

**THE EXPRESSIVE VOICES OF DRAMATIC CUSTOMS IN RELATION TO THE SCOPE OF LANGUAGE IN MAHESH DATTANI'S *SEVEN STEPS AROUND THE FIRE***

**S. Janani**, PhD Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai [Tamil Nadu]

**Dr.V.P Rathi Asst.Prof.**, Dept. of English, Mannar Thirumalai Naicker College, Pasumalai, Madurai [Tamil Nadu]

**Abstract**

*The present paper is an attempt to highlight the condition of language and the significant feature of language in Mahesh Dattani's Seven Steps Around the Fire. He initiates the Indian customs and traditions with the scope of language. His drama draws on the voice of Indian literature, evoking dramatic emotions of invisible domination. The story is based on transgender people and their lifestyle, and how people use language towards them. Transgender people are not born, but made. When the neuter gender is born, it does not have any identity but slowly changes, and then it dedicates itself to being completely transgender. This paper attempts a unique analysis of the essence of literature. Transgender is strictly in the irrational category, where animals and inanimate things fall. Except for these handful of books, others valued transgender people as untouchables. Transgender people are used to be called by various names like hijras, eunuchs, etc. Hijras lead an appalling life, totally isolated from mainstream society. Dattani, with the fine balance of stage and performance, imparts an exceptional vehemence to such situations. The Seven Steps Around the Fire represents the voice of the eunuch community, who are not even allowed to show their face in public. They are permitted to mingle with other human beings, but are prohibited from expressing their concern for human relationships. The author has ironically portrayed this aspect to bring to light the marginalization of the eunuch community.*

**Keywords:** Language, Culture, Eunuch, Identity, Conflict, Voices, Tradition, Societal norm

**INTRODUCTION**

Literature has the power to revitalize people's perspectives. Language serves as a fundamental means of communication among humans, and every word a writer chooses reveals its emotional resonance with readers. The potency of language enables writers to craft distinctive features in their work. Through literature, language conveys a wide range of human thoughts and opinions from across the globe. It portrays the human experience and the path to achievement, highlighting the complexities and challenges that come with it. Language also reveals the various roles and relationships between living and non-living entities. As a medium of understanding, language allows us to express and share our feelings with others. Historically, language evolved through various forms, including art, music, and gestures. Over time, spoken language developed with unique accents, enabling us to communicate in distinct ways.

Language plays a vital role in shaping our understanding of the world and ourselves. Through literature, language can evoke emotions, convey complex ideas, and provide insights into the human condition. The use of language in literature also reveals different positions of living and non-living things, highlighting the interconnectedness of all things. When the language was flourishing, it was divided into three categories plus one category. They are masculine gender, feminine gender and inanimate things. There are some words like neuter gender words to address the transgender but there is no gender language separately for the neuter gender as like other three genders have. Common nouns are available in all languages for transgender people like those of other genders. But by going deeply into the language; for example, pronouns, neuter genders are in a position to rely on other genders to be addressed. But these are all the double gender dominated linguistic that it gives names to the transgender not the share in the language as a separate gender that they want seriously as mark of recognition.

The evolution of language is a complex and multifaceted process. From its early forms, such as art and music, to the development of spoken language with unique accents, language has adapted to different cultural and social contexts. This evolution underscores the dynamic nature of language and its ability to convey complex emotions and ideas. The play talks about the Complexities of Identity through the use of dramatic customs.

Dattani weaves a powerful narrative that challenges social norms. The play makes a commentary on social barriers through the characters, which are Complex and multi-dimensional. He uses the language with rich cultural references, under Symbolism, fire by the Concept of purification and Inclusion. He shows their identity. All being, they have overcome the sense of rituals and customs that refer to their hard perseverance. As a Hijra Community, they need to face marginalization because they lead their life with the Identity of a third gender, which is not common in Indian society. They used to bring them in the name of pronouns, which is considered to be on non-living object. Dattani uses the language for their Voice in many places. Throughout the play, he uses dramatic customs that have the characters struggling to find acceptance, and how they are portrayed through their Interactions and the customs they follow or reject. Three components are given to handle language, setting, and plot. The overall success of a play gives an apt stage direction. Most of his plays are about the important constituent of Indian society, which made the grievance. Dattani is a good observer of human beings and weaves his dramatic perspective with psychological and social norms. He is a prominent figure who highlights the customs of survival. Through its rich language and poignant Storytelling. Seven Steps around the Fire

**Objectives:**

- I. To find out language trends in the play.
- II. To diagnose the role of gender in Indian Literature;
- III. To form distinct perspectives of Indian society.

