

CHAPTER IV

THE CLUB: POSITIONAL POWER AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONS

CHAPTER IV

THE CLUB: POSITIONAL POWER AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONS

The power of an individual depends on the position in the society and family and affects the professional relations. The position in the society is helpful to hold the power and dominate others in the society. The person, who holds the position in the society, has the power to rule and dominate. The present chapter analyses the positional power and professional relations reflected in David Williamson's *The Club*.

The Club, a satirical play, commissioned by Melbourne Theatre Company was first produced in 1977 and published in 1978. It is known to be Williamson's most popular Institutional play dealing with the power politics in a football club. The play is about the clashes between human loyalties and materialistic gains. It is inspired by the backroom dealing and antics of the Victorian League's Collingwood. The play satirically reveals the self-interest and double dealing underlying the politics of an ostensibly democratic institution of sport. The central metaphor of club stands for the professional sports club in Australia in which the commercialism has destroyed the zeal of sport as they become the centre of exploitation and dominance. The play reflects a scenario of 1970s Australia.

The Club depicts the professional, social and familial realities of the football players who are in the tremendous tension of survival in the huge competition and brutal power politics. Actually, only six characters appear on the stage but several others are just mentioned by others. The play reflects how the interpersonal relations of Ted Parker, a Club

President; Jock Riley, a Club Vice-President; Gerry Cooper, Club Administrator; Laurie Holden, a Coach; Geoff Hayward, a Player; and Danny Rowe, a Captain are influenced by the notion of 'power'. They are never altogether at once and two of them Gerry and Geoff never speak to each other. The women characters – Jock's wife Rosemary, Gerry's wife June, Laurie's wife Helen, Ted's wife, Danny's wife and mistress and Geoff's friend Susy – never appear on the stage.

Throughout the play, it can be observed that the characters struggle for power and frequently make attempt to gain power and dominance over others. As a part of club, everybody struggles to create an authoritative position in the field of sport and for that exerts power at personal and professional level to become dominant in their interpersonal relations.

The play through different social scenes demonstrates how the characters use the authoritative power, physical power, gender power and economic power to gain what is desired. At the opening, Ted Parker and Gerry Cooper discuss the present condition of the football team. The play is full of reversals as well as false appearances. Its plot begins with Gerry's effort to reconcile Ted and Laurie, the two men who are on the verge of being sacked. The power struggle and the personal desires resulted into continuous failure of the team. As an administrator Gerry should concern with the victory of his players but instead he only thinks in terms of his reputation as a best administrator.

Ted Parker is the President of football Club as well as the owner of a meat pie factory. He uses his power as a President and attempts to dominate everyone. Williamson delineates this character to demonstrate

how the person who holds the political and economic power dominates in the society. Throughout the play for several times it is observed that he exerts the power in the capacity of a president. He exerts the authority power on all the members of the committee and players of the team.

TED: . . . I am Club President, Laurie. I was elected by the members to lead this Club, and I am bloody well lead it, and if anybody tries to stop me I'll crush them. No, Gerry. I'm sick of pussyfooting around. I'm going to speak my mind. He's called me autocratic, so he just better come with some evidence. (133)

The dialogue reveals that he is an autocrat in nature and is very committed for his professional success. This dialogue is not just a fit of rage but it is a serious intimation to all those who raise a voice against his dominance. On the another occasion, he says –

TED: You're very smart, aren't you, Rowe? Very, very smart. You just might need my signature on a clearance form one day soon. Just remember that. (144)

The power is further used for the corruption as the selection committee of the club hires players by giving some money. Through this, they control players and use their skills them for their personal benefits. In order to gain the premiership, he not only buys the players but also the coach along with the administration. Ted uses the political as well as the economic power throughout the play. Ted hits a Stripper and it forces him to resign from the membership of the Club. His personality is not at all loveable, as Jock states that "With closed fists too, you mongrel. Don't expect me to be sorry for you" (173). His hypocritical nature becomes apparent for several times in the play as he speaks, ideally but behaves

contradictorily; for instance in public he opines that to create violence against women is not good for the social position but in personal life he beats his wife.

