

Envisioning Radical Change in Post-Emotional Society with Reference to Dattani's Seven Steps around the Fire

Hema. R

Abstract: *Stjepan Gabriel Meštrović's Postemotional society considers that world has been progressively indifferent to the feelings of others as a result of emotional manipulation experienced from every culture, news, entertainment. The term 'post' in postemotional society does not mean that emotions no longer exist in people but emotions have been numbed. The postemotional society values superficial emotions over the collective ability and intervene helping others. So, the competence to feel real deep emotions is endlessly simulated and the display of feeling is short lived, unrealistic, useless and becomes disconnected from a sense of justice and from a genuine concern for humanity. Meštrović argues that this problem can be fostered with the development of empathy and compassion within the individual. Transphobia is a tendency to feel hatred, fear and anxiety towards transgender community. The effects of transphobia blind the people to take concrete steps to accept them and intensify the prejudice and stereotypical conventions about them. The present article proposes to accentuate how hijras have endured emotional crisis in post emotional society and in transphobic society. Dattani's Seven Steps Around the Fire is taken as a resource to show hijras' self-identification process and change in phobic emotions as a means to seek solidarity and peace. This article also suggests that the society should develop a humane concern for the down-trodden and deserted and it is yet to fully ripen for non-judgemental life. Meštrović (1997) defines, "Post-emotionalism is a system designed to avoid emotional disorder; to prevent loose ends in emotional exchanges; to civilise 'wild' arenas of emotional life; and, in general, to order the emotions so that the social world hums smoothly as a well-maintained machine" (p.150).*

Keywords: *Hijras, Transphobia, Postemotional Society, Solidarity, harmony, co-existence.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Meštrović (1997) quotes Arthur Schopenhauer's view that, "Compassion should be the emotional glue that holds together all members of a society on a basis of a common humanity" (64). Hijras are the most visible and the most oppressed minorities who are relegated to survive on the fringes of our society and this happens predominantly in South Asia. In fact, they are double marginalized both by nature and man. They are transgender people who are born biologically male but certain hormonal changes tend them to behave feminine or vice a versa. Literally the term 'transgender' implies a person with the characteristics of both the sex / gender called male and female or masculine and feminine.

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*Correspondence Author(s)

Dr. Hema. R. Assistant Professor, Department of Science and Humanities, Kumaraguru College of Technology, Coimbatore

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The term may also imply the adoption of dress or behaviour that is conventionally associated with other two genders. Most of them live in group to deal with the hostile society. They undergo castration (surgical removal of male sexual organs) to join their community. There are labelled with different names and identities all around the world like Eunuchs, transsexuals, transgender, hijras. The cultural construct of hijras in India is not only a matter of conviction but is deeply rooted in the world's most ancient civilizations, mythologies, cultures, traditions and sculptures. They claim themselves as the incarnations of Ardhanarisvara, the half-man half-woman form of Lord Siva. Traces show that they exist in the great epics like The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. They have even enjoyed various political patronages during the Mughal dynasty. They are always thought to be more suitable to guard the harems of the kings, noblemen as well as women folk. They are treated as soldiers and generals in the Kingdom. They are always considered to have the strength equal to men and they are neither a danger to women nor an attraction. Uma, the central character in the play Seven Steps Around the Fire, traces the origin of the hijras and also places in front her preparedness to research on the position of hijras in the present society.

Though the ubiquitous presence of hijras in the ancient contexts is appreciated, colonial and post-colonial context kicks and negates the presence of hijras from the mainstream society. They find no space in Indian constitution. A basic question can be raised on how to determine their gender. Since there is no recognition of gender for them, they are denied to avail employment opportunities, education, housing, health facilities, property rights, marriage rights, ration cards, passports, voter identity cards etc. Above all, they face hostility, cruelty, violence, ridicule, shame and discrimination from the state, police, medical establishments, family, friends and the society all the time. Finally what remains is a construct of low-living peripheral cross-dressed people occasionally hunting the mainstream society for money.

Dattani criticizes such a degenerated condition of the eunuch community which is enforced by the false norms and codes of the society. Their specific patterns of behaviour like the mode of speaking, clapping, and singing is made vulnerable as it is completely different from others. He explores the emotional crisis met out by them which is due to the social stigma, social neglect and multiple layers of power domination. Rishi A. Thakar foregrounds the same thought:

Mahesh Dattani has created a niche by giving vent to the frustration and anger of the long suppressed and unrecognized marginalized sections of the society.



