



Female Discrimination- An Investigation of Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

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Abstract

The play Tara of Mahesh Dattani deals mainly with the theme of gender discrimination. The present paper attempts to argue and analyze the issue of discriminate upon women in the play. It story narrates about the twins, a boy, Chandan, and a girl, Tara, who is surgically separated to in favour of the boy. In fact, Tara becomes unable to survive and disadvantaged in every way and passes away. Tara is a tragedy of female discrimination. In most of the cases, twins have been recognized to have a touching connection that transcends other siblings. In the case of Tara, the emotional bond similarly exists, but is shattered forcibly separated by her mother Bharthi and her grandfather. She has been offered a worst type of oppression instead of giving equality even in the stage of a child. That leads her to utter oppression and finally she succumbs and dies. Hence, the paper studies some glimpses of gender discrimination in the play to bring forth awareness.

Keywords: gender discrimination, patriarchal domination, guilt, feminism.

*She is not regarded as an autonomous being ...
She is defined and differentiated with reference to man
and not him with reference to her. He is the Subject,
he is the Absolute and she is the 'Other'*

Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* 270

The statement of Simone De Beauvoir caters the theme of Mahesh Dattani, one of the promising playwrights of India. His plays such as *Where There is a Will, Final Solutions, Dance like a Man* and *Tara* are worth in portraying the domestic and feministic issues of the recent times. He stands out in the group of high profiled writers. As a leading playwright in English, he has been awarded with prestigious the Sahitya Academy Award for English literature for his play *Final Solutions*. Dattani has taken the genre drama of India to a very high place and he does not write on conventional subjects. He exposes the hideous and dejected matters of human life through his dramas. Dattani performs women characters strongly react and refuse to accept the patriarchal set up that exists in the family and society. He says *One can see such discrimination even at the babyhood*. The word 'discriminate'



originated from the Latin word 'discriminat'. *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives its meaning as *the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, especially on the grounds of race, age or sex*. In a society, witnesses on several atrocities upon women are widely seen. The present media carries numerous reports of violence and discriminatory treatment of women, girls and even female infants or foeticide. Dattani pictures one such atrocity through his women characters of different types. His women characters like Alka Trivedi, Aruna, Dolly Trivedi, Kiran Javeri, Lalitha, Lata, Smita, Sonal, Tara, Preeti, and Ratna are completely free from the Sita-Savitri stereotypes. They work effectively to create a space for themselves within the family and society.

He depicts female protagonists as struggling to overwhelm the myth of womanliness as an imperfect angel in the house. They revolt against the father figures, who are the chief agents of patriarchy. At juncture, they chiefly reject the constructs of patriarchal stereotypes that make women as puppets in the hands of men. Their rebellion eventually emerges as a determined type of womanhood trying to deconstruct the patriarchal frame work operative within the family unit. While these constraints make them slaves of men of the family, women are champions who crest to make the place for them in their lives.

Dattani's women characters differ from the women portrayed by his contemporary Indian playwrights. They are not rebellious like Tendulkar's women roles. His women also differ from Karnad's women who stand at crossroads of culture trying to liberate them sexually. His portrayal of the mother figures of his plays cannot be compared even with Mahasweta Devi who portrays the oriental nature of patriarchy from the eye of woman, Dattani even a male writer explores the feminine self that lies dormant within him to bring out the benevolent qualities female sense to the society. In close to it, he enunciates the female gender discrimination through his works. His women remain within the patriarchal system to fight against it in a well-sustained manner.

It is also noteworthy that Dattani's women characters cannot be arranged into particular groups. They do not fall into any category. He portrays a galaxy of women characters who subvert the patriarchs in their own ways and manners. If one tries to categorize his women, they may be of three groups-the *submissive woman*, the *seemingly submissive but rebellious woman* and the *constructive woman*. The only matter of line that unites them is that they seek freedom from the oppressive nature of patriarchal set up.



The Indian wives and mothers who suffer under the patriarchal domination of the father figures are not silent sufferers. They try to create a space for themselves in the family to assert their individuality. They understand the patriarchal nature, raise their voice of protest, and threaten the patriarchal rule. Even they also realize that they are economically dependent on the patriarchs; they induce their efforts to destabilize the patriarchal system, by gently get support either from their sons or from daughters. In such manner, they represent modern Indian wives and mothers who neglect Sita-Savitri stereotypic trauma of modern times.

Dattani's plays most often deals with gender issues. His five plays such as *Where There is a Will, Dance Like a Man, Tara, Final Solutions, Bravely Fought the Queen* deals with gender issues. He is the voice of all the oppressed people like women, child, caste or religious minorities.

On the outset, his play *Tara* is a riveting play that arise the question on the role of the society that entreats the children of the same womb in partial ways. Dattani's *Tara* is about a boy and girl who are twins joined at the hip and have to be separated with a major operation, which may procure the death of the two or one. The injustice perpetrated by the victim's own mother is the preference of her male child. This makes the play more suggesting that it is the women who continue the chain of injustice on women. Perhaps, the explanation provided here is very simplistic on the feministic norms but it is the central area of play.

Tara is not just the play, but it is the story of every Indian girl child born in the family. It may be urban, the situation is extremely aggravated if the girl becomes physically challenged or any physical or mental deformity in her. It seems a bitter example of feminine child abuse present in the society of India. Every Indian girl suffers many kinds of oppression and if the exploitation is very much, it is visible that a boy of the family gets all the privileges consciously or unconsciously from them. The renowned scholar Sudhir Kakar in his *The Inner World: A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* observes:

In daughterhood, and Indian girl is a sojourn in her own family and with marriage she becomes less a wife than a daughter-in-law. It is only with motherhood that she comes into her own as a woman and she can make a place for herself in the family, in the community and in her life circle. (52)

This is the state of pathetic women in India.



