

The Reclusive Exclusive Life of Women: Unwinding Why Woman Becomes a Sex Object and How Patriarchy Cause Crime Against Woman in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*.

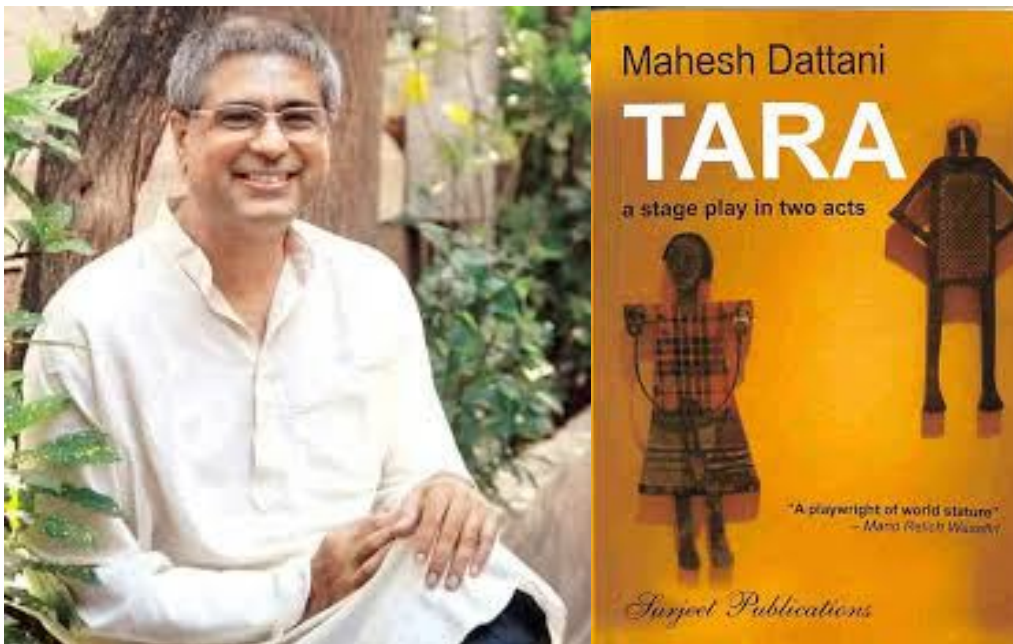
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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the varied aspects, the suffering embedded in the lives of Indian women and their experience portrayed in Mahesh Dattani's play "Tara". Dattani in this work shows his concern in the issues of bias against a girlchild over a boy child. This study focuses on the life of an Urban-middle class Indian family that showers favouritism towards a boy child ignoring the life of his Siamese twin sister Tara. Dattani's "Tara" explores gender and patriarchal norms function in Indian society to marginalise, exploit and ill-treat the other. The present study tries to ideate and reconstruct the prevailing unequal order. If literature is a reflection of society, Dattani's works provides a powerful view of it, shedding light on numerous issues that are relevant to Indian society. The play deals with the tragic death of Tara and explores the main reason for her death as gender prejudice her society and family holds. She was segregated from the mainstream society on account of being a girl. This paper looks at how women are treated in a male chauvinistic society and also at how they suffer under patriarchy. "Tara" is critically analysed using the theory of feminism and how the effects like discrimination and loss of identity are viewed in this play.

Key Words: *Gender prejudice, Patriarchal system, Marginalisation, Exploitation, The other.*



Introduction

The stories of silenced or subjugated women have become a recurrent theme in Indian literature. The voice of the voiceless subjects has gone into the formation of a group and from there, to a new school of literary study which focuses on women's liberation, came to be known by the general and political term 'Feminism'. It involves a range of political movements, ideologies and social commitments that share a common goal: to define and defend the equal rights and opportunities for women. The European colonisers spoke for the status of women in Indian society, at the time when practise such as 'sati', female infanticide, child marriage and 'purdah' were rampant, combined with lack of education. The rise of concept of nationalism brought social reform movements related to caste and gender relations. Women's participation in the struggle for freedom developed their critical role and their roles in independent India. Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar worked towards the progressive ideals of widow remarriage and women's education. Since independence, Indian feminist movement or women liberation movement has become more engaging with issues such as female foeticide, dowry-deaths, sexual violence, inequality in work space and lack of sexual freedom.

