

Unveiling the Patriarchal Society: An Analysis of Gender Discrimination against Women in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

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Abstract: Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*, (2000) emphasizes the concept of gender discrimination and social issues that are equally known by men and women. This paper focuses on significant concept, such as gender discrimination, injustice done solely based on gender, and Indian families' propensity to have more male offspring. The subject of gender inequality is addressed in 'Tara'. It is an example of how deeply embedded patriarchy is prevailing in the society. Women serve as a key in the hands of patriarchy, assuring the continuation of patriarchal norms. This article's goal is to debate and analyse the play's female marginalize issue and gender discrimination.

Keywords: Gender, Discrimination, Patriarchy, Society, Women.

INTRODUCTION

The true representative of India's urban middle class is Mahesh Dattani. He is the first Indian writer to receive the Sahitya Akademi prize for a play written in English. His plays primarily address topics that are both current and timeless. The family is the focus of Dattani's dramatic concern, which he uses to explain the dynamics of interpersonal interactions. No topic is either too sacred or too taboo for Dattani to discuss. The disarmingly honest way in which he analyses the human condition is remarkable. "Dattani's work probes tangled attitudes in contemporary India towards communal differences, consumerism and gender... a brilliant contribution to Indian drama in English" (2000) says the Sahitya Akademi award citation about Dattani".

Dattani addresses societal constructions of gender, the patriarchal system, the predicament of homosexuals, the institution of marriage, and the hypocrisy surrounding each of these topics. Butler, (2014) states that "gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex". The Indian middle class society, with its double standards, pretence of respectability, façade of the loving, ideal family, the benevolent father, the adoring wife, and the submissive children, occupies the stage space of Dattani. In this society, gender roles are almost inviolable; man is the provider, and woman is the homemaker. Dattani addresses what he refers to as the "invisible concerns" of Indian societal problems that are not unknown to us but that we would not like to discuss problems that we would

opportunistically hide under a rug and pretend do not exist. The ability to keep one's facade up has become a way of life and an essential survival skill. Dattani forces us to deal with these issues. His plays have won accolades from the audience and the press both in India and abroad due to his desire to shake us out of our complacency and his openness in his approach. "An overview of Dattani's works reveal a recurring theme: gender identity" (Dattani 8). Gender is a social construct, sex is a natural phenomena. When they appear in the other sex, the so-called characteristics of masculinity and femininity are considered inappropriate by society. In the middle class Indian society, gender roles are set in stone. "Gender ambiguity" is a recurrent theme in the plays of Dattani. In his plays "common assumptions about male and female roles get pushed about and turned around" (Dattani 25). Dattani exposes the sacrifices that men must make in order to live up to cultural expectations while criticising male hegemony and conventional beliefs, or rather misconceptions, about gender. Dattani does not support one sex above the other; rather, he highlights the flaws in the prevailing gender hegemony in society.

Analysis of Gender Discrimination

Dattani's drama aims to represent society's dysfunction, but instead acts like freak mirrors at a fair and projects hideous visions of everything that appears for ordinary in our culture. Gender discrimination is one of the major themes in modern English-language writing by Indians.

Despite the fact that many authors have focused their works on the identity dilemma of women, few have tried their hand at Indian English theatre. The contemporary women novelists have been more prolific and some of them are avowedly feminist. Mulk Raj Anand, acknowledged that “the women writers are more eloquent, intensive, and sensitive. Few male writers can give some sense of intensity to their writing” (Sunanda Mongia, 222). Indian English fiction and theatre have a history of expressing realism either implicitly or explicitly, and they do contain realism to varied degrees, with minute details of social life and economic undercurrents governing human relationships. Mahesh Dattani joins the ranks of great experimenters like W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, and Harold Pinter by transforming fictional genres into dramatic frameworks and weaving them into a multifaceted fabric in the form of a cohesive plot.

In *Tara*, a drama by Dattani, it is suggested that gender inequality ultimately destroys humanity. Due to gender disparities within the Patel family, both sexes in this drama encounter difficulties. Women actively contribute to the promotion of discrimination against women in patriarchal cultures. Bharati, a lady, favours Chandan, a boy, during surgery. This drama shows us how patriarchy, which has many facets and is firmly ingrained in our culture, has distorted the social structure of what is considered modern society. A boy’s childhood is important for more reasons than only the economy. Indeed, a number of other important aspects, including social, religious, and other considerations, also significantly contribute to this prioritisation and bias decision. “The kind of themes, topics, and treatment reminds the Victorian Era in British literature, where women started getting free recognition after rejection and criticism” (Kumar, 2020; Kumar & Khalaf, 2021). **Tara** (2000) is a play about Tara and Chandan, twins conjoined to be practiced at birth. The play revolves around Tara, Chandan, Bharati, the mother and Mr. Patel, the father. The mother and the boy’s maternal grandfather decide to give the boy the limb that gets most of its blood flow from the girl and hence has a higher chance of survival in her during an operation to separate the children. The leg that Tara should have had is now useless to Chandan as a piece of decomposing, dead flesh.

