HOW UTOPIC ARE THE GREEN SPACES IN DATTANI? SITUATING HOPE IN INDIAN URBAN FAMILY DYNAMICS

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Abstract

The plays of Mahesh Dattani revolve around the destabilization and subversion of conventional historical modules of Indian urban hopes – hope, the quintessential universal human value. They make visible lived lives of the middleclass city dwellers whose visions of ideal life, society and domesticity remain under-noticed and unquestioned: Conjoined twins, cancer patients, a male dancer, women dreamers in Dattani's texts display various modes of hoping. Theoretical frameworks on the relationship between hope and utopia have posited three modes of hoping: non-utopian, anti-utopian, and utopian. Since hope is both a source and a product of a thriving society, it is necessary to trace hope in an otherwise dystopic Indian urban context, especially when it is attached to muffled voices, marginalized subject positions, fragmented identities and contested dreams. If Dattani wishes to map hope against hope, he needs to do so metaphorically, and the most convenient language for couching hope is the language of the botanical metaphor. Literature in general and theatre in particular has used botanical references to express hope. Even the most problematic play on hope like *Waiting for Godot* offers sprouting leaves. Dattani is no exception albeit his botanical metaphors are (perhaps) the most complex metaphors for hope. While most of his plays are meant to be staged within the four walls of a house or hotel building sans botanical references, *Where There's Will*, *Dance Like a Man* and *Bravely Fought the Queen* offer almost

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dead-ending greenscape(s). These green spaces – rare, illusive, fleeting, and insufficient – are powerful tools to comprehend the routinized monotonous lackluster hopes of the modern fractured identities of Indian urban families. These unaccustomed hopes must be identified and critiqued with a concern to revive and foster transformative hope to combat the everyday dystopias of urban social violence, coercion, distortion, marginalization, and oppression. The present study, therefore, takes up Dattani's *Where There's Will*, *Dance Like a Man* and *Bravely Fought the Queen* to read and analyze the represented greenscape(s) as metaphor(s) of hope. In so doing, it problematizes the very nature of marginalized middle-class urban hoping frameworks.

Key words: botanical metaphors, theatre, hope, utopia, urban, family

Hope, in the present-day dystopic situation, is (perhaps) the only way to meaningfully respond to trauma and adversity at both individual and community levels.

Hope is the most universal of all human attributes. It is a positive moral value that enables one to believe in the possibility of a favourable outcome. Hope is a cognitive aspect. Hoping is more than a wish or a desire; it is a conscious intellectual exercise of human choice to not succumb even when things are beyond control. According to Webb (2008), the three modes of hoping are non-utopian ('estimative' and 'resolute') hope, anti-utopian ('patient') hope and utopian ('critical' and 'transformative') hope. Hope in drama is where the green space is. Be it the Birnam Wood of the Shakespearean tragedy, the Forest of Arden of the Shakespearean romantic comedy, the sprouting leaves of the Beckettian absurd tragicomedy, or/and the red oleander tree of the Tagorian symbolic play, botanical metaphors have been powerful and complex signifiers of hope as a human experience.

In *The Theory of Metaphors,* I.A Richards presents a semantic theory of metaphors and analyses how images and feelings have a constitutive function. However, metaphors do not exist in isolation and images become crucial and relevant only when they are related to the network of ideas, notions and designs. Metaphors based on concepts draw two unlikely domains (or concepts) together wherein the two domains/concepts connect, interact and communicate with each other. One of the two concepts, here, is characteristically more concrete and tangible than the other (the other concept, thereby, being more abstract). The correspondence and co-relation

is established in order to comprehend and analyze the abstract concept in light of the concrete concept. Metaphorical linguistic expressions may vary cross-culturally but many conceptual metaphors appear to be potentially universal or near-universal. For example, the motif of greenery has been the most convenient expression of environmental signs. Greenscape, perhaps the most fundamental sign of transformative hope, has been culturally represented since prehistoric times to depict the physical environment and human-nature interactions. In this context, the present study explores the botanical metaphors as represented in Dattani's greenscape(s) to decipher the nuanced human experiences of hope in otherwise dystopic built spaces of Indian urban domesticities. For this, the first section interfuses literary analysis and ecological criticism to explicate how hope is related to botanical representations in Indian English drama. The second section makes a textual analysis of Dattani's representations of botanical metaphors to understand the various modes of hope within the dynamics of contemporary complex urban households. The third section draws the conclusion.

