

## A Study on Human Relationships in Mahesh Dattani's *Where There's A Will*

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### Abstract

Hasmukh Mehta is a self-made industrialist who rules household with an iron hand as an autocratic patriarch. He has final say in everything and has no regard for his wife Sonal, son Ajit and daughter-in-law Preeti. He has no conjugal relationship with Sonal, his wife. Ajit, his spendthrift son is frustrated being belittled and ignored by his father. Hasmukh's daughter-in-law Preeti is a scheming snaky character seeking only his money. They are a strange household. Ajit is considered a failure by his father. Hasmukh treats his wife like a servant to keep his house in order. He is suspicious of daughter-in-law Preeti's intelligence. She is the only who can match his lack of concern for any one. Hasmukh heads such a family and keeps everyone under his control.

**Keywords:** Patriarchal Supremacy, Displeasure, Indispensability, Spendthrift, Reconciliation, Intimacy and Infatuation.

As the play opens, Ajit is on the phone talking to a friend about his frustration as his father does not give him company's Rs. 5 Lakhs to modernize the factory. Being the JMD, he has plans to diversify the business to manufacture electronic typewriters. As the telephonic conversation continues, his father Hasmukh keeps commenting on Ajit's irresponsible and crackpot schemes. Born (455) He goes to the extent of cursing the day Ajit was utterance: and wishes him dead. There is comical irony in his...

I actually prayed to get him. Oh God! I regret it all. Please let him drop dead. No, no. What a terrible thing to say about God, one's own son. I take it back. Dear

him into don't let him drop dead. Just turn a nice vegetable in my so he won't be factory, way. Ever since he entered my he has been in my way. (455)

Confrontation ensues as between Hashmukh and his son Ajit three year the father considers Ajit a bankrupt twenty- old wastrel. However, Ajit claims to be brainy and young blooded, though inexperienced. That He is confident with his talent and vigour he can contribute to the company's growth. The more, he claims his right to prove his worth, Ajit is taunted by his father as a good for nothing saying, "I am not trying to humiliate you. I am trying to put some sense into you. Trying to fill up empty space." (458) Ajit exposes his father's selfish motives due to depravity in childhood. "Anything I do is wrong for you! Just because you are a self-made man and had deprived ... Nothing I do will ever seem intelligent to you. You are prejudiced." (450) Hashmukh keeps nagging Ajit calling him a big zero and affirms that he would ever remain so. The argument and counter argument between the duos end up with the father slapping Ajit for disrespecting him.

Dattani focuses also on the female characters who are busy preparing for dinner. The quarrel and commotion send shock waves to Sonal as her blood pressure shoots up. Still she busies herself preparing dishes for her husband and son. She is like a machine churning out the same dishes a usual-salad which Hashmukh never eats. Still she refuses to stop making. Ironically she also makes orange flavoured halva for Ajit which irritates her husband who is a diabetic. Preeti is busy arranging the plates as Hasmukh keeps enquiring if dinner is ready. From the interaction of the characters it is evident that they have no deep familial relationship. The dinner time is only a daily ritual of bonding. Each one is suspicious of the other- the only unifying factor is the wealth of Hasmukh which they long to inherit after his death. The dinner table brings them all together and Hasmukh continues his tirade against Ajit and utters, "You should get a son like yourself. He will finish you off much faster than you've finished me." (463)

As Hasmukh retires to his room he regrets having had Ajit got married at a young age. He reminisces with complacency his patriarchal supremacy inherited from his father. "I am forty-five and look at what I have achieved. This is because I had the good sense to learn from my father." (463) Unlike his wayward brother who roamed about the streets singing praises of Lord Krishna, Hasmukh was forced with

his early marriage to Sonal and the early birth of Ajit. Despite it all he was able to build a business empire, becoming one of the richest business tycoons. He regrets that his son Ajit on the contrary is on his road to failure at twenty-three. The bitter argument between Hasmukh and Ajit leads the latter to drive off to be with his friends.