Reading Dattani's plays is a new kind of experience altogether. Within the framework of dramatic structure, Dattani tries to investigate the identities of those who occupy no space in social order and have been dragged in darkness. (p.28)

II. UPSHOTS OF MECHANIZED EMOTIONS

In the confrontation of mirroring various trends of the society, Dattani's play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* freezes the entire Indian society with shock as he discloses a series of injustice shown towards hijras. While highlighting their sufferings and emotional crisis, hijras' longing for dignity and self-esteem is registered. It rises to the pedestal the importance and necessity of social justice for the hijras and places a moral obligation to each individual to promote peaceful co-existence and solidarity.

Hijras always struggle to find an honourable position in the society and pushed to stay in the fringes of society as well. Anarkali, a hijra, is believed to be the murderer of her sister, Kamla. She is arrested and brutally abused in the lock up but nobody bothers about her condition. Both the constable and Uma's husband refer hijras as 'it', 'worthless pigs' (Dattani, 2010, p.5), 'dogs' (Dattani, 2010, p.8), equating them to animals and inanimate objects like 'that bud of pomegranate' (Dattani, 2010, p.16) and 'sort of a crap' (Dattani, 2010, p.16) which is a reflection of social prejudice and heartless discrimination.

As eunuchs do not have a separate prison, Anarkali is locked up in the male cell. Most of the hijras are vulnerable to harassment by the police. Munswamy becomes angry and orders Anarkali's fellow prisoners to beat her, when she is reluctant to meet Uma. When Uma expresses her unhappiness over the ill treatment of Anarkali in prison, Suresh makes contemptuous remarks. Even Suresh laughs at her sympathy and disapproves her compassion towards hijras, "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..." (Dattani, 2010, p.8). Suresh is found irrational and unreasonable towards the hijras. Even though Anarkali knows about the true murderer of Kamla, she is not allowed to disclose the fact. If she goes out on bail and happens to speak truth, she will be murdered by the real murderers of Kamla. If she remains silent, she would be tortured in jail to death. Either way, she is molested and made susceptible. The real condition of the hijras can be understood when she expounds, "They will kill me also if I tell the truth. If I don't tell the truth, I will die in jail" (Dattani, 2010, p.14). The hijra community is considered as one of the most disempowered and utterly marginalized sectors in the society. Just because they happened to be the third gender human beings, the hardships they endure are intolerable and unimaginable. According to the mainstream society, the hijras are 'liars' (Dattani, 2010, p.7) and only prone to imprisonment. Their aspirations, hopes, identity, desire, longing, wishes, vision of life are suppressed and even all the basic rights are denied to them by the heartless society. The image of materialistic world is reflected in the treatment of hijras who are in no way responsible for the good and bad happens in the society. Eunuchs are marginalized even in crime. The love story between a eunuch, Kamla and a man, Subbu is an evidence of utter chaos and impossibility. If at all it happens, the society responds to them in a disgusting manner, "Marry! Who would want to marry...? Tchee! What kind of people are there in this world" (Dattani, 2010, p.33). The tortures encountered by Kamla are irresistible. She loves Subbu and secretly marries him. As the

idea of marriage with a hijra is an intolerable one for anyone in the society, sooner or later Sharma 'eliminates' (Joshipura, 2009, p.48) Kamla from the social order of the society. The power of money and the power of power in the society make the truth voiceless in case of Kamla. Kamla's body is found by some passer-by after four days. The temple priest complains about the stench. "It was thrown into the pond after being burned" (Dattani, 2010, p.17). The society has been practised in a way to accept only the heterosexual marriages. It has been in our system of culture or civilization since ages. So the basic principle created and set by the powerful becomes strongly acceptable and visible. As Subbu's love for Kamla is an unacceptable one for his father. His influence of power has not only decided the fate of Kamla but also Subbu. As mentioned in 'Postemotional society', the cruel actions of Mr.Sharma is not about dead emotions but power, influence and conventional codes prevailing in the society rejects the elements of showing and sharing emotions with the society. Being a father, he doesn't respect or show regards to the feelings and emotions of his son, Subbu. To maintain Sharma's fame, name and power in the society, he exhibits false emotions as a father. He reacts indifferent to the feelings of his son. Meštrović (1997) explicates how the influence of power plays foolery with the emotions of the people: 'Power is in inflicting pain and humiliation. Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of our own choosing.' Power is in being charming while inflicting pain and humiliation. Power is in tearing human emotions to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes without inducing the human agent to think about choosing. (p.xiv) Meštrović states the difference between pity and compassion in Postemotional society. He says that media plays a larger role in telecasting the real situations happening around the world that directly influence the middle class people. As the influence of television channels on people directly affected the emotions, they are manipulated to be pitiable than compassionate. Hence, failing to show real emotions and discarding the humane values are considered purely an identity of post-emotional society. When manipulation of real emotions itself is treated post-emotional, showing no emotions to the human beings can be reflected as worse kind of post-emotion. Anisha.N (2012) articulates: When we go through the entire play we get the feeling that this is not a murder of a human being because for the heterosexual community, the murder of Kamla has been not an issue at all. The silencing of the minority class by the homophobic society is what Dattani tries to explore through this play. In the play silencing works at both emotional and physical level. By emotional what it means is that the silencing of their desire-their desire to become a mother, a father, a brother, a sister or even a daughter. Their desire to be loved by others, their desire to love others all are at stake... (p. 3-4) It is disheartening to see that human beings love and pet animals but they fail to support fellow human beings. Bringing the views of Meštrović, People have turned insensitive to the sufferings of the other fellow human beings. People show manipulated emotions to others. Their internal conflicts remain unnoticed by the other people in the society and people have turned hypocritical in the contemporary world.

