
REVELATION OF PATRIARCHAL CODE IN MAHESH DATTANI'S WHERE THERE IS A WILL

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Abstract : *Patriarchy in social structure means male domination but it doesn't mean that all men are powerful or all women are powerless. Where There's a Will by Mahesh Dattani is a drawing room comedy of a rich businessman, who tries to control his family even after his death through his 'will'. The play is a satire on the water tight patriarchal code.*

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Patriarchy is a social system in which the male is the primary authority figure. In a family it is a rule by the father. The father holds authority over women and children. Thus, patriarchy does not refer to simply a binary pattern of male power over women, but power exerted more complexly by age as well as gender, and by older men over women, children and younger men. Some of these younger men may inherit and therefore have a stake in patriarchy's continuing conventions, while some others may rebel. The operations of power in patriarchy are usually enacted unconsciously. It is represented in unspoken traditions and conventions performed in everyday behaviour, customs and habits.

Patriarchy in social structure means male domination but it doesn't mean that all men are powerful or all women are powerless - only that the most powerful roles in most sectors of society are held predominantly by men and the least powerful roles are held predominantly by women. Women experience discrimination and unequal treatment in terms of basic right to food, health care, education, employment, decision-making and livelihood not because of their biological differences or sex, which is natural, but because of their gender differences which is a social construct. Gender based discriminations and exploitations are widespread and the socio-culturally defined characteristics, aptitudes, abilities, desires, personality traits, roles, responsibilities and behavioural patterns of men and women contribute to the inequalities and hierarchies in society. Gender differences are manmade and they get legitimized in a patriarchal society.

Where There's a Will is one of the four earliest plays of Mahesh Dattani. The play is a drawing room comedy of a rich businessman, who tries to control his family even after his death through his 'will'. The play is really 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 is a satire on the water tight patriarchal code.

Hasmukh Mehta is a doyen businessman and staunch follower of the patriarchal system. Including him there are four members in his family. Sonal is his wife and Ajit and Preeti are his son and daughter-in-law respectively. Hasmukh strictly followed steps of his father in his life. He wants his own son Ajit to follow his footsteps in real life. He exercises the patriarchal authority over all the members of his family. He believes in 'absolute power'. Hasmukh Mehta is the autocratic head and demands unquestionable obedience from his family members. Hasmukh is a self-made man. He is a forty-five-year-old man. He is described as Garment Tycoon. He criticizes his son Ajit's ways. He observes categorically in the play; "...am one of the richest men in this city. All by my own efforts. Forty-five years old and I am a success in capital letters. Twenty-three years old and he is on the road to failure, in bold capital letters..." (CP: 464). According to Hasmukh, his son Ajit is wasting money and is on his way to bankruptcy. Hasmukh Mehta is projected as very autocratic father. He controls and checks every movement of his son. He wants his son not as partner or owner of his property, but he wants his own son as a slave. Hasmukh Mehta has overpowered identity of his son, Ajit, by exercising absolute control over his home and business affairs. Hasmukh's wife Sonal is quite subservient and subordinate to her husband. Hasmukh criticises his wife by calling her dry and good for nothing. He calls her mud. She has no choice of her own. She has learnt how to execute her husband's instructions and orders in toto. In this sense, Hasmukh is anti-thesis to her. The play depicts how women are subjugated and suppressed by their male counterparts in patriarchal social set up.

Even after his death, Hasmukh Mehta governs the life of his family members through his will and his mistress, Kiran Jhaveri, about her the family members come to know only after the death of Hasmukh Mehta. Soon after his demise, the will was read. It sets forth avenues of varied reaction and revelations, charges and counters charges, surprises and shocks, protestation and acceptance. There is an air of turmoil and upheavals in the family of Hasmukh Mehta caused by his 'will'. It is soon, clear among them that authorization patriarch and garment tycoon will continue to dictate their lives through the terms and conditions inset in 'will'. The will can be viewed as whip and mistress can be viewed as the agent. The 'will' was very complicated and detailed one. As per Hasmukh's instruction, the lawyer summoned them exactly a one week after his death to read out the 'will'. As per the 'will', none of the three Mehta family members has any legal right over the property of Hasmukh Mehta including their present living room. Hasmukh has formed a charitable trust named Hasmukh Mehta Charitable Trust. He has donated all his 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 six p.m. in the evening. No new business project of Ajit will be sanctioned. To Hasmukh, Ajit is not competent enough to run his business. He lacks the nitty-gritty of the business world. 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 further more by making Kiran Jhaveri, as the trustee of the trust. Kiran Jhaveri is a mistress of Hasmukh and is a very shrewd and hard-headed marketing executive. She lives in company flat in posh locality. According to

Hasmukh Mehta she is the only person who possesses the guts, the shrewdness and proper spirit to reign supreme in his industry, who is also quite commanding and courting as well as daring and diplomatic lady. Has Mukh has taken meticulous care and every precautionary step to avoid any challenge to the validity of his will.

