

Gender Inequality: A Study of Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

Prof. Dr Parul Tyagi, Principal, Rani Bhagyawati Mahila Mahavidyalya, Bijnor
(246701), Uttar Pradesh, India

Received Date 03/06/23, Revised Date 28/07/23, Accepted Date 28/07/23, Published Date 30/07/23

Abstract: Present work throws light on the writings of Mahesh Dattani, presenting him as an eminent and outstanding playwright. Various themes from different plays by him are discussed, with special reference given to the play *Tara*. The play *Tara* by Mahesh Dattani addresses the subject of gender inequality. This essay aims to explore and critique the problem of women's marginalisation in the play. In an Indian household, *Tara*, a female kid, is not favoured above *Chandan*, a boy child. This essay makes an effort to examine gender discrimination in society, the injustices committed solely based on a person's gender, and the preference Indian families give to male children over female children. The drama also addresses the separation of Siamese twins on an emotional and physical level. The drama illustrates how deeply ingrained the patriarchal system is in society. The patriarchy uses women as a key to maintain patriarchal norms. Despite being *Tara*'s mother, *Bharati* damages her life in this drama, and *Tara* ultimately pays the price for *Bharati*'s cruel deed. Through this play, Dattani highlights the insensitivity of society towards those with physical disabilities. Being a guy of science and technology, *Dr Thakkar* abuses his position. *Bharati* and her father bought him off with a plot of land in exchange for the surgery that killed *Tara*.

Keywords: gender discrimination, patriarchal system, female marginalisation, dominating society, women subjugation

Introduction

Mahesh Dattani has achieved international name and fame as a playwright. He is a versatile genius. He is at the peak of his creative powers, continuously experimenting with new forms and manners of expression. Dattani is one of India's emerging playwrights whose expectations of his audience are high. (Baskaran.G.)

On August 7th, 1958, Mahesh Dattani was born in Bangalore, Karnataka. His parents were Gujarati natives, hailing from Porbandar. He attended Baldwin High School, a place where 'Snob Culture' was dominant. Being proficient in English and leading a Westernised lifestyle were regarded as placing one head and shoulders above their fellow compatriots who lacked these advantages. Vernacular was looked down upon, and only English was used for communication. Mahesh was passionate about watching Gujarati, Marathi, and Kannada plays with his parents and sisters, despite the school's disrespect for native

languages and customs. These plays were to leave a deep imprint on his soul, igniting his innate desire for dramatic creativity. Being a native son, he would use his theatrical talents to create stage plays, radio plays (for BBC Radio 4), and screenplays (movies) later that would depict the diverse flavour and sensibility of Indian life.

Dattani argues that to acquire the practical theatre knowledge that has contributed to his success, he had to relearn a lot of what he had learned in school. He is aided in this unlearning process by the vernacular plays he has seen with his family. The writer adheres to the zen school of thought, which teaches via unbiased observation and exploration rather than by copying a predetermined set of ideas and behaviours.

1.1 Mahesh Dattani as a Social Writer

Mahesh Dattani has powerfully dramatised the concerns of the impoverished, the victims of social organisation, the subalterns, the ill, the homosexuals and lesbians, the victims of child abuse, and the oppressed women in his plays, despite the possibility that he may be accused of catering only to the urban class, as he would readily admit. He has illustrated the horrors of religious extremism and the indifference of the political establishment during times of adversity. Thus, he roughly sums up all of India's current difficulties. He seems to prefer a society where people coexist in harmony while respecting their inherent differences in thought, religion, sexual orientation, and professional ability. He also seems to favour a society that is compassionate towards taboo topics like AIDS and physical challenges and that

collaborates for creative and productive goals without gender discrimination.

Mahesh Dattani holds the distinction of being the first writer in the English language to get the Sahitya Akademi Award for *Final Solutions* and *Other Plays* in 1998. A playwright and director from Bangalore, Mahesh Dattani. A sizable number of readers and theatregoers have been drawn to the topics of his plays. Through his plays, he has attempted to bring to light taboo social themes like the hardship of women and transgender people, prejudice based on gender, homosexual behaviour, sexual assault of kids, etc. In the world of Indian plays written in English, Dattani occupies a particularly special status. In his plays, he has effectively shown the difficulties of urban life in India. He stands out among other dramatists thanks to his impressive artistic imagination. Readers are affected emotionally and intellectually by his plays.

According to Alyque Padamsee, 'At last, we have a playwright who gives sixty million English-speaking Indians an Identity. Thank you, Mahesh Dattani!' (CP Back Cover) Padamsee explains what drew him to Dattani's work, 'I had been looking for a Playwright I could work with for a long time, but all of them wrote literary plays. Mahesh was the first modern playwright to write about issues in contemporary India in which the dialogue Sparkled'. (Pillani, 34)

11 stage plays, seven radio plays, and three screenplays were all written by Dattani. The following is a list of all of his published works, which may be grouped into nine board categories.