Section I: Botanical Metaphor, Hope and Indian English Drama

The presence of greenscape is conceived as an emotionally restorative element both in active and passive ways. Historically, the 'imagery of the natural world has been embedded into a variety of art forms which serves more functional than aesthetic purpose' (Montgomery-Stephenson 1994, 14). Horticultural images and botanicals have acquired a metaphorical vitality in different conscious and unconscious levels of human experience. Within this interwoven relationship between nature and human life, botanicals become significant signifiers. According to Kellert, human dependence on nature includes 'human craving for aesthetic, intellectual cognitive and even spiritual meaning and satisfaction' (1993, 18). From the Islamic Garden of Paradise, the Judeo-Christian Garden of Eden, to the Tree of Life and the Tree of Enlightenment, greenscape(s) have always been attributed with deep allegorical connotations in literature. The metaphors of vines, trees, bonsai, leaves, fruit, flowering branches, seed pods, flowers have been used to evoke complex, psychic, visual and metaphorical significance. Botanical metaphors – evocative in many ways which may be personal, ancestral, experiential, or archetypal – are expressions of conscious as well as unconscious layers of the human exercise of hoping. This is perhaps

because 'plants enter a spectrum of experience through color, symmetry, scale, texture, scent, and shape whose attributes merge with an individual's own history' (Montgomery and Janet 2015, 20). As far as cultural representations in India are concerned, humans have brought in palpable, organic botanical connections to human life from the cradle to cremation, to depict hope. Imagery of fruit, flower, tree; of plowing, sowing, bearing and reaping - traditional Indian literature is replete with botanical metaphors. Conventionally, botanical metaphors are used as supportive motifs and settings, and become important primarily for their emblematic and figurative meaning. Ecocriticism as a discipline did not originate in India, but there is 'always already' an ecotopic vision rooted in the Indian culture. The lives of human beings have been essentially interfused with nature and natural objects. The basic premise behind horticultural therapy is that proximity to plants fosters hope in an individual as well as in a community. Indian cultural and spiritual representations – from the 'ajrakh' motif to the 'Mahabodhi tree' – emphasize the intrinsic value of botanical references and highlight the human dream to connect with plant life. In Indian English drama, from Kalidasa to Tagore, 'Jatra' to 'Krishnattyam', plays have foregrounded botanical references reflecting spiritual contemplation, individual and community wellness and revolutionary zeal wherein characters have sought solace, enlightenment, or transcendence. Using vivid imagery and symbolic language to evoke the sensory experience of the natural world, these dramatic works provide a lens to envision a more equitable, sustainable, and harmonious connection between human beings and the natural world. With the progress of science and technology, and forces of globalization, the conflict between progress and ecological devastation has begun to emerge as the central theme in literature. As a result, plant presence in Indian plays has been replaced with plant absence, representing environmental dystopia. Contemporary Indian theatre, in this context, has sought to explore the socio-political realities of a rapidly developing nation grappling with ecological anxieties and individual unwellness, and the playwrights have felt the necessity to refer to the environmental challenges by highlighting 'the detrimental impact of human activities on the environment' (Bajpai 2012, 678) and reflecting on 'issues such as deforestation, pollution, industrialization, and resource depletion' (Bajpai 2012, 678). The difference in botanical metaphors as represented in Kalidasa's *Abhigyanashakuntalam* or Tagore's *Red Oleanders* and as represented in Mahesh Dattani's plays are not just different in degree but in principle. Dattani's botanical

metaphors reflect urban India which has been through fundamental depletion of natural resources, greenery, harmony and humanity. Greenscape becomes redundant and minimal and often is reduced to mere relics, tokens or memories in the urbanist setup of Dattani's plays. In many of Dattani's plays 'nature and environment get less prioritized'(Kumar 2017, 110).As playwrights and researchers are grappling with pertinent issues related to deforestation, biodiversity loss, industrialization, pollution, exhaustion of resources or/and climate change, it is necessary to question how these themes have impacted modern plays. Most importantly, it is an imperative to discover how these issues have percolated through the four walls of Indian urban households and have thereby found expressions in modern theatre. In this context, the present study seeks to examine how Dattani has depicted modern human fractured hopes couched in grey green botanical metaphors.

