Chapter IV

Social Maladies in *Where There’s a Will*

Mahesh Dattani’s *Where There’s a Will* rings the note of some social maladies inflicting the man of the modern time. Like *Tara*, it also flings a very harsh satire on the patriarchal authority. But the beauty of this drama lies in it that the playwright has exposed this grave reality of patriarchal domination with the help of some comic situations and humours. As a matter of fact, a serious thought presented in a comic mode elates the pleasure of the theatre, liberates the text from the burden in inter textual pressures. The humour in the play through the visible and invisible presence of Hasmukh, especially after his appearance as a ghost, his mute observations and the free display of the inner feelings of different characters against the authority of Hasmukh, is a unique device for self-assessment for the characters.

*Where There’s a Will* is the first play written by Mahesh Dattani in 1988 that was performed at Deccan Herald Theatre Festival at Bangalore. It is through this play a ‘distinguished playwright’, in the form of Mahesh Dattani, came into being. He wrote in the language to which he usually speaks. In the English language he wrote Indian matter and sentiments. The play is the reflexion of his deep-rooted perception of a Gujarati traditional family. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri writes about the play:

“Ever since his first play in 1988, *Where There’s a Will*, which was rooted in the Gujarati familial dynamic, Dattani has in a sense chronicled the follies and prejudices of Indian society as reflected
within the microcosm of the family unit, the most tangible and dynamic reality in middle class Indian lives. Dattani calls the play an ‘exorcism of the patriarchal code…’ and skillfully works his narrative around the intrigues and manoeuvrings of a dysfunctional Indian family.”

Like other plays of Dattani, the play Where There’s a Will speaks across linguistic and cultural barriers. It is essentially rooted in the Indian settings. The playwright makes an abundant use of Indian mythology, rituals, traditions and contemporary problems in his plays and this play is not an exception to them. In this play he elevates the theme of gender discrimination and patriarchal code to higher level, touching the human chords that emanate love, happiness, will and problem of identity. In this play he is able to merge the past and the present as well as geographical locations.

In this play the playwright, Mahesh Dattani, has raised the issues of gender discrimination and feminine sensibilities very beautifully which are gaining ground all over the world. In other words he has exposed the ills and maladies prevalent in the society. The playwright has, also very deliberately and thoughtfully, used the method of comic pleasure so as so lessen the bitterness of the situations or events. This reminds us of the various tragedies of William Shakespeare and the plays of George Bernard Shaw. It seems that Dattani wants to use the theatre as a powerful tool for bringing about some significant social maladies. He excels in mirroring his society dramatically. As he tells in an interview:
“Theatre to me is reflexion of what you observe…
I write plays for the sheer pleasure of communicating through this dynamic medium.”

Where There’s a Will is a stage play in two Acts. The play raises the ugliest problems of society which Dattani tells them in comical ways. These problems are running without any punctuation marks in the society. Here his attitude seems to be very much near to that of William Shakespeare who strongly believes in the concept of telling the truth of life with the help of poetry and literature. As Sita Raina, a well-known Delhi-based actress and theatre director who directed this play, says:

“Joy is the essence of life and I have always believed that theatre exude delight. Where There’s a Will is such a play. It is not only thought provoking and introspective but also provides an evening of pure entertainment.”

For any play, aesthetic beauty and delight is must. It is in this perspective that the playwright, Mahesh Dattani, is hailed high in the field of dramatic art and poetic presentation. He declares that in his plays “everything is geared towards rasa.” His deep-rooted concern for ‘rasa’ makes him a distinct playwright on the contemporary scene. He carved a niche in the realm of the long tradition of Indian drama. His primary business as a writer of drama is to entertain the general audience. He never wants to be called himself a propagandist or didactic writer. He depicts in his plays what he sees: “Theatre to me is reflection of what you observe. To do anything more would be to become didactic and then it ceases to be theatre.”

His play Where There’s a Will is full of his experience of his
observation of society. The play has several interesting aspects to which Sita Raina, the director of the play, points out:

“Where There’s a Will has several interesting aspects. Mahesh described 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 pushed to the edge.”

The play Where There’s a Will is about the relationship between a father and a son, a husband and a wife and a rich man and his mistress. In this play, the playwright depicts the gap that still prevails in our society and family in the name of ageold tradition. The older generation tries to impose the traditions on his own wards that he has inherited from his own forefathers. But the new generation tries to lead an independent life, free from all the backward traditions. It also shows the miserable relationship that still exists between a husband and a wife. The playwright has dramatic technique to show that happiness still exists in the family matters, but under the traditional influence we leave that and as a result we get misery, although it can be achieved. As Subir Dhar gives his opinion about the play:

“Where There’s a Will is quite evidently a young man’s play which shows fairly optimistically that there is a way by which men and women can find happiness on their own terms. The developments, twists and surprises in the action are not however not facilely based on contrivances of plotting alone
but far more appropriately on human motivations
and wills.”

Dattani’s first play *Where There’s a Will* is rooted in the Gujarati familial dynamic and he has in sense chronicled the follies and prejudices of Indian society and especially the reality in middle class Indian life. All his energy is centred around the intrigues and manoeuvrings of dysfunctional Indian family.

The play is about Hasmukh Mehta, one of the top ‘Garment Tycoons’ in the city. He is a gritty, gusty and stubborn type of man. Having been a good boy to his father all through his life, he expects the same from his son Ajit and does not allow him intervene in his plans. He does not have good relationship with his son and thinks him as an ‘outright loss’. As Hasmukh regrets to have a son like Ajit:

“… Oh God! I regret it all. Please let him just drop dead.”

Here his nature seems very harsh towards his son, Ajit. Hasmukh also tells that Ajit has no single quality to which he likes. He thinks that his son, Ajit, has ruined his life and he has been left with nothing. But we also find in him the heart of an Indian sensitive father. He curses Ajit to die but very soon he apologises for what he commits. As the playwright writes:

“…No, no. What a terrible thing to say about one’s own son. I take it back. Dear God, don’t let him drop dead. Just turn him into a nice vegetable so he
won’t be in my way. Ever since he entered my factory, he has been in my way.”