Tara is the object of Bharati’s obsession. She feels compelled to make up for the harm she committed when Tara was just a young child by showing Tara all the love she has to give. She had

caved in to a long-standing bias present in Indian society by choosing to favour her son in a significant decision. She attempts to overprotect her daughter in an effort to get over her guilt. Tara’s shock knows no bounds when she learns the truth about her mother’s choice at the end. Chandan flees to London unable to confront his wrongdoing towards Tara. After a kidney donation, wherein the mother again engages in a compulsive behaviour prompted by guilt and donates a kidney to Tara, the mother withers away. No specifics are provided on Tara’s demise. We learn about it from Chandan’s father’s telephone discussion with Chandan.

According to Hall (1997), the projection and representation of women in the media does not reflect reality; rather, it merely creates and recreates images and ideologies using jargon. Men as well as women may be impacted by this work division. It may burden males and constrict their ability and interest. The fact that women actively support discrimination against women is another huge irony of our patriarchal culture. In this play, a woman favours a male during surgery. Their desire is a proof that, in a patriarchal society, societal norms and values that are common in Indian society have a considerable influence on a woman’s mentality. A woman acts as another patriarchal weapon used against another woman in the patriarchal Indian society. Chandan views Tara’s physical impairment, which is seen as a miserable cross on her back, with a great deal of sympathy. His father wants to educate him about business and prepare him for life since he does not want him to stay at home as a “sissy” and his grandfather has left him his entire estate. For no other reason than her gender, Tara, a strong-willed, bright young woman, is denied of her body, her opportunities, and ultimately her position in life. She is far intelligent than Chandan, but she isn’t encouraged to develop her talents. Her mother’s frantic displays of love are equally stifling as her father’s terrible apathy towards her. Tara is a perfect example of a gifted but undervalued Indian woman.

Dattani’s play **Tara** (2000) deals with “Tara syndrome” that exists in our country; favours the girl child over the boy. The drama is focused on the growing emotional distance between two conjoined twins, Tara and Chandan; after discovering it their mother, Bharati, and grandpa used physical separation to favour the male over the girl. The girl’s side of the twins’ three legs received the majority of the blood supply. The boy

needed to have two legs in order to survive, as custom would have it. Chandan was left with two legs after the twins were divided during surgery, while Tara was left with just one. Finally Chandan's body refused to accept his leg. Tara's body might have worked better for it. As the plot develops, Tara experiences various bodily issues, and eventually passes away. Chandan is abandoned. He switches his identity to Dan, moves in with his uncle in London, and makes an effort to suppress the guilt he feels for his sister's passing by leading a life devoid of a past. Tara must endure the burden of having a physical disability her entire life since she is an innocent victim of society's unfairness. Tara's illness is revealed by Satwana Halder. "If Tara were like any crippled girl (like Laura in *Glass Menagerie*) her story would be a pathetic one, drawing sympathy from others. But Tara's case is tragic as it is revealed to her that there was a conspiracy behind her deformity and that her mother whom she has loved most and who has so long expressed her concern for her daughter, contributed to that conspiracy" (Tara 58).

The middle-class society, which is supposed to be well educated and have a respected reputation in society, has been exposed by Dattani. He is skilled at portraying the actual circumstances of females who have been living in a culture where they are treated with little respect or honour. When Tara inquires about the Patels family's treatment of the girls, Tara's neighbour Roopa responds, "Since you insist, I will tell you. It will not be true. But this is what I have heard. The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting girls babies. You know dowry and things like that so they used to draw them in milk... they could say that she choked while drinking her milk (Tara 349).

Dattani is an accomplished and skilled dramatist who can help us recognise how deeply ingrained gender inequality is in society and how challenging it is to overcome. It is difficult to break the chains of prejudice against girls based on gender wherever they are born, live, 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 men 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. Chand asked Roopa to select between the two, but Roopa selected men:

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).

Kumar, T, (2021) proved that the binary philosophy, Dattani rejects prejudice against men and women. He disputes the widely held belief that men are superior to women and asserts that both masculinity and femininity are inherently a part of one's nature. (p-65). The drama *Tara* explores the gendered self. This drama is about girl children. One example of the mental and emotional problems under a patriarchal environment is Tara's narrative. The mother tries to undo every bad choice; the father regrets not stepping in earlier; Chandan tries to accept his responsibility; and Tara lashes out at everyone, unable to conceal her rage and fury at being unable to fit in. The play subtly questions gender prejudices. Conceived as a family drama, the play's text moves between the past and the present of a young writer, Dan, trying to write the story of his twin sister, Tara. Suffering from an acute writer's block, the agonized writer in a barely furnished room in London begins to reminisce about his twin sister who got a raw deal during an operation, which separated the conjoined twins. It's been a while since I've been this excited about a book. Even the subtext of gender inequality in family interactions takes on a dramatic turn at the climax. Dan calls his father in Bombay when he is in London and informs him

that he does not want to go back to India. I just don't think I can handle living there any longer, to paraphrase Dan. "Tara has been dead for six years and now mummy has gone as well, there's nothing left for me to come back to" (Dattani, 372).

The tragedy of **Tara** is neither truly Tara's nor Chandan's. Tragic events that occur every day are depicted as catastrophic events in the play. The author of Dattani uses a range of characters drawn from society in his setting as a backdrop to display the current political hot-button issues. Halder, (2009) demonstrated that "the archetypal feminine picture is the woman holding the mirror to her face. A woman's attractiveness and seductive appeal are treasured in a culture where