

DISTORTED & DILAPIDATED FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SELECTED PLAYS OF MAHESH DATTANI

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ABSTRACT

Families though remains an untouchable object in India-has been distorted and dilapidated. Numbers of divorce cases in the court rooms are the best yardstick to know the real status of families in India. Mahesh Dattani's families are the replica for what is going on to the families in this post feudal era. My paper would like to analyze the various reasons for the distorting and dilapidation of the families in general and Indian families in particular.

Keywords: *Indian families, Mahesh Dattani's plays and women.*

Introduction:

"Lately it has become fashionable to deny the existence of this initial stage in human sexual life. Humanity must be spared of this 'shame'".

-Frederick Engels in his *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884)

Background & Introduction:

Family always stands out from deconstruction. No one in this world has the guts to question this traditional and orthodox form of so-called culture. That is how sacred and divine the role that the family has here is. Before plunging very deeply into the deconstruction of family it is very important to understand the origin of family.

Family got its origin from class based society. When one is talking about the family, one cannot forget the role of the surplus. Human beings lived by always wandering around for food. But when the groups' strength was increased, obviously, there was shortage of food and

basic necessities. Thus necessity is the mother of invention; human beings started working on further production. They concentrated on agriculture, animal husbandry, and such. Men and women hunted. Women at the time of pregnancy stayed back in their shelters. At the same time children too stayed back but were gradually groomed for survival and scavenging. The main productive force and tools of the hunter-gatherer society were identified by their mother because a herd system prevailed in that time. There existed a matriarchy system.

Women led the societies by inventing all the new inventions like fire, the wheel, etc. and that made the men the 'real literal civilized' men. The ones who discovered the usage of iron, that made the hunting powerful and the level of food production high were women. Then and there was born the surplus; the deciding factor of human beings' struggle. Surplus acted as the historian who registered class based history keenly after its birth. With the advent of the patriarchal family, we enter the field of written history. In front of the classless human beings, surplus stood as the forbidden but beloved apple. The men eagerly ate it with lots of lust and greed. When human beings get the surplus, the question raised and arrived at before the common and/or wealthy human beings is: who will be the shareholders of the surplus?

Those who had strength to participate well in hunting regularly (here, basically, women were wiped out from the scene due to their continuous pregnancy) become the real shareholders of the surplus. At the same time those men who had the surplus in their hands wanted to pass this superiority to their heirs as hierarchy. For that they wanted to avoid polyandry in order to avoid the confusion of whose child it may be (since in matriarchal system, off springs were identified only after mother).

They imposed the strict polygamy in which a man could marry many wives, whereas woman could not do so. The overthrow of the mother's rights was the globally historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children. When polygamy was introduced, there was born the family, and the children were identified after men. In order to protect their legitimacy and their heir's legitimacy, they had created slaves; slowly it took the form of the premature stage of state and gradually it became the real state with all its oppressing powers and forces. Such a form of family shows the transition of the pairing family to monogamy. In order to guarantee the wife's fidelity and therefore the paternity of the children, she is delivered over unconditionally into the power of the husband; if he kills her, he is only exercising his rights.

Thus with the defeat of women class history starts its life. At the very first, women become slave to the men; gradually majority men become the slave to the minority men, who control the majority with their muscle power and theological power like claims over gods, etc. Slowly it was identified as state machineries, religion etc. So those who want to make a radical family and those who want to revolutionize the family have to place their minds about

the birth of family i.e. family is not the divine form of human relationship but it is the very first product of human slavery. Unequal stages of men had its ball set rolling only with the birth of family. Only by not considering family as a radical form of existence could one actually assess the family.

Laws of Contradictions:

There are two types of contradictions in the history of contradictions; they are personal and impersonal contradictions. Normally personal contradiction could be between the like-minded people and those who do want to depart from one another. But impersonal contradiction has to be sorted out on the streets. Impersonal contradictions could go for reconciliation sometimes but mostly it would go for the departure of the two who indulge in those types of contradictions.

When one considers the family as the contradictory part, when couples indulge in contradiction, there was no chance for them to have the second choice of impersonal contradiction i.e. if one of them feels they are suppressed. Surely the women folk are excluded to an extreme degree from this contradiction. All couples here are advised to solve their problems with the mindset of living together; even the legal procedure in the name of protecting the women folk does the same: that family is being protected as opposed to the woman.

