



## Hegemonic Masculinity and the Affective Persistence of Power in *Where There Is a Will*: A Critical Study

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### Abstract

Mahesh Dattani's *Where There Is a Will* is regarded as one of his most revealing plays, which underlines the issues of gender and patriarchy, as well as familial complexities, making it an apt piece for analyzing domestic and familial frameworks. Existing scholarship on this play primarily presents the relation between patriarchal structure and familial frameworks but the critical lens that aligns these issues with hegemonic control and disciplinary power remains subordinated. This paper underlines Mahesh Dattani's *Where There is a Will* through a critical lens, showcasing the convergence between patriarchal ordinance and masculine orthodoxy. It intends to explore how the dynamics of patriarchy are shaped by order, surveillance and control. Moreover, this paper emphasises how the masculine orthodoxy can be analysed through affect studies, wherein the dominant agency controls the emotional dynamics of subordinate subjectivities. These emotions, for instance, fear, hesitation, and silence circulated by the subordinate bodies, serve as symbols of masculine domination, presenting that patriarchal structure operates by governing emotions. Focusing Pierre Bourdieu's theory of masculine domination, Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary power and Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, and Sara Ahmed's outlook on affective economies and socio-cultural relations of emotions, this study focalises the character of Hasmukh Mehta through the paradigms of authoritative masculinity that disciplines female agency and familial dynamics not just through gender norms but through affective control, economic power and hegemonic realms.

**Keywords:** Mahesh Dattani, *Where There Is a Will*, Patriarchy, Masculine domination, Hegemonic masculinity, Disciplinary power, Affect theory.

## Introduction

Mahesh Dattani's plays are revered for being the cornerstone for demonstrating the quintessential issues regarding gender and patriarchy. Most of his plays like *Dance Like a Man*, *Tara*, and *Bravely Fought the Queen* deal with multi-faceted issues of Indian society with regard to gender roles and personal autonomy, gender discrimination, and suppressed sexual identities. Discussing the relevance of his plays, Mahesh Dattani affirms in the preface of *Collected Plays* (2000), "I am certain that my plays are a true reflection of my time, place and socio-economic background" (Dattani, 2000, p. 7). Drawing on the plays of Dattani, Asha Kothari Chaudhuri affirms, "Dattani's early plays especially concern themselves with the apparatus of the family that is entrenched within the middle class milieu—of which the playwright self-admittedly is a part—and would attempt to 'connect' with audience drawn from similar backgrounds" (Chaudhuri, 2005, pp.24-25). The aspect of the middle class has been a matter of discussion in Dattani's plays as it serves as the foundation for dealing with familial complexities and dysfunctional relations. His characters are often more stand-ins for opposing worldviews, points of view and eternal contradictions that make their family dynamic a state of instability. Some represent a more patriarchal, authoritarian worldview (e.g.: Amritlal from *Dance Like a Man*; Hasmukh Mehta from *Where There Is a Will*), others (*Tara*, *Jairaj*, *Ajit*) with the ideals of subordination and submission. For the audience, these contrasting worldviews reflect the fractured spaces they inhabit within their family hierarchy.

In the play, *Where There Is a Will*, Dattani presents the hegemonic features of masculinity by employing the character of Hasmukh Mehta, wherein the patriarch determines the subordinate identities of other individuals. The character of Hasmukh Mehta further resembles masculine ego, wherein he boasts of his craft as a businessman, claiming himself to be a self-

made man. Mehta is egoistic and replete with pride in his patriarchal paradigm, and he seeks to anchor the life of his son on his own terms, exemplifying his orthodoxy as a father. Moreover, Hasmukh's overreaching pride is so towering that it overrides his physical ailments, showcasing his negligence towards his own body, which ultimately leads him towards death. It can be stated that these overarching attributes of Hasmukh Mehta are what make him stand out from the traditional heroes of Mahesh Dattani. While the other domineering male figures of Dattani's plays have been studied through the lens of patriarchal power, Hasmukh Mehta's character demands an intricate critical analysis that links his patriarchal ordinance to bourgeois masculinity and hegemonic patriarchy.

The minute analysis of Hasmukh Mehta's character through the paradigms of disciplinary power, hegemonic ordinance, bourgeois masculinity, and affective dynamics aids in broadening the corpus of the representation of familial frameworks and patriarchy in Indian society. This critical lens and affective outlook further demonstrate that patriarchal structure is shaped by order, surveillance, power structure, and emotional confinement that determine the prospects of family dynamics and gender relations. While the majority of the studies emphasise the representation of familial complexities in Indian society through the lens of gender issues and patriarchal framework, this study brings a critical lens to the corpus of familial frameworks.

