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Patriarchy and traces of feminism in Mahesh Dattani's *Where There's a Will*: A holistic analysis

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani is known as a writer, actor, director and a theatre professional. His works are well known in the social domain for dealing with social and familial issues. He has used Indian mythology, rituals and traditions along with social issues to present the real and impartial portrayal of Indian society and families. In *Where There's a Will* (1988) Dattani takes universal issues that cover societies of the whole world. Dattani says more in less word. Through this short and concise drama he raises the universal problem of patriarchy and suffering of women in particular. Through Indian society and Indian family of Hasmukh Mehta, Dattani takes hold of attention of the readers towards the whole world where women suffer silently in the hand of authoritative patriarchal system. The play is set against the patriarchy and makes an urge of freedom, equality, liberty and independence for women in male dominating societies. Therefore it supports feminism, a movement of women for demand of equality and rights same as those of men enjoy in the families as well as in the societies. So, Dattani calls the play; "exorcism of the patriarchal code".

Keywords- Patriarchy, Equality, Domination, Idiosyncrasies, Existence

The drama can be subtitled as an Indian Family drama or a Domestic play. Its chief concerns are patriarchal system of Indian society and women subjugation to patriarchal force and an urge for liberty from controlling power of men. This patriarchy leads to control the lives of women in a family and the system enters into the society through mental make-up of men. Men assume themselves as controllers of everything, makers of all, and masters of will, desires, interests and liberty of women. Usually in Indian families, in childhood both the male and female Children play with each other as brother and sisters and enjoy same love and affection from their parents but when they grow older their parents and teachers teach them 'who they are?'; who is male (powerful) and who is female (submissive to powerful). The play at one side depicts the form of patriarchy and at another side demonstrates the strong women personalities who can take decisions, as the men, against the wish and will of their masters and patriarchal system. This courage against the patriarchal norms gives birth to the

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present form of feminism, where women demand equal rights for themselves in the families as well as in the society. In the play, too, women who were once suppressed by male power come to play crucial roles in demanding their own rights in the property of Hanshmukh Mehta, with more boldness and courage. Kiran Jhaveri, mistress of Hanshmukh and caretaker of his property and will, suffers throughout her life. Jhaveri's father was a drunkard and after drinking he had used to beaten her mother daily at evening. Kiran was witness of her father's violence at her mother and seldom upon herself and her younger brothers and sisters. Kiran's husband was also a drunkard and he also practiced violence against her. She wants money for her livelihood and domestic amenities, therefore she accepted to be Hanshmukh's mistress. Hanshmukh was a dominating husband and father. He did not like his wife, Sonal and his daughter in law, Preeti. He wants his son, Ajit to be a husband like him (Hanshmukh) and must follow Hanshmukh's footprint in the business to be a successful businessman like Hanshmukh himself and must comply with his orders and ideas. Hanshmukh wants to control the lives of every member in his family and far long he becomes successful to practice his will and patriarchal idiosyncrasies in the family. But when his wife and son did not comply with his wishes, he feels himself humiliated and in frustration he came to meet Kiran and became close to her and enjoy himself in her company. With the passage of time they become closed to each other and thus Kiran becomes his loyal friend and mistress because she complies with his wishes and ideas. Hanshmukh's dominating personality and hidden patriarchal force comes to disclose in these lines;

why am I unhappy? Because I don't have son. Who is Ajit?... He does not behave like my son...I make my father happy. I listen to him. I did what he told me to do. I worked for him. I worked hard for him. I made him happy. That is what I wanted my son to make me...But he failed! Why do I have a mistress? Because I am unhappy...
(MD 36)

Ajit wants to live his own life, in his own ways. He does not follow Hanshmukh's teachings of to be a successful and rich businessman. Hanshmukh obliged to his father's commands and has inherited his father's traits of dominant personality. He has an instinct to control the lives of other in accordance with himself and his own wishes and interests. But Ajit also has an instinct to go against the wishes and orders of his father. Ajit's statements disclose his personality; "I mean that you want to run the show, play Big Boss as long as you can...And can do it through me. In short, you want me to be you...And what become of me? The real me. If I am you, then where am i?"(MD13)

Ajit's statements are not only his rebel against dominating and controlling powers of patriarchal system but also an urge for existential identity of his own personality. He wants to see himself as a distinguished person that exists in this world. He wants his own individual existence of his personality.