Also the self-acclaimed vulture of Indian culture proudly claims that Indian families are known for their pride and heritage. They further go on to say that due to their Indian family set up, Indian relationship is far better than other countries comparatively. Though Indian family has the feudal touch and security and other quite few things to be proud of, they slowly distorted and dilapidated gradually but steadily. Since in the name of human bond and forceful petty bourgeoisie values and legal means it survives bit by bit, the core of Indian family slowly rots. By the single word 'adjustment', it survives. But the adjustment also is confined to women alone. The so called family pride, values and the continuous nature of upbringing of women, train women for adjusting their lives. I do NOT want to say that marriage and family have to be forbidden and such, but it has to be understood that marriage and family were the forms and side-effects of the ugliest human relationships i.e. class based society. So in that mindset alone must marriage and family be understood and deconstructed. Monogamous marriage was a great historical step forward; nevertheless, together with slavery and private wealth, it opened the epoch that has lasted until today in which every step forward is also relatively a step backward; in which prosperity and development for some is won through the misery and frustration of others. (Page.75)

Woman sided Silence saves family in Mahesh Dattani's Families:

Mahesh Dattani focuses on the husband and wife relationship with reference to day to day life. As Dattani ascertained to me, he concentrated on the petty bourgeoisie class families alone, from which he emerged from. He never tried his hand on the working class family. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire* Uma Rao, the daughter of Vice Chancellor and Wife of Deputy commissioner Suresh was portrayed by Dattani an emerged-from-petty-bourgeoisie-class representative but a petty bourgeoisie intellectual and also a radical one. Though she acts like a real revolutionary she never tries her hand anything revolutionary in her family. Inside her family she adjusted since she has to make family survive.

Here the husband Suresh is portrayed as sex centered always; by yielding to his desires, Uma achieved some things, sometimes for her own purpose and sometimes for the betterment of the subaltern society, Transgender. Though she has contradictions over the approach of Suresh towards Transgender she never tried her hand to have a chat with her husband to change him or at least to have mere discussion with him. She merely accepts the point of view of her husband without questioning, but then and there her address of transgender with respect was criticized by her husband. Here one could find out that man keeps arguing and imposing his points but in order to save the human bond and family setup woman maintains silence.

“Interior. The bedroom of Suresh and Uma.

A Hindi movie fight scene blaring from a TV set in the next room.

Suresh: That is just the sort of name a hijra would fancy, (Chuckles.) Anarkali!

Uma: Why do they put her in male prison? Suresh. They are as strong as horses. Wear the purple one.

Uma: I wore that last night.

Suresh: Again

Silence. Uma opens the ward robe.

Good.

Uma: She is being beaten up all by the male prisoners. ...”

Here Uma addresses Kamla, transgender as Anarkali, (also a transgender)’s sister as Kamla addressed by Anarkali. But Suresh makes fun out of it. For this there was no opposition or at least discussion try from Uma’s side.

“Uma. Yes. I know she is arrested for the murder of her sister, but...

Suresh chokes with laughter as he is gargling, and coughs.

Suresh (off): What’s that you said? Sister? (Re –enters.) There is no such thing for them. More lies. They are all castrated degenerate men. They fought like dogs every day, that Anarkali and...

Uma: Kamla.

Suresh: Look, it is one thing that I am allowing you to go through these cases for your thesis, but don't feel any compassion for them. They will take advantage...Keep your soft heart for me.

Uma: What is the evidence against Anarkali?

Suresh: Come here.

Silence. Uma lies down on the bed. Suresh moans with pleasure as he kisses her." (9-10, Seven Steps Around the Fire)

Thus the above spoken conversation starts with the approaches of a husband and wife. But there were no initiatives from the wife's side to discuss anything. But husband keeps on insisting his point. Here if Uma wants to have discussion with Suresh about his views on transgender, the scene would not have ended in bed room, but in court room. But Uma, the woman, the sub trodden, meant for adjustment adjusted with her husband though she has contradictory views to her husband. Thus survives one Indian family.

