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The Position and Predicament of Transgenders in Dattani's Seven Steps Around the Fire: A Critical Analysis

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“Trans people are extraordinary, strong, intelligent, persistent and resilient. We have to be. And we will not stand for the picking and choosing of rights. We still have hope.”

Abstract

In the play Seven Steps around the Fire, Mahesh Dattani, a renowned playwright, portrays the deplorable position of Hijras (Eunuchs) in Indian society and his efforts to heighten the consciousness of the existential pain that these people endure as a result of prejudice in their daily lives. The goal is to evaluate how the Hijra community and the so-called sophisticated and biologically legitimate community, or the typical male and female in society, relate to one another. In the current inflexible societal framework, where their existence is neither recognised nor respected, Dattani's play Seven Steps around the Fire unpretentiously strives to disclose the additional efforts and additional changes the Hijras are needed to do in order for them to sustain themselves. Because of those limitations, they are compelled to live a life of insignificance, devoid of the status and acceptance that so-called normal males and girls naturally enjoy. Readers are moved by the play's description of the eunuchs' pitiful living conditions and are left with a deep wish to see injustice and prejudice eradicated from society. The play's tight-knit plots and supportive structure educate everyone about the Hijras' human rights, which are equal to those of other people and include the same fundamental freedoms. It exposes the appalling circumstances of the eunuchs, whose lives have been rendered meaningless by the ruling class (females/males) of society. The eunuchs are forced to live in a virtual world of humanity devoid of equality, cultural space, respect, and acknowledgment because they are given the freedom to impose their own cultural norms on this deprived class. This research paper deals with all these deliberations.

Keywords: Compelled, Cultural Space, Hijra, Orthodox, Relationship.

Introduction

One of the most well-known playwrights in contemporary Indian drama is Mahesh Dattani. Being a skilled craftsman, he examines in depth the agony of the oppressed people who lack the ability to decide on autonomy and rights for their basic requirements to lead a life as a common man. In 1998, his play collection Final Solutions and other Plays earned him the Sahitya Academy Award, making him the first dramatist in the annals of Indian English writing to do so. His superb ideas, concepts, and issues raised for the advancement of the society's suppressed and marginalised sects have earned him praise. As an actor, writer, director, and prominent social worker, Dattani is a multitasking person noted for his contributions to the world of art. He determined the Play Pen Theatre to highlight the skills of the new, up-and-coming generation, with a focus on honing acting, directing, and writing for stage productions. His initiatives are unquestionable and ground-breaking. He is unequivocally an idealistic, dedicated individual who has dedicated his life to the advancement of society. He hopes to make a lasting and advantageous influence in the world

through his artistic pursuits. Through his writings, Dattani exposes the societal ills that are pervasive in society, including child maltreatment, patriarchy, gender and religious discrimination, and sexual identity.

Distinctiveness of the Third Gender

He invokes empathy and compassion in his readers in *Seven Steps Around the Fire for the Hijra* (Eunuch) community, the most under-discussed community in India. The eunuchs were mostly employed in the past for the safety of royal women as their presence posed little threat to their chastity. Though they were called by names that were typically used for men and women, their status was highly degrading. Either a guy or a woman is considered an acceptable human being in our culture. Only each of these sexes have the freedom to live their lives as they choose, but sadly, there is also a third gender in the world that is not taken into accounts when it comes to fundamental rights and freedoms.

Dattani empathizes with the Hijra's distress and pain and portrays the same in his play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* in a pragmatic and profound mode to create sympathy in the heart of his readers/audiences. He illustrates how the society treats them unfairly, resulting in their lives unpleasant. The so-called keepers of order and security in society, like as police officers, who are tasked to preserve peace, occasionally engage in humiliating and prejudiced conduct by taking hijras for granted.

Following is an instance when the character Anarkali is ill-treated in jail and without giving her any opportunity to offer any justification in her defence.

Anarkali. I didn't kill her. She was my sister!
Munuswamy (hitting the bars). Back! Beat it!
Kick the hijra!
The other inmates begin to beat Anarkali up.
Anarkali (hitting back at first). Ai! Don't touch me!
The other inmates scream with pleasure as they beat up Anarkali.
Aaagh! Aaaagh! (Collected Plays 236)

In the play, Suresh holds an important title in the police department, which is meant to assist those who are less fortunate and serve the general public.

However, it has been noted that throughout the performance, Suresh has not made a single favourable remark about the third gender. As readers, we have an unfavorable view of Suresh and outwardly condemn him, but we cannot deny the reality that most of us secretly share the same opinions. Dattani effectively exposes the hypocritical mentality of people.

The playwright portrays the viewpoint and attitude of the average man towards the third gender through the character Suresh. Suresh seldom listened and overlooked Uma's warnings that male prisoners had abused a eunuch named Anarkali. He disrespects and overlooks the third gender, as demonstrated by this. The dialogue involving Suresh and Uma features the following lines, which extremely bluntly express Suresh's disapproval for eunuchs: Suresh: What's that you said? Sister? There is no such thing for them.

