and adjust relatively, but still her desire to have another leg is persistent; she desires to live normally in society that humiliates her. Throughout the play we can feel that she bears some kind of grudge against the society. She seems to have some kind of aversion with the outside world and her world consists of only her parents and her brother. Tara's attachment to her brother and the internal anguish is expressed in her conversation with her brother Chandan, when she says: "May be we still are. Like we've always been. Inseparable." (CP-I, 325)

In spite of all this, Tara lives happily with the support of her mother and her brother; but the truth, which destroys her life, is the revelation that her own mother, to whom she is closest, meted out this despondent plight on her by being biased on her birth. Therefore, the play gives the most frightening instance of women blindly adhering to patriarchal values and gives us a picture of the plight and helpless condition of women in our society.

Gender discrimination replicates itself from generation to generation, violates the rights of the girl child and chokes her further development. Born into indifference and reared on neglect, the girl child is caught in a web of cultural practices and prejudices that hamper her growth and progress, both physically and mentally. In India for a girl child the period from infancy to adolescence is a perilous path.

This is really, what happened to Tara. The co-joined twins, Tara and Chandan were born with three legs and a repeated scan showed that there was the greater chance of success if the third leg remained as part of Tara's body. But Bharati, Tara own mother, showed the 'jaundiced eye' or partiality to the son and supported by her father and his financial and political influence, to favour the boy over the girl, went against her husband's wishes and told doctor to make the third limb part of the boy's body. But the operation as usual failed and the whole effort went in vain because the leg very soon became a lump of the dead flesh on Chandan and had to be amputated. To think that it would have been part of Tara, makes Bharati neurotic and made her to live with a sense of guilt all her life. Mr. Patel has very well exposed the whole process of this tragedy to the children in the end:

A scan showed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl. Your mother asked for a reconfirmation. The result was the same. The chances were slightly better that the leg would survive... on

the girl. Your grandfather and your mother had a private meeting with Dr. Thakkar. I wasn't asked come. That same evening, your mother told me of her decision. Everything will be done as planned. Except- I couldn't believe that she told me – that they would risk giving both legs to the boy... maybe if I had protested more strongly! I tried to reason with her that it wasn't right and that even the doctor would realize it was unethical! The doctor had agreed, I was told. It was only later I came to know of his intention of starting a large nursing home-the largest in Bangalore. He had acquired three acres of prime land-in the heart of the city- from the state. A few days later, the surgery was done. As planned by them, Chandan had two legs-for two days. It didn't take them very long to realize what a grave mistake they had made. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead flesh which could have-might have-been Tara. (CP-I, 378)

Bound by guilt, Bharat tries to compensate and reimburse by over protecting Tara, with excessive concern for her, something her with affection and even making her feel that the father loves Chandan more; she even attempts to 'buy' friendship for her daughter. She begs Roopa, a neighbour girl of Tara's age:

If you promise to be her best friend-what I mean is if you would like to be her friend – I will be most grateful to you and I will show it ... in whatever way you want me to. (CP-I, 341)

Bharati's, sense of regret is so deep that she agrees to donate her kidney to her daughter so that she may survive for a few more years. In a conversation with her son, she tells him: "I plan to give her happiness. I mean to give her all the love and affection which I can give. It's what she...deserves. Love can make up for a lot." (CP-I, 349)

Patel always gives hints to Tara about her mother being a hypocrite as she showers love on her just for the atonement of her guilt; he tells her, “Tara please believe me when I say that I love you very much and I have never in all my life loved you less or more than I have loved your brother. But your mother...” (CP-I, 354)

But Tara has always been led to believe that it is she who has been discriminated by her father, and always gained the extra bit of affection from her mother. That is why, the play generates a death-like response from Tara when she learns the truth – it was her own mother’s decision that deprived her what she wanted more than anything else in the world all her life – a second leg. It is a shattering discovery for the naturally ebullient Tara: “And she called me her star!” (CP-I, 379)

This is the crucial moment in the play, which practically kills the female and tears her apart from the male; Chandan moves far away, never to return, forever incomplete. Thus, we see that both Patel and Bharati connive together in the working of patriarchal norms. Though Bharati has changed because of her sense of guilt, Patel carries on merrily, almost as if to rub Bharati’s nose in. He remained as a mute observer of the whole affair. He too believes in gender hierarchy and subscribes to the ideology of the patriarchal world. He blames his wife and father-in-law for the damage done, but his complicity in the whole operation cannot be denied.

The injustices are done in the name of construction of gender identities. The hierarchization and demarcation of roles do as much harm to men as to women. The viciousness of the grandfather and his mother not only takes away the life of the girl but also ruins the life of the boy who was very much attached to his sister Tara. For no fault of his own for his sister’s untimely death, he somehow holds himself responsible for it and cannot forgive himself for the atrocity done towards his sister. For that reason, he escapes to London and transforms his name from Chandan to Dan,

lives without a personal history and unable to make any progress in his writing career. He is alive but divorced from all his realities; he thinks that his sister's tragedy is his own. Even when his father informs him about his mother's death, he refuses to come back in India. While writing the life history of his sister Tara, Dan agrees that we are destined to live out plans that are not in our control:

Like other objects in the cosmos, whose orbits are determined by those around. Moving in a forced harmony. Those who survive are those who do not defy the gravity of others. And those who desire even a moment of freedom find themselves hurled into space, doomed to crash with some unknown force. (CP- I, 379)

His sense of trauma and anguish is so intense that at the end of the play, we see Chandan apologizes to Tara in the most moving of all the lines in the play: "Forgive me Tara. Forgive me for making it my tragedy" (CP-I, 380). In the end of the play, two siblings hold each other in a tight hug, together once again, and as complete whole. The play *Tara* can be read in so many different ways. It presents Dattani's view of how the 'forced harmony' of our lives is so fraught with uncertainties and so close to angst that the surfacing of even one memory can tilt the balance completely, change our paths into that of collision and self- explosion makes Tara an important text for the issue of a girl child.