In the story, Mr. Patel and his mother belonged to a well-known family of bureaucrat. The Patels also quarreled over this issue of importance to the boy on girl. It is most striking that the fact when the mother allows the doctor to do the surgery, which disturbs the entire life of the family members. Chandan is very much attached to his twin sister and the greatest misery he educes than any other member of the family by the mortal operation.

In the play, scene opens in London with Chandan, now an eminent playwright, recalls his childhood days that he spent with his sister Tara. They both are duel sides of the same self rather than two separate entities. Chandan now Dan, while trying to write his story has compelled to write Tara's story. He writes Tara's story to rediscover the oppressed half of himself to become a whole being. He writes:

I have my memories....But now I want them to come back. To masticate my memories in my mind and spit out the result to the world in anger.

(Dattani Tara 323-4)

A series of flashbacks gets everyone an insight about their early family life. The plot revolves around the twins, Chandan and Tara. They are under an operation to separate the twins at birth. In doing so, Tara silent becomes crippled for life. The protagonist of the play fights against the prejudices of the society for the crippled Tara. Mahesh Dattani in one of his interviews to the interviewer Lakshmi Subramanyam in her *Muffled Voices: Women in Modern Indian Theatre* says:

I see Tara as a play about the male self and the female self The male self being preferred (if one is to subscribe to conventional categories of masculine traits and feminine traits) in all cultures. The play is about the separation of self and the resultant angst. (Lakshmi Subramanyam 88)

The view of Dattani is true in the sense of an Indian. Everyone it may be man or women, they like their male self only. In the play, Chandan, the extra privileged brother wants to direct his anger into drama on his sister Tara's childhood. In the play, it is lucid to find that Tara bears some kind of grudge on the society. Tara has aversion on the outside world and her world full of her parents and her brother Chandran who was very close to her. She expresses her attachment to her brother and the internal anguish in her conversation with her brother. She says *Till we were forced out and separated*. The anguish of Tara has been



seen in her conversation. This is the unfortunate condition of every oppressed female child of India.

The play explores the typical Indian stereotype, which has time immemorial preference of the male child to a female child. It also notes down the success and failures of an Indian family. The father is Patel; mother is Bharati and the twins Chandan and Tara. Especially, Tara is with the trauma of disability and which is certainly expressed by Mahesh Dattani through this play. Dattani has clearly elicited that the society prefers male gender and produces subjugation and discrimination to feminine gender.

Later, it is revealed that the decision taken by the Tara's mother left crippled her for life. It becomes guilt in Mrs. Patel conscious and her guiltiness can be observed throughout the play. Her regret is so melancholic that she becomes ready to donate her kidney to her daughter so that her daughter may survive for some more years. She tells to her son; *I plan to give her happiness. I mean to give her all the love and affection which I can give..... Love can make up for a lot.* (Dattani Tara 349).

Due to her guilt, Bharati imposes her sense of regret on her neighbour Roopa and she bribes her always to be her daughter's companion. Mrs. Patel becomes just ready to do anything for the sake of Tara's happiness. The core desire of Mrs. Patel is able to be understood by them that Bharati look something good to her daughter.

Mrs. Patel's internal suffering is too strong that it hinders her relationship with her husband. She always complains about something or the other to him. Her father's trait has always been the reason of contention between them. She constantly complains about her husband to her children.

Mr. Patel bears the agony that Mrs. Patel had always used her dowry as a strength to reply all of his efforts against him. This strength of money that has made Mrs. Patel to take the decision in separation of her twins who were joined from the breastbone to the pelvis. The surgery was done at the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital in Bombay by the famous doctor Thakkar. The parents were warned precautions of survival in such case of operation.

The play *Tara* has a manifested purpose, first to show the adherence of the modern educated urban family to the favouring anything that is masculine. The second is to put both the corruption ongoing in the bureaucratic society and the deterioration of ethical medical



profession and third to show the female subjugation in the society. This can be noticed in the conversation of Mr. Patel to his children. He speaks to them:

A scan showed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl. The chances were slightly better that the leg would survive on the girl. Your grandfather and your mother had a private meeting with Dr. Thakkar. I wasn't asked to come....I couldn't believe what she told me that they would risk giving both legs to the boy. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead flesh which could have-might have-been Tara.

(Dattani Tara 378)

Again, his talk reveals that his wife is the main reason for oppression and Tara's crippled state to save the male child who will be the future heir of the family. It is easy to understand; even as women, they have no certain right as a family child. The moving speech of Mr. Patel sums up essence of the play. It centres around the theme 'male or female' that how the physical separation of the children manipulated by Mrs. Patel and her father to give full structure the boy (Chandan) than the girl (Tara) which kindles an emotional separation among the twins. At the end to the play, Tara who did not get enough opportunities dies pathetically. Gender subjugation is evidently seen in the birth of the female child is clearly shown in the play. Tara dies really out of the oppression done to her. It is not only man that is mainly woman acts as the corruptor of female lives and often ends in mortality.

Thus, the play is the portrayal to female discrimination in the society. It clearly shows us the preference of male child and the male sense at all times even by women also. Dattani like a psychologist probes deep into the conscience of his characters and had brought the original desire of maleness in every man and women through his play, which eventually brings out the wide scale of female gender discrimination.

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