

## Break of Patriarchal Codes: A Study of Dattani's Where There's a Will

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### Abstract

We find a patriarchal system in Indian society from ancient times. If a man runs his house earning a livelihood, he is dominant over his wife, children, and daughter(s)-in-law. It is not that all such men are cruel or senseless towards their families; some are senseless and proud of their abilities. The topic to be discussed here is that, in modern India, to some degree, the family members become submissive. However, in their heart and even openly they oppose the reckless dominance of the family head.

**Keywords:** Patriarchal codes, dominance, recklessness, submissiveness, break of the codes.

### Introduction

The research paper studies a two-act play, "Where There's A Will", written by Mahesh Dattani, an Indian writer in English. It focuses on how Hasmukh, a family head, dominates the family discarding their feelings and how the family members, in an extension, bear that. Beyond a limit, there is protest against the codes and at the end of the play, the patriarchal dominance has to be defeated.

### Patriarchal Codes

There are patriarchal codes in the view of Husmukh. He thinks good family members follow the head of the family. He says that a good son should obey his father without doubt. He gives an example of himself as a good son and describes how he obeyed his father in all his concerns. He follows his father's instructions even after his father's death.

In the views of Husmukh, the head of the family has the right to decide everything in his house, and those who do not agree with the decision, deserve to be discarded from the right of inheritance. He even puts this opinion into practice in an extension. He is so obstinate towards the patriarchal codes that he rules by them even after he dies in the form of his will.

Hasmukh has views about a wife. He thinks that if a husband does not find pleasure in his wife he has the right to seek it outside. Hasmukh feels his wife like a meal without salt. So, he finds pleasure in having an affair with his secretary.

Hasmukh is unhappy with his married life. So, he keeps a mistress. Then he finds that the reason for his unhappiness is his son who is not a son in Hasmukh's point of view. According to Hasmukh, a real son should make his father happy by being obedient to his father. He thinks that a man marries a woman to get a son but he is not happy with his son because of his disobedience. Hasmukh does not believe that a son should have freedom of expression of his feelings and thoughts. A son's goodness and advantage is in listening to his father's opinions and decisions.

In his will, he puts the codes of conduct for his family members failing which they will disinherit from his property.

### **Dominance**

Hasmukh prefers his patriarchal dominance to his family relations. He does not think that family relations are fragile and to be taken care of. He thinks that he is the creator of the wealth they have. So, he will decide where and how his money should be spent. He thinks, being the owner of the house, he is the first to enjoy the rights; and, if the family members reject his opinions or decisions they have no right to live in his house.

He is angry that his son, Ajit, keeps him waiting for his business call. He says that the phone belongs to him, so, Ajit should not use it for calling his friends. He also scolds Ajit's friend saying he should mind his own business.

Hasmukh undermines the prescriptions of the doctor. Despite the advice of the doctor, he smokes and eats sweets. When his wife, Sonal, opposes this concern, he disregards her statements and does whatever he likes to do. He hates Sonal for prohibiting him from eating his favorite dishes. When Sonal threatens him saying that she will go to her parents' house if he does not listen to her, he boomerangs her statement to her.

Sonal: You can't it that! What about your diabetes? The doctor said...

Hasmukh: (quite sternly). Enough! One more word from you and I'll personally put you on the next plane to Ahmadabad."

Hasmukh is so dominant and obstinate that he wants to control the life of his family even after his death. He writes a will restricting his family members after his death. As he is not satisfied with the conduct of his wife, son, and daughter-in-law, he inherits them but with conditions. He puts conditions in his will stating that the family will possess his property only after passing his test regarding conduct and ability to run the business.

## Recklessness

Hasmukh regrets that it was a mistake that he wanted a son. He is so reluctant with Ajit that in the heat of the moment, he wishes his son to be dead. As he realizes his cruelty towards his son, he lowers its intensity saying that the god should turn his son into a vegetable. He thinks that his wife, son, and daughter-in-law are triggering his anger. They make him upset to such a degree which is not good for his health.

He expresses his feelings about his marriage in such words: "... the greatest tragedy of my life took place. I got married to my wife, Sonal... The following year Ajit was born. Tragedy after tragedy." (Where There's a will, 12).

Hasmukh does not like his son to talk on his telephone. He thinks that if Ajit handles his business, it will be bankrupt. He has no consideration for Ajit's friend. He speaks about him arrogantly. When Ajit argues, Hasmukh slaps him. He has no realization that his son is not a child but a grown-up man.