The play enlightens us that no matter how much a girl outshines a boy; she will remain in the background and can never be given an advantageous position. Some epic characters like Sita, Savitri and Gandhari, etc. are seen as the role models are the products of and fashioned by millennia of patriarchal norms, which play an important role in creating women's images of themselves and in reinforcing gender dichotomy. But how is this male domination perpetuated generation after generation?

Do women also contribute to it? Are they merely passive victims of the process? Don't they accelerate the pace through their sleepy and somewhat dormant subservience? In the man's world, not only men but women too perpetuate their deformed positions, even when they are educated. It is really shocking that Bharati, being an educated mother, showed such shortsightedness regarding her children and thus worsened the conditions. If she had not shown an indulgence for the male child and had done justice to her female child then both the children would have flourished happily and would have lived as healthy human beings.

Is this the punishment for Tara for having been born as a girl? What a girl should do if she gets suppressive treatment in her own home by her own parents and not by the society alone? Does she have an identity? How can her own mother, being herself a woman, treat her daughter in this manner? A girl is as much the part of body of the mother as the son is, then why is there such kind of difference towards them? These and many more questions arise naturally in the mind of any girl living in the position of Tara, which is a general sight in society among any class and community. Sometimes this kind of suppression leads to depression and acceptance of her own plight by the women and sometimes they get ready to revolt; but in some cases, the truth is so shattering that it takes the life of an innocent girl, as in the case with Tara. Through her parents, we witness the ongoing gender based power struggles, the decisions are made because of these struggles and the guilt and subsequent perverse behaviour. The story draws in by examining how the lives of children and adults are affected by societal gender preferences. Though the spheres of men and women are symmetrical and complementary, they are not equal.

The determination of the twins to express themselves and the people they encounter in their separate but simultaneous journey through life highlights the

obstacles imposed on individuals by the society and those they impose upon themselves. This demonstrates the havoc of Indian society, where the first teaching of suppression of the feelings in a girl is given by the mother who herself is in the grip of patriarchal dominance. This is carried from one generation to another making one question, “where is the escape?”

The characters are no different from the rest of us; making choices all the time between right and wrong, standing up to or surrendering to peer pressure and social expectations, for the most of time; good people ,who sometimes make bad choices which haunt them for the rest of their lives. Tara is an interesting window into our own lives and reveals to us that we may be victims too of our own prejudices, and our choices are often influenced by too many external considerations. As the protagonist of Dattani’s another play, a radio play *Clearing the Rubble* says:

If you can’t clear the rubble you have to live with it, around it and over it, because what you lost is buried in there somewhere and until you find it, you have to keep on living with the rubble. (CP-I, 83)

The above illustrations of the plays of Dattani constructed and perpetrated the patriarchal ideology both by men and women, but Dattani’s aim is not only depicting this domination and ascendancy, but deconstructing the gendered society by the ‘strong’ male and female persona of present generations. Therefore, briefly, looking above at a number of ways in which Dattani uses the ‘play’ to ‘play’ with the idea of gender, now in the following part, the subversion of the social norms which gender appears to imply. Notes John McRae:

...as the characters make fall, their emotions unravel, and their lives disintegrate. For the fault is not just the characters – it is everyone’s, in a society which not only condones but encourages hypocrisy, which demands

deceit and negation, rather than allowing self-expression, responsibility and dignity. (CP-I, 46)

Dattani's feminism is not only about the elimination of differences between the sexes; nor even simply the achievement of equal opportunity: it concerns the individual's right to find out the kind of person he or she is and to strive to become that person. Aiming to dismantle all "systems of domination", Dattani even illustrates the phrase of Simone De Beauvoir, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...." (Beauvoir, 267)

According to her, women and men both are not born but rather become women and men and it is the civilization that turns them likewise. When the position of women within the social whole is altered, new conceptions of the self and society come directly into conflict with older ideas about a woman's role, her destiny, and even her 'nature'. Sandra Lee Bartky writes that feminist consciousness is the experience in a certain way of certain specific contradictions in the social order.

In Dattani's patriarchal world, both men and women dominate and are dominated in the fixed societal norms. He demolishes these typecast roles by generational gap and repositioning of the male-female stereotype within patriarchy by depicting 'strong' women and 'weak' men in his plays. Dattani's women in the end may not seem 'ideal' for Indian tradition, but they are true to themselves in revealing their true inner selves and fights back. Dattani's vision of emancipation has fired the imagination of many women. It involves as an escape from male-defined femininity that turns them into domesticated, cosmetized and caged birds in order to realize their inherent creative energy. He affirms:

We are talking about communal complex, we're talking about gender battles maybe and the male-female equation have been re-examined, at least in the cities. And I think all this has to reflect in the theatre we do, and it's absolutely vital and necessary for this to happen. (Uniyal, 179)

Women in Dattani's plays are marginalized, but not victims as they fight back in the end like Dolly and Alka in *Bravely Fought the Queen*. All the women characters in this play are examples of exploitation prevalent in educated urban families and also the epitomes of retaliation if they are not heard or are crushed for a very long time. These women are of course the 'Queen' referred to in the title of the play, a title which in itself is an inter-textual derivative source from a translation of a Hindu poem of the indomitable Rani of Jhansi. According to John McRae:

The title goes back to tradition Hindi text "we learnt in school ... but had to translate it in English as an exercise" – but with its refrain of 'so bravely fought the manly queen' it comes right up to date in its questioning of female and male roles in society. (Multani, 58)

Alka and Dolly have their moments of resistance that make them survive in the oppressive atmosphere of the Trivedi house. Dolly listens to the thumri of Naina Devi and defines her sexuality through a fantasy with the cook, Kanhaiya, who gratifies her emotional and physical needs, which do not exist on this quotient with her husband Jatin. Therefore, a taboo issue of extra-marital relationship in Indian families is illustrated by Dattani:

Definitely, the right values are not anything that is confrontational.... You can't talk about a middle-class housewife about having sex with the cook or actually having a sex life, that isn't Indian either- that's confrontational even if it is Indian. (Multani, 163)

Alka creates her identity through acts of defiance –such as drinking alcohol and dancing in the rain. She very boldly questions the authority of her husband and asks for an explanation for his disloyalty. She also exposes the betrayal of her brother for not revealing the existence of homosexual relations between her husband and her brother. Just like Girish Karnad’s play *Hayavadana*. Dattani’s play *Bravely Fought the Queen* questions the patriarchal moral code which demands the faithfulness of a woman to her husband but not the faithfulness of a man to his wife, Alka is all armed to fight back and to question the norms set by men for women and this instantly reminds the readers of Dolly’s lines where she says:

And we can all go-bravely fought! *Bravely Fought the Queen!* Full of manly valour (CP-I, 296)

Dattani pronounces the idea of writing the play and talking its title, such as:

... *Bravely Fought the Queen* was triggered off by the poem we learnt in school, “khoob ladi mardani who to Jhansi Wali Raani thi” and what I had witnessed at somebody’s house, was some form of battle between the woman and her husband and immediately something triggered off and the poem came to my mind, that she was fighting very bravely. And then I immediately got this setting of a woman fighting a losing battle and the title just came to me and is reflective of Laxmi Bai’s fight against the British and it was a losing battle but she never gave up. (Dawan & Pant, 183)

This attitude of Dattani is clearly revealed, when Alka desire to dress up as the Rani ki Jhansi, to be the brave queen in the costume party. She seems to be getting ready to fight back, with an imaginary sword swinging in her hand; for all that she has undergone. By focusing on sexual fantasies and subconscious desires of Alka and

Dolly, which were suppressed from a long time, Dattani gives them their identity for existence. He says:

.... it is amazing how often I have been criticized for having the women enact their sexual fantasies.... My primary focus was on giving the women some kind of release from the tedium of their existence. I still continue to see that as one of more positive aspects of the play which otherwise is quite dark. (Subramanyam,130)

The liberating dance of Alka in the rain signifies the sense of freedom from the shackles of society, when she dances freely in the rain, she finds herself in a utopian world. It envisages a world free of male privilege and male hierarchy and authority over women. A world that, Julia Kristeva envisages:

A society in which the sexual signifier would be free to move, where the fact of being born male or female no longer would determine the subject's position in relation to power, and where, therefore, the very nature of power itself would be transformed. (Kristeva, 172)

When the two world of men and women converge violently in act III, all the characters stand exposed, the sham and façade ripped apart, In a 'review of *Bravely Fought the Queen* in BAC, Ian Shuttleworth says:

Much of the play's tension comes from the interaction between the enclosed, claustrophobic, female world of Act I and the male world of business in Act II. The fact that both sexes are living lives based on fantasy is cruelly exposed when the characters confront each other in Act III, and the realities of their lives emerge. The homosexuality of one of the brothers, the crippled daughter of the other marriage, Baa's continued presence- all of these facts are concealed in the uneasy world which the characters inhabit. The play becomes

a plea for humanity and for tolerance. It is equally a cry for the acceptance of Indian values that are shifting, where tradition and contemporary clash, confuse and create a new social landscape. (Dattani, 89)

We see that women have not been presented as sinners, but they endure because of the men who are part of their lives. Jiten, at last, exposed to be a pathetic escapist and is driven to guilty tears and Nitin, too exposed his homosexual relations with Praful. Therefore, both escape as it is too late now to go back. As Mahesh Dattani says in an interview to Lakshmi Subramanyam:

I am not sure I have portrayed the women as victims in *Bravely Fought the Queen*. I see the men as victims of their own rage and repression. This has serious consequences on the lives of the women. But they do fight their battles and win some and lose some. (Subramanyam, 130)

There is yet another, character, outside the Trivedi household, Lalitha, Sridhar's wife whose entry into the play introduces a relatively different schema that is totally alien to the two sisters. She is independent, free, choosy and creative. She nurtures 'bonsai plants', does a bit of creative writing for a woman's magazine and is also well – versed with the professional affair of her husband, Sridhar – a world, which is alien to the Alka and Dolly. On the one hand, Lalitha's attempt at formulating an identity of her own dissolves the class hierarchy between the women in the Trivedi house and Lalitha. On the other hand, she represents the post-feminist viewpoint regarding women's status in the postmodern social and cultural environment. The evening she spends in the Trivedi household is enough to tell her of the existing cruelties of the patriarchy which a modern or the postmodern woman disavow to believe. After discovering the inner realities of Dolly and Alka and the truth behind the illusory Kanhaiya and the dark auto driver etc, she realizes that 'we

have to long walk ahead of us' (CP-I, 314). Even after a lot of claims of the reformation of women are made by modern feminists. No matter how much the world proclaims about woman enfranchisement and feminine liberation, subconsciously all women are aware of the fact that they have go to long way to break shackles. Therefore, Mahesh Dattani has always been very particular about the correct portrayal of his women characters and he has no biases against them. He says to Lakshmi Subramanyam:

I believe I can forget my own gender.... So those scenes between women didn't come from an 'outside' view point at all. In fact, I am not even sure about the politics of gender since at times I don't even think about the gender of my characters. Its only when other characters in the play react to their own gender, or the gender of those around, that the issue comes alive. In that sense, contrary to what I said earlier I am on the outside looking in. And sometimes I am on the inside looking out. (Subramanyam, 130)

The fissure between conventional and current cultures has thrown up a new social landscape. The play races towards a culmination and laying bare the gruesome truths that lies behind the pretence of conservative Indian morality. Questions of gender, sexuality and identity are raised and the unspoken is voiced, the unseen is made visible. In the play *Tara*, the context is different, the issue in question is different, but the guilt is very much the same and the ramifications are different. The play deals with the cultural constructions of gender that always gives preference to male over the female. And the odds faced by the physically challenged children in society are highlighted in the play *Tara*, and how the sincerity and inclination of a girl like Tara has to prove her mettle in the world of male supremacy. Tara herself is spirited, tough and a survivor with a sense of honour. She fights against prejudices,

which the society has against the crippled and the female. Tara is often ridiculed for her artificial leg by her peers at the school and the girls of her neighbourhood-Roopa, Prema and Nalini. Roopa's words about Tara are representative of the attitude of Prema and Nalini, and possibly of the society at large, "She is a real freak of nature all right" (CP-I, 342). But as the name Tara rightfully suggests a star, the girl was a bright and shining star, who did not permit this disability to surmount on herself and always became the source of happiness to her surroundings. She has the ability to laugh at it herself, and laugh at the imbecility of those who consider it great deprivation and a subject of pity or ridicule. Tara is a girl, whose complete life could have done wonders as she has a fire in her, which Chandan does not have. Therefore, she is very much capable of holding her own and making the best of her life, with all its givens. Therefore, she emerges as a strong character from the beginning to the end by her capacity to revolt frankly as she lashes out at her peers calling them names. As she says to Roopa:

Get lost! And please ask Nalini and Prema to come here. I have something to say to them- about you! Oh, wait till they hear this! They will love it. They are going to look at your tits the same way they looked at my leg! Let me see how you can face them ogling at you! You won't be able to come out of your house, you horrible creature! You are ugly and I don't want ugly people in my house! So get lost! (CP-I, 369)

Tara outbursts in the end against men and eventually against all the systems that think that a girl should always be compassionate and careful and should not be selfish like everyone else 'men' and revolts her father on his forcing only Chandan to go to the office because she is unable to mask her anger and resentment. She says to Chandan:

TARA. We are more sensitive, more intelligent, more compassionate human beings than creeps like you and And....

CHANDAN. And?

TARA. Daddy! (CP-I, 371)

She also goes against Chandan when he advises her to be calm and polite. She says, “How do you expect me to feel anything for anyone if they don’t give me any feeling to begin with? Why is it wrong for me to be without feeling? Why are you asking me to do something that nobody has done for me? (CP-I, 371)

Another strong female character is Bharati, though she hides herself behind the mask of love to Tara to hide her guilt towards her. Bharati worries about Tara when she says to Chandan:

It’s all right while she is young. It’s all very cute and comfortable when she makes witty remarks. But let her grow up. Yes, Chandan. The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you- but not her! Oh, the pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable. And what about forty and fifty! Oh God! (CP-I, 348-349)

Under this apparent maternal love for Tara, it is clear that it was not just only an act of penitence but also her moral superiority over her husband and the maternal love becomes an instrument to carve out her space within the family. Therefore, in Dattani’s family, the parental love, care and protection is also a kind of fight turf wars over their children- a conflict for control and power as there is always a power stricker within families and also struggles for power. As Erin Mee puts it: “... Dattani focuses on the family as a microcosm of society in order to dramatize the ways we are socialized to accept certain gendered roles and to give preference to what is ‘male’” (CP-I, 320).

Though Bharati's one wrong decision gives her mental trauma but eventually she wins in the fight of power struggle from her husband by deciding the activities of her children.

Dattani's deep preoccupation with gender issues leads to the emergence of the idea of the twin side of one's self—quite literally embodied in one body and the separation that follows. The 'gendered' self, as Dattani refers to it, must in some sense always partake of the 'other' in order that it is complete. The fragmented self is clear as to how the Siamese Twins are first born by fragments of male and female. They are separated emotionally so that they could not come together by forcing them to grow differently. Again, the double naming of Dan and Chandan is itself a further example of fragmented self. This metaphor is about the separation of the multiple identities, available to us, which social constructs require. As Dattani puts in an interview to Erin B Mee:

...about the male denying the female, and how the cultural construct of gender favours the male. Whether it's a biological woman or biological man, the favour is to the male, so I think it has to do with coming to terms with one's own self in terms of the feminine in the self. (Multani, 159)

That is why he would prefer to say that this play is more about the 'gendered' self, about acknowledging the female side of one. Notes Erin Mee:

Tara and Chandan are two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities and that Dan, in trying to write the story of his childhood, has to write Tara's story. Dan writes Tara's story to rediscover the neglected half of himself, as a means of becoming whole. (CP-I, 320)

The tale is, after all, narrated by Chandan, the male half of the whole of which the 'other' is Tara. Erin Mee again puts it:

Dattani sees Tara, as a play about the gender self, about coming to terms with the feminine side of oneself in a world that always favors what is 'male'.... (CP-I, 320)

Dattani ends the play with the projection of the 'whole' identity together again, with two legs each, in Dan's memory, beyond nature and society, without the limp or the disabilities, locked in an embrace. This moment tells a lot beyond language, beyond time –a silent song of the wholeness of hug, giving equal importance to the feminine and masculine, merging on an even footing, with a hope of a completely different abled world, a world of real abilities and possibilities and gender equalities.