- Crime and suspense (Seven Steps Around The Fire, The Swami and Winston, Uma and Fairy Queen and Final Solutions)
- Gay and lesbian relationship (On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Mango Souffle and Do the Needful)
- Subaltern concerns (Seven Steps Around the Fire)
- Natural Calamities (Clearing the Rubble and The Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child)
- Family Plays (Thirty Days in September, Bravely Fought the Queen, Where There's a Will and Do the Needful)
- Music and Dance (Morning Raga and Dance Like a Man)
- Disease and Disabled (Ek Alag Mausam and Tara)
- City (The Big Fat City)
- Theatre (Where did I leave my Purdah?)

1.2 Mahesh Dattani as a Feminist Writer

In the realm of contemporary literature, Mahesh Dattani stands as a beacon of artistic prowess, boldly exploring themes of gender inequality and female empowerment in his writings. As a feminist writer, Dattani fearlessly seeps into the depths of societal norms, unravelling the intricate webs of patriarchy and exposing the injustices that plague women in Indian society.

Women in a male-dominated social system is well described by Satwana Halder as, "the image of the woman holding mirror to her face is the typical feminine image, in a male-dominated society, a woman is valued for her beauty and sex appeal. She is always afraid of her beauty withering with time and therefore she holds up a mirror which tells her of youth, beauty and sexual

attractiveness remain intact." (Satwana Halder, 62)

In Final Solutions (1993) Dattani explores the struggles of women trapped in a patriarchal society, challenging the traditional roles assigned to them. He explores the themes of marital confinement, societal expectations, and the quest for liberation, exposing the limitations imposed on women. While in Dance Like a Man (1989) Dattani speaks loudly of the complex dynamics within a family, examining the gendered expectations and sacrifices made by women pursuing their passion for dance. Through the character of Ratna, he questions societal norms that stifle women's ambitions and relegates them to secondary roles. According to Shubra Tripathi, "He has the courage to discuss unconventional themes like homosexuality, men pursuing dance as career, pain and suffering of conjoined twins, and child sexual abuse"

His drama Bravely Fought the Queen (1993) has homosexuality as its main topic. Gender identity is a subject that Mahesh Dattani also addresses in his plays. How are gender roles formed for men and women? For instance, Amritlal does not consider dancing for males in Dance Like a Man, while Hasmukh Mehta does not think about Where There is a Will in a manly enough manner. These and other inquiries about gender and socioeconomic stratification are brought up by Dattani. Dattani is not a realm of straightforward opposition. Relationships are rife with strife, and nobody wants to be the easy victim. He sheds attention on the struggles of society's outcasts via his plays. He makes an effort to

educate and sensitise the general public about these issues.

2.1 Gender Inequality in Tara

The play Tara, which is gripping, explores the function of patriarchal culture in treating infants from the same womb in two different ways. In Dattani's Tara, a boy and a girl who are linked at the hip must undergo surgery to be separated; this procedure might result in one of the two of them dying. The play is more effective because it implies that women are responsible for continuing the chain of injustice because the victim's own mother, who prefers the male kid, committed the wrong.

In the words of Mithila Kumari, "Dattani is preoccupied with age-old prejudices, traditions, and the emergence of new women in this play. He has focused on the relative status of male and female children, and has shown how women are also to blame for their predicament."

Tara is the name of the main character in the play, but it is also the tale of every girl born into an Indian family, whether they live in the city or the countryside. When the girl has a physical disability or any other mental or physiological defect, the issue is even worse. It is a painful illustration of the child maltreatment that occurs in Indian society. Every female born into an Indian household experiences some form of exploitation, and when her family has a son, the exploitation is very obvious since the benefits are either deliberately or subconsciously extended to the son. We get the impression that she has some sort of resentment towards society throughout the entire performance. She appears to have some sort of antipathy to

the outer world, and the only people she has ever been close to are her parents and her brother. The drama examines in addition to revealing the typical Indian mentality, which has historically favoured a boy over a girl child. It examines the successes and setbacks of the Indian family. A spunky child, Tara finally deteriorates and passes away because she is not given the same opportunities as her brother.

The patriarchal system depicted in the drama is having several facets and is firmly ingrained in society. Boy children are preferred over girls for a variety of reasons. In addition to being economic, these aspects are also social and religious. In this drama, the Patel family is stable on both an economic and political level. They don't prefer spending more money because of Tara. The patriarchal character of society still favours Chandan over Tara. A girl's place is always in jeopardy. For instance, she never experiences any positive effects from her environment, unlike Tara. Even if her mother's background also strives to absolve her of the blame of patriarchal bias, Tara is only appreciated by her family. In the play, Tara and her friend Roopa are talking, and Roopa informs Tara that the Patels used to drown her newborn girls in milk since they didn't want a girl kid. Here, Dattani draws attention to the widespread social issue of female infanticide. Fortunately, Tara does not encounter such wickedness, but ultimately, her life is wasted.

