

SOCIAL PREJUDICE IN MAHESH DATTANI'S WHERE THERE'S A WILL**M. Kalyankumar¹ & V. B. Chitra^{2*}**¹Research Scholar, JNTUA, Ananthapuramu - 515002, India²Dept. of Humanities, JNTUA, Ananthapuramu - 515002, India

Abstract

Mahesh Dattani occupies a very distinct and illustrious place in the realm of Indian drama in English. He has manifested his individuality in so many ways. His presentation of problems from real-life situations is a significant contribution to Indian English drama. Among modern Indian playwrights, he stands forth with singular distinctness, striking as artistic perception, and immense dramatic guts. He is the most serious contemporary dramatist in Indian drama in English. He takes up social problems prevailing in urban India. His plays contain some important elements like human pathos, passions, conflict, and appeal to human sentiment, which can immediately touch and stir the common audience. He puts Indian drama in English to the level of world drama.

Keywords: Indian drama, human pathos, conflict, appeal and social problems.

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1. Introduction

Mahesh Dattani was born on the 7th of August in 1958 in Bangalore, Karnataka. He was educated at Baldwin's Boys High School and then went on to graduate from St. Joseph's College, Bangalore. After graduation, he worked for a brief period as a copywriter for an advertising firm. In 1986, he wrote his first play, 'Where There is a Will'. After his first play, Mahesh Dattani began to concentrate on his writing and wrote more dramas like Final Solutions, Night Queen, and Dance like a Man, Tara, and Thirty Days. From 1995, he started working exclusively in theatre.

Where there's a will dramatizes the social prejudice in a very comical and satirical way. The play replete with laughter and mirth. The tone of sarcasm and humor runs throughout the play. Where there's a will is one of the four earliest plays of Mahesh Dattani. The play is the drawing-room cum living room of a rich businessman, who tries to control his family even after his death through his will. The play is very interesting and appealing. It generates a lot of laughter and mirth among the spectators. Despite its humorous trait, the play is very introspective and thought-provoking.

The play *Where There's a Will* has many trademark qualities of Dattani's play. Like other plays, the play has a Gujarati milieu and successfully runs on the stage. The play presents women in their own homes are marginalized. Though the kitchen or home is described as the kingdom of women, they are no longer ruling over them. Instead, they are pushed on the margins of invisibility. The play was first performed by Playpen at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore, on 23rd September 1998, as part of the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival. The play is translated into Gujarati and Hindi by Suresh Rayda and Rajendra Mohan respectively. Hindi *Shaw* was performed in Tanzil Theatres, Mumbai on 25th December 1992 under the direction of Jasthpal Senter. The narrative of the play takes place in the lavish house of Hasmukh Mehta, a doyen businessman and staunch follower of the patriarchal system. The dramatist has introduced the ghost of Hasmukh Mehta to make watcher of his own. The stage is divided into three spaces namely the fancy dining cum-living room, the bedroom of their son Ajit and his wife, Preethi. Hasmukh strictly followed steps of his father in his life. He wants his son Ajit to follow in his footsteps in real life. He expresses the patriarchal authority over all the members of his family. He believes in absolute power. The dramatist focuses on the fractured interpersonal relationship within the range of familial relationships, like all modern families; there is a lack of emotional attachment and understanding towards other views and opinions [1].

The character of Hasmukh Mehta can be analyzed in two ways. Though his familial world and business world. He is the boss of both spaces. His relationship is plagued with grievances and unrest at home. However, he is enjoying the position of the ablest and perfect boss at the business house. Thus, Hasmukh Mehta is embodied with patriarchal canons and tried to control family even after his death through his will. He is both dead and alive, but his business remains unobstructed and unceasing. The play is divided into acts and these two acts as subdivided each into two parts.

The play begins at the lavish house of rich protagonist Hasmukh Mehta. All the five members of the Mehta family stand in sharp contrast to their certain parts. Mehta is the auto critic head and demands unquestionable obedience from his family members, whereas his wife Sonal is quit subservient and subordinate to her husband. She has no choice of her own. She has learned how to execute her husband's instructions and orders in too. In this sense, Hasmukh Mehta is the antithesis to her.

The play depicts how women are suggested and suppressed by their male counterparts in a patriarchal social setup.

When the play begins, Ajit is talking on the phone, and Hasmukh Mehta enters through the main door with his walk staff. Mehta is self-made and led a deprived childhood. He is forty-five years old man. He is described as a garment tycoon. He criticizes his son Ajit's always. He observes categorically; "one of the richest men in the city. All by my efforts. Forty-five years old and I am in capital letters. Ajit a young man of twenty-three years is the joint managing director of his father's factory. According to Hasmukh Mehta, he is wasting money and is on his way to bankruptcy. He makes a very satirical statement that god has just forgotten to open an account for Ajit [2].