Dattani seems to agree with Judith Butler that gender is performative. He makes Patel look after his children while Bharati is in the hospital. Patel plays the role of Bharati—the role of a mother—in her absence. Like Bharati, Patel asks Tara, “Tara, what would you like for dinner? (No response) Will kanchipuram idlis do?” Surprised by Patel's behaviour she remarks: “My, oh my! You sound just like mummy! (Goes towards her room.) You men can imitate us so well if you want to. Pity we can't return the compliment” (CP-I, 357). Patel performs the role of a mother very perfectly. He pays attention to Tara's likes and dislikes and mothers her properly. This proves that the man can play the role of the woman if he decides to and the woman can play the role of the man if she is given the opportunity. Thus, the gender roles can be reversed as they are culturally constructed.

The third play in this chapter is *Seven Steps Around the Fire* which deals with the plight of third gender i.e. Hizra, Eunuchs. The Hizra is a neutral gender and a special sect of Hinduism. They dress and act like women and worship Bahuchara Mata or Mother Bahuchara. The temple dedicated to her in North Gujrat is central

place of worship for all of them all over the country. To be initiated into the community, they have to be castrated first. Natural the converts come from male gender. Then on they have to behave as women though they are neither men nor women. They have special vocation in Hindu society. They perform dance and singing song to bless newborn babies and newly married couples. ‘The term hijrais of Urdu origin, a combination of Hindi, Persian and Arabic meaning ‘neither male nor female’. (CP-I, 10)

That they are a neutral gender does not mean that they do not have any sexuality. They cannot play man, but they do play for women. The hijras used to be also soldiers, even generals. In medieval period Malik Naib Kafur, Alauddin Khilji’s favourite, was a distinguished general, who won many battles for Sultan. He was a hizra. People generally consider them bad due to their neutral gender, because they are neither men nor women. They are discriminated on the basis of gender. Society is kind to them from a distance but it does encourage relationship with them. Their presence at the public places is unwanted. They have a Shaven beard, coarse voice, tough physique and their movements are masculine. Yet they have to be dressed like women. This frightens everyone.

As far as their social position is concerned, Uma says in a voice- over they are “perceived as the lowest of the low, they yearn for family and love. (CP-II, 239)

The presence of Hijra/Eunuchs can be traced back in the myths and epics also. In Shaiva mythology lord Shiva has a form called Ardhanrishvara in which the left half of his body is female. Lord Vishnu’s incarnation as Mohini, as a beautiful woman is also a unique example of eunuchs represented in mythology.

But transsexuals are not actually hijras or eunuchs. Nidhi Dugar Kundalia explains deference between a transgender and a hizra:

Hizra: The term could have two implications. Most are biologically male or intersex, and have been castrated early in life with major hormonal consequences. The rest have probably been male at birth, but adopt feminine gender role and wear women's clothing.

Transgender: This is the state of one's gender identity not matching one's assigned sex. It is independent of sexual orientation; transgenders may identify themselves as homosexual, bisexual, polysexual or asexual; some may consider conformist sexual orientation labels as insufficient or inapplicable to them (1). The term hizra means neither male nor female.

Nidhi Dugar Kundalia observes:

Gender identity is persons's private logic and subjective experience of their own gender. It is usually formed by age three and is fixed by the age of six. Apart from male or female, there exist a category called third gender for people who are uncomfortable with the gender that is usually associated with their sex. (Kundalia,1)

According to census 2011, there are 4,87,803 transgenders living in India, with literacy rate of 56.07%, but the actual number is five to six times more. The International Human rights Day is celebrated on 10 December every year, in order to sensitize people about the basic human rights, in violence against women, child sexual abuse; child labour etc. But the rights of Eunuch community is largely neglected. They are discriminated on the basis of their gender, deprived of any basic rights and are often victim of violence at home or outside. Even members of family do not understand their problems. Due to denial of acceptance in family, they have to leave their own homes. The apathy and discrimination of family, general public and government has reduced them to life of penury and they indulge in begging,

prostituting and other anti-social activities in order to meet-out their daily needs. In India they are socially marginalized, victimized and economically impoverished. Dattani's play *Seven Steps around the Fire*, is about hijra community that leads a life of social exclusion in Indian society. In this play, Dattani raises his voice against the injustice meted out to the marginalized sections of our society namely hijra community and homosexuals. The play criticizes an age-old social institution of marriage that is based on the heterosexual relationship. Dattani pleads on behalf of the hijras and homosexuals to whom the privilege of marriage is denied by man and nature.

The play rotates around "the third gender- the community of eunuchs and their existence on the fringes of the Indian milieu" (Chaudhuri, 62). The plot of the play *Seven Steps around the Fire* revolves around the incident of murder of Kamla, a hijra, who is married secretly to Subbu, the son of a minister, Mr. Sharma. While working on her research paper "Gender related Violence", Uma Rao, a research scholar and the wife of the superintendent of police, meets Anarkali, a hijra, who is put into the prison on the false charge of the murder of Kamla. Her intention behind the investigation of the murder case of Kamla is to "show their position in society" (CP-II 239). The hijra community has no space in male dominated society. They live on the margins of the society invisibly. The rights enjoyed by men and women are denied to them as they are, in the words of Serena Nanda, "neither men nor women"(Nanda,1).

