



## **WHERE THERE'S WILL: AN ECHO OF A NEW ECOLOGY OF AN EXORCISM OF CAPITALIST IDEOLOGY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper deals with the reflections of Marxist ideology represented by Mahesh Dattani in his play *Where There's Will*. It shows that though the themes of this play are: a filial relationship, an intricate man-woman relationship and the treatment given to the children, its base is an economical aspect. Dattani himself has described it as "the exorcism of patriarchal code", explicated the condition of both educated and uneducated women in Indian society, how children are sidelined but the reflections of capitalist ideology is also an inseparable part of this play. Most of the critics have interpreted this play as a family comedy, centered around 'Mehata family', a Gujrati family living in a city but the factory 'the Mehta Group of Industries' run by Hashmukh Mehata, a businessman, is a parallel institution that reflects the traces of capitalist ideology in the play. So the play is "the exorcism of capitalist ideology".*

**Keywords:** *Marxist ideology, base, superstructure, economic determinism, dialectics, exorcism*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The present paper focuses on the reflections of Marxist ideology in the play *Where There's Will*. The play is a family comedy written in 1988 by Mahesh Dattani. It is his first play and Dattani himself described it as "the exorcism of the patriarchal code" (*Dattani i*) but the parallel and running theme of the play is the conflict between the capitalists and the labourers. It is based on 'money', which directly or indirectly governs all the activities,

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incidents etc. that happen in the play. Terry Eagleton, a 'new left' Marxist critic says about literature that "Literature is an instrument of ideology" (Krishnaswamy et al. 103). It is true about this play because the present play is an instrument of capitalist ideology.. There are the traces of communism explained by Karl Marx (1818-1883), a German Philosopher and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), a German social scientist in their world-known book *Communist Manifesto* (1848).Karl Marx argues that all ideological systems are the products of real social and economic existence ( Seldon et al.93). The dialectics of the play indicates the world of capitalism and labourers.

Marxist philosophy believes in 'base' and 'super structure' model. Marxism is a materialistic philosophy and its opposite is an idealist philosophy. A 'base' means the material means of production where everything is determined by the economic base and it decides a 'superstructure', which means the 'cultural world of ideas, art, religion, law and so on (Barry 151). Marxist critics make a division between the 'overt' and 'covert' content of a literary work, concentrate on the social class of the author, the period that produced a literary work, the social assumptions of time, a political circumstance and representations of conservative social structures in a literary work. They focus on 'a politicisation of literary form' (161). Marxist philosophy finds out the representations of the class conflict in a literary work. It shows different classes like aristocratic class, middle class, lower middle class etc.. The focus is on how the servants or the people of economically low class become the victims of the ideology of the upper class people.

The play *Where There's Will* is a fine example of the reflections of Marxist ideology. Though Dattani himself has described it as "the exorcism of the patriarchal code", it is actually "the exorcism of capitalist ideology". The overt content of the play deals with effects of patriarchy but its covert content focuses on the effects of industrial capitalism. The family is at the centre of the play but the parallel theme that runs throughout the whole play is the capitalist ideology. The world of industrial capitalism is reflected by the company named the 'Mehta Group of Industries', where Hashmukh Mehta is the head or boss of company. It is a fine example of the reflection of capitalist ideology. He runs this factory and is a strong representative of the capitalist urban society. The workers/labourers in his company are Kiran Jhaveri, who later becomes his mistress, Ajit, his only son, who is in fact a joint managing director but a servant like fellow in the eyes of Hashmukh, the typists and some other workers. The other characters that depend upon such capitalists financially are kiran Jhaveri's mother and her brothers' wives, who depend upon their husbands economically in Jhaveri family, and Sonal, Ajit and Preeti Mehta, who are dependent on Hasjmukh for their economical needs in Mehata family. There are some servants like Maharaj, the cook, Mary, a maid servant, Damodar, a gardener and a truck driver, who are the victims of capitalist mentality. All these characters have to bear the shocks of capitalism.



The workers at the 'Mehta Group of Industries' too are not safe. The first victim of despotic capitalism is Kiran Jhaveri, who is a marketing executive working in the 'Mehta Group of Industries'. She is an efficient manager, and a shrewd and hard-headed person. Her husband, who was an excise inspector but a heavy drinker, used to exploit her for the sake of money. This pathetic situation forced Kiran to get job. She gets the job but is exploited there too. When she becomes a directorship of that company and comes at Mehta's house, as it was mentioned in Hashmukh's will, she narrates the pains in her life before Sonal Mehta. She had to develop sexual relationship with Hashmukh. Kiran's answer to the question asked by Sonal Mehta shows how she is exploited for the sake of money.

*SONAL: I suppose my husband was useful to you financially. Was he useful in any other way?*

*KIRAN: I guess he was. He respected my judgment and intelligence... anybody.*

*SONAL: Yes. I know that. So you had an affair with my husband because he respected you and trusted you.*

*KIRAN: Mrs. Mehta, no woman has an affair with an older man, especially a married man, for a little bit of respect and trust. It was mainly for the money (Dattani 506).*

She makes it clear that she preferred to be Hashmukh's mistress only for the sake of money. She gets service, a flat at walking distance from the company and so on but she has to sell her body for all these things. If she had enough money, she would not have to develop an illicit relationship with him.

