The plays of Mahesh Dattani emerged as a ‘fresh arrival’ in the domain of Indian English drama in the last decade of the twentieth century. His plays deal with contemporary issues. They are plays of today sometimes as actual as to cause controversy, but at the same time they are plays which embody many of the classic concerns of world drama. I have selected ‘Tara’, Seven Steps Around the Fire, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai ‘Bravely Fought the Queen’, and ‘Final solutions’; to study the contemporary values in these plays.

1.2 : justification

Dattani’s plays have a universal appeal. They can be staged anywhere in the world, they would draw full attention of the audience. Dattani moulds his subject in such a way that it is both topical as well as appealing. His plays speak across linguistic and cultural barriers. Dattani makes an abundant use of Indian mythology, rituals and traditions and contemporary problems, India is beset with but he elevates these themes to a higher level, touching the human chords that emanate love, happiness, sexual fulfilment and problem of identity. Though he lives in Karnataka, he writes about the whole nation of India, about the whole world he lives in. It is in the fitness of things that we must make an attempt at evaluating the playwright’s thematic concerns as well as his exploration of, and experimentation with stage.

1.3 : MAHESH DATTANI : HIS LITERARY ACHIEVEMENTS

Mahesh Dattani was born in Bangalore on August, 7, 1958. He is the famous Indian English dramatist. He took admission in Baldwin’s High School and St. Joseph’s college of Arts and Science, Bangalore. He is a graduate in History, Economics and Political Science. He is a Postgraduate in Marketing and Advertising Management. He worked as a copy writer in an advertising firm and later on with his father in the family business. Dattani’s theater group—Play pen was formed in 1984. He made his directional debut with Mango Souffle. He has directed many plays for them ranging from classical Greek to contemporary works. Over a career spanning twenty five years he has written radio plays for the BBC and the film script of Ek Alag Mousam.

Plays—
(i) Tara
(ii) On a Muggy Night in Mumbai
(iii) Where There’s a Will
(iv) Dance like a Man
(v) Bravely Fought the Queen
(vi) Final solutions

Mahesh Dattani received the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for his contribution to Indian Drama in 1998. The International Herald Tribune while praising Mahesh Dattani praised him as "One of Indian’s best and most serious contemporary playwrights in English." Mahesh Dattani is India’s first playwright to be awarded the Sahitya Akadami Award. Alyque Padamsee says, "Mahesh Dattani is one of the famous Indian-English dramatists. He has successfully launched the Indian theatre in English. In many of his plays, he deals with various issues like homosexuality, gender discrimination, communalism and child sexual abuse. In an interview Personal Agenda published in Branch on March 21, 2004 Dattani said, "The love of my life is drama and I want to write more plays;" His most distinguishing quality is wide range of themes that he deals with in his writings. Dattani’s plays are written for the stage. It is the visual quality and dramatic effect which are of paramount importance. Dattani shapes his subject in such a way that is both-topical as well as appealing. Alyque Padamsee assisted Mahesh Dattani in building his self-esteem and helped him in securing regular audience for his plays.

As Mahesh Dattani points out in his preface, "Alyaque believed in my work even before I believed in it myself. He gave me courage to call myself a professional playwright and director. In 1998, Dattani won the Sahitya Akadami Award for his book of plays. Final solutions and other plays were published by East-West Books, Chennai. According to the Sahitya Akadami Award, Dattani’s plays have a universal appeal. They can be staged anywhere in the world, they would draw full attention of the audience.