More lies. They are all just castrated degenerated men. (Collected Plays 238)

The playwright's awareness of their appalling situation highlights the distinctiveness as individuals shared by this socially marginalised community. The hijra community's survival on the outer edges of Indian civilization is a topic covered in *Seven Steps around the Fire*.

Prominence of their Identity

Through this drama, Dattani highlights how many members of the eunuch community go sans even the most basic necessities, which are provided for by nature for other men and women. Due to their solitude and experiences with rejection and contempt, they need to feel like they belong and to be around compassionate individuals. They develop a low self-esteem as a result, which might end up in personality disorders and an inferiority complex. They become involved in criminal activity as a result of the trauma their frustration caused. Terror made me difficult as Emily Bronte appropriately stated it in one of her famous reports. Their fear of being abandoned and alone drives them to get involved in antisocial behaviour. In a sense, it may be stated that society has responsibility for instilling in them criminal tendencies. The readers frequently encounter heartbreaking and sad scenes involving the hijras that indicate the anguish and depression they

encountered while reading the play. In an interview, Laxmi, an acclaimed and educated eunuch, admits that while the government has placed in place an assortment of measures that benefit the third gender, equitable treatment for hijras in the nation is still a long way off. The hijra community has its fair share of criminals, just like the rest of society. They are subjected to excessive and unfair punishment from both the police and the general population.

Portrayal of Characters

Dattani is an expert in portraying and defining characters that correspond with the requirements of the theme, but he always does justice in this area of the craft when it comes to bringing out the characters' natural instincts. By emphasizing Uma's delicate personality and womanly traits like compassion and beneficence, he communicates his empathy with the eunuch society. He regulates her character with the optimum balance of rationale and feeling. We are incapable of feeling social responsibility towards those who are disadvantaged hijra people until we have concerns for them. Uma works to bring Anarkali, a hijra, to justice after she gets detained for purportedly killing Kamla (also a hijra). When Anarkali Suresh exposes her as her sister, he makes mockery of the relationship. Furthermore, nobody, not even Suresh, has any feelings for them considering Anarkali is often referred to by the pronoun, which indicates a lack of compassion for this underprivileged group. Uma understands that justice and releasing Anarkali go hand in hand. Would be more difficult to unlock. Even the Hijra community is aware of its limitations, which has led to its remoteness and pursuit of a dignified existence. They restrict their relationships, as seen in the following conversation between Anarkali and Uma:

Anarkali (Offering sympathy). Oh. (Smoking.)

If you were a hijra I would have made you, my sister.

Uma. No. Thank you.

Anarkali. But you are not a hijra, no?

Uma. No. Anarkali.

So, you will not be my sister. (Collected Plays 242)

Word handling is where The Dattani performs exceptionally. His comprehension of the language is exceptional and the way he combines it with the characters' expressions makes the play come alive.

Through his plays, Dattani aims to make addresses that usually remain concealed plainly apparent. He admits as much in the following segment from an interview with Dhvani:

Question: You've often been known to bring issues which have remained on the backburner and bring them center stage. I personally feel this is your uniqueness as a dramatist. What exactly goes on before you actually ideate on a play?

Answer: A subject has to be inspiring enough for me to want to write a play about. I do believe the purpose of the theatre is to bring to the forefront issues that society would rather keep in the background. (Word weavers)

The main focus of *Seven Steps around the Fire* is how the third gender functions in this patriarchal culture, not Uma's studies on class, gender, and its associated violence or the search for Kamla's murderer. The subject gives the superior genders a reminder of how they all have the same rights under the Almighty to share the lands, water, and air in this beautiful world, but due to fabricated social structures and theories, they have an obligation to disconnected and must lead solitary lives. Dattani illustrates how the hijra community becomes easy victim in the hands of the so-called male and female population through the narratives of the play. The entire play is devoted by Dattani to helping the oppressed Eunuch population. Through the character Uma in the current play, Dattani also highlights the identity crisis and powerlessness felt by another suppressed class, Indian women who are enslaved by patriarchal system. Through her, the play's principal character, *Seven Steps around the Fire* questions male-identifying predominance on feminine weakness. Through this protagonist, Dattani patrols their disappointing state in society.

Conclusion

Through this drama, Dattani warns us that anything that crosses the tipping point will result in pain and civilizational annihilation. Culture and civilization create systems to enable all of their citizens to lead smart, a structured manner and refined lives, but what happens if the systems are flawed? This unquestionably leads to discord and disarray. Therefore, it is imperative that the momentous

inhuman attitude towards eunuchs be changed because it is bad for society as a whole. In order to accommodate everyone without bias or gender specificity in the system, this delicate problem must be handled with compassion and flexibility. Through this theatrical endeavour, Dattani sends a powerful message to society: We are acknowledged as human beings when we act like one, and that incorporates possessing qualities like compassion, a fraternity empathy, and equality towards every member of the community.

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