Hasmukh continues to reveal his frustration after his son took over the business. He also makes detesting remarks on Sonal his wife with whom he never enjoyed marital bliss. "Twenty-five years of marriage and I don't think she has ever enjoyed sex ... And I haven't enjoyed sex with her." (473) Frustrated in his conjugal life he began his affair with Kiran Jhaveri, his typist and secretary, in whom he found brains that matched his.

The scene comically shifts to Sonal conversing with Preeti as she clears the dinner table. Sonal ironically comments on the meaning of 'Hasmukh' which means 'a smiling face'. But her husband never smiled, blaming her and her son for all his problems. She reveals how Hasmukh had lost his mother when he was only four. He married only to fill the vacuum of a woman in his life as he utters :

Why have does a woman a man marry? So that he to himself? No. There's can more needs to a it than that. What? May be the faithful companion? Was No. If that I think it, all men would keep dogs. No. No, the important reason anyone should marry at all is to get a son. Why is it so important to get a son? Because the son will carry on the family name? Why did I marry? Yes, to get a son. So that when I grow old, I can live life again through my son. Why did my father marry? To get me. Why did I marry? To get Ajit... Then I should be a very happy man. I've got a loving wife who has been faithful to me like any dog would be. She has given me a son ... I should be happy ... I've got what I want ... Why am I unhappy? Because I don't have a son. Who is Ajit ... He's just a boy who spends my money and lives in my house ... he doesn't behave like my son. A son should make me happy. Like I made my father ... happy. That is what I wanted my son to make me... But her failed! Miserably! He has not a single quality I look for in a son ... It won't be long before everything I worked for and achieved will be destroyed! (474-475)

In the second part of the play, the scene shifts to Hasmukh's death. He rises from his bed and observes his corpse. He moves behind the bed and speaks calmly of

his death. Applying magic realism, Dattani has very deftly brought in the scene to establish the protagonist's patriarchal hegemony even after death. "I am dead. I can see my own body lying still on the bed. Looking peaceful, but dead." (476) The ghost of Hasmukh makes comments throughout the rest of the play adding much humour to the sequences.

Act I scene II takes the story a week after his death. Lying on the sofa, Hasmukh make a weekly found up of events. He feels good to be dead since it has put an end to his health problems. "No more kidney problems, no backaches, no irregular heartbeats, no heartbeats." (479) But the family was bothered with too many condolence phone calls, rush of visitors and the paraphernalia of the funeral. The gathering was very impressive as family friends kept pouring into the bedroom to pay their last respects to the departed. His wife kept her appearance of great loss crying at the appropriate moments under instructions from Minal. Hasmukh struck even headlines in the media. He felt good knowing how famous he was after death with obituary in the papers full of photographs inserted by his own different companies.

The ironic way the dead man continues to wield his patriarchy is noteworthy. "Now it's all over. My life is over and I have no business hanging around here. I should be flying to heaven on a buffalo. But what about the mess that's down here? What about all my money? ... I don't they deserve all that money. None of them have worked for it, especially not my son... You see, I have

In the sequence that follows, family arrives home the solicitor as per Hasmukh's will and testament. They from the solicitor's office. They have been summoned by which are all he very has upset ruined after having learnt about the will by and quarrelling over them the all. They begin their bickering turn of events, accusing each other for Hasmukh making them suffer. Preeti accuses Ajit for bringing out the disaster on all of them by his not being nice to his father. The trio keeps accusing each other for the ugly turn of events. The only remedy left is to put their heads together for a final solution:

AJIT: ... Now we can't contest the will. It was all his money and his property. He could do whatever he liked with it.

SONAL: But why did he do this to us? He must have been mad!

PREETI: Mad! That's it! We can say that he wasn't in the right frame of mind when he made the will. We'll get certificates to prove he was senile! (482)

But their plan doesn't work as Ajit recalls how his father had a qualified physician as witness while executing his will, who had attached a certificate stating his sound mind while signing the document.