Dattani moulds his subject in such a way that it is both topical as well as appealing. His plays speak across linguistic and cultural barriers. Dattani makes an abundant use of Indian mythology, rituals and traditions and contemporary problems, India is beset with but he elevates these themes to a higher level, touching the human chords that emanate love, happiness, sexual fulfilment and problem of identity. Though he lives in Karnataka, he writes about the whole nation of India, about the whole world he lives in. It is in the fitness of things that we must make an attempt at evaluating the playwright’s thematic concerns as well as his exploration of, and experimentation with stage.
work) probes tangled attitudes in contemporary India towards communal differences, consumerism and genera
brilliant contribution to Indian drama in English. His plays deal with religious tension, sexuality and gender issue. Alyque Padamsee calls him one of the most serious contemporary playwrights; Dattani takes issues that afflict societies the world over. He has chronicled the social victim and the follies, foibles and prejudices of Indian society. Some of Dattani's plays are eloquent defences of society outcasts and would be rebels. These plays include On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, a compassionate look at the life and tensions of a homosexual community tricked away in Mumbai. Both On a Muggy Night in Mumbai; and Do the Needful; are probably the first Indian plays to boldly deal with the subject of homosexuality. The play Final Solutions; is about partition. It reveals how the engendered suspicion only deepens from generation to generation. The plays of Mahesh Dattani emerged as fresh arrival; in the domain of Indian English drama in the last decade of the 20th century. The plays have a great contemporary value. According to John Mc Rae. They are plays of today, sometimes as actual as to cause controversy, but at the same time, they are plays which embody many of the classic canons of world drama. Mahesh Dattani's plays are revelatory in nature. If, in Where There is a will, it is the ghost not of Hasmukh Mehta but of his father that has to be recognised in Dance like a Man. In Bravely Fought the Queen, it is a host of issues that have to be revealed and faced from the homosexuality of certain characters. Dattani shows us the hollowness of middle class lives. His plays explore what lies below the facades characters and families front up to fool the world. The family in Dattani stands for society at large. Dattani's characters search for security and acceptance, to be true to themselves. In Dattani's world the socialisation process initiated in the family unit has its aim the stunted growth of a bourgeoisie. The prominent theme of Mahesh Dattani's plays; later plays is homosexuality. Homosexuality is dealt with in Bravely Fought the Queen, Where There is a will, and Dance Like a Man. Another important theme of Mahesh Dattanis's plays in Gender Identity. Bravely Fought the Queen; foregrounds this whole issue with its very title. Dattani raises these and a number of other questions regarding gender and social stratification and hierarchy and sexuality. The most significant feature of Dattani is, perhaps his use of language.

The note to his very first play, Where There is a will; reads as follows. Should the play be need in classrooms, I sincerely wish that English language teachers will not dismiss my syntax as bad English; or worse still as incorrect, while knowledge of the rules of grammar is important, the richness and variety of the spoken word is a study in itself. The past and the present both co-exist, and while the past has fashioned the present, the present helps the characters to re-read the past. Dattani's stage techniques are aimed at making the audience intimate with the life of a family, its trials and transgressions and debilitating secrets. Dattani exercises great care in ensuring through his detailed stage direction that reader and potential directors understand all this. This division of the stage allows clearly demarcated space for certain characters, or time periods, as well as for different locales. C.K. Meena says, in an article on Dattani, Unmasking the Middle class : The Drama of Mahesh Dattani; that this distribution of the action among different levels on stage not only makes his plays visually exciting landmark but more at a snappy pace. Mahesh Dattani defends his use of English as spoken by people in India and also goes on to make another serious statement. He says that his characters would love to speak in Gujarati; and his challenge as a writer is to convey their Gujaratiness without distortion in English. Dattani's characters speak the kind of English that most middle class Indians do. He also uses Indian English with great confidence and captures the rhythms of the spoken English.

1.4 : Research Methodology
I have resolved to do research on the dramas of Mahesh Dattani: Tara, Bravely Fought the Queen, Final solutions, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, and Seven steps Around The Fire; I shall take recourse to the following methods. The study of various literary journals published in India and abroad incorporated in the corpus of the bibliography. The study of various News-Papers in English in India and Abroad. The analysis of each drama after close scrutiny.
INTRODUCTION

2. CHAPTER ISSUE OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

3. CHAPTER ISSUE OF EUNUCH [SEVEN STEPS AROUND THE FIRE]

4. CHAPTER ISSUE OF HOMO SEXUALITY [ON A MUGGY NIGHT IN MUMBAI]

5. CHAPTER ISSUE OF COMMUNALISM [FINAL SOLUTIONS]

6. SUMMING UP

INTRODUCTION

Mahesh Dattani is a contemporary writer who writes specifically in English. Dattani's plays question some of the norms and conventions of society. In the process, interesting questions arise regarding gender and other issues like homo-sexuality, lesbianism, child sexual abuse. Dattani tackles issues that afflict societies the world over. Dealing with issues like male-female ascendance divide, the patriarchal tradition, consumerism, communalism, Dattani holds back nothing. Alygue Padamsee calls him one of the most serious contemporary playwrights.