In our society, the construction of identity is influenced by culture, nationality, ethnicity, class and historical differences. The concept of 'women' as a model tends to classify and define all women irrespective of class, race, or caste as the 'silent' subject. In every sphere of life, a woman's myriad forms a girl, wife and a mother, is crucial but our society' psyche refuses to repress our age-old traditional beliefs. India is predominantly a patriarchal society and since time immemorial, a male child has been preferred to the 'weaker' sex. On exploring our history, it becomes unambiguous that the Indian society has a

preconceived notion against the girl child. In many parts of India, a girl child has remained and even sometimes considered as the 'invisible one'. Even in the twenty-first century, when India is thriving to lead the world, one of the many hurdles to thus progress is the society's attitude of discrimination on gender basis. Statistics shows that during the last fifty years the birth rate of girl child has declined (2011 popular Census report). This gender disparity is due to female foeticide. In 1990, the Nobel Laureate and economist Amartya Sen alerted the world to "the missing women" (Sharma, *The Socjournal*). According to him more than a hundred million women were missing from the world, which challenged the commonly held belief that women make up to fifty percent of the world's population and it witness an issue of 'endangered sex'. The 'sex selective abortion' is one of the main reasons for about half of the 'missing female population' from India. According to Arpita Mukhopadhyay, "a women's journey through life till her death is a Herculean task." (Mukhopadhyay, *Literary/Cultural Theory: Feminisms*)

One of the main reasons for this injustice is economic insecurity. Most parents feel it as a financial loss when it comes to provide the basic amenities for a girl child. The fear of expenditure on her education and marriage is considered unproductive. Dowry is a common evil practiced by both rich and poor, in rural as well as in urban areas. Traditional Indian concept of marriage was 'swayamvara', where the girl chooses her husband from those who are assembled. Later it changed to 'kanyadan' or giving away the bride to a groom with gifts, ornaments and dowry cash. In many states of India, a son is a plus and daughter is a minus. This concept has deteriorated and sometimes a girl is not considered as a human being. She is tortured, assaulted, molested and even made a martyr for someone else's pain and pleasure. Discrimination against girls in India has several sociological impacts. Gender based discrimination against female children is pervasive across the world. Studying the 'gender bias', the first thing that ought to be considered is the distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'. Sex is a biological factor whereas gender, is decided by society. That is, it is a cultural delineation as masculine or feminine.

Plays for social cause

The role and place of drama has the power to carry out socio-cultural changes. Drama has the power to educate and it often mirrors the realities of our social life, thus it can be a tool for examining the conscience of society. Drama can be regarded as a tool for a social change. According to Karl Marx, social change occurs only through conflict and this will bring change in our society and sequentially the economic and the class distinction. The problem play is a form of drama that emerged during the 19th century as part of the movement entitled realism. They were distinguished by its intent to confront the spectator with the dilemmas experienced by the characters. The earliest form was evoked by the French writer Alexander Dumas. It was further innovated by Henrik Ibsen in

whose work controversial issues are debated between the characters on stage. Ibsen addresses a flood of problems, most notably the retraction on *A Doll's House* (1879), sexually transmitted disease in *Ghost* (1882), etc. Ibsen's dramas proved immensely influential on the works of George Bernard Shaw and other later dramatists.

Drama in India has a long history and its study was so sacred that it was called the 'Fifth Veda' with texts like *The Natyashastra*, the oldest amongst the treaties on the theory of drama. The origin of drama in India is marked by three phases. The first is marked by the high-quality Sanskrit dramatic literature, imaginative setting styles as well as a profound theatrical reflection as in Bharata's *Natyashastra*. The second phase of the classic Sanskrit theatre and the emergence in all regional languages of India, thus varied forms of theatre marked by the change in socio-political conditions. The third phase consists in the encounter of Indian theatre with the west in the nineteenth century. As a result, there came a new kind of theatre breaking the links with the traditional spectrum.

Mahesh Dattani

The arena of Indian English drama is being extended by translations. In the post-independence period, the dramatists like Asif Currimbhoy, Nissim Ezekiel and others have done a lot of service in the area. The translated works of Girish Karnard, Vijay Tendulkar, Manjula Padmanabhan and others have come forward to bring a new spirit into drama. In the 1950s the Indian English Playwriting began with Aurobindo and Tagore. A new generation of Indian English play writes in the twentieth and twenty first centuries tried their hands at plays reflecting the current issues and problems of the Indian contemporary society. Mahesh Dattani is one prominent name. Dattani has written and directed several plays ranging from Classical Greek to contemporary Indian English plays. His plays are based on current Indian life. Dattani shot to fame after winning the titles as the only playwright in English to be awarded the 'Sahitya Academy Award'. He won the second-highest literary honour in India for his work *The Final Solutions and Other Plays* in the year 1998. His most celebrated works include *Dance like a Man* (1989), *Tara* (1990), *Final Solutions* (1993), *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998). His entire work can be seen as an attack on Indian patriarchy. The relevance of Dattani as an artist lies in his endeavour of expressing the psyche of modern man. He emphasises certain issues like sexuality, homosexual relationships and gender issues which have always formed the nucleus of his plays. He deals with such themes that are invisible in public. Dattani formed his own theatre group, 'Playpen', in 1984. He frequently takes his subject for his play from the modern urban family. Dattani's characters struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, cultural constructions of gender and repressed desires. Dattani make an abundant use of Indian mythology, rituals and traditions and contemporary problems. The