Ajit, a young man, is the ‘joint managing director’ in the factory of his father and thinks to bring innovation in his father’s factory. But Hasmukh thinks his innovative plans as his ‘crackpot schemes’. He always wants to possess over his son’s will, factory, wife and daughter-in-law. He thinks that Preeti is ‘charming, graceful and sly as a snake’. He always thinks that his will should prevail all where in his family matters as well as in factory. He could not tolerate any slide deviation from that. As a result all become his enemies. He goes to the extent of comparing his wife ‘as good as mud’.

Hasmukh thinks that his son, Ajit, is not an able child and his suggestions are dangerous for his factory and he may come under fiscal problem. He always suggests his son that he should work for his factory and should not spoil time talking to his friends. Hasmukh always wants to control his family and it is the real problem for him and his family also. He forgets the basic nature of human that pines for independence to which he wants to tame. Machine and an organization may be controlled but the family matters are different from all those.

No one of his family members controls Hasmukh. But Kiran Jhaveri, an executive in his office wins his free heart accolades. She is a beautiful girl with genuine brain. She manages her work, house and Hasmukh at the same time. She is an experienced girl who knows the psychology of man very well. When Sonal, the wife of Hasmukh, says that Kiran is a lucky and educated girl and that is why she is in a position to win the heart of her husband, Hasmukh. But on the contrary Kiran refutes this:
“Wrong. I learnt my lesson from being so close to life. I learnt my lessons from watching my mother tolerating my father when he came home every day with bottles of rum wrapped up in newspapers. As I watched him beating her up and calling her names! I learnt what life was when my mother pretended she was happy in front of me and my brothers, so that we wouldn’t hate my father. And I learnt when I kept my mother away from my father, so that in return he would remain silent for those three hours when he came home, and before he fell asleep on the dinning table, too drunk to harm us anymore. I served him those drinks, waiting for that moment when he would become unconscious and I would say a prayer… Thank God he was too drunk to impose himself on us! Yes, Mrs. Mehta. My father, your husband – they were weak men with false strength.”

Hasmukh is a different kind of man. He wants a safe relationship with ladies. He wants a mistress who may control and direct him. When he finds all these qualities in the conduct of Kiran, he appoints her in his factory. He also develops his weakness towards her and wants to treat her as his mistress and in course of time he raises her status to the directorship. He has many reasons to do so as he explains the reason of doing that:

“…Twenty-five years of marriage and I don’t think that she has ever enjoyed sex. Twenty-five years of marriage and I haven’t enjoyed sex with
her. So what does a man do? You tell me. I started eating out well, I had the money; I could afford to eat in fancy places... And... Those expensive ladies of the night in five star hotels! ... But ... I needed a safer relationship. Something between a wife and a pick-up. Yes, A misters! It didn’t take me very long to find her. She was right there in my office. An unmarried lady... If there was anyone in my office who had brains to match mine, it was her. She is now one of the directors of the company.

It shows that Hasmukh is not satisfied with his son, Ajit, his wife, Sonal, and his daughter-in-law, Preeti. As a result, he died in early age. After a week of his death, all people of his family know the reality that Kiran Jhaveri, the director of his company, will be the real power holder. Sonal, Preeti and Ajit are shocked by this act. They, in the beginning, try to kick her out from their family house. But according to the Will of Hasmukh, they could not do so. Kiran is given the full power to run the factory as well as family. Hasmukh, during his life time, had made all these plans to amend the way of his family members and for imposing his will indirectly.

But Kiran behaves with all of the members of the family very nicely. She makes it clear that she is only the trustee of all the wealth and not the owner of the wealth. According to the Will, she assigns the job to Ajit that he will go office daily. Sonal will get a regular allowance to run the house and Preeti will get allowance only when she will become a mother. Kiran will get the salary for her job. As she clears all these:
“... I am only the trustee of all his wealth. Not the owner… Everything rightfully belongs to the three of you… Ajit will have to attend the office as usual… Mrs. Mehta, you shall get a regular allowance to run the house, and a little more for your personal expenses. And Preeti, you too will get an allowance – When you become a mother. When your child is twenty-one, the trust automatically dissolves. Its holdings will be transferred to Ajit for him and his heirs to enjoy.”

The will clearly shows that in his life time, what Hasmukh could not achieve, he tries to get them through his will. But Kiran creates a very cordial relationship with the family members of Hasmukh. Preeti does not want that Kiran should live in the house ‘as part of the Mehta family’. On this Kiran threatens to divide the trust between certain charitable institutions and thus she will get nothing. Only then all members become ready to allow Kiran to live with them. Ajit, in the beginning, feels uncomfortable in the office. He does not like to step into his father’s shoes but he is shoved into them.

Most of the people do not know the real relationship between Kiran and Hasmukh. Preeti even does not know whether Kiran is married or unmarried. But Kiran tells them about her real social status and the relationship between her and Hasmukh. When Sonal tries to know more about their affairs she clarifies her relationship very clearly. She explains:
“Mrs. Mehta, no woman has an affair with an old man especially a married man, for a little bit of respect and trust. It was mainly for the money.”

Thus we find that Kiran explains the problems which she faces everyday in the society. In the childhood she suffered in the hands of her father. After marriage she leads a miserable life under her drunkard husband. For wine her husband sends her to work in a factory. Here she is sexually harassed by her boss Hasmukh. So all where Kiran is shown as an experienced girl but at nowhere she leads a respectable life.