Section II: Botanical Metaphors and Modes of Hope in Dattani's Plays

The present section takes up three plays wherein Dattani has used botanical metaphors in the context of middle-class urban living spaces. These plays are primarily set around the kitchen space, bedroom space or living room space where patriarchal voices tend to dominate the male and female members in the house - so much so that they are conditioned to foster fragmented hopes. Themes of dystopian urbanism such as unconventional-and-unfulfilled love relationships, fractured families, exploitation of women, incest, domestic violence, child sex-abuse, communal disharmony are a few of the dominant issues in Dattani's plays. Trehan opines, 'Dattani takes the family unit as the locus of most of his plays focusing on human relationships and personal choices….' (Trehan 2016, 63). However, this study contends that underneath these dystopias are present undercurrents of hope although his plays have been critiqued from numerous socio-psychological perspectives as well as multi-faceted notions of gender identity and the gendered self. Therefore, this study uses botanical metaphors in Dattani as potent tools to dig deeper and argue how metaphors should not be seen or perceived merely as linguistic devices, but rather as signifiers to read latent signs of social transformation which are extensive, systematic, and fundamental. *Where There's a Will (*1986)*, Dance Like a Man* (1989), *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991) bear botanical spaces within the visible stage framework. The botanical metaphors appear

either in the appearance of reverie away from the empirical present or they appear on stage in distorted form inhabiting a space which lies outside the experiential reality where the characters are situated. These appearances of greenery might generate the illusion of an immediate utopia only to later evoke symbolic erasure or forcible expurgation of the greenscapes. But if these erasures are further analyzed, these grey greenscapes might reveal signs of deferred hope. The botanical references in *Where There's a Will (*1986), *Dance Like a Man* (1989), *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991) – connected to marginalized existences and erasures pertaining to some socio-cultural groups and ethnic minorities – allude to tormented personas. Thes personas include abused women, homosexuals and victimized minorities who are the agents of the Dattani plays. And therefore, this section undertakes a deep reading of the botanical references in the three plays to find hidden traces of meaningful hope as evinced by the tormented agents.

The play *Dance Like a Man* opens in a faintly lit room of an old-fashioned house situated in the heart of a city and the narrative probes into the fractured lives of Ratna and Jairaj, the two Bangalore-based dancers. Scenographically speaking, they negotiate a liminal space and are caught in a constant tussle between the past and the present:

> There is a rather modern-looking rear panel behind the entrance with a telephone and a modern painting on it. The rear panel can be slid to reveal a garden. (Dattani, *Dance Like a Man* 388).

The 'garden'is delineated in a way such that it remains elusive and hidden from the on-stage reality of the ruptured domestic space which is the locus of the conflict of the narrative. The play seamlessly moves between the past and the present, multilevel, multi-dimensional spaces and the narrative synchronically dissolves the transitions in time and space. It is only when Jairaj is mentally deported to his past and assumes the character of his imperious father Amritlal that the garden scenery becomes visible. The garden was nurtured by his domineering father. Amritlal wanted to culturally condition his son and force him to forego his passion for dance because he considered it as a social taboo for a man. This resulted in ghettoization within the domestic space where the father pushed his son to the margins because he felt that his son's desire to follow dance as a career and to sport long hair are inappropriate to his 'masculine' taste. When Viswas asked Jairaj about his childhood memories of his father, Jairaj replied,

> JAIRAJ...The gardens. He had plenty of spare time. He used to do a lot of gardening. A rose garden. Creepers climbing the walls. When he died, I had everything removed. Pulled it all out from the roots. (Dattani *Collected Plays, Dance Like a Man*, 408)