The next scene of this couple also happened in (Deliberately?) bed room. More over in this play more number of scenes of Uma and Suresh happened only in bed room (Family happens to survive because of bed room). When Uma talked about their childless condition, she told him that she had gone to hospital for check-up and doctor wanted to see him for a normal sperm count. But Suresh refused that since he believes that the reason for not begetting child has nothing to do with him (or nothing with male), but it is the concern of females, and the stutter in his speech proves that he believes the sperm count will mean that it is a check up on his masculinity and it would be a scar on his masculinity.

"Pause.

Uma: I went to the doctor again. Your mother insisted she takes me

Suresh: What did they say?

Uma: Nothing...They want to see you.

Suresh: I don't think so.

Uma: Just a test for your sperm count.

Suresh: I don't have to go...

Uma: Would you like to go shopping with me?

Pause." (P.32)

Here also When Uma was insisted upon and taken to hospital, there was no question of potency, but though the Doctor insisted to bring Suresh for a sperm count test, he was not willing. But Uma Rao kept silence to avoid the untoward situation between her husband and her. So she diverted the topic by having spoken about shopping. After that there was a pause in the dialogue. In that pause Indian family survives. Due to Uma's silence this time also a discussion was diverted to shopping and her silence saved the family.

In the hunter gatherer age, the women's control over all the productive tools was lost. Once they lost their control over all of these, they had lost their power and they stood at the mercy of men. Engels says, "If now the economic considerations disappear which made women put up with the habitual infidelity of their husbands- concern for their own livelihood and still more for their children's future." (95). Here in this play also their money is controlled by Suresh only. Though Uma Rao is employed as a lecturer in Bangalore University, she is at the behest of her husband for money. Though Suresh is lenient on money a matter, the issue one has to be very much concerned about is 'Right cannot be given; but it should be shared.' So the money of the family is not in the control of both but in the control of Suresh where Uma is in the position to request or ask or demand.

"Suresh: Your father called.

Uma(stirs her cup): When?

Suresh: Yesterday, some time, I can't remember when. He said something about money. (Puts down paper.) Why do you need so much money?

Uma: I don't. Its for something else. I have it all with me right here in my bag. (Picks up bag and unzips it.) See... (32)

...

Pause

Why did you ask your father for the money?

Uma: Oh, no particular reason. I was visiting him and...

Suresh: You should have asked me. Have I ever refused me any money? (32).

In order to save the family relations, Uma kept quiet for all the outburst issues that regards from personal to general issues. Uma was ready to accept a transgender as a sister.

"Uma: One day you will understand. Anarkali, I would love to be your sister, if you will be mine.

Anarkali: Oh! You are only being kind. Don't hurt my heart.

Uma: No, I mean it".

And she even corrects Constable Munswamy when he uses inanimate pronoun for transgender i.e. it.

Munswamy: If you don't mind me saying, what is the use talking with it? It will tell only lies. I will bring it.

Uma: No. Can I meet her in there? (7)

But she fails to correct her husband when he addresses Transgender in the filthy language for the sake of family.

"Uma. Yes. I know she is arrested for the murder of her sister, but...

Suresh chokes with laughter as he is gargling, and coughs.

Suresh (off). What's that you said? Sister? (Re –enters.) There is no such thing for them. More lies. They are all castrated degenerate men. They fought like dogs every day, that Anarkali and... (Page 9-10)

Women's silence/ Locked room's crying is the Final Solutions of Family crisis:

Final Solutions, the Sakitya Akademi awarded play by Dattani, concentrates more on two things. They are supremacy of Hinduism and male dominated family. It is one of the famous plays of Dattani in which he speaks volumes about gender relations and gender war. Here a character named Daksha is introduced to us by Dattani as a scapegoat and victim of this male dominated family. Her situations and dialogues are full of gender war and also the position of female in the gender crisis. The play starts with her diary writings. Here she writes in her diary.

Daksha (reads from her diary): 'Dear Diary, today is the first time I have dared to put my thoughts on your pages. (Thinks for while.) (Final Solutions P.165).

Now one can understand the real family condition of Daksha. Even in writing in her diary, today only she has dared to write. Writing her opinion even in diary needs too much courage and these many days for her. So how long and how much courage will it take for her to speak to her husband openly about her thoughts.

