

Exorcising the Patriarchal Code: *Where There's a Will*

Foreword:

Foucault observed, "...in the relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance... that reverses the situation" (quoted in Champagne, 5). Dattani's comic muse appears at its most elegant of demeanors when it cuts deepest into the rotten and hidden structure which holds a sick society. *Where There's a Will* is a comic masterpiece which offers a sharp critique of hetero-patriarchy, the specific brand of politics prevalent in the sociocultural milieu of the Indian upward mobile urban upper middle class family, standing at the border line of tradition and Westernization, and at the same time, gives an unexpected solution – innovative, hilarious and rejuvenating. It shows how the possibility of resistance lies in the very structure of oppression itself.

Hetero-patriarchy like other forms of human expression is extremely complex. As an institution, it is rooted in gender hierarchy which acquires validation from its central mechanism of marriage. As Yep rightly remark, "[i]mplicit in the marriage contract is men's appropriation and exploitation of women's bodies (e.g., sexual, reproductive) and labor (e.g., domestic, emotional)" (Yep, 29). But its ubiquitous presence reduces it into the uncritical ordinariness, and ordinariness precludes reflection privileging further the exercise of power. However, many of the identities available to women under the hetero-patriarchal structure like wife, girlfriend, mother, daughter and daughter/sister-in-law shape, regulate and constrain the ways both men and women operate and function in the family and society at large. "[C]ultural conceptions of a 'good

wife' or 'good mother' create expectations and experiences and regulate women's behavioral choices" (Yep, 29). Founded upon gender hierarchy, it systematically and structurally creates and maintains the subordination of women ranging from physical and emotional exhaustion to violence and diminished mental health. The asymmetry of power and sexist norms are common in the regime so far so that "Through institutionalized heterosexuality, discourses and representations of sex are articulated in phallogocentric terms, that is, the positioning of women as sexual objects and men as sexual subjects" (Jackson, Quoted in Yep, 29).

In India the family is the primary structural and institutional unit of society and, naturally, it acts as the most vital site of the perpetuation of the ideals of hetero-patriarchy. It serves as the moral community, unit of productive enterprise and the support group to its members. The predominant form of family is the traditional joint family – fast disintegrating though -- based on common ties of ancestry and property. It is patriarchal and patrilineal in nature, and based on prioritization of consanguine and filial bonds over conjugal relations. In most cases, it acts as a unit of production and consumption; and apart from shared economic function, it maintains a familistic organism determining the goal of the individual, following a collective conscience and family consciousness. Patriarchy and fixity of gender are central to its construction. Authority rests with male head (sometimes in his absence the matriarch); status depends on age, generation and relation open to the upward mobility in the hierarchy replacing the dead -- in every stratum men being higher than women. Women and younger members are generally excluded from decision making process and attempts are made to hinder and carve individual aspiration especially at variance to the family values.

In order to facilitate the understanding of Indian family, Critics make an important distinction between the household and family, and maintains, whereas “household is a physical structure, localized and a specific constellation of emotional and economic relationships among its core members”; family is “more amorphous, seen as larger kinship groupings, spread over time and space” (Ghosh, “Contextualizing Domestic Violence: Family, Community, State”, 58). While the familial ideologies remain the same, household structure gets shifted according to the social, economic and political changes outside. Hence, if woman’s participation in public role may change the patriarchal structure by destroying sexual division of labour or winning women agency at home, it may produce new anxieties. It is often seen that working women are subjected to violence. The structural change breeds new patriarchal anxiety and violence is chosen as a means to restore the status quo. The new condition leads to new pattern process of coercive and controlling behaviour and power and control ways.

We get so fully programmed to see life from and internalize the norms and values of patriarchy, that it is very difficult to locate the oppressive mechanisms outside the arena of exceptional violence. The New Woman’s movement in India, taking its shape in the 1980s, mainly centered round violence against women. The landmarks of violence like custodial rapes, dowry murders, suttee etc show the asymmetry of gender that highlight the social formation, legal process and citizenship rights. However, it was only in the nineties that the theory of exceptionalism got replaced by the recognition of violence in psychological, emotional and sexual domains. The definition of domestic violence given by LCWRI may be drawn on in this regard which encompasses “any act, omission or conduct which is of such a nature as to harm or injure or has the potential of

harming or injuring the health, safety or well-being of the person aggrieved or any child in the domestic relationship and includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, and verbal and mental abuse and economic abuse” (quoted in Ghosh, “Contextualizing D V...”, 52). Thus the human rights of women sought to include along with right to life the rights to security, equality, liberty, integrity and dignity.