family n Dattani stands for society at large. The bias against the female child arise largely because of economic reasons. In many parts sons are viewed as means to attain 'social security'. The preference towards boy child is mostly seen among the uneducated rural population of India, who live in poverty. However, the abortion of a female foetus is a common practice in upper middle class and wealthy urban Indian families as well. In our society, there is a deep-rooted perception that the woman is inferior to man. This mistaken notion runs through the mind of every Indian, educated or not, it is visible in every aspect of our culture. Mahesh Dattani in his short play *Tara* tries to project the consequences of this discrimination in a typical middle-class Indian family.

Tara

The play *Tara* illustrates the troubles and sufferings of Tara and Chandan, the conjoined twins who were surgically separated and yet remained entwined. The play is unravelled by Chandan, the male half of which the 'other' is Tara. The story line moves when Mr. Patel, is married to Bharati. Their happiness elevated when they got pregnant but was trimmed down when they learned that Bharati is going to have Siamese twins. The twins- Tara and Chandan were separated after a complex surgery. The surgery did not end their problems but dawned new troubles. The conjoined twins had three legs and major supply of blood to the third leg was from Tara's heart.

"The problem begins when it was recognised that it has been an unequal, unfair operation, with the mother, Bharati, her father and the surgeon collaborating to afford the male with better chances; physically- the second leg"

(Khan, *Modernism and Gender*

Study)

Therefore, the third leg would have suited Tara more, but her mother Bharati and her grandfather decided to give it to Chandan because of their preference for the male child. Dr Thakkar is bribed by Bharati's father. So, after the operation Chandan gets two legs and Tara gets one. The decision proves to be disaster both for Chandan and Tara, as the leg does not survive on Chandan, and both the children become cripples. The society's preference for male child persuade Bharati to accepts her father's choice. This discrimination makes Tara cripple, Bharati in the agony of guilt turns insane, Chandan withdraws himself from the external world and Mr. Patel is left alone.

The play starts in a quiet note, without any music and we find Chandan/Dan, Tara's Siamese twin, in a London suburb trying to revive the highlights of his painful existence. He has literary pretensions but has not been able to publish anything so far. He recalls his twin sister Tara; "Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out..." (Dattani 5)

Chandan suffers emotionally after the forced separation from his sister. Dan is in a dilemma as he is trying his hand at writing his story of his long-lost sister entitled *Twinkling Tara* in two Acts, but hasn't gone beyond the title of the play and his own name and address so far. Dan introduces the central characters and takes the readers to the beginning of the story. Dan gives us a peep into the Patel household- the stained relations between his parents who had married for love, his lively and smart sister and the nosy neighbour girl Roopa.

Dattani brings us back to the sixteen-year-old twins, Chandan and Tara playing a game of cards and Tara is winning. Bharati is seen concerned over Tara's health, Mr. Patel wants his son to accompany him to his office but Chandan has no intention of doing so. Instead, he suggests that his father take Tara to the office as he is sure that 'she'll make great success in business'. However, he wants only Chandan to come. Although he claims to love both his children equally and blames his wife for turning them against him, he clearly shows a marked preference and concern for Chandan. He wants his son to go to college and then to London for higher studies where his 'special requirements' would be taken care of Chandan resents this as he wants Tara to have equal opportunities in life. Mr. Patel however feels that Tara can look after herself when she grows up as her grandfather has left her a lot of money plus a house in Bangalore. Roopa, a fifteen-year-old neighbour girl enters and Tara tells her that the men in the household are busy "deciding on whether they want to go hunting while the women looked after cave" (Dattani 8)

There is apparently a dark family secret about the surgical separation of the "conjoined twins". Each of them has only one leg and the other is an artificial limb, the famed Jaipur foot. Bharati wants to lavish all her care and attention on Tara, while Mr. Patel, concentrates on Chandan, a happy-go-lucky sixteen-year-old who, instead of going to the physiotherapy lessons with Tara, spends all his time listening to music. Tara is to go for a kidney transplant soon and, out of a sense of guilt or concern, Bharati insists on donating one of her kidneys to her. But Mr. Patel strongly objects to this and even slaps her. Bharati insists that he leave her alone and says that she is satisfied with staying at home and looking after Tara. This leads to more arguments between the couple.

