



# Scrutinizing The Unheard Echoes And Voices In Mahesh Dattani's Seven Steps Around The Fire

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## Abstract

*Seven Steps Around the Fire* is one of the most famous and renowned drama by Mahesh Dattani. Through his this play Dattani has tried to break all the stereotypes and dogmas which are present in the society regarding the eunuchs. Through the use of refined language and characterization Dattani has tried to subvert all the notions regarding the conventional dramatic structure. Dattani has tried to give voice to the most deprived section of the society by bringing forth the issues related to the life of eunuchs especially of getting married and bearing the progeny. Dattani has tried to streamline them and bring the third gender community on the same page and the work in itself serves as an alarm or reminder to the humanity regarding self introspection.

Keywords: stereotypes, dogma, eunuchs, streamline, self introspection.

## Introduction

*Seven Steps Around the Fire* is one of the most different and yet crucial work by Dattani at the same time. Mahesh Dattani is usually famous for writing on the issues which are less talked about or are rather taboo topics. Here too, through this work of Dattani he has tried to bring something different and out of the box. He has talked about the most deprived and vulnerable community during the present times ie; eunuchs or transgender. Though the work seems to be quite a simple and lucid read but it has lot more to offer when dealt in detail or in depth. The playwright through the character of Uma Rao brings forth the plight of eunuch community by telling how Uma Rao is shown as the daughter of Vice Chancellor of Bangalore University and wife of the Chief Superintendent Suresh Rao who was working on her thesis on eunuchs. While working on her thesis and research she came across the news of a eunuch being burned to death and in order to solve this mystery she tried her level best by meeting and interacting with the people of eunuch community.

The play starts with Uma going to the police station inquiring about the hijra or eunuch who was put behind the bars and on her inquiring she was asked by the police that she could have worked on something else for her research work which highlights how insignificantly we treat the transgender community. We are told how time and again Uma was told to change her decision about working on the eunuch community. When Uma requests Anarkali (who was falsely accused of Kamala's murder) to meet her she denies and through this incident it is highlighted how the transgenders are exploited in the prisons which is highlighted in the lines-

Anarkali: Go away. After servicing all these sons of whores, my mouth is too tired to talk.

The above quoted lines in itself highlight how safe are the eunuchs in the prisons as they are physically exploited by the so called protectors of the society. This in itself highlights how safe and sound environment we provide to the people of this community. As the story moves ahead and Uma on getting convinced to work on some other case, then Anarkali being helpless tells that she was innocent and she hadn't killed Kamala as she was like a sister to her. Eunuchs usually are shown doors at a very early stage in their life and are not accepted by the families. So when they join deras it is there only, that they start their life afresh and make new families and make their own world. So, Kamala here for Anarkali was like a sister and

family to her. When Anarkali tries to prove her innocence she was beaten by the inspector and mocked by the prison inmates. Further as the story progresses the scene shifts to Uma and her husband Suresh. While Uma interacts with her husband who was the Superintendent, she asks about the treatment which was given to Anarkali being beaten by male prisoners and being placed with the males in the prison which was quite unethical. Here her husband acts as the mouthpiece of society who believes in marginalizing the people of this community and having hatred towards them. He tells Uma not to believe them as most of them are liars according to him, and tells his wife not to believe their stories and he had only allowed her to meet them for her thesis. While interacting with her husband she highlights the importance of eunuchs telling how they are depicted in Ramayana and how insignificant they are in the present times which in itself is the biggest irony!

Further Uma also highlights and brings forth the significance of the title telling how eunuchs are bereft of the seven rounds or circles around the fire. They are not allowed to marry which tells how their life is placed in the quagmire of fire. The scene again when shifts to the prison we are told how Anarkali asks for a cigarette from inspector and he denies to which she says why would he not offer her and calls him 'sister-fucker' when he addresses her as sister. This brings forth the snobbishness of the ones who protect the nation and exploit the transgender community inside the four walls. At this juncture Anarkali for the first time had interaction with Uma when she offered her cigarettes of her husband and here they inquire about each other for the first time.

While interacting with Uma she tells her sad fate how they have to beg on streets in order to feed their bellies. Here after telling about her abysmal fate she requests Uma to be her sister as she did not have any sister. This tells that they too have an urge to have a family like the hetero normative world around. They too crave for a family like other normal beings. Anarkali further pleads her to take her out from the prison as she would tell her the real killer of Kamala only on the condition if she would not tell her husband as nobody would believe her narrative or story and the society and law would kill her. This shows the real plight of the eunuch community that how lightly are they treated and they are not at all given any weightage in the society even if they speak the truth. The pre conceived notions for them are that strong that nothing can shake the pseudo accepted realities. The helplessness of the eunuchs is highlighted in the lines-

Anarkali: They will kill me also if I tell the truth. If I don't tell the truth, I will die in jail.

