



Patriarchy in Mahesh Dattani's play Where There's a Will

Kathad Mahendra Amubhai

Research Scholar

Department of English

Shri Govind Guru University, Vinzol, Godhra

&

Dr. Anuragsinh D. Puvar

Research Supervisor

Shri Govind Guru University, Vinzol, Godhra

Abstract

This research paper will discuss the patriarchy in Mahesh Dattani's play *Where There's a Will*, and its implications for families in a middle-class Indian context. The play is about Hasmukh Mehta, the father, who, with his authority, wealth, and draconian rules, controls his family members. Hasmukh believes that the main purpose of marriage is to have a son, and he expects his son Ajit to follow his instructions just as he obeyed his own father. This reflects how patriarchal beliefs are passed down from one generation to the next. Instead of being guided by love, relationships are dominated by strict control, making emotional bonds less significant. The play depicts the different reactions of women to patriarchy: Sonal is passive and accepts unilateral male dominance, whereas Kiran opposes this and motivates others to self-assert. Dattani focuses attention on the detrimental impact patriarchy has on younger men, constraining their autonomy and selfhood. The play condemns the patriarchal structure of power, particularly in its sociopsychological aspects, and pleads for the restoration of balance, the disintegration of patriarchy, and socio-psychological well-being in family life. By focusing on wealth, authority, and societal expectations, *Where There's a Will* portrays how patriarchal norms operate in Indian families and how they might be challenged.

Keywords: *Family Power Structure, Financial Control, Gender Oppression, Patriarchy.*

Mahesh Dattani is among the most prominent Indian playwrights of the contemporary period. His works explore the Indian middle-class life, the conflict within domestic spaces, interpersonal relationships, and the unspoken rules that shape everyday behaviour. Among the various themes he analyzes, patriarchy is of great



importance. It refers to a social structure in which males occupy the central position of power, while females and subordinate males are expected to follow their instructions. In this play, he illustrates the functioning of patriarchy in male-dominated Indian society. It depicts a family that is under the control of a single man, Hasmukh Mehta, who, in an attempt to control the household even after he is death, uses his will to manipulate his wife and son. It is a powerful commentary on the deeply rooted patriarchal system within Indian households. The present paper examines the ways Dattani's presents patriarchal relationships in the Mehta family and the impact these relationships have on each family member.

According to Sylvia Walby “I shall define patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” (Walby 20).

In the play, Hasmukh Mehta clearly demonstrates his dominance over both his immediate and extended family members. He shows strong patriarchal views, as his controlling behaviour reflects his belief that being the richest person in the family gives him superiority. He openly feels that his financial power makes him superior as a father, husband, and breadwinner. This creates considerable conflict and tension in the family, as his controlling nature acts like a prison, restricting other family members. Through his character, the audience sees a clear representation of patriarchy showing how control and power are used to silence others and create fear rather than earn respect and understanding. In this play, when Hasmukh says, **“Wrong! I, Hasmukh Mehta, have every right. It’s my phone you are using in my house, and it’s my business secrets you are leaking to government officers, and my typists your friend is flirting with.”** (Collected Plays 458)

He thinks everything around him the house, the phone, the business, and even other people’s actions belong to him. This shows the patriarchal attitude of a family head, who behaves as if owns everyone around him. He does not allow his son to have his own opinion, or individuality, and he speaks as if he is the only one with the right to make decisions, expecting everyone else to follow his orders without question. Hasmukh’s words also clearly show that he sees himself as the primary and absolute authority, which reflects male dominance in society.

For Hasmukh, family appears to be a construct whose members derive identity, purpose, and worth solely from being an extension of, and service to, the father’s ego. His vision of a ‘perfect son’ has no room for individuality, disagreement, or emotional complexity. Dattani showcases how patriarchy creates a toxic culture in which control and domination are valued far more than love or authentic relationships. The play’s portrayal of the father-son relationship becomes a paradox as Hasmukh’s expectations of Ajit’s character and personhood are completely ignored, while only Hasmukh own authority is valued. The outcome is that the



whole family is left with a glaring void, as the cycle of control and power subjugates any possibility of genuine love or understanding.

The Mehta family is a showcase of Hasmukh's authoritative power over his entire household. His attitude is condescending, as though he owns them all as property. Hasmukh's condescending behaviour does not end with Sonal's complete submission and silence. Even though he verbally abuses Sonal, she believes that a husband's guidance must be endured, and she is expected to submit and remain silent. Sonal's character displays the extent to which a family becomes accustomed to the principles of patriarchy. Once a woman believes she lacks the power to voice her opinions or make decisions for herself, the depth of the silence within her becomes a part of her everyday life.

