
**The Theme of Didacticism in the play ‘Seven Steps Around the Fire’ by
Mahesh Dattani**

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Abstract- The present research paper is based on the the play ‘Seven Steps Around the Fire’ is one of the radical play expressing the torture and the torment of the transgender community living in the urban setting in Indian context. The play reveals all the afflictions these individuals undergo be it physical, psychological and sociocultural. Being an art form the theatrical representation of any play has its powerful reformative impact on the mind of the audiences which tend to affect the thinking perspective of the the people in the contemporary society. Literature never aries from the isolation for writer being the part of the society is obvious to get influenced by the social scenario. ‘The play Seven Steps Around the Fire’ has created an image based on reality in the contemporary social milieu prevailing in the society which is yet far away in the direction of inclusive society where these transgender individual would live as an important part as the other heterosexual individuals are.

Key Words: Transgender, heterosexuality, stereotype, taboo, marginalized sexual orientation
stereotype society.

Introduction:-

Mahesh Dattani is a contemporary writer was born on 7th August in 1958 in a Gujarati family in Bangalore had taken his early education in English medium at Saint Baldwin Boys High School and later St. Joseph’s College. He started his career as a copy writer but his natural inclination could not stop him from being a playwright and wrote first play ‘Where There is A Will’ a comedy play. Since then he never looked back while adopting full-time profession as a playwright as well as actor, director and flim maker. He is a prominent and promising Indian origin writer has won the Sahitya Akademi award for the first time in Indian English writing for his collection of the plays ‘The Final Solution And Other Plays’ in 1998. In his writing he skillfully handles the themes like religious controversies in Hindu and Muslim, child sexual abuse, gender identity issues and the most prominent L.G.B.T identity crisis. He prefers to write in english as has taken his education in english medium only; generally expresses specially about the urban middle class society where english is an easy medium of communication. Through his radical and sensational writing on L.G.B.T. themes has won the world wide acclamation. The themes in his narrative are handled is otherwise considered as ‘Taboo’ or less talkd about. He has taken the crucial initiative in his narrative namely ‘Seven Steps Around the Fire’ which expresses the sufferings and the humiliation which these transgender individuals undergoes in an Indian scenario showing the brutal reality and prejudiced stereotype sociocultural environment where the patriarchal hegemony has discarded the sexual orientation other than heterosexual; any deviation from the established social norms leads these transgender individual to suffer psychologically and physically where except humiliation they get nothing.

Dr. Beena Agrawal remarks,

“Dattani in the process of engineering the current of Indian drama by bringing it closer to real -life experiences tried to articulate the voice of the oppressed section of the society whose identity is shrouded in the cover of myths and social prejudices.They have been draged in darkness, doomed to survive in

perpetual silence bearing the oppressive burden of hegemony of the elitist class. Dattani within the framework of dramatic structure tries to investigate the identities of those who occupy no space in social order.”(34)

According to the web search, on WebMD.com,

“The term transgender refers to a person whose gender identity, or their internal sense of being male, female or something else does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. A transgender woman is a person who was labeled as male is someone who identifies as a woman. A transgender man is someone who was labeled as female at birth, but who identifies as a man. Some transgender people don't fit into the traditional categories of male and female and may feel their gender identity is a mix of both genders or that it doesn't match either. They may use the terms “nonbinary” or “genderqueer” to describe themselves.”(What Does It Mean to be Transgender?)

The play ‘Seven Steps Around the Fire’ is a sensitive narrative depicting the life situations of the trans community in India where in the 21st century the group called the marginalized people known as ‘Hijara’ or ‘Eunuch’. In the first voice over Uma Rao reflects the light upon as ‘The term hijara, is of Urdu origin, a combination of Hindi, Persian and Arabic literally meaning neither male or female.’

The very section are yet a neglected part in the prevailing sociocultural milieu. They forcefully live in an isolation away from the mainstream. Mahesh Dattani has given the voice to these transgender which is otherwise unheard and looked down upon.