Meanwhile Sonal's sister Minal calls to enquire of the legal developments after Hasmukh's death. It is to be noted that Minal wields great influence over Sonal which Hasmukh always resented. Ajit tells Minal how things have become had them as his father has formed Hasmukh Mehta Charitable Trust to deal with all his property, finances and shares including the house where they live. They are all to receive a regular allowance from the trust. The will states that the trust would continue to direct Ajit until forty-five. A certain Kiran Jhaveri, Hasmukh's mistress, is named executrix of the will. Ajit begins to reflect on his misery and expresses his bitterness as he talks:

You must be happy now, wherever you are. Ever since I was a little boy you have been running my life. Do this, do that or don't do that, do this ... Then, when I grew up, I learnt to away you back. I think it was worth disagreeing with you. At least I have the satisfaction of knowing that you were worried about me. (487)

The scene that follows open with a comical note with Hasmukh making comments on his garlanded photograph. He is upset since they have not kept fresh the picture not up to his expectations being faulty at the cheeks, lips and eyes. He reminisces how he had locked up his father's photograph after honouring it for some his time. son Similarly, his own photograph will be dumped by the some day. He has premonition that he will meet same fate in the future when everyone would forget a his ghostly memory. Frustrated the ghost of Hasmukh decides on tamarind tree. action: "I think I'll go outside and swing on the Upside down." (488)

Act II scene I ends with the arrival of Kiran, being named mistress, who has come to stay in the house the executrix of the will. The role assigned to Kiran is The similar to that of Oedipa Mass in Thomas letter naming her Crying the of Lot 49, where she receives a Prince Inverarity, legal executrix of the estate of one of her wealthy ex-boyfriends. knows She that the estate was in total mess, however, Oedipa silently resolve to perform her duty. She suspects that her husband, Mucho Maas,

will not be able to give her any help. "The letter was from the law firm of Warpe ..., and signed by somebody named Metzger. It said Pierce had died back in the spring, and they'd only just now found the will ... Oedipa had named also to execute the will in a codicil dated a year ago." (Pynchon 2). Similarly, Kiran is appointed the executrix of Hasmukh's will. Both the women are mistresses to the men involved and are forced by circumstances to leave their legal husbands.

The focus of attention is Kiran and the way the other characters show their displeasure in having her in the house. She makes it very clear that she prefers to stay in the house than in the flat. Ajit, Preeti and Sonal lambaste her with queries on her affair with Hasmukh. She goes on to reveal how Hasmukh got her married to a man whom she supplied booze to be drowned in it to be mistress to Hasmukh. It was her intellectual acumen that attracted Hasmukh in his passionless marriage. Kiran establishes her indispensability as she has come to assist them as per Hasmukh's will.

Preeti sums up the shame faced by the family: "The will has left us all naked. The whole world is saying, "Hasmukh Mehta didn't have faith in his own family. He didn't get along with his wife. His son is a spendthrift. His daughter-in-law is a scheming little witch. That's why he left all his wealth in the hands of an outsider." (WTW 493)

Kiran, however side tracks their accusations of having influenced Hasmukh to become his mistress and clears their misunderstanding about her authority. "I am only the trustee of all his wealth. Not the owner... Everything rightfully belongs to the three of you. Provided you follow his instructions." (493) She asserts that Ajit will be briefed to attend daily to his duties and the two women will be given their regular maintenance allowance. The trust will be automatically dissolved when Ajit's child would be twenty-one and Ajit would be made the heir to the property. Kiran's duty is to train Ajit and eventually delegate the responsibilities to him. Meanwhile she would leave her husband and be in the Hasmukh household. When they protest at the deal, Kiran warns them of the consequences that "the holdings of the trust will be divided between certain charitable institutions recommended by the founder." (494) Cursing Hasmukh's evil machinations, the family to the proposal of Kiran.