Gerry Cooper is one of the important characters who exert the political power as a Club administrator. Similar to Ted, Gerry also has associated himself with the sport only for the social reputation as he is not a player and even has a little information about game. But then also he dreams to be the best administrator of the football Clubs in Australia. Gerry looks towards the Club as a business. It doesn't affect Gerry whether one wins or lost, and he doesn't care for the players' future. When there is discussion between Laurie and Gerry, he declares that,

GERRY: I don't love the club, and I don't particularly like the game and that might make me an oily weasel in your eyes, but I'm the best football administrator in the country and you're only the second best coach; so don't count on being able to return that photo for quite a long while. (181)

Gerry maintains his dominance over Ted and Laurie in their professional relations. Gerry persuades Laurie's mind from resignation and works in the Club for this season and apologies towards Ted in front of the press. Gerry discloses a secret in front of Laurie that Ted would resign the Club within a short period. If there is resignation of Ted then it is not good for Laurie to resign from the Club. At the end of the debate, Laurie and Ted agree on a resolution. After a discussion with Laurie, Gerry spends some time with Ted and persuades his mind for the resolution with Laurie. Thus, he is very shrewd and professional in resolving the ego conflicts of the plays. He does it not out of love for

them or concern for the club's reputation, but he does it for his personal interests.

Danny Rowe is a captain of the team who plays for the football Club. Danny Rowe, twenty-eight years old, is in support with Laurie. If the committee accepts Laurie's resignation, Danny declares that the players would go on strike, and they will not play tomorrow's game. The whole team, except Geoff Hayward, supports Laurie. The team also has the authority over the committee. It is also a political power. Through the following dialogue, he presents his loyalty towards Laurie.

DANNY: Then perhaps the Committee had better roll up and play tomorrow's match.

TED: What's that supposed to mean?

DANNY: It means that if that bloody Committee of yours gives Laurie the boot tonight, then we don't play tomorrow.

LAURIE: Come off it . . . [*DANNY*].

TED: A strike threat.

DANNY: It's no threat. We mean it. You sack Laurie tonight and you won't have a team tomorrow. . . .

TED: Laurie offered his resignation, and we're treating it seriously. What else do you expect us to do?

DANNY: He only offered to resign because you bloody well drove him to it. How could any coach run a team with you sticking your nose in everywhere? (134)

He comments on Ted that he is responsible for Laurie's resignation. Ted also scratches on Danny's private life only to manipulate him. He behaves very unethical when in the absence of Danny, in

committee room he discusses that Danny has an affair with the Avis girl, Raylene and he even pays the rent of her flat. He ignores his wife for his mistress. Laurie knows the structure and order to manage the team so that Danny helps Laurie in the critical situation. Danny controls over the committee with the help of the team. Thus, both these characters use their power to control each other.

Geoff Hayward is another character who is supported by Ted Parker. Ted uses the power of money to control him. In the selection of players, Committee offers him \$90000, but he demands \$10000. Ted takes this as an opportunity to dominate Geoff and writes a cheque from his own account and pay the demanded amount. Further it is seen that Ted rules Geoff and as a result he could not give his full in the performance. At the end of the play, he becomes aware with the fact and decides to support Laurie. On this occasion, Jock and Gerry plan to scratch his private life and blackmail him to refuse to play the game. In his private life, he misbehaves with his friend Susy, his sister and mother. He discloses that due to his misbehaviour with his sister and mother, his father has committed suicide. Geoff changes his role on the basis of the situations. Throughout the play it is seen that he is controlled by other characters.

Jock Riley, an ex-football player of the Club, is the champion and designated as a Vice-president of the Club. He creates huge records and keeps it for a long time compare to any other player of the clubs in Australia. He also has won four premierships as a coach.

Laurie is also a prominent and powerful character of the play. He is a man of potential who begins with an ordinary player, champion of the

team and respectful coach of the team. But he is also opposed by some members of the committee and the fellow players. When Jock comes to know that, the team will strike if the committee accepts the resignation of Laurie, he opposes the idea:

JOCK: What's this bloody business about a strike? Did you threaten this Club with a strike?