In his preface Dattani writes,

“I am certain that my plays are true reflections of my time, place and socioeconomic background. I am hugely excited and curious to know what the future holds for me and my art in the new millennium in a country that has a myriad of challenges to face politically, socially, artistically and culturally. Where does one begin? By ending this preface and carrying on with the business of holding a mirror up to society.”(col. plays.preface xv)

The play ‘Seven Steps Around the Fire’ for the first time was broadcast as a radio play in the year 1999 on 9th January, on BBC radio under the title ‘Seven Circles Around The Fire’ and in the same year on 6th August the first performance of the same happened on stage at Museum Theatre in Chennai by MTC production and 6 players.

It presents a heartshaking representation of the murder mystery of the alluring eunuch Kamala who has been burnt alive to death brutally by her own father-in-law, a powerful politician Mr. Sharma when it brings it home to him that his own son Mr. Subramanyan is in wedlock with a transgender.

Kamala had womanish allure where the priest himself failed in recognizing that he is allowing the hijara and the man's union.

Aarkali is another eunuch who got arrested on the basis of suspicion without any strong evidences against her and put into the jail with male prisoners where she faces physical torture and sexual abuse until she meets Uma Rao, the wife of Superintendent Suresh Rao and the daughter of vice-chancellor of Bangalore University; who is working on her research paper based on “Class And Gender Related Violence.” When she came to know about the murder of the eunuch so far it is related to her study, she decides to meet Anarkali, who has been arrested as the main suspect. Suresh Rao using his power allows her to meet the very suspect Anarkali with a constable Munswami for her security. Uma Rao could understand that what kind of miserable and poor condition this eunuch is living in.

Munswami frequently calls her not by her name but uses the word ‘It’ again and again whereas Uma Rao uses the pronoun ‘She’; though these are the naming words but it makes a lot of difference. How could it

possible that a living entity is being treated like a thing as if no importance at all. This is truly a questionable thing.

Munswami -- You may see the hijara now if you wish, Madam.

Uma --- Will she talk to me ?

Munswami (chuckling) She! Of course it will talk to you. We will beat it up if it doesn't

Uma --- Please don't. If she doesn't wish to talk to me, I Will ---it's okey. Don't force her.(col. plays 231)

Uma --- Anarkali! please help me.

Anarkali --- After serving all these whorse, my mouth is too tired to talk.

Uma--- God!

Anarkali --- I din't kill her . She was my sister.

Anarkali--- would u kill your sister?

Munswami--- (beating the bars) Back! Beat it! Kick the hijara !

The other inmates begin to beat anarkali up.

Anarkali--- (hitting back at first) Ai! Don't touch me!

The other inmates scream as they beat up Anarkali.

Aaagh! Aaagh!

Uma--- (her voice almost drowned by the anarchy.) Stop! Stop it!

Uma runs out. Munswami watches as Anarkali gets

beaten up . (col. plays236)

After confronting the actual condition of Anarkali Uma Rao works her best in granting the bail for her. Meanwhile the reciprocal approach of Uma Rao towards Anarkali shows a true humans spirit beyond the dogmatized social norms. where these individuals are considered as "castrated degenerated men" in the words of Suresh Rao (col.play.238)

Anarkali--- Oh! If you were a hijara i would have made you my sister.

Uma --- Oh. Thank You.

.Anarkali --- But you are not a hijara , no?

Uma --- No.

Anarkali --- So you will not be my sister.

Pause.

Uma--- Upcourse we can be sisters!

Anarkali--- Where are you, and where am I?

Uma --- But... i wish you could understand This is just what i am trying to do with my papers.

Anarkali --- What papers?

Uma --- One day you will understand Anarkali, I would love to be your sister if you will be mine.

Anarkali --- You are only being kind to me. Dont hert my heart.

Uma--- No, I mean it.

Uma is putting away her note pad.

Anarkali--- Look at me.

Oh! my sister! You are my sister, no?

Uma looks at Anarkali for a while and then put her hand on her arm.

UMA --- Yes. (col. play. 242)

Uma Rao being the mouth piece of the author gives her positive responses to both Anarkali and the head hijara Champa regarding their acceptance as a human for the need of filial love .

It is evident through the interaction among the Uma Rao, Anarkali and Head hijara Champa that they share the same emotion and feelings and no more different from each other to be called marginalized.

