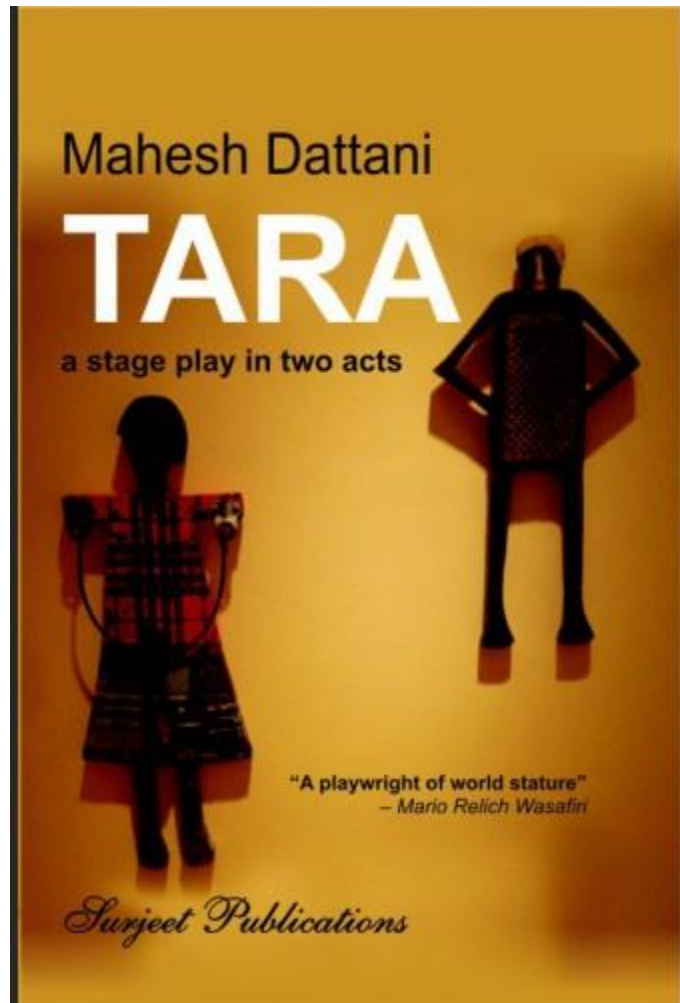


Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani is one of India's most serious contemporary playwrights, writing in English. He is the first playwright in English to be honoured with the "Sahitya Academy Award". A director, actor, dancer, teacher and writer, Dattani before entering the world of literature, worked as a copywriter in an advertising firm. His first play is "Where there's a will". There is a long chain of plays written by him -- "Tara", "Night Queen", "Final Solutions", "Dance like a man" and others. These are the plays which embody many of the classic concerns of the world of drama. His plays deal with the social and contemporary issues. Apart from theatre, he is also active in the field of filmmaking. His works express

his political beliefs without being instructive or revolting. His plays question all kinds of discrimination including religious prejudice, and gender discrimination. The subjects of recognition and power struggles run right through all his plays. His plays not only bring up gender issues, but also the space allotted to women in a patriarchal society.

Keywords: Mahesh Dattani, gender discrimination, social issues, male domination

The Play Tara - Focus on Gender Roles

In the 21st century, when in India girls have repeatedly proved themselves competent for every profession, the deep-rooted gender discrimination continues even among the affluent and educated people living the so called modern life in the metro cities. Dattani seems to consider gender issues more prominent than others, in today's Indian society.

One of the most important themes in the play is that of gender roles in modern society in Gujarati and generally in Indian life. The play explores infanticide and its effect on the remaining family members. In a society that it supposed to be advanced and show respect to women, we still find it common to kill baby girls. The play *Tara* carries the theme of unequal treatment given to male and female children even when they are born physically attached twins. The point of equality between male and female, and equal opportunities given to both are very superficial. In reality, a female has to face inequality at every level, whether it be a family or society.

A Girl Who Wants to Twinkle and Shine

Tara is the story of a girl who wants to twinkle and shine, just like her name. Dattani uses the themes like gender identity, discrimination, middle-class life, revelation and so on. Through these themes, he has beautifully shown the agony of a girl in a typical Indian society. Also, in the play we can see him experimenting with the stage. Right from the beginning we can see the difference between male and female, like in the scene in which Bharati has finished her pooja, and Patel is getting ready to go to work. These are stereotypical gender roles and Dattani makes full use of them.

Another example is when Tara explains to Roopa about the conversation between father and son, "The men in the house were deciding on whether they were men looked after the same". Another, theme is revelation where Tara comes know that it was not her father but mother who discriminated between herself and her brother; right from the time when Bharati was three months old, her mother insisted on giving the best to her brother which rather incited her more. When the play begins a

spotlight picks up Dan and faint music is played when he is imagining the past and a spotlight is up the stage level to highlight Tara and Chandan who walk in. Then the light cross fades to the Patel's living room and the action moves there. Again when Dr. Thakkar is introduced to us, the light picks him up while Dan fades into darkness. But Dr. Thakkar's interviewer is Dan who continues to speak from his level. Dattani very cleverly uses the lights to highlight the action wherever he wants, at any level, without any breaks for change of scene. It is this that gives the play the feeling of unity of action. Music is so well used that it creates and enhances the mood of characters - fade music for past-flash back and different music when Tara is hurt or fight between Bharati and her husband or when the secret is revealed.

