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G.B. Shaw's *Candida* and Mahesh Dattani's *Where There's a Will*: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I have tried to compare and contrast Bernard Shaw's *Candida* and Mahesh Dattani's *Where there's a Will*. The plays (*Candida* and *Where There's a Will*) are based on the concept of marriage and position of women in the society. Shaw in *Candida* exposes the hollowness of ideal marriage and Dattani too puts forward the bold theme of marriage and extra marital affair in his *Where There's a Will*. How the time and ambiance changes the family bonding and interpersonal relationships has also been showcased. The difference between position of women and the concept of new women in 1890's and that of patriarchy in 1980's is compared. Both the dramatist exposes the evils of society but in their individual style. The paper throws some light on the tools and techniques used by the dramatists which made their plays unique and successful. One is an apostle of new drama, other the revolutionary dramatist who brought to forefront the invisible issues of post modern society. The dramatists draw their characters from different strata of society. Shaw's characters are drawn from different strata of society (lower, middle or elite) but Dattani's characters are epitome of urban society. Shaw and Dattani though belong to different country, cultures, time span but are the votaries of art for life's sake.

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G.B. Shaw's *Candida* and Mahesh Dattani's *Where There's a Will*: A Comparative Study

George Bernard Shaw-the apostle of New Drama was born in Dublin and brought to focus the social change that Europe has witnessed during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and onwards. Shaw focused on the themes like poverty, slum landlordism, prostitution, reality of war, marriage, religion and so on. On the other hand Mahesh Dattani was born in Bangalore explores Post colonial and multi cultural India. He basically deals with the issues which are considered to be invisible rather taboo by the Indian society like gender discrimination, homosexuality, trans-genders, patriarchy, communalism and so on.

Shaw the playwright of Ideas exposes the hollowness of ideal marriage in *Candida* which bears a striking similarity with Dattani's *Where There's a Will*. Dattani's play deals with the fragmented relationships in the Post Colonial Indian society especially husband and wife relationship that is marital and extra marital affairs. Marriage is the recurrent theme of both the plays. *Candida* involves another important issue of the nineteenth century i.e. the 'women question' in which women demanded equal rights with men. Dattani's *Where There's a Will* also deals with the similar theme.

Morell and Candida has been introduced as perfect husband and wife however Eugene's entry makes it an eternal triangle. Shaw objects to marriage and family because these institutions are based on false economics and biology which is exhibited in *Candida*. The institution of marriage is invented and adopted for procreation by society .This statement has its echo in Hasmukh's speech in *Where There's a Will* by Dattani. Hasmukh says "Why does a man marry? So that he can have a woman all to himself? No...May be he needs a faithful companion? No. If that was it, all men would keep dogs. No. No, I think the important reason anyone should marry at all is to get a son...because the son will carry on the family name" (Dattani 475) .Shaw opines that marriage is associated with property as well, and it shifts the attention from procreation to

accumulation of wealth. He even advocates that marriage forces women to economic slavery which is true to some extent in *Candida*. In the beginning it appeared that James Morell is an ideal husband, devoted to his wife but through normal day to day activities in the course of the play it's revealed that he acts as a parasite on his wife. He's dependent on *Candida* for everything, its *Candida* who performs all the tasks to keep things fit and proper. *Candida* is seen peeling and slicing onions, filling the lamp with paraffin oil which shocks Eugene's romantic sensibility. Eugene says "to be idle, selfish and useless: that is to be beautiful, free and happy: hasn't everyman desired that with all his soul for a women he loves? That's my ideal what's yours...sermons and scrubbing brushes! with you to preach the sermon and your wife to scrub."(Shaw 142) This acts as a satire on the whole system of marriage where husband works and is rewarded with money, power and prestige but wife works and is rewarded with drudgery of work and slavery. Marchbanks is even horrified by the hypocrisy which *Candida* had endured during all those years when she selfishly and blindly served and sacrificed herself for Morell and family. *Where There's a Will* re-echoes the traditional Indian thinking that man is meant for business and woman for kitchen. This shows the subaltern position of women in Indian society. . Gayatri Spivak says "*subaltern* is not just a classy word for "oppressed", for the Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie. . . In post-colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern — a space of difference." Though there is a huge difference in the time-span of writings of Shaw and Dattani but the position of women has not improved, she is still chained in household drudgery. Marriage is a tragedy for Hasmukh and his marital life is fragmented and fractured. He condemns his wife for her failure to provide him a good and healthy married life. He comments that Sonal means gold and when they were newly married he always use to say that she is good as gold but soon found out that she was good as mud. He even says that twenty five years of marriage has passed but he hasn't enjoyed sex with her wife, so he opted for something between wife and a pick up i.e a mistress. Sonal on the other hand says Hasmukh means a smiling face but nobody has ever seen him smiling. There is a difference between the marital bond of *Candida*-Morell and that of Sonal-Hasmukh. *Candida* is co-operative and assists her husband in almost all the tasks. She keeps all the troubles away from Morell. On the other hand Morell is caring and loving husband who is full of praises for *Candida* where as Sonal and Hasmukh keep mocking at each other and have huge differences between them. Morell tells Lexy that if one marries a woman like *Candida* life