Seven Steps around the Fire presents the biased attitude of the heterosexual society. Munswamy, the police constable; Suresh Rao, the superintendent of police; and Mr. Sharma, the minister represent the heterosexual patriarchal society that hates the hijra community. Munswamy considers hijras as criminals and liars. When Uma

Rao goes into the jail to meet Anarkali to collect information regarding the murder of Kamala, he tells Uma that there is no use of talking with Anarkali as “it will only tell you lies” (CP-II 234). According to him the hijras are worth neglecting and that is why he suggests Uma to take another case for her research. While giving the details about the dead body of Kamla, Munswamy throws light on the criminal nature of hijra community. They not only steal gold and money but also kidnap small boys for money. Champa, the head hijra admits it in the play. She mistakes Uma as the mother of Ramu, whom hijras have kidnapped. She asks Uma to take Ramu home if she wishes. Generally it is believed that hijras kidnap small boys either for money or to make them hijras.

Suresh Rao considers hijras as “just castrated degenerate men” who fight “like dogs” every day (CP-II 238). He warns Uma: “Don’t believe a word of anything it says. They are all liars” (CP-II 237). Though Anarkali cries out, “I didn’t kill her. She was my sister!” (CP-II 236), the police officer Suresh Rao and the police constable Munswamy do not believe in her words. She has been beaten and ill-treated in the prison. There is no separate prison cell for hijras. The other male prisoners torture them and scream with pleasure as they beat up Anarkali.

It is the plight of the terribly marginalized hijras in Indian society that they are not treated as human beings at all. They are not allowed to mix up with other people. The society, in which they are born and of which they are part of, does not pay heed to their needs and demands. The basic rights are denied to them. The parents to whom they are born, the brothers and sisters with whom they played in their childhood, and the relatives, who caressed them and showered love on them when they were children—all these relatives consider them as disgrace to their families and avoid any kind of contact with them as if they are leprosy patients. They

are not given any share in family property. As a result, there is no other alternative left before them except begging, stealing and prostituting.

Mahesh Dattani is a humanist who has empathy for the marginalized, subjugated and oppressed class of people in Indian society. He speaks through the character of Uma, a research student in sociology. Her voice-over gives us more information about the lives of hijras and their origin. Her voice-over says:

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. All people of the city wanted to follow him. 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 man and nature.

Not for them the seven rounds witnessed by the fire god, eternally binding man and woman in matrimony, or the blessings of 'May you be the mother of a hundred sons. (CP-II 239-40)

Uma Rao's Voice-over throws light on the miserable condition of hijras in India. They are socially, economically and culturally ex-communicated. Marriage and birth are the only two social events where their presence is acceptable, but these

two privileges are denied to them by man and nature. Marriage, love, family, birth, motherhood, and wife—these words have no meaning in their lives. Generally, they address men and women as brothers and sisters. It shows how hungry they are for family and love. Anarkali addresses Munswamy as ‘brother’. But Munswamy does not like Anarkali addressing him as ‘brother’. He says her “Shut up. And don’t call me brother” (CP-II, 240). No man likes to be called a brother by a hijra and wants to get involved with them. In the play, all the men characters hate hijras and use the pronoun ‘it’ to refer to a hijra. They do not like to be associated with them. So it seems that it is a general practice among men to treat them as stuff.

The play also throws light on the empty and insignificant lives of hijras. When asked by Uma to tell something about her life, Anarkali remarks: “What is there to tell? I sing with other hijras at weddings and when a child is born. People give us money otherwise I will put a curse on them...” (CP-II 241). There is nothing significant in their lives to tell others. They have no voice of their own at all. As Champa says, “We can not speak... When we want to speak, nobody listens. When we can not speak...” (CP-II, 259). These words of Champa remind us Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

Hijras are well aware of their position in society. When, Uma expresses her desire to be her sister. Anarkali says, “Where you are and where am I?” (CP-II 242). However, she takes Uma in confidence and convinces her that she has not killed Kamla. But she does not reveal the name of the murderer to Uma. Knowing the power of the murderer, Anarkali states her dilemma to Uma: “Please, sister! I will die here. Help me out, then I will run away... They will kill me also if I tell the truth. If I don’t tell the truth, I will die in jail.” (CP-II 244)

Anarkali knows that there is no way out. Though she is innocent, she has to suffer only because she belongs to the class of people who have no voice of their own. Dattani talks about the trauma of hijras like Anarkali and Kamla who have to suffer for no fault of theirs. Suresh Rao, after the release of Anarkali from the prison, admits that there was no proof against her. He tells Uma: “Anyway, we only arrested her because there was no one else. There is no real proof against her. These hijras ... they cut off their balls ... they kill. It would be any one of them.” (CP-II 270)

Uma Rao, a mouthpiece of the dramatist, feels sympathy for Anarkali as she is convinced that she has not killed Kamla. In order to give justice to Anarkali, she investigates the murder case of Kamla and finds out the truth that Mr. Sharma, the minister, gets Kamla burned to death with the help of his bodyguard Salim, being unable to tolerate his son's marriage with her. After that, Mr. Sharma arranges his son, Subbu's marriage with another girl. The marriage takes place but when the hijras dance and bless the newly wedded couple, Subbu remembers Kamla and he snatches the gun from Suresh Rao and commits suicide.