After sometime, Mrs. Kiran Jhaveri comes to Has Mukh's house to stay with his family members. So, the family is surprised, rather socked. They don't want to let her stay with them. However, they decide to keep her with them after becoming aware of the instructions provided by Has Mukh in his 'will'. Preeti asks her what if they don't keep her with them: Preeti: What if we refuse to let you stay with us? Kiran: (Studies Preeti) As the trustee of the Has Mukh Mehta charitable Trust, I have the right to make a statement declaring that since the recipients 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 earned by your father in-law. Now will you refuse to let me stay here? Preeti: Welcome home (CP: 494)

Preeti is quite scheming and selfish lady. All the three embers of the Mehta family have to learn new lessons every day under the Madam Jhavari. She is teaching them at home and office. At home, she is guiding and instructing Sonal and Preeti, whereas she is taking hard task from Ajit at the office. Now, they realize the very complexity and toughness of the situation. Has Mukh ruled his family when he was alive. After his death, he tried to control his family from his grave through his will. Kiran puts: "Has Mukh was intoxicated with his power. He thought he was invincible. That he could rule from his grave by making this will. (CP: 508) Actually, Has Mukh didn't trust any of his family members. He reserves his doubts about their ways and intentions. He trusted completely in Kiran Jhaveri, who was working as an executive in his office and has won his confidence.

It seems that initially Has Mukh Mehta succeeds in his intentions. Gradually, he realizes that his desire to control over the lives all those associated to him after his death is collapsing slowly. He has appointed Kiran to set his family order and check them leading lives in their own fancies. Moreover, Kiran makes certain revelations about his personality. Kiran tells Sonal, "He depended on me for everything. He thought he was the decision maker. But I was. He wanted me to run his life. Like his father had. (Pause) Has Mukh didn't really want a mistress. He wanted a father. He saw in me a woman who would father him! (Laughs. Has Mukh cringes at her laughter.) Men never really grow up!" (CP: 510) She added that she felt pity for his attempts at ruling over his family after his death, through his will. His desire of ruling over the family results from the fact that his family was ruled over by his father. He was just a good boy to his father throughout his life. That's why he couldn't tolerate Ajit objecting to him. He wants Ajit to him as he was to his father. His life was overshadowed by his father's and wants Ajit's to be overshadowed by his life.

Sonal Mehta is the most tragic-comic character in the play. She lacks self- confidence and discreet. She is a parasitic creature in the play. Her life is dominated by others. In the play, she constantly depends on her sister Minal in every matter of her life. Her character

lends a humorous touch to the play. Tragedy of her life is that most characters in the play blame her in one or another way. After the arrival of Kiran in her house, her condition becomes more pathetic and now she depends upon the mistress of her husband. However, she found a good friend in her soon. Sonal has learnt so many new lessons and also things about her husband through Kiran. Therefore, she tells Kiran "How little I knew him. If I had understood him when he was alive, I would have died laughing." (CP: 510) Thus, a sea change occurs in her nature and thinking at the end. Her attitude towards her sister and other members of the family is totally changed.

The introduction of the ghost element is a very humorous and interesting one. The most amazing thing is that the ghost of Hasmukh Mehta watches his own actions after his death. So, the play has two Hasmukhs-the dead and the alive. In *Where There's a Will*, Hasmukh Mehta has control over his family through his money and forgoes an opportunity to improve his interpersonal relationship. Consequently, when he became the watcher of his actions, he perceives that his desire for control has led him to be the victim of his own machinations unlike Kiran who uses power play to essentially improve her relationships. The ghost of Hasmukh witnesses that he has been dismissed as a shadow of his father, a man to be pitied on, a man without his own dreams and desire, vision etc.

Where There is a Will is a comic caricature of patriarchal authority. The first part of *Where There is a Will* is the assertion of patriarchy and the second part is the mockery of patriarchy and second part of second act is the collapse of patriarchy. The play focuses on emptiness and uselessness of strict adherence to the patriarchal code.

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