Through the sufferings at various stages of her life Kiran has got deep insight on various issues of family and life. When Sonal says that Preeti is doing now all the work for money; on her own experience, Kiran says that it is bad to say such type of comment. She clears it that she has become the protector of the money and Preeti is trying only to get them back. She also says that everyone likes her because she always gives something to others at the cost of her own suffering. At the same time she also says that she is not always loser but a gainer also. Thus Sonal learns her lesson that she does not get because she never gives. On this Hasmukh’s ghost becomes happy that at last Sonal learns her lesson.

The pathetic plight of women can be known through Kiran. She clears the fact that her mother suffered and used to make her children happy. So now she is doing all the work very conveniently while sufferings go on in her life. It is her experience of life on which she evaluates the nature of Hasmukh. She tells Sonal that Hasmukh is the same creature who never disagreed with his father. He was brought up under the guidance of his father. He does not have his own life – that is why when Ajit tries to live an
independent life Hasmukh opposes his ways. He becomes cruel due to his father’s nature. He wants that all the family members should be dependant on him for all decisions. He wants a wife who could control him as his father used to. He wants an obedient child. When he finds such type of talents in Kiran he appoints her his adviser and also makes the protector of his family. And a ‘stuborn’ man like Hasmukh bows before a beautiful lady.

It is very interesting that Kiran is appointed to tame the family members. But she is happy that Ajit could not inherit those qualities from his father and has escaped. She also says that ultimately Ajit has won his fight. The proud of Hasmukh was false. He thinks that he is a powerful man but in reality she is the real power holder in his office. This is what Kiran says to Sonal:

“...He thought he was the decision maker. But I was… Men never really grow up!”

Ultimately we find that Kiran gets success to win the heart of all the members of the family. She makes them happy and all the members, after some time, start to co-operate her in all the decisions. It is because she never wants to impose her will but she tries to include them in her decisions. The wealth, that had created gap between Hasmukh and his families, never comes in their way and the play, Where There’s a Will ends with a note of gay mood in which the ghost of Hasmukh disappears and the new life springs in Mrs. Mehta’s family. It means the time is coming close to hand over the property to the family by Kiran.

In this play the whole actions move round the character, Hasmukh. But all other characters, Preeti, Sonal, Kiran and Ajit, get enough space to
flourish in this drama, according to the plan of the dramatist. But Hasmukh typifies the general outlook and behavior of the business tycoons who gestures no hesitation in busting up relationship which are not in furtherance of their self interest and who misses no chance of using others as means to their ends. He is very possessive of his property and he is extremely cautious of person who demands even a fraction of it. He thinks that his wife is good for nothing – physically and mentally. Ajit and Preeti are ‘dead loss’ for him. Ajit, his son, has no brain to run the industry. Kiran has, as he thinks, almost all the qualities that he wishes. She is enticing, commanding and headstrong. For Hasmukh; she is a worthy-match. Besides Hasmukh and Kiran, all the characters prove their role very artistically. Their relationship grows in perfect direction, according to the plan of the dramatist. It is in their friction and reaction that the play gains definite impression. As Ashwini Kumar Vishnu writes:

“…The charm of the play, in truth, lies in the left orchestration of these characters. Especially noteworthy is Dattani’s skill with which he has saved them for being flat, dull and vulgar. Hasmukh, Ajit, Sonal, Preeti, Kiran – all exude their nature consistently and without being anachronistic. They may be aptly called ‘adequate’ in actual styanian sense.”

It is very remarkable that Dattani’s Where There’s a Will is a comic play by nature but it also raises a serious issue of the world – gender discrimination. Although we are living in modern world but women still have been enslaved, degraded and subject to various types of atrocities and tyrannies at the hands of man and male-dominated society. Even the modern
era have not brought liberation for her. The gift of democracy, which we have received from our earlier generation, is denied to women. The principle of equality of sexes has never been put into practice. The play *Where There’s a Will* reflects the intricacies of patriarchal code where women are destined to be in peripheral position. Kiran is an educated girl and economically independent girl, but these qualities do not give her freedom from injustice and tyranny from male-dominated society. When Sonal says that Kiran is ‘lucky’ because she is an ‘educated’ girl. That is why she could succeed in getting the faith of Hasmukh. But on the contrary, Kiran says that Hasmukh was not a powerful man. He was intoxicated with his power of money. The Will of Hasmukh is nothing but his false pride, through which he wanted to rule over his family. On the basis of his money Hasmukh keeps a mistress, Kiran, and uses her for his own physical satisfaction. He, for his own interest, provides wine to Kiran’s husband so that he could not oppose the relationship between Kiran and Hasmukh. As Kiran says:

“…Anyway, it all worked out to be quite convenient. I got a husband, my husband got his booze, and your father get … well, you know.”

It indicates that Kiran is an educated girl. She earns money but she has no freedom. She leads her life for her husband. She works in the factory of Hasmukh for arranging the wine of her husband and her boss Hasmukh physically exploits her for his own satisfaction. Thus Kiran is crushed from the both sides and has no way to escape from it. In this way she becomes a source for both – her husband for getting his liquor and her boss for getting physical and sensual satisfaction. At nowhere her relation is based on respect, mutual understanding, co-operation and dignity.
It is very strange that our religious scriptures enjoin upon us the duty to accord due respect to women. The great sage of the Hindus, Manu, writes in his famous work ‘Manusmriti’:

“Yatra naaryasthu pujyanthe,
Ramanthi tatra devatha.”

This above hymn suggests that gods dwell where women are worshipped. Has women enjoyed this status of being worshipped? From time immemorial society has never given women their right share. Violence against women is rising in society. Many people do not prefer to discuss such issues because they bring bad name to the society and country. They are always treated as second grade citizen. A woman always lives in the search to be loved, but she never finds that. Her life becomes meaningless in searching it. She is always marginalized in our society. As Manju Kapur writes in her famous novel *Difficult Daughters*:

“I was nothing, husbandless, childless, I felt myself hovering like a pencil notation on the margins of society.”