Jairaj's father was obsessed with a stereotyped notion of masculinity, and he could hardly tolerate any kind of aberration in his ordered home. He manipulated his daughter-in-law to exercise control over his son surreptitiously. Jairaj had no choice but to suffer silently and helplessly under the repressive burden of patriarchal expectations. His father's autocratic control undermined his life. Through Jairaj's character, Dattani attempts to make audible the voice of the oppressed segments of society who are strangulated by the hetero-normative demands. Every time Jairaj remembers his bygone days in the play, the garden appears in the backdrop as a reverie. This garden becomes a metaphorical site of control and conflict between two generations - that of the father and the son. The play subtly hints at the Christian notions of the overarching presence of the patriarchal dictum, defiance and disobedience and consequent fall, and the loss of the Garden of Eden. Jairaj is forced to forgo his passion for Bharatnatyam under domestic oppression. He becomes a victim of the restrictive constriction of the patriarchal order. The play, set in a modern-day Indian urban moment, becomes a microcosmic reflection of a post-lapsarian world of urban dystopia. The garden is absent in the concrete home of reality but appears as an illusion of the bygone past in his dreams. If we look at the garden as a fantasy, or a dream of the past, it will provide a psychoanalytic understanding of Jairaj's relationship between his tormented past and his abused present (which is a by-product of the past as well). It shows how the relationship permeates his being and consciousness, including his cognition of events, properties, logical and semantic categories. The unconscious is ageless and timeless. Its past and present co-existent simultaneously. Repressed by his father, he often found himself relocated in the realm of the unconscious where the memories continue to influence daily life and dreams indirectly. It is in Jairaj's dreams that the garden appears like a fantasy. Psychoanalytically, these mappings become cognitive and metaphorical because they allude to the profound relationship between past and present phantasies, dystopia and utopia. The garden is synonymous with his father and co-terminus in identity. Curiously, it often exchanges its position and functionality with the living room:

> *…The living room changes to the garden, bathed in moonlight. After a while the younger Ratna and Jairaj enter from the garden.* (Dattani, *Collected Plays*,

> *Dance like a Man, 388* Stage Directions before the commencement of Act 1)

Again:

> As soon as Ratna exits, the garden becomes the present-day living room. Amritlal becomes the older Jairaj as he removes the shawl ... (Collected Plays, Dance Like a Man, 426)

Jairaj remarks that when they moved to a high-class flat after leaving his father's house, there had been a gulmohar tree overlooking the house which the neighbors wanted to 'cut off' because it caused traffic disruption. 'But it was saved by a group of retired old men in this building. I think I was one of them' (Dattani, *Dance Like a Man*, 449). Jairaj obstructed to the demolition of the trees along with the group of retired men, because throughout his life he has been fighting to safeguard his choices, albeit failing painfully to execute them. In his act of kindness and empathy, he had the support from only a group of retired men who were his fellow companions. The perpetual clash of commitments, power and personal desires of an individual and the oppressions of the hegemonic social order are demarcated in the play as it constantly moves back and forth in time spanning three generations. In the final scene when the characters realize how they were only human who 'lacked the brilliance' and 'magic to dance like God' (Dattani, *Dance like a Man*, 450) through their forced acceptance, Dattani brings out the desperate and frantic attempts of the characters to hope albeit with a sense of dystopia and disillusionment in their life. In the construction of their personal relations, past events are not present - temporally or spatially - but through the reveries set against verdant backdrops. Dattani shows how the absent past has shaped the contours of their present relationship, and the present and future history of the relationship has been scripted on a palimpsest which bears faint marks of the now-absent-and-invisible-past. The garden becomes a potent metaphor of that embedded history. In reality, Jairaj cannot face his father as they have drifted apart both spatially and temporally. It is only through his reveries that he connects to his absent past (and it is only here that the garden becomes visible before the audience which appears in the form of stage directions). The lost garden signifies a sense of fear, dormant agony, and his father's egoistical embarrassment and reservation about his son's decision to dance and the social taboo associated with it altogether. The discernible influence of his father and ambitions of his wife had turned Jairaj into a failed artist and alcoholic for life. The absent presence of

