

Unique Melodies of the other: study on Mahesh Dattani's *Seven Steps Around The Fire*

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani has always been considered as a playwright with a distinctive approach towards urban life. His plays alter with the themes of transgenders, womanhood, homosexuals and make him the spokesperson of all the marginalized people who are forced to lead a horrible and degraded life – not merely for shocking the public but with a specific purpose of arousing awareness about these invisible problems mainly the repressed desires, innermost emotions, loneliness, feelings of different groups, etc. This paper attempts to bring out the traumatic life of transgenders in the play *Seven Steps Around The Fire* written by Mahesh Dattani. It creates awareness of eternal conflicts of minority and the courage to break the barriers of voiceless life. The repressed life of transgenders has to transfigured into a life of freedom.

Key notes: Transgenders, marginalization, gender, reality, society

In the second most populous nation in the world, there are four to six million outcasts. These people are called hijra, which literally translates, eunuch, commonly known in the western world as transgender. Transgender people are people who have a gender identity, or gender expression, that differs from their assigned sex. Hijra, a [Hindi](#) and [Urdu](#) term traditionally translated into English as ‘eunuch’, actually refers to what modern Westerners would call transgender women and [effeminate](#) homosexual men (although some of them reportedly identify as belonging to a [third sex](#)). Not being the part of the mainstream system, this group is considered as “polluted” and unable to escape their bachelorhood status.

Seven Steps Around The Fire is one of the famous radio plays of Mahesh Dattani. The play uncovers the truth behind the murder of Kamala, a eunuch through Uma Rao, who is the daughter of the Vice Chancellor of Bangalore University and the wife of the Chief Superintendent, Suresh Rao. She uncovers the reality behind the murder of Kamala while working on her research paper titled “Class and Gender Related Violence”. The play represents the plight of eunuchs in the society. They used to come on two occasions— wedding and child birth which the nature denies them. They only come out in groups and make their presence felt by their peculiar loud hand clap. In the play, Subbu Sharma, the son of a minister is married secretly to Kamala, a eunuch. When his father came to know about this relation, he burnt Kamala to death and Anarkali, a eunuch is arrested for her death. One thing which connects to all the problems is the

photograph of Kamala and Subbu with marriage garlands. Mr. Sharma sends his bodyguard Salim to get the photograph. But he is able to get that photograph only after the death of Subbu on his wedding day. Champa and Anarkali, both of them know the criminal and who killed Kamla, they don't tell to Uma because they knew it very well that they have to face more suffering and case and nothing will happen to the real criminals. The suicide of Subbu is considered as an accident and the photo of Subbu and Kamala is destroyed. Suresh Rao accepts before Uma that there is no evidence or proof against Anarkali but they arrested her only as a formality to close the case.

The present grows from the past and both the past and the present change together. Hijras (Eunuchs) in India have practically no respectable public identity, no acceptance and no protection from prejudice and abuse. The discrimination against them is often translated into violence. The main factor behind the violence is that society is not able to come to terms with the fact that hijras do not conform to the accepted gender divisions. Male and female – these are the only sexual categories which have secured society's approval. Individuals, who do not fit into these two classes, have to bear social ostracism, isolation and contempt. The invisible clutches of social forces do not permit the hijras to carve their own design beyond the patterns recommended and accepted by society. Mahesh Dattani gives the hijras of India a voice to articulate their feelings and predicaments in the English theatre through his play *Seven Steps Around The Fire*. Remarking on the theme of the play, Dr. Beena Agarwal remarks:

Dattani in the process of engineering the current of Indian drama by bringing it closer to the real life experiences tried to articulate the voice of the oppressed sections of the society whose identity is shrouded in the cover of myths and social prejudices. They have been dragged in darkness, doomed to survive in perpetual silence bearing the oppressive burden of hegemony of the elitist class. Dttani within the framework of dramatic structure tries to investigate the identities of those who occupy no space in social order.

Dattani underlines the fact that other than the social customs and bindings, the hijras have a 'self' that longs for dignity and when it is denied, it tries to break free of such customs. When they protest, most of the times their voice is suppressed by the established order that prevails in the society. Isolated and humiliated, they are considered as the lowest of the low, but they crave for love and family. Those who try to break free have to face dire consequences. The same thing happened with Kamala, who loved Subbu and secretly married him, but was eventually murdered, on the bidding of Mr. Sharma, who is an influential politician and Subbu's father. The play is not only about the murder investigation of a hijra but also about their social positioning and the social setup where a hijra cannot crave his feelings and emotions beyond the patterns and boundaries recommended by the society. It is the society that acts as the villain and Dattani is

ruthless in exposing such hypocritical society. They are human beings with no voice, no sympathies, no love, no consolations, no justice and probably no hope of acceptability in the society.

The plight of hijra in our society is deplorable. Dattani tries to represent here the wide distance between the third gender and the normal gender and their longing for the acceptance. The story of the love affair between Kamala and Subbu shows the impossibility of the marriage between a eunuch and a man in Indian society. Each one of us is marginal in a way, residing in a no man's land between crisis and comfort zone –trying to belong to the comfort level while the crisis pulls us back. As we can refer to the term “Subaltern” to the marginalized group, this “subaltern” in *Seven Steps Around the Fire* is forced to maintain silence against oppression and injustice. The play deals with the violence inflicted on the hijras, who are unseen and unheard in the society.

This paper presents the plight of hijras or eunuchs, their uniqueness and discusses their rights as a human while analyzing the death of Kamala in the play. Dattani succeeds in portraying the reality of the unrecognized community through the characters of eunuchs. Their suppressed feelings and forbidden love by the society are observed carefully and realistically in his plays. The word “sister” indicates the real sense of the eunuchs and their treatment towards others.

Anarkali: If you were a hijra, I would have made you my sister.

Uma: I would love to be your sister, if you will be mine.

Anarkali: Oh! My sister! You are my sister, no?

Ratna Kapur also states that the lack of recognition of their gender identity curtails their access to education, healthcare and public places, and results in discrimination in the exercise of their right to vote and secure employment, driving licenses and other documentation where eligibility is contingent on declaring oneself as either male or female. It is Dattani who talks about blurring boundaries which lay unfortunately within the communities. He aims not at changing society but only seeks to offer some scope for reflection in the hope that his plays will give the audience some kind of insight into their own lives. Dattani's characters search for security and acceptance, to be true to themselves, even though they form a quiet visible group of Indian society.

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The logo is a shield-shaped emblem. At the top, the word 'JETIR' is written in a large, bold, serif font. Below it is a stylized flower with five petals in different colors: red, cyan, blue, yellow, and green. The flower is surrounded by a laurel wreath. The entire logo is semi-transparent and serves as a watermark.

WEBSOURCES

[http://www - tec.mit.edu/Dattani/Seven Steps Around the Fire/](http://www-tec.mit.edu/Dattani/Seven Steps Around the Fire/)

<http://www.epub-to-pdf.com/pdf> - out