



# **BODHI** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN HUMANITIES, ARTS AND SCIENCE



An Online Peer Reviewed, Refereed and Quarterly Journal

**Vol – 1 No – 2 January 2017 ISSN: 2456-5571**

[www.bodhijournals.com](http://www.bodhijournals.com)

## BREACH OF RELATIONSHIPS IN MAHESH DATTANI'S "WHERE THERE'S A WILL"

**C. Tharini**

*Head i/c, Department of Communicative English,  
N.M.S.S. Vellaichamy Nadar College, Madurai*

**Dr. P. Padmini**

*Associate Professor, Department of English  
Ethiraj College, Chennai*

Drama is the literary representation of human sensibility beyond the limitation of time and space. The theatre represents human life on the stage with all its facets and dimensions as well as complexities. Thus the playwright, the actor and the stage manager has to coordinate the dialogue, plot, metaphoric construction, psyche of the characters and audience, paraphernalia and stage craft

The twentieth century India witnessed a literary boom with the advent of playwrights like Bijan Bhattacharya, Utpal Dutt, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, Manoj Mitra and Girish Karnad. Moreover very recently Indian English drama has shot into prominence with the contribution of young writers like Manjula Padmanabhan and Mahesh Dattani, both focusing on the ugly and unhappy things of life and the distorted world that we live in. Mahesh Dattani, Indian director, actor and playwright has written around 9 plays, through which he voices out the problems of the marginalized in India. He is the first playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award. The plays of Mahesh Dattani emerged as 'fresh arrival' in the domain of Indian English Drama in the last decade of the twentieth century. In many of his plays he deals with various issues like homosexuality, gender discrimination, communalism sexual abuse and identity crisis. His characters speak the kind of English that most middle class Indians do. Dattani's stage techniques are aimed at making the audience intimate with the life of the family portrayed, its trials and debilitating secrets

*Where There is 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 special 'will'. The play is very humorous at the same time it is very

introspective and thought provoking. The play was first performed by Playpen at Bangalore as part of the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival. The dramatist mainly reflects on the issues of gender discrimination and evils of patriarchy along with a host of other issues like interpersonal relationship within family, evils of capitalism in the post colonial purview etc. Dattani describes the play as the exorcism of patriarchal code.

*Where There is a Will* deals with the mechanics of middle class Gujarati family. The narrative of the play takes place in the lavish house of Hasmukh Mehta, a doyen businessman. The actions take place in the fancy dining cum living room or in the threbed room of Hasmukh and Sonal or in the trendy bedroom of their son Ajith and his wife Preeti. In *Where There is a Will* the protagonist has control over his family through his money and forges an opportunity to improve his interpersonal relationship. (Raina 451)

Hasmukh Mehta tries to dictate his son's life through his will after his death. He is dissatisfied with Ajit since he does not obey his father implicitly. Though Hasmukh makes Ajit as the joint director of his companies, he does not allow him to have any rights in policy making. Hasmukh fails to dominate Ajit while he is alive so he tries to subdue not only his son Ajit but his wife Sonal and his daughter-in-law Preeti through his 'will'. In his will he writes his properties to a trust that he had created and denies his son Ajit the ownership of the company till he becomes forty five years old. As the play proceeds, Hasmukh's ghost watches all the happenings in his house and company with triumph and finally realizes the folly of his desire.

The play apart from patriarchal theme, deals with the fractures interpersonal relationship among the

members of Hasmukh's family- that's between the father and the son, husband and the wife, mother in law and daughter in law, father in law and daughter in law and finally in the extramarital affair.

Hasmukh is described as an archetypal picture of an overbearing father and a domineering husband. He is unhappy with everyone around him and makes other's life too miserable. He often feels that no one has lived up to his expectation like he has fulfilled his father's. Hasmukh Mehta is the boss at his familial world and also in the business world. As an autocrat head he demands unquestionable obedience from his family members. His wife Sonal is quiet subservient and subordinate to him. Hasmukh often laments as. "When I was twenty one, the greatest tragedy of my life took place. I got married to my wife Sonal" (646). He never cherished his marriage to Sonal. He never respected her feelings too.

Sonal is introduced as someone who keeps 'cooking food like it's a new invention'. Hasmukh does not bother about Sonal care in feeding the family with good food, instead he charges of wasting so much of ghee, oil and rich food. He keeps criticizing every act of hers. When she makes special effort to make salad for him and orange flavors halwa for Ajit, Hasmukh scolds and insults her. "make her eat the salad"(CP467). Sonal really cares for her husband who is not only diabetic but has also got high blood pressure and kidney problem. She raises alarm when he smokes and tries to go for a walk to digest the halwa he ate. But this caring attitude irritates Hasmukh. When she wants to make parathas so that the family can have a complete meal, he loses his patience and yells at her, "stop irritating me and sit down" (470). As a husband he could never understand his wife. And as a wife Sonal could never understand the needs and priorities of her husband. Both of them try to fit in the other in their mould.

Sonal means 'gold' and she was as good as gold to him when they were newly married. But as days go by Hasmukh remarks, "I soon found out what a good for nothing she was. As good as mud". Hasmukh Mehta has neither love nor respect for his wife Sonal. He blames her for his failed sexual relationship too and finally he ends up having a mistress, who according to him, has got beauty and brains. He even justifies his act by questioning, "What is wrong with having a bit on the side? Especially since the main course is always without

salt?" (473) Sonal is so ignorant that she does not know about his lusty longings and his night life in the fashionable hotels.

