



## Think India (Quarterly Journal)

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-05

ONE DAY NATIONAL SEMINAR

ON

DISABILITY, REPRESENTATION AND LITERATURE

held on 03 October 2019 and Organised by P.G. & Research Department  
of English

S. T. HINDU COLLEGE, NAGERCOIL-2, Tamilnadu, India



### Disability And Culture As Represented In Mahesh Dattani's Tara

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#### ABSTRACT

Mahesh Dattani is one of the modern Indian English playwrights who consistently voices out the frustrations of the voiceless and underprivileged in society. His plays play a crucial role in bringing out the social evils that still prevails in Indian culture and society. His characters are carefully crafted and skillfully played. In the select play *Tara* Dattani has depicted the deep rooted patriarchal system in society. Women act as a puppet in the hands of men and strengthen patriarchal values. Bharati despite being the mother of Tara ruins her daughter's life and suffers in the long run because of her inhuman act. Dattani through this play exposes the callous behaviour of society towards the physically disabled persons. Dr. Thakkar makes the misuse of his profession. He was bribed by Bharati and her father for surgery that led to the death of Tara. *Tara* was written by Dattani in 1990 and it explores the depths of gender-based discrimination as Chandan narrates the alienation experienced by Tara. When the Siamese twins come to know about the truth behind their separation, Tara dies and Chandan leaves India. This paper examines in detail about the disability and culture as represented in this select play.

#### KEY WORDS

Siamese Twins, Gender Discrimination, Marginalisation, Patriarchy

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Mahesh Dattani, a noted playwright in Indian English Literature. He is the first English language playwright to win Sahitya Akademi Award for *Final Solutions* and *Other Plays* in the year 1998. The themes of his plays have attracted readers and audience in theatres. He has attempted to bring out the hidden issues of society such as the condition of women and transgender, gender discrimination, homosexuality, child sex abuse and so on into light through his plays. Dattani holds an extreme status in the realm of Indian play in English. He has demonstrated the issues of city life in India in a hasty manner in his plays. He has an aesthetic mind that makes him different from other writers. His plays influence the minds and the hearts of the readers. The features of Mahesh Dattani's plays are gender disability and depiction of culture.

Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* unravels the invisible hand of society that ruined the lives of Patel's family. The dictum of the society operates in the name of 'culture'. Though culture was primarily meant to civilize, unify, generate and create better ways for living, it fails miserably when it favours to strengthen the opinions and desires of one sect of the society by subjugating the other. Culture becomes an indifferent dictator when it gives away the ruling scepter to male-dominance by usurping the rights of the other. Indian culture is centuries old and it is male-centered. Although male-centered, it believed in the power of female and made them deities. Down through the years, the power and respect earned by the patriarchal society is being misused by them and even the other is trained to accept that they are weak and has to yield to the beck and call of the powerful.

The play opens with Dan who is engaged in typing and addresses the audience directly. He is composing the play called *Twinkle Tara* and the play understudy is called *Tara* and that means star. Chandan recollects his childhood with his sister Tara. Both had shared one body which implies that they were Siamese Twins. He uncovers the patriarchal mindset of society which chooses a boy child to a girl child. Mahesh Dattani's plays women assure the tradition and custom where men go to work. Dattani makes full use of stereotypical gender roles. In this play, Dattani plots an immediate conflict among a husband and wife with respect to her



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father. Bharati is much worried than Patel about Tara's diet and health. Patel seems to distress about Chandan's career. He wishes him to follow his footsteps. Chandan gives the impression to have changed plans and wants to be a writer while Tara would like to be strong, healthy, and beautiful.

Patel :I was just thinking .... It may be a good idea for you to come to the office with me.

Chandan :What for?

Patel :Just to get a feel of it.

Chandan :You can take Tara. She'll make a great business woman.

Patel (firmly) :Chandan, I think I must insist that you come.

Chandan :We'll both come with you.

