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**UNTOLD RESEASONS FOR GENDER DISCRIMINATION:
 A STUDY OF MAHESH DATTANI'S SELECTED PLAYS**

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Abstract:

The entitled research article is based on the explanation of the untold issues behind the gender discrimination from the Indian perspective with the explicit references from the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani who is one of the most renowned contemporary Indian dramatists who has won the Sahitya Akademi award for his book of plays in 1998, entitled Final Solutions and Other Plays. His first full length play is Where There's a Will and Playpen is his theatre group, formed in 1984. The discrimination is found in the relation between man and woman and eunuch, and there are many reasons to establish this discrimination. And every play of Mahesh Dattani has pointed out some specific reasons that work for the formation of the discrimination and inequality between man, woman and eunuch. The selected plays of Mahesh Dattani, Dance Like a Man, Tara, Bravely Fought the Queen, and Seven Steps Around the Fire etc. represent the discrimination and inequality from different perspective angles in the Indian society. In the play Dance Like a Man, the discrimination is found through the cultural practice of dance in the Hindu patriarch society; in the play Tara, it is presented throughout the conducts of parents towards their children according to gender and sex. And in the play Bravely Fought the Queen Dattani shows the relation between commercialism and gender or the Marxist gender issue. Seven Steps Around the Fire has been known for the study of the Indian third gender.

Keywords: *patriarch, Oedipus complex, masculine, feminine etc.*

In the society, the term gender stands for the cultural practices. In a society, there are three types of genders according to the cultural practices. They are male, female and the third gender. Male and female are the first and second genders. These three genders are distinguished from each other according to their cultural practices. As the society is a structure of power, and every structural element of the society is connected with the other elements with the hidden thread of power. The society is divided into many sections with the inequality of power. And such inequality of power is found among these three sections of genders. Men are the first genders, hold all the power and enjoy the power system by exercising the power over others. Women belong to the second gender and the power is exercised over them by the men and they also exercise power over the third genders. Gay, eunuch, hijra, lesbian are known as the third gender; and they have nothing to exercise but the power is being exercised over them by the first and the second genders. The people of the third gender are doubly dominated at a time. Mahesh Dattani in his plays very explicitly delineates the domination of one gender by another gender, the exercise of power. The plays contain the multiple reasons which are responsible for the discrimination and inequality between genders.

There are many reasons behind the discrimination between the genders in the society. The first and foremost reason for the discrimination and domination of one gender by another gender is the patriarchal structure of the society. It is a concept for the structure of the society that suggests the male centered formation of the society. It means that the males are the masters. They hold all the power system, push other into a subservient position. Patriarchal norms in the society suggest all controlling powers in every field like domestic, politics, economic etc. should be centered around the world of men where the positions for

women and for the third genders are nothing. The patriarchal philosophy is found in the Indian society and families. Mahesh Dattani is an Indian dramatist and he very cleverly has used his skill to portray this patriarchal society and its dominating power over other genders. The power of man is the main reason behind the gender discrimination in every society, and India is not an exception, and in the plays of Mahesh Dattani for the gender discrimination or domination of genders, the patriarchal concept plays the leading role. Mahesh Dattani in his plays shows how the patriarchal concept works for creating the subservient position for the women and the third gender. Each play delineates a new side of the patriarchal domination. In the play *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Mahesh Dattani has used the background of Trivedi family. The Trivedi brothers, in the play *Bravely Fought the Queen* are typical middle class Indian capitalist patriarchal figures. They are more conscious to launch a new design nightwear for the 'Re Va Tee Company' but they have no a little conscious for their wives, Doli and Alka and for their feelings. In the family, the reputation for both Alka and Doli is nothing. They live like other in the family or are the subaltern creatures in the family. They are puppets at the hands of Jiten and Nitin. At the beginning of the play, Doli is preparing herself for the visit to Kapoors, but this visit is postponed because of the masked ball party in order to launch a new range of colour- coordinated nightwear and underwear for women in favor of the Re Va Tee company. And this information is send to Doli via Lalitha by her husband Jiten and brother in law Nitin. Besides this, the deformity of their daughter Daksha is the result of the domestic violence in that patriarchal family. At the time of pregnancy, Doli has been brutally beaten by Jiten and the result is the deformity of Daksha: "*Dolly. And you hit me! Jitu you beat me up! I was carrying Daksha and you beat me up!*"(Dattani 311)

Before the conjugal life, both Doli and Alka had to face the patriarchal domestic domination by their brother Praful who controlled all the activities of his sisters. He did not allow his sisters to make friendly relation with the neighbor boy: "*Alka... Praful saw. He 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!*"(Dattani 257)

In the play *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Mahesh Dattani shows the inequality between husbands and wives, and this inequality is found for the domestic rights, economical rights.