Act II scene II opens with a comical sequence where Hasmukh sits on the dinning table cross-legged, commenting on the grim family situations. He talks to the

audience about his perception of life after death and demonstrates how to lie upside down from a tamarind tree to observe his family:

Have you ever swung on a tamarind tree? Upside down? ... You can see the world the way it really is ... That's the way I see my family now. Their lives have been turned upside down since Kiran entered this house ... You may ask - What kind of a fool would ask his mistress to live with his family? A fool who knows his family very well. Kiran may have been my mistress, but she has Transformed. more brains than my wife! From stupid incapable house-wife to clever incapable housewife. Every day is a new lesson for her on husband-understanding. The more time she spends with Kiran, the more she learns about me. The more she learns about me, the more she'll regret having been such a good-for-nothing wife. That will keep her from being a happy widow ever after ... I want Kiran here. To keep a check on my daughter-in-law. (496)

His intentions are very clear - to prevent any happiness to any of his family members after death, thereby exercising perfect patriarchal hegemony. Things have turned out to be very difficult for Ajit who feels frustrated after the first day in office under the strict formalities executed by Kiran. Sympathizing with his sorry plight, the mother consoles him saying that he has to patiently endure the order for twenty-one years. The ghost of Hasmukh blames his wife for bringing up Ajit like an irresponsible baby. Meanwhile the briefcase he carelessly keeps on the bed hurts Preeti who lands on it, hurting her tummy. She is enraged :

PREETI : What have you done, you lout? What if something happens to the baby?

AJIT: Oh, no! Don't say that!

HASMUKH: If anything goes wrong, I'll never forgive you! (499)

Hasmukh's reaction is typical of establishing his patriarchal supremacy. He longs to have sway over everything in his household including his grandchild to be born. Preeti cannot bear any more the ordeal of being haunted by the will of Hasmukh being executed by his mistress. She longs to exorcise the ghost of Hasmukh but utters her helplessness: "A picture of a perfect family. The widowed mother, the expectant mother, the son who has stepped into his late father's shoes without a peep, and of course the mistress of the house. The only one left to complete

the picture in your father." (500) Ajit bitterly acknowledges that he was forced to step into his father's shoes being shoved into it. All are equally upset over the ghost of Hasmukh continuing to dictate terms through the will :

AJIT: He is still alive. Through his will! Through his mistress!

PREETI : Oh! The two things I hate most in this house. The will and his mistress! Followed closely by your mother.

AJIT: He is making me do things he wanted me to do. Through her! In the office. Without realizing it, she has replaced father and is replacing me with father ... Everything she tells me to do is exactly what he would have wanted me to do. We are all living out a dead man's dream! ... I can't fight him now. He has won. He won because he's dead. But when he was alive, I did protest. In my own way. Yes, I'm happy I did that. Yes, I did fight back. I did do 'peep peep'. That was my little victory. (501)

Preeti, on the other hand, was more intelligent and scheming in handling Hasmukh. She had warned Ajit to endure his father's bossy nature. However, he didn't relent, instead always retorted in justification. On her part she simply relented to his exerting authority, "I gave in, I simply listened to him and didn't 'protest' like you! I knew he didn't have long to live. I thought; why not humour him for a few days! After he's gone, we can have all the freedom to do what we want, and also all the money. I almost succeeded. He would have left everything to us if you hadn't protested'. That was your mistake!" (501-502) Being a scheming woman, she planned it intelligently even by mixing her vitamin tablets with Hasmukh's medicines in the same bottle. She blamed Ajit for having made her and her future child paupers by his habit of answering back his father. Meanwhile, searching for her Calmpose tablets, Ajit finds the medicine bottle with vitamin and other tablets.

The scene shifts to the conversation between Sonal and Kiran. Sonal is surprised to know how Kiran manages all her household chores and attend to her office diligently. Kiran takes pride in managing everything on her own including her husband which drew the attention of Hasmukh to make her the executrix of his will. Sonal accuses her of having an affair with her husband. But Kiran has her thought out answer: "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 money." (506) Kiran's honest confession makes the two women come closer in understanding.

