

DECENTERING HUMAN IN MAHESH DATTANI'S "WHERE THERE'S A WILL" IN A POST HUMANIST LENS

Ms. S. Aparna

Assistant Professor, Department of English, SDNB Vaishnav College for Women

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This research paper tries to explore Mahesh Dattani's *Where There's a Will* in a post humanist lens. Post humanism decentralizes human and focus on the non-human agencies. It does not mean that the human is not the central focus whereas it tries to draw non-human system as parallel to human (Nicenboim, I., Oogjes, D., Biggs, H., & Nam, S). In this aspect "Will" is defined as an asset, factor of an economy, could also be considered as an object which did not have life but power. However, "Will" is the focal point where the plot and sequence of action revolve around it and also to be noted that the "Will" did not speak anywhere like other human characters, but it makes them to unveil their character effortlessly. The knowledge and the action of all the characters evolved through the "Will". This research paper tries to forefront non-human system: "Will" in the center position than the other characters.

Mahesh Dattani is an Indian prolific writer, director, filmmaker, and actor, received Sahitya Akademi Award for *Final Solutions and Other Plays*. His *Where There's a Will* published in 1988, addresses the contemporary issues like identity, gender, social and family dynamics. Whereas, this paper tries to enforce the lens of Post Humanism. The article "Decentering Through Design" highlights Di Salvo and Lukens idea of decentring as "an experiential component of non-anthropocentrism, where individuals encounter how non-human qualities and forces shape knowledge and action". This idea is conceived in this research to explores how the "Will", factor of economy challenges and influences the human knowledge and action.

Moreover, in defining post humanism, Oxford Bibliography suggest, "A contribution of posthumanist thought has been to decentre the human and to demonstrate how all matter is interlinked, mutually dependent and co-evolved, whether this is the animal forms on Earth or the impact humans have on technology and vice versa". Here, the focus is not on "Earth", technology" but it tries to emphasis the "Will" as the non-human entity which is a factor of economy that makes the characters as "dependent". It also "co- evolves" and governs the characters of the play.

Hasmukh, the protagonist is a business tycoon, founder of Hasmukh Mehta's group. He wanted his son Ajith to be as him, in the aspect of hard work, dedication and also expects his son to run his business. Hasmukh and his father has created the property, he wants this property to be safeguarded. Ajith, son of Hasmukh did not have any intentions to live his father's dream, whereas he wanted to start his own business and live with his desires and individuality. The Conflict arises between father and son because of Ajith's behavior and Hasmukh incapability to understand his son. Although his wife, Sonal, his daughter in law Preethi moderates them, Hasmukh did not believe them. After Hasmukh's death the entire family comes to know about the "Will" and they were shocked. As a ghost Hasmukh watches the behavioral and psychological changes of the family members. Through this plot the readers could understand that the "Will" directs the interrelationship in the family. When Hasmukh is alive, his strong intentions were on the property and its protection, even he wants his son to live as him to safeguard the wealth and to pass on to the next generation. The entire action spans over the materialistic value, the decisions taken by the characters of the play is centralized on the asset. Hasmukh and his family members are desired by the economy, status in which their individual desires, dreams are modified. The power is on the money not only the autonomy of individual.

Even after Hasmukh's death, all the characters come to the limelight because of the "Will". If it is not the central focus then the plot and the action might not come to the end. In Note to the play, Sita Raina, Theatre Director of this play says, "In *Where There's a Will*, has control over his family through his money and forgoes an opportunity to improve his interpersonal relationships" (2). The quote of Raina, supports this research paper by emphasising the idea that the focus of the play is on the money, the interpersonal relationship of the family members spins around the money, which is the non-human system. The entire family concerns in protecting and inheriting the wealth, although they wanted to live in their individuality, the status and financial stability of the family makes them to rethink and redefine their action.

In the beginning of the play, Ajith and Hasmukh has conflict, because of the phone call in which Ajith talks to his friend about money. In the conflict, Hasmukh says, "I will retire one day, either from the company or from this world. What will become of you then? I have to season you now. You need seasoning" (10), which refers that Ajith has to learn the business in order to protect the wealth. The real care is not on Ajith but it is about the wealth which he created. The word "Seasoning" again indicates the behavioural changes which is required for Ajith to protect the wealth. The money, the materialistic value is the ultimate focus rather than the individual interest. When Ajith questions about the word "Seasoning", Hasmukh says "... Somebody tough has to be around to run the show" (10). It is clear from the statement that the "show" is nothing but his business and his wealth. In the heated argument between the son and father:

AJIT. And what becomes of me? The real me. I mean, if I am you, then where am I?

HASMUKH. Nowhere! That is just my point! If you are you, then you are nowhere. You are nothing just a big zero. No matter what you do, you'll remain a zero. Over the years you'll just keep adding zeroes to

your zero. Zero, zero, zero. On their own, the zeroes don't mean a thing. But if there's a number one standing before all those zeroes, then they really add up to a lot. (11)

The value which the wealth creates is highlighted in the above conversation, Although Ajith is longing for the individuality, Hasmukh considered him as "nowhere", "nothing" "big zero". He again states when "the number is added before zero" then it has value, where the number refers "Hasmukh". This "number" is because of his wealth-asset. When Hasmukh narrates about his family and his father, he states that they "dream of being millionaires! (15)". After attaining what they dreamt, he considers himself as success and his son as failure. It again vividly describes that the conflict between them arises because of the economic status which he has created. The article, "A Reappraisal of Mahesh Dattani's *Where There Is a Will* Protagonists" emphasises, "the idea that the world is running after money and it becomes difficult to find out the good person (12)". This money not only plays a vital role in male characters but also in female characters. Sonal, wife of Hasmukh cooks variety of meals to showcase that they are rich and they could afford all the rich food. She is not satisfied even if any one of the dishes is missed. This action indicates that the wealth which they had is reflecting even in their custom, lifestyle and food. It overrides and dictates the style of living. Sonal says,

"He wasn't like this before. He used to listen to me before. Money has made him stubborn."

