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## THE DEPICTION OF MALE EGOISM AND AUTOCRACY OF THE PATRIARCHY IN MAHESH DATTANI'S *WHERE THERE IS A WILL*

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with the patriarchal egoism, how it is represented by protagonist and how it is cause for destroy his relationship with other member of his family in Mahesh Dattani's play *Where There's a Will*. The worst is when the man does not try to keep his ego behind in the relationship. Egoistic men are very reserved and it is difficult for them to adjust with anyone. If the ego of a person is hurt once, it stays for a long time and tends to spoil the relation. Men seldom accepted their mistakes and bend down. Mahesh Dattani's realistic portrayal of human nature evokes both sympathy and empathy in the mind of reader. He reflects on the problem of relations between man and women, and ego clashes, the clash of ego between husband and wife, and father and son how it is cause for destroy their relationship. Where there is egoism there is no place for love. There is no way for love to live next to egoism. Egoism kills love.

**Keywords:** Discrimination, Autocracy Patriarchy and Protest.

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Mahesh Dattani is one of the leading contemporary Indian English dramatists in the history of Indian English literature. He is the first Indian playwrights in English to be awarded the *Sahitya Academi Award* for his *Final Solutions and Other Plays* in 1998. Like Barnad Shaw, his plays deal with the burning social issues like religion tension, communal disharmony, child sexual abuse, lesbianism, sexuality and gender discrimination, which were until recent considered to be a taboo in Indian society. His language is alien but the content and context are rooted in ancient tradition and modern conflict of Indian society.

He is a man full devoted to the theatre. He knows the problems of stage and influence of Director over the plays. Under this influence, he founded *Playpen* a theatre company in 1984 to perform the plays. He uses the theatre as a powerful

tool for bringing social changes. As a result his plays are well received by Indian audiences as well as the people of different countries. He is a versatile in the matter of the themes of his plays. He is different in the matter of art and craft, feeling and form. All this dramatic qualities help him tremendously to broaden the horizon of theatre. Earlier the themes of drama were concentrated on the religious believers and political changes of our country but the present drama deals with many current issues and the real life problems. His realistic portrayal of human nature evokes both sympathy and empathy in the mind of reader. He reflects on the problem of relations between man and women, and ego clashes, the clash of ego between husband and wife, and father and son how it is cause for destroy their relationship.

The present paper deals with the patriarchal egoism, how it is represented by protagonist and how it is cause for destroy his relationship with other member of his family in Mahesh Dattani's *Where There's a Will*. The worst is when the man does not try to keep his ego behind in the relationship. Egoistic men are very reserved and it is difficult for them to adjust with anyone. If the ego of a person is hurt once, it stays for a long time and tends to spoil the relation. Men seldom accept their mistakes and bend down. Try to make him realize his mistake as it will only kill his ego. Hasamukh's ego will ultimately spoil his relationship with his family members. The egoistic man is a man who develops his life only around his precious self and he never notices other people around him. He never notices other people and their interests and their needs and their troubles. And he always bothers about his own problems. He is always looking for problems in other people. He will never realize that he is the only reason for those failures and he will always blame other people in things that go wrong in his life. The egoistic man is a man, who will never be a good husband and a good father. He will never notice the loneliness and pain in the eyes of his wife and he will never care about problems of his son who needs him more than anything in this life. Where there is egoism there is no place for love. There is no way for love to live next to egoism. Egoism kills love.

*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 *Where There's a Will* has many trademark qualities of Mahesh Dattani's play. Like other plays, the play has Gujarati milieu and successfully runs on the stage. The play presents how women in their own homes are marginalized. Though the kitchen or home is described as the kingdom of women, they are no longer ruling over there. Instead, they are pushed on the margins of invisibility." (Parmar-37)

Where the father is almost like dictator who has supreme power to take decision. Hasmukh

is staunch follower of patriarchal system. In the play, both men and women of the Mehta family suffer considerably due to the patriarchal authoritative head of the family.

The central theme of play *Where There's a Will* is egoistic nature of the male section of the society, especially the head of the family who always lives under the impression that without his concern not a single leaf would be allowed to fall down. In this play the family head Mr. Hashmukh Mehta is the symbol of what we say Hitlerism. He does not allow including his son anyone to do as they wish. He is a symbol of patriarchal ego, 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'. He couldn't distribute his power among his family members because he wanted to dominate each and everyone including his wife Sonal Mehta. He is the autocratic head who demands unquestionable obedience from his family members.

