

Treatment Of Second Sex In Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

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ABSTRACT

Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian-English playwright to be awarded with the Sahitya Akademi Award. He is always known for byzantine dynamics of the modern urban family. In his plays, he handles innumerable topics like gender discrimination especially dealing with the problems faced by the second sex, LGBT studies precisely homo sexuality, socialism and child mishandling. Dattani challenged the uncanny social structure of Indian society. *Tara* deals with the aspects of twins which are considered as the two sides of the same coin. The play presents the struggle between deception and genuineness as reverberated by the multi-level set. In this play, Tara, Dattani attempts to bring the gender-based inequality and how the male child was given predilection over the female child in a middle-class Indian family, which gave upper hand to the male, as quoted by Simone de Beauvoir. Dattani's *Tara* deals with the sensitive separation of two Siamese twins. It also deals with the concept of female infanticide that is still practiced by the Gujaratis. The family tried to manipulate the mother of the Siamese twins and their grandfather in favour of the boy child over the girl child. *Tara* also focuses on the issues of class and community and traditional values.

KEYWORDS: Gender-Based Injustice, Second sex, Dattani, Gender Discrimination, Female Infanticide and Child Sexual Abuse.

INTRODUCTION

Mahesh Dattani is one of the celebrated playwrights in Indian writing in English. He is the first dramatist in English for winning Sahitya Akademi award for his famous play *Final Solutions* in the year 1998. The concepts and themes of his plays have fascinated the consideration of a countless number of

not only Indian readers and audiences in theatres but also world literature lovers. He has brought hidden issues of social injustice like the plight of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and transgender; gender discernment; child sex abuse; mistreatment of female child and male chauvinism into sunlit alley with the help of his plays. Dattani grasps a very diverse status in the realm of Indian drama in English. He has an outstanding imaginative technique which makes him unique from other contemporary dramatists. Through his dramas, he illumines the light on the lives of downgraded people of society.

Tara is the third theatrical work of Mahesh Dattani which is considered as one of the most loved plays by the lovers of Indian writing in English. The play, *Tara* discourses the interrogation of gender in numerous customs, though not inevitably through prosaic pigeon-holes of 'prejudice against the girl child'. In *Tara*, Dattani stages with the impression of female infanticide which is predominantly occupied in the minds of Indian society. Dattani concerns with sex-based prejudice issues. *Tara* is an anecdote of a girl who wishes to sparkle and glow like her name which means a shooting star. By adopting the themes of sexual discrimination, gender identity, middle-class life of Indian society, revelation of male chauvinistic and the inability of feminine gender to express themselves freely, Dattani has gorgeously brought the torture and torments faced by a girl in mediocre Indian society. In *Tara*, we can perceive the difference between a girl child and a boy child.

GENDER-BASED INJUSTICE IN *TARA*

In this play, *Tara*, Dattani attempts to bring the gender-based inequality and how the male child was given predilection over the female child in a middle-class Indian family. As quoted by Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex*, *Tara* also treated in unbiased and unjust manner even by her family members.

Tara is narrated by Chandan, the male half of the conjoined twins. Mahesh Dattani has

brought the strange authenticity of the woman playing second scam to man. Chandan and Tara are Siamese twins who are conjoined to their ribs. Both of them combinedly have only three legs. They ought to be detached for existence yet the problem starts when the tension arises for the inadequate, partial operation. Despite the doctors' awareness that the third leg would be appropriately suit better to Tara than Chandan, her brother. Tara's family begins to plot in favour of the boy. As an outcome Chandan gets the second leg where as her sister becomes a crippled.

Though Bharati, the mother of conjoined twins, is very much concerned about the future of her daughter Tara, she is terrified to fight against the decision of her family. She begins to think that the world will not agree to take Tara when she grows up. She begins to concern for Tara and shows her motherly love towards her daughter due to the burden of guilt she has. Tara could have survived better but for the decision of her family to give the extra leg to her Siamese twin brother, Chandan. It is a shocking moment when Tara's mother agrees a leg of the conjoined twins to be surgically removed from twin although there was a great chance of the survival of Tara.

Throughout the play, the playwright blows out an acrimonious reality of child abuse in the Indian society. Not only to Tara, almost all the middle-class girl child born in an Indian family suffers from some kind of mistreatment. Tara is an emblematic woman character that has been extensively applauded and differently construed based on gender difference and racial discrimination. The playwright confidently expresses the mistreatment of Indian women in *Tara* as it is very much observable as the so-called privileges are deliberately or involuntarily advocated to the boy child in the Indian middle-class families. In Lakshmi Subramanyam's *Muffled Voices*, Mahesh Dattani expressed, "I see Tara as a play about the male self and female self. The male self is being preferred in all cultures. The play is about the separation of self and the resultant angst". (*Tara* 129)

Women, in male chauvinistic male society, is never considered equal to men. There is differentiation between a male and a female child. Dattani has revealed all the inadmissible themes. In *Tara*, he enquires the predicament of a conjoined Siamese twins. *Tara* orbits around the twins, Chandan Patel and Tara. The crucial medical procedure to separate the conjoined twins leaves Tara crippled throughout her life. The decision made by the family for giving the second feet to the Boy child also created a kind of wounding in her heart. *Tara* discovers and leaks the typical Indian middle-class psyche which always preferred a boy child to a girl child. The play explores a different kind of female infanticide in a scientific way.

