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Dismantled Gender Constructs and Represents Gender in Mahesh Dattani's
Where There's a Will

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Abstract

The intention of this paper is to examine how Dattani dismantles gender constructs and represents gender. The paper intends to explore what is the mode in which Dattani has dismantled gender constructs and represents gender. The paper brings pertinent instances from the texts to show Dattani's perceptions and responses vs. society's perceptions and responses with regard to gender and gender constructs. Besides this, the paper also optimizes the instances from the text to show how Dattani simultaneously deconstructs gender constructs and represents gender. It also shows the gender hierarchy and the position of each gender in the hegemonic, patriarchal, heterogeneous society. Moreover, to identify author's motive in writing these plays and the ideology that author conveys.

Dattani is extensively respected for his technical excellences as well as displaying a wide range of themes and subjects. The study is basically text-oriented. These select plays have made bold innovations and experiments, dealt with themes related to the present social scenario, in an effort to bring about social change, and sociocultural revolution to make the people aware of the need to reform the present social structure. The plays deal with the aspirations of the destitute mid marginalised sections of society and depict the acute conflicts of contemporary city life.

Key Words: Gender, Gender Constructs, Patriarchal, Hegemony, Sexuality, Society.

Introduction

Patriarchy is an age-old political-social system that insists that the senior most powerful males are inherently dominating and superior to everyone else who deemed weak, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule. They maintain their dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. It is a very common feature in India that the father holds authority over women, children, and property of the family. The males' rules and privileges are dependent on female and other weak member's subordination. For ages the principle of patriarchy is the pivot of the social, legal, political, and economic organizations.

World is a place of order, everything has a hierarchy in the system, a government or an office has a step-by-step order till the top from the bottom. This is even followed in the families of India. This order is named patriarchy, the parental authority over a child and over other members of the family. These types of orders can be useful in an organization but it never helps in a family. A son is just a relation not a doll or a thing that can be controlled by the father. The patriarchal society and the culture made this idea and it still affect the life of an individual in every Indian family. Dattani through these plays had given a voice for this type of suppression over the family members by a typical Indian father.

Dattani's plays preoccupies with power. The anguish and pain of family life destructive, stultifying relationships and patterns of behaviour are embedded in the fabric of life are due to the influence of power. Our personality is the complex product of various roles that one has to play. While playing their culturally programmed roles as boss, father, husband brother, mother, mother-in-law the power of domination over others leads humiliation to revenge in assertion to eventual victimization. In exercising one's power over the family leads them to be the victims of their own machination. Not only the patriarchal power, the power of profession, the power of money, but also the power of love, the power of sex influences the mind to impose itself upon another, causes eventual victimizations. Humans will do anything in their power to get it. Such persecutors will become powerless at the end. Sometimes having been in powerless position, we may feel better by taking assuming power over others. The power of one mind to influence and impose itself upon another personal campaigns for control and domination over oneself, over others and over one's world.

Mahesh Dattani forces us to examine our own individual and collective consciousness. Thus, Mahesh Dattani holds a mirror to society, portraying reality as it was but at the same time moving through the causes and reason for a gradual positive change.

Dattani explores the difference between the male/female roles within the archetype of the family headed by a man and what happens when a woman takes over. Dattani brings in reference to three successive generations of the male line, and indicate the compulsion under which Hasmukh in *Where there's a will* behaves in the way he does, on him lies the follow up of patriarchy and its stereotypes to the future society, but change occurs in the end as Ajit wants to get out of the circle and make a life of his own rather than following the orders of his dominating father. The change in postcolonial society is very slow but the progress is on its way, people started to think different rather than blindly following the tradition without questioning the belief and values that are followed for years, westernization may be a reason for the change in getting out of the family circle and thinking out of the traditional circle or a family business and tend to move towards one's own dream.

Patriarchy is old and freedom is new, In the country parents feel like they own their children and wants them to act according to their views and wishes but world is running and every day is a new day, every day world looks new with new ideas and thoughts. Dattani's plays portrays the children as caged birds in the beginning and releases the caged bird at the end of the play.

The politics of alternative sexuality

Where there's a Will has been read and criticised on different levels. As Sita Raina observes that the play has several interesting aspects. Dattani, the playwright, described it as the exorcism of the patriarchal code. Women - be it daughter-in-law, wife or mistress - are dependent on men and this play shows what happens when they are pushed to the edge. The play, *Where There's a Will*, is also interpreted in regard to the passive instinct of the rich and the moneyed in the society. Some critics still view the play in terms of marital profligacy, and still a few opine that the play is about the chaos reigning in a family due to the emotional and temperamental incompatibility of the members. Some regard that the individuals have literally no alternative than living in forced harmony. Gauri Shankar Jha observes that there are feminine questions of identity and dilemma of feminine sensibility. Kiran the mistress of Hasmukh is the representative of women living in the post-colonial society. The play

appears to be rich and complex since it has different layers of meanings. When one looks only on the surface level it appears to be the play of a top businessman by name Hasmukh Mehta. When one dives in deep, the play appears to be rich and copious revealing its different interpretations.