Some days after Subbu's suicide, Uma Rao shows the photograph to Suresh and tells him:

The photograph was what Mr. Sharma was after. A Polaroid picture that Subbu and Kamla had taken soon after their private wedding in some remote temple. A picture of Kamla as a beautiful bride smiling at Subbu with the wedding garland around him. The Poojari probably didn't know that Kamla was not a woman. Of course Mr. Sharma couldn't have it, totally unacceptable. So he arranged to have Kamla burned to death. But Salim had to tell him about the picture. Mr. Sharma simply had to have

that picture. He sent Salim to threaten Anarkali and Champa He did get the picture eventually...after losing his son. What a price to pay! And now he will be arrested and tried for murder. (CP-II 280-281)

Suresh Rao, taking the photograph from Uma and tearing it, comments “I don’t know...” (CP-II 281). His incomplete sentence speaks a lot. Suresh tears up the picture and destroys the only proof of the marriage between Subbu and Kamla. His act of tearing the picture clearly indicates that he is a corrupt police officer who acts on the whims of the ministers like Sharma to get promoted. His comment “I don’t know...” also suggests that Mr. Sharma, being a minister, will not be arrested and tried for murder. In a democratic country like India the laws are only for the poor people and the marginalized sections of society, and not for the rich people like Mr. Sharma. By using their political power, politicians can easily put the innocent hijras like Anarkali into the prison to hush up the murders committed by the rich. It is very painful that the guardians of the law and order, the police, support the rich and men in power to suppress the voice of the weak, poor, and marginalized sections of society. It is Uma Rao, who treats the hijras as human beings, empathizes with them and tries to give justice to them. She voices her protest against the injustice done to hijras and homosexuals by patriarchal hegemony.

By bringing the murderer of Kamla to light, Uma Rao proves the innocence of Anarkali but she fails to give justice to Kamla. No one bothers about them. No one believes what they say. They lead lives of humiliation. It does not matter to society whether a hijra is murdered or put in the jail. Wandering in the streets begging for bread and butter to meet their hunger, they lead the lives of cats and dogs. They are beaten up, raped, tortured and even sometimes murdered but no one raises a protest against the injustice done to them. Kamla is burnt to death and

Anarkali is put into the prison on the false charge of Kamla's murder. But the man behind the murder, Mr. Sharma, is not arrested and tried for murder. It is only because hijras have no voice and they have no space in our society that is made for heterosexuality.

Kamla's murder by Mr. Sharma also proves that hijras cannot have the married life either with another hijra or with a homosexual man like Subbu. The patriarchal society does not accept their marriage with another man.

Hijras are also human beings who care for one another and it has been proved in the play. Champa sells her jewellery and bails out Anarkali. She also nurses Anarkali when her nose is broken. All these acts show that hijras too are human beings and crave for family and love. If we treat hijras sympathetically, they also show their concern for us. Both Champa and Anarkali sympathize with Uma for being childless. When Uma goes to meet Anarkali for the last time, Anarkali takes out a locket and hands over it Uma and says:

“A special mantra is in the locket. Champa gave this to me for you. Wear it.

You will be blessed with children... sister! May you and your family be happy! Now go away, and do not come here again... Please go, sister!” (CP-II 282) The words of Anarkali show how much emotionally there are involved in the life of each other. Their relations seem as strong as the relations between real sisters do. By their behaviour, both Champa and Anarkali prove that they are not “just castrated degenerated men” CP-II 238) but human beings with tender hearts.

The play ends with Uma's voice-over:

They knew. Anarkali, Champa and all the hijra people knew who was behind the killing of Kamla. They have no voice. The case was hushed up and was

not even reported in the newspapers. Champa was right. The police made no arrests. Subbu's suicide was written off as an accident. The photograph was destroyed. So were the lives of two young people.... (CP-II, 282)

The play is a tragic love story of Subbu, a homosexual and Kamla, a hijra. Both of them desire to seek same sex love and marry each other secretly. Living in darkness away from the purview of an open society, they fail to fulfil their desire- to live together as husband and wife-as it is crushed by the heterosexual society represented by Mr. Sharma in the play. Their love remains unnatural, pervert, and immoral in the eyes of society that upholds heterosexual relationship leading to marriage. They become victims of that society. One is murdered and the other has to commit suicide. Subbu commits suicide perhaps, to become one with Kamla hoping to live as husband and wife in another world.

Seven Steps around the Fire also deals with the relationship between Suresh Rao and Uma Rao, a young and well-educated couple. Suresh Rao, the police officer, is no different from an average Indian husband who imposes many restrictions on his wife. Uma has to depend upon him for everything. She cannot demand money for the bail of Anarkali; that is why she borrows it from her father. But Suresh does not like this act of Uma i.e. borrowing money from her father. He asks her "Why do you need so much money?"(CP-II 269). She cannot tell him that she needed money to bail Anarkali out. He would not have liked it. Therefore, she lies that she needed money to purchase wedding gift for Subbu. She shows him the money so that he should not suspect her of her intention. It is clear that, though Uma is the wife of the superintendent of Police, she is not free to spend money as she wishes. Like any other Indian women, she, too, is economically dependent on her husband.

