

# Partiarchal Dominance and Dictatorship in 'Where There's A Will' by Mahesh Dattani

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## **Abstract-**

The present paper makes an attempt on the patriarchal system and dictatorship in Where There's a Will by Mahesh Dattani. It was his first stage play in two acts. It was written in 1986 and still has its relevance. The playwright has satirized modern contemporary society and its long prevalent malpractices like generation-gap, disrespect for women, avarice for wealth, extra-marital relationship, patriarchal egoism, ego clash between husband –wife and domestic violence. The playwright has shown that in patriarchal system the condition of women – be it daughter, daughter -in-law, wife or mistress are dependent on men. No doubt, the play has different layers of meanings. The dominant theme of the play is the father-son relationship in the Indian society which is increasingly becoming individualistic.

**Keywords:** Avarice, extra-marital, patriarchal, ego clash, loom over

About The Playwright- Mahesh Dattani Is A Modern Playwright With A Considerable Talent. He Is Unquestioningly One Of The Playwright India Has Ever Produced. He Blends Traditional Themes With Some Modern Approach In His Works. Dattani Doesn't Offer Any Remedy In His Plays; He Simply Presents His Keen Observation To The Audience. He Has Always Reflected Indian Land And Sensibility In His Works. The Societal Themes Have Been A Pivot Of His Plays. His Works Have Been Interpreted As A Text Of Social Critique. Dattani Portrays Topics Such As Gender Inequality, Homosexuality And Communal Violence As Subject Matter In His Plays. Witten In 1986, The Play 'Where There's A Will' Still Has Its Relevance. This Is Dattani's First Full Length Play And Has Successfully Attained Its Well Deserving Applause. From 1995 ,Dattani Has Been Devoting Full Time In Theatre. His Works ' Dance Like A Man' Final Solutions,' Night Queen, Thirty Days In September, Do The Needful, On A Muggy Night In Mumbai And Others Plays Established Him As The First Indian Playwright In English Language To Win The Prestigious ' A Sahitya Award.' We Find A Wide Range Themes And Subjects In His Plays. He Blends Conventional Themes With Some Modern Approach In His Works. His Plays Are Sum Total Of Social, Personal And Rustic Life. He Has Given Voice To The Unvoiced Section Of Our Society Presenting Their Mean, Ugly, Unheeded And Unhappy Aspects Of Life.

'Where There's A Will' Is Dattani's First Play Which Was First Performed By PLAYPEN At Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore On 23 September,1988. Dattani Founded His Own Company PLAYPEN In 1984 And Began To Look For Indian Plays In English. He Didn't Want The Usual Western Canonical Texts That Were Generally Performed. He Wanted To Do More For Indian Plays With Indian Environment.

The Play “Where There’s A Will” Has A Simple Structure. In The Play, Mahesh Dattani Satirises Modern Contemporary Society And Its Long Prevalent Malpractices Like Generation- Gap, Disrespect For Women, Domestic Violence, Dominance Of Patriarch, Avarice For Wealth, Extra Marital Relationship. The Play Wright Has Touched Upon These Societal Ailments In His Works.

The Play ‘Where There’s A Will’ Is Divided Into Two Halves- One Prior To The Death Of Hasmukh And Another Post Death. Man Chases After Money From Cradle To Grave. Man Keeps Asides The Bonding Of Conjugal Love, Sanctity Of Relationship In Accumulating Wealth. This Very Aspect Has Been Brought Into Light In ‘Where There’s A Will’. It Is Strong Comment On The Money-Mindedness Of Modern People. Even Personal Relationships Are Based On Money. Again The Play Comprises Two Parties—The First One Is Mr. Hasmukh. He Is A Forty -Five Year Old Rich Business Tycoon . He Is The Protagonist Of The Play. He Keeps A Mistress Named Kiran Jhaveri. The Second Party Is Hasmukh’s Family Members –Sonal (His Wife), Ajit (His Son), And Preeti (His Daughter- In- Law). Hasmukh Is A Unique Character. He Dominates All The Family Members. He Disparages Them Each Time. Hasmukh Flares Up On Petty Matters. These Four Members Are Living In A Patriarchal Family Without Any Bond Of Love And Respect. Hasmukh Is Neither Happy With His Wife Nor His Son. He Considers His Marriage And The Birth Of His Son As “Tragedy After Tragedy.”