Despite such types of various above mentioned injunctions in our old scriptures we have been ill – treating women and have been showering scorn on them in various ways through centuries. In the play *Where There’s a Will*, Kiran is tortured everywhere. No one ever tries to know about the inner feelings of the woman. Even women like Preeti and Sonal mock Kiran for her relationship with Hasmukh, without knowing the reality. It shows that even a woman does not support a woman in time of need. As Preeti says to
Kiran: “Mrs. Jhaveri, we were all looking forward to a new arrival in this house, but we didn’t expect you.”

This incident shows that how in modern age the greatest enemy of the women is women herself. Generally we see that when a woman falls in some critical juncture and some deep distress, the other woman, may be her very close relative and friend, jeer and taunt at her. Sometimes they even go to the extent of fabricating some unbecoming strategies to catch the woman in the net. So many modern TV serials are glaring examples. The same is the case here with Kiran Jhaveri who has to suffer a lot in her life.

The play shows that the average woman leads a life not better than of a slave. At all the stages of life, right from the childhood to the old age, she has been in a subordinate position to her male counterpart. She has never been recognized as an ‘independent entity’, free to select a course of her life at her own choice. Her good has always been said to be associated with the good of her husband whose service alone has been recognized as a way for her deliverance.

To a wife, the only God worth-worshipping is her husband, regardless of the fact whether he treats her well or ill. Simone de Beauvoir, one of the greatest exponent of women’s right, writes in her famous book The Second Sex:

“…humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; She is not regarded as an autonomous being…[woman] is simply what man decrees: thus she is called ‘the sex’ by which is meant that she appeals essentially
to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex — absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is … the Absolute — she is the Other.”

What Beauvoir observes in her famous book *The Second Sex* we find the same issue in the form of dramatic art. Dattani in his play *Where There’s a Will* shows that Hasmukh is a big business tycoon. He always wants to fulfill his lust through Sonal, this wife. When after some time of his marriage, he does not get the same pleasure, he compares his wife, Sonal, to mud. As Hasmukh says:

“I soon found out what a good-for-nothing she was. As good as mud. Ditto our sex life. Mud Twenty-five years of marriage and I don’t think she has ever enjoyed sex. Twenty-five years of marriage and I haven’t enjoyed sex with her. So what does a man do?”

It shows that a man always expects a rich sexual life from his wife and if she does not fulfill that he starts to search elsewhere. As Hasmukh does in the play. When Sonal involves herself in family business, Hasmukh gets his physical satisfaction from others. For him, women can be bought at the cost of money. For a rich man the dignity of woman is nothing but she is an object who can be hired and after satisfying sexual pleasure, can be fired. As Hasmukh does in the play:
“...I started eating out. Well, I had the money. I could afford to eat fancy places. And what about my sex life? Well, I could afford that too. Those expensive ladies of the night in five star hotels! (Smiles at some pleasant memories.)”

It is interesting to note that feminism has become a matter of literary discourse in Post Modern literature. Most of the Indian writers, particularly women writers and poets have shocked and mesmerised the Indian audience with their revolutionary attitude about the suffocation and persecution of women. Prof. S.Z.H. Abidi in his key note address on ‘Feminism in Post Modern Indian English Literature’, rightly says: “… Thinkers like Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Elaine Scurry and several others have invested a great deal of their concerns in the way the body is discursively manipulated and energized in the recent times, providing a rich context for new subjectivities. When deployed in the arts, literature, cinema and media, the body as substance and trope could be both exploitative and empowering. Such an investment has also raised questions about the normativity of hetero-sexual relationships. The last few years have been commentaries, both critical and literary, on every possible aspects of human embodiment especially in relation to the female body. These include the works of Veena Das (1988), Leena Dube (1986), Meenakshi Thapan (1995), Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner (1990), Susan Bordo (1993), Judith Butler (1990, 1993), Elizabeth Grosz (1994), Emily Martin (1987) and Luce Irigaray (1985). The ‘body’ has become a powerful metaphor of such specificity and concreteness, which rejects the male Cartesian tradition that thinking, can somehow occur on a plane of disembodied universality. Indian women novelists and poets writing in English often reflect in their poetry and fiction not only the complex phenomenon of their movement towards self-
individuation and self-differentiation but also telescope the changing position of women in the Indian society. They delineate women’s journey from dependence on men to independence of women from the powerful clutches of men. The central female protagonist of Uma Vasudev’s novel *A Song for Anasuya* is a contrast to Anita Desai’s Maya and Uma. In *Cry, The Peacock* Maya craves for sexual jouissance and even her naked body fails to evoke any response from Gautam but Anasuya uses men and is happy with herself.”

Women are marching ahead in every field but their achievements are not recognized by the world today. Mahesh Dattani, a minute observer of society, deals with the gender issue in his another play *Bravely Fought the Queen* in which he mocks at the man’s artificial world that thinks that ‘bravity’ is the word related to man. As Alka says: “So bravely fought the manly queen…” It shows that a woman can not be a fighter and the basic element of bravity lies with a man. It also shows the patriarchal domination in our society.

It is interesting to note that there are many similarities between the play *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *Where There’s a Will*. As Baa is not in a position to control her son, Jiten in *Bravely Fought the Queen* and so is Sonal who does not control her husband Hasmukh in *Where There’s a Will*. The character of Jiten and Hasmukh is very similar and they are representative of carrier of patriarchal code. As Hasmukh inherits the qualities from his father and suppresses all the members of his family and Jiten does it in the play *Bravely Fought the Queen*. As Subir Dhar observes:

“In fact, in one way the thesis of this play [Bravely Fought the Queen] is somewhat similar to that of
Where There’s a Will. As Hasmukh had been his father’s son down to possessing his father’s mean little eyes, so too does Jiten in Bravely Fougth the Queen resemble his father in appearance and in nature. Both Hasmukh and Jiten,… represent the darkest face of patriarchy – intolerance, hatred, dominance – passions all fuelled by inner insecurities and complexes of guilt and fear.”