Tying yoke for sufferings of the fellow human beings is a shame for the world and punishment for them. Nick Stevenson proposes the current state of the world that substantiates the concept of post emotional society, “We currently live in an age of crocodile tears and manufactured emotion. This is a society of synthetic feeling where we have all become progressively indifferent to the suffering of others”. (“Meštrović: Postemotional Society”)

Showing love and respect towards the fellow sufferers does not cost anything. In fact, it is a form of civilization and humanitarian concern. Human relationship and bonding is weakening in families for various reasons. People say that love begins at home. If a child is grown with lot of love, sympathy and human nature at home, it is obvious to reflect in the society also. On that note, co-existence is a very important aspect of survival. Love is an ingredient to the element of co-existence and survival. Stijn Oosterlynck and Bart Van Bouchaut reflect the idea of Pickering as, “One crucial aspect of the social order was the family which taught the importance of love as the basis for self-improvement. This love was transferred later to one’s family and finally to humanity as a whole” (p.8).

III. CO-EXISTENT AFFINITY

Lack in social cohesion and conscious brings in tension, rivalry, brutality among the people in the society irrespective of any gender, caste or creed. Lending ears to the emotional sufferings of the victims or any human being falls under the perspective of social realization. It does not only fulfil our personal needs but also shows our social responsibility. The emotional attachment serves the purpose of attending the psychological needs of the sufferers. This sense of attachment and belongingness creates a larger space to eliminate inequality, disharmony and miseries. A.N.Tripathi (2003) reflects: This belongingness also creates a sense of responsibility for working towards removal of social inequalities, disharmonies and afflictions of various kinds. It nurtures the social virtues of care and concern. Without it society ceases to be ‘a web of social relationships’ for the nurturance of human values, human happiness and human growth. It becomes a cold, numerical collectivity of individuals and groups, and worse still, a tension filled, strife torn, ruthless and oppressive system, governed by the jungle law of might is right. (p. 6-7) Dattani weaves not only the murder investigation story of a hijra but also hijras’ craving to share feelings and emotions beyond social enmity experienced by them. Though various comments and criticisms consign hijras as unsocial fallen creatures, their thirst for love and family drives them to form an organized society among themselves. Jaspal Singh (2012) presents, “Dattani has exposed the multiple layers of realities that co-exist in the Indian society” (p. 107). Uma, being a victim herself, extends her compassion to view the hijra society as an organized social structure built on the same familial codes of conduct reflecting many of the beliefs, roles and behaviours of the majority society. Though entangled in the enigma of her married life, Uma’s feeling of kinship and compassion wins the heart of determined Anarkali who breaks the silence to reveal the murder story. Jeremy Mortimer (2000) observes, “Mahesh’s plays often feature characters who are questioning their identity, and who feel isolated in some way. Uma certainly feels isolated in her marriage and this sense of isolation makes her empathize with Anarkali, the Hijra she befriends” (p.4). In the same way,

Anarkali’s longing for various relationships like brother, sister, mother, father echoes that even hijras have equal rights to desire for personal relationships. When Uma offers her to be her sister, she is overwhelmed and finds consolation in love and sympathy of Uma, “They will kill me. But I will tell you because you are my sister” (Dattani, 2010, p.13). Addressing Uma as sister show signs of additional space for human touch and interpersonal relationship. They defend their cause and stir awareness in the society through the bonds of relationship. The word ‘sister’ strengthens social relationship even if it is an uncommon characteristic of the society at large. Hijras show love and responsibility on main sect of people. Anarkali and Champa show love, affection and empathy towards Uma. Both of them ensure Uma’s safety when she is in their place. They always try to protect her and bless her for her well-being. The socially imposed label of criminality drops off when Champa warns her, “Are you mad? Hold the bag tightly. You should not bring so much money in to such places” (Dattani, 2010, p.25). As the place is frequented by rowdies like Salim, she alerts Uma to reach home safely instead of snatching Uma’s bag that contains fifty thousand rupees. Anarkali feels that Uma is innocent about outside world. Similarly, Champa refers Uma as ‘Ignorant Woman’ (Dattani, 2010, p.43). She empathizes with the state of Uma as “more unhappy than I am” (Dattani, 2010, p.13). Hijras very well understand how pathetic it is on the part of a woman not to have a child. So they shower Uma with blessings “Oh, may you have a hundred children!” (Dattani, 2010, p.26), “Oh, may you have a hundred sons!” (Dattani, 2010, p.27). Even as a token of love towards Uma, a representative of mainstream as well as fellow sufferer, Anarkali gifts Uma a locket with ‘special mantra’ (Dattani, 2010, p.52) to bless her with children. Such a bonding enlightens the audience with a view that if people connect themselves to hijras in an emotional way or exhibit little sympathy towards them, they reciprocate the same double times and even protect people. Inhibitions and inconvenience also get shattered which enhances total bonding and harmony.

