

PATRIARCHY IN MAHESH DATTANI'S *PLAYWHERE THERE'S A WILL*

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Abstract

Women have been victimized and marginalized since ages. They have been always treated as second citizen at the familial, social and political spheres of the society. The present paper tries to investigate how injustice is imposed upon them in the light of feminist approach. Women's identity and selfhood are being questioned in the wake of patriarchy even after Indian independence. Though Indian constitution offers equality, fraternity and justice to every fellow countryman but it is the patriarchy, social customs, and social creeds that encroach their self-identity in every field of their lives.

Keywords: Patriarchy, individualism, identity, selfhood, marginalization, feminism

Introduction: The concept of patriarchy is widely debated along with the struggle of women all over the world. It encompasses the structure of domination and exploitation by men, which affects women's status in the society. Therefore, the feminists analyzed and interpreted the concept of patriarchy and underlined the principles of women's oppression. The term patriarchy essentially means the rule of the father or the patriarch, a male member of the household. It implies a system in which the father or a male member is considered as the head of the family. He controls all the economic and property resources, and makes all the major decisions of the family. This restraint by the male authority indicates physical and psychological dominance in the family. Carole Pateman, one of the significant feminists, opines 'the patriarchal construction of difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection' (Pateman 27).

In the existing patriarchal system women's humiliation, suppression and oppression begin in her childhood, moves to its highest point in her youth and ends only with her death. In the male dominated society unquestionable obedience is expected from women. Women are made quite submissive and obedient to their husband in domestic sphere. Under the mechanism of patriarchy women have been taught only to learn obey the instructions and orders from the male 'authority'. Women are victimized throughout the generations; they have no space of their

own in the family (Woolf 40). In *Where There's a Will* (1986) there are three women characters who are victims of patriarchal code. This play exposes the norms of patriarchal authority in the society. In the play, Hasmukh Mehta is a business tycoon in town and wants control over his property as well as on his family members. He expects his own son should follow his instructions and never gives the freedom which his son Ajit expects. Hasmukh denies an individuality of the 'self' and treats his family members as slave. His wife Sonal is also a victim of patriarchal code and conducts. She suffers throughout her life but doesn't get justice from the tyrannical husband. The statement made by Hasmukh Mehta shows his attitude towards his wife Sonal.

Hasmukh: Do you know what Sonal Means? No? 'Gold.' When we were newly married, I used to joke with her and say she was as good as gold. But that was when we were newly married. I soon found out what a good-for-nothing she was. As good as mud (Dattani, CP WTW 472-73).

He looks at his wife Sonal as a disinterested women and regrets of marrying her. He compares his wife with mud that has no value in human life. Dattani presents common psychology of men that considers their wife as 'good for nothing' and give a little importance to them in their lives. Sonal spent several years with her husband as a loyal wife but she never get a reward of honour. Dattani mocks at the human tendency which does not understand the feeling and emotions of their life time companion. Hasmukh never exposed his hostile feeling towards his wife till he gets a mistress. Dattani highlights the human nature to find out the partner outside the home seeking the comfort in relationships. Hasmukh admits his guilt of marrying Sonal and considers it as a tragedy of his life. He opines

Hsasmukh: Then when I was twenty-one, the greatest tragedy of my life took place. I got married to my wife Sonal. You will soon meet her, the following year Ajit was born. Tragedy after tragedy (Dattani, CP WTW 464).

Sonal is a subservient wife and compelled to obey her husband. She doesn't have her opinion in her life, even in kitchen she doesn't have freedom of cooking the dishes she likes. This fact reveals the innocence and trapped condition of women in the contemporary patriarchal society.