Society is made up of the combination of man and woman but she is always marginalized. Sonal suffers in the hands of her husband in Where There’s a Will. And Baa, the mother of Jiten and Dolly, the wife of Jiten, suffer in the hands of a man, Jiten. As Sonal never fights but bears the brunt of tradition and so is Baa, who is ill-treated by her own son. Dolly has to fight a battle against a violent and unfaithful husband. It shows that at nowhere women are safe. Alka, the wife of Nitin, who is the brother of Jiten, bears the tyranny of patriarchy, whose hair is burnt to punish her for having been dropped off at home from school by a neighbour’s son on his scooter. As Alka says:

“…Nitin and Praful were home, talking I came home from school with the neighbour’s son on his scooter instead of walking with you. I told him to drop me before our street came. He didn’t understand and dropped me right at our doorstep… He [Nitin] didn’t say a word to me. He just dragged me into the kitchen. He lit the stove and pushed my face in front of it! I thought he was going to burn my face! He burnt my hair…”
The above description shows that women are marching ahead. They have come out the boundaries of household matter but the mentality of men has not changed much. Most of men are still in the trap of old traditions and customs. They only wish to confine women to the household works. This is what Shashi Deshpande holds the view:

“Even in the real life, during the last 30-40 years you see women have changed so much. There is a lot of change in the attitude of women, but there is no change in men. This is the reality I’ve seen. Men are reluctant to change. They still expect things to be what they were… We still have rapes and all these things go on – and one thing is true, that men have not changed very much.”

It is interesting to note that in order to change the attitude of men in society so many female and male writers are giving their whole-hearted support. The critics, like Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, J. S. Mill’s *On the Subjection of Women*, Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch*, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* and Helen Cixous *The Laugh of Medusa*, have done their best to raise the problems of female and domination of male hypocrisy. They have also tried to establish a separate identity of women in the society. They even demand a female language, free from all types of domination of men, in which they could express their own wishes and aspirations.

It is also very interesting that Patriarchy has given woman only one identity i.e. physical or sexual identity but she is denied the independent
desire. She is told to cover her head, body and other symbols of sexuality. Her sexual identity is meant only to provide sexual pleasure to men and her own emotional, physical and sexual needs and ‘jouissance’ are always ignored. Such type of attitude of man’s exploitation of woman is exposed by the well-known poetess Charmayne D’ Souza in her poem ‘When God First Made a Whore’:  

“My body  
Is a coffin creak  
and the tap-tap of a desolate  
shutter,  
it’s the cuckold’s last silent shriek  
and the village idiot’s stutter.  
Adam’s rib  
chewed to bone, to blood  
and the stone  
that hurled Abel to the mud.  

One day,  
God will ask for this sweety body  
of mine  
but, like all the rest,  
He will have to stand in line  
So said the whore,  
as they asked for more.”  

We are living in the age of science and technology. But on the matter of patriarchal – domination we never apply the same reasoning power. Men
always find the genesis of women in religions scripture that support the suffering of women and male domination over female. *The Bible* says:

> “Then the Lord God made the man fall into deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took out one of the man’s ribs and closed up the flesh. He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him.”

It is interesting to note here that what Mahesh Dattani depicts the characters of Sonal, Kiran, Preeti in his play *Where There’s a Will* about the feminine sensibility and gender discrimination is very close to the Indian Women Writers in English who have tried their best to expose the sham and hypocrisy of the male dominating world. Women Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahagal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy – to name only a few – have raised their revolutionary and rebellious views about the pathetic plight of women of the working classes in general and the rural women suffering the undeserved sufferings in particular. But in the presentation of this challenging theme, the play of Mahesh Dattani is even more interesting because it is the dramatic presentation of the subdued and suppressed emotion of women. The dramatist is very successful in presenting those psychological treatment of women, their struggle for individuality, their undeserved suffering and untold miseries under the patriarchal root, their marathon efforts for searching their identities in cold and indifferent atmosphere.

It is a universal fact that dramatic art has always been admired for its fine fabric of philosophical undertone and social consciousness. The philosophical reflections on the predicament of human destiny against the
odds of socio-cultural practices impart an exceptional depth and richness of his plays. However *Where There’s a Will* is positive justification to the observation that Dattani’s genius is equally fertile both in comic plays and serious plays. The comic mode has even a far reaching effect than tragedy. It is predicted that “satire, irony, gallows, homour and other mutations of the comic spirit will be the guiding force of our theatre in the coming years and tragedy has little to offer to a rebellious generation obsessed by the danger of mega-deaths.”

Although the play *Where There’s a Will* describes the social maladies of society, it is a brilliant comedy containing sustained moments of pure laughter and good humour. Hasmukh, who is suffering from many diseases like hypertension, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and an enlarged heart, leaves the audience cracking into laughter when he chuckles to them:

“In the old days, if you said someone had a large heart, you meant he was generous and loving. Today it means he is receiving high aggravation from his twenty-three-year-old son and his scheming daughter-in-law.”

The above mentioned example is not one but it is one of the many examples in the play which create comic situations before the audience. Another enliven scene appears when Hasmukh unravels, before the audience, his motive behind making Kiran as the in-charge of his trust and to live with his family. As he says:

“…I suppose it was a nasty thing to do. Making Kiran come and live here. You may ask – what
kind of a fool would ask his mistress to live with his family? A fool who knows his family very well. Kiran may have been my mistress, but she has far more brains than my wife ever had. But you should see her now, my wife! Transformed. From stupid incapable housewife to clever incapable housewife. Everyday is a new lesson for her on husband-understanding. The more time she spends with Kiran, the more she learns about me. The more she learns about me, the more she’ll regret having been such a good-for-nothing wife. That will keep her from being a happy widow ever after. One thing I can’t stand is a happy widow. There should be a law against them… There’s one more reason why I want Kiran here. To keep a check on my daughter-in-law. If there’s anyone who has me worried, it’s her. She is a clever piece. Might find some loophole in the will. But Kiran is too clever for her. Any woman who is mistress and a wife has to be clever.”