Hasmukh means 'a smiling face'. But throughout the play he neither smiles nor looks happy at any point of the play. Sonal longs for a gentle reply and a smile from her husband but he disappoints her. She feels so hurt when he brands her to be without brain and can't do anything right and can't even cook like his mother. In fact his mother dies when he was just 4 years old and he would not even remember her face!

The husband and wife relationship is not healthy. Though Sonal was an obedient and a caring wife, she could not satisfy her husband. Hasmukh never cared for his wife's feelings. Sonal often consoled herself telling that she does her best for him in the sight of god. She learns to put up with life. So in spite of staying together for twenty five years their marital life was never a success.

Ajit loves his wife Preeti and really cares for her. According to Hasmukh Preeti is pretty, charming, graceful and sly as a snake. She is intelligent and has an eye on Hasmukh's money. She is a scheming daughter-in-law, who knows how to please her father-in-law. She never talks back to him like Ajit. She has a knack of replying others without hurting them. When Sonal wanted to make parathas, she stops her by gently replying, "It is a tragedy that we can't eat your delicious parathas, but we'll survive" (470). She does not really care for Hasmukh. At one point, against the doctor's advice she was willing to provide more salt to Hasmukh. Preeti too hated Hasmukh like the others in the family but never showed it out. She was expecting a baby and is quite calculative and assertive. After Hasmukh's death, her plot to kill him was unearthed by Kiran. Preeti replaces his blood pressure tablets with her visibly identical vitamin tablets. She was waiting for him to die so that she can inherit his property. Ajit trusted his wife but she married him for money. There was not a real love relationship between them. Preeti feigns love and care to him.

If the husband and wife relationship in the play were all failures then the father-son relationship is worse than that. Hasmukh wanted Ajit to obey him but Ajit questions him and rebels against him. He accuses his father "Ever since I was a little boy you have been running my life. Do this, do that or don't do that don't do

this . . . then when I grew up I learnt to answer you back” (487)

Hasmukh was furious about the son's disagreeing nature. According to him Ajit is wasting money and is on his way to bankruptcy. He makes a very satirical statement that God has just forgotten to open an account for Ajit. Hasmukh as a autocratic father controls and checks every movement of his son. Ajit can be called a filial subaltern. The play dramatizes the politics of patriarchy, marginalizing not only women but the other male members of the family too. Ajit has to execute the father's orders and commands.

*Ajit: Don't I have any right at all?*

*Hasmukh: You have the right to listen to my advice and obey my orders (CP 458)*

The father considers him as 'zero' and makes a mockery of his son and shows his displeasure towards his attitude.

Even after Hasmukh's death he tries to keep Ajit as a puppet through his 'will' and under the surveillance of his mistress Kiran. This makes Ajit rebellious. The father-son relationship was never cordial. As a father Hasmukh was a failure. He tries to impose himself on his son. As a son Ajit never looked up to his father. The play focuses on the emptiness and uselessness of strict adherence to patriarchal code. The play depicts the conflicting relationship between father and the son. It depicts the clash between conservative notions and contemporary generations.

If the relationship in Hasmukh's family is totally in discord then the relationship in Kiran Jhaveri's is worse. Her father, brothers and even her husband were drunkards. They come home drunk and beat their wives. "They were weak men with false strength" As a child she was denied the love and affection from her drunken father and as she grew up she was never cared by her drunken brothers and finally when she got married her husband never supportive. He was so concerned with his bottle of whiskey and allowed her to have an extra martial affair with her boss Hasmukh. She learnt to suffer silently. But questions at the end of the play, "Where will all this end? Will the scars our parents lay on us remain forever?" (CP 508)

Kiran never found solace in Hasmukh either. "Hasmukh didn't really want a mistress. He wanted a father. He was living his life in his father's shadow. He had no life on his own" (509) He was dependent on Kiran for everything thought he thought that he was the decision maker. So in such a empowered woman's life too the relationships were never in harmony.

All through the play some characters were dominated by other characters either consciously or unconsciously. Sonal lived in the shadow of her sister Minal, who decided Sonal's cook and even told her when to cry in her husband's funeral. Hasmukh was dominated by his father and later on guided by Kiran. Hasmukh tried to subdue his son Ajit. Preeti who is a schemer tries to outwit everyone and even has orchestrated her father-in-law's death.

So the play focuses on fractured interpersonal relationship within the range of familial relationship. Like all modern families there is a lack of emotional attachment and understanding towards other's views and opinions. There is discord and disharmony among all the characters. In the beginning of the play there is a forced harmony among the family members and also strong dependence and domination of characters. But in the end with the entry of Kiran from the margins to the centre, the tables turn. Unlike Hasmukh, Kiran uses power play to improve relationship. Kiran has determined to help them live a peaceful, regular and respectable life (Joshiyura 208). The play depicts man's rift in the relationships were cemented, the characters try to understand each other, the suppressed ones were emancipated and the domineering characters try to understand the feelings and desires of others.

#### Works Cited

1. Dattani Mahesh, *Collected Plays*. New Delhi: Penguin Publishers, 2000.
2. Joshiyura, Pranav *Critical Study of Mahesh Dattani Plays*. New Delhi: Sarup Publications Pvt. Ltd.
3. Raina, Sita. "A Note on the Play". *Where There's a Will. Collected Plays*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000.