the garden and the patriarch father who nurtured it continue to dominate the current reality and temporality of the subject. However, the botanical reference of garden and gulmohar tree in connection with Jairaj is still a narrative hope. This is because Jairaj's strategic endeavor to'remove' and pull it all out 'from the roots' signifies his utopian hope of regenerating and transforming the intimate space of the garden wherein stereotypical rose creepers shall grow no more to conform to the aesthetic expectations of a normative society. Moreover, Jairaj's protest to reclaim a gulmohar tree by a street speaks volumes about his genuine intention of safeguarding the rights of marginalized identities in public spaces. These two acts alone can subvert the entire degenerative urban dystopia in the play and posit the most ideal form of hope, the utopian hope (critical and transformative) as pointed out by Webb (2008).

The next botanical image is that of a bonsai tree in Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen.*

It is Sridhar's wife Lalitha who introduces the 'dwarfish' bonsai into the claustrophobic drawing-room of the play *Bravely Fought the Queen.* She had brought it as a token gift for Dolly. In the conversation that follows her arrival, she informs the Trivedi sisters about her passion for growing miniature green plants and the painstaking effort that goes into the making of the bonsai. She narrates how she directed her vital energy into making them and had thereby derived intense satisfaction in creating these miniature forms. Her neurotic obsession is similar to what Freud identifies as 'attachments of affection' and 'libidinal ties'(Freud 1930, 15) On being asked how she created them, Lalitha mentions how the deliberately 'dwarfed' miniature bonsai plants were grown with the help of human intervention and care.

> Lalitha: You stunt their growth. You keep trimming the roots and bind their branches with wire…
>
> In the beginning, you will have a lot of dead shoots on your hands. But then you learn ... You first find a sapling of your choice. It could be of any tree…
>
> Lalitha: I myself prefer fruit bearing trees because when they are fully grown (giggles)—I guess you can't call them fully grown - but when they've reached their (demonstrates with her hands) dwarfed maturity, they really look bizarre with pea sized mangoes or oranges! (Dattani, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, 17-18)

Traditionally, the ethos of bonsai-making implies a Japanese horticultural technique of gardening wherein trees are meant to

be grown in miniature forms on trays or small pots. Employing the techniques of trimming, clipping, pruning, root reduction, grafting and defoliation, small trees are grown that mimic the shape and style of fully-grown trees. The twisting, trimming, deliberate mutilation and violent pruning of the different parts of the plant body become metaphorical and symbolic in the context of the play which appears like a complex labyrinth where the female voice is subjected to domination, violence, subjugation and strangulation. The image of the bonsai runs as a strand in the play which suggests a prolonged process of rheostat and stunted growth subjected to human intervention, and the coercion almost becomes synonymous with the 'invisible forces of the society that seeks to bind, wire, twist and cut the soul of the women to make them fit into prepared molds of tradition' (Ghosh 2012, 70). But what is important is how the tree continues to survive even after being subjected to intimidation, compliance and docility. 'The dwarfish maturity' becomes a visual representation of the marginalized consciousness of women' (Chatterjee 2012, 48). Through the metaphor of the amorphous form of the bonsai in the play *Bravely Fought the Queen,* Dattani shows how individuals seek to construct, create and recreate an essence of their own being through the power of resistance. Foucault claimed that power relations 'dissipate through all relational structures of the society.'(Foucault 1998, 63). Power is everywhere and originates from everywhere' so in this sense it is neither an agency nor a structure. Instead, it is a system of 'metapower' or 'regime of truth' that pervades society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation. Foucault uses the term 'power/knowledge' to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and 'truth'. This enabled him to construct 'a model of everyday life and mundane manners' (Foucault, 65) in which power is exerted and contested'. He interpreted the individual as a dynamic subject and not simply as a tool for the exercise of power. Childless and lonely, Lalitha's nearly therapeutic act of creating bonsai was an act of resistance against society, an act of diversion from her dystopian family life which empowered her in a way and enabled her to derive hope. This act of exercising hope can perhaps be recognized as anti-utopian (patient) hope as identified by Webb (2008).