CHAPTER ISSUE OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

'Tara' is a riveting play that questions the role of a society that treats the children of the same womb in two different ways. Dattani's 'Tara' is a poignant play about a boy and a girl who are joined together at the hip and have to be separated surgically, which will mean the death of either of the two. The fact that the injustice perpetuated by the victim's own mother whose preference is to the male child, makes the play more powerful suggesting that it is woman who continues the chain of injustice. Tara is not just the story of the protagonist of the play but it is the story of every girl child born in Indian family whether urban or rural. The situation is aggravated if the girl is physically challenged or there is any other physical or mental deformity in her. It is a bitter example of child abuse present in the Indian societies. Every girl child born in an Indian family does suffer some kind of exploitation and if there is a boy child in the family, the exploitation is very much visible as the privileges are consciously or unconsciously propounded to the son. The scene opens in London with Chandan, now a playwright, reminiscing about his childhood days spent with his sister Tara. 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 own childhood, has to write Tara's story.

The play revolves around the Siamese twins, chandan and Tara Patel, an operation to separate the twins at birth, leaves Tara crippled for life. Chandan, the privileged brother wants to turn his anguish into drama on his sister's childhood. 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 whom she was ever close to. The play explores besides exposing the typical Indian mind set which has from time immemorial preferred a boy child to a girl child. It looks at the triumphs and the failures of an Indian family, comprising of father (Patel), mother (Bharati) and two children (Chandan and Tara) coping with the trauma of disability. Tara, a feisty girl, who isn't given enough opportunities as were given to her brother eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister's death. His sense of trauma and anguish is so intense that at the end of the play, we see Chandan apologizing to Tara in the most moving of all the lines. The play explores besides exposing the typical Indian mind set which has from time immemorial preferred a boy child to a girl child. It looks at the triumphs and the failures of an Indian family, comprising of father (Patel), mother (Bharati) and two children (Chandan and Tara) coping with the trauma of disability. Tara, a feisty girl, who isn't given enough opportunities as were given to her brother eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister's death. His sense of trauma and anguish is so intense that at the end of the play, we see Chandan apologizing to Tara in the most moving of all the lines. The play explores besides exposing the typical Indian mind set which has from time immemorial preferred a boy child to a girl child. It looks at the triumphs and the failures of an Indian family, comprising of father (Patel), mother (Bharati) and two children (Chandan and Tara) coping with the trauma of disability. Tara, a feisty girl, who isn't given enough opportunities as were given to her brother eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister's death. His sense of trauma and anguish is so intense that at the end of the play, we see Chandan apologizing to Tara in the most moving of all the lines.

CHAPTER ISSUE OF EUNUCH

'Seven Steps around the Fire', the most popular play, dwells on the theme of eunuchs, their identity, their constitution and their connotation. Uma Rao, the sociology scholar, emerges as the most powerful character of the play, the mouth piece of the playwright, who fights to establish the identity of an eunuch. Mammal, during her research on the class and gender related violence and crime, meets justice in the nemesis of the play. An eunuch, a beautiful one, invited for marriage, and the final tragic death—all seem to be a mis construct. This is all about marriage of a beautiful hizra Kamla to a son of a wealthy government minister named subbu.