Conjoined Twins of Different Sex

Tara is unique in Indian writing in English as the play revolves around the lives of conjoined twins of different sex. The conjoined twins are usually of the same sex. The play gains its prominence because of this aspect. Separation of twins here becomes a necessity as they are of different sexes. There is no noble cause reason as to benefit both the daughter and son to have a distinct, wonderful future for each of them. The operation could have been justified only if it were to be performed with a genuine reason where Tara and Chandan could have their own future without depending on each other, both physically and emotionally. The ulterior motive of separation was to favour Chandan. Mahesh Dattani brings into limelight the fact that even educated parents in the 21st century have biased notions and ideas towards gender.

Varying Tone, Temperament and Treatment

The themes of Mahesh Dattani's plays bear the testimonial of varying tone, temperament and treatment. Dattani expanded his range and canvas of creativity from stage plays to radio and screen plays. He has an ability to amalgamate the traditional beliefs with ultramodern disposition and conviction. His plays are heavily charged with socio-political, emotional, physiological and psychological issues. The theme of family covers the large chunk of plays wherein its members are found to be struggling and wrestling with one another.

The best example of such a play is *Tara* which circles around the grave and traditional issues of gender bias shown between the son and daughter delivered from the same womb. They are preferentially treated by no less than the parents themselves in the intoxication of superstition and ancestral beliefs and the daughter is sacrificed for the short-term benefit of the son. The play is

contextual and relevant in the light of the burgeoning incidents of foeticide and widening gap in the sex ratio of the male and female child.

Kinds of Discrimination

As far as the play *Tara* is concerned, the two kinds of discrimination have been dealt with in the drama. One is class discrimination and the other is gender biasing, but Dattani deems the gender issues more prominent and graver than the problems of class. Dattani presents his own views in this regard in a conversation. Bharati realizes she was committing a sin stigmatizing motherhood, by doing injustice to her daughter. Consequently, she suffers a nervous breakdown for her ill-treatment of Tara. In an effort to seek salvation from the unforgivable sin, she exhibits pretentious sympathy and empathy towards Tara, and makes many attempts to bring ill repute to Patel in the eyes of her daughter. Females are discriminated not only biologically, but also culturally. Women and girls are trained to remain confined to kitchen and courtyard.

For Dattani biological differences are totally fabricated and can be curtailed, contained and averted. Tara suffered from disability. She is offensive and comic. She has been purposefully bestowed with hesitant command over both English and Kannada. Hence, it provides awesome opportunity for spectators, audiences and readers to laugh at her, and thereby enjoying a kind of diversion amid glum, grisly and gruesome story of Chandan and Tara.

Chandan

The childhood and Indian name of Dan is Chandan. Dan is both the narrator and protagonist of the drama and spectators watch the drama from the points of view of Dan, so it is called Dan's play. He is deemed as the Sutradhar of the play. The play *Tara* opens with Dan who remains busy, typing the text chapter pertaining to his life-long experience Dan is undergoing mental pain and conflict caused by reverberation of some tragic incidents of the a. Dan and Tara had shared one body which is popularly and scientifically known as Siamese twins and in the terms of Dan they were like "two lives one body, in one comfortable womb". The case of a play within the play is witnessed as Dan is writing a script of a drama known as "twinkle Tara" which has comprehensive connotation as Tara is the protagonist of the drama under discrimination and also the literal meaning of the twinkle star.

Flashbacks

The play suddenly takes the shape of flashbacks, and action suddenly moves towards Mumbai where Dan and Tara had spent their childhood lives. The scene of a traditional, patriarchal and paradigmatic Indian family is observed, in which Bharati the mother of Tara and Dan just finishes her worship and Patel, the father of the twins, getting ready to join duty. Both Bharati and Patel seem to be in the milieu of making Chandan a writer and Tara, as usual, strong, healthy and beautiful to be a belle bride of the future. Bharati and Patel belong two different states, Karnataka and Gujarat respectively, and they were not in good terms and always shown to be quarrelling with each other owing to cultural gap and dominance and intervention of Bharati's father in the relationship between Bharati and Patel.

Siamese Twins

Dr. Thakkar is bribed by Bharati's father to operate upon the Siamese Twins according to his wish and thus he earns notoriety to the name and fame of a doctor who is deemed as next to god for healing the wounds and pain of the aggrieved and diseased. The father-in-law of Patel has played a villainous role in this play and he is responsible for the imbroglios, gender biasing and class discrimination encountered by Patel's family. It is he who bribes Dr. Thakkar to carry out surgery in favour of Chandan. He is of the belief that the male should always be given golden and greater opportunity and his penchant for male-chauvinism remains unabated when he left his home in Bangalore for both Tara and Chandan, but money for only grandson, Chandan. Dattani aptly demonstrates how the interventions of in-laws into the family affairs destroy its smoothly functioning, harmony and cordial atmosphere. Though it is another thing Patel should not have remained the mute onlooker to the discrimination perpetrated on Tara by Bharti and her father. He is further an accomplice in the malicious acts of gender biasing when he chalks out plans for the better education and career of Chandan. Dattani elucidates gender biasing in the light of the character and protagonist Tara in the play.

Gender Discrimination

The theme of gender discrimination is dominant in the drama *Tara*. The issue of cultural discrimination with women has been elaborately and comprehensively dealt with by Dattani in the play wherein females are subjugated and underestimated. Tara is killed by a social system, which controls the minds and actions of the people. The play *Tara* shows that all the genders, whether female or male or lesbian or gay or even eunuchs, want their own personal space for a good life.

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