..., He thinks he is king of all he surveys! And we are his subjects. But you know the story about the crow painting himself white to become a swan? Well, that's him He can put on all the airs he wants to, but he doesn't fool me. I know who we are. We are just middle-class people with a lot of money. That's all." (24)

This quote indicates that the money plays a power play in the family. The family members are interconnected with the wealth and they keep on displaying the power which they had with the money. On close reading, the readers could understand that, it is not the family members but money is the connecting thread and it makes to play the power role within the family. In the course of the play, even Hasmukh and Sonal feels that they get into the phase of marriage for giving birth to the son. They think that the son will look after the wealth of them. When Ajith is not living the life of Hasmukh, he says,

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. I listened to him. I
did what he told me to do. I worked for him. I worked hard for him. I
made him . . . happy. That is what I wanted my son to make me. (29)

As stated above, "A son should make me happy", which clearly indicates that Hasmukh wants his son to be as him. When Ajith is not, there arises the fear of relinquishing money. At the end of the first act, the death of Hasmukh shocked the family members. Apart that the "Will" which he has written tear them apart. Moreover, Hasmukh did not leave the world, he lives as a ghost to observe the family members and his money. He has given allowance for Preethi and Sonal; at the same time, he mentions Ajith will attain the property only when he turns forty-five. Until that, he appointed Kiran Jhaveri, his mistress as the trustee of the trust. Ajith, Sonal and Preethi are ruined by this. Preethi's character changed altogether; she agrees that the marriage of her with Ajith is happened because of the wealth which he had. She says: "I married you because you were well-placed (35)". Through out the second act Preethi finds fault with Ajith for behaving against his father's wish. Moreover, her attitude towards Sonal is also changed as they are in the same state. This portrayal of Dattani again emphasises the importance of the will. Money changes the behaviour and situational factors. It controls the character of the play. The article "Complex Familial Relationships in Mahesh Dattani's *Where There's a Will*" also states, "the way Dattani depicts his characters in *Where There's a Will* appears to highlight his hate for the undesirable passion for money (149)".

Kiran Jhaveri, mistress of Hasmukh appears in the second act of the play. When she intends to stay with them, the family members were not welcoming. After she explains that if they are not doing according to the will, the money will go to the trust.

since the recipients of the trust, namely you all, are not complying with the rules set down by the deceased, the holdings of the trust will be divided between certain charitable institutions recommended by the founder. Which will mean that you won't ever get to see even a single rupee earned by your father-in-law. Now will you refuse to let me stay here? (50)

Immediately three of them agreed. Which clearly implies that the money has power rather than the human. If she says it, without the "Will" then she would not be heard. In the beginning they did not have any sort of respect towards Kiran, but the money made them to accent to her requirement. According to the "Will" written by Hasmukh, Kiran leaves her husband and stays with Hasmukh's family. So, it is again clear that the connecting thread is the will and it makes the characters to behave by it. If Ajith wishes to retain in his individuality, he might have walked out of the "Will", but he did not do so. As he is aware of the economic status and the power, he wanted to inherit the money. Richard Mahapatra says, "The unprecedented accumulation of wealth today, along with the growing number of billionaires, is not primarily driven by business successes or innovations. Instead, most new billionaires have entered the elite club through inheritance." Ajith also started to enter in to the spin.

The interesting scenario of this play is after the death of Hasmukh, all the characters in the play hate the “Will” but they live with it for the need of it. This paradoxical situation illustrates that the power play of the money. The family relationship is decided by the economy. Sadhu in her research article says, “Several plays of Dattani present the fight of individuals with society, which can still be considered as a brave movement, but when the fight is with family and at last with inner-self, it makes things difficult and unbearable (66)”. This play also has such family conflict, search for individuality but underlying problem of the family is the factor of economy. The family members did not let go off the money and the financial status. When they find difficulty in utilizing the “Will” the unresolving problem arises in the family.

In the course of the play, Preethi’s character also comes to the limelight, where she is the one who changed the bp tablets of Hasmukh to that of her vitamin tables. She had done the deed for the sake of attaining the wealth. When Kiran Jhaveri, finds it out, she says,

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. (72).

Although Kiran hides the truth for the sake of the unity of the family, it is clear that all the characters of the play revolve around the “Will”. Thus, the entire action and the consequences of the play is depended on the economic wealth and the status of the money. In describing Post Humanism, Biswas Mellamphy, N., & Vangeest, J. says, “The “human” is no longer taken as the singular nexus of value or domination, but instead as an equitable partner (eco-centrism) or an entangled and connected part (post-humanism) of a greater whole (600)”. This research paper tried to examine on the lens of post humanism to emphasise that the non-human system (“Will”) could also be at the centre rather than the autonomy of the characters.

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