Uma Rao tells Suresh about her visit to the doctor for treatment. Her mother-in-law takes her to the doctor for medical check-up as she cannot bear children. Like every Indian mother-in-law, Uma's mother-in-law also holds her responsible for being childless and takes her to the doctors. Thanks to the modern medical science that can tell who is responsible for being childless—either a husband or a wife. Earlier the wife was held responsible and was driven out of the house, as she could not give a son to run the clan and husband used to remarry. Uma's husband might have done the same thing if the fault had been with her. The conversation between Uma and Suresh throws light on man's mentality.

UMA. I went to the doctor again. Your mother insisted. She takes me.

SURESH. What did they say?

UMA. Nothing ...They want to see you. SURESH. I don't think so.

UMA. Just a test for your sperm count. SURESH. I don't have to go...

UMA. Would you like to go shopping with me? (CP-II 269)

This conversation clearly indicates that Uma was enforced to visit the doctor by her mother-in-law but she cannot force her son for the medical check-up. It shows the prejudiced attitude of Suresh Rao's mother towards Uma. Besides his mother, Suresh Rao does not think it necessary for him to go to the doctor for the treatment. If something had been wrong with Uma regarding procreation, Suresh and his mother might have ill-treated and divorced her. But Uma does not utter a single word about it as she is a woman. On the other hand, when she realizes that her husband is not in the proper mood to discuss the most sensitive issue, she changes the subject so that her husband should not feel humiliated.

When Uma finds it difficult to win the trust of the hijras to collect information regarding the murder, she thinks of giving up the research. But thinking her position in the house, she determines to continue her research. Like the hijras, she too is subaltern and may be thrown out of her house any time. She says: “If my family throws me out, I hope that doctorate will come in handy.” (CP-II 262)

Thus, the play *Seven Steps around the Fire* throws light on the miserable condition of hijras, homosexuals and women in Indian society.

The study of three plays in this chapter justifies the hypothesis that gender stereotypes play a very important role in perpetuating gender discrimination. Women and Eunuchs are subject to discrimination in the village or city, in India or elsewhere. The victims of gender construct are justified to raise their voice against the oppressive norms of patriarchy and old age pattern of discrimination. It is commonly observed that relegation of femininity is due to the elevation of masculinity (gendered roles). Men and women must be seen as human beings not as different gender identities. Thus, the oppressive structures, which perceives man and woman as binary opposites has to be dismantled. Men cannot be exonerated for the evil perpetuated against women, as men are also in certain cases even victims of gender discrimination.

Hence not only women but men also have to be emancipated. The women's problem in India is but enigmatic or paradoxical as the older generation of women (mother-in-law) to some extent, because of their social conditioning – are perpetrators as they tend to perpetuate evil practice i.e. dowry, female infanticide, foeticide and abuse.

Dattani uses the strategy of 'deconstruct and transform' approach. Dattani feminism is not elimination of distinction between the sexes; not even simply the achievement of equal opportunity, it is related to individual's right to find out the kind of person he/she is and strives to become that.

All the observations finally arrive at the consideration that sex in this country as a status category with power politics, which is designed to maintain an old age system, where one group of persons are controlled by another.

According to the historical view in which a diabolical patriarchy systematically holds women in a state of submission and dependency may be term as a conspiracy theory or interior colonization, where women are viewed as inferior intelligence, an instinctual and sensual gratification or an emotional nature both childlike and primitive and so on. In a country, where women are worshipped as Kali, Durga and Saraswati but this other face of tormenting is dreadful. Isn't our societal worship of women merely a stratagem to lull them into sub-mission, an extra ordinary piece of sexual politics, a game which the master group plays in elevating its subject to pedestal level.

'Masculine' and 'feminine' are not the complex natural distinctions we had assumed them to be elaborate behavioural construct for each sex with in society, obviously, cultural, and subject to cross-cultural variations. Sex is biological, gender psychological and so cultural therefore, by eliminating discrimination; we would all be the same, in a perfect world with no difference in between. This what Dattani's plays do when his characters travel into their marginalized journey of lives struggling to dismantle the tag of 'otherness' stucked to them. As dattani put it in-an Interview to Angelic Multani:

It is one thing focusing on these areas in the human condition that leaves the individual with a sense of displacement or being the other: But it's what the character does under those circumstances that make him/her interesting. Ultimately all good writing is about character revelation and journeys. The provocation that are connected with a person's marginalized identity are what spur the character into action. (Multani, 166-167).

Thus, he has turned the table in favour of women. If a woman makes a man master, she can make him aware of his weaknesses and shortcomings also. Women choosing not adhere to traditional gender roles are thrust into the 'other' suspect category, which has further alienated them from possible solidarity with their sisters. Dattani has tried to show that women should be able to live their own sexuality, taking initiative about what they wish.

One another aspect of Dattani's plays is that we have also hetro-sexual bias in term of gender-based violence, where we think men are the one perpetuating violence against women. This is also true, but we are not thinking about the men, who are also violent to other men.

Women and men of younger generations in Dattani's plays are all increasingly moving away from traditional gender roles. Ultimately, change will come with new generation of men/women who are able to see their place in democratic setup, where the rights of all women, transgender and Eunuchs (Hizras), regardless of ethnicity, class and caste will be seen as critical political change and a just society. Basic tenet of Dattani's feminism is to deconstruct power and to propose alternative paradigms for power sharing and the exploration of how women and men strategically redefine power, around the world in present times, challenging the power structures, systems, dismantling injustice, exploitation and inequality in all their forms. The structures of

colonialism and capitalism are beneficial to the structure of Patriarchy sothat they should be dismantled. Dattani's characters struggle against the structure of patriarchy and other institutions that politically, socially and economically sustain sexist structures. After examining the plays, the conclusion is that 'nothing is right or wrong it is just the perspectives'.

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