

CONCLUSION

FISSION AND FUSION; ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION

The purpose of this chapter is to gather the individual strands, findings and observations of the preceding chapters, binding these into a comprehensive whole in order to arrive at a definite inference regarding the confrontation of binaries vis-a-vis repositioning of gender stereotypes as it operates in the plays of Mahesh Dattani.

Mahesh Dattani's name is synonymous with the English theatre movement in India. For Dattani, who writes plays for the sheer pleasure of communicating through this dynamic medium, whether it is in a stage play or a radio play, the characters speak his words. Most of Dattani's stage endeavours have managed to take taboo subjects centre stage and kick up a storm within the four walls of an auditorium. From religious fundamentalism, to child sexual abuse, to gender roles, to homosexuality, to arranged marriage, his plays have confronted issues that could cause many an Indian audience to squirm.

Alyque Padamsee, one of the foremost names in Indian theatre, has described Dattani as "a playwright who gives 60 million English-speaking Indians an identity." Originally written in English, Dattani's plays are characterized by theatrical and thematic innovations and have been staged very successful.

With the globalization and arrival of digital technology, the world has become the small global village and English has become the lingua franca of this new global village. Ostensibly, the credit of globalizing the Indian stage and theatre goes to Dattani who has Indianized his English plays. Of course, he has succeeded in making its presence felt at global level. Dattani intends to develop theatre which can be understood and enjoyed by multi lingual community of India and abroad. Therefore, he resorts English as a medium of communication of his theatre. His plays are staged in the leading theatres of India and abroad. With his sincere and sustained efforts, Dattani's plays have been performed to public and critical acclaim in the cities like, Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and London.

Dattani, with his innovative bent, artistic perception and originality of vision, has altered conventional concept of Indian English Theatre. He has an ability to synchronize

the traditional issues with that of post-modernist issues. His plays are very remarkable not only from socio-political but also emotional and psychological point of views.

Mahesh Dattani in his plays highlights his women protagonist as prevailing, vocal and ingenious who make united effort to deconstruct the traditional role of woman. Like the radical feminists he argues that only by working together women can create a special dynamic that would ultimately work for the betterment of the entire planet unlike Post feminists who celebrate women's multiple and sometimes contradictory identities in today's world. The personal empowerment and action which Post feminists encourage besides aggression and celebration of women's sexuality is negated by Dattani who talks against the treatment of women as "an object", "commodity", "thing" and "the other" which patriarchal ideology has been promoting since ages.

In the preceding chapters of this dissertation, the major selected plays of Mahesh Dattani are analysed to highlight the vision of the dramatist to re-position gender stereotypes within patriarchy in the Indian context and also to dissect the cauldron of gender which has been stifling Indian women for ages. Before concluding in an individual as well as a cumulative manner about Dattani's vision it would be pertinent to mention that the confrontation of binaries has been pondered and debated universally by various feminists and writers and Dattani emerges as a *sui generis* in the galaxy of various literary luminaries. What makes Dattani extremely convincing is his creative genius to highlight how patriarchal assumptions about gender and gender roles continue to oppress women and their exists urgent need to revisit the well established relationship between sex and gender; and between sexuality and gender.

Writers worldwide have made feminist articulations in poetic, fictional, dramatic and theoretical forms. Compared to other literary genres, drama by its nature holds two-fold significance — that of the text and the performance. This multi-dimensional nature of drama connects it to society more closely particularly the Indian society which has been constantly undergoing the upheavals of cultural flux. Mahesh Dattani's theatre is committed to social transformation particularly to the stereotypical role assigned to women. The power dynamics that operate in the dramatic world of Mahesh Dattani not

only raise issues of patriarchal assumptions about gender and gender roles that continue to oppress women but also highlight alternatives to the concept of gender where feminine and masculine need urgent redefinition. Various feminists and writers worldwide have been deeply perturbed over the very basic and bitter fact that fairer sex is gender and male society is power.

The chapter first gives an in-depth analysis of various debates and discourses about feminists and gender issues which have appeared over the time. These discourses starting from early nineteenth century to the twenty first century are not just a matrix of words: they deal with the problem of getting beyond patriarchal programming and have offered many different solutions. Some major works on feminism like Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of Rights of Woman* (1791), Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), Zillah Eisenstein's *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (1979), Gerda Lerner's *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986), Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) speak a lot on this issue. Further, the recent Western and Indian integrated approaches that treat gender as a socially constructed system have been mentioned to form the bedrock of the argument. Prominent seminal works dealing with gender issues like Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Judith Butler's *The Gender Trouble* (1990) and noted Indian voices like Pandita Ramabhai Saraswati's *The High Caste Hindu Woman* (1888) and Rokeya Shakawat Hussain's *Sultana's Dream* (1905), Malashi Lal's *The Law of the Threshold* (1995) Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* (1977), Gail Omvedt's *We Will Smash This Prison: Indian women in struggle* (1980), Vrinda Nabar's *Cast/e as Woman* (1995), Jasbir Jain's *Indigenous Roots of Feminism* (2011) have been analysed in the introduction. Moreover, the treatment of feministic issues in the Indian fictional and dramatic world has been discussed to establish Dattani's stance on feminist and gender issues.