Additionally, the stereotype conceals the unpleasant realities by dressing up in a welcoming manner. On the surface, the Patels appear to be the perfect parents that unique children like Tara and

Chandan need to live; in fact, it is because of their devoted parents that they have. However, there are still additional details that must be released.

2.2 Social Injustices in Tara

Tara illustrates how society discriminates against girls. Dan, who is typing and speaks straight to the audience at the beginning of the performance. His piece is titled Twinkle Tara, and Tara, which means star, is the character's stage name. Chandan remembers his early years with his sister Tara. They were identified as Siamese twins since they both shared a body. He reveals the patriarchal attitude that now prevails in society and favours male children over female children.

Women in Mahesh Dattani's plays make sure that tradition and ceremony continue where men go for employment. Dattani uses these traditional gender norms to her greatest advantage. In this drama, Dattani depicts a direct argument between a wife and her husband over her father. In addition, Bharati is more worried than Patel about Tara's nutrition and well-being. Patel appeared to be worried about Chandan's professional future. He wants him to carry on his legacy. While Tara aspires to be a writer, Chandan appears to have other goals. Tara the victim of the social injustice compares men and women and says to Chandan:

Tara: Women grow mature faster. ... We are more sensitive, more intelligent, and more compassionate human beings than creeps like you...(51)

Expressing her desire for real legs Tara says:

Tara: I would wish for both... I would wish for both... I would wish for two of them.

Chandan: Two Jaipur legs?

Tara: No, silly. The real one. (266)

As the act goes on, Tara is requested to display her prosthetic limb. We learn several things in the discourse that follows between Tara and Chandan, but the most essential is that Bharati fusses over Tara, and Tara behaves in a way that she perceives her father's lack of interest in her. Roopa, who had just examined Tara's leg, reappears on stage. Bharati is paying Roopa to be friends with Tara. Bharati wishes to give her own kidney, and Roopa dashes out to notify her friends. Patel disapproves of the fact that it leads to arguments between the couple and the harsh statement made by the husband that Bharati has always relied on her father's wealth. She attempted to stop Roopa from speaking to Tara since it was rumoured that the Patel family was against having daughters because they would murder the infants by drowning in milk. Tara appears to be very beloved by Bharati. Chandan adds that Bharati lost a stitch while crocheting a sweater for Tara during this conversation. When Patel comes and sees Chandan assisting his mother with her knitting, he expresses his opinions on gender identification. Regarding Chandan's future studies overseas, he has already made preparations for him. He claims that his wife purposefully and completely took control of Tara. The positions Patel allocates to men seem to be those that come naturally to them, but the roles he allocates to women are very different. Why can't Tara go to work and Chandan knit? Another often-asked issue is: Why are infant girls

slain in our nation? More of these concerns about gender discrimination are brought up by Dattani. Act I conclude with Tara, the subject of controversy, going down in a fatal sleep.

Males are given a greater status than females based on the roles that they are given in society. In a culture where men predominate, the man is always a dominant character, subduing the 'other' or feminine, who is frequently involved in patriarchy both surreptitiously and explicitly. As can be observed throughout the play, Mrs Bharathi, the mother, confronts patriarchy by refusing to be complicit. When making a choice for her kids, she is the one who becomes biased. The only gender that deserves all benefits and consideration is the masculine gender. Therefore, Mrs Bharathi decides to give her son Chandan the favoured leg under the guidance of her father as well as society at large. Mrs Bharathi is the one who turns political in the play. Together with her politically powerful father, Bharathi is able to use gender politics against her daughter while advancing herself. In the past, Tara's mother indulged in making relationships political. The performance sheds light on the fact that the mother was also encouraged to participate in patriarchal discourse. Prasad rightly assures us about the play. "This is a play about the injustice done in the name of the construction of gender identities - this hierarchization and demarcation of roles does as much harm to men as to women." (141, Prasad)

Patel requests Tara's assistance with household duties while asking Chandan for business help. One of the main reasons for gender discrimination is this sex-based

division of employment. Through Tara and Chandan, Dattani aims to break down this division of labour. Tara is leaning towards a job like her father, but Chandan aspires to be a writer.

Women contribute significantly to the persistence of gender inequality in a patriarchal culture. During surgery, Bharati, a woman, likes Chandan, a boy. The girl's survival was the biggest hurdle, according to Dr Thakkar. Patel then makes the decision, to be honest with the kids. He claims that he, his wife, and the grandpa are all at fault. The third leg of the twins, who had three legs altogether, was nourished by the girl's blood supply.