Hanshmukh Mehta is a patriarchal figure, therefore, he controls all the issues related to the family and his decisions are binding over all the members of the family. His son, Ajit does not like this practice and goes against his father's wishes. Father and son go against each

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other and it leads to clash between two patriarchal figures. In this duel Hanshmukh always wins but Ajit never surrenders himself to Hanshmukh. Hanshmukh forms rules for Ajit that he has to follow in his office that; Ajit will go to office regularly, no mobile phone, eat the tiffin at lunch and no entertainment in the office. But Ajit wants to establish his own company, At &T. Hasmukh was against Ajit's decisions and therefore Hasmikh was not polite towards Ajit and this leads to scuffle between these two frequently. Hasmukh fails to understand capability of his son, Ajit. He assumes Ajit as an immature child and stubborn who is valueless like zero; "...you are nothing. Just a big zero. No matter what you do, you will remain zero. Over the years, you'll just keep adding zeroes to your zero. Zero, zero, zero...the zeroes don't mean a thing.'"(MD13).

Hasmukh says that his wife, Sonal is fond of cooking and a caring wife but he has never enjoyed marital sex with his wife because Sonal does not take interest in sex and therefore Hasmukh enjoys intimate relationship with Kiran Jhaveri and makes her mistress. Hasmukh says;

Ditto our sex life. Mud .twenty five years of marriage and I do not think she (Sonal) has ever enjoyed sex. Twenty five years of marriage and I have not enjoyed sex with her. So what a man do?...I started eating out .Well, I had the money...A mistress. An unmarried lady...A shrewed hard headed marketing executive. If there was any in my office who had brain to match mine, it was her.'(MD33)

Though, Hasmukh, in his lifetime when he was alive, failed to teach a lesson of patriarchal code to his family members, he does not lose his confidence after his death. They would not be able to get a single coin from Hasmukh's property. It is Kiran Jhaveri who is trustee and caretaker of the will and the property along with supervisor and boss of Ajit in the office as well as at home. He prepares a will of property consisting a number of rules and principles which must be members followed by his family otherwise.

Hasmukh chooses Kiran as a trustee of his will because in his view Kiran is a clever as well as a wise women and she is capable of keeping a check on Hasmukhs daughter in law Preeti who is sly as a snake and cunning. In spite of all these qualities Kiran possesses a brain which matches with that of Hasmukh. She thinks like that of Hasmukh. Hasmukh transfers his role of patriarchal figure to Kiran after his death because Hasmukh wants to control the lives of his son wife and daughter in law according to his own wishes. Hasmukh is aware of his thing that all that members of his family wants share in his property. It becomes an opportunity for Hasmukh to teach a lesson of patriarchy to his family members after his death he rules over his family in the name of Kiran Jhaveri. Hasmukh's ghost keeps an eye on everyone and makes comments on the member's activities. Here comes a turning point in the drama after the death of Hasmukh Metha. Now Kiran Jhaveri, a woman becomes a patriarchal figure. She also controls and manipulates the lives and course of actions of the family members. Though she is a lady she behaves like a man a patriarchal figure with help of this function If Kiran Jhaveri it seems that patriarchal system is not only male centred concept but it also involves female. Patriarchy is a system where male and female participate