The analysis of the individual works incorporated in the present study begins from chapter two onwards and concludes in chapter five. In the second chapter, the analytical focus vis-a-vis the patriarchal image of women rests upon two plays *Where There's a Will* and *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Both the plays analysed in the chapter

highlight Dattani's handling of the image of "the Angel in the House" which places woman on a pedestal, thereby, leaving very little room for her to do anything but fulfill the prescribed role. The image which originated in the Victorian culture in England is undoubtedly universal making women to make home a safe haven for her husband, where he could spiritually fortify himself before resuming the daily struggle of the work place, and for children, where they could receive the moral guidance needed to assume their own traditional roles in the adult world. The plays present a compelling and a revelatory cast of women characters who epitomize the prototype of Angel as described by Virginia Woolf. Nevertheless, despite all the charm, sympathy and sacrifice Dattani presents a remarkable insight into the thoughts of women who declare aloud their thoughts, speak out, protest and express what they feel. Sonal and Kiran in *Where There's a Will* embody the qualities which Dattani vehemently advocates. The dramatist is ultra-critical of patriarchal authoritarians like Hasmukh Mehta who remain effective even after their death. This has been conveyed by Dattani in a theatrical innovation direct-to-audience address. The dramatist, however, conveys his vision through Kiran who intelligently destroys the patriarchal oppression prevalent in Mehta's family.

Be it the crucial man-woman relationship or the politics of Indian joint family Dattani himself confronts the reader with a pertinent quandary: how can we as denizens of the so-called liberation and emancipation, negotiate the compulsive observance of age-old subjugation of women within the institution of marriage. At the end of both the plays, Dattani brings home the message clear: male hegemonistic appropriations of the female identity and female self become unacceptable and paradoxically ironic. As Jennifer Hansen observes, "Beauvoir strongly believed that marriage...trapped and stunted women's intellectual growth and freedom"(2). Dattani's women protagonists be it Sonal and Kiran in *Where There's a Will* and Alka and Dolly in *Bravely Fought the Queen* fulfill their own potential in the world rather than investing in the accomplishments of their husbands and sons.

Dattani shakes the citadel of patriarchy by giving another vocal and vociferous women protagonists in *Tara* and *Dance Like a Man* who shatter the "social constructionism" (Tyson 86) to reinforce the dramatist's viewpoint that patriarchal gender roles are destructive for men as well as for women. The third chapter highlights Mahesh Dattani's attempt to question the stronghold of gender defined roles which are

engrained in Indian mindset as portrayed through the character of Ratna in *Dance Like a Man* and Tara in *Tara*. Through these characters Dattani revisits patriarchal ideology to subvert the norms that present the absurd picture of gender stereotypes. The open condemnation of the patriarchs by the women protagonists reveal their desire for independence and happiness under the domineering credence of tradition, cultural constructions of gender and repressed desire. Tara's aspiration to go beyond the mundane existence of women inspite of all conflicts and contradictions conveys Dattani's unflinching faith in women. By portraying Tara as a character of profundity and receptivity, the belief of the dramatist in the unconventional role of women is established. Likewise through the character of Ratna, Dattani has tried to shatter the stereotyped image of woman who questions the patriarchal norms and beliefs in order to assert her identity.

The artistic excellence of Dattani's vision is powerfully conveyed in *Dance Like a Man* when Jairaj accepts the mistakes committed in the past and rejoices at the perfection of dance which can attain divinity only if performed in unison. Here, the playwright's vision for re-positioning gender stereotypes is convincingly conveyed which nowhere aims at the conflict between men and women but re-visions the fusion of the two in a more holistic manner.