With the girl, there was a better chance that the leg would survive. However, despite the risk, Bharati and her father chose to give the male kid a leg. The doctor was paid off by Bharati's prominent political father with approval of property in Bangalore since Patel could not object firmly enough. The limb had only been alive for two days, yet it might have been Tara's for the rest of her days. This information has crushed Tara. The social system in which girls must both live and die. Assassinated by this societal structure that governs people's thoughts and behaviour. At the conclusion of the play, Chandan apologises to Tara in the majority of the lines.

Dattani is an accomplished and skilled dramatist who has helped us recognise how deeply ingrained gender inequality is in society and how difficult it is to overcome. It is difficult to break the chains of prejudice against girls based on gender wherever they grow up, reside, and die since Rome cannot be built in a day. In

addition to being a concept from modern civilization, it also dates back in time. The idea that males engage in gender discrimination is false since women also do it; they separate women from men. When the opportunity arises, they will also favour men over women. Roopa selected the man when Chandan asked her to pick between the two:

CHANDAN. What would you do if you had to choose between a boy and a girl?

Who would you choose?

ROOPA. A boyfriend definitely?

CHANDAN. Definitely?

ROOPA. Yes. It's bad enough studying in a girls' school. I would definitely want a boyfriend.

CHANDAN. No, no. I didn't mean that!

ROOPA. Oh, boy child and girl child. Say that! CHANDAN. What would your choice be?

ROOPA. Mmm ... I would be happy with either one.

CHANDAN. That's not the point. In the film, I mean- the Nazis will only allow her to keep one child. The older one would be taken away to a concentration camp or something.

ROOPA. How nasty of the Nazis!

CHANDAN. Would you send your girl child to the concentration camp?

ROOPA. Definitely not! I think it's more civilized to draw her in milk if you ask me (365).

Through the play Tara, Mahesh Dattani informs his audience that politics are a component of a social structure. It functions with electricity that is omnipresent. Power is always relational

and intersubjective, and it does not come from a single source. Michel Foucault rightly says, 'Power is not an institution and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society'. Dattani clarifies that gender in his plays – ...has to do with my own comfort with both the feminine and the masculine self in me...the masculine self is very content; it doesn't need to express itself. But the feminine self seems to seek expression...And since I have the male self, which is equipped to fight as well, it is a proportionate battle (Chaudhuri 47-8.)

Conclusion

It may be said that Mahesh Dattani's play Tara skillfully addresses the issues of differently-abled people, gender, and self-identity. One of Mahesh Dattani's most well-known works is Tara. By focusing on Siamese twins, he addresses a variety of gender discrimination-related topics. As opposed to being just one particular person, Tara develops into an archetype, an image of the Indian female child who is beaten and tamed in the manufacturing plant of tradition and modernity. We are extremely moved by this play because Mahesh Dattani not only exposes the prejudice that girls face in a culture that values education but also emphasises how people in Indian society actively promote discrimination. The play's portrayal of the condition of oppressed women is a huge hit. Mrs Bharathi participates in complicated power dynamics that have an impact on her and others around her. In a society, power and knowledge are supposed to exercise certain forms of social control, according to

Foucault. People are constantly susceptible to relational and intersubjective power control. Mrs Bharathi's father and the society at large are to blame for her participation in patriarchy. This play illustrates how discrimination against women begins in the mother's womb. Female feticide is a widespread occurrence in our society. In a patriarchal society, a girl is seen as a social and emotional burden on her parents in addition to a financial one. That is why a boy childlike Chandan is preferred to Tara, a girl child, in this patriarchal culture.

References:

Baskaran G., Girish Kranad and Mahesh Dattani Methods and Motives p.43-44, Published by Y Kings Books, Jaipur(2012)
Chaudhuri, Asha Kuthari. Mahesh Dattani. New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2005. Print

Dattani, Mahesh. Collected Plays. New Delhi: Penguin, 2000.Print.
Foucault, Michel. Subject and Power, Jstor.org University of Chicago press: Pg778. Web.
Foucault, Michel. 'Foucault –Power-Knowledge'. Bartleby.com. 11th Jan 2012.Web
Halder, Satwana. Mahesh Dattani's Tara: A Critical Study. Prestige International, 2009. P.62. Print.
Pillani, Sohini.Challenging Religious Communalism With Theatre: Mahesh Dattani's Final Solutions. Honours Thesis Collection, Wellesley College Digital Scholarship and Archive. 2012: 34. Print.
Prasad, G.J.V. "Terrifying Tara : The Angst of the Family". Mahesh Dattani's Plays: Critical Perspective. Ed. Angeli Multani. Pencraft, International, 2007. P.141. Print.