Where there's a Will is a comedy with slight farcical touches. It is rooted in the Gujarati familial background in which Dattani has chronicled the follies and prejudices of Indian society as reflected within the microcosm of the family unit. It is the most substantial and dynamic reality in middle class Indian families, which makes a point about the way patriarchal men always behave egoistically. The plot of the play revolves around the life as well as after-life of a man named Hasmukh Mehta, who is a rich and successful businessman, and his family. He is a dissatisfied patriarch with the typical problems of familial expectations from his indifferent wife, Sonal and colourless married life; his spendthrift son Ajit, and a crafty and conniving daughter-in-law, Preeti; and last but not least his mistress Kiran Jhaveri. All the four believe their names. Hasmukh is not a smiling face and Sonal hardly shines. Ajit is not victorious, at least in his father's eyes and Preeti has no love for anybody in the family. They are living as a unit under the patriarchal order without any bond of love among them. Hasmukh is neither happy with his wife nor his son. He considers his marriage and the birth of his son as "tragedy after tragedy". He finds his son to be irresponsible and wastrel and Sonal obsessed with cooking and feeding, driving him crazy. What he expects is implicit obedience to him, as he practised it in his father's case. When things drift away, from his control, he thinks of a checkmate. He creates a trust and appoints his mistress Kiran Jhaveri its trustee.

One night, after a heavy squabble with the family, Hasmukh passes away. But his ghost lingers on to control his family from the other world! By the will his family will lead a frugal life until Ajit turns forty-five. As the Mehta family reconciles to their fate, Kiran walks in who has to stay and manage the family and the business. Kiran's presence disturbs the family, much to Hasmukh's delight, who had planned to teach his family a lesson and hopes they will learn how inadequate they were as wife, son and daughter-in-law. But Sonal and Kiran bond together and share their opinions on his conniving and devious nature. In his moment of recognition, he realizes his own shortfall, living in the shadow of his father. As he decides to leave them and find his place in heaven, Preeti's baby kicks in her womb which is suggestive of Hasmukh's getting a second chance at being with his family as his yet to be born grandson.

The preoccupation with gender and gender roles becomes apparent from this play. It is embedded within the mechanics of the middle-class Gujarati family. Dattani has often referred to the subversion of patriarchy in the play as one of his major concerns. Interweaving his story around the scheming and plotting of the family members who have been put in a fix by a dead man's will, Dattani explores the dichotomy between the men-female roles within the archetype of the family headed by a man and what happens when a woman takes over. Through the mechanism of the will, the patriarch assumes that he has finally won the battles that he fought when alive. As his ghost returns to watch with great pleasure, the discomfort of his family, however, is quite surprising. Dattani brings in references to three successive generations of the male line, and indicates the compulsions under which Hasmukh behaves in the way he does. He underestimates his son in the office before his colleagues, in the house before his wife and mother and the friends on line. Ironically, the tough person who is to run the office is to be a female. Here Dattani points out unfailingly that women deal with things very differently. Though Sonal is mostly mute before Hasmukh, she has brought up her son differently. Ajit refuses to be another extension of his father. He fought back.

Dattani focuses on the point that the real danger of the patriarchal code lies in denying an individual the opportunity for an independent growth. In the name of tradition, good manners and even duty, the son is expected to follow blindly whatever he is asked to do. This will deprive a man of his drive and initiative. Dattani calls the men who demand this kind of obedience as "weak men with false strength." He also condemns those who submit to this type of subjugation. Kiran recalls her own

drunkard father who abused her mother and beat her. She remarks that her brothers have turned out like their father. They too come home with bottles of rum and abuse and beat their wives. It was the ill fate of Kiran that the same has recoiled on her life. She also married a drunkard and listened to his swearing. Like her mother, she too has been suffering silently as if everything was right with her and that she was happy in that home.

Conclusion

Dattani's plays preoccupies with power. The anguish and pain of family life destructive, stultifying relationships and patterns of behaviour are embedded in the fabric of life are due to the influence of power. Our personality is the complex product of various roles that one has to play. While playing their culturally programmed roles as boss, father, husband brother, mother, mother-in-law the power of domination over others leads humiliation to revenge in assertion to eventual victimization. In exercising one's power over the family leads them to be the victims of their own machination. Not only the patriarchal power, the power of profession, the power of money, but also the power of love, the power of sex influences the mind to impose itself upon another, causes eventual victimizations. Humans will do anything in their power to get it. Such persecutors will become powerless at the end. Sometimes having been in powerless position, we may feel better by taking assuming power over others. The power of one mind to influence and impose itself upon another personal campaigns for control and domination over oneself, over others and over one's world. Mahesh Dattani forces us to examine our own individual and collective consciousness.

Mahesh Dattani holds a mirror to society, portraying reality as it was but at the same time moving through the causes and reason for a gradual positive change. Dattani explores the difference between the male/female roles within the archetype of the family headed by a man and what happens when a woman takes over. Dattani brings in reference to three successive generations of the male line, and indicate the compulsion under which Hasmukh in *Where there's a will* behaves in the way he does, on him lies the follow up of patriarchy and its stereotypes to the future society, but change occurs in the end as Ajit wants to get out of the circle and make a life of his own rather than following the orders of his dominating father. The change in postcolonial society is very slow but the progress is on its way, people started to think different rather than blindly following the tradition without questioning the belief and values that are followed for years, westernization may be a reason for the change in getting out of the family circle and thinking out of the traditional circle or a family business and tend to move towards one's own dream.

Patriarchy is old and freedom is new, In the country parents feel like they own their children and wants them to act according to their views and wishes but world is running and every day is a new day, every day world looks new with new ideas and thoughts. Dattani's plays portrays the children as caged birds in the beginning and releases the caged bird at the end of the play. *Where there's a will* has a moral ending to the play to tell the patriarchal society how it feels to be the watcher of one's own actions after their death. And losing the control over the family to a woman is also a better way of proving things to the age-old traditional society which needs some updating. These type of images in the play can bring awareness to the society and introduce a change into it. It may not be a mass impact giver but eventually this model will come up in the society as people are already in the lookout for change in behaviours through the impact from western countries. People cannot change all of a sudden but society implies every individual, so change in an individual may become the change in the society. Ajit is a revolutionary character, who teach the people to know the value of independence and having once own vision and to get out of the domestic dominance.

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