The Theme Of Generation Gap Looms Over In The Beginning Of The Play. Hasmukh Points Out- “Hasmukh: Why Does A Man Marry?--- Why Did I Marry? Yes, To Get A Son. So That When I Grow Old, I Can Live Like Again Through My Son.---Why Do I Have A Mistress? Because I Am Unhappy. Why I Am Unhappy? Because I Don’t Have A Son. Who Is Ajit? Isn’t He My Son? No. He Is Just A Boy Who Spends My Money And Lives In My House. He Doesn’t Behave Like My Son. A Son Should Make Me Happy. Like I Made My Father ...Happy. I Listened To Him. I Did What He Told Me To Do...I Worked Hard For Him. I Made Him Happy. This Is What I Wanted My Son To Make Me. But He Failed. He Has Not A Single Quality I Look For In A Son! He Is Going To Destroy Me.”( 1)

The Play ‘Where There’s A Will’ Has Many Touches Like Comedy, Farce Etc. It Is Deeply Embedded In The Gujrati Familial Background In Which Dattani Has Chronicled The Follies, Foibles And Prejudices Of Indian Male Dominated Society. Hasmukh’s Family Is The Microcosm Of Indian Patriarchal Family System. The Plot Of The Play Revolves Around The Life As Well As After Life Of A Business Tycoon Hasmukh. He Is A Disgruntled Patriarch With His Bossy Nature. Hasmukh Does Not Know The Meaning Of Love, Affection, Regard. He Disrespects All The Family Members. He Lambasts Them Openly. He Insults His Son Ajit Everywhere I.E. Before His Wife(Preeti),His Mother (Sonal), And In Office. Ajit Says-

“You Have No Right To Humiliate Me In Front Of My Friends.”( 2).

Ajit (Aju) Has To Swallow The Pride Of Self Respect Every Time. Although All His Family Members Dances Upon Hasmukh’s Tune. They All Are At His Disposal But Nevertheless Hasmukh Calls Spade A Spade To Them. Being The Boss Of The Family, He Has A Wont To Pass Comment At The End Of Each Work. Ajit Points Out-

“You Will Never Be Happy. Not Until All Of Us Dance Upon Your Tune. And I Will Never Do That.”(3).

Hasmukh Does Not Want To Handover The Baton Of Power To His Son, Ajit. He Treats Him( Ajit) Good For Nothing And Reckless. Ajit Is A Prospective Successor Of Garment Tycoon Hasmukh Mehta. But Mehta Is Whimsical Character. He Has A Tempestuous Mind. None Can Fathom Him. Nowhere He Matches With His Name. As His Name Is Hasmukh But He Always Keeps Crying Over His Family

Members And Employees. He Loves And Respects None But Only One Person – His Mistress Kiran Jhaveri. If We Delve Into Deep So Many Facets Of His Character Come Out. He Has Many Failings In His Character. Mehta Looks Down Upon His Son Ajit Because The Latter Refuses To Depend Upon The Former. Ajit Wants To Make His Own Identity. He Is The Managing Director Of Mr. Hasmukh's Company But He Is Not Allowed To Sit In Decision Making Meeting Of The Company. He Tries To Move Out Of His Father's Shadow. He Wills To Take Independent Decision . He Has His Own Dreams In Life. Ajit Is A Typical Young, Energetic Youth. He Has Cherished His Own Dreams In Life. He Wants To Come Out Of Influence That His Father Had Cast Upon Him. Dattani Names Persons Like Hasmukh As “ Weak Man With False Strength”