In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Kanhaiya sits on his haunches on the parapet outside his room, 'spitting on the plants below' (Dattani 2006, 265) and waits for a clandestine sexual encounter. Here, all the representations of greenery and foliage that the audience gets to see

on stage come in the form of the miniature bonsai. Lalitha's bonsai plants were survivors, however contorted and bizarre they were in their appearance, and in the same way the women in the play too had learnt to find their own coping apparatuses when nothing was to be done. Dolly had found her secret lover Kanhaiya, Alka had sought refuge in alcohol, and Lalitha had decided to indulge in a horticultural passion. Lalitha's action of nurturing bonsai becomes symbolic in the framework of the play: On the one hand, the idea of mutilation and deliberate strangulation hint at a symbolic presence of repressive power while at the same time it engenders a counter discourse of resistance to this idea of hegemonic authority which shows how a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power and at the same time an act of confrontation and resistance, a stumbling point of confrontation and a starting point for an opposing strategy of survival. According to Foucault, 'Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but at the same time it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart' (1998, 101). The characters devise their own sustenance strategies to resist the authority which seeks to strangulate them. Lalitha's botanical metaphors are living specimens which might be bizarre and distorted in appearance, nevertheless they give her anti-utopian hope.

The next botanical metaphor thwarts all previously attempted botanical references in theatre – a haunted tamarind tree in *Where There's a Will.*

The play *Where There's a Will* deals with an exorcism of the patriarchal code. The family drama 'exposes the politics of power that lurks beneath the patriarchal constructions of fixed gender identities/roles' (Sengupta 2005, 151). Hasmukh Mehta, the head of the family seeks to exercise comprehensive control and hegemonic power over his family through financial authority which is a replication of what he had seen in his father, and so he creates a will in such a way that his family members remain subservient to his orders even after his demise. The will becomes a living embodiment of his absent physicality in the stage space. Hasmukh's presence continues to dominate the life of his family members even when he is gone. In the absence of his corporeal form, his deceased soul derives a vicarious pleasure by hanging itself upside down in the tamarind tree outside the house.

> Hasmukh Mehta: I think I'll go outside and swing on the tamarind tree ... (Dattani *Where There's a Will, 486*) ….

> Hasmukh: (*to the audience*).Have you ever swung on a tamarind tree?
>
> Upside down? ... You can see the world the way it really is. It's important to get a good grip on the branch with your legs ... (Dattani, *Where There's a Will*, 495)

Dattani brings out the societal oppression of individuals by various ideological and repressive state apparatuses wherein the family constitutes a significant unit applying coercive control. Dattani uses dark humor to subvert and thwart the trope popularized by the ubiquitous family sagas of television serials which depict a 'Hindu joint family presided over by a 'Babuji (father) or a Maaji (mother) in his absence, [that] goes through a succession of trials and tribulations followed by the eventual triumph of an unproblematic/monolithic' (Sengupta 2005, 164). When he realized that his mistress Kiran had destabilized his authority by constructing new relationships based on better understanding, acceptance, consideration and empathy, he knew he was not important anymore.

> Hasmukh. No. I don't think I can enter this house. It isn't mine . . . any more. I will rest permanently on the tamarind tree. (Dattani, *Where There's a Will*, 514)

Meanwhile in the realm of physical reality, his family members decided to trim the tamarind tree because it was obstructing the neighbor's electric wires. The spectral presence of Hasmukh fails to exercise any further control as a strange bond of friendship develops between his mistress and his wife as both decide to transcend the dictates of the overbearing patriarch. Ajit's plan of trimming the tamarind tree which was inhabited by the ghost of his domineering, patriarchal parent, Hasmukh, signifies non-utopian (estimative) hope, as identified by Webb (2008):

> Ajit … I'll have it [tamarind tree] chopped off. I never did like that tree. (Dattani, *Where There's a Will*, 515)

As the characters, restricted and dominated by Hasmukh, come together to estimate the redundance of Hasmukh's entity, the play posits the end of the 'permanent' after life habitat of Hasmukh - the tamarind tree. The three plays therefore emerge as powerful commentaries on the three modes of 'hope' (Webb 2008) and show how the contemporary urban middle class societies within dystopic spaces exercise the act of hope, which are complex but significant – non-utopian ('estimative' and 'resolute') hope, anti-utopian ('patient') hope and utopian ('critical' and 'transformative') hope.

