

Depiction of Tara as a Scapegoat of Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

K. Birathana, M. Phil Scholar,
Department of English & Comparative Literature,
Madurai Kamaraj University,
Madurai- 21

Abstract

This article tries to unveil the gender discrimination and inequality faced by women in 21st century through Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*. It portrays how women are dominated by the male in their own family. It explores how women's life is changed because of her father's decision in her life. It not only unknots the blindfolds and shows how Tara is oppressed by her mother but also picturizes how the male child is given preference over the female child. Thus, this paper presents how patriarchal system in the society and forces women to act as a puppet in the hands of patriarchy to perpetuate patriarchal values.

Keywords: gender discrimination, patriarchy, male dominance, suppression, challenges.

Gender discrimination acknowledges that men and women are not equal. This discrimination also affects an individual's life predictions and their experience. These differences arise from distinctions in biology, psychology and cultural norms. Some of these distinctions are empirically grounded while others appear to be socially constructed. Studies show the different lived experience of genders across many domains including education, life expectancy, personality, interests, family life, careers, and political affiliations. In the play *Tara* Mahesh Dattani shows how Tara is discriminated by her family members from her birth to her death.

In the world of Indian theatre, Mahesh Dattani is a name for the fusion of an actor, director, author and a social thinker. Emerging as a "shining star" in the world of Indian English drama, he is undoubtedly indebted to the heritage of theatre in India, his predecessors and the classical Sankrit theatre. Dattani, the young playwright, the recipient of honorable Sahitya Akadami Award for Dramaturgy, was born on 7th of August 1985 at Porbandar in Gujarat. He does not take themes for the fantasy, he just takes the themes from the real life situations and hence, his characters are life-like and not larger than life. The themes which reflected in the plays of Dattani are child sexual abuse, anguish of cancer survivors, mental crisis of Eunuchs and homosexual, and the suffering of AIDS victims. Dattani always blends social reality and human sufferings.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 20:2 February 2020
Prof. Dr. S. Chelliah, Editor: Select Papers of the International Conference on
Human Praxis and Modern Configuration through Literature

K. Birathana, M. Phil Scholar

Depiction of Tara as a Scapegoat of Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* 140

In *Tara*, Dattani plays with the idea of female infanticide by giving it a twist where in the girl child is not killed but made to suffer because of discrimination based on gender. It is the story of the lives of two conjoined Siamese twins who are separated surgically to favor the male child and the resultant physical and emotional trauma they and the other family members undergo. The play looks at an Indian family trying to cope up with the reality that they have freak children who have to struggle for their very survival. It exposes the existing patriarchal stereotypes which favor a male child over a female child even within the setup of a highly educated and affluent family.

In the play *Tara*, Tara and Chandan are conjoined twins. Birth of the conjoined twins of different sex is an extremely rare phenomenon, and they are separated by surgery, only one of them to survive. They have perfect chances of surviving after the surgery, with each important organ present in each body. The boy and the girl, together have three limbs lower, the limb surviving in the girl is higher than surviving in the boy was said by Dr. Thakkar. Dr. Thakkar states that the leg will not surviving long onto Chandan's body. Nature wants the girl to have two legs but the product of nature, social animal such as Bharati's father and Bharati want the boy to have two legs.

Destiny drives in the way that both the twins are equal. They both are made to have one good leg for each. The interesting fact which applied here is that the gender role or we can say the role of discrimination. Tara the female child even before being given a chance at a full life, is deprived of it, because the conventional tradition male-child-preference operates here. There is a certain cold ease with which the mother who is microcosmic representation of patriarchal leanings of society, strips the girl of the right to live as an able-bodied, complete women and seizes the leg from the girl which is biologically and naturally hers. This unthoughtful action not only leaves both her children crippled but also leads to many physical and psychological problems in their life. The gender discrimination by Bharati and Bharati's father is exposed in Mr. Patel's conversation with his children:

“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 grand – father and your mother had private meeting with Dr. Thakkar. I wasn't asked to come..... I couldn't what she told me – that they would risk giving both legs to the boy..... The doctor had agreed.... It was later I came to know of his intention of starting a large nursing home – the largest in Bangalore. He had acquired three acres of prime land – in the heart of the city from the state.”
(Dattani,378)

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 20:2 February 2020

**Prof. Dr. S. Chelliah, Editor: Select Papers of the International Conference on
*Human Praxis and Modern Configuration through Literature***

K. Birathana, M. Phil Scholar

Depiction of Tara as a Scapegoat of Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* 141

Tara is discriminated against because of her gender not only by her grandfather and Dr. Thakkar, but also by her father Mr. Patel who though professes affection for her, is in fact a patriarchal prototypes showing his true characters through his actions. He plans for Chandan's education and future career but chooses to ignore Tara's claim to life despite her being the more witty, intelligent and deserving one. But Mr. Patel never thinks about the career and life of Tara. He always thinks and cares about the education, life and career of Chandan. Patel wants Chandan to take care of his office after his demise. He always wants Chandan to accompany with him to office. But he wants Tara to stay in the house and learn the household works such as cooking, cleaning the house, washing the clothes and other household activities. The conversation between Bharati, Patel and Chandan shows how Patel discriminate Tara and Chandan as

“Patel: What are you two doing?

Chandan: Mummy's knitting and I'm helping her sort out her mistake.

Patel: Let Tara do it.

Chandan: It's okay.

Patel: Give it to her.” (351)

This shows how Patel discriminates the twins who are both at the same time. Patel wants the girl child to do the household work but he does not want his son to do the household work. He also scolds Bharati for not doing the work on herself. He barks on Bharati for allowing Chandan to do the girl's work and making him as girl.