DANNY: I told . . . [*GERRY that if*]

JOCK: I have never heard anything like it in my life. Who's involved? Give me their names. You're not indispensable, Rowe. No one's going to hold the Club to ransom. I'll suspend the lot of you. Who else is involved?

DANNY: The whole team. Except Geoff Hayward. It'll give him a chance to show what a real champion he is.

JOCK: This is a disgusting and despicable threat, Danny. I never thought I'd live to see the day. I played two hundred and eighty-two games for this Club and every time I ran onto the ground I felt as honoured to be out there wearing the Club colours as I did the first time. (142)

This communication focuses on the changing scenario of the sport club in which the people are more interested in playing the power game, rather to be a good player with a sportive nature. For instance –the power struggles between Laurie and Jock is evidenced by Laurie's accusation that Jock supports the committee's traditional approach only to stop Laurie's success. There are several occasions in the play that reveals the power struggle between Jock and Laurie. Jock does not want that Laurie would get success and progress in the team, so he supports the committee to hold an old tradition. Laurie wants to buy players by his choice, but

Jock refuses it. Laurie states that in the present situation it is necessary to buy players for the team. For his failure to win a premiership, he blames the Club tradition. The Club doesn't win the premiership since nineteen years. He states "You and your cronies wouldn't let me buy players." Jock replies "We were upholding an old tradition. It was wrong, but we believed in it."(148)

Some of the characters are more successful than others. However, the two players Danny and Geoff do not get involved in these power struggles except when they aid Laurie at the end of the play. Geoff and Laurie discuss that –

GEOFF: Yeah. Well I missed the history and copped Jock, Ted and Gerry. Honestly, what's an old fool like Jock doing in a position of power? . . .

LAURIE: We're not here to talk about Jock.

GEOFF: Was he a bad coach?

LAURIE: Yes.

GEOFF: How come he got those premierships then?

LAURIE: [*irritated*] He got them in his first six years, in the days when the best talent in the country was fighting to get a purple and gold guernsey. By the time I took over all of that had long finished. (159-160)

Ted has the most obvious power at the beginning of the play, although he steadily loses it as the other characters strive to improve their stands. The desire for power is universal, and there is resentment from those who are not in power towards those who are. These attitudes were also still relevant in the 1990s, as shown by the recent Super League

Fiasco. The point is that the Club is not particularly successful recently and has not won a premiership for nineteen years only strengthens the characters competitive attitudes and desire for victory.

In this play, the male characters use the power over female characters. They harass the women physically, sexually and mentally. Men treat women as an object to fulfil the sexual desire. Laurie and Gerry have good relations with their wives, whereas Ted, Jock, and Danny betray and beat their wives and create physical and domestic violence.

Laurie and Gerry believe that it is unacceptable to commit acts of physical violence against women. Jock refers to an incident where Ted hits a Stripper that forced him to resign. However, Jock's attitude in this case is highly hypocritical. He has admittedly bashed his own wife. Society's attitude towards such violence against women is similarly hypocritical.

TED: You believe her story, I suppose. Every word.

JOCK: Why shouldn't I? Gerry was there.

TED: I slapped her. That's all Gerry saw.

GERRY: You hit her at least once, Ted.

TED: I slapped her.

GERRY: If it comes to the point of testifying, I'll say that I was confused, and I wasn't sure what you did. But you did hit her.

JOCK: With closed fists too, you mongrel. Don't except me to be sorry for you. (173)

This dialogue expresses that Ted slaps the girl, and it is a plan made by Jock and Gerry to force him to resign the Presidentship and gain

the power. This time also Ted is ready to give money to the girl's partner for closing the matter.

When Ted will resign, and Jock will be a President of the Club, Geoff decides to play for Laurie's sake. Jock tells Gerry that if Geoff does not listen to him, he would suspend him from the team because of his behaviour. The committee threatens later on Laurie's position as head coach and to replace him with Rostoff. The players do not like this and the team, including Geoff choose to play as well as they can at least make the finals and show the committee that Laurie is not bad. The committee has the authority to replace the coach.