## Theoretical Frameworks

This study intends to draw a relation between affect theory, masculine dominance, and patriarchal ordinance by adopting the theoretical lens of Pierre Bourdieu's *Masculine Domination*, Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary power, Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, and Sara Ahmed's affective economies.

The first focus of the study connects the concept of patriarchy to Bourdieu's concept of masculine domination. In his book, *Masculine Domination*, Pierre Bourdieu underlines that "the strength of the masculine order is seen in the fact that it does not need justification: it imposes itself as self-evident, universal, and unquestioned" (Bourdieu,2001,p.9). Bourdieu argues that the paradigm of masculinity or masculine domination is normalised in a patriarchal structure, exemplifying the naturalisation of gender hierarchy. Bourdieu underlines that this normalisation of masculine dominance is not open to any political discourse because it is displayed through universally accepted narratives, further corroborating the existence of masculinity as unquestioned in a patriarchal structure. The critical lens on masculine dominance propounds the idea that patriarchal structure operates through consensual submission rather than dominance. The foundation of masculine domination in a patriarchal structure remains adamant because it needs no political justification or binary narratives.

Furthermore, this paper employs Sara Ahmed's concept of affective economies to determine that the circulation of emotions is shaped by power dynamics. Affective economies, broadly, emphasise the socio-political paradigms of emotions, portraying how emotions such as fear "circulate between bodies" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 5) and determine social identities. The perpetual fear and silence of migrants' bodies in a foreign land are examples of how affect attaches meaning to their identities as outsiders. Identically, in familial frameworks governed by patriarchy, masculine authority governs emotional frameworks and emotions such as fear and hesitation that circulate between family members determine their marginalised identities, solidifying gendered power and masculine dominance.

Furthermore, this paper uses Michel Foucault's idea of disciplinary power to exemplify the power structure of patriarchy. In his book, *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault shows that the "machinery of power" (Foucault,1998,p. 138) displays dominance by producing submissive identities, highlighting the formation of "subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies" (Foucault, 1995, p. 138). Identical to Foucault's concept, patriarchal structures also operate through power that produces docile female identities. The character of Hasmukh Mehta is a product of a patriarchal structure shaped by disciplinary power.

This study further advocates the realm of patriarchy through Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. In the book *Masculinities*, Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 2005, p. 77).

Connell's ideas regarding masculinity are quite similar to Bourdieu's masculine dominance. Hegemonic masculinity frames the dominance of masculine identities as consensual control. It normalises masculine control by legitimating the centralisation of males and the subordination of female identities. In the context of Indian society, this hegemonic masculinity is synonymous with traditional gender narratives, wherein the superiority of males has always been accepted without any discourse. On the contrary, the other half remains subordinated, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it, "One is not born but rather becomes a woman" (Beauvoir, 2010,p. 13).

Hasmukh Mehta's character is well fitted for a critical analysis of patriarchy. The image of

Hasmukh Mehta represents authoritative masculinity that seeks to anchor the lives of his family. Mehta's surmounting character evokes a sense of legitimised domination, wherein the demonstration of power is underlined through his acceptance as the sole patriarch of the family.

### Methodology

The paper employs a qualitative analysis of the text to foreground the convergence between affect theory, patriarchal structure, and masculine domination. By employing a close reading of the text *Where There Is a Will*, this study intends to move beyond the traditional representation of patriarchy in Indian societies where patriarchal supremacy is structured mainly through gender narratives. This study emphasises the affective persistence of patriarchy and how patriarchy is shaped by power and hegemony. Instead of the traditional representation of patriarchy, this study highlights the deep-layered structures of patriarchy validated by power and how that patriarchal power is felt by the subordinate bodies. By emphasising the theoretical vocabulary of Sara Ahmed, R.W. Connell, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, this study showcases how hegemonic patriarchy is felt.

### Analysis

#### Gender, Patriarchy, and the Binary Framework in Dattani

A large portion of Mahesh Dattani's plays, although dealing with many quintessential issues, reconfigure as a burning question that tries to define the relation between gender and patriarchy. When it comes to the convergence between gender and patriarchy, Dattani somewhat portrays a binary narrative.

"Gender obviously is a major part of it. And I think it has to do with my own comfort with both the feminine and the masculine self in me. I think the masculine self is very content; it doesn't need to express itself. But the feminine

self seems to seek expression [...]" (Katyal, 2000, p.32).