The plays are set in confined spaces wherein greenscapes have been meaningfully uprooted (*Dance Like a Man*), limited (*Bravely Fought the Queen*) and chopped (*Where There's a Will*). The interactions of humans with plant lives in the texts are minimal and therefore significant. They represent the three modes of hope in the context of diverse settings ofcontemporary urban dystopia.

Section III: Conclusion

All the three plays include botanical metaphors which characteristically bring out cross-domain psychoanalytic mapping involving the crisscrossing of several modes of hope. On one hand, they subtly hint at the prevailing power structures in society and show how the hegemonic authority operates in society at numerous levels by subjugating the 'other'. On the other hand, they reflect how resistances are articulated and negotiated to exercise consciously, the act of hoping. The diversification of hope that emerges in the course of the three plays ruptures and fractures this supremacy of power structures. There are multiple modes of coercive violence and subordination vis-à-vis multiple modes of hope. The binary is ingenuously represented using subtle botanical metaphors. In all three plays, Dattani uses this binary not in direct opposition to physical presence but as an inevitably and intrinsically interlinked indicator to multiple complications and tensions. The absence of men in Act 1 and women in Act 2 in *Bravely Fought the Queen* provides a stimulus for the sequence of events to take place. Despite the physical absence of Amritlal, his invisible presence impacts the lives of the characters present on the stage like Baa who resides in a liminal space and remains hidden from view as she continues to enforce invisible matriarchal authority on Dolly and Alka by constantly ringing a bell. In many ways she resembles the authoritative Hasmukh Mehta in *Where There's a Will*, the patriarch who not only made a will constricting his family members financially but also decided to take refuge in the tamarind tree outside his house in his afterlife to exercise a continuous watch on them. They are not much different from Jairaj's father Amritlal who chalked out an unholy alliance with his daughter-in-law Ratna before his death to prohibit his son from taking up dance as a career because he considered it unmanly and a social taboo. Such authoritative figures might not be visible to the public eye, but they continue to administer control and regulation through their non-presence thereby confining and strangulating the private lives of the characters on stage. Baa's bell, Daksha and

Praful's absence, Jairaj's father's elusive garden, and Hasmukh's ghost hanging upside down from the tamarind tree and deriving a sadistic pleasure while observing his family members hint at an actual or empirical dystopia in the immediate urban domesticity.

The botanical metaphors become significant markers, acting as conceptual and logistic signifiers. The emotionally barren dystopic urban spaces where Dattani's plays are set are devoid of greenery and foliage and the only plants and trees that appear are either uprooted, stunted or possessed. It is as if no natural, healthy greenery can survive in this claustrophobic space and hence almost all these representational metaphors hint at some form of aberration, ambivalence, peculiarity or abnormality. The absence of greenery hints at the environmental degradation and its impact on life. The theatrical world serves as a powerful indictment of all forms of violence and oppression and shows how unchecked power and exploitation upsets the ecological balance. The deliberate choice of botanical metaphors creates a bizarre effect that subtly hints at a purposeful rejection of the legitimate allegories which seem inadequate and incompetent to capture the cultural complexities of the modern fractured identities of urban families residing in globalized metropolises. Words like 'cutting', 'uprooting', 'twisting', 'trimming,' associated with foliage, hint at erasures, subjugation, intimidation, and embedded history of cultural violence.And yet, located in modern urban societies – wherein the characters are subjected to entrapment in constricted spaces being pinned down under monolithic edifices of patriarchal injunctions – there are clear attempts in the play to confront, to resist and most importantly, to hope. Hope remains as a vital psychological resource in their lives, and without it there would be little to sustain them. The capacity to hope is a universal coping mechanism. The characters learn to create some form of redemptive site for themselves whereby they acquire the capacity to adapt, hope and grow in their own way.

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