

## FAMILIAL RELATIONS AND THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE IN MAHESH DATTANI'S PLAYS

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### ABSTRACT

Indian society has been a very traditional society with strong patriarchal values. Here fathers have desired to have sons because they are supposed to carry forward the name of the family, and because in their sons, fathers have hoped to live out their own dreams and aspirations. In the past, this had led to a situation where a father demanded unquestioning obedience from his son because he firmly believed that he alone knew what was best for him. This denied the son any opportunity for independent growth. With changing times, this has begun to change. Issues like personal liberty, religious tension, sexuality and gender- issues which play significant role in constituting and evolving familial relations dominate the thematic structure of Dattani's plays. What one loves about these issues is the way he brings in the dynamics of personal and moral choices while focusing on human relationships. Dattani deals with the problem of the individual in relation to his social environment and shows men and women struggling against the conventions of an unhealthy family and society.

**KEYWORDS:** Family and Society, Marriage, Dattani

### INTRODUCTION

Marriage is yet another issue that Mahesh Dattani deals from a different angle in his plays. According to him, marriage is an institution that nauseates women folk because it legitimizes violence and gives men a legal control on women's bodies. Mary Wollstonecraft in her book *A Vindication of the Right of the Women* addresses marriage as "legalized prostitution" as the husband can do whatever to a woman's body at his own free will. In Dattani's plays we have the portrayal of exploitation of women by men. But at the same time, Dattani does believe that the suppression cannot last long as women will fight back to question the autocracy of men, whether it is the issue of marital rape or other issues.

While dealing with the issues of the women, Dattani unconsciously hints at the plight of the women, torn between being and becoming. The overall impact of colonial consciousness has made us class conscious, creating a situation for women's liberation, deepening the feeling of self- cent redness and proneness to materialism.

In the play *Where There's a Will* has several interesting aspects. Mahesh Dattani describes it as the exorcism of the patriarchal code. Women – be it daughter –in– law, wife or mistress – are dependent on men, and this play shows what happens when they are out of their family. (Raina, Sita, "A Note on the Play", *where there's a Will in collected Plays* 451).

In the frustration of Hasmukh, we witness a father who is upset over the state of disorder in the whole family. He finds Preeti, his daughter-in-law more intelligent than his son. She understands that her husband is the son and successor of a rich businessman. Hasmukh gains the sympathy of the readers whenever his wife Sonal turns against him.

As the time rolls by, his anger also goes up. His family members do not support him because of his over reaction on even small things.

Dattani has presented a typical Indian family where the sole bread earner of the family does not get respect often because of the indifferent attitude of the family members. People know that familial bond is so strong that the head of the family can't take any drastic step. The case of Hasmukh is more or less the same. Despite the fact that family members complain against Hasmukh's fault finding behaviour, Sonal, his wife does have concern for her husband, "How many times have I told you not to smoke?...who do you think the doctors will blame if you get another heart attack ? Me. Who else?" (*Where There's a Will* 467).

Family is not only an important constituent of Indian society, but also the nerve center of Indian life. If Indian English poets and writers take 'family' as a metaphor in their works, Dattani examines the relationship among the members of the family with accuracy and authenticity. Marriage and the breaking of marriage, parent-child relationship, extra-marital relationship, difference in outlook among family members on various issues – all these attract Dattani's attention and shape his attitude to family life.

Love, marriage and man-woman relationship came within the orbit of the family. The generation gap creates a kind of credibility gap which leads to misunderstanding between parents and children in a number of plays. In portrayal of Hasmukh's character in *Where There's a Will*, Dattani has tried to put before us his attitude towards his wife, son and mistress. What could be the reaction of a father whose son has fallen short of his expectations is shown vividly in Hasmukh's character.

Music cements human relationship beyond the boundary of family. Love of music and dance brings people of different families together. Passion for music, art and dance arouses love in the heart of the people for each other who work in a group. It is a kind of love deeply rooted both in the heart and mind of a person surpassing love for the opposite sex. Hence, it unites people of the same taste and goes beyond blood relationship.

Love of the profession and jealousy arising out of it brings misunderstanding between Ratna and Jairaj which further deepens and the wife accuses her husband of destroying his own career and family life. She goes to perform alone, ignoring the husband. No wonder the family remains on the brink of disaster.

Dattani is a good observer of human beings in the profession of singing and dancing. That is why, in the two plays, *Morning Raga* and, *Dance like a Man*, he has dived deep into the hearts of the characters to reveal their true feelings. Artists are sensitive people and prone to jealousy. These fame hungry people can spoil family relationships for the sake of the profession. Dattani knows it too well.

Family relationship as portrayed in Dattani's plays is authentic and realistic in our situation. To read his plays and watch the characters enacting their roles is to transport us to the everyday world in which we live. Such characters we encounter in our society—they are like-live and real. Therein lies Dattani's strength as a dramatist. We witness the disintegration in the family. Life is typical of the Indian situation in the contemporary society. But there are some limitations in Dattani's plays, that is, the family portrayed in his plays is the urban family in our society. Rural life and family are not portrayed here. But then, rural family has also come under strain because of the large scale migration to the town and city. No longer the saying "Heaven is where home is" holds well – either in rural India or in urban India. That is why, Dattani's plays appeal to us in our situation. In this context, the following comment by Erin Mec is worth quoting:

Mahesh Dattani frequently takes as his subject the complicated dynamics of the modern urban family. His characters struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, cultural constructions of gender, and repressed desire. Their dramas are played out on multi-level sets where interior become one, and geographical locations are collapsed – in short his settings are as fragmented as the families who inhabit them (“A Note on the Play: The Angst of the family” 141).

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, we find that Dattani has taken up the theme of marriage from a different perspective. No doubt, the institution of marriage is a stabilizing force for a healthy family life, but it fails to fulfil the desired goal of a person, its credibility is always in question. Often Dattani seems to be criticizing this institution as behind it, so many questions are left unanswered. Moreover, often it also becomes a burden because of the ambitions of the husbands and wives. But, truly speaking, women are the biggest sufferers as they are forced to make compromises often in the name of family, children, husband and even so called social status. Those who are discarded from the system of marriage, hardly find any social recognition unless they are outstanding in terms of their personal feats. Marriage may be good or bad, but as an institution, its importance cannot be denied. That is why Dattani has highlighted its importance in most of his plays.

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