Many other comic situations also prevail in the play. Whenever Hasmukh and other characters self-expose themselves and interact with each other, the audiences go gleeful. The scene where the members of the family condemn and flout each other, when Hasmukh’s affair with Kiran comes in their knowledge, is a beautiful comic:
“HASMUKH: My daughter-in-law certainly has changed overnight, hasn’t she?
PREETI: How could he do this to us?
AJIT: Well, he’s done it.
PREETI: It’s all your fault!
AJIT: My fault?
PREETI: Yes, If you had been nicer, all this wouldn’t have happened.

HASMUKH: Clever girl.
AJIT: I wasn’t nice to him because he wasn’t nice to me.
PREETI: So what? He wasn’t nice to me either.

SONAL: And he wasn’t exactly in love with me either. If I’d known he had a mistress, I would have left him.

HASMUKH: I should have told her years ago then.
PREETI: Well, I have to suffer on account of you two.

SONAL: How can you say this?
PREETI: He didn’t get along well with both of you. So he did what he did. I was always obedient to him.

SONAL: I haven’t noticed him leaving you any money! You didn’t fool him for a second.
HASMUKH: Full marks!

PREETI: Rubbish!

SONAL: Anyway, it’s hardly your place to talk about money. You’ve married about your standards.

PREETI: Well, that hardly holds good now, does it?

SONAL: How dare you say that?

PREETI: At least my father didn’t keep a mistress!

AJIT: Preeti! Don’t talk to mummy like that.

SONAL: That’s because he couldn’t afford one!

HASMUKH: Not bad at all! I’ve misjudged the woman.

AJIT: Mummy! Don’t talk to Preeti like that!

PREETI:

(Together). It’s all your fault!  

SONAL:

Thus this serious play, Where There’s a Will, on the patriarchal code and gender discrimination, is full of comic scenes. It evokes laughter at many places in the play and the dramatist has been able to depict those darker aspects of life with the help of his aesthetic and dramatic touch in both the Acts of the play. As Asha K. Chaudhuri comments: “Dattani’s wicked humour is at its best in the first half, revealing itself in the acerbic venom that Hasmukh spits at everybody in general. The second half is
problematic because here the dead man’s perception of himself and the world that he has left behind are radically jolted. The comedy runs riot at times…. the play also hints at pathos, in the special kind of bonding that takes place between Sonal and Kiran. New power centres in place, the entire perception of the world, as it were, is turned on its head, best illustrated physically in the play by the dead father hanging upside down as ghosts are wont to do in Indian cultural belief – instances that the contemporary audiences will recognize as individuations and participate in convivial laughter aroused by a community understanding, as the play looks at the Indian middle class morality and then proceeds to parody it. Hasmukh’s reality is taken apart by the two women who know him best, and his ghostly outrage goes unnoticed by the protagonists who amalgamate into a properly functioning family unit under female leadership. His ploy with the will has worked all too well, and he can see himself and all that he stands for, being buried once and for all. He escapes, (like many of Dattani’s ‘powerful’ men do) to hang himself from the tamarind tree; but there is no respite yet, and the audience is told that the tree will be chopped off the next day.”

Comic is introduced in the play to bring laughter among the audiences while the playwright puts the social ills through dramatic dialogue. Indian traditions and customs dominate all where in the play in which a father always wishes that his son should obey and follow his foot-steps. But this very thought brings miseries in the life of Hasmukh. He does not get satisfaction with his son, Ajit. The playwright shows that Hasmukh behaves typically only because he is carrying what his father has imposed upon him. Like most of the Modern English Literature Where There’s a Will is related to the experiences of Hasmukh who felt them in his childhood and wants to impose his experiences and wills upon his son, Ajit. To study the behaviour of Hasmukh, his past history is necessary to be studied.
Hasmukh Mehta, from the very beginning, lived under the guidance of his father. His father was very much conscious to provide him the best business skill because he had no option. His another son had left his house and he did not want to leave Hasmukh to adopt any other habit. So he imposed his qualities upon Hasmukh. From his father, Hasmukh learns the art of earning money. As he says:

“Yes. My father had only me to help him out. He took great trouble to make sure I did not turn out like my brother. No more school. No more loafing for me. Hard work. And I am happy he did that! We made money! I remember we used to spend half the night going through our accounts and counting our profits. The other half of the night we would dream of being millionaires.”

Hasmukh follows his father’s foot-steps and no problem arises. But when Ajit tries to lead his own life, the family problem begins. In all the decisions Hasmukh thinks himself as superior while other’s inferior. Ajit criticizes his father’s attitude that all the members should dance at his tune. He comments upon Hasmukh as stubborn. And he even evaluates him in the following terms:

“…Anything I do is wrong for you! Just because you are a self-made man and had a deprived childhood, you feel that I am having it too easy. Nothing I do will ever seem intelligent to you. You are prejudiced.”

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Hasmukh’s childhood is very much manipulated by his father and so he always thinks himself as an ideal son while his father as ideal father. He was beaten by the virus of idealism to such an extent that all through his life he becomes a great champion of it. His character reminds us of the protagonist of the story *The Kite* by S. Maugham. He wants to infuse his skill into Ajit. It is because he thinks that Ajit is raw and by imposing himself upon him, Ajit will be in a position to survive in the rough circumstances of world. As he tells:

“…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 for him. I worked hard for him. I made him … happy. That is what I wanted my son to make me… But he failed ! Miserably ! He has not a single quality I look for in a son ! He has made my entire life worthless ! He is going to destroy me !”^37

It is interesting that all the characters – Hasmukh, Kiran, Sonal, Preeti, Ajit – lead their own life but it is only Ajit who breaks the traditional code and leads his own independent life. Hasmukh lives but actually he lives the life of his father. Kiran is fully under the shadow of her mother, to whom she learns how to tolerate and never revolt against the tyranny perpetuated by the male-members of her family. Sonal has no power to take decision but follows the instructions of her sister, Minal. Preeti is ready to sacrifice her independent will for money. But Ajit never comes under the traditional patriarchal code. He even says:
“I shall be happy if I get a son who turns out to be like me. Now if he turns out to be like you that would really finish me off.”