Patel :No! ( 327-328)

Based on the roles assigned to males and females, a male is given higher status than female. Patel asks Chandan to help him in business and wants Tara to do household work. This division of work is based on sex is one of the root causes of gender discrimination. Dattani attempts to deconstruct the segregation of roles through Tara and Chandan. Chandan wishes to be writer whereas Tara is inclined to join a profession like her father.

Bharati after giving birth to a conjoined twins ( Tara and Chandan) prefers to give the leg that biologically belongs to Tara to Chandan during their separation. Here we can see a mother taking a decision that marks the downfall of the Patel's family. Although the mother is given freedom to choose she chooses in favour of her son that leaves her daughter without a leg for lifetime. Here gender in itself becomes a 'disability'. Tara is thus doubly disabled, one by her gender and the other a physical disability. She is thus confined both physically and mentally within the four walls of her house. we come to know the truth about separation when Mr. Patel shares the dark past with his children Mr. Patel says:

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



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survive... On the girl. Your grand-father and your mother had private meeting with Dr.Thakkar. I wasn't asked to come...I couldn't believe she told me – that they would risk giving both legs to the boy...The doctor had agreed ...Chandan had two legs for two days. It didn't take them very long time to understand what a great mistake they have made. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead fish which could have might have- been Tara. (378)

In India, male is considered to be the official heir to continue the familial lineage and thus enjoy immense privilege like inheriting the family property, education and rights etc. Thus the injustice meted out to Tara is silently played out by the societal norms and standards of Indian culture. Tara dies after she discovers the truth about their separation. She is victimized by her own family as they deny the rights to live her life to the fullest.

Chandan can be perceived as the other self of Tara as they shared their mother's womb together. Chandan is guilt struck when he came to know about the truth behind their separation. Chandan says:

Like the astonishing Dr.Thakkar, I must take a little from Tara and give it myself. Make capital of my trauma, my suffering, and make it my tragedy. To chew them in mind and spit out the result to the world, in anger. (379)

The play presents a Patriarchal societal system as multilayered and is deep-rooted in cultures. There are different factors responsible for preferring a boy child to a girl child. These aspects are not only monetary but also social and religious. Patel's family is sound in all aspects. Tara isn't a burden to their family. Due to the patriarchal nature of society, Chandan is preferred over Tara. She is engrossed in the system, which tells us about the conventional use of a peculiar case to uncover the treacheries in the regular Indian family that deal with the girl child, a play that remarks on the society how it treats the children who share the womb differently. Patel's look like the perfect parents that unique children like Tara and Chandan need to



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live without a doubt they have lived because of their committed parents. However, there are more things that should be revealed.

Mr. Patel : Maybe if I had protested strongly! I tried to reason with her that it wasn't right and that even the doctor would realize it was unethical! The doctor had agreed, I was told. (378)

Mr. Patel feels sorry for being quiet when Mrs. Bharati and her father chose to do embrace the dishonest approach to do injustice to Tara. And says, the protest that he had challenged his will doctors would have accepted his requests.

Mr. Patel : It was only later I came to know of his intention of starting a large nursing home –the largest in Bangalore. He had obtained three acres of prime land –in the main part of the city –from the state. Your grandfather's political influence had been used. (378)

A child is a gift from above. They deserve to live their life to the fullest irrespective of their gender, class and culture. The life of a child disabled by her gender and culture is portrayed clearly through the life of Tara in the play. Mahesh Dattani has featured the problems of differently abled and patriarchal culture. *Tara* is considered one of his most prominent works. The social condition of Indian women is exposed in *Tara*. It portrays the Indian middle -class families. Tara isn't simply an individual character but rises as an original, a symbol of the Indian girl child who is subdued and suppressed in the branch of tradition and culture. This is an account of Siamese twins. Dattani examines that men are focused in India. The playwright passionately unknots the play, how girls are enthralled to discrimination in civilized society and emphasize how discrimination and disability is practiced in Indian culture.

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