Hasmukh Doesn't Let His Family Members As They Wish Even His Son, Ajit. Hasmukh Is A Symbol Of Patriarchal Ego. He Opined That He Was The Strict Follower Of His Father's Rule, So His Son, Ajit Should Follow Him. But Mr. Hasmukh Never Gave Ajit The Parental Advice. He Did Not Want To Decentralize Power Among His Family Members Because He Wanted To Dominate Them. He Is Autocratic Head Who Dominates Each Of His Family Members. He Is The Autocratic Head Who Demands Unquestionable Obedience From His Family Members. He Always Passes Orders To Be Followed By Family Members Without Any Ifs And Buts. It Is A Superficially Ego In A Male Dominated Society. In 'Where There's A Will', The Playwright Has Depicted Mr. Hasmukh Mehta A Bossy Tree Which Does Not Deem Its Leaves And Branches Its Parts. Dattani Has Depicted The Tyranny Of Patriarchal System In The Play. In The Patriarchal System, The Paterfamilias Acts In A Tyrannical Manner. He Has The Authority To Say Yes Or No At The End Of Each Work. He Has His Own Touchstone To Assess The Life. Patriarchal Men Always Behave Egoistically. It Is The Most Substantial Reality In Middle Class Indian Families.

Mrs. Sonal Mehta Is Step- Ford Wife. She Is Very Meek, Innocent And Submissive And Plucked Chicken Person. Mrs. Mehta Is A Paragon Of Virtues. Her Character Does Not Match With Her Husband Hasmukh Mehta. She Is Very Devoted, Faithful And Decent But Her Husband Is Cunning, Unfaithful And Rude. Although Hasmukh Had Succeeded In Business; He Couldn't Manage His Small Family. He Treated His Family Members As Company Employees. He Is Devoid Of Love, Regard, Sympathy, And Trust. He Doesn't Possess A Single Quality. He Fails At Every Front. He Has No Respect And Love For His Better Half. Sonal Is Ruled And Exploited By All. She Is Totally Governed By Others. Hasmukh Treats Her A Faithful Dog. He Says-

“ Then I Should Be Very Happy Man. I've Got A Loving Wife Who Has Been Faithful To Me Like Any Dog Would Be.”(4)

Many Say That In Childhood A Woman Should Be Under Her Father's Control, In Youth Under Her Husband's, And When Her Husband Is Dead, Under Her Son's. She Should Not Have Independence. In This Play, All These Things Hold On Mrs. Sonal Mehta. Her Life Is Full Of Untold Agonies. Neither Could She Prove Herself An Ideal Wife Nor A Mother Or A Mother-In-Law. She Is Thoroughly Innocent. She Does Not Know What To Do At What Time. She Dances On All And Sundry. She Could Not Develop Her Own Identity. Sonal Perspires While Cooling In The Kitchen Fulfilling The Demands Of Everyone But She Is Paid No Respect. She Falls Crestfallen After Hasmukh's Death. Now Her Life Becomes More Pitiable And Miserable. She Is Complained Each Time. Now She Is Given Shabby Treatment By Preeti, Her Daughter -In-Law.

Mrs. Sonal Mehta Lived A Life Of Shadow. She Is A Mute Character. She Had No Life Of Her Own, No Dreams, No Thoughts, No Likings Or Dislikings. She Always Depended On Others. Sonal Admits To Kiran:

“I Have Always Lived In My Sister’s Shadow. It Was Always Minal Who Decided What We Should Wear, What Games We Should Play...Even At My Husband’s Funeral, She Sat Beside Me And Told Me When To Cry.”(5)

Knowing That Her Husband Is A Lascivious Nevertheless She Believes In Conjugal Love. Unlike Her Husband, Sonal Never Crosses The Threshold Of Chastity To Satisfy Her Carnal Appetites. She Had To Live And Suffer Under The Dominance Of Her Egoistic Husband.

Preeti Is A Conniving Daughter –In-Law. She Is A Devious Lady And Has No Love For Anybody In The Family. Like Chameleon, She Changes Her Behaviour Towards Sonal And Comes Out In True Colour After Hasmukh’s Death. She Confesses The Reason For Marrying Ajit. She Had Already Set Her Eye On The Family’s Income. She Madly And Badly Desires Money. Preeti Applied Her Mind To Remove The Hurdle In Her Life As She Wanted To Live A Quite Comfortable Life. She Plans An Evil Design To Kill Her Father-In-Law By Exchanging Her Vitamins Tablets With His Blood Pressure Controlling Tablets.