Now, Sonal's complaints are about her daughter-in-law who has become a menace to her for the sake of money. Kiran advises Sonal to look at the turn of events from a different perspective, she is told to see Preeti's actions ruled by circumstances to make money. When Kiran tells that it is more important to give than to receive, Sonal declares that never got because she never gave. At this the ghost of Hasmukh feels fulfilled in his plans as his wife has learnt the lesson, and he can go to heaven and Kiran back home.

The conversation between the two women further leads to Kiran's speaking of her family and way her mother was ill treated by her alcoholic father. She and her brothers has grown up seeing their mother endure their drunken father beat her. "I learnt what life was when my mother pretended she was happy in front of me and my brothers, so that we wouldn't hate my father." (508) To keep her mother away from her father, Kiran got him fully drunk daily, so that he would sleep off at the dining table and would be too drunk to 'harm any one. She learnt her lesson from life that men "were weak men who with false strength." (508) This is a revelation to Sonal is told how mean and weak her husband was:

Hasmukh was into intoxicated with his power. He thought he was invisible. That he could rule from his grave by making this will ... Isn't strange how repetitive life is? My brothers. They have turned out to be like their father, going home with bottles of rum wrapped up in newspapers. Beating up their wives. And I — I too am like my mother. I married a drunkard ... And I too have learnt to suffer silently. Oh! Where will all his end? Will he scars our lay on us remain for ever? (508)

Kiran's reference to 'scars' of parents remaining for ever is similar to what Mrs. Alving utters in Ibsen's Ghost:

Ghost ... we are all ghosts ... there is in me something ghost like from which I can never free myself ... It isn't just what we have inherited from our father and mother that walks in us. It is all kind of dead ideas and all sorts of old and obsolete beliefs. They are not alive in us; but they remain in us none the less, and we can never rid ourselves of them. (Ibsen, 39)

Scars and ghosts of lingering patriarchal hegemony need be ostracized, if life has to go on for the living in both the plays.

Kiran's disclosures bring all the character in the Hasmukh household united in action with the executrix to get them all out of the claws of the will. Kiran also reveals how Ajit lived all the time in the shadows of his father having no independent life of his Hasmukh, treating him exactly the way Hasmukh's own father had treated him. Kiran further reveals the mental trauma Hasmukh suffered: "He depended on me for everything. He thought he was the decision maker. But I was. He wanted me to rule his life. Like his father had. Hasmukh didn't really want a mistress. He wanted a father. He saw in me a woman who would father him! ... Men never really grow up!" (WTE, 510)

Kiran felt disgust for Hasmukh and hated him like her own father, brothers and husband. She felt pity for them as Hasmukh continued to rule over them even after death through his will. He did all that only to continue in his father's foot steps who ruled family with an iron hand. She was glad that Ajit by revolting against his father, had escaped from the scars and ghost of the past: "He may not be the greatest rebel on earth, but at least he is free of his father's beliefs. He resists... That is enough to prove that Ajit has won and Hasmukh has lost." (510)

The revelations bring Hasmukh household together in their fight against the ghost of Hasmukh. As the scene of reconciliation between Kiran and the others take place, the ghost of Hasmukh grows more panicky as his evil designs are defeated. The household is so happy with Kiran that they invite her to stay with them for ever. The ghost realizes his own folly being ruled by his own father's patriarchy all his life:

HASMUKH: It is ... true? Have I merely been to my father what Ajit has been to me? Have I been my father's? If that is true, then where was I? What became of me, the real me? (511)

Kiran's explanations open the eyes of Sonal to stand on her own feet, rejecting the aid of her sister Minal under whose shadow she lived all the time. She had to break loose from ghosts of her own making in her stressful life under her husband.