Patriarchy allows men to have several wives. Through this play Dattani attacks the question loyalty of husbands in respect to their wives. Hasmukh Mehta doesn't remain faithful to his wife Sonal and keeps an affair with his secretary, Kiran Jhaveri. Even in his 'will' he doesn't make any financial arrangement for his wife except some allowances. Being a mistress Kiran has a complete access to his property through his 'will.' He made the special provisions for his mistress in his will. He wanted his wife Sonal should suffer from the inferiority complex that how she was inadequate as a wife. This tendency of Hasmukh shows that men always considers women as a non-entity in household and behaves with them according to their wishes. Sonal admits:

Sonal:I know why! This is his way of setting even with me! Your [Kiran's] presence will keep reminding me how... inadequate I was (Dattani 464).

Semone De Beauvoir put forth her main argument in her *The Second Sex* (1949) that women always have been thought of as object for men. They have been relegated the secondary position and denied the individuality and responsibility. Women have been shaped in such a way that "women found it easier to balance the claim of womanhood with their concern" (Geetha 7). In the present play *Where There's Will* Sonal submits her self-identity in the realm of patriarchy and judge her husband as superior to her. She is naturalized to behave in a certain manner in the male centered surrounding. Dominant cultural norms, social codes and conducts make women submissive to every situation. Oppressive cultural practices subordinate women to a great extent. Women have been forced to absorb the things and thoughts men impose on them and try to live according to the prescribed norms.

Religions and mythical stories shape the identity of women. Women have been treated as an inferior creature since the origin of religion. In Indian culture woman is worshipped as mother Goddess, Christianity also maintains mother Goddess Mary as a Holy mother. The followers of these religions organize prayers and sermons to get blessed by mother Goddesses. Therefore, worshipping women as mother and also devaluing them to vulnerable condition is a contradiction we come across in terms of religious faith. V Geretha asserts: "women's identity is displayed into the female sex and made to appear natural to it" (Geetha 7). Women realize these facts but makes themselves believe that they are happy in the male slavery. Often the chains of

woman's slavery first get its shape in their own home that may be their parental home or in-laws' home. Their roles determine their identity as mother, housewife etc. they have been nurtured in a way to assume their homely duties.

The present play *Where There's a Will*(1986) portrays the trapped position of women at work place. The female character of Kiran exposes this fact. Kiran is forced to keep an affair with Hasmukh out of her necessity as her husband is jobless and alcoholic. Dattani portrays the victimized position of women even at the work places. The exploitation and harassments are the common tools used by the superior to subordinate women. Dattani portrays the two different and contrast female characters in the society. Kiran has to manage her household on her own whereas Sonal represents the women that depends on her husband for every means. Dattani criticizes the double standards of culture which allows one woman to go outside for earning and second one to remain at home as a part of cultural dignity.

Patriarchy affects the process of socialization which plays a pivotal role in the oppression and suppression of women. Women are made to internalize the negative image by the socialization they come across and the result of social requirement, a woman comes to believe that she is not important in this surrounding. She feels unworthy, frustrated and undeserved. Her life is almost entirely defined by the interpersonal, domestic and physical relationships. Her identity remains dependent on 'other' instead of 'herself.' The identification of 'self' in response to 'other' leads her to loss her own autonomy. She is forced to exist in relation to others. Patriarchal society pushes woman to lead a dependent life and this imposed dependency works as a catalyst in the oppression of woman. Such dependency is visible in Sonal. Her dependency results to a mental torture and results in a lack of self-revelation and respect. Finally, she loses her self-esteem and lives a lifeless life.

The play *Where There's a Will*(1986) uncovers the fact that there is no significant improvement in the condition of women still in the modern era. It strongly believes that empowerment of women can be done by providing proper education and awareness about women's empowerment. This play underlines the educational and economic empowerment has failed to improve the status of women's lives in the society. It is exposed by the conversation between Kiran and Sonal. Kiran is well educated and employed but she learned lesson of life from being so close to her life. She narrates her bitter experiences of life as:

Kiran: ...I learned lessons from being so close to life. I learnt my lessons from watching my mother tolerating my father when he come home every day with bottles of rum wrapped in the newspaper...as I watched him beating her up...learnt what life was when my mother pretended she was happy in front of me and my brothers, so that we wouldn't hate my father...(Dattani CP WTW 508).