There is a lack of kindness between the father and the son. Hasmukh and Ajit, both seem selfish. They don't care about each other's dietary needs. They behave like rivals on the dining table. There is a lack of love and respect that one should show towards one's father or son. They have no care for each other's wants and feelings.

Sonal tries to stop Hasmukh from eating Halwa, which is denied by a doctor, for health purposes. She warns him that if he doesn't listen to her she will go to her parents. Hasmukh desires to eat Halwa at any cost. He responds to her: "Enough! One more word from you and I'll personally put you on the next plane to Ahmedabad." (Where There's a Will, 20). On this, Sonal is upset. She ironically says if he wants to eat something else, he should eat but not her head. Hasmukh has a quick and reckless reply to this: "No, I don't want to eat anything else. You can throw your head and the food into the rubbish box!" (Where There's a Will, 22).

Ajit leaves the house speeding his father's car. His wife worries that he should not drive at such speed in heavy traffic. Here, Hasmukh does not worry about a probable accident due to the speed but he worries that the tyres of the car wear out due to such driving. Where, Ajit's mother worries that where Ajit should have gone, Hasmukh answers, "Out. Burning my petrol and my tyres" Here, a reckless father does not care for his son but a car.

## Submissiveness

All the family members are submissive to Hasmukh in a sense. Sonal tries to dissuade Hasmukh from eating sweets for his health. She thinks she is responsible if some wrong happens to the health of her husband. Hasmukh is too obstinate to listen to her. Hasmukh smokes and

eats sweets despite her opposition and she has to finally be quiet to listen to his arrogant words. She can express herself in complaining words but cannot act against his will.

Ajit opposes his father's thoughts but he can do nothing against his father's actions and decisions. So, Preeti also has to follow. All the three object against the will of Hasmukh. But after Kiran's, Hasmukh's secretary, explanation, they have to submit themselves to Hasmukh's will. They have to follow Hasmukh's instructions in his will because if they fail to do so, they will be disinherited. And, this is observed by Kiran if they follow the instructions or not.

### **Break of the Patriarchal Codes**

Despite Hasmukh's dominance, Ajit breaks the patriarchal codes, and Preeti's behavior is astonishingly changed when she comes to know about Hasmukh's will after his death.

Ajit is aware and satisfied that though his father restricts him from his money and possessions, it is finally going to belong to him. He dislikes his father's behavior.

When Hasmukh scolds Ajit while he is on the phone with his friend, Ajit does not bear that. He retorts: "Daddy, you have no right to humiliate me in front of my friends!" (Where There's a Will, 6). Ajit says it is unfair to treat him like this.

Ajit further explains that his father is treating him so, because he was deprived of his own childhood. He says that his father finds him wrong with whatever he does because he is a self-made and prejudiced person. When Hasmukh calls Ajit a zero, he objects bitterly saying: "How can anyone in this world be such a pompous fool?" (Where There's a Will, 9). Ajit further calls him angrily "I meant you, you thick-skinned buffalo!" (Where There's a Will, 9)

Hasmukh gives his intention that he expects Ajit to be like him; but Ajit openly discards that he would never like to be like his father. He further says that he will be happy if he gets a son like himself and not like Hasmukh.

At the time of the meal, sitting at the dining table, Ajit and Hasmukh argue about what they want to eat. Ajit follows his father's step in this matter. He does not care what disturbs his father. He asks for Halwa on the table even if it disturbs his father (his father likes Halwa so much that he does not care about his health). He starts to eat papad before his father sits at the table. On the objection of his father, he replies that he is not eating but nibbling.

After knowing about Hasmukh's will Preeti also revolts against the will. She wants Ajit to contest the will proving that Hasmukh was not in the presence of mind; that on a whim, he has given the wrong statement in the will while his son, Ajit, is the legal heir.

Hasmukh's secretary, Kiran Zaveri also wants to break the patriarchal codes Kiran also has suffered from the patriarchal system in her parents' house. She also hates his father and

brothers for maltreating their wives. She extremely desires to break this continuous circle where the son becomes like his father. In this concern, she likes Ajit for his opposing his father's ideas.

### Conclusion

Hasmukh thinks he is a boss even in his family. He has no consideration for the fragile relations. He is reckless towards the relations; and, due to the fear that they may be disinherited for their disobedience the family members are found submissive in an extension. Ajit, Sonal, and Preeti find themselves helpless and submissive before Hasmukh, and even before his will after his death. They have to follow his instructions but reluctantly. In their heart, they desire to breach the patriarchal codes. They do not like Hasmukh's behavior and his attitude towards them. They hate the dominance of Hasmukh. They dislike Hasmukh's insensibility towards family relations.

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