Patel knows that Tara is witty and intelligent and deserving one. Even after knowing about Tara he does not allow Tara to show her intelligent to others. As far as Tara is concerned, she taken care and given more attention by Bharati. He considered it as a futile exercise that will only spoil Tara. He wants Tara to be discouraged from showing her intelligence and wit and in fact even Bharati is worried that the qualities which would have been acceptable in Chandan can become a bane for Tara in society which expect girls to confirm to certain standard prototypes. Bharati is fearful about the future of her bright daughter. She says thus,

“It is alright when she is young. It's all very cute and comfortable when she makes witty remarks. But let her grow up. Yes, Chandan. 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!”. (349)

The patriarchal society unable to accept and appreciate the women's intelligence and gets intimidated by her intelligence. Patel compares Tara with business women in society but his

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 20:2 February 2020

Prof. Dr. S. Chelliah, Editor: Select Papers of the International Conference on

Human Praxis and Modern Configuration through Literature

K. Birathana, M. Phil Scholar

Depiction of Tara as a Scapegoat of Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* 142

comparison did not attribute it to her business acumen, but to her shrewdness. When Chandan criticizes Tara's victory in the card game as cheating, Patel proclaims that the women who were successful in business were also successful only by cheating. Tara gets hurt at remark, said by Chandan, which is not true. Even Patel ignores her future prospects and the need to engage her in any meaningful endeavor. She is forced to confirm to the stereotype of the Indian women – devoid of her intellect, deemed fit only to perform mechanical household chores. In other words, the domestic animal, expected to toe to the line, someone who can be cared for and provided for but not regarded with respect.

Barathi's father further strengthens the attitude of male preference by leaving all property in the name of Chandan after his demise but he does not leave a paisa in the name of Tara. It is undoubtedly manifested in the play by the chat between Patel and Chandan as

“Patel: Your grandfather has left all his wealth to you. Since your mother was his only child, you and Tara inherit their home in Bangalore.

Chandan: That huge house. It gave the creeps, I remember.

Patel: He left you a lot of money.

Chandan: And Tara?

Patel: Nothing.

Chandan: why?

Patel: It was his money. He could do what he wanted with it.” (360)

From a humanist, precisely a feminist point of view one could say that, of course, it is his money and he can do whatever he wants to do with it but though Tara is as much his grandchild as Chandan, he prefers Chandan who is a male child and once again he puts Tara at a position of disadvantage. Thus, the economic and cultural factors are responsible for the discriminations against a girl and the ‘inferiorization’ of the girl child are exposed by Dattani very effectively in the play.

The ultimate trauma and shock is getting to know the role her mother played in her life, and the discrimination she faces at the hands of her father, grandfather and even the neighbors and acquaintances becomes too much miserable for her. She feels unwanted and withers away to death. Tara dies in a shock when she learns that it is her mother Bharati whom Tara trusts more is involved in the conspiracy of her unfair separation from Chandan. Though Chandan physically survives this trauma, but he fails to lead a peaceful life. He migrates to suburbs of London, changes his name and attempts to create a new identity.

Tara is killed by the unjust social system, which controls the minds and actions of people. It is societal pressures and prejudices that create the divisions between sexes leading to the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 20:2 February 2020

Prof. Dr. S. Chelliah, Editor: Select Papers of the International Conference on

Human Praxis and Modern Configuration through Literature

K. Birathana, M. Phil Scholar

Depiction of Tara as a Scapegoat of Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* 143

suppression of the innermost desires which get silenced in the performing of the gendered scripts resulting in prioritizing one sex over another. It is the socially internalized attitude of preference given to the male child that is the cause of the tragedy of Tara. She was a bright and shining star which was source of cheerfulness and happiness for her family. Had she been given a complete life she probably would have scaled heights which Chandan could not, but her potentiality was sacrificed at the altar of gender discrimination. In fact discrimination against Tara continues even after her death also. Chandan who writes their story as Dan, writes it from his own perspective and converts it into his tragedy. He apologises to the now dead Tara, to forgive him for writing their story as his tragedy, thereby denying her a fair deal even in fiction.

Thus through this work, Tara raises the question to the society that treats the children of the same womb in two different ways. It is a play about two children conjoined together where one is boy and other is a girl, they can be divided surgically. The partially and the injustice starts right from here. This story has a strong claim that women are the enemy for themselves. The mother prefers the male child and thus fortifies the chain of injustice. The first thought behind selecting the boy child is that he will look after the family when he starts earning and the whole of his money will be for the family where he is born. Tara was an example of child abuse prevalent in the Indian society. Even in the 21st century, even after girls have repeatedly proved themselves competent for every profession, girl is considered as an unwelcomed imposition, imaged as the origin of sorrow when she is born, thrown away as a burden for her parents who have to amass dowry. The people have to change this mentality because women are able to do many things equal to men. So, it is perfect to consider women as a human not as a weaker sex.

Works Cited

1. Agarwal, Beena. *Mahesh Dattani's Tara: A Critical Perspective*. Jaipur: Aadi Publications. 2016. Print.
2. Agarwal, Beena. *Mahesh Dattani's Plays A New Horizon in Indian Theatre*. Jaipur: Book Enclave. 2008. Print.
3. Dattani, Mahesh. *Collected Plays*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India. 2000. Print.
4. Subramanyam, Laxmi (edi.). *Muffled Voices: Women in Modern Theatre*. New Delhi: Shakti. 2002. Print.