

Seven Steps Around the Fire

- One of the famous Radio plays of ***Mahesh Dattani***.
- First broadcast as *Seven Circles Around the Fire* by BBC Radio 4 on January 9, 1999.
- First performed on stage at the Museum Theatre, Chennai, by MTC production and The Madras Players on August 6, 1999.

Characters in the Play

- *Kamala*- The Eunuch who is murdered for taking the seven sacred steps around the fire
- *Uma Rao*- The academician who unravels the mystery of Kamla's death
- *Suresh Rao*- The Chief Superintendent of Police and Uma's husband
- *Munswamy*- A constable and the bodyguard of Uma
- *Anarkali*- The Eunuch who is accused of Kamala's murder
- *Champa*- The head of the eunuch
- *Mr. Sharma*- The Minister and the father of Subbu
- *Subbu Sharma*- The Minister's son who marries Kamala
- *Salim*- Mr. Sharma's servant who goes to take the photograph of Kamala's marriage with Subbu; the only evidence of their wedding.

Outline Summary of the Play

- 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. Uma teaches Sociology in Bangalore University. She uncovers the reality behind the murder of Kamala during working on her research paper titled "Class- and Gender- Related Violence".

- All the characters of the play are introduced through the course of her inquiry of Kamala's murder. Munswamy, a constable is introduced as a bodyguard of Uma selected by her husband.
- She meets the character of Anarkali, a eunuch in the jail and Champa, the head of the eunuch at her home. She also meets Salim, a servant of Mr. Sharma at Champa's house.
- Mr. Sharma and his son, Subbu Sharma are introduced to her at their house. All the characters of the play are assembled at the house of Mr. Sharma on the day of his son, Subbu's wedding where the truth of Kamala's murder is revealed.

Major Themes in the Play

The Plight of Eunuchs in the Society

The play represents the plight of eunuchs in the society. They used to come on two occasions- wedding and child birth but the nature denies them both the things. It is considered if they are denied to dance and sing on these occasions, they curse the family. They are neglected section of the society. The play also presents the idea that the powerful always exploit the weak. The eunuchs are not given any respect in the society. They have no right to get love. If they try to do so their fate will be like Kamala. Not even they, the people who try to give love to them have to suffer like Subbu in the play.

The Exploitation of the Weak by the Powerful

The play presents the real plight of eunuchs who are represented as the weaker sections in the society. If they come in the way of a reputed family, they will have to suffer and to the worst effect, the criminal is not even given any punishment. 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 on the accusation for her murder. But the one thing which connects all the things is a photograph of Kamala and Subbu with marriage garlands. To get this photograph, Mr. Sharma sends Salim, his bodyguard to Champa and Anarkali to threaten them. But he is able to get that photograph after the death of Subbu on his wedding day. He has to pay such a great price for that photograph. Both Champa and Anarkali, are aware of the identity of the criminal who got Kamala murdered but don't reveal it to Uma because they fear that they will have to face more suffering in that condition and the real criminal will not be effected in any way.

Police as Puppets in the hands of the Powerful

Even the police are not ready to take any action against a reputed man like the minister. After the suicide of Subbu, the police considers it an accident and the photo of Subbu and Kamala is destroyed and nothing is inflicted on the minister. To complete the formality of the case the police holds an innocent person responsible for the crime. Suresh Rao accepts before Uma that there is no evidence or proof against Anarkali. They arrested her only as a formality to close the case.

Man's Inability to Accept his Weakness

In Indian society man is not ready to accept his own weakness. Uma, the wife of Suresh Rao has no children. She is taking the treatment from a doctor who asks her to send her husband also for test but her husband denies. It is not easy for a man to accept that he cannot become a father. Man is not ready to accept the weakness in him. He even tries to impose his weakness on women. Suresh Rao has the fear of being barren; hence he ignores going to doctor.

The Appropriateness of the Title

The title of the play is relevant. The whole play revolves round the enquiry made by Uma about the murder of Kamala who has taken seven sacred steps around the fire against the social norms. A eunuch is denied to marry or take seven steps around the fire by the society and these seven steps around the fire result in Kamala's murder. She is murdered because of her secret marriage to Subbu. The fire which is the evidence of their marriage turns to be the instrument of her destruction. In this way, the title of the play *Seven Steps around the Fire* is a relevant title.

Setting of the Play

The social setting of the play is obviously Indian society with its conventional social norms. The play begins with wedding mantras and the burning scene of Kamala. The physical setting of the play contains the office of the Superintendent of Police; the male section of central jail, Bangalore where Uma meets Anarkali; Uma's house; Uma's father's house; the living room of Champa in Shivajinagar where Uma meets Champa, the head of the hijaras; the Minister's residence where Subbu's suicide takes place and everyone comes to know about Subbu and Kamala's marriage. The play ends in the office of Superintendent of Police from where it begins. In this way the play completes its whole circle.

Sound Effect and the Style

The use of the sound effect in the play is very effective like whirring of fans at the office of Superintendent of Police, the sound of opening and shutting of drawer, traffic noises, screaming of children on the roadside, soundtrack of music and singing of hijras and their loud clapping of hands, tinkling of bells time and again at Champa's residence, music from a radio with a lot of crackle, the sound of telephone being dialled. The language and style of the play is in accordance with the dramatic effect.

Web Source-- <https://eltweekly.com/2013/12/book-review-seven-steps-around-the-fire-by-mahesh-dattani/>