The Club has some power parallels that create conflict between two groups. Even in this sport organization the power relations are analogous to the relations between employer and workers in the professional context. Ted, Jock, and Gerry all have pride as being hard-nose businesspersons. Nevertheless, Ted and Jock at least look representative products of a particular social mobility. In this way Williamson has delineated the characters and recognizable situations reflects the world in the microcosm of struggles for power in the management of a football team. Gerry fosters commercialism where he derives power and wealth from the Club at any cost. Laurie has shifted the committee to business and money. Gerry's sole objective is to derive power and wealth from the Club.

The power plays a significant role in these plays, as it reveals uses and abuses of power on human relations. For instance – Gerry can manipulate others. Ted uses sarcasm to achieve power over the other characters whereas Jock has no practical aspiration of power without the

support of Gerry. Thus, all these characters associated with the club begin to argue and start ripping each other out with politics, money, and decisions. The play is about commitment, passion, glory, jealousy, greed, money and power. The Club turns into commercialism. In the beginning, the Club purchases Geoff Hayward for \$90000. Gerry and Jock plan for the next year that they would buy players and coach and sell the previous players. Many big corporations donate funds to sponsor the Club.

The play depicts the various types of interpersonal relationships such as friendship, marital and professional relations. Ted, Gerry, Danny, Laurie, Jock and Geoff have the professional relations because they are working with the same club and are not interested in personal intimacies. Gerry and Geoff do not speak to each other in the whole play, but they communicate with others with each other's reference. At the same time, they are friends but they have failed to maintain good relations with each other.

Though, the exclusive focus of the play is on the power politics among the players associated with a club, in the margin, the play explores the realities of man-woman relationship through the memories and dialogues of the male characters. In the very beginning of the play, playwright through the dialogues of male characters reveals that he is not only concern with the power in the context of the professional world but also concern with it in the familial context:

TED: [*off*] How's June?

GERRY: Sick.

TED: [*off*] That's great. Sick? . . .

TED: I'm sorry. It's come to this Laurie.

LAURIE: So am I. [*There is another awkward pause.*]

June better yet, Gerry?

GERRY: Improving, thanks, Laurie.

LAURIE: Give her my love. (131-132)

The dialogue presents the importance of the relations between Gerry and June. Gerry has a stable relationship with his wife. His place in the family as a head underlines his capacity as leader in the Club. By depicting the successful marital relationship between Gerry and June, author wants to depict how the familial power is related with the professional.

Likewise Gerry, Laurie also has good and healthy relationship with his wife Helen. Gerry and Laurie's personal relationships lead them to hold the power in the Club and maintain the leadership. On the other hand, due to escapism and avoiding the responsibilities, other characters are incapable to hold their professional conditions, as well as personal relations.

Geoff Hayward is one of the positive examples of the relation with women. While discussing with Laurie, Geoff explains that her relationship with Susy is very frank, and he respects Susy's opinion about the game of football. He states through the following dialogue:

LAURIE: Are you still living with that girl?

GEOFF: Susy? Yes, Why? Do you think she's a corrupting influence?

LAURIE: She didn't seem very interested in your football career when I met her.

GEOFF: She's not.

LAURIE: She thinks its macho-competitive bullshit too?

GEOFF: You can't exactly blame her, when it gets to the point where we start coming to blows behind the lockers. (159)

Geoff represents less maturity in comparison with Laurie and Gerry to become a leader. In the discussion with Jock, Geoff reveals his personal life that he has a sister and on her 18th birthday she got an accident and lost her legs from knees. One day, in the dark night, as she felt afraid and cried loudly, he comforts her by sleeping with her. But this calf-intimacy further turned into incest sexual relation which was further joined by his mother. It is seen that this moral botheration or the conventional power of ethics affects his performance in the play. This fact is also used by other characters to blackmail him; for instance – when in the end Geoff shows his willingness to play for Laurie, Jock threatens him that he will disclose his secretes. Thus, this secretes has power that dominates his life. At the end of the play, he is ready to play the game for Laurie's sake that time Jock talks to Gerry that if he would not support us, he discloses his misbehaviour. But in the end again all these things are suspended when Jock discloses his secret, Gerry replies a different version of truth:

JOCK: Yeah. He's been up his mum and his legless sister, and he thinks he killed his old man.

