



Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

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ABSTRACT

Mahesh Dattani, a versatile playwright, became the first Indian English dramatist to be honoured with the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998. His plays are rooted in reality. He is preoccupied with social and political realities in India today. The purpose of this paper is to trace the 'psychological conflicts' in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*. It tells the story of conjoined twins, a boy, Chandan and a girl, Tara are surgically separated in an unequal manner intended to favour the boy. Due to this Tara is unable to survive and eventually passes away. Tara is not merely an individual character but emerges as an archetype and an icon of the Indian girl child who is vanquished and subdued in the mill of tradition and modernity.

Key Words: Mahesh Dattani, Gender Discrimination, social and political realities, Tara, etc.,

Tara is a two-act play by Mahesh Dattani, earlier it was published as 'Twinkle Tara', which means star. In a poignant story of two Siamese twins, this play unearths the many dishonourable tendencies which exist in the underbelly of our society even today. The play revolves around the physical and later the emotional separation of two conjoined twins, Tara and Chandan. The surgical operation is manipulated by Bharati, the mother and the maternal grandfather as to favour the son, Chandan. The twins had three legs between them with the major supply in the girls side. However, as tradition required, it was essential for the boy to survive with two legs. Surgically the twins are separated in such a manner that Chandan has two legs while Tara remains with one leg though fate had its own plans and Chandan's leg was not accepted by his body resulting in amputation. Perhaps it would have suited Tara's

body better. Consequently, both Tara and Chandan have one artificial leg each. Later several physical complications arise leading to the early demise of Tara.

Tara is about issues of class and modern life style and values. Patel and Bharati are educated parents but they crested discrimination in the play. Even Bharati's father, a resourceful person, is also considered to be one of the factors in this misfortune. She offers her kidney to give a new charge of life to Tara. She knows the reality that after giving the kidney she will not survive but she wants to sacrifice because of her mistake, now she realize the truth and that is why Patel is not agree to donate her kidney. Mr. Patel knows the reality of his wife. Chandan migrates to London for residing with his uncle Praful adopting the name Dan. Both Tara and Chandan knew the details of the surgery. Tara accepted decisions complacently with an attitude of compromise and surrender to the customs and traditions of society. She knew that she was less privileged than her brother because she was a girl child. Dan's later life became a burden for he was submerged in thoughts of his dead sister, the loss being unbearable as if he was living without a personal history. The brother and sister were close to each other just like two sides of the same coin. In order to overcome his sense of isolation and guilt consciousness Dan decides composing his autobiography in which Tara naturally recurs as an essential character reminding Chandan how life was frustrating and lonely without her.

Dan's recollections of childhood are inextricably mixed with Tara's childhood. Often he attempts to rediscover his neglected half feeling incomplete without his sister. He finds himself in a dilemma while putting things on paper, he was broken by the thought of his sister with whom he once shared a body. He craves for freedom which is a far cry. Through Roopa, a neighbour, Dattani narrates how Gujaratis' would drown a baby girl in milk and then declare that the death was due to choking. Bharati, the mother of the twins is torn between tradition and motherly instincts to nurture the girl child in the best possible way feeling guilty of manipulating the surgery of the twins leading to the death of Tara. Though Tara was physically handicapped Bharati would look for her assets and would affectionately pamper her saying, "Tara, My beautiful baby! Tara you are my most beautiful baby! I love you very much (*Tara* P. 335)". Consequently, she has a nervous breakdown and dies though as long as she was alive would attempt to cover up her guilt by lavishing excessive love and affection

on Tara. It is not only the mother who is terrified over the plight of her daughter but Tara, the daughter realizes that her position as a girl child is underprivileged.

Tara was more enthusiastic and full of jest and spark of life. She had high aspirations which she could not achieve because of her handicapped state while the boy had given the second leg. Why not Tara? Because she is girl? Is being girl in the society a curse? Even this biased thing was done by the woman. Why woman can't understand the problem of other girl? Always women have to sacrifice for the man in the society? The play is about issues of class and modern life style and values. Patel and Bharati are educated parents but they crested discrimination in the play. Even Bharati's father, a resourceful person, is also considered to be one of the factors in this misfortune. She offers her kidney to give a new charge of life to Tara.. She knows the reality that after giving the kidney she will not survive but she wants to sacrifice because of her mistake, now she realize the truth and that is why Patel is not agree to donate her kidney. Mr. Patel knows the reality of his wife.

The society is a system in which the girl child has to live and die. Tara is killed by social system, which controls the minds and actions of the people. At the end of the play, we see Chandan apologizing to Tara in the most moving of all the lines. Tara is not merely an individual character but emerges as an archetype, an icon of the Indian girl child who is vanquished and subdued in the mill of tradition and modernity. This play made us to move deeply, Mahesh Dattani not only reveals how girls are subjected to discrimination in an educated society but also stresses upon the fact that how the discrimination is encouraged by people.

References

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