**Language is a social identity :**

Literature has the power to rejuvenate ideas, evoke emotions, and convey complex thoughts and experiences. Through language, literature can provide insights into the human condition, highlighting the complexities and challenges of human life. The use of language in literature can also reveal the distinct perspectives of living and non-living things, underscoring the interconnectedness of all things. By exploring the role of language in literature, we can gain a deeper understanding of its significance in human communication and its impact on our lives. Language is a social identity; sometimes it gives an optimistic nature of success. Even with the wrong usage of language provides unnecessary pessimistic thoughts at the same time. Language got separated according to regional convenience. They used to follow different accents with the feature of cultural transmission.

Through our language, we can emphasize our inner desires. The language is not only for humans, but it connects the ideas and feelings of all-natural elements. In literature without language, it feels like a human body without a soul. It reflects extraordinary events and societal issues. With our language, we can move to survival. Each writer has their own way of world with a special style and sign of languages. If we move towards various literature, we are able to feel the life they led in their native it will happen through the writing style of a unique author's mind. Through the words of writers able to connect with the nature of how it feels and is compared with human life. We never know if the tree is happy or not, but a writer can reflect its mood through his own ideas. This is the literary connection that shows up in every phrase of their work. Indian literature raises the diversity culture of many people's ideological concepts.

Indian literature evokes the thoughts of religious belief. Sometimes mythological customs. Writing is a habit that begins with researching the writer's need by their own responsibility. Many are having a different format while writing in a different genre. Later, to have a proper channel, they attempted to arrange a formal format of writing. In the form of genre, we use to follow that poem will be small and novel, will take a story plot, etc. This is a new methodology which a basic form of writing in any language. Many languages exist there, but English is an official language of medium to connect

easily with people apart from their vernacular language. In Indian literature, Dattani plays an important role as a writer. He performed many literary works. He was a most dedicated and passion for the theatre. It made him the best dramatist. 'Since Salman Rushdie swung open the door to the West, English language Indian novelists have wowed the world. Indian playwrights have been less conspicuous except for Mahesh Dattani – vibhuti Patel, *Newsweek International*.

He was good at screen, stage, and Radio plays. Mahesh Dattani is one of the strong men who reveals his destiny as a writer. He brings the practices of Indian people and their complications to follow some customs built by every person.

### **Dattani Highlights Societal Norms:**

Dattani gives respect to the values and their tradition, but not to those that bring a contradiction of cultural identity. We believe language that connects everyone, but in his work, the same language opposes their society. The play sheds light on the social stratification in India, particularly the marginalization of the hijra (transgender) community. Dattani highlights how societal norms and expectations can be both limiting and oppressive. The play challenges traditional notions of gender and identity, showcasing the struggles of individuals who don't conform to societal expectations. The characters of Anarkali, Champa, and Kamala exemplify the complexities of hijra identity. Amidst the societal pressures and expectations, the play emphasizes the importance of human connection and relationships. The bond between Anarkali and Champa, as well as Subbu and Kamala, showcases the depth of human emotions. The title "Seven Steps Around the Fire" is symbolic, representing the marriage ceremony that becomes a catalyst for tragedy. The play's structure, revolving around the investigation into Kamala's murder, allows for a nuanced exploration of these themes and their intersections. In his play, Seven Steps Around the Fire gives how transgender treated and the manner of language used for them. They mention the pronoun "it," which reflects the representation of her identity. This is not only the pronoun of her identity issues, but this was an invisible domination. We have only a handful of characters who represent transgender community, they are Anarkali, the one who is arrested and sentenced to jail for allegedly murdering her sister, another transgender named Kamala. Transgender people are considered here like animals. These were clearly portrayed in Mahesh Dattani 's plays. They used to address transgender people in the name of hijra after their Common name.