This is a crucial step of the Mahesh Dattani towards the inclusive society in the true sense where reform needs to be taken place.

The relationship among Champa the head hijara, Kamala and Anarkali demonstrates true kind of family spirit where they share a real bond of filial love. When Uma Rao for the first time sees Kamala's photo with her true biological parent and asks about the beautiful young man in the photo; it is apparent that how quickly Champa answers as,

Uma--- Who is this beautiful young man?

Champa--- Kamala. Before she became Kamala. (Going through the pictures) These were his first father and mother. Afterward I am her father and mother... This one we took together after she became my daughter... (col.play.260)

This is not just for Kamala but she has the same feelings for Anarkali too.

When Anarkali is back from the jail to her dwelling place at Chamapa; is quite injured and in groaning.

Anarkali --- My mother used to sing me when I had fever

Champa --- You shut up. I am your mother. Understand.

Anarkali --- Then sing.

Champa --- Say that, you bitch! ... Now close your eyes. Close.

Anarkali closes her eyes. Champa sings a lullaby from a film. La lalla lori dhudh ki katory ... Champa has tears in her eyes as she continues to sing.

Champa has motherly feeling for the both Kamala and Anarkali; she regularly addresses using a word "daughter"

It reflects the purity and innocence of the emotion among them. Champa being the head hijara has all the qualities to handle her group of transgender community. They have created their own home together where it has the profound base of acceptance and oneness, where they don't feel alienated and marginalized

Uma Rao in her search working as a spy throughout the play it helps in proceeding the actions further. On her first meeting with Champa she sees Salim who is there at Champa for a particular photograph which leads Uma Rao to Mr. Sharma's home and meets Subbu for the first time whose eccentric behaviour raises questions on her mind. She again meets Anarkali and Champa as to know who truly the culprit is but she doesn't get a clear answer but a remark from Anarkali,

"One hijara less in this world doesn't matter to your husband." (col.play.272)

Uma Rao attends the marriage ceremony with her husband Suresh Rao where as per their plans reached Champa and Anarkali with other hijara group to bless the newly wedded couple and start giving blessings and perform dance when Subbu couldn't bear it as he sees as if Kamala is there one of the performer and is asking him for their reunion. He totally lost but any how manages to snatch the gun from Salim and points out at Mr. Sharma as why he killed his wife Kamala expressing his immense grief he at last shoots himself and symbolically Kamala and Subbu are together in the other world away from the all the so-called social norms which discards the true union the loving hearts beyond the metaphysics.

Conclusion---:

In this way being a responsible part of Indian society, Mahesh Dattani has conveyed the didactic message against the prejudices of the present stereotype rules which has become the rigid tradition where discrimination on the basis of gender identity is made, closing all the gates, showing no sign of acceptance as a human for these transgender individual.

Uma Rao reflecting the humanitarian aspect tried her best to bring the reform in so-called cultured society giving the respect, acceptance and love to these transgender individual namely Anarlali, Champa and fights in getting the justice for innocent Kamala, it reflects her kind heart showing compassion for the plight of these transgender individual whose voice has no ears to be listened and to be judged. She fights her best against the existing evil of gender discrimination is noteworthy. The politician Mr. Sharma representing the power and hegemony of the patriarchical society which is yet deaf and dumb in giving the right to be lived as equal and dignified as he is. The play "Seven Steps Around the Fire" through its didactic approach while representing the suppressed group of marginalized section of the Indian social milieu has given the solidity to the voice which otherwise was far away and locked in the shackles of myth, prejudices and evil traditions.

Uma Rao in her last voice over contemplates her best, They knew, Anarkali, Champa and hijara people who was behind the killing of Kamla have no voice. The case was hushed up and was not reported in the newspapers. Champa was right. They made no arrest. Subbu's suicide was written off as an accident. The photograph was destroyed. so were the lives of the two people.....But Anarkali's blessings remain with me (through the locket) I could not tell her I did not want blessings for a child. All I want is ----what they want ...To move, To love, To live.(Col.play 282); in true sense Uma Rao's last words which encapsulates the very message of the author Mahesh Dattani.

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