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Politics of Queer Sexuality in Mahesh Dattani's Where There's a Will

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Abstract: This paper examines Dattani's representation of gender and the weakened gender norms imposed on women. The study clearly portrays gender stereotypes. To show Dattani's perceptions and responses to gender and gender construction, compared with society's, the study uses relevant examples from the literature. In addition, the study uses examples from the text to show how Dattani simultaneously embodies and dismantles gender norms. It depicts the gender hierarchy and each gender's position within a patriarchal, heterogeneous, dominant society. Additionally, it identifies the ideology behind the author's inspiration for writing these plays. Dattani is well known for both his broad range of themes and subjects and his technical mastery. Essentially, the study is text-focused. To effect social change and a sociocultural revolution and raise public awareness of the need to reform the current social structure, these plays undertake audacious inventions and experiments and address issues relevant to the current social context. The plays portray the intense conflicts of modern city life and address the ambitions of society's underprivileged and marginalised segments.

Keywords: Mahesh Dattani, Where There's a Will, Society, Patriarchy, Gender Disparity.

Introduction

Patriarchy is a long-standing political-social structure that holds that the oldest and most powerful men are naturally dominant, superior to all others considered weak, and granted authority to rule. Psychological terrorism and violence in different forms are how they keep their power. In India, fathers often control the family's property, and women and men follow rules and privileges. The foundation of social, legal, political, and economic structures has long been the idea of patriarchy. Everything in the world is arranged in a hierarchy; offices and governments operate according to rules followed from bottom to top. The families in India even observe this. The authority that parents have over a kid and other family members is known as patriarchy. In an organisation, these kinds of directives may help, but they are never beneficial in a family. A son is not a doll or an object that a father may manipulate; he is simply a relation. An individual's existence in every Indian household is still impacted by this notion, which was developed by the patriarchal society and culture. Through these plays, Dattani gives voice to this kind of family-member oppression by a typical Indian father. Dattani's plays explore power. The devastating, stultifying connections and patterns of behaviour ingrained in family life, along with the accompanying sorrow and pain, result from power dynamics. Our personality is a complex result of the different roles we are required to play. As they carry out their socially prescribed roles as mother, mother-in-law, father, husband, boss, or brother, their dominance over others causes humiliation, retaliation, and ultimately victimisation. The family becomes a victim of its own wicked schemes when someone uses their influence over them. Power comes from many sources, including sex, love, and profession. These factors can produce victimisation since they shape people's minds to force their will on others. People will stop at nothing to obtain it. Those who pursue such targets will ultimately lose all influence. Sometimes, after experiencing helplessness, we could feel better about ourselves if we have authority.

Politics of Queer sexuality

A person's disability exerts influence and force on another, as shown through personal efforts to dominate and control others, themselves, and their environment. Mahesh Dattani forces us to consider our individual and social consciousness. Pandey, Lavanya, et al. use feminist and queer theory to analyse gender roles in Dattani's plays. Its focus on how characters negotiate power and social expectations provides a strong theoretical framework for arguing that Dattani defies gender stereotypes. (5) As a result, Mahesh Dattani serves as a mirror for society, reflecting reality but also exploring the reasons and causes behind progressive improvement. Prasad, Amar Nath provides a broad overview of Dattani's dramatic techniques and themes. It helps contextualise Where There's a Will within his larger body of work, particularly regarding concepts of alternate sexuality, gender, and the fusion of form with feeling. (2) In lead of a man-headed family, Dattani examines the differences between the roles played by men and women and the situations in which women assume leadership responsibilities. Dattani mentions three male-line generations and highlights the pressure Hasmukh faces to change, which ultimately happens because Ajit wants to break the cycle and forge his own path rather than follow his domineering father's instructions. Where There's a Will, he acts in a way that perpetuates patriarchy and its stereotypes to the people of tomorrow. "This is the main point that speaks of Hasmukh's dialogue about marriage and sons. It shows the patriarchal hegemony in a family. Where There's a Will is the foundational text for any scholarly work on Dattani's plays." (Dattani, Collected Plays) Although postcolonial society is changing slowly, progress is being made. People began to question long-held beliefs and values rather than mindlessly adhering to tradition. Westernization may have contributed to this shift away from ancestral businesses and towards individual aspirations. Throughout life, parents may feel they own their children and should act according to their opinions and desires. However, time passes, and new ideas and concepts emerge daily, making the world feel fresh and new. Patriarchy is outdated, and freedom is modern. In Dattani's plays, the children are first portrayed as imprisoned birds; then, by the end of the act, they are freed.