Hashmukh Mehta tried to control his family even after his death. He has absolute rights or power. His dictatorship is intolerable to all members of the family but they are not supposed to speak a single word without his permission. To rule over them even after his death he had made a 'will' of his property. The dramatist has introduced the ghost of Hasmukh Mehta to make watcher of his actions. When Ajit asks his father to give him only five lakh to modernize his factory plant Hasmukh laughs at him. He criticizes his son's ways. He observes categorically:

"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 failure, in bold capital letters'...." (Dattani-464)

According to Hasmukh, he 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. Twenty three years old Ajit is the managing director of Hasmukh's factory but he is not allowed to take a single decision. He is married but according to Hasmukh still he is not mature

enough to take right decision at the right time. So he neglects his son's efficiency to control his established business in a right way. 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. Ajit is not entitled to use his father's property, for any purpose. His father does not think to include the managing director of his factory in any decision making process. Thus like Hitler he is self-opinioned man who doesn't allow Ajit to use his skill and talents for the business development. He has to listen to his father's command carefully to obey them keeping his talent and efficiency aside.

The dramatist 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 others' views and opinions. The character of Hasmukh Mehta can be analyzed in two ways - through his familial world and business world. He is the boss at the both the spaces. His relationship is plagued with grievances and unrest at home. However, he is enjoying the position of the ablest and the perfect boss at the business house:

"Hasmukh Mehta is embodied with patriarchal canons and tried to control family even after his death through his 'will'. He is both dead and alive, but his business remains unobstructed and unceasing." (Parmar-38)

Hasmukh Mehta is portrayed as very autocratic father. He controls and checks every movement of his son. Ajit Mehta is quite gentle and occupies little importance at both the spaces. He can be called the filial subaltern. The play dramatizes the politics of patriarchy which doesn't only marginalize the women folk of the family, but also other male members of the family. Hasmukh Mehta has over powered identity of his son by exercising absolute control over his home and business affairs. He has no power to use the property of his father in his own way. He is excluded from decision making process in business. His father is highly ego-centric and horribly self-opinioned man who doesn't allow Ajit to use his skill and talents for the business enhancement process. Strangely enough, Hasmukh

Mehta has made Ajit the managing director of his companies. However, he is not supposed to undertake any business errand and affairs at his own. He has to execute his father's orders and command keeping his own say aside.

Ajit : Don't I have any rights at all?

Hasmukh : You have the right to listen to my advice and obey my orders.

(Dattani- 458)

The present play *Where There's a Will* deals with the mechanics of middle class Gujarati family, showing how patriarchal canons control not only the lives of women of the family but also men of the family. Since Hasmukh was leading businessman of the city, every newspaper lime lighted his death news. His death news appeared in the newspaper under the caption 'Garment Tycoon Dead'.

"Hasmukh: (cutting.) 'Garment Tycoon Dead.' That felt good. You never really know how famous you are until you are dead. Of course, it's at the bottom of page seven and it's only six lines. But look at the obituary page. Filled with my photographs. All inserted by different companies. All mine, of course. (Throws the paper away) Now it's all over. My life is over and I have no business you see, I have made a special will! (Laughs) they are going to hate me for doing this to them!" (Dattani- 479)

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. As per Hasmukh's instruction, the lawyer summoned them exactly 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 everyday at nine and he can leave at six p.m. in the evening. No new business project of Ajit will be sanctioned. 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 by making the will and further more by making Kiran Jhaveri, as the trustee of the trust. He has kept namely Kiran Jhaveri who was a very shrewd and hard headed marketing executive. She lives in company flat in posh locality. Hasmukh has taken meticulous care and every precautionary step to avoid any challenge to the validity of his will. He had a qualified physician as witness number one to his will and attached a certificate stating that signatory was of sound mind etc. The certificate was signed by their family doctor, Jhunjhunwalla, who attends him regularly. So contesting the will was out of question to the members of Hasmukh family.

Hasmukh's personality displays moods and temperament of business tycoons who throws aside any person not fruitful for the enhancement of their business interest. Hasmukh is stubborn and adamant, gritty and gutsy. As a businessman, he is quite alert and accurate. He promptly grabs opportunity of utilizing others for his business gain and profits. All the three members of the Mehta family have to learn new lessons every day under the Madam Jhaveri. 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.

Hasmukh ruled his family when he was alive. After his death, he tried to control his family from his grave through his will. Kiran puts: "Hasmukh was intoxicated with his power. He thought he was invincible. That he could rule from his grave by making this will." (Dattan-508). Really, Hasmukh didn't trust any of his family members. He reserves his doubts about their ways and intentions. He trusted completely Kiran Jhaveri, who was working as an executive in his office and has won his confidence. Hasmukh Mehta has all praise for her. She has fine body to cater his sensuous desires and brilliant brain to run his business in an effective manner.