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is like heaven whereas Hasmukh sounds derogatory in his attitude while talking about marriage. Morell is loyal to Candida while Hasmukh was not loyal to Sonal. The notion of Patriarchy is clearly visible in both the plays however towards the end of the plays this myth was broken. Patriarchy is a society where women are dominated by men. It basically involves male domination, male identification and male centrality. For *Where There is a Will*, Beena Agrawal says "The first part of where there's a will is the assertion of patriarchy, second is the mockery of patriarchy second part of second act is collapse of patriarchy"(112). Hasmukh Mehta wants to control the life of everything and everyone that surrounds him. Hasmukh not only controls the life of his family members while he was alive but also makes an arrangement to control their lives after his death through the will prepared by him. Ajit says his father wants members of the family to dance on his tunes. The will acts as whip and the agent is Hasmukh's mistress Kiran Jhaveri. Hasmukh's power of money and greed for absolute control has fractured interpersonal relationship within his family. Like a typical modern family there is lack of emotional attachment, fragmentation of personality and lack of understanding for one's views and opinions. Here the politics of patriarchy not only marginalizes the female but the male as well. According to the 'will' Ajit has to attend office nine to five daily and has to learn about the business tactics from Kiran for which he will be getting an allowance, similarly Preeti (Hasmukh's daughter in law) will be getting an allowance after she becomes a mother and Sonal will also get an allowance but they all had to act according to the will otherwise the whole property will be donated to a charity. On the surface level it appears that Kiran too was subordinated by Hasmukh Mehta but her vibrant speech to Sonal reveals the truth. Kiran says she pitied Hasmukh. "He depended on me for everything .He thought he was the decision maker. But I was .He wanted me to run his life like his father had.(pause). Hasmukh didn't really want a mistress .he wanted a father .He saw in me a woman who would father him! (laughs).Men never really grows up!" .This bears a striking similarity with Candida's statement "I make him master here, though he does not know it.." In *Candida*, Morell thinks that if he gives up Candida there would be none to protect her, to help her to work for her to provide for her children this also shows the patriarchal

point of view. Eugene acting as Shaw's mouthpiece remarks that it is Candida who wants somebody to protect, help and to work for. He says that Candida should be given the right to choose between them. When Candida comes to know of this cold war between Eugene and Morell, she explodes "what have you to offer for my choice? I am up for the auction it seems..." Morell says he has nothing to offer but his strength for her defense, his honesty for her surety, his ability and industry for her livelihood, his authority and position for her dignity. This is what a man can offer to a woman whereas Marchbanks offers his weakness, desolation and his heart's need. Candida gives her verdict that she gives herself to the weaker of the two. Here it must be noted that it's Candida (the wife) is the real creditor, for it's she who builds a castle of comfort and love for her husband and stands as a sentinel to keep out vulgar cares. Candida even explains in Act III that Morell is weaker than Eugene as Eugene had no one to care for him; his clever sisters and his successful brothers were his parent's favorites. His life was miserable; he was even starved by his father to compel him to return to Oxford. He was accustomed of living without comfort or welcome, in a way Eugene is emotionally stronger and more will powered. On the other hand Morell was spoiled from his cradle by love his parents and sisters; he was the hero of that family. She says "Ask James's mother and his three sisters what it cost to save James the trouble of doing anything but be strong and clever and happy. Ask me what it costs to be James's mother and three sisters and wife and mother to his children all in one..." (Shaw 174). She even takes care that nobody disturbs him during his sermons. She says "I make him master here, though he doesnot know it..." This proves that Morell pretends to protect and help Candida in various aspects and that she is dependent on him. Shaw breaks the illusion and exposes the reality that it's Morell who is dependent on Candida for everything. It's Candida who provided Morell all the luxury, comforts, love affection and protection. Shaw turned the eternal triangle upside down by making woman morally stronger enough to sustain the two men instead of being upheld by them. However the contrasting element is that in *Candida*, Candida is Morell's wife so it's obvious that she knows her husband well but in *Where There's a Will* its Kiran, Hasmukh's mistress who know him better than his wife does. This shows the deterioration of relationships in modern urban society. The sanctity of marital bond is broken and the materialism of contemporary society is clearly highlighted.