Kiran reveals the unbearable condition of women and it represents the current scenario of women day-to-day life. Her harsh experiences of life are the experiences of women in the society. Dattani depicts the real-life incidents of domestic life with a drunkard father or husband.

In patriarchal system 'family' is the most primary and important sphere in which most women have to live their lives. It is the most important institution in the society. But in the contemporary world it has become a most oppressive institution for women. We come across to numerous news related to the domestic violence against women like murder, dowry death, honour killing, forced abortion, physical, mental, financial and sexual abuse. These are the forms of violence employed against women in domestic sphere. All kinds of violence against women stem from power relations between men and women. Violence against women is used as a tool to control women's autonomy and is perpetuated by gender norms that mediate expectations regarding the gender roles.

However, this play depicts the deep concerns for gendered subaltern. Sonal and Kiran the female character represents the woman who suffers throughout their life. Both became the victims of psychological and mental abuse. The playwright reflects on the gender roles and women's miserable conditions in the modern era. Women have to live a long violent life till their end. Kiran narrates it as, "How repetitive life is? My brothers...beating up their wives...oh! Where will all this end? **Will the scars our parents lay on us remain forever**" (Dattani 508)?

Women look at marriage as a new phase of their life. **They leave their parents' home with a hesitant mind that whether they could adjust in the new surrounding or not.** This thought compels them to live a passive life. **They are forced to bear every torture of their husbands and in-laws.** Cultural laws instruct women to suppose husband home as a final destination to them. Kiran relates the everyday experiences of women in the society where women are beaten up and

humiliated on a minor issue. She is the soul witness of her father's violence against her mother in her childhood. When she becomes a young, she witnesses the tortures of her brothers against their wives. The play reveals that the violence against women in the family is the major place of repression for married women. The playwright very carefully explores the condition of women through the female character and underlines its seriousness.

Since Mahesh Dattani is a spokesperson of the marginalized people he dealt with the tabooed subjects and themes like women's position in the society. His play *Dance Like a Man* (1987) focuses on the dancing art which is profession of women in the patriarchal point of view. Through this play Dattani points out the traditional concept and prejudices of patriarchal society regarding 'Dance'. Traditional social concept considers dance a profession of women and that can be only chosen by women. If someone from male community comes forward to choose it as a profession he has to undergo with a severe torture as Jairaj has suffered from it. Amritlal Parekh, Jairaj's father allows Ratna, his daughter-in-law to dance just because she is a woman and at the same time, he restricts his own son Jairaj from dancing. His play *Tara* (1990) talks about how Indian society deals with girl children, women in general including those who are differently abled. Mahesh Dattani is a sensitive writer who writes about patriarchy, gender bias, social discrimination of the girl child, etc. such themes can be seen in the plays *Where There's a Will* (1986), *Dance Like a Man* (1989), *Tara* (1990), *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991) etc.

To sum up, as regards to the male dominance the play *Where There's a Will* (1986) reflects on the male intricacies of patriarchal code where women are destined to be in peripheral position. Mahesh Dattani presents the socio-cultural background of urban middle class family in its entire dimension through *Where There's a Will* (1986). The patriarchal system rules the family structure. Dattani put forth the question of self-realization, identity and survival particularly for women. He attacks holds and vices of patriarchal society which marginalize women. He also raises the question against the dominant social ideology which forces women to be dependent on men. Thus, Dattani brings out power play in the gender structure in the Indian society. The characters Kiran Jhaveri and Sonal suffer on account of their no fault. They face the problems of identity and patriarchy. One can see the shades of gender bias and patriarchy affecting women characters. The play *Where There's a Will* (1986) reveals us that women are still victimized in patriarchal set up and patriarchy works in every section of society where women

have to live as a second-class citizen in their own home, society, country and ultimately in the world.

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