With the framing of domestic violence as the violation of woman’s human rights and gender violence and locating it as an endemic and pervasive reality in women’s life, the concept of violence against women has been shifted from a social condition to a social problem. Unlike other oppressed groups, women lacked shared tradition, and have remained unwritten about in history. Hence, the possibility of women’s collectivity could not be realized. Woman-only groups are expected not only to give women confidence and opportunity to speak but to positively act towards female solidarity.

Dattani calls attention to the underside of the Indian tradition by exposing the patriarchal underpinnings of various institutions that often denied freedom to its individual members, especially women and younger persons. His family dramas expose the politics of power that lurks beneath patriarchal constructions of fixed gender identities/roles and proliferation of the hyperbolic versions of “man” and “woman.” However, in Dattani, the complete independence from the pressure of tradition, culture and family is neither conceivable nor desirable. But individual pushes the boundary in order to accommodate a space for oneself.

In *Where There’s a Will*, the scene is set in the household of Hasmukh Mehta, the autocratic patriarch, and within his jurisdiction are his wife, son and daughter–

in-law. Here the drama of resistance really becomes amusing as individuals, disillusioned of being protected by authority, relocate their subjugated identity, mistress and the subordinated wife, develop a sisterhood and the rebellious son is applauded for rejecting the patriarchal inheritance and the authority is re-coded as the slavish internalizer of prevalent power structure.

Autocracy:

“[I]nequality is embedded in oppressive structures of a family ideology committed to an age and gender hierarchy which is worked out within a household” (Karlekar, 1742). Since in *Where There's a Will* Dattani chooses the arena of the nouveaux riche family of Hasmukh Mehta to work out his dramatic skill of superb fusion of the comic and the serious, the scene is laid in the household of Hasmukh himself living with his wife Sonal, his son Ajit and daughter-in-law Preeti. Positioned as the head of the family -- financially and socio culturally, Hasmukh appropriates and enjoys the privilege hetero-patriarchy offers to the coveted post. The method of subjugation adapted by the autocratic patriarch includes the constant hammering and establishing of the idea that he has the sole proprietorship of the life of his family members - both behaviour and ideologies -- in the same manner of his property. Thus we see the dominating but domesticated man and the vulnerable but virtuous woman living in an ideal gender relation in the household working as an operational unit of Indian family - by implication the society. However, the mimicry and exaggeration of the role he performs reduces it to the point of parody and serves the desired comic effect.

Men do control, monitor and appropriate women's labor in most domestic situations by gendered division of labour, emotional blackmail and sexual behaviour. Like so many other heterosexual women, Sonal lives in inequitable and exhausting relationship arrangements in her family: she carries the burden of housework, care-taking expectations, and accepting child-rearing obligations, and parenting responsibilities associated with motherhood. Following the typical patriarchal norms, the man Hasmukh casts himself as rational, strong, patronizing and decisive and therefore having the sole power of decision-making. And he misses no opportunity to present the women folk of his family as irrational, emotional, weak, submissive and nurturing like his wife or scheming like his daughter-in-law and uses his experience as the standard to judge others' life-position caring little for their own. Sonal has also been subjected to what Guillaumin calls the "sexage" Referred in (Tyson, 97) as the household has appropriated her time with no limit or holiday which the garment tycoon enjoys at the end of the day and that of the week, her body was invested for the sexual pleasure of the man and the procreation of the future generation and her care is continuously appropriated to look after the "men". Losing all identities of her own, she is reduced to a social tool assigned to the task men don't want to do.

Christina Delphi holds the family as an economic unit in which women constitute a subordinate class. She defines marriage as a labour contract that ties women in unpaid domestic work commonly trivialized as "housework" (Tyson, 97). Sonal as a wife is thus excluded from the "realm of exchange" (Tyson, 98) where service is paid. Not that she gives less time or labour, but she is considered a non-worker since in Indian sensibility, domestic labour is kept outside the realm of economic productivity and

women family members remain unpaid. What she receives in form of her subsistence, is not handed out for the work she performs, but independent of her work. It is rather treated as a gift in man's own interest to maintain the labour power as well as his status in a society. Hasmukh does never forget and make others forget that he is the provider and therefore the only will that should be respected in the family is his.