Both the plays deals with the love triangles on one hand there is Morell-Candida-Eugene on the other hand there is Sonal-Hasmukh-Kiran. Shaw's pivotal character in *Candida* is his

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heroine Candida. She is a typical Shavian heroine the driving force who not only drives herself but also their family, society and the world. The maternal aspect of woman is explored by Shaw and these women exercise power through their control and authority over others. She is a powerful and emancipated mother. Candida is a practical realist who had no illusions about herself, her husband and the poet lover. She is the driving force who mothers two grown up babies (Eugene and Morell) with the love of her heart and labor of her hands. Morell has been addressed as a 'great baby' and Eugene is addressed mostly as 'boy' which clarifies the mother like caring attitude. Candida is loved and respected by Eugene and Morell both in their different ways. Candida is a new woman who hardly pays any importance to Victorian values like purity and goodness, for her it's trivial and insignificant. She says to James "Ah! James, how little you understand me, to talk of your confidence in my goodness and purity! I would give my shawl to a beggar dying of cold, if there were nothing else to restrain me." Candida is pragmatic and practical in approach she knows that females are fascinated by James's charms and she is well aware of Eugene's love for her therefore she wants to teach him the reality and truth of love. Throughout the play she is seen directing Morell, Marchbanks, Proserpine, Burgess. She exists as the central nucleus around which others revolve. Watson has observed that Candida exhibits herself as a practical lady thoroughly. For her poet is strong because of his independence of spirit which is risky for a woman as compared with the solid dependence of Reverend Mr. Morell. Candida loves Morell because he is a strong figure in society but is weak before Candida and is dependent on her. Candida represents one of the perfect New Woman that has been created by Shaw. Though Candida does not have all the traits of new woman yet she has qualities like spirit, individuality, self control, politeness, wit, will and most importantly self sufficiency. She is complacent having ambivalent attitude and approach. Shaw presents her as a progressive woman who does not belong to anyone else but to her own self. Her name signifies frankness and candour and there is nothing sly or underhand about her. Though the play belongs to the period of 1890s still the condition of woman is far better as compared to the female characters of *Where There is a Will* by Mahesh Dattani. One comes across a major difference between the social

positions of women while comparing both the plays. In *Candida*, Candida is presented as a woman of strength and intelligence who has no impact outside the household world while in *Where there is a Will* women can be distinguished in two categories: one bearing the household drudgery, victims of patriarchal society like Sonal Mehta who is a silent sufferer and the others (Kiran, Preeti) representing modern new women who is capable of handling both the household and the outside world and is capable of raising their voice against male chauvinism. They fight against patriarchal unjust authority for their rights and equality. Sonal is the most tragic comic character in the play. She spends most of her time in either kitchen or pujaagar. She was also dependent on Minal, her sister for all the decisions of her life. The tragedy of her life is that almost all the characters blame her by one or other way. With Kiran's entry her condition became intense however she found a true friend in her. It's because of her support and help Sonal at last gains confidence to take decisions in her life. Kiran is the most important female character of *Where There is a Will*. She is also a victim of patriarchal society however she raises her voice against this injustice. She represented the new women of society. Sonal says Kiran is fortunate because she is an educated woman and knows much about life. Kiran breaks her conception of an educated woman saying that she has learnt her lessons from life, watching her mother. She says "I learnt what life was when my mother pretended she was happy in front of me and my brothers..." (Dattani 508) She tolerated all the atrocities of life and pains inflicted on her by husband. Kiran says "my father, your husband— they were weak men with false strength" (Dattani 508). This idea is also reflected in Candida's speech about Morell, that it's Candida who made him the master with an impression that he is strong. Dattani here explores the issue of gender roles and their miserable plights. Even in post modern era women are being treated as sex objects and exploited physically and mentally. Feminine "self has not been restored yet". The sorry state and plight of women from one generation to another has been depicted with wrath and anguish in Kiran's words:

"Isn't it strange how repetitive life is? My brothers, they have turned out to be like my father... And I-I too am like my mother. I married a drunkard... learnt to suffer silently. Oh! where will all this end..." (Dattani 508)