Hasmukh Mehta is projected as a very auto critical father. He controls and checks every moment of his son. He wants his son, not as a partner or owner of his property, but he wants his son as a slave. Ajit Mehta is quite meek and occupies little importance at both the places. He can be called the filial subaltern. The play dramatizes the policies of patriarchy which doesn't only marginalize the womenfolk of the family but also other male members of the family. Hasmukh Mehta has overpowered the identity of his son Ajit by exercising absolute control over his home and business affairs. He has no power to use the property of his father in his way. He is excluded from the decision making process in business. His father is a highly ego-centric and self-opinioned man who doesn't allow Ajit to use his skill and talents for the business enchantment process. Strength enough, Hasmukh Mehta has made Ajit the managing director of his company. However, he is not supported to undertake any business earned and affairs at his own. He has to execute his father's orders and command keeping his say aside.

Ajit: Don't I have any rights at all?

Hasmukh Mehta: You have the right to listen to my advice and obey my orders.

Like Sonal to Hasmukh, Preeti counterfoil to her husband Ajit, Preeti is a young, charming, and graceful lady. She expects a baby. She is quite a calculative and assertive lady. Hasmukh knows her well. Therefore, he says; that's my daughter-in-law, pretty, charming, graceful, and sly as a snake. Hasmukh has formed a charitable trust named Hasmukh Mehta charitable trust. He has devoted his all property including finances, shares, etc to the trust. As per the will, they get a regular allowance from the trust. The trust will be dissolved when Ajit Mehta turns forty-five. Everything remains with the trust till he is not forty-five. He can use and utilize property and money after that period. Further, according to the will, Ajit has to attend office every day at nine and he can leave at 6 pm. No new business project of Ajit will be sanctioned. If Ajit and others fail to abide by the terms and conditions, the trust will donate its funds to various charities as approved by Hasmukh. Thus, Hasmukh Mehta shuns his

family making a will and furthermore by making Kiran Jhaveri, as the trustee of the trust. He has kept namely Kiran Jhaveri who is a very shrewd and hard-headed marketing executive. She lives in a company flat in a posh locality. HasmukhMehta has taken meticulous care and every precautionary step to avoid any challenge to the validity of his will [3].

HasmukhMehta's personality displays the moods and temperament of business tycoons who throw aside any person not fruitful for the enhancement of their business in trust. Hasmukh Mehta is obstinate and adamant, guilty and gusty. As a business, he is quite alert and accurate. He promptly grabs the opportunity and utilizing others for his business gain and profit.

The play *Where There's a Will* focus on eruptives and the uselessness of strict adherence to patriarchal code. One of the major social qualities dissect from the play is the conflicting relationship between father and son. It depicts these clashes between conservative their viewpoint regarding son's life, whereas rejects the idea of complete command over his life. At the very beginning of the play, Ajit expresses his displeasure regarding his father's idea. He is quite young and innovative. He wants to give a touch of modernity to his plant. His considerations "zero" in business and practical affairs, where Ajit feels that his father is a hard linear, and stubborn fellow. He doesn't respect anybody's say in the decision making process. Hasmukh Mehta thinks that his son is very novice and silly in the world of business. He makes a mockery of his son and shows his displeasure towards his attitude. Later in the play, Kiran Jhaveri appreciates Ajit's invisible spirit for telling truth on the face of his father. Ajit doesn't raise much voice against the autocratic regime of his father. He just disappears his father's views and ideology. Kiran appreciates his revolutionary spirit in this manner. He may not be the greatest rebel on earth, but at least he is free of his father's beliefs Ajit asserts his individualistic identity and protects against parental hegemony. In this sense, the father-son relationship is a past colonial dictionary of contemporary society. He is content with his idea that he is defiant. He has challenged the dictatorship of his father. Thus, the play dramatizes the discard and disharmony between the father-son relationships. Father and son are shown in a constant fight. There is a nerve-war between them. The play depicts the forced harmony among the members of the same family. In this sense, the play may be deemed as the post-colonial protest against the colonialization of self and identity. Dattani's plays peep into the past and find out the reality. His peeping into the past is not a myth-feeling attempt, but he dives into the past for bringing up the social realism lying in the darkness, at the dark button of the past.

The realization of past errors helps the character understanding the present in a better way. It has got modern relevance. It is because of this; his plays are seen and enjoyed again and again.

The play is both funny and philosophical. The dramatist mingles them in a very innovative and meaningful way. The invisible presence of Hasmukh Mehta has been analyzed especially after his appearance as a ghost, his mate observation, and the free display of the inner feelings of different characters against the authority of Hasmukh Mehta, is a unique device for self-assessment of the characters. The play ends with Sonal's assertion of confidence in Kiran Jhaveri denoting the newly developed bondage of mutual understanding and trust between the wife and the mistress. The play exposes the illusion of perfect and complete control over the aspirers too much for authority and power. Dattani is convinced that it is an attempt to make one self-secure and survive. So man's drive for domination arises of his wife's own apprehensive of insecurity.

2. Conclusion

The play, *Where there's a will* has social richness, brilliant dialogue delivering, a touch of humor and satire, suitable social realism, and dramatic structure. The play has a philosophical twist and a happy end. The play explores the deteriorated inter-personal relationship among members of the same family. The play stands as an outstanding one showing the protagonists as the watcher of his action.

References

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