The egocentric perception of the world which is central to patriarchy is brought through minute and apparently insignificant details of everyday life providing the author the scope to exhibit the working of power mechanism at micro level and produce comic effect. One example may suffice for the rest. Hasmukh reacts sharply at making "halwa" (a sweet dish) since it is harmful to his health ("How can I eat halwa when I have sugar in my urine? ...Why should she bother making it?" (*Where...*, 462), disregarding the fact that any body might like it and have it without any damage to health. Financially and ideologically positioned as the fount head of power, he never stops to acknowledge his disgust with and threaten other members. As Linda Barrette argued, in a patriarchal structure, the emphasis remains not on what the women feel but how they display it since the emotions are supposed to serve the interest of the subject (referred to in Tyson, 102). In the course of the play we find Sonal and Hasmukh feel same indifference towards each other, but while Hasmukh is unconcerned about the fact, Sonal keeps anxious to display more care to "become" a proper wife: "Who do you think the doctors will tale If you get another heart attack? Me" (*Where...*, 467).

The categorizer does not stop to label other members: Hasmukh detects Preeti to be "sly as a snake", (*Where...*, 456) who could have no other motive except grabbing his

wealth behind marrying a “dead loss” (*Where...*, 456) like his son. Neither does he stop to express his disgust with other members for whom he claims to act as a provider. He evaluates Sonal as “good for nothing”, (*Where...*, 472) calls Ajit a “nincompoop” (*Where...*, 456) and goes on complaining the loss he has to suffer on account of his marriage offering him a wife like Sonal and a son like Ajit.

If women speak something which undermines patriarchal logic then it is readily labelled as incoherent and unintelligible and it is only by having access to the semiotic dimension of language that women can go beyond the patriarchal language. Hence it is the tentative and indefinite answer to Has Mukh’s questions offered by both Sonal and Preeti that they refute Has Mukh’s authority – the mathematical mind so adept in calculating even the abstract feelings of life. The scant respect he has for his wife in particular and woman in general is dramatized in the mimicry of the women’s non-committal attitude always answering “yes” (*Where...*, 456) to his question “Is dinner ready?” (*Where...*, 456).

Holland and colleagues (1996) observe that “‘proper sex’ [is] widely defined as a specific version of heterosexual intercourse in which the man’s penis penetrates the woman’s vagina; *it starts with his arousal and finishes with his climax*” (quoted in Yep, 30). In India, in terms of sexual practice, sex is defined as “penetration for men’s pleasure in which women find fulfillment primarily in the relationship, in giving pleasure” (Holland and colleagues, quoted in Yep, 30) and performing the vegetable procreative function. The absence of female agency in the context of desire and method is evident in the way Has Mukh maps out his sexual relation with his wife. He

takes up to describe Sonal's experience and declares her unworthy: "Twenty-five years of marriage and I don't think she has ever enjoyed sex. Twenty-five years of marriage and I haven't enjoyed sex with her" (*Where...*, 473). Hence he had sex with his wife for procreation, for reproduction of a son who will be made in the maker's own image. Sonal exemplifies for him the type of good girls whose sexuality he can control and whom he can dominate financially so that his sexuality is not threatened.

Men sleep with bad girls but don't marry them. Hasmukh carefully chose a mistress Kiran - a market executive in his office for pleasure. She strikes of course a fair deal with her boss providing her with a secure, high salaried job and a flat in a posh area, but her story of marriage reveals a varying version of gender violence. Women invest their meaning in husband and son because, as Beauvoir claimed, they try to escape their freedom to realize their full potential in the world since it is risky, with no guarantee for success or wellbeing (Referred in Tyson, 97). But Kiran's story reveals another façade of the institution. She makes a pact which turns out to be an ironic appropriation of the institution. She is conveniently married with a man who required some one to supply him with his basic needs like bottles of Johnny Walker every evening in exchange of the marital status to his wife who needs it as the cover for a relation with her married boss. The story of Kiran's mother and sisters-in-law reveal the pathetic saga of domestic violence, her childhood experience presenting only a variation of it, and her present story offers an alternative which is another version of oppression.

Hasmukh recounts his loss and gain in a characteristic manner. In order to compensate for his own brother's rebellious act of running away from home to join

hippies, “He [father] took great trouble to make sure I [Hasmukh] didn’t turn out like my brother” (*Where...*, 464); his father put him on the harness of hard work by day time and counting of the profit for “half of the night” and “dream of being millionaire” (*Where...*, 464) for another. He gets married and becomes father both adding to the debit side of his ledger, though they produced happiness not by effect but by proving lucky, since “Within no time we were running a very successful export house” (*Where...*, 464). Now the self-made man is one of the “richest” men of the city, the “success in capital letters” (*Where...*, 464).