The treatment of women as "an object", "commodity", "thing" and "the other" which patriarchal ideology has been promoting since ages is the prime concern of Dattani as depicted in the plays *Thirty Days in September* and *Ek Alag Mausam* which have been analysed in the chapter four. The basic premise of patriarchal ideology which suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have — if she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she is a "good girl" and if she doesn't she is a "bad girl" equates femininity with submission, convinces women to tolerate familial abuse, wait patiently to be rescued by a man, and view marriage as the only desirable reward for right conduct. Dattani's portrayal of Shanta in *Thirty Days in September* typifies the image of a traditional Indian woman who has internalised patriarchy and bears the pain of sexual abuse by keeping her voice silent whereas Mala conveys Dattani's vision which reinforces the power of protest. Mala's rebellious sensibilities, revolt against her mother's silence and negation of the institution of marriage which symbolizes women oppression in many ways shows the writer's

concern for revisiting the constitution of social institution like marriage which thrives on the supremacy of one sex over the other. Likewise Dattani through his acute penetrative vision highlights the suppression and subjugation of women in the world of prostitution and HIV AIDS which again thrives on power dynamics. The portrayal of Aparna and Rita in *Ek Alag Mausam* exhibits the double marginalization of women in the traumatic world of the HIV positives of the Indian society which too is men's world. Rita represents the darker side of HIV positive prostitutes who are used, abused and reduced. Through the character of Rita, Dattani highlights the unlicensed sex business that is managed by men, in which women are reduced to functional thing and an object of appetite for men.

Aparna in *Ek Alag Mausam* and Mala in *Thirty Days in September* voice a strong feeling experienced by women in general; the feeling that they are not fairly treated by men. Their act of self-assertion has given them self-confidence, self-respect and self-motivation. The resilience of women protagonists in both the plays articulates the playwright's staunch belief in the potential of the oppressed gender to awake the society from its somnambulism.

Chapter second, third and fourth highlight Mahesh Dattani's portrayal of patriarchal hegemony as it operates in marriage, family and society and chapter fifth moves on to religion which too stunts the growth and freedom of women. The various forms of women oppression at these four levels has been dealt by the playwright to convey his vision for the emancipation of women. The tormenting narrative of man-woman relationship find its captivating expression in two partition plays of Dattani which are *Final Solutions* and *Where did I leave my purdah?*. In both these plays written against the horrifying background of partition, Dattani highlights the predicament of women during 1940's by juxtaposing it with that of the present.

In the play *Final Solutions* Dattani's vehemently questions the structure and foundation of religion and his women protagonists: Smita and Daksha convey his vision. Both Smita and Daksha confront the prevailing influence of religion and create a new aspect of womanhood to give a new dimension to female autonomy. The sexual trauma, sufferings and painful experiences of women during and after the Partition which constitutes the thematic corpus of Partition Literature has been dealt in an

innovative manner by the dramatist. The play *Where did I leave my purdah?* highlights Dattani's attempt to explore how every society ascribes meaning to women's bodies; in effect, women's body becomes a space of control. Women bodies are constructed as a contested space over which different ethnic, political and religious groups fight to acquire this symbolic territory. While trying to unravel the tangled skein of relationship between religious communities, between women and their men, between women and their families across the two new nations formed after partition, Dattani perceives women at the intersection of these forces rather than at the periphery. Rather than portraying women as pathetic and pitiable creatures he highlights his women protagonist as powerful, vocal and resourceful who make collective effort to deconstruct the traditional role of woman by adapting and improvising the popular Indian myth of Shakuntala. Dattani's women protagonists, Smita in *Final Solutions* and Nazia and Ruby in *Where did I leave my purdah?* register protest against the unreasonable and irrational control of social conventions that do not permit women to articulate their feelings.

After a period of aggressive defiance which can break certain women mentally, Dattani's women characters succeed in breaking the constraints binding them and in developing independent identities. Once they have succeeded in the quest and found their true selves, they are at peace with themselves and with the world. They become the people who have their own aims in life, making their own choices with a sense of responsibility.

An analysis of the vast plethora of Dattani's plays reveals his faith in the power of re-visioning gender stereotypical roles which patriarchy has been dictating since ages. The writer nowhere advocates the substitution of patriarchy by matriarchy but vehemently opposes the patriarchal ideology which has a pervasive, deeply rooted influence on the way we think, speak, see ourselves and view the world in which we live. He raids the treasuries where our meaning of being man and woman has been preserved which has ironically been loop sided. Dattani as a maverick genius of Indian ethos becomes for every reader across the globe a living personification of deconstructing gender dichotomy. Dattani himself once proclaimed that he believes in the values of an egalitarian society and does not belong to the feminist ideology which

advocates hatred of men and complete reversal of family norms. The perpetual binaristic understandings of femininity and masculinity that shape the way we perceive gender, as a fundamental crisis of human consciousness, within the creative cauldron of Dattani establishes his vision of revisiting the gender tyranny.