GERRY: [Staring] What?

JOCK: He confided in me, so don't tell anyone although hey! If he starts playing too well, we can always leak a rumour or two.

GERRY: Jock. Geoff has two brothers, no sisters and his father had his fifty-fourth birthday last Saturday. Now get inside and try and sober up before the meeting. (186)

Thus by giving the different version of truth Gerry defuses the power of this secret and release Geoff from the tremendous moral tension of it.

Unlike Gerry and Laurie, Ted neglects his domestic duties. Through the dialogues it is revealed that his relations with his wife are not good and they speak rarely with each other. It is also seen that he is not capable to carry the tensions as consequential effects of the leadership. In the course of the play when Gerry makes a scheme on him and makes him to slap the Stripper that generates the demand of his resignation, he takes the alcohol to reduce the tension. In the end he resigns the Presidentship and expresses his feeling:

TED: [*to GERRY and JOCK*] I'm not running away. I could stay here and fight and probably get the numbers, but I couldn't be bothered. I've got a bedridden wife to look after, and I've run out of energy and I don't even know whether it's worth fighting when the Club's fallen into the hands of people like you. You've been scheming to get rid of me for six months, and the gods have delivered me into your hands, but one day when the true history of the Club is written. I'll have pride of place over you two vultures. I'll be amongst the very great ones. [*He leaves.*] (176-177)

The last speech of Ted reveals many truths about his personal life. It is in fact Ted's surrender to other characters, who become successful in defeating him in the power politics.

Jock's marital life is also not happy and healthy. Every time he dominates Rosemary. Jock is not satisfied with his wife and has desire for

other women. The following dialogue makes one clear that he hates Rosemary:

JOCK: Ah, shut up! You're lucky he didn't flatten you. You've got to be bloody tactful when a player's getting on in years, Ted. It's a hell of a shock to the system when a player you could have matched when you were younger turns round and takes you apart. I got angry about the strike stuff too, but you've got to be tactful about things like that. Tubby Robbins took me apart in the '39 grand Final and when I got home Rosemary said, 'I think you met your match today,' and thumped her one. She apologized later but by that time the damage was done. (146)

Rosemary has no space to express herself in front of Jock. When Rosemary states the truth and hurts his ego, he punishes her instead of accepting the reality. Jock's dysfunction lies in his narcissism as he does not give importance to Rosemary. According to Jock, woman is an object that should be controlled for personal interests. It is mentioned that he betrays and beats his wife badly. His extravagant behaviour in celibacy is also revealed through the dialogues between Laurie and Jock, when he comments - "I don't seem to recall that you were famous for your celibacy in the old days, Jock. In fact if my memory serves me" (156).

Danny has a wife and kids, but he is not happy with them. He has a mistress named Raylene; he leaves his wife and kids for her and escapes from familial responsibilities. This is an example of unsuccessful marital relationship. His family life is totally disturbed because of his extra marital affair. He spends his family income on his mistress.

GERRY: Has Danny's domestic life smoothed out yet, Laurie?

LAURIE: He's back with Raylene, but I don't know if it'll last. I hope it does. He's very fond of his kids.

JOCK: Raylene's a hell of a nice girl but the word is she's not real keen on hiding the sausage.

JOCK: Domestic strife's ruined many a great footballer. Donny Joseph's wife went off with a real estate agent the night before the 47 semifinal, and he only got three kicks. What's happened to that Avis girl Danny shacked up with?

LAURIE: I wouldn't know.

TED: He's probably still paying the rent on her flat. No wonder he's only got eighty dollars in the bank. (146)

Danny has a good relationship with Laurie. Just for Laurie's sake the whole team will go on strike. Danny is the captain of the football team so has a capacity to control the team as well as committee.

Thus, by reflecting the struggle of power and prestige among the people associated with the sport club, Williamson comments on the notion of power and its influence over the familial, social and professional relations of the characters. The characters of the play are involved into the political schemes and even exert the power of majority. Thus, the play reflects how the power of designation can be used to exploit and manipulate others.