Ironically, the greatest frustration of Hasmukh’s life lies in his failure to make his son replicate him, to live his “life again through my son” (*Where...*, 475). Hence he tries every measure to trim and shape Ajit’s life and ideology by deterring his independent moves. He refuses to disburse sufficient money to Ajit to renovate the factory chiefly because it was Ajit’s plan. He did not even read the project report prepared by his son: “because the answer was no” (*Where...*, 456). Another fear of accepting a younger person’s suggestion may be the fear of being leveled as old or out-dated which will amount to being economically unproductive leading to the lowering of his status. He enjoys the supreme authority to define, categorize and certify. Naturally, he defines Ajit as “bankrupt” in brain following his own line of reasoning – “My son isn’t really after my wealth. That’s because he doesn’t have any brain” (*Where...*, 456) -- “nincompoop”, “failure” (*Where...*, 458) -- a “big zero” without the number (*Where...*, 461) added before him.

Hasmukh keeps on reminding that it is his house Ajit lives in, his phone he uses, his office where he is the JMD, it is his typist whom Ajit's friend Deepak flirts with to the comic extent of claiming that the blood which runs through his son's body is his: "...it's my blood. Only younger" (*Where...*, 457). The authority always controls the epistemic standard of "right" and "wrong" in both senses: "I, Hasmukh Mehta, have every right" and "I am stubborn because I know I am right" (*Where...*, 458). He just regrets having prayed for a son who, instead of "making" him happy and live his dreams, turns out to be a perennial embarrassment for him. It is not that he does not love his son, but what he wants is a younger version of himself in the latter, a desire by which patriarchy reproduces itself: "Just turn him into a nice vegetable so he won't be in my way" (*Where...*, 455). Even when training his son in managerial minutiae of putting stress on "what" and not on "how", what he means to assure is the art of giving "order" (*Where...*, 458), deactivating any possibility of dialogue - "counter argument" (*Where...*, 460). His attempt at "seasoning" or "toughening" (*Where...*, 460) his heir is, as Ajit puts it, an extension of his desire to make Ajit "to run your [Hasmukh's] show, to "play the big boss" (*Where...*, 460) through him.

Even after he drops dead, the rubric of power does not collapse and Hasmukh enjoys continuing the ring master who "run[s] the show" as per his own expectation and the discourse of which is his own and by which our experience acquires meaning and behaviour regulated. Positioned in a director of the show, he puts all stress on the enactment/performance of the roles assigned objectively and without caring much about the way of feeling. Hence he feels uncomfortable at the thought of Sonal's being asleep without discovering his death, but gets happy and applauds her ("well done," *Where...*,

477) for the first strong reaction at the discovery. For the first time in the play we see an ear-to-ear grin in his face as his wife and daughter-in-law begin to cry and Ajit runs to verify the truth. Though a bit concerned about Ajit's supposed incapacity to arrange his funeral without him to guide, he is rather pleased by the number of condolence calls, the way Sonal managed the condolence visits – “cried at all the appropriate moments” (*Where...*, 479) --, the traffic resulting from the gathering of large number of cars in front of his house, and of course, not the least at the mention of the incident in the paper: “‘Garment Tycoon Dead’. ... You never know how famous you are until you are dead” (*Where...*, 479).

The sadistic ghost observer represents the disembodied nature of authority which controls even during the physical absence and determines the behavior of his family members through the apparatus of will. Hasmukh exercises his “will” to “play the big boss” most effectively by the “will” he made which was read to the family members by the solicitor after seven days of his death - the time period enough for them to “dream of spending money” the way they chose. He is almost intoxicated with the sadistic pleasure at witnessing the effect of the will on his intended victims. Each of the three was accorded a nominal amount of allowance from the trustee and a permission to live in the house as long as they follow the terms and conditions mentioned such as Ajit's presence in the office from nine A.M. to six P.M, taking lunch there etc and satisfy the vigilant trustee. Ajit can only have his money at the age of forty-five if he abides by the terms otherwise it will go to the charitable institutions as pre-ordained by him.

Initially, it breaks the bonding and union of the victims to the great satisfaction of the victimizer. Sonal and Preeti accuse each other, sob, cry, shout and scream. Both women allege Ajit “It’s allyour fault” (*Where...*, 481) - Sonal for marrying such a “scheming” creature instead of the “good girl” (*Where...*, 482) chosen by her sister Minal and Preeti for not being pretentiously obedient to his father: “If you had been nicer, all this wouldn’t have happened” (*Where...*, 481).