Kiran also finds how Hasmukh had a slow lingering death consuming wrong tablets for his ailments. Preeti had mixed her vitamin tablets along with his

medicines. All the tablets in the bottle looked alike apparently. After Hasmukh's death Preeti had hidden the medicine bottle making excuses that she didn't need them any more. Kiran, however, questions Preeti on the matter while she trembles and begins to sob:

The tablets you threw out of the window the ones for his high blood pressure. The tablets I found on his dressing table were your ... vitamins. When did you exchange them? Oh, you could have done it any time. You had plenty of opportunities. He was right - you are very clever. Of course, you didn't kill him. You just let nature do the work for you. Were you so impatient? Couldn't you wait a few more years? Oh, I'm glad he made this will! You don't deserve any of his money. (513)

Though Preeti is concerned there is no definite proof for the accusation levelled against her. Kiran can't go to the police either lacking clear evidence. Although Kiran has the power to disinherit Preeti, she didn't want to do it for the sake of Ajit and the child to be born. Instead, she plans of letting Ajit know facts, thus inciting in him hatred for his wife. Since Preeti pleads Kiran not to tell it all to Ajit, she desists and changes the topic of conversation to the surprise birthday party. Preeti has planned for Ajit.

As the party progress, they all decide to be good friends for rest of the twenty-one years as per the clause in the will. Their hearty cheering drives Hasmukh's ghost tamarind tree outside, regretting for having made the will, which ultimately drove him out. The conversation shifts to Sonal, expressing the neighbours' concern about tamarind tree, obstructing their electric wires. Ajit decides to cut it off as soon as his servant sprung into life. The cutting of the tamarind tree will drive Hasmukh's ghost out of his shelter for never, ending the patriarchal hegemony. Sonal also decides to break with her past from the shadows of her sister Minal by firmly responding to her over telephone, " ... as far as I'm concerned you can jump into a bottomless pit!" (516)

By trying to establish supreme control over family through his money and will, Hasmukh was only perpetrating the filthy tradition inherited from his father. Somewhere the hegemony had to stop. Ajit revolts against patriarchy and establishes his final victory. At the end, they all join hands being victims of the same male

domination and ruthless patriarchy. Dattani has successfully explored like Ibsen some of the problems faced by patriarchal societies that need urging of the ghosts of the past.

**Multiplicity of Relationship:**

'Where There's A Will' is a superb study on human relationships. The characters in search of fulfilment in interpersonal relationship can be analyzed from the backdrop of the triangular theory of love propounded by psychologist Robert Sternberg. The theory of love is characterized by three different components.

**Intimacy:** Which encompasses feelings of closeness, connectedness, and boundedness.

**Passion:** Which encompasses drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, and sexual consummation.

**Commitment:** Which encompasses, in the short term, the decision to remain with another, and in the long term, the shared achievements and plans made with that other (Sternberg).

Different types of love can be classified either individually or in combination of these components. A particular type of love can in course of time be transformed into another type.

It is very strange that the familial relationships in Hasmukh household is basically one of non-love as patriarchy rules with an iron hand. Hasmukh treats his son as a zero indicative of psychological break-down in his own life having been a victim of patriarchy himself. Therefore he fights the ghosts of patriarchy by perpetrating the same evil, fulfilling the adage 'father like son'. Since Ajit has the guts to challenge his father, he is crushed economically, disregarding any feelings of closeness, connectedness, and boundedness by Hasmukh.

Hasmukh's relationship with his wife is frigid empty love. There is no intimacy in relationship and he goes on with his extra-marital affair with Kiran. Sonal on her part merely fulfils the roles as wife mechanically all the time. She also allows herself to be under the perpetual shadow of her sister Minal.

Hasmukh's love for Kiran is only from infatuation as he needed a mother and mistress in her. On her part Kiran found Hasmukh a growing up child who needed

psychological mothering from her. She hated him finding in him a replica of her father, brothers and husband. But she used him to amass wealth for herself.

Relationship between Ajit and Preeti remains merely at the level of companionate love as she married him only for his money. On his part, Ajit needed a woman merely as a companion in his life-long fight against patriarchy.

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