In the play *Dance Like a Man* Mahesh Dattani has created the conflict between father and son for the cultural practice of dance. In the Hindu culture dance is regarded as a feminine cultural practice and according to the Hindu myth the dance has been practiced by the temple dancers and it belongs to the lower class of people especially to the prostitutes. But lord Shiva is the idol figure and the god of dance in the Hindu myth. Amritlal Parekh is a liberalist and he is the supporter of the equality in the society. But in the case of his family the situation is different. Jairaj, his only son has the fantasy for the Indian classical dance and his practice of the classical dance is the blame to the reputation for the family of Amritlal Parekh. He supports the liberty of common people, but he denies the liberty of his son Jairaj because of his practice of this feminine art form 'dance'. He wishes to control the life style of his son Jairaj. He doesn't accept his son Jairaj as a dancer because it is disreputable for his family background. On the other hand Jairaj decides to be a dancer. Dance is a feminine art for Amritlal and he wants to make his son to be a man. He mocks Jairaj thus: "Well, most boys are interested in cricket; my son is interested in dance" (Dattani 415). The play *Dance Like a Man* also highlights that a woman may easily succeed in the world of men, but a man can't succeed in the world of women. The play shows the position of a man in the feminine culture.

The play *Tara* shows the parental treatment for their children on the basis of sex. Sex is the biological difference whereas the gender is the cultural differences between men and women. The inequality of the parental treatment for their children on the basis of sex is not a new incident in the Indian society, even such incident is found in the western society. The western parents provide all the facilities to their sons whereas their daughters are brought up under restrictions. In the early twentieth century, the British feminist Virginia Woolf has attacked this psychology of the parents. She has created the imaginary sister of William Shakespeare, Judith Shakespeare in her *The Room of One's Own*. Judith Shakespeare is

the representative of all the intelligent daughters whose talents and intellectual lives are spoiled by their own parents. The daughters in the families are not provided the sufficient atmosphere for their development. They are restricted. Such differences are clearly attacked by Virginia Woolf in *The Room of One's Own*. She says: "...Meanwhile his extraordinary gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was an adventurous, as imaginative, and as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil..." (Leitch 896).

Like William, Judith Shakespeare is so talented; but her talent is restricted or prevented by her parents. She has been educated only on fine arts, painting, needle, music whereas William has been provided all the facilities to develop his intellectual power. And as a result, the world has received only one Shakespeare not two, that is male. The same subject has also been highlighted by Judith Butler in her theoretical text *Gender Trouble* where the conducts of parents towards their daughters have been criticized. Mahesh Dattani, in the play *Tara has pointed out* the same issue. The Patel's family is standing for all the families where both son and daughter have received different treatments from their parents according to their sexes and genders. Both Patel and Bharati are the representatives of all the parents who prefer their sons to their daughters. And Tara is the Judith Shakespeare in the Patel's family. Both Tara and Chandan are Siamese twins with three legs and the extra leg medically belongs to Tara and the gender discrimination has been practiced here during the surgery. It is Bharati who does not want a deformed son and she decides to give this extra leg to Chandan. But the surgery is not a successful one: "...As planned by them, Chandan had two legs- for two days. It didn't take them very long time to realize what a grave mistake they had made. The leg was amputated" (Dattani 378).

There are many of reasons behind this injustice against Tara, done by her mother Bharati. Bharati thinks that Chandan as a man can be a perfect supporter in future for Bharati at the last phase of her life and Tara can't do so in future because she is the daughter of the family. Besides this in the patriarchal society, the value of a son is higher than a daughter and this value of son indirectly enforces Bharati to take a wrong decision for Tara. Tara is also haunted by her father Patel. She is the excellent and brilliant daughter of the family, but like Judith Shakespeare, her talent is restricted by her father Patel who doesn't offer higher education to Tara, whereas for Chandan, he has planned much, his education at abroad. Chandan is also asked for help to the office work by Patel but for Tara that is the beyond of the scope:

Patel: You will come with me to the office until your college starts.