Kiran herself a victim very well understands the suffocation and dilemma of Sonal however she has the courage to stand and fight for her cause. Kiran boldly says that women are suffering not

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because of their faults or because of lack of education or employment but they are victims of man's false ego and pride. This male chauvinistic attitude is cause of all their woes and sufferings. Asha Kuthari Chaudhary says "interweaving his narrative around the scheming and plotting of the family members who apparently have been put in a fix by dead man's will, Dattani explores the dichotomy between the male/female roles within the archetype of family headed by a man and what happens when a woman takes over.."(57). However it must be said that the position of *Candida* in Bernard Shaw is far more independent, confident and secure than the position of Sonal, Kiran and Preeti in *Where There's a Will*.

Techniques and stagecraft have great importance in drama that has been well exhibited in Mahesh Dattani's *Where There is a Will*. Multi-level sets, flashback techniques, split scenes, thought techniques, voice over are quite popular in Dattani's plays. In *Where There's a Will* Dattani exquisitely used supernatural element in form of ghost of Hasmukh. The narrative of play takes place in lavish house of Hasmukh Mehta. The stage is divided into four rooms –two bedrooms, the living room and the dining room. Each room is created with specific details to set the tone for the play. The play has a Gujarati milieu and fuses tragic and comic insights. Sita Raina says "joy is the essence of life and I have always believed that theatre should exude delight...it's not only thought provoking and introspective but also provides an evening of pure entertainment."(Dattani 451) Dattani peeps into the past to find out the reality that's lying in the darkness of past. The supernatural element i.e. the ghost of Hasmukh provided humour and sarcasm to the play. According to Beena Agrawal it also acts as a device for the self assessment for the characters. Another notable technique is that all the characters are opposite of their names Hasmukh means a smiling face but he rarely smiled throughout the play. Sonal means gold but according to Hasmukh she was good for nothing, she was like mud. Preeti means affection but was unaffectionate to almost every member of the family. It's only Kiran whose name was appropriate as she acted as a ray of hope, whose efforts made a fragmented family in true sense a family. Bernard Shaw on the other hand uses various devices naming characters, dialogue, stage directions, character interaction, paradoxical and anti climatic endings. Shaw's elaborate stage

direction produces a picture in front of one's eyes through his words. In *Candida* through stage directions gave an account of environment, personal appearance habits manners and so on. Shaw's characters are vehicles of his ideas and are drawn from real life. Name of the characters are important in Shavian characterization. Candida in *Candida* according to her name is frank, bold and honest which is quite clear through the speeches. Shaw uses the instruments of wit, humor, satire to expose the realities of life. However he uses a sugar coating on a bitter pill. The hollowness of the claims of Church that the kingdom of heaven on earth can be established through preaching has been ridiculed and satirized in *Candida*. Candida reveals that women admire Morell not because of his preaching but because they love him and wants to listen to his eloquent speeches. She even explains that people come to hear about Christianity every Sunday just because other six days they are full of business and money-making, they want to rest on seventh day so that they can return fresh and make money harder than ever. She says Morell's preaching's cannot make them good rather once their conscience is satisfied they continue with their worldly materialistic activities. For Shaw clergymen is like other ordinary people who are the creatures of flesh and blood, capable of dignity but are not free from human failings which is clear through Morell's character. Shaw's heroes are fond of rhythmic and rhetoric. Marchbanks used word 'because' repeatedly throughout the play, even he used 'if' at least nineteen times in the play. Shaw used a conventional plot in *Candida* but reversed the basic situation of domestic comedy. Conflict in Shavian drama is unique. In *Candida* there are clashes and encounters i.e. clashes of ideas instead of any external physical combat. Conflict is made more dramatic by paradox and anticlimax which provides characters with complexity and made them more interesting. *Candida* is a 'drama of ideas' and discusses a number of social problems. The institution of marriage and family exploitation of workers and issue of university education are discussed from various angles. Shaw uses ordinary English language or King's English, however Burgess uses cockney dialect. A.C Ward said cockney speech is dialect of uneducated Londoners who often omits initial letter 'h' omits final consonants etc. however this provides amusements to readers. Another important difference is that Shaw's characters belongs to all strata of society (lower, middle and elites) where as Dattani characters belong to urban strata of society.

To sum up, it can be said both Shaw and Mahesh Dattani deals with the social problems and evils of the society of their own times. However there is a difference in the style of writings

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of Shaw and Dattani ; as Shaw uses sugar coating on bitter pill, Dattani present the reality in its in its true and crude form.

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