*Munuswamy: You may see the hijra now if you wish, madam.*

*Uma: Will she talk to me?*

*"Munuswamy (Chuckling). She! Of course it will talk to you. We will beat it up if it doesn't." (pg. no.7)*

In this drama, as humans, they are subjugated by all people only because of their own identity with a true sense of emotion. The plot of the story revolves around the death of Kamala Hijra eunuch, which made Anarkali the victim of her own sister's death. All this accomplice to express how humanity remains in the name of culture.

### **Focus on taboo issues:**

Mahesh Dattani retained the essence of the Indian cultural context in his characters in each dramatic dialogue. He uses the language with the flavour of the locale in this drama to make the readers understand easily. He uses the fusion of cultural form with the textual of Indian combination with the Western theatre cultural context.

*"I will come inside and beat you up, you worthless pig! (Pg. no 8)".*

He made the reality of eunuchs in their day-to-day life. We are not able to give them equality as third-gender persons. The word pig is not only the language he used in this line, but they also repeat the word beat. It influences the harsh reality of their approach towards them. They were not able to have their freedom to realize it. Most of them are getting abused. There were mythological and cultural customs followed by the Indians, as we trace their ancestry to the Ramayana. There are transsexuals all over the world, and India is no exception.

To survive in society, they need to follow some restrictions. All this emotional imbalance happened to the readers through the help of Dattani's language, which ironically the same destroys the identity of the protagonist. Mahesh Dattani employs different concepts in writing creatively and innovative. He initiated new art forms emerging from the use of technology. Especially, he used to focus on the taboo issues in India that were not spoken about. But he uniquely handles them to have realistic, heart-touching feelings. He has successfully projected the conflict character on the stage. This was a brilliant contribution to have worldwide recognition.

*"Anarkali: They will kill me also if I tell the truth. If I don't tell the truth, I will die in jail."* (Dattani 14).

The play demonstrates how different social identities intersect and interact, resulting in unique experiences of marginalization and oppression. Uma's character, as a sociologist, navigates the complexities of these intersections. The tragic circumstances clash with her own desires and the expectations of a patriarchal society. The playwright masterfully portrays the complexities of life, where individuals are often trapped in extraordinary situations. Through his writing, he highlights the deep-seated customs that continue to be followed by some, despite being outdated and illogical. The language used in the play is powerful, evoking strong emotions and imagination in the reader. The narrative reveals the harsh realities of modern culture, where individuals are forced to live in the shadow of death and societal pressures. The play "Seven Steps Around the Fire" is a poignant commentary on the struggles of those who are marginalized, particularly the transgender community. By exploring the complexities of human experience, the playwright encourages readers to accept the harsh realities of life and to develop a deeper understanding of the human condition. If we observe, the conditions of Uma are also not much better than those of Anarkali. Uma tries to face the real condition of Anarkali. Anarkali points it out to her in a very subtle way.

*Anarkali: Maybe you are unhappier than I am.*

*Uma: Look, I want to help you, but I don't know how.*

*Anarkali: If you give them money, they will release me.*

*Uma: But I can't bail you out! (CP 14)*

The play exposes the brutality and cruel treatment of our cops to the eunuch community. The helplessness of Anarkali is highlighted in the following dialogue:

*Uma: you can't do that ! You have to report to the police station.*

*Anarkali : They will kill me also if I tell the truth. If I don't tell the truth, I will die in jail (CP 14)*

Dattani has exposed the multiple layers of realities that exist in Indian society. This play explores the social positioning and the social setup.