The travail brings out the hitherto unexpected features of the characters. Sonal -- as usual -- troubled and puzzled pathetically turning to her sister for consolation and support, calls her husband a “nasty no-good man” (*Where...*, 484), and at the same time, points out his ability to probe through Preeti’s calculated appearance: “You didn’t fool him for a second” (*Where...*, 481). It is Preeti who “has changed overnight” (*Where...*, 480) as the ghost of Hasmukh observes. She makes it plain that she married Ajit only because he was well-placed reiterating Hasmukh’s assumption about her, misbehaves with Sonal, holds Ajit and his mother responsible for not being sufficiently good to him for the misfortune come upon them, curses her fate and the “tamasha” (*Where...*, 486) (jokes) made by her in-laws. Preeti declares that Ajit does not half her brain. She even attempts to contest the will on the ground that during the preparation of the will, Hasmukh was senile and tries to get their family physician Dr. Jhunjhunwallah bear witness in support. The only person who appears to be sane and reasonably managing the situation, is Ajit. He requests the women not to humiliate each other, suggests relief, provides proper information to both outsiders like Minal aunty as well as to Preeti trying to contest the will on vain ground and even does not forget to perform his duty to hang the photograph of Hasmukh in the wall and put garland on it.

The greatest blow comes in the form of disclosure of the identity of the trustee who is none other than Hasmukh's former mistress Kiran. In this context we may allude to the demand of SNTD Mumbai to bring within the ambit of domestic violence "all acts perpetrated in the private domain of the home to secure woman's subordination; and which is rationalized and sanctioned by the prevailing gender ideology" (Ghosh, "Contextualizing D V..." 53). The present play exhibits how law, as a patriarchal institution, fails to protect a family from the tyranny of an autocratic patriarch.

Exorcism:

If "conflict" is the crux of the play in general, the play *Where There's a Will* derives its meaning, motivation and its comic magnificence from it. Moreover, here the opposition comes from the very sector which is expected to be the most faithful ally. The flow of power on a reverse direction is shown as a potential if not actual counter move. Ajit's refusal to allow his life to be moulded by his father, to "dance to your tune" (*Where...*, 458), deters the linear flow of power: "We can't do that" (*Where...*, 482). His blatant denial to enter into his shoe to replicate and perpetuate the autocracy through generations presents a powerful rupture in the rubric. He refuses to be the "son" through whom his father may control and regulate and replicate himself even in his absence and, instead of being the means of playing the "big boss" – an act performed by Hasmukh himself --, Ajit hunts for his own identity: "And what becomes of me? The real me?" (*Where...*, 461)

The outside-inside-home dichotomy by which patriarchy functions in regulating the life of the subordinates, offers/restricts Sonal within the regime of the kitchen. Naturally, it becomes the only space where she could assert her existence and enjoy triumph over her male counterpart. She goes on cooking plenty of foods unnecessarily, making Ajit's favourite dishes to provide for his nourishment, controls Hasmukh's diet as a token for her duty towards her husband and thus escapes from the responsibility of being stigmatized as an improper wife: "My own sister blaming me for your condition! As if you would listen to me even if I was firm with you" (*Where...*, 467). Hasmukh's stubborn refusal to eat salad is countered by Sonal's refusal to stop preparing it. It is the precise point where she alternates the authority of her husband to be subjugated by, with that of Minal, her sister, since she cannot come out of the habit of being dominated.

The present (Hasmukh), though it tries hard to make itself a continuance of the past (father's appendage) and shudders at its discontinuity into near future (Ajit), the rupture was a presence in the family's history, though attempts have been made to obliterate it. Hasmukh's father ensured Hasmukh should be like him unlike his brother who fled home to join the Hippies and opted for an art form leaving the masculine pursuit of money. Hence, while Hasmukh conceives of a replication of Ajit through his unborn child as a suitable punishment for him, on Ajit's part a continuum is desired for the distant future: "Now if he turns out like you, that would really finish me off" (*Where...*, 463).

