

## Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

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Mahesh Dattani is a contemporary Indian playwright. His plays are significant from the point of view of form as well as content. He has received the Sahitya Academy award for his contribution to Indian Drama. R. K. Dhavan calls him 'a fresh arrival'<sup>(1)</sup> John Mc Rae calls him 'the voice of India now'<sup>(2)</sup> Tanu Pant refers to him as 'the face of Indian drama'<sup>(3)</sup> Bijay Kumar has included him in the list of postmodern Indian dramatists<sup>(4)</sup> These and many other such references clarify that Mahesh Dattani is a rare genius. He has achieved popularity among the common audience and critical acclaim from the literary circles.

Mahesh Dattani believes in crossing the borders. He has shown this by dealing with unconventional subjects in most of his dramas. He touches upon various issues of our society through his dramas. He touches upon various issues of our society through his dramas. In *Final Solutions* he deals with the issue of communalism. In *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, he deals with the issue of homosexuality and, in *Seven Steps around the Fire* with the problems of *Hijras* and in *Tara* of course with gender discrimination.

Discrimination against girls is a reality in the developing countries like ours. We congratulate each other at the birth of a boy. To us, a son means insurance and *Papa kahte hain bada naam karega; beta hamara aisa kaam karega*. If it is a girl the reaction is very different. Women start crying and men feel cheated. To them, a daughter is just another expense. She is neglected and ill-treated to such an extent that she feels inferior. She prays to God *Agle janam mohe bitya na kijo, ab jo kiye ho data waisa na kijo*. She becomes a second rate citizen in the family itself. Cultural traditions and poverty are at the root of gender discrimination as Kofi Annan says:

Short-changing girls is not only a matter of gender discrimination; it is bad economics and bad societal policy.<sup>(5)</sup>

In this short paper, I plan to discuss how gender discrimination is presented in Dattani's drama 'Tara'. The play has only two acts. It is the story of twins-Tara and Chandan. They share one body. They are separated by a surgery.

The way we started in life. Two lives and one body in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out.<sup>(6)</sup>

Right in the beginning of the play, Dattani talks about the gender-roles. Patel is the father. He represents the male domination. He wants Chandan to behave like a boy. He expects Chandan to join him in the office at least to get the feel of it.

PATEL: I was just thinking-it may be a good idea for you to come to the office with me...

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

PATEL: (Firmly) Chandan, I think I must insist that you come.<sup>(7)</sup>

Tara is an intelligent girl. She is fully aware of the situation. She knows her limitations both physical and social. Though we claim to be civilized and modern, we have not changed much. Still today, we want women to stay at home and raise children. Tara sharply comments upon this and suggests the continuation of the status quo. Tara says:

The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave.<sup>(8)</sup>

Patel and Bharati are the parents. It seems that Bharati the mother cares for Tara more. Patel, the father on the other hand likes Chandan more Tara longs for her father's love but she never gets it.

CHANDAN: ...He's not what you make him out to be.

TARA: Your say that because he's nice to you.

CHANDAN: He's nice to you.

TARA: He talks to you more often.

CHANDAN: All right. He talks to me, but he's nice to you.

TARA: I tell you, he hates me!<sup>(9)</sup>

Tara needs a kidney transplant. Bharati wants to donate her own kidney to Tara but Patel does not approve of it. In the course of the play we come to know that their maternal grandfather has left all his money to Chandan and not to Tara. When Chandan asks about it Patel replies:

It was his money. He could do what he wanted with it.<sup>(10)</sup>

Another evidence of extreme discrimination comes forward when Roopa informs us that when Patels didn't want daughters they drowned babies in milk. Gender-roles are given much importance. When Patel sees Chandan helping his mother with knitting; Patel feels that his wife is creating confusion. He has already decided that Chandan would study further and go abroad.

In the second act, Bharati decides to donate her kidney to Tara out of love as well as to make up for what Tara's father and God has not given Tara. When Bharati becomes ill Tara is unhappy. She refuses to go to college. Chandan is not ready to go to college without her. Patel wants Tara to study for her brother's sake.

TARA: Of course not. There's no point in my going to college if I have to drop out half-way through or stay away for days not knowing when no!

PATEL: I understand. (*Going to TARA*) But we have a problem here. Chandan refuses to join college without you.<sup>(11)</sup>

Tara wishes to die. She even dies. After her death Chandan comes to know that the separation of Tara and Chandan was complete. The doctor who operated them believes that the greatest challenge was to keep the girl alive. Patel tells Chandan that the twins had three legs. The third leg was fed by the girl's blood system. The chances

of the leg's survival were greater with the girl. But Bharati and her father decided to give the leg to the boy. It survived for two days only. There was a possibility of its survival with Tara forever.

With this revelation, we come to know that Bharati's love for Tara was a result of her guilt consciousness. Patel is not free either. He is not different from Bharati and her father. He does not care for Tara at any point of time. Thus, the play discusses the injustice done to women. Bharati's guilt consciousness has changed her. But Patel remains unchanged. Chandan considers himself responsible for Tara's tragedy. It was only that he was a male. So he snatched away the possibilities of a healthy life from Tara. The doctor is also one of the culprits. He sacrificed the nobility of his profession just for the corruption that he received from Tara's grandfather.

Tara is, no doubt, a victim of gender discrimination. Apart from it our attitude towards the handicaps is also responsible for her tragedy. Roopa is a girl of neighborhood. She is of Tara's age. Because of Tara's fatal leg, nobody be friends her. Bharati has to bribe Roopa with cosmetics and other things to make her a friend of Tara. Yet, Roopa has an inward dislike for the freaks. Towards the end of the play, there is a verbal war between Tara and Roopa. As a result, Roopa puts a poster in the area with a slogan "WE DON'T WANT FREAKS." She places it prominently against the wall. Hence, both Tara and Chandan are afraid. They are afraid of meeting new people. They are afraid that the people won't see beyond their crippled legs.

The family tensions also add to the difficulties of Tara. Thus Dattani starts with gender discrimination and reaches to the issues beyond it. From the point of view of feminism, this may be a diversion but as Amaranth Prasad says:

Mahesh Dattani comes in (the) category of writers who champion the cause of true art-free from any theory, minerals in taste and flavour, appealing to all sections of society, never bound to any caste, class and creed. <sup>(12)</sup>

**References:**

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