This shocking revelation culminated into the murder of Kamla. The society accepts a hizra for gracing the ceremonies of marriage and births but would not allow them to portrayed of such ceremonies. The author has ironically portrayed this aspect which would not have been given any head, for any matter related to them is of no importance to anyone. The heart rendering story about a hizra that she is murdered simply because she had fallen in love with subbu a young man having a status of importance in society, fills us with horror and sense of injustice. Again in the play we observe how the Police officer refuses to subject him self to any medical examination to rule out the barrenness of his wife due to his impotency. This bias of squarely blaming the woman for her barren state is another societal phenomenon that Dattani exposes.
Bravely Fought the Queen was written by Dattani in the year 1991 and it was performed at the Sophia Bhabha Hall, Mumbai on August 2, 1991. The narration is centered around an Indian family in which two brothers Jiten and Nitin, the co-owners of an advertising agency, have married two sisters, Dolly and Alka. The women remain at home much of the time, where they look after the men's ageing mother Baa. Jiten and Nitin's father was a cruel and a dark man who usually harassed their mother. The kind of cruelty perpetrated on Baa by her husband is brought to light every now and then in the play. Baa sees the picture of her husband in her elder son, Jiten and thus automatically develops an inclination towards her younger son, Nitin who resembles her a lot. So here we have two generations sharing the same experiences at the hand of their chauvinistic husbands and yet to come third generation, Daksha who also experiences the mal-treatment of her father even before her birth and is born as a disabled child. In the same way Dolly and Alka in Bravely Fought the Queen arm themselves at the end of the play to fight back.

Alka 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. There was Kanhaiya, who represents the world of sexuality whether heterosexuality or homosexuality. He might be the alluring cook who might or might not be Krishna of Dolly and Alka, or the dark auto driver who embodies Nitin's sexual guilt. Nitin at the end of the play exposes his homosexual relations to Alka who is fast asleep after getting drunk. Thus we see that women have not been presented as sinners but they suffer because of the men who are part of their lives. This play presents the concept of gay culture prevalent in big cities. On a Muggy Night in Mumbai is a tragicomedy which deals with homosexuals. In the play, Sharad and Deepali, though comfortable with each other, have different ways of being gay. More stress is laid on the characters of Kamlesh and Prakash who is also Ed and romances with Kamlesh's sister Kiran. Initially Kamlesh and Prakash were ardent lovers when Prakash suddenly turns coats and changes into Ed, wearing the garb of a hand some guy, head over heels in love with Kiran, who unfortunately happens to be Kamlesh's sister. Kamlesh playing the role of humble lover resides to the changed situation without complaining. Nevertheless, his sexual needs are fulfilled by sharad, his friend. He shocks us a bit by stooping down to mating with a guard for which he is ashamed of himself. Prakash who had now changed to Ed suddenly emerges into the room and the scene to meet Kamlesh's sister and bumping into Kamlesh is revived of his earlier crush on Kamlesh, Nonetheless Prakash/Ed is ashamed of being a homosexual and tries to leave the place with Kiran as soon as possible to escape the cynical eyes of the others who knew about his relationship with Kamlesh. Karan is shown to having all compassion for the gay people and wishes they could many for happiness of her brother who she knew was homosexual. The irony of the whole story is that the poor girl did not know that the man to whom she was going to get married was homosexual and ex-lover of her brother. The revelation in the end comes as a shock to her. The whole story throws light on the growing homosexuality and its non-acceptance by the Indian Society.
puppeteers are the culprits. The play-wright at the end of the play, wishes to stop this game of hatred and communal tension through the character of Ramnik. Ramnik accepts that his father has done the black deed. We should forgive the offenders and forget the past. This can be the final solution.

CHAPTER 6: DATTANI’S ACHIEVEMENT AS A PLAY WRIGHT

Dattani’s plays have contemporary values and his plays can be said to have been impaired by Ibsen the Father of Realism. Dattani handles every problem from gender issues to sexuality very successfully. Dattani’s achievement as a play wright depends on the fact that his plays are a slice of life. They present reality as it exists. Dattani’s theatre group, playpen, was formed in 1984 and he has directed several of their plays ranging from classical Greek to contemporary work. He has an array of themes to offer in his plays and the issues he chooses to project are the most topical but also the most controversial one. Dattani’s plays, have purely performance oriented scripts that elicit from the audience and emotional as well as strongly intellectual response. His plays address the middle class and only the middle class. The reason is not far to seek—it is this class that constitutes his audience. Dattani has created a vibrant, new theatrical form which is a marked development on the hither to stagnant Indian drama in English.

Bibliography

A. Primary Sources

B. Secondary Sources
1. Karnad, Girish: Author’s Introduction, Three Plays (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994).
2. Ramanujam, A. K.: Introduction &rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsquo;rsq