Biased sexual discrimination, chauvinism, two-facedness importance and traditionally blinded myths are all analyzed in an intricate manner. Erin Mee celebrates Mahesh Dattani as “a young dramatist who can generate a new generation in the Indian English Drama which deals with the imperceptible social issues”. (52) In her *A Note in the Play*, Erin perceives that Dattani’s preoccupation in *Tara* is “the indistinguishable Indian social issues”.(23) Mee further includes:

Woven into the play are issues of class and community, and the clash between traditional and modern lifestyles and values, the play dealing with the feelings of Siamese twins is also about the gendered self, about coming to terms with the feminine side of oneself in a world that always favours [sic] what is ‘male’. (Erin Mee, 56-57)

Mahesh Dattani takes a therapeutic freedom and focuses more in the “sensitive emotional separation” of the Siamese twins rather than their surgical separation. In an interview with Sachidananda Mohanty, Dattani revealed:

Tara is about a boy and a girl, Siamese twins, I have taken medical liberty over here because Siamese twins are invariably of the same sex and they are surgically separated at birth. It was important for their survival and the play deals with their emotional separation.

The play *Tara* is also a metaphor for the conjoined and separated male-female entities and the male given preference over the female. (134)

The writer commences with *Tara* to investigate his own work of art, and at the erstwhile with his rigid questions of gender bias, identity crisis, self-identification and the crack in the family relationship. Though there are many ‘freaky’ aspects in the play, it continues to be one of Dattani’s most loved plays. *Tara* is a captivating drama that enquires the ruthlessness of a society that handles the children of the same womb in two opposing manner. The sarcastic fact is that the injustice is committed by the victim’s own mother. It is the mentality of most of the rural Indian women whose partiality to the male child enables the play more distressing and recommends indirectly that women, not men, are the real barriers who continue the shackle of injustice to women’s rights.

Tara is not just the story of Tara, the protagonist of the play, but it is the story of a girl child born in a middle-class Indian family. The circumstances get intensified and turn shoddier if the girl is bodily or psychologically impaired. The play is the best example of female infanticide and girl child-abuse which is predominant in the Indian society. Many baby girls born in middle class Indian family undergoes a certain kind of mistreatment and abuse. *Tara*, in the perspective of Dattani, has slightly modelled on Tennessee Williams’ play *The Glass Menagerie* which is similar to Williams’ biography. Tara’s father Patel belongs to the middle-class family man alike Williams’ father so as in the case of Mrs. Bharati Patel who resembles Williams’ mother. The Patels often quarreled over the place of woman in a family alike the Williams.

The fortunate brother of Tara, Chandan, wants to register his agony over his sister’s childhood bitterness in the drama. Tara’s warmth relationship towards Chandan and the interior suffering are articulated in her discussion with Chandan. She says: “Maybe we still are. Like we have always been,

inseparable. The way we started life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out... and separated”. (*Tara* 325)

Tara discovers as well as leaks the emblematic middle-class Indian mindset, which, throughout the ages, prefer a boy child to a girl child. This middle-class Indian mentality is explicitly stated by Dattani in his interview to Lakshmi Subramanyan:

I focus on cultural emphasis on masculinity and how all the characters are at conflict with that. The parents, the grandfather the neighbor – they are all in that sense in tension with their own sensibilities, as opposed to cultural sensibilities they may have knowingly or unknowingly subscribed to. (129)

The decision taken by Mrs. Patel’s leaves Tara crippled for life and it is noticed that Mrs. Patel’s guilt gets revealed repeatedly throughout the play. She tries to compensate for this unfortunate decision (about their daughter) through her excessive concern for her. Her sense of regret is so deep that she agrees to donate her kidney to her daughter so that she may survive a few more years. While conversing with her son, she tells him: “I plan to give her happiness. I mean to give her all the love and affection which I can live. It’s what she... deserves. Love can make up for a lot”. (*Tara* 349) The exciting conversation between Bharati, Tara’s mother, and her neighbor Roopa expresses that the mother is always ready to do whatsoever for the sake of Tara’s cheerfulness:

“You can watch whatever you want! Just be my Tara’s friend”. Bharati’s internal turmoil is so intense that it often comes out in the open in her relationship with her husband. She is always complaining about something or the other. Her father’s wealth is always a bone of contention between Mrs. Patel and her husband. Mrs. Patel is often seen complaining to her children about their father and especially about his attitude towards their grandfather.