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and accept. A female also can play the role of father figure as Kiran Jhaveri plays for Ajit after the death of Hasmukhs wife Sonal is controlled by her sister Minal. Minal is a father figure and a patriarchal figure who controls Sonal and Sonal accepts to live under sister commands. Patriarchal system comes to function when targeted subjects accept it. Hasmukhs dominating nature functions because his wife Sonal, his daughter in law Preeti and his mistress Kiran Jhaveri accept to live under the feet and shadow of Hasmukh. Though these ladies suffer under Hasmukhs commands they wait for his death and that auspicious day when they will get their shares in Hasmukhs property, so family and society accept patriarchy because at somehow it provides security not only to female but also to male. Kiran Jhaveri is like Hasmukh in her views and behaviour because as a woman she has suffered in the male dominated family and society. She hates the male race. She has suffered atrocities of her father and of her husband. In the hand of Hasmukh she gets opportunities to take revenge from the male race. Hasmukh gives her power and authority to control the lives of Ajit. Kiran performs her duty honestly. Kiran comes to Hasmukh's house and lives with Ajit, Sonal and Preeti. Kiran says;

I am only the trustee of all his wealth. Not the owner. Everything rightfully belongs to the three of you. Provided you follow his instructions... My main duty is to run the reliable group of industries on behalf of Ajit Mehta. My duty also extends to training Ajit Mehta and eventually delegating most of my responsibilities to him in phases (MD 66,67,68) As the trustee of the Hasmukh Mehta Charitable Trust. I have the right to make a statement declaring since the recipient of the trust namely you all are not complying with the rules set down by the deceased the holdings of the trust will be divided between certain charitable institutions recommended by the founder. Which will mean that you won't ever get to see even a single rupee. (MD69).

Kiran was playing the role of patriarchal order not only for Ajit but also for Hasmukh was controlled to live under the shadow of father figure. Hasmukh was more a puppet in the hand of Kiran Jhaveri. Kiran was central figure as well as father figure in the life of Hasmukh. Every decision was made by her. Kiran says; "He depends upon me everything. He thought he was the decision maker. But I was. He wanted me to run his life. Like his father had. Hasmukh didn't ready want a mistress. He wanted a father. He saw in me a woman who would father him men never really grow up" (MD 94).

Now we find that patriarchy that was mainly governed by male come to function over the patriarchal code. Women get strength to go against rules and norms made by men. Women get liberty and independence in family and society because men have come to realize their weakness in showing off false strength through the wrong norms and rules made for women. Women have demanding equal rights in family and society since they have become aware of their power and strength and weakness of the men. It is feminist movements that have raised the voice of female for equality. Feminism is the consequence of awareness of women of their strength and equal participation in family and society. Therefore they must have equal rights to the male. If a male can control the lives of a woman, a woman can too,

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can control the lives of men like Kiran Jhaveri. A woman can control the lives of a woman too, like Minal. So, it is the feminism that has extended the narrow views of family and society and has changed the ways of thinking. At initial level Kiran was harsh towards Ajit but later she comes to realise that Ajit was not like his father. Ajit is humble and polite towards women. He is not authoritative and of dominant nature like his father. He has courage go against his father's bad wishes therefore Kiran realises that she should be generous and polite towards Hasmukh's family. Because Hasmukh had already caused to suffer more to his family when he was alive and after his death he has made strict rules for the family to suffer. Kiran comes to conclusion that she will be friendliness towards Hasmukh's family because she wants to end the game of sufferings in the hand of the patriarchal system. She has experiences of her past life when she has suffered badly in the hand of her father, brother and her husband;

I learnt my lesson the same way as you did...through life. I learnt my lesson from watching my mother tolerating my father when he came home every day with bottles of rum wrapped up in newspapers. As I watched him beating her up and calling her names! My brothers. They have turned out to be like their father, going home with bottles of rum wrapped in newspapers. Beating up their wives. And I too am like my mother. I married a drunkard and I listen to his swearing. And I too have learnt to suffer silently. Oh! Where will all this end? (MD 91)

Kiran, Sonal, Preeti, Hasmukh and Ajit each one is controlled by someone and the condition of each one is similar. If male has courage to against the patriarchal orders, why not a female? Kiran comes to realise this fact and decides to end the sufferings in the hand of the patriarchal code. She comes to know that Praati has murdered Hasmukh, Kiran does not tell it to anyone and keeps it secret and allows Hasmukh to suffer silently and he has been entrapped into his own tricks .Thus in the end feminism gets victory over patriarchy. Therefore we must support feminism and has to change the ways of thinking about women.

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