Dattani's viewpoint on gender and patriarchy is marked by the issue of the domination of male identity in the face of a submissive feminine paradigm. His plays highlight that traditional patriarchal society portrays the persona of masculinity as supreme and dominating, which controls familial dynamics. However, the critical insights regarding this acceptance of masculinity and femininity as domineering and submissive, respectively, remain understated. The prospect of masculinity and how it operates within the patriarchal structure is a quintessential framework.

*Where There Is a Will* conceptualises the very idea of exorcising patriarchy and how its mechanism operates through hegemonic control and disciplinary power. Irrespective of the gender binaries of male/female, this play underlines the extent of patriarchy that continues to dismantle family dynamics to extremities. Hasmukh Mehta embodies bourgeois masculinity, whose domination over his family continues even after his death, signifying the patriarchal convergence between economic power and familial dependency.

#### Bourgeois Masculinity and Hegemonic Control: The Construction of Hasmukh Mehta

From the very first act, the character of Hasmukh Mehta is shown as a rich businessman who boasts of his wealth and success, defining himself as the sole provider of the family. Hasmukh Mehta's character mirrors the prospect of hegemonic masculinity, wherein he expects his ideals to be validated without any discourse. Mehta intends to anchor the economic frameworks and aspirations of his family, which indicates the traits of bourgeois masculinity. When his son Ajit seeks to venture into the prospect of a business enterprise in modernising factories through governmental aid, Hasmukh Mehta vehemently opposes it,

positioning himself as the sole decision-maker in the household. Moreover, when Ajit seeks to understand the reason behind his negation of this business idea, Mehta dominantly affirms, "I didn't read it. I didn't need to, because the answer was no" (Dattani, 2000, p.453).

Connell, in his book *Masculinities*, portrays that the domineering identity of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 2005, p. 81) is related to "marginalised masculinity" (Connell, 2005, p.81), which helps identify specific masculinity and the mechanism of power. Ajit, despite being a man, drifts into the narratives of marginalised masculinity because of his lack of economic power and authority, while hegemonic masculinity demonstrates power by legitimising its dominance and marginalising the existence of others. Hasmukh Mehta often ridicules Ajit's idea of becoming a businessman, stating, "My son, the businessman. Just listen to him" (Dattani, 2000, p.453). This subversion of marginalised masculinity is a distinctive feature of masculine domination, wherein the demonstration of power is subjugated through unquestioned authority. Pierre Bourdieu argues that the domination of masculinity is legitimised in society because it works as a hegemonic manifestation of normalcy and universality (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 9).

### Domestic Space Thorough Disciplinary Power

The relationship between Hasmukh Mehta and his family members demonstrates the impact of hegemonic dominance and patriarchal structure on familial relations. Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity operates by showcasing "dominant position of men and subordination of women" (Connell, 2005, p.77). Hasmukh Mehta's relation with his wife, Sonal underlines how masculinity disciplines female agency. In one of the scenes in the play, the tussle between Mehta and Sonal is evident when he keeps complaining and refusing the food cooked by his wife. Although

she cooks halwa, parathas, and even salad for him, he always finds a way to complain, deciding what is favorable to eat. This tussle is not a simple disagreement with regard to food, but acts as a microcosm for the convergence between authoritarian masculinity and subversion of feminine agency. Sonal's efforts are seen as obligations, highlighting the devaluation of female existence and the supremacy of masculine domination.

### Objectification of Women and Marriage as a Patriarchal Institution

Hasmukh Mehta's character normalises the supremacy of masculine domination. This normalisation translates into patriarchal ordinance, wherein males repeal female agency, positioning them as mere objects. Bourdieu affirms masculine order as "self-evident" (Bourdieu, 2001, p.9) and "unquestioned" (Bourdieu, 2001, p.9), which invalidates the autonomy of others. In the play, Dattani apparently examines the objectification of women. In the course of events in the play, Hasmukh Mehta utilises the stage and addresses the aspect of marriage. In a shocking revelation, Mehta says, "I think the important reason anyone should marry at all is to get a son" (Dattani, 2000, p.472). In this framework, the existence of Mehta's wife, Sonal, is only confined to the role of mother, highlighting Mehta's proclamation over her body. Mehta's confession penetrates the ethical standards of humanity, demonstrating the imposition of masculine authority. His normalised views on marriage and female identities underline the legitimisation of masculine dominance. Besides that, this normalisation of Sonal's existence posits the delimitation of female autonomy, portraying how women like Sonal fail to revolt against the masculine order because of economic dependency and established norms of masculine supremacy. This is synonymous with what Foucault views as disciplinary power, wherein the power structure forms "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1998, p.138), which validates

the supremacy of the dominant system without any discourse.

The relationship between Hasmukh Mehta and his son Ajit further structures the convergence between hegemonic masculinity and masculine dominance. However, in contrast to the self-proclaimed domineering identity of himself, Hasmukh Mehta regards his son through the paradigms of negligence and uselessness, considering him a mistake. Mehta perpetually contrasts Ajit with himself, questioning his existence as a son.

#### **Masculine Domination and Affective Control - Circulation of Fear**

Another lens that can be employed for analysing the paradigm of masculine domination within a patriarchal structure is the somatic experience of subordinate bodies. The terminology of somatic experience designates the bodily intensities. This bodily intensity, according to some authors, remains in the private chambers of individual identities. However, Sara Ahmed posits that bodily intensities are not independent of socio-political frameworks and it manifests into socially narrativised emotions. These emotions, according to Ahmed, stick to bodies and circulate, attaching meaning to their identities. These emotions such as fear, anger, and shame stick to individuals and attach meaning to their identities. In *Where There Is a Will* the perpetual fear and bodily sensations of shock and anxiety circulate between the family members. Ajit, Sonal, and Preeti share the same emotions of grief against the masculine orthodoxy of Hasmukh Mehta, underlining their marginalised identities. When Hasmukh Mehta places his property in a trust, his family members demonstrate the shared feeling of sorrow and hopelessness: "He has ruined us! The old man has taken us for a nice ride" (Dattani, 2000, p. 477). This constant paranoia of grief and fear among the family members displays how the patriarchal structure regulates

emotional intensities. Sara Ahmed's Affective economies postulates a relation between capital and emotions. As is identical to how economic capital circulates in society, emotions circulate and "stick" (Ahmed, 2014, p.5) between people. These emotions then stick to certain people and produce labelled identities. The family members of Hasmukh Mehta inherit the submissive identities because they carry the collective emotions of fear and hesitation against the patriarchal orthodoxy of Mehta.

#### **Spectral Presence of Patriarchy- Power After Death**

One of the major features of Dattani's plays is the perpetual persistence of patriarchy, or the spectral presence of it. Whether it's the character of Amritlal in *Dance Like a Man* and Hasmukh Mehta in *Where There Is a Will*, the effect of masculine domination remains intact even after their deaths. In this play, the spectral dominance of masculine control is translated through Hasmukh Mehta's will. Before his death, Hasmukh Mehta placed his wealth under a trust, thus excluding his son from the share of his property. Although Ajit works in the factory of his father, Hasmukh Mehta places his son in a subordinate position, excluding him from financial control. Bourdieu in *Masculine Domination* argues "The social order functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded" (Bourdieu, 2001, p.9). Hasmukh Mehta's masculine domination is so overpowering that it serves as a symbolic machine that continues to grip the fate of his family, exemplifying the transformation of his individual dominance to institutionalised control. Ajit's lack of agency postulates the extent of masculine dominance that outlives the patriarch to dictate the lives of others. Hasmukh Mehta's spectral presence is symbolic of the omnipresence of bourgeois masculinity which shapes the economic frameworks and social dynamics of Ajit, demonstrating the subordination of his identity.

Through these textual instances, this play highlights the pervasive influence of masculine dominance and hegemonic control. The family of Hasmukh Mehta represents subordinate bodies that succumbed to the overarching dominance of Mehta. Hasmukh Mehta's character serves as an example of cruel masculinity that dismantles familial frameworks and social relations.

### Conclusion

This study examines the deeper layers of patriarchy and its different mechanisms through the paradigms of masculine dominance, hegemonic masculinity, affective control, and disciplinary power. Generally, in Indian societies, the patriarchal structure is only studied through the convergence between the supremacy of males and the subordination of females. Patriarchy is a deep-rooted structure shaped by ideological forces, order, hegemony, and masculine dominance. The representation of patriarchy in Mahesh Dattani's plays is quite explanatory, however, despite this, the adoption of a critical lens in exploring multifaceted structures of patriarchy is a much-needed prospect. By employing the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, Sara Ahmed, Michel Foucault, and Connell, this study explores the somatic as well as socio-economic experiences of subordinate bodies in a patriarchal structure. The intended focus of the paper is to understand how patriarchy is felt and operates through the paradigms of ideology and power. Further study on this aspect may uncover other frameworks with regard to performance studies and intersectional feminism.

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