Ajit, Hasmukh's son, also experiences dilemmas under his father's control. Although officially an adult, Hasmukh permits him no professional autonomy or self-determination. Ajit wishes to live differently and be free, but his father is never on his side. Hasmukh treasures Ajit's submission and control exactly as he held over his own father. This illustrates how deeply embedded these beliefs are and how they are transferred to the next generations. Absolute submission is expected from sons, which inevitably conflicts with Ajit's will, leading to his frustrated confinement. When Hasmukh says:

“Nowhere! That is just my point! If you are you, then you are nowhere. You are nothing, just a big zero. No matter what you do, you'll remain a zero....” (Collected Plays 461)

This conversation demonstrates that Hasmukh is convinced that Ajit is worthless and will remain so until he follows the direction Hasmukh wants. Hasmukh sees himself as the chief authority of the family, and in his eyes, other family members only have value when they are fully submissive to him. The attitude reflected in this scenario indicates the impact of patriarchy within the household. Given the dynamics of authority, age, and finances, Hasmukh seeks to dominate Ajit and undermine his self-esteem. Rather than acknowledge Ajit as a self-sufficient individual with convictions, Dattani demonstrates through this interaction the impact of patriarchy on younger men, especially the ability of older men to control younger men's sense of self and shape their future.

There is systematic control in which money plays a dominant role. Hasmukh believes that because he earns money, he is owed ultimate respect and unquestioned allegiance. Love and respect are not feelings for him; he considers them rewards that should be earned by others when they comply with his demands. Hasmukh still controls his family through his testament. The bequest is an emblem of his wish to continue presiding over his family, albeit in vain. He imposes numerous demands and stipulations on how his assets are to be



used, placing Sonal and Ajit in a perpetual state of obligation to his whims. This shows that patriarchal oppression, is not only emotional and physical but also financial.

In the play, the two female characters react to patriarchy in very different ways. Sonal represents a woman who has lived for many years under her husband's rule and now believes that obeying him is her duty. She has accepted patriarchal ideas so deeply that it becomes difficult for her to imagine a life beyond them. On the other hand, Kiran is shown as a modern, independent woman who refuses to accept Hasmukh's controlling behaviour. After Hasmukh's death, Kiran becomes a guiding force for Sonal and Ajit, encouraging them to question the unfair rules that have restricted them for so long. She guides them to understand that they do not have to live under oppression. Through the bond Kiran and Sonal develop, Dattani illustrates that change is feasible if women stand in solidarity and challenge the status. In the performance *Where There's a Will*, Sonal portrays the stereotypical, subservient, and docile Indian housewife. One character admits that Sonal's husband, Hasmukh, is extremely patriarchal. In one scene, Sonal tells Preeti, **"Proud? He thinks he is king of all he surveys! ... We are just middle-class people with a lot of money. That's all."** (Collected Plays 472)

These dialogues clearly indicate that Sonal is aware of Hasmukh's arrogance and domineering character. He thinks highly of himself, and she appears to submit voluntarily. The image Sonal constructs of Hasmukh as "a crow that thinks it is a swan"—shows that his superiority is artificial, based only on money. Sonal is too intimidated to speak the truth to his face and is too conditioned and trapped to defend herself, especially under systemic patriarchy that forces women to protect the legal rights of their husbands to the point where they remain completely subjugated. Through Sonal, Dattani highlights the struggle of many middle-class women who are aware of the injustice of a male-dominated society.

As the play progresses, both Sonal and Ajit gradually realize their worth. They come to understand that Hasmukh's control is not love but a means of keeping them submissive. They start to think for themselves and make their own choices, reflecting the fact that once people recognize the impact of patriarchy on their lives, a shift becomes possible. It is then that people can reconstruct their relationships on the foundation of empathy rather than fear.

To conclude, *Where There's a Will* encourages us to reflect on the power of patriarchy in Indian households. The play shows that when Hasmukh assumes complete control, the other family members lose their voice, confidence, and happiness, and eventually become passive and miserable. We can say that his actions suggest that because he is the male breadwinner, he is entitled to total authority. However, the play clearly



demonstrates that this attitude harms the relationships that people believe they share. Through simple family interactions, Mahesh Dattani demonstrates the urgent need for families to shift from the damaging structure of patriarchy and adopt values based on equality, understanding, and freedom.

Works Cited

Dattani, Mahesh. "Where There's Will". Gurugram: *Collected Plays*. Penguin Books India, 2000, pp. 458,461,472,

Walby, Sylvia. "*Theorizing Patriarchy*". Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1991, pp. 20

References

Das, Bijay Kumar. "*Form and Meaning in Mahesh Dattani's Plays*" New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd, 2022.

Chaudhuri, Asha Kuthari. "*Mahesh Dattani*" New Delhi: Cambridge University Press India Pvt. Ltd, 2005.



**MULTIDISCIPLINARY COSMOPOLITAN JOURNAL OF RESEARCH
(MUCOJOR)-2583-9829 (On-line)**

International Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal

Certification of Publication

The Board of Multidisciplinary Cosmopolitan Journal of Research (MUCOJOR) is hereby awarding
this certificate to

Kathad Mahendra Amubhai

In recognition of the publication of the paper entitled
Patriarchy in Mahesh Dattani's play Where There's a Will

Published in Volume 03, Issue 06, December 2025.

EDITOR IN CHIEF



**MULTIDISCIPLINARY COSMOPOLITAN JOURNAL OF RESEARCH
(MUCOJOR)-2583-9829 (On-line)**

International Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal

Certification of Publication

The Board of Multidisciplinary Cosmopolitan Journal of Research (MUCOJOR) is hereby awarding
this certificate to

Dr. Anuragsinh D. Puvar

In recognition of the publication of the paper entitled
Patriarchy in Mahesh Dattani's play Where There's a Will

Published in Volume 03, Issue 06, December 2025.

EDITOR IN CHIEF