The narrative of history gets also ruptured by the simultaneous presence of two alternative narratives. A typical patriarchal mode of continuing lineage through marriage is evident in Hasmukh's account of his conjugal life. He got married at the age of twenty-one ("greatest tragedy") and became father the next year ("tragedy after tragedy", *Where...*, 456). His initial assessment of his wife Sonal "as good as gold" turns out to be wrong and he soon finds her "good-for-nothing" (*Where...*, 472). The dissatisfaction in sex life made him channel his instincts to greed for prohibited food (he is a patient of diabetes, blood pressure and enlarged heart) and enjoys sex outside marriage. In order to maintain a balance between pleasure and reputation, he arranged for an in-between "a wife and a pick-up" (*Where...*, 473), a mistress. He chose a "hard-headed market executive" of his office, "who had brains to match mine" (*Where...*, 473). In an attempt to account for his decision to marry, he forwards following reasons: one marries to have a woman all for himself -- a property ensuring uncontested possession --, ore convincingly, to have a "faithful companion" (*Where...*, 475) - though the purpose might be served better by keeping a dog --, and finally reaches the conclusion by locating the reason to have a "son who will carry on a family name" (*Where...*, 475). Yet, after all that, having a faithful wife, who has given him a son, the ledger of his happiness tilts on the debit side since what he gets is not a son but "a boy who spends my money and lives in my house" (*Where...*, 475).

However, a counter narrative is presented through Sonal. An extremely fond mother, she sees her husband nothing better than a "crow painting himself white to become a swan", a middle class man with "a lot of money" (*Where...*, 472). And it is this

large sum of money which has made him arrogant, “king of all he surveys! And we are his subjects” (*Where...*, 472).

The embodiment of power is confronted with the greatest rebellion from Hasmukh’s own body which gets afflicted with so many diseases limiting his consumption of many things he had plenty of, and finally refutes his authority by collapsing into death: “I never imagined it would happen so soon” (*Where...*, 476). The person who most effectively creates a rupture in his dream, “When I grow old I can live life again through my son” (*Where...*, 475), is Ajit himself who resists his father’s mission: “to play Big Boss. And you can do it through me” (*Where...*, 460) - by always hunting after the “real me” (and thus extinguishing his will to live after death).

The first challenge Hasmukh meets after his death is in the form of his inability to break Ajit’s resistance. The latter of course is honest enough to admit his fondness for his “little money” to give a damn to it, and even if by doing this he was going to lose the property even at the age of forty five. He does never regret to have been what he used to be, a rebel. The framed photograph which Ajit hangs on the wall makes Hasmukh begin to feel a sense of a kind of restraint imposed on his regime of power at the comic level of touching up of his photograph. He regrets Ajit not having the sense of touching it up as he did with his own father’s to make him a bit more “dignified”. He seems really disturbed at the thought of himself being remembered by the world as having hollow chicks, tight lips and “mean little eyes” (*Where...*, 488) and being fathered the son like Ajit.

With the arrival of Kiran, his mistress, to live in the house “as one of you” (*Where...*, 494), as per the terms put down in the will, Hasmukh’s triumph appears supreme. Kiran appears to be very practical, and acts smartly enough to avoid any melodramatic scene. In order to avert any embarrassment, she behaves civilly and discreetly enough, not to mention any unpleasant parade of her power, but proves intelligent, efficient and quick-sighted to evaluate the characters at first sight. She is rather cordial with Sonal and sympathizes with her humiliating position being insulted this way by her husband: “if I had known about his plans I would have persuaded him not to do it” (*Where...*, 492). However, once given the responsibility, she frankly points out the duties imposed on her: “I can’t promise not to get in your way. But I’ll certainly try not to” (*Where...*, 494). The person who feels even more threatened than Sonal and Ajit and outraged by the decision is Preeti and she explores every measure to get her out of the house until Kiran states in clear terms the extent of her power: “...I have the right to make a statement declaring that 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” (*Where...*, 494). But otherwise she quite sees it as part of her official job and no opportunity to show off her triumph and power. She is only the trustee of the property, which “rightfully” (*Where...*, 493) belongs to the family, and that too until Ajit is forty five, and Preeti’s child twenty one and the trust dissolves. She must work at a fix salary and be the decision-maker in interest of the company and “training Ajit Mehta and eventually delegating most of my responsibilities to him in phases” (*Where...*, 493). She reacts sharply at Preeti’s suggestion to prove to the world that it was Kiran who influenced the

will so that they might contest the will: “But to desire it with such a ... passion! Don’t you see anything wrong in that?” (*Where...*, 492)

Interestingly however, the employee of Hasmukh, expected to carry forward his “show” through his “will” even after his death, refuses to be an agent of patriarchy which was his real project. She recounts her story of being in an affair with Hasmukh Mehta who arranged a convenient marriage for her with an excise officer who eventually got fired being found out having the “little side business” (*Where...*, 491) of selling empty liquor bottles with foreign stamps and could not but approve of Kiran’s relation that assured him a bottle of Joni Walker every evening which is his “basic necessity” (*Where...*, 490). The little confusions about the persons referred to as “he” regarding Hasmukh and Kiran’s husband, hints at a kind of replacability of one for the other both copying and embodying the structure of hetero-patriarchy.

