

TYRANNY OF EUNUCHS IN MAHESH DATTANI'S *SEVEN STEPS AROUND THE FIRE*

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Abstract:

Gender inequality plays a major role in an individual's life. It is due to the society which we live in. Being a eunuch, a person experiences gender dysphoria which means disorder in gender identity. Gender dysphoria is seen as a disconnect between which a person's sex is assigned at birth and the gender which one identifies with. Mahesh Dattani's "*Seven Steps Around the fire*" probes towards gender and communal differences. Eunuchs of India belong to the community of Hijras. Hijras usually face lack of understanding by the society. They are not respected and are referred as "it" or "this thing". They are observed as subjects of mockery, scorn and suspect. Dattani examines in the present paper the fact that how every human are given rights irrespective of caste, colour, creed, sex etc. Eunuchs are violated and forced to non-human existence.

Keywords: Eunuch, Hijras, Society, Inequality and Gender difference

Introduction:

Gender studies deal with the identities of genders. It has categories concerning the studies of men, women and queer. Gender inequality shows discrimination faced by men and women, on the basis of race, culture, politics etc. Mahesh Dattani probed works on gender and communal differences. He was a spokesman for all marginalised people. He says, "All of us, want to be part of society, of the mainstream but we must acknowledge that it is a forced harmony".

Dattani's plays compromise stuffs such as guilt, dishonesty, prejudice and compromise. His plays also search for security and acceptance. He deals with contemporary issues. He also makes use of myths, rituals and traditions. Dattani's *Seven Steps Around The Fire* deals with these issues and also hits superstition of Indian society. *Seven Steps Around The Fire* was a radio play which was broadcasted as "Seven Circles Around The Fire" by BBC Radio 4 on January 9, 1999.

The play presents issues regarding the plight of hijras in the society and how the powerful section exploited the weaker section. The play also deals with the flights of the hijras for their identity in the society. The term hijra is of Urdu origin. It is a combination of Hindi, Persian and Arabic. It really means 'neither male nor female'. A popular myth on the origin of hijras has legendary traces to the ancestry of the Ramayana. As Rama was going into exile to the forest, people wanted to follow him. He said, "Men and Women, turn back". Some of the male followers did not know what to do at the same time did not want to disobey him. They sacrificed their masculinity, to become neither men or women and followed Rama to the forest. Rama was pleased with their devotion and blessed them. This was how there are trans- sexual all over the world.

This paper deals with study of hijras to show their position in the society. It highlights the hijras as subalterns and how the transgendered are ridiculed and discriminated. Hijras are welcomed on two occasions: i) marriage ii) childbirth. It was to sing and dance and to bless them. If they are not allowed to sing or dance, hijras would curse them.

The play begins with wedding mantras and burning scene of Kamala. Later the setting moves to the protagonist and thus begins another story. Uma Rao teaches sociology in Bangalore University and is researching about the hijra community for her Ph.D thesis on class and gender based violence. As her husband Suresh Rao is the Superintendent of Police Uma refers to the case studies dealt by her husband for her thesis. It refers to a hijra Anarkali, who had been arrested for the murder of Kamla, another hijra.

Uma wanted to see Anarkali and interview her. Her husband Suresh Rao deputed the constable Munswamy, to have an eye on Anarkali and also to help Uma interview Anarkali. Uma is in the prison of Anarkali. Munswamy is shocked to see Uma referring Anarkali as 'she', while mostly everyone calls out as 'it' or 'this thing'. Anarkali was dismissed by everyone as she killed her sister Kamla but denied. She was loud-mouthed and was abusive but Uma tolerated for the sake of her thesis, "What is there to tell? I sing with other hijras at weddings and when a child is born. People give us money otherwise I will put a curse on them. (*Laughing*). As if God is on our side. (*Smoking*) I did not do anything to Kamla. She was my sister" (11).

Anarkali was hesitant to share to Uma the truth about the murder of Kamla. She then told the truth when Uma offered to bail her out. Anarkali asked Uma to visit Champa, the head of the hijras. Uma, in order to free Anarkali had borrowed money from her father of Rs. 20,000. She went to visit Champa. When Uma meets Champa she found her uncooperative and challenging. Champa says to Uma, "If I had the money I would throw it on that Superintendent's face and get her back. Sons of whores, all of them" (26).

When Uma had a conversation with Champa, there came Salim who was the driver of the minister, Mr. Sharma. He had argued to Champa about a photograph but Champa had refused and he left the place. Champa gave the keys of Kamla's trunk to Uma and made clear that neither she nor Anarkali were the murderers. Champa revealed the truth behind Kamla's murder. Kamla, a hijra was secretly married to Subbu, Mr. Sharma's son, whom she loved.

This was hesitated by him and so he sent Salim to warn Kamla, that was how Salim visited the place of the hijras frequently.

Kamla was burned to death by the minister Mr. Sharma. All the events were connected with the photograph of Kamla and Subbu in their wedding garlands. Uma, the researcher moved hither and thither to find out the man behind the murder of Kamla. She attended the wedding of Minister Sharma's son. As a wedding ceremony was on progress, the hijras came to sing and dance. Mr. Sharma got angry and asked them to leave but Uma said that they meant no harm but have come to bless the bride and the groom. At that time Anarkali showed Subbu the marriage photograph of Kamla and Subbu. He started to cry and blame his father, "They killed you, Kamla!" (49). He demanded his gun and shot himself and laid down dead.

After his death the whole picture was cleared as to why Kamla was murdered. Anarkali told the truth of Kamla's death to Uma and gives her the photograph. She took it to her house and showed it to her husband and convinced Suresh that the Minister was behind the killing of Kamla and Subbu's suicide and their discussion was made a mystery. But Suresh wanted

to protect the Minister and he favoured him in all possible ways. The evidence (photograph) was destroyed and the death of Subbu was hushed up. So were the lives of two young people.

Uma had acknowledged the emotional bonding between the three transsexuals. All the hijras knew the murderer of Kamla but they had no voice and the case was hushed up. She had levelled them high in the society. Uma wanted to free Anarkali from being a victim. The hijras longed for self-respect, identity and justice but they had no voice. They were always seen as a victim. Dattani had revealed the truth that the eunuchs needed understanding and self-respect and not sympathy. They are humans and are to be treated the same.

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