Kiran also says about Ajit:

“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.”

Hasmukh always bursts against the plan of Ajit. He is a frustrated man as Kiran declares at last in the play and says that the real winner is Ajit who rejected the manipulated plan of his father and ultimately leads his own life. Psychology also tells that if a man’s ardent desire in his early life is crust or suppressed, it bursts like a lava of volcano in his later life. In other words, disappointment, frustration and repressed sentiments begin to take its toll in the sufferer’s life. The mind is fractured with so much psychological maladies that he begins to develop a sadistic attitude so that his long suppressed desires may be compensated. As we see in the life of Hasmukh, he never lived his own life. His childhood is so much dominated by his parents that he thinks to implement his own will upon his son, Ajit. When his son – Ajit, his wife – Sonal, and his daughter-in-law – Preeti, do not follow his dictates, several deformities arise in him. He comes under the grip of hypertension, blood-pressure, enlarge heart, sugar etc. At last he died in his early age.
After watching the play, the audience may also know the psychological reaction that is gaining ground in the heart and mind of Hasmukh. He wishes that his wife should co-operate him and fulfil his physical, mental and sexual desire but Sonal, his wife, never does so. Hasmukh is active while Sonal behaves passively. As a result he develops bodily relationship with other women during his five star hotels visit. He even does not get the support of his son –Ajit and his daughter-in-law – Preeti. The feeling of loneliness, emptiness and imperfectness have collectively created a situation in which Hasmukh makes many wrongs which are not the matter of happiness but he does so. As he tells:

“Sonal. My wife. My son’s mother. Do you know what Sonal means ? No ? ‘Gold’. When we were newly married, I used to joke with her and say she was as good as gold. But that was when we were newly married. I soon found out what a good-for-nothing she was. As good as mud. Ditto use sex life. Mud. Twenty-five years of marriage and I do not think she has ever enjoyed sex. Twenty – five years of marriage and I haven’t enjoyed sex with her … I started eating out … I could afford … Those expensive ladies of the night in five star hotels ! ... Some of them were really…”

Through this statement, the dramatist shows that human organ has some certain needs which a human being wants to get them fulfilled at any cost. Sex is also the need of body because it is the root of all energy. Freud propounded his theory related to sex and it is now not a taboo subject.
Dattani, very clearly, depicts this here. D. H. Lawrence, the well-known novelist, holds the same view in his novel *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*:

“The blood of man and the blood of woman are two externally different streams, they can never be mingled. Even scientifically we know it. But therefore, they are the two rivers that encircle the whole of life and in marriage the circle is complete and in sex the two rivers touch and renew one another without ever commingling or confusing. We know it. It is the deepest of all communions as well as the religions in practice we know.”

When we examine psychologically the play *Where There’s a Will* we find that all the characters are suffering with the wishes that arise in their minds. Hasmukh wants to secure his business. Ajit always wishes for new experience, as he has new experience of the world. Kiran wants the equal response from the male member but it could not be feasible. Preeti wishes for recognition. When their psychological needs do not get satisfaction, all come under cares and anxieties. They live under ‘forced harmony’.

On psychological level Hasmukh is very close to Arundhati Roy’s Pappachi in *The God of Small Things*. In the novel we find that Pappachi develops an unamiable, sapless and obdurate behaviour. All these are due to the denial of credit for his scientific discovery of a new moth. This denial is so devastating that he always beats his wife and children severely. Although Hasmukh does not beat his child and wife, their relationship is never cordial. He never leads a happy and amiable life. He does not learn the lesson of
love. He only knows how to rule over other as his father used to. This is what Kiran says in the play:

“Hasmukh was intoxicated with his father. He thought he was invincible. That he could rule from his grave by making this will.”

It is also notable that the experiences of childhood have moulded the life of Kiran. When she comes close to Hasmukh, she becomes his faithful colleague and he promotes her from marketing executive to one of the directors of his company. He also appoints her the protector of his Trust after his death. He does so as to suit his caprices. But Kiran behaves differently and she gets success to win the heart of the family members which she had learnt in her childhood.

Dattani, through his play *Where There’s a Will*, shows the various picture of society. It does not only show the picture of tradition bound Indian family but also depicts the picture of changes. There is an extra marital relationship. There is a new woman of today in the form of Kiran who is full of confidence and capability. The play has a ghost. The playwright, at last, also highlights a murder mystery. So this has made the play a gripping one where the audience or the reader eagerly awaits to see what happens next.

It is interesting to note here that the playwright presents the modern society very artistically. The post-colonial Indian society has undergone some fundamental changes. In the beginning of the century, Indian economy was predominantly agrarian, which fostered the patriarchal code. The son tilled the field in the same way his father did. That is what Mahatma Gandhi calls: “We are inheritors of a rural civilization.” In social and family life,
codes were fixed and each succeeding generation was taught to follow them in a rigorous manner. Business was also carried forward as a family enterprise from one generation to another. So, whether in villages or in towns, life was organized around families rather than individuals. The head of the family was supposed to be the custodian of the community traditions. With changing economic scene all these began to change. In Independent India, the agrarian set up began to crumble over the years. There has been an exodus from villages to towns. With the spread of education and the growth of employment opportunities in industry, commerce and service sectors, the youngsters from villages have been drawn to towns and cities. This has led to a breakdown to joint families and growth of nucleus families, resulting in individualism. Since the young man has to look after himself, he develops an independent thinking where the guidance of the father and other elder of the family have but a limited role. In many cases the decision has to be his alone.