Hasmukh at first misses the point and enjoys having turned the life of his family members upside down—the exact position in which he hangs from the tamarind tree. He sets down the reasons for conducting the “nasty” thing of keeping the mistress in the house: it is to teach Sonal the value of him - a lesson in “husband understanding” -- make her regret her inefficiency as a wife, most importantly, to prevent her being a “happy widow” (“One thing I can’t stand is a happy widow”, *Where...*, 496). However, he is keen enough to detect Preeti as “sly” and scheming and works rightly to keep her under check. His joy knows no bound as Ajit returns home worked up under strict discipline and training of Kiran Jhaveri (“she should have been a jailor. She has turned my office

into a prison. The only things missing are the bars on the windows...she may bring in a grindstone”, *Where...*, 497).

Preeti, the most rebellious however, reacts more desirably – she gets impatient, calls her husband a “big mistake”, or a “lout”, (*Where...*, 499) accusing him of any kind of harm done to her, and almost verging on the point of getting crazy about the “will and the mistress”: “Do you want your baby to have a nervous wreck for a mother?” (*Where...*, 500) She even alleges Ajit of a false rebellion, and designates him as a “...the son who has stepped into his late father’s shoes without a peep” (*Where...*, 500). She calls Hasmukh a save-driver with sufficient skill to drive some one mad with his bossy nature. However, she found out a way; she pretended to “humour” him and give in so long he lives (“...he didn’t have long to live”, *Where...*, 501) in exchange of the freedom and the money she would enjoy thereafter. However, Preeti was not waiting patiently and passively for the desired day. Suspense creeps into the plot as Ajit discovers a bottle of tablets hidden behind Preeti’s sari in her cupboard and she reacts sharply at Ajit’s searching her things to get her compose. She tries better means than shouting and tries to explain the peculiar event away by pointing out the warning of keeping the peals out of sun light and her getting healthy enough not to need them any longer, and agrees politely to take Ajit’s advise regarding the sedative. The moment she is alone she throws them out of the window along with the bottle, but is aghast at the sight of Kiran picking them up. Ajit feels himself being “shoved” (*Where...*, 500) into Hasmukh’s shoe, having his father’s will concretized of turning Ajit into himself, only now Kiran replacing him in his absence, making him do what exactly his father liked: “we are all living out a dead man’s dream!” (*Where...*, 501)

However, a drama of resignification gets its start imperceptibly. In spite of all the misbehaviour shown by Preeti, Sonal seems concerned for her and her baby and feels relaxed to be around her to help her to raise her son. Contrary to the ghost's accusation of having turned "Ajit" (the victorious) into "Aju" (*Where...*, 498) -- the name of a pampered pet--, and not having a proper knowledge of "bringing up" (*Where...*, 497), Sonal proclaims her pride: "One thing I will always be proud of ...I brought my son up the right way" (*Where...*, 498).

The process of exorcism is most effective in the realm of a slowly but steadily growing sisterhood between the two perennial opposites – the mistress and the wife. Kiran nurses the cut on the finger of Sonal and shares the secret of her life. The mistress's honest confession of using Hasmukh for his money alone punctures the ghost's ego. Sure about herself, Kiran has charted out the map of her life with the education she got for being so close to life. She was aware of her managing capacity, ability to manage the office, household works, her husband and Hasmukh and now his house; the "efficient manager" (*Where...*, 505) she posed made her "useful" to him. But she also saw to it that Hasmukh, in his turn, should be useful to her: his reliance on her intelligence and efficiency gave her enough confidence, his trust gave her self-respect, but as Kiran confesses candidly, "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 the money" (*Where...*, 506). In the new situation, rather intelligently, Sonal discriminates between Kiran and Preeti and instead of Kiran's protest she requests her companion not to "lower" (*Where...*, 506) herself by comparing herself with her daughter-in-law. Kiran tells the pathetic story of her mother who "only gave" (*Where...*, 507), was beaten, called name by her drunkard

husband night after night, pretended happy in front of her children so that they should not hate their father. Kiran learned the lesson to escape from the nightmares of her troubled childhood, save her mother from her father's rage and pray for getting spared. She also slips a comment of herself suffering for giving too much which prompts Sonal to exclaim "I never got because I never gave" (*Where...*, 507) drawing an enthusiastic applause from the ghost of her dead husband. However, to his utter disgust, Kiran was quick to find out the "insensitive" (*Where...*, 507) nature of Hasmukh and his cruelty to Ajit. Sonal in her turn, compares him with the village buffalo. Hasmukh, she observes -- now as under Kiran's guidance she gains new knowledge and freedom of understanding --, was intoxicated with power.