Hasmukh criticizes his wife by calling her dry and good for nothing. He calls her mud. She is innocent and ignorant woman, who does not know about his sexual lust and his enjoyment with night women. To Hasmukh, Ajit is not competent enough to run his business. It seems that initially he succeeds in his intentions. Gradually, he realizes that his desire to control over his death is collapsing slowly. He has appointed Kiran to set his family in order and check them leading their 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) Hasmukh didn't really want a mistress. He wanted a father. He saw in me a woman who would father him! (Laughs. Hasmukh cringes at her laughter.) Men never really grow up!" (Dattani-510). His desire 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.

The play reflects on emptiness and uselessness of strict adherence to the patriarchal code and it depicts the clash between conservative notions and contemporary generation. Both father and son have their own view points regarding life and business. The father strictly believes that he has right notions regarding son's life, whereas son rejects the idea of complete command over his life. At the very beginning of the play, Ajit expresses his displeasure regarding his father's idea. He is quite young and innovative. He wants to give touch of modernity to his plan. Hasmukh doesn't trust his son's ways of world and his ability of dealing with business affairs. He considers him 'zero' in business and practical affairs, whereas Ajit feels that his father is hard-liner and stubborn fellow. He doesn't respect anybody's say in decision making process. Hasmukh thinks that his son is very novice and silly in the world of business. He makes mockery of his son and shows his displeasure towards his attitude.

Later in the play, Kiran Jhaveri appreciates Ajit's invincible spirit for telling truth on the face of his father. Ajit is not a blind follower of his father Hasmukh's footsteps as Hasmukh did to his father. However, Ajit doesn't raise much voice against the autocratic regime of his father. He just disapproves his father's views and ideology. Kiran appreciate his revolutionary spirit in this manner.

"He may not be the greatest rebel on earth, but at least he is free of his father's beliefs. He resists. In a small way, but at least it's a start. That is enough to prove that Ajit has won and Hasmukh has lost." (Dattani-510)

Ajit asserts his individualistic identity. He protests against parental hegemony. In this sense, father-son relationship is a post colonial dichotomy of contemporary society. He is content at the idea that he is disobedient. He has challenged the dictatorship of his father.

"Ajit: All right. I can't fight him now. He has won. He has won because he's dead. But when he was alive, I did protest. In my own way. (laughs) Yes, I'm happy I did that. Yes, I did fight back. I did do 'peep peep' to him! That was my victory." (Dattani-50)

Thus, the play dramatizes the discord and disharmony between the father-son relationships. Father and son are shown at constant fight. There is a nerve-war between them. The play depicts the forced harmony among the members of the same family. In this sense, the play may be deemed as the postcolonial protest against the colonializations of self and identity.

"Hasmukh, the head of the family is typical patriarch. He behaves as monarchy of his family empire and demands absolute loyalty from his wife, son and daughter-in-law..... His son is an equally egotistical patriarch; Ajit had struggled through his own childhood and youth to free himself from his father's clutch. Ajit is not just his son but also his rival who appears threatening as young man full of ideas" (Mukarji-105)

All trouble comes out of Hasmukh's false notions of joy and happiness of life. He considers domination as the only final system which can bring

joy and happiness in family. Ironically he fails to understand that domination kills joy of human heart and soul. Domination flourishes killing other self and identity.

Dattani extensively exorcises patriarchal code through his dramatic art. Hasmukh Mehta wants unquestionable obedience and unchallengeable authority at home and at the office respectively. Therefore, he doesn't allow growing the 'self' of his son, Ajit who defies the autocratic father, but he fails to articulate his own space. He doesn't scare to drag to patriarchal authority. Nor does he revolt against him significantly. He just tries to assert his identity before his father. Dattani's play peeps into the past and find out the reality. His peeping into past is not myth-seeking attempt, but he dives into the past for bringing out the reality lying in the darkness, at the dark bottom of the past. The realization of past error helps the character understanding present in a better way. It has got modern relevance. It is because of this; his plays are seen and enjoyed again and again. Dattani doesn't stick to one particular tradition of drama. He infuses various traditions into one making his theatre true and authentic representation of real life experience. Through this process, he incepts a new tradition of drama which is quite innovative, authentic, and capable of representing the spirit of Indian soil. Therefore, his plays are the real life stories.

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