The life of eunuchs is full of hurdles and impediments. Life for them has never been a bed of roses and rather has always been a bed of thorns. Before Uma's husband enters the police station, Anarkali told Uma to go and meet Champa who was another eunuch. After this Uma makes an excuse and tells her husband to leave her to her father's house. While on her way to her father's house she kept on thinking about the fate of the eunuchs and asked the inspector about the body of the eunuch who was burnt and killed. Further as the plotline progresses when Uma reaches her father's house she asks for some money in order to buy a gift for Subbu's wedding who was the son of a Minister. After borrowing the money from her father she leaves to find Champa who was another eunuch. As she got down the car she could see the narrow streets and the condition of eunuchs which was quite gruesome which in general is the reality of every eunuch. Once Uma reaches the narrow streets she goes directly to Champa in the dera wherein she interacts with her and tells her that Anarkali had sent her. On interacting with Champa, Uma smells the rotten rat as Champa tried being bad mouth about Anarkali which highlights the inner tussle of the deras to replace each other and the kind of power which operates or circulates in the deras amongst each other. When Uma offered money to Champa she thought and said her to be the life savior of Anarkali. Amidst all this bodyguard of the minister comes in order to take photograph of Kamala and minister's son which was evidence that kamala and Subbu were married. This incident highlights how for the sake of pleasure people get married to eunuchs and show them false dreams and hopes and later kick them off as per convenience. The same thing is highlighted in the novel *A Burning* (2020) by Megha Majumadar wherein the protagonist Lovely lives along with her lover or husband Azad who later leaves her because he had to get married to a girl. This episode in itself highlights the kind of life which eunuchs lead that is full of uncertainty and unpredictability.

After coming across the minister's bodyguard Uma got a little suspicious and asks Champa to show the belongings of Kamala to her. After going through the belongings she went along with the inspector to minister's house. Once Uma reached there she started interrogating about Kamala and how she was connected to them. Meanwhile all this son of minister named Subbu came and his gestures portrayed he was not at all happy getting married. After this the scene shifts to Uma's house where her husband told that Anarkali was

released as one of the eunuch had paid money and taken her away. Further he tells how they had no proof against her but they had randomly arrested her without any reason. The same thing is highlighted as-

Suresh: ...Anyway, we only arrested her because there was no one else. There is no real proof against her. It could be any of them.

The incident highlighted above indicates how vulnerable the people of third gender community are. Whenever it comes to accuse or blame they are often seen as the easy targets. In real lives also ethically and morally human beings have gone down the ladder of humanity and have always targeted them in every possible way out.

After interacting with her husband Uma once again goes to the dera of hijras wherein she meets Anarkali who was released recently and asks her, who was the real murderer of Kamala to which she says it would be futile to know. The same thing and the insignificance of eunuchs is brought forth by Anarkali in the following lines-

Anarkali: One hijra less in this world does not matter to your husband.

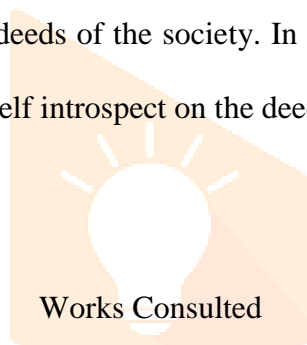
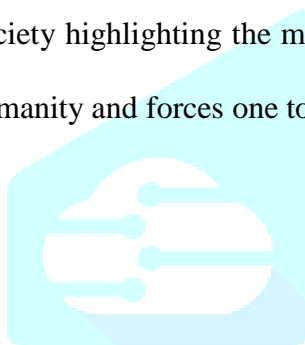
When it comes to the real life also, then also eunuchs are nothing but just a number in this harsh and cruel world. There are numerous laws which are framed for them but still their fate stands still. As the play approaches its end Uma and her husband go to attend the wedding of minister's son Subbu and there hijras/eunuchs also come to perform one of the most important rituals which is asking for Badhai by dancing and singing. When Champa, Anarkali and their troop came then the people who were present there got really offended due to their presence and told to chuck them out. After seeing all the eunuchs around Subbu loses his control and had train of memories flashing in front of his eyes. He brought a revolver from somewhere and killed himself in front of everyone revealing the real murderer of Kamala that was his father.

The incident stated above wherein the minister had burnt and killed kamala highlights how many powerful people try to suppress the voice of the marginalized communities due to the fact that they form majority and are in power. At the end it is revealed how Uma solves the jigsaw puzzle of the murder mystery

of Kamala. Instead of the murderers being revealed nobody was arrested and Subbu's suicide was declared as an accident and the photograph was destroyed.

## Conclusion

The play in nutshell highlights that justice delayed, is justice denied. From the beginning till the end we are told how eunuchs are treated lowest on the ladder of humanity. They are denied basic rights and are quite an easy prey to all the misdeeds conducted by the society. Law is supposed to protect people around but when it comes to the eunuchs then law is generally silent in their cases. Thus through the play Mahesh Dattani wants to bring forth the plight of the community of the third gender and the work in itself acts as the mirror towards the society highlighting the misdeeds of the society. In nutshell the work serves as the constant reminder for the humanity and forces one to self introspect on the deeds one conducts on daily basis.



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