Multicultural Gender Politics

The play contains a few fascinating elements, as Sita Raina notes. As a playwright, Dattani called it an exorcism of the patriarchal code. Whether they are a wife or a mistress depends on the drama. Raina's insight into the play's themes and Dattani's intentions offers a foundational lens for analysing the drama's "fascinating elements." It also explores what happens when those relationships are strained. Another way to read Where There's a Will is through the lens of wealthy, well-off people's tendency toward passivity. Several critics still see the play as a portrayal of marital excess. In contrast, others believe it shows the chaos that arises in a family when members are not emotionally or psychologically compatible. Some people believe living in forced harmony is the only option available to individuals. According to Gauri Shankar Jha, identity problems and dilemmas around feminine sensibility are specific to women. Kiran, Hasmukh's mistress, embodies women in post-colonial society. With several layers of significance, the play feels rich and sophisticated. On the surface, it seems to be about a successful businessman named Hasmukh Mehta. A deeper reading reveals multiple interpretations. Vikas Jaoolkar & Poonam Matkar discuss Dattani as a social realist who exposes the "loopholes in the social structure." It supports the claims about Dattani holding up a "mirror to society" and addressing the "ambitions of the underprivileged and marginalised segments," including gender biases. (4)

Dattani's portrayal of the misconceptions and bigotry of Indian society as they are mirrored in the family unit's microcosm has its roots in the Gujarati family background. It highlights the way patriarchal men constantly act egoistically and is the most significant and dynamic reality in middle-class Indian homes. Gunanidhi, P. N. examined "patriarchy and gender discrimination in the play by focusing on Hasmukh's attitudes and the Gujarati familial context.

Xavier highlights the protagonist's situation and financial control as a tool of patriarchy. It discusses how Hasmukh's desire for control ultimately makes him a victim and highlights the contrasting roles of women like Kiran, which is central to your section on "Multicultural Gender Politics." (5) It shows Dattani's view and portrays the "true face of patriarchy" and the hierarchical structure within the family.

Hasmukh Mehta is a powerful, successful businessman, and the play focuses on his family and explores his life after death. As a disgruntled father, he faces the usual challenges of his offspring's expectations: his cold-hearted wife, Sonal; his dull married life; his impulsive son, Ajit; his cunning, deceitful daughter-in-law, Preeti; and, last but not least, his mistress, Kiran Jhaveri. IPL provides a comparative study of the female characters in Dattani's works. It contrasts victimised figures like Sonal with more assertive, modern women like Kiran and Preeti, reinforcing the analysis of the different strategies women use to navigate patriarchal authority. (IPL, 2020) Each of the four is confident in their names. Sonal barely makes an impression, and Hasmukh looks grim. Preeti feels no affection for anyone in the family, and Ajit is not the winner, at least in his father's eyes. With no romantic ties between them, they coexist as a group under the patriarchal regime. Neither Hasmukh nor his son brings him happiness. "Tragedy after tragedy" is how he views his marriage and the birth of his son. Sonal's obsession with cooking and feeding him drives him mad, and he sees his son as a reckless wastrel because he has always shown implicit obedience to his family.

Patriarchy, as portrayed in Mahesh Dattani's Where There's a Will, is not simply a social shape but a deeply internalised system of psychological manipulation that governs one's family relationships, identity formation, and the distribution of energy. The play exposes how authority inside the Indian family often operates through domination, emotional manipulation, and silent coercion as opposed to overt affection or information. Through Hasmukh Mehta, Dattani dissects the patriarch's authoritarian mindset, which equates manipulation with duty and power with love. Mehdi, Zeba, and Shravan Kumar offer a psychological reading of the power dynamics between the oppressor (Hasmukh) and the oppressed (his family). It is highly relevant to your discussion of how patriarchy operates through "psychological terrorism" and how control persists even after death. (6) Hasmukh's obsession with regulating his family tyrannically even past his death symbolises the suffocating grip of patriarchal authority. His strained relationships with Sonal, Ajit, Preeti, and Kiran reveal a family no longer bound by intimacy, but by hierarchy. They once loved freedom, but it was denied to them. Shailesh Sharma addresses the "exorcism of the patriarchal code," a phrase Dattani himself used to describe the play. It supports your argument that the play advocates "freedom, equality, liberty and independence for women" and connects to your discussion of gender politics. (5) The family members coexist beneath a regime wherein obedience is unsuitable for respect and fear substitutes for emotional connection.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, Dattani demonstrates that such rigid patriarchal structures become the cause of alienation, resentment, emotional strain and financial ruin. The patriarch himself becomes a victim of the very authority he wields, trapped by his desire to dominate. The generational battle between Hasmukh and Ajit displays the gradual transformation of postcolonial Indian society. Ajit's preference for carving out his own identity signals resistance to inherited patterns of domination. In comparison, patriarchy attempts to reproduce itself through lifestyle and financial management, converting social values, Western influences, and emerging individual aspirations into its permanence. The play shows that true progress lies not in outright rebellion, but in questioning inherited authority and redefining familial roles. Dattani foregrounds gender politics by presenting women shaped by patriarchal expectations; Sonal's obsession with the home, Preeti's calculated survival strategies, and Kiran's unbiased presence illustrate distinct ways of negotiating strength within a patriarchal framework. Thus, the play exorcises patriarchal codes by revealing their absurdity and fragility. Ultimately, Where There's a Will argues that power politics sustained through fear and manipulation is self-

damaging. Freedom, individuality, and mutual admiration ultimately replace outdated hierarchies. Through satire and psychological realism, Dattani holds a mirror up to Indian society, urging it to replace domination with authority and empathy.

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