Irresistible craving for human relationship and the gravity of emotional ties proves that eunuchs are not different from the other human beings. Hijras take time to build trust, but once they create a familial bondage, their relationship becomes strong and priceless. Their relationship is built with love and strength. The words uttered by them are not mere letters but life and reality. Since their relationship is built on trust and confidence which even their parents denied, it is stronger than their true blood relation. Beena Agarwal (2008) expresses Champa’s feelings, “She confessed that sexual handicapped is no barriers in their bonds of relationship. They have equal fight for being involved in human relationship and their yearnings have equal intensity” (p.40). Champa’s love for Kamla and Anarkali proclaims that their relationship is also universal though beyond the restrictions of myths and conventions. Dr.T.Marx (2012) supports the view, “Dattani celebrates the solidarity and loving hearts of the hijras through the character of Champa” (p.79). As the head hijra, Champa takes every right to show anger and sympathy towards the fellow hijras. Champa acts as a bridge of solidarity. She denies, hurts, hates and also loves people more than anybody in the world.

Though hijras cannot conceive, their ability to love people outperforms motherhood. Though Champa acts towards Anarkali unsympathetically sometimes, sooner or after her anger subsides, "I know I said she should die in jail. But, after all, I am the head hijra and she is my daughter" (Dattani, 2010, p.26).

Beaten up severely in the lock up, Anarkali sobs in pain. Champa tries to caress her like mother. She puts her on her lap and sings a lullaby. In spite of being born in different families, they share love and affection like blood relations. Ultimately Uma's confession, "All I Want is that they want... to move on. To love. To live." (Dattani, 2010, p.52), articulates the crucial role of human relationship which is needed for peaceful social solidarity and also it sensitizes the audience about their pathetic existence.

Few examples can be quoted to show that the world is dropping itself from being a transphobic one. Subbu's love for a hijra and their marriage is the beginning of society's concern and love for them. As his love for Kamla is deep and true, the illusionary presence of Kamla shuttles him to the past and present. In an extreme depression, he cries out, "I'm leaving you all! You can't keep me away from Kamla." (Dattani, 2010, p.49) and shoots himself. His end is depressing but it voices against oppression and proves a spiritual one. It signifies that Subbu's deepest feelings for the death of Kamla are beyond the hold of human rationality. In the beginning, Suresh denies the existence of sister relation between Anarkali and Kamla, "What's that you said? Sister? There is no such thing for them. More lies" (Dattani, 2010, p.8) but at last, in the play, Suresh, the patriarchal representative starts calling transgender as 'she' (Dattani, 2010, p.40).

IV. RESULTS

In this paper, we find "A social transformation has occurred from privately and passionately held rigid moral standards to a publicly and loosely held set of standardized feelings that are used in predictable ways depending upon social circumstances" (p.52). Considering a transformation in the phobic feelings with hijras and supportive policies of the transgender community, the world is envisioning to take a great leap to accept them totally. Eradication of social stigma, discrimination and human rights violation can also be implemented to bring even a better status for transgender community.

V. CONCLUSION

Hijras' world is not restricted only to social ties but it involves emotional and psychological struggles. Dattani tries to advocate a view that society should be responsible enough to maintain solidarity by accepting them as a part of the society. In the journey of exploring the positive side of hijras, he successfully attempts to make people realise the need to acknowledge the third gender. Ankur Konar Conveys, "In the education map of enlightenment, Dattani's artistic snippet is very difficult to be disliked and there is reason to rejoice the private promise and public face made by his innovative and impressive ego-puncturing dramas" (p.10).

In our contemporary India, Government has introduced a lot of welfare schemes like inclusion in census, documentation, issuing of the citizenship ID Cards, issuing passports, social-economical and constitutional safeguards for them.

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AUTHORS PROFILE

Dr.Hema.R, Assistant Professor, Department of Science and Humanities,, Kumaraguru College of Technology, Coimbatore