It is the very interesting fact of the modern Indian society. The spirit of individualism has pervaded other walks of life as well. Even when a young man is working with his father or other elders of the family, for example – in the family business or industry, he has his own views on different aspects of the business and industry, he is involved in. He wants them to be implemented. But a younger’s thoughts are not given due weightage in the patriarchy. This is what Dattani depicts in the play. Ajit is a dynamic manager in his father’s factory. But Hasmukh thinks differently about Ajit. As he says to Ajit:

“You are nothing just a big zero. No matter what you do, you’ll remain a zero. Over the year you’ll just keep adding zeroes to your zero. Zero, zero,
zero. On their own, the zeroes don’t mean a thing. But if there’s a number one standing before all those zeroes, then they really add up to a lot.\textsuperscript{44}

The above dialogue shows that for a father, the thought of a child is meaningless. But he forgets that the importance of ‘zero’ and ‘one’ all are important in mathematics as well as in real life.

But the dramatic beauty lies in the fact that Dattani shows that Ajit is zero but he is a zero after a number who can enhance the value of a number. He is not the ‘yes man’ of his father but his own idea dominates. Hasmukh accepts his defeat: “…. what I wanted my son to make me … But he failed! … He has made my entire life worthless."\textsuperscript{45} Ajit wins his liberation because he is firm on his idea and he never bows down before his father. He thinks that he has ‘brain’ to think and ‘blood’ to realize the thought into reality. As he says:

“… All right, so I’m still inexperienced. But I’ve got brains. That’s what really counts. Brains and young blood. That company needs my talent and young blood."\textsuperscript{46}

It is relevant to say here that Dattani seems to say through his play that all should give their wards full freedom to fly in the sky. Under patriarchal code and traditions they should not be denied their opportunities and talent to utilize them. If the society will do so, it will continue from generation to generation without limitation. So the playwright is not in the favour of ‘a weak man in the society with false strength.’ He puts question mark against this. This is what Kiran says:
“Oh! Where will all this end? Will the cears our parents lay on us remains forever?”

Dattani depicts Hasmukh as a traditional father who believes in Sanskrit hymn ‘Putrah Pituratma’ (a son is the shadow of a father). When he does not find his own image in Ajit’s behaviour. He calls him ‘worthless’ and ‘outlaw loss’. But the dramatist proves this wrong. At last, he shows that Ajit is right and the evaluation of Hasmukh was not appropriate.

It is interesting here to note that in the beginning all characters are in the influence of other’s. Hasmukh is in the shadow of his father, Sonal is in the trap of her sister, Minal, Kiral is leading the life of her mother, Ajit is forced to obey the dictates of his father and even Preeti pretends as close to Hasmukh for money. But at the end of the play we find that all realize their fault and they think to lead the life of peace and harmony free from all types of will and tradition. As Sonal says to Minal to “go jump into a bottomless pit !”

Mahesh Dattani is not only a different playwright in the matter of content but also in the matter of technique. He uses the most innovative and interesting technique to convey the matter of a dead protagonist in the play Where There’s a Will. He uses injected dialogues of Hasmukh which though unheard by the other characters, introduces a further dimension of implication for the benefit of the audience:

“KIRAN: He was just like his father, wasn’t he?
HASMUKH: No, I wasn’t.
SONAL: Yes. He was.
HASMUKH: Don’t contradict me, woman!
KIRAN: The same bossy nature?
SONAL: Yes.
( together )
HASMUKH: No.
KIRAN: Did he ever disagree with his father?
SONAL: No !
( together )
HASMUKH: Yes !
KIRAN: Did he ever do anything at all without consulting his father first?
SONAL: No, never !
( together )
HASMUKH: Yes, always !”

It shows that Dattani excels in the matter of content as well as in technique. He makes experiments with new theatrical devices to sustain nobility and dynamism. In the second part of the play Hasmukh is dead but Dattani presents him in the form of Ghost. His invisible presence, he encounters the inner conscience of all those characters whom he dominates in his life time. The idea of invisible presence is an excellent device of self realization. It also contributes to sustain a lively homour with a constant shift between illusion and reality. About this Dr. Beena Agrawal says:

“…The garb of authority maintained by Hasmukh was a method to save his own inner self from clashes of the outside world. After the death of
Hasmukh, the real nature of each character is freely revealed and their comments present a fine mockery of parental authority... The amazing reactions and witty remarks of Hasmukh at the reality of Sonal, Ajit and Preeti make the play a sparkling comedy…”49

Thus this brief critical analysis of the drama Where There’s a Will shows how Mahesh Dattani, a great observer of man and manner of the society, has very brilliantly portrayed a very realistic presentation of society. The various maladies which we, the reader, confront with in this work are very common to our day-to-day life. The problem of a free and independent existence of a woman in a male-dominating world is a glaring example today. The same is the case with the will of a man which plays a very vital role in moulding the personality of a man. Everybody has a will of his own. The will should not or must not be crushed and mutilated by the elders or by the conservatives. In order to run the society smoothly, it is necessary the part of the elders to pave the way for the new comers so that these new comers may flourish and bloom with new vigour and vitality without any impediments. This is what Dattani wants to show in this drama. We all know that Mahesh Dattani, like the modern playwright G.B. Shaw, depicts a very realistic and thought-provoking portrayal of this modern world. But so far as the plays of G.B. Shaw are concerned we generally see that in most of his plays the protagonist becomes the mouthpiece of the dramatist. But in the plays of the Mahesh Dattani, the playwright Dattani is never visible through his character. He allows his characters to speak as naturally as the water of the river gushes out of the mountain. The thoughts and ideals which Dattani has depicted in this play are not the collection of facts and figure but they are
moulded in the form of rich art rendered through metaphoric expression and some other dramatic and poetic devices.

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