Kiran Jhaveri Had Been Depicted A Strong And Quite Intelligent Lady In The Play. She Is The Marketing Executive In Hasmukh Mehta’s Company. Mehta Has Made Her The Trustee Of The Trust Named Hasmukh Mehta Charitable Trust. He Has Donated All His Properties, Fiancés And Shares To The Trust. As Per The Will, If The Family Members Obey The Rules Mentioned In The Will, They Will Get A Regular Allowances From The Trust. The Trust Will Be Dissolved When Ajit Mehta Turns Forty-Five. Hasmukh Had Done So To Check And Teach A Lesson To His Family Members. Being A Trustee, Kiran Will Stay With The Family Members. But The Family Members Deny Her To Stay In The House. At This Kiran Says :-

“As The Trustee Of, Hasmukh 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 A Single Rupee Earned By Your Father –In –Law. Now Will You Refuse To Let Me Stay Here?”(6)

Kiran Is Sharp, Opened Minded Modern Woman. She Is A Lady Of Quick Understanding. She Uses Both Her Mind And Body To Make A Place In Hasmukh’s Life And Company. She Studies Hasmukh’s Mind Very Minutely. Later She Narrates Her Experiences With Sonal:

“He Depended On Me For Everything. He Thought He Was Decision Maker. But I Was. He Wanted Me To Run His Life.” (7)

Kiran Had No Emotional Attachment With Hasmukh. Kiran’s Relationship Was Based On Money. She Was Useful To Hasmukh For The Sake Of Money. She Tells Sonal The Reason Of Having Affair With Him:

Sonal : Yes. I Know That. So You Had An Affair With My Husband Because He Respected You And Trusted You.

Kiran: Mrs Mehta, No Woman Has An Affair With An Older Man, Especially A Married Man For A Little Bit Of Respect And Trust. It Was Mainly For Money.(8)

Being An Ultra Modern Woman She Rises Beyond Hasmukh Petty Matters And Makes The Family Realize That Where There Is A Will .. There Is A Way.

Dattani Conveys A Message Through His First Play "Where Their's Is A Will' That Any Amount Of Hostility Can Be Overcome Only Through Compassion And A Good Rapport With Each Other. For Example, Kiran Being A Keep, Not Only Brings All The Family Members On The Right Track But Also Makes A Place In Their Hearts. When Kiran Came To Stay With Them (As Per The Will), She Was Denied By All Members. But She Adjusts Herself With All. She Keeps An Eye On Their Activities. She Studiously Hid The Matter Of Hasmukh's Death, As It Could Be Detrimental For The Member Yet To Come In Mehta's Family. There Was No Tuning Among Family Members When Hasmukh Was Alive. The Same Family Is Maintained By Kiran Jhaveri Very Well. She Tries To Bring Each Relation On The Mend And At Last Succeeds.

Trust And Regard Are Indispensable Bonding For Each Relation. Both Are Paramount To Maintain The Relations. As Each Relation Is Very Fragile. Each Relation Needs The Balm Of Trust And Regard To Survive. Mr. Hasmukh Mehta Is Devoid Of These Two Things. It Was His Wont To Disregard Everyone. His Inflammatory Remarks Against The Family Members Spoiled The Relation.

Dattani Mirrors The Society Through Short Dialogues Appealing Directly To The Heart And Mind To The Audience. The Play Shows That The Patriarchal Man (Hasmukh) Is Misfit To Exist In Family. He Mortgages His Human Values With Money. His Follies, Foibles And Prejudices Diminishes His Character To Zero. Patriarchal People Still Believe That Through Domination, Dictatorship And Threat One Can Rule The Other. But The Playwright Has Proved It Wrong In This Play. One Can Win Other's Heart Through Love And Regard Not By Command And Order. The Play Explores That The Deteriorated Inter-Personal Relationship Among Family Members Ruin Its Foundation. Rancour Relationship Always Leads To Damage Congenial Atmosphere Of Family And Society.

1. Mahesh Dattani; Collected Plays, New Delhi: Penguin, India, 2000. Pp. 474-75
2. Ibid. P. 456
3. Ibid. P. 456
4. Ibid. P. 473
5. Ibid. P. 511
6. Ibid. P. 513
7. Ibid. P. 510
8. Ibid. P. 506
9. Ibid.