### **Marginalization faced by the Hijra Community:**

In India, the Hijra community faces a profoundly distressing situation. A gripping narrative of seven incidents surrounding a fire highlights the severe challenges encountered by Hijras. This account sheds light on the harsh realities of their isolation from the broader societal fabric. Hijras experience a life cut off from the mainstream Hindu cultural practices. They are largely excluded from significant life events like childbirth and marriage ceremonies. During cultural festivities, they might be permitted to perform songs and dances, but this is perhaps the extent of their involvement. The paradox lies in the fact that despite being part of the societal landscape, they are denied basic rights and treated with disdain by the very nature of societal norms.

The irony of their situation is stark. The author emphasizes this aspect to underscore the marginalization faced by the Hijra community. Historically, they have been portrayed in a manner that reinforces their exclusion from mainstream society. This portrayal contributes significantly to their struggles, limiting their access to equal opportunities and respect. The Hijras in India lead lives marked by considerable hardship. Their detachment from mainstream society results in limited access to various privileges that others take for granted. Basic human rights and dignity are often denied to them, exacerbating their plight. The societal attitude towards them is a mix of disdain and irony, where on one hand, they are allowed certain traditional roles like singing and dancing, but on the other, they are barred from fundamental aspects of social and cultural participation.



This exclusion has profound effects on the Hijra community, pushing them further into the margins of society. The author brings attention to this issue to highlight the need for awareness about the struggles of Hijras. By narrating the heartbreaking incidents around the fire, the severity of their isolation and the resultant hardships are starkly illustrated. The play is a powerful and thought-provoking play that sheds light on the marginalized lives of the hijra community in India. Through its poignant portrayal of the struggles and hardships faced by the hijras, the play highlights the need for acceptance, understanding, and inclusivity in our society. Dattani's masterful use of language and dramatic structure brings to life the stories of these often-ignored individuals, forcing the audience to confront the harsh realities of their existence. Ultimately, the play is a testament to the resilience and strength of the human spirit, and a call to action for a more compassionate and equitable society. It critically examines the complexities inherent in representing contemporary issues through dramatic forms, especially within Indian cultural contexts. The analysis points out that when the medium is radio drama, there is a heightened challenge in recreating the right atmosphere and cultural setting solely through sound, without the aid of visual cues. This difficulty is intensified in narratives where some elements, such as hidden or taboo aspects of marriage, are not directly presented. The discussion references Dattani's treatment of marriage, specifically contrasting a conventional arranged marriage with a 'hidden' one involving a eunuch character who meets a tragic end. The lack of the eunuch's visual body on the radio is notable, since that physical absence eliminates a crucial layer of meaning from the play. The mainstream urban society views them with contempt. The play unfolds in an Indian metropolitan backdrop, shifting from affluent neighborhoods to less prosperous outskirts. These locations represent 'center' and 'margin,' emphasizing the creator's awareness of social class divisions, scenarios, and shifting viewpoints. Renowned critic Ashis Nandy asserts that psychological liberation surpasses even political and social freedom in importance. He argues that colonialism not only dominates bodies but also profoundly influences minds, prompting internal changes within colonized societies to re-prioritize culture and self-perception. This transformation, he notes, turns the West into a concept present everywhere, influencing both external structures and internal beliefs.

### **Conclusion:**

Mahesh Dattani's *Seven Steps Around the Fire* explores complex questions around hijra identity, including their physical being, social connotations, and their level of acceptance or rejection by society. Classified as 'invisible' within the social hierarchy, hijras are positioned at the very bottom and face discrimination due to both their inherent traits and societal prejudices—prejudices that are even harsher than those based on religion or caste. Their exclusion is so severe that they are not even acknowledged as legitimate members of society. This exclusion is infused with disgust and aversion. The play highlights their anxieties and hardships, portraying them as individuals with no outlet, compassion, or support, left without consolation or justice, and facing a slim chance of gaining recognition or acceptance. The playwright's use of language is a potent tool for conveying the emotions and experiences of the characters. The play's portrayal of the struggles of Kamala, a transgender individual, serves as a powerful commentary on the societal norms and expectations that can be both limiting and oppressive. Through the narrative, the playwright highlights the complexities of human experience and the need for acceptance and understanding.

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