“Your father doesn’t want us to use them. He doesn’t want us to use any of your grandfather’s things [like tumblers and plates]”. (*Tara 325*)

Mr. Patel is often mindful of the rudeness that Bharati heaped on him by means of her father’s wealth as a power of economic strength against him. The senior male members of the family take all the prominent decisions despite the female members being elder than the male. The perfect example could be Bharathi, who being senior and elder, who was not given as much priority as the male. Bharathi’s father is an eminent politician and the eldest among the three senior members of the family. He was the one who took decision on the issue of operation. He is the one who decided that the conjoined second leg ought to be given to Chandan. He even bribed doctor Thakkar to support in favour of Chandan instead of obtaining a sound medical verdict of operating the leg with Tara, he peddled out his own self for the lure to fulfill his ambition.

As the play develops, we could interpret that Tara exhibits her non-natural leg. In the succeeding discussions between Tara and Chandan, she exhibits what she realizes as lack of interest towards her father. Roopa, the jovial neighbor, inspects Tara’s artificial leg. But the real fact is that Roopa is bribed by Bharati to be approachable and jovial with Tara. Not only Tara, but Bharathi also mistreated by her husband Patel. When Roopa learns that Bharathi is about to donate her kidney, she informed it to her friends and surroundings. This created ruffle between the domineering husband and submissive wife. During the heated argument, Patel called Bharathi arrogant and informed her that the latter’s father’s money was her only strength without which she is good for nothing.

Bharathi tries her best to stop Roopa from spreading the news, especially to Tara. Bharati is the only Patel who shows a lot of love towards Tara and informs, “*Love can make up for a lot*”.(349) Throughout the play, Bharati keeps on knitting sweater for her crippled love Tara during which Chandan helps his mother. When Patel enters, he puts forth his ideas of gender identity. As a male chauvinist

husband, he informed that his son is not entitled to do such feminine course. He further accuses Bharathi for deliberately showing more love on Tara than Chandan. In this scene, Dattani arises many socio-equal questions like: Why Chandan is not entitled to knit; why Tara does not attend office; why the baby girls in the country are killed; why the boys were given too much priority over the girls and also questions various gender biased inequalities.

Tara exhibits Patriarchal system as complicated and deeply rooted system in the society. There are many issues responsible for predilection of boy child to girl child. These issues are not only due to economic purpose but also for social and religious security. In *Tara*, the family of Patel is politically and economically comprehensive.

Tara is not a burden on them economically. Still Chandan is preferred over Tara due to patriarchal nature of society. *Tara* is enthralling in that it makes use of a rather unlikely freak case to lay bare the injustices in the conventional Indian family meted out to the girl child, a play that comments on a society that treats the children who share the womb differently. And as always, the stereotype comes in a friendly garb, covering the ugly truths. The Patels, on the face of it look like the ideal parents that special like Tara and Chandan need to survive indeed they have survived because of their dedicated parents. But there are more things that need to be revealed. (Chaudhari 38)

On the foundation of the roles assigned to men and women, man is conferred with higher status than woman. Patel insists his son Chandan to support him in business. But on the other hand, he expects Tara to be helpful in domestic work to her mother. This detachment of social employment based on sex is the most dangerous root causes of gender inequality. Dattani deconstructs this inequality of social domestication through the character of Tara and Chandan. Chandan desires to become a writer whereas Tara aspires to design her profession similar to her father. During the operation it is only because of

Bharathi and her father's intervention that the second leg, which could well suited for Tara, was offered to Chandan.

With Chandan, the leg survived only for a couple of days. Had it been offered to Tara; it would have been supported her throughout her life. When this message was revealed to her, she was completely devastated. In most of the places, we can find the guilty conscience of Chandan. In many instances he apologizes Tara for obtaining the second leg which could have suited better to his sister. Through the character of Chandan, Dattani also reveals that not all male is crooked and cruel. Tara dies due to the shock when she finds that her mother Bharati involved in the plot of her prejudicial separation from Chandan. Chandan mentally carries this Trauma in the play. Throughout the play we can find the struggles, turmoils and hardships faced by Tara, being a scapegoat of Second Sex, physically, mentally, and even medically by her intimate circle.

CONCLUSION

The play *Tara* successfully serves its theatrical purpose. It brings out the genuineness and feeling of a girl to endorse her determination in the world of male chauvinism. Similar to the name Tara which means a star, she was a cheerful and outstanding star. She acts as a prime source of cheerfulness for her family. Even Dan, the name adopted by Chandan, could not have a complete life but for Tara. The father of the two also bends downwards for fortifying the imminent future of Chandan. Identity crisis becomes a chain with which a female is shackled when the question of choice between a male and a female arises. The play illustrates the uncanny bias towards women which flinches even from the womb of mother as the baby being embryo. Female infanticide has become common in our society. The male-controlled Indian society contemplate a girl as a burden. In this play, Dattani has skillfully brought out the discrimination against female child (Second Sex).

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