The next person, who suffers in the same company is a typist from Hashmukh's office. Deepak, Ajit Mehta's friend flirts with her. Hashmukh scolds Ajit for it and advises him to tell his friend, Deepak to flirt with the typists from his father's office, and not from his own office. He does not strictly prohibit him for doing that unfair thing. He expects that Deepak should not behave in that way in his own company but he may do so in his father's company. This is not a proper preaching. Deepak behaves with a typist in that way, the reason is quite clear. It is the behaviour of Hashmukh because he keeps a mistress from his office. So how can we expect morality from others, if a boss of that company himself is immoral?

The second victim of the cruel capitalist world in this play is the servants from Mehta family and from their industry. The servants are always looked down by the Mehtas. They criticise them for their manners of eating, ways of living and their class. Hashmukh criticises the truck drivers for the way, they eat. When Preeti is serving food to him, he says that they are not



truck drivers to eat the food like navaratan pulao, malai kotta, halwa, baigan barta, patties and salad one by one so he orders Preeti to bring all at once.

While commenting on their cook named Maharaj's indigestion, Hashmukh states that the rich food, Maharaj eats at the Mehta's house is the only responsible factor for his indigestion. It means that the food provided to him is above his standards. Maharaj does not have the habit of digesting such rich food, according to Hashmukh. Hashmukh calls Damodar, a gardner at the Mehta's house 'Damo', instead of Damodar. Such abbreviated names have derogatory sense sometimes in Indian context. The one more servant named Mary has been appointed at the Mehtas's house for washing dishes. Her character reflects the world of such washer women. She is thus their representative.

The third victim of the despotic capitalist world of Hashmukh Mehta is his own family, which is the victim of both Hashmukh Mehta, a true capitalist and Kiran Jhaveri, a pro-capitalist. Almost each and every family member has to bear the shocks of capitalism. The first affected member from his family is Preeti Mehta, Ajit Mehta's wife. She herself tells it clearly that she married Ajit only because he was well placed and is the only son of Hashmukh, a middle class man. Hashmukh and Sonal directly attack on Preeti's class. They think that Preeti is inferior to them due to her class. Sonal tells Preeti that she has married above her standard (481). She openly speaks about her class because of her superiority complex. While comparing Preeti with Kiran, Sonal says "Preeti is low. She is lower than Kiran"(513). Hashmukh too stresses that money is the only reason due to which Preeti married his son and she has an eye on his money, he thinks.

Ajit Mehta is the second family member victimised by the capitalist ideology of his father. The cruel capitalist ruler, Hashmukh does not care for his only son too. He cares for the business of money making only rather than for his son. He considers himself one of the richest men in that city. He does not like his son, Ajit's behaviour because he thinks that Ajit does not know how to earn money and is a silly person and a big zero. He slaps Ajit sometimes. He orders him to polish his shoes. Ajit has to bear all these things for two reasons: the first is that he is Hashmukh's son and second one is that he is economically dependent on his father. Thus, he is exploited as a child at his house and as a worker at his father's company, though he is a joint project manager in that company.

The third member of the Mehta family, who becomes the victim of an oppressive capitalist ideology, is Hashmukh's wife, Sonal Mehta. She speaks about their own class. She says that they are just middle class people with a lot of money (472). Sonal too speaks directly that Hashmukh has become stubborn due to his money. Hashmukh treats his wife, Sonal as a lower class. He says that she wastes ghee and oil because she does not know how to handle



such costly food. He keeps mistress named Kiran Jhaveri, gives her flat and goes closer to her rather than his wife. He behaves so because he considers himself one of the richest men in that city. The money makes him immoral, Sonal believes. Thus, Sonal is exploited.

Kiran Jhaveri is the next representative of the capitalist ideology for a momentary period. She is one of the workers of the 'Mehta Group of Industries' but later becomes a dictator for some time when she develops an illicit relationship with Hashmukh and becomes his mistress. Hashmukh makes her a director of his company. He gives all the authorities of his company to her in his will after his death and she becomes a sort of capitalist, a pro-capitalist especially. She has the power of taking all the decisions, though she is running that institute on behalf of Ajit. While stating the conditions put forth by Hushmukh in his will before all the family members, Kiran does it in a despotic way. She threatens all the family members of Mehta family that she will divide the holdings of the trust among certain charitable institutions and will not give a single rupee to them. All the members of the Mehta family become victims of the mentality of the pseudo-capitalist, Kiran Jhaveri, if they are not following her orders.

Preeti has to play the role of a servant like a cook. It becomes compulsory for her to make breakfast lunch etc. and wait for Madam, Kiran Jhaveri. She is tortured everyday by Kiran. She has to behave very modestly with Kiran, though she does not will so in fact. Sonal Mehta too has no other way except accepting Kiran Jhaveri as a master of their house. Ajit Mehta too has to follow her orders, though Ajit is a heir of the Mehta's. He has to go to the office regularly for getting the holdings of his father's company. The house of Hashmukh Mehta becomes a factory or company for some period and all the members from this family seem to be the labourers, who work under Kiran Jhaveri after her arrival at the Mehtas's house.

Thus, all these characters seem to be the workers and they have to bear the shocks of the despotic capitalist world. Dr. Beena Agarwal has described this play as 'the irrational control of paternal authority' (Prasad 29) but it is the irrational control of "the despotic capitalist world" too. The materialistic interpretation of this play flashes light on this exploitative capitalist world, where money is important, not men. Thus, the present play is a complex network of the different existing ideological discourses as Terry Eagleton says (N. Krishnaswamy et al.102).



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