



Portrayal of Transgenders' pathos by Mahesh Dattani in Seven Steps Around the Fire

S.Shakeela

Assistant Professor

Central University of Andhra Pradesh

Anantapuramu

ABSTRACT

Transgenders are not unfamiliar community in our society. Their presence in the events like marriages and child birth functions is considered auspicious; people feel their graces are signs for good omen. But it is very pathetic to know that though their presence is considered good in marriages and birth functions but they are exempted from marrying and giving birth to children. They are treated as separate entities by major part of the world. Writings on Transgenders' problems are very rarely seen in Indian writings. Mahesh Dattani is one of the powerful Indian writers in portraying the issues which are serious but neglected, prominently about gender discrimination. Even though many of his plays focus on contemporary issues like corruption, communal rivalries, male superiority but his main attention is on the problems of Transgenders. They are shown as the victims of our own human society. *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, a significant play of Dattani that deals with the sufferings of these transgenders through the help of the character Kamla. It is a tragic play of Kamla, a beautiful eunuch who loves Subbu, a minister's son and marries him but gets killed just because she is a transgender. Uma is another major character who brings into limelight the sufferings of these transgenders and reveals the murder mystery of Kamla with the help of Anarkali. Two tragic incidents are shown in this play the first is the murder of Kamla and another is

the death of Subbu. This play deals with the emotions of transgenders as all human beings feel and advices for the equality of all genders.

Key Words: Transgenders, Pathetic, Gender discrimination, Contemporary, Mystery.

Mahesh dattani, a renowned Indian play wright is famous for portraying controversial issues through his plays in contemporary Indian society. His plays remain as a land mark in Indian literary world for having unique quality of reflecting major issues but neglected by the majority of people. *Seven Steps Around the Fire* is one of the important plays of Dattani which can be counted as one of the best specimen plays produced in Indian English writings. It is a play of suspense that revolves around the murder of a eunuch named Kamla and solving the mystery behind her murder. The plot in this play though revolves around the murder mystery of Kamla and her tragic life, but Uma is another central character in this play, who unveils the murder case of Kamla.

Uma is a daughter of University vice chancellor in Bangalore, wife of Suresh Rao a police Superintendent. She is working on her research topic entitled "Class- and Gender- related Violence". She is completely dedicated to her work in research, as a part of her research work she shows interest to solve the mystery behind the murder of Kamla, a Eunuch. Suresh permits Uma to work on her research paper by meeting a Hijra, who is convicted in the murder case of Kamla, another eunuch. Munswamy is a constable sent for the security of Uma by her husband, creates comical situations in the serious run of the play. He tries to stop Uma from meeting Anarkali, who is a Hijra. He says to her about Anarkali "She! Of course it will talk to you. We will beat it up if it doesn't. Madam, if you don't mind me saying, why is a lady from a respectable family like yourself . . . ? There are so many other cases. All murder cases. Man killing wife, wife killing man's lover, brother killing brother. And that shelf is full of dowry death cases. Shall I ask the peon to dust all these files?"(7)

Though Munswamy prevents her meeting from Transgenders , she gets some more inspiration to go deeper into the case after finding Anarkali as an innocent victim who is trapped tactically. She gets some hints to clear the murder mystery after meeting Champa and bails her by providing 50,000 rupees through the help of her father. Earlier though Anarkali denies to speak with Uma, but later cooperates with her. Suresh Rao does not like Uma

helping hijras. This can be traced in his following words, “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.”(10)

This play throws light on the discrimination showed on transgenders by human community and they are shown completely marginalised from common lives. The play brings forth the common people about the ancient mythology of hijras and their sufferings. Dattani, in this play presents ancient legends of hijras and their origin through the narration of Uma. This creates positive thought in Indian society about hijras that they are not the cursed and their lives are also graced like all other human beings. She shares her knowledge of research done on hijra community to her husband and says:

“ . . . The term hijra, of course, is of Urdu origin, a combination of Hindi, Persian and Arabic, literally meaning ‘neither male nor female’. Another legend traces their ancestry to the Ramayana. The legend has it that god Rama was going to cross the river and go into exile in the forest. All the people of the city wanted to follow him. He said, ‘Men and women turn back.’ Some of his male followers did not know what to do. They could not disobey him. So they sacrificed their masculinity, to become neither men nor women, and followed him to the rest. Rama was pleased with their devotion and blessed them. There are transsexuals all over the world and India is in no exception . . .” (10).

The play not only speaks about the pathetic conditions of Transgenders but also about the male psychology of domestic domination over woman. It is traced in the conversation between Uma and Suresh Rao, when he rejects to take a medical check-up.

UMA. Just a test for your sperm count.

SURESH. I don’t have to go. (32)

Dattani begins the play with the vague marriage scene of Kamla and Subbu. It begins with the fading of Sanskrit mantras and the growing sounds of fire. It is the murder scene of Kamla, which is brought into limelight by Uma at

the end of the play. Subbu loves and marries Kamla though she is a transgender. He is the only son of Mr. Sharma a minister, who opposes this marriage and burns her to death. Subbu goes mad after witnessing Kamla's murder. Mr. Sharma arranges the marriage of Subbu for the second time without his consent. She shows sympathy for Subbu and tries to know the truth by talking to him but meanwhile his father interrupts to divert the issue. Anarkali and Champa know the real murderer of Kamla but they do not reveal it to Uma due to the fear of minister's political influence. By meeting Anarkali, Champa and Salim Uma finally finds the real murderer through the help of Subbu and Anarkali's marriage photo. She is shown as a typical Indian woman abiding husband's words and thinking about family prestige but at the same time she is proved as an extraordinary figure by saving Anarkali and detecting the murderer of Kamla. She becomes the voice for the entire hijra's community and brings Anarkali out of the peril, a victim of conspiracy woven by the minister. It also reflects the struggle done to get the justice thus in the words of Bijay Kumar Das, "The play can be interpreted as a protest play against the injustice meted out to the downtrodden in the society" (17).

The concept of showing "Discrimination" in Indian literature through gender, caste and wealth are common but the peculiarity of the present play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* is about showing discrimination on Transgenders. The problems of transgenders are shown realistically in this play. Kamla's life is a microcosm of the sufferings of all transgenders and ends in tragedy. This community people are considered as separate entities from human society. As in the words of Serena Nanada, "The Hijras of India states that they are an intermediate sex or gender category as nothing other than transitional; it cannot be, in our culture, a permanent possibility" (123).

Dattani through The present play shows the society that, how a eunuch like all human beings desires to join a family and start a life with her life partner, which is generally not welcomed by the rest of the society. Dattani shows the age old culture of transgenders such as electing of a Guruma as their leader and leading restricted ascetic lives. The ill treatments given to Transgenders Socially and even by the police are clearly portrayed by Dattani. They are considered as valueless lives by the human community which is reflected in the words of Anarkali's words to Uma: "One hijra less in this world does not matter to your husband" (35).

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Mahesh Dattani begins with the the death of Kamla and ends with one more death of Subbu. It deals with the tragic end of two lovers who have endless love for each other and don't even bother for societal limitations of human community. Subbu marries Kamla secretly though she is a eunuch. But Mr. Sharma kills her and makes Anarkali, Kamla's sister as a culprit to divert the case. The minister though escapes from police through his political power but he loses his son which is the most painful punishment given to him through the destiny. Dattani focuses on two characters Kamla and Anarkali to show the public about the sufferings of transgenders and how these people become easy prey to human atrocities. Through this play Dattani shows the public about the pain of transgenders which is ignored by all classes of people and tells that all living beings are equal before the creator.

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