She further proceeds her writing that

"I am sharing my inner most thoughts with you. Nobody else knows what I think or how I feel, except now- you (165)."

She has a single outlet to share her thoughts in her home, or jail, rather. Even with her husband she could not share her thoughts. And nobody in her house knows or wants to know what she thinks or how she feels. That's how 'good' the so-called gender relationship is between her and her husband. She further preceded her entry in her diary about why she invented the diary and why she needed to tell all her secrets to the speechless object of a diary, rather than to her 'live' husband. Because her "dreams have been shattered" (166). Even her little dreams like singing were banned in the name of family pride by her father and mother in law.

"All my dreams have been shattered...I can never be a singer, like Noor Jehan. Hari's family is against my singing film songs. His parents heard me humming a love song to Hari last night. And this morning they told him to tell me..." (166).

In the next scene itself she hates Muslims as she hates her husband and father and mother in law since they have all broken "the songs of love that I had learnt to sing with. Those beautiful voices. Cracked."

When her father and mother in law and husband were no more, her whole hatred turns out as a personal cum religious vengeance against Muslims. She further elaborated her relationship with her sweetheart i.e. husband. There was no freedom in her house. Though she wanted to break that, she kept silence because she knew very well that it would result in the breakage of their so called divine bond.

So here her silence saves her family bond from the wreckage. She never believed and loved her husband as her life partner. So she narrated him as being her lord and master.

"You must be wondering why I haven't mentioned Hari very much. After all he is my lord and master. Well, that's because I think my lord and master has the brains of a silly goat." (166).

She does not have the courage all these directly to his silly goat brained man because of her male dominated and self-oppressed upbringing, so behind the curtain she does it.

Next to Daksha and Hari, another couple that is their son and daughter in law was introduced. Daksha felt envy towards her grand-daughter as she enjoys her freedom. For her things have not changed that much. Before her son, she was the slave to her husband Hari, so she wrote all in her diary instead of speaking on the face of her husband. Now also in lieu of speaking to her son, she "rambles on about old times." Both Ramnik and his wife Aruna (or Aruna and her husband Ramnik) were introduced with a fight going on between them. Wherever they are introduced with dialogue, there they fight.

"Cross fading to the living room of the Gandhis. Aruna, Ramnik's wife, enters just as Smita and Ramnik are retiring for the night

Aruna (sternly): Smita, go to Baa and ... with her till I call you.

Smita makes to go.

Ramnik: I think Baa will be fine. There's no need.

Aruna: She hasn't spent any time with Baa. She must learn to be with elders.

Ramnik: Baa will ramble on about old times and bore her to tears. ..."

Thus they fought on how to nurture and bring up their daughter, Ramnik wants his daughter as he wishes her to be, but Aruna wants her daughter to develop as she wishes her to be. This problem is always solved by their daughter Smita. This couple does not have the courage to discuss the issues between them on the table. They just keep on rambling about the stories, fight for some time and return to their barracks with the heart full of pain. They fight like enemies for silly matters. It clearly shows how well they are knit together. Though they have well claimed and sought after differences between them, they are 'united' together for the sake of family pride. Thus live Indian families, but thus die fundamental rights.

Summing up & Recommendations:

In both oxford and Long man dictionaries, one could find the meaning of wife is as follows “the woman that a man is married to”. But more than the ‘married to’, it has miles ahead. When the term ‘life partner’ is going to translate the word wife socially, economically, physically and psychologically, no messiahs can save the Distorted and dilapidated Indian families from its down fall and its internal crisis. Indian families look better externally, but behind the curtain they will do those which are not allowed by this society’s so called fake values and prestige. Keeping silence never means wives accept whatever the men folk speak but rather they will do those that are restricted by the men folk. The open discussion in between couple alone can solve the internally rotten stage of the family. As an ending note, I quote Engels and he says, “And if strict monogamy is the height of all virtue, then the palm must go to the tape worm, which has a complete set of male and female sexual organs in each of its 50 to 200 proglottides, or segments, spends its whole life copulating in all its segments with itself. Confining ourselves to mammals, however, we find all forms of sexual life-unrestrictiveness, indications of group marriage, polygyny, and monogamy”.

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