Chandan: I don't want to go to college! (Fighting his tears.) Not without Tara!.....

Patel: You will not. I won't allow it (Dattani 351).

The patriarchal concept in the society and in the family is not only the reason for the subservient position for the second or third genders or inequality between genders or not only men dominate women. In the play *Bravely Fought the Queen Mahesh Dattani identifies the other issues besides the male power, which are responsible for the wretched condition for women. The prime example in that regard is Baa*. Through her, Mahesh Dattani presents how Baa becomes a masculine figure from feminine. During her married life Baa was a victim of the brutality of her drunken husband then she had all the feminine qualities. But after the death of her husband, there is found lot of changes. She is inherited the family property. She has not shown a little sympathy for her daughter-in-laws, Dolly and Alka. Baa is charged by Alka that it is she who prevents Nitin to have a physical relation with her and as a result that they have no a child: "Alka. You know why I can't have children. You won't let me. That's why!" (Dattani 284)

Perhaps Baa finds some pleasure by giving the mental torture to Doli and Alka and it gives her some solace for her past life. Beside this explanation, it is also noticed that Baa has an immoral fantasy with Nitin because Nitin possesses a different face from his father. As Baa has the economic power, she has lost the capability to understand the plights of her daughter-in-laws. She dominates every one of the family. Here Mahesh Dattani identifies that sex and money are responsible for the creation of discrimination between genders.

Jiten: She will have to change her will.

Nitin: She won't. She will never give it to you.

Jiten: But she will give it to you.

Nitin: No. She won't.

Jiten : I tell you she will.

Nitin: She has never forgiven me!

Jiten: Make her forgive you!

Nitin: How?

Jiten: Get rid of Alka! (Dattani 290)

The sex plays another significant role for the conflict among the characters of the play. And in every case of the sexual domination, it is Alka who has been victimized always. At first she has been betrayed by her own brother Praful who married off her with Nitin in order to hide his immoral relation with Nitin. Both Praful and Nitin have homosexual relation. Secondly Alka is dominated by her mother in law Baa who prevents Nitin to have a sexual relation with Alka. Thus being a female, Alka is dominated from every sexual ground. So here Mahesh Dattani presents sex is another reason to create the discrimination. The capitalism or power of money is also responsible for the subservient position for Alka and Doli. They have nothing about money they have to depend on their husbands.

In the dramas *Dance Like a Man*, *Tara*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Mahesh Dattani presents the discrimination between men and women, but the situation for gender in the play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* is totally different. Here he focuses on the Indian third gender and their plight in the Indian community rather than man-woman relation. Anarkali is a hijra and is imprisoned on the charge of the murder of the fellow hijra Kamla but who is actually victimized by the Indian patriarchal political society, represented by M.L.A Mr. Sharma. In the police station, Anarkali is put in the cell which is already full with male prisoners. This marks the lack of Indian administrative facilities for the hijras or eunuchs. The play shows the exact position of the Indian third genders in society, in the police systems in India: "*Uma- She is being beaten by all the male prisoners*". (Dattani 9)

Besides this, Munswamy is the representative of all the official persons who think the hijras are not human beings, they are animals in the society: Munswamy (hits the bars again). Back! Beat it! Kick the hijra! *The other inmates begin to beat Anarkali up*" (Dattani 9).

If the hijra is regarded as the third gender then men are the first and the women are the second genders. Men, being the first, possess all the facilities and for women the facilities are limited, but for the hijra, these are totally blocked. And they are dominated in two ways at a time, the first by men and then by the woman. Mr. Sharma presents the first category and Uma Rao is for the second. Through the research work of Uma on the hijra, Mahesh Dattani discloses the mystery of the murder of Kamla. Uma is a teacher of sociology at Bangalore University and doing a research on the Indian third gender. She has come to know the injustice against the Kamla and Anarkali but she is not active to punish the culprits. She does only those things which are informative for her thesis: "Uma. I think this particular one is of interest to me at this time (Dattani 7).