A new interpretation of the behaviour and practice of patriarchal norms is given as accounts pour in of how history keeps on visiting the present. Kiran's brothers turn out to be like their father, "going home with bottles of rum wrapped up in newspapers. Beating up their wives" (*Where...*, 508); she herself got married a drunkard and suffers silently. IN the same manner Hasmukh is exposed to have fit in the scheme. The short colloquy between two women involving him resignifies the history of the great Hasmukh Mehta and reduces it into a mere story of a parasite, "living his life in his father's shadow ... whatever he did was planned for him by his father" (*Where...*, 509). However, the master blow comes in the form of Kiran's exposure of the "false strength" (*Where...*, 508) he used to enjoy. It was Kiran who was the real decision-maker when he was under the illusion about himself, she played the father in his life instead of a mistress: "he saw in me a woman who would father him" (*Where...*, 510). The final lesson of "husband understanding" (*Where...*, 496) for Sonal, for which Kiran was appointed, climaxes with

the knowledge that even his crude and loud temperament and desire to dominate his wife was a mere imitation of his father: “All his life he was merely being a good boy to his father” (*Where...*, 510). The supposed competitors turn out to be friends with open confession of enjoying each other’s company. The reinterpretation of Hasmukh’s authority puts a mirror before him to give him a reverse reflection and he catches himself repeating Ajit’s nonsense: “What became of me, the real me? O, my God! I sound like Aju!” (*Where...*, 511).

Ajit’s disobedience also gets a positive interpretation; it is read as a sign of difference - an individual’s attempt to carve a niche for himself instead of carrying the burden of his father’s lineage: “He resists. In a small way, but at least it’s a start” (*Where...*, 510).

Kiran however proved, as expected by Hasmukh, “too clever for [Preeti]” (and she discovers the dark design Preeti had been fabricating behind his death. The schemer took the vitamin tablets and put them into the bottle where her father-in-law used to keep his peals which “controlled his blood pressure”, which “kept him alive” (*Where...*, 513) and as Hasmukh took them unnoticed, “let nature do the work for you” (*Where...*, 513). Kiran expresses a positive disgust at the baseness of her unlimited greed. Yet instead of taking any hasty measures like going to the police which may not proved much effective without proper evidence, or disinherit Preeti that might affect Ajit, decides to tell everything to Ajit who will deal with her properly and hate her for whole life. However, at the last moment she changes her resolve and substitutes a dark truth which would ruin the family forever into a life-giving lie: “Preeti is planning a birthday party for you”

(*Where...*, 514). Thus the authority uses the power to preserve the interest of life by rewarding the worthy and putting the scheming evil under effective control.

Having a true companion who might guide and could offer dependence, without being oppressive and bossy like Hasmukh or authoritative like her sister Minal making her feel inadequate by herself, Sonal also finds out her own suppressed personality and rejects the authority of her sister altogether: “I have always lived in my sister’s shadow” (*Where...*, 511) and asks her to “go jump into a bottomless pit” (*Where...*, 516). Now she takes up the responsibility of the family on her shoulder and owns the agency of her action in real sense.

Hasmukh now feels himself unable to enter the house comprised of an efficient housewife, an expecting mother, a sufficiently individual man and an authority who manages without oppressing: “...I don’t think I can enter this house... They are not my family any more. I wish I had never interfered with their lives... With Kiran sitting in my place. O... I wish I had lived” (*Where...*, 515). With a light comic touch, the family members also decide to chop off the tamarind tree - the only place in the world for Hasmukh’s ghost to hang upside down from. The subversion of the power mechanism turns the instrument of oppression into that of salvation.

Thus, the mistress, supposed to perpetuate the oppression, turns out to be a resisting individual. Quite contrary to expectations, Kiran develops a kind of sisterhood with Sonal. She keeps the scheming Preeti under control. The potential difference of Ajit is honoured. Hasmukh’s dependence on his mistress as “father” and the welcome replacement of the father himself by the father’s mistress dislodge the standardized

gender definition. In his turn, Hasmukh is exposed to be living out a dead man's (his father's) dream. Sita Raina maintains, Hasmukh "perceives that his desire for control has led him to be the victim of his own machinations unlike Kiran who uses power play to essentially improve her relationships" (*Where...*, 451).