Physical handicap has been given too much importance in his drama. Tara is shown helpless because she is handicapped. Her father's eager plans for her brother's future and total indifference towards her, forces her to come to the conclusion that she is incompetent for any productive work. The dramatist focuses on the humiliation faced by a handicap when Tara is forced to expose her artificial leg. Even though she is deeply hurt she bravely hides her pain.

Bharati is more concerned over Tara. She insists that Tara must have a career. Tara is smarter in comparison to Chandan, but her mother is still worried for her.

“It’s all right while she is young. It’s all very cute and comfortable when she makes witty remarks. But let her grow up. Yes, Chandan. Then the world will tolerate you. The world will accept you- but not her! Oh, the pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable. And what about forty and fifty! Oh God!” (Dattani 30)

The second act opens with Bharati showering all her affection on Tara. Bharati assures her that everything will be fine after her kidney transplant and she intends to donate one her own kidney to her. Mr. Pate, who has taken charge of household in the absence of his wife as she is been hospitalised for a nervous breakdown. One day Chandan was sitting alone when Roopa comes to his home. She bought with her a movie, which she wants to watch with Chandan. She begins to talk about her wish for a boy and cracks another joke about the Gujaratis drowning of their infant daughters in milk and when people ask them how the baby died, they would say she choked while drinking her milk.

Dr Thakkar, ‘the amazing doctor’, hogged media headlines and was hailed for the rare surgical feat. The doctor kept insisting that the separation of the conjoined twins was a “complete” success. Their greatest challenge was to keep the girl alive because “nature wanted to kill her” and they would not allow it. His statement is interspersed by Mr. Patel revealing the dark family secret to his children. He gives them a glimpse of the time they were born. When the twins were born, they looked like “two babies hugging each other” but nobody expected them to survive. The twins were born with three legs. Bharati and her father had wanted Chandan to have two legs, leaving Tara with one, because she was a girl. Tara’s mother had allowed to amputated from her conjoined twin even though there was a great probability of the survival of the girl. Mr. Patel did not protest strongly to this unethical medical practice in the part of the doctor to agree to what her father wanted. But it proved to be a futile exercise because Chandan had two legs only for two days; his second leg, which would have survived on Tara, hung limply and had to be amputated. Because of unnatural case it was passed off as “natural rejection” with the results that the twins had one leg each and had to be fitted with an artificial limb each- the famed Jaipur foot. As a result, both Tara and Chandan limped. As for Bharati, she could not get over her guilt for having been unjust to Tara. To makeup for it she showers all her love over Tara.

Tara, a cheerful and lively girl, wastes away and dies while Chandan (now Dan) migrates to London. When Mr. Patel, who loves his wife and claims to have a “happy marriage”, is left alone with Bharati’s death, Dan refuses to return home and be with his father. Instead, he wants Mr. Patel to come to London and be with his brothers without expecting anything from him. The play ends when Dan tears up all that he has written. He seeks forgiveness for the injustice done to her and is apparently forgiven when we see the twins, without the limp, hugging each other tightly at the end of this play. In *Tara*, Dattani

gives life to the bone, dealing with gender issues. In short, he talks about the feminine side of world that always favours what is 'male'.

Conclusion

The play *Tara* is an eye-opener to the urban middle-class patriarchal supremacy, female infanticide and gender inequality that prevail in the Indian society. Dattani through this touching story reminds about the audience/reader about the 'unsaid' and 'undebated' topic. Here the girl Tara, who is full of dreams and ambitions and wants to shine as a star justifying her name and a boy Chandan, born as Siamese twins. The play has three female characters- Tara, her mother Bharati and their neighbour Roopa. The central character Tara is the voice of every women who questions her marginalised treatment at each step and wants to emerge as an independent female. The play focuses on gender based stereotypical roles of male and female in the society. Mr. Patel constantly worrying about Chandan's future and completely ignoring the intellectual potential of Tara. Thus, in the play, it is seen that, the power/ knowledge is in the hands of the male characters.

Dattani in this play picks up the issue of the preference of a boy child over a girl child which forms the infrastructure of this play. The girl child, though she performs better than her brother, would remain in the background. But it becomes unpardonable when characters like Tara's mother Bharati worsen the situation for her daughter. If she had not shown partiality towards the male child, both Chandan and Tara might have flourished equally well. *Tara* thus points the picture of the helplessness of women in our society.

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