Dattani very carefully has pointed out this speechless condition of the Indian third gender: "Anarkali. They will kill me also if I tell you the truth. If I don't tell the truth, I will die in jail (Dattani 14). Uma knows the actual incident of the murder, the system also knows the actual culprit behind the murder of Kamla, all hijras are also known with the truth; it is the power of inequality and lack of power for the Indian third genders that all are silent.

Uma (voice-over): They knew. Anarkali, Champa and all the hijra people knew who was behind the killing of Kamla. They have no voice. The case was hushed up and was not even reported in the newspapers. Champa was right. The police made no arrest. (Dattani 42)

The gender discrimination has presented also in the radio play *Uma and The Fairy Queen* by Mahesh Dattani with the background of Islam. It is a detective play on the murder of Michael. But it also focuses on the women and their sexual rights in the Muslim world. Before the relation with Michael, Nila was a

famous Pakistani T. V actress and every household in Pakistan knew her as Ruksana, the ideal housewife. But Nila has been charged that she had immoral sexual relation during her glamorous career and there was restriction, like fatwa by the authority of the Muslim society. On the other hand her first husband Malik is capable to have two wives, Nila and Sohaila at a time. This marks the sexual freedom for the men and the restriction for women on the basis of gender in that society according to religion. Feroz is the son of Nila and Malik. Both of his parents have multiple sex relations in their lives. But the life of Feroz becomes critical for his mother's immoral relations, not for his father Malik. And it is that society that forces Feroz to intend to murder his mother: "Feroz... She was an immoral woman and that is something we do not forgive! She slept with her actor friends! For money, for pleasure, or just to please the Devil. And I was born out of her cesspool of lust" (Dattani 465).

These are all the situations by which Mahesh Dattani presents the gender discrimination. But at the same time, he tries to create some situations where the discrimination marks its impact very little. Mahesh Dattani introduces some good couples who lead very successful marital lives. He has used same names of his characters in many plays but there are some little differences behind the backgrounds, for example Uma and Suresh in both of Dattani's plays *Seven Steps Around the Fire* and *Uma and The Fairy Queen*. In both cases, they prove themselves good companions for each other. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Suresh has applauded the importance of the dream of his wife Uma and after the marriage, Suresh allows his wife to continue her study and the research work on the Indian third gender. Besides this, in the play *Uma and The Fairy Queen*, Uma has been introduced as a detective and her journey to disclose the mystery of the murder of Michael is appreciated by her husband Suresh. And it is she who solves the case of the murder rather than her husband Suresh. Lalitha and Sridhar is another good couple by Mahesh Dattani in the play *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Lalitha is not helping her husband in the domestic field but also in his office work. She has gone to the Trivedi family as the representative of her husband to Dolly and Alka for the preparation of the mask ball for the 'Re Va Tee company' that is going to launch a new range of colour- coordinated nightwear and underwear for women, as Dolly has some experience of the mask ball arrangement. Besides that part of Lalitha, Sridhar knows how to maintain the dignity of his wife. He involves in fighting with the Trivedi brothers while Lalitha is insulted. He quarrels with Jiten when he insults her: "Sridhar. Be more polite! It's my wife you are talking to! / Jiten. Screw your wife" (Dattani 306).

Sridhar later leaves the job for the dignity of his wife. Mahesh Dattani has created some situations where for women have no value, for examples in the cases of Baa and her dead husband, Dolly and Jiten, Alka and Nitin; but in the cases of Lalitha and Sridhar, Uma and Suresh, but at the same time Dattani has created a different position of man-woman relation where man and woman are equal.

Mahesh Dattani is the greatest Indian playwright. His dramatic works are closely related with the present issues of India or the present India is the theme of his writings. It has already explained that his dramas reflect the conflict of gender. Mahesh Dattani has shown that the women in India and their plight in India are not satisfactory. They are humiliated, pushed into the subservient positions in life. At the same time he also suggests to increase the position of women in the Indian society. In short, his plays talk about lot of themes about life and its multiple relations in society. But the discrimination and inequality for men, women and the third gender in the society are the basic angels of his works. He explains the untold reasons behind the gender discrimination and inequality through his playwritings. Mahesh Dattani remarks about his plays 'I (Mahesh Dattani) write for my plays to be performed and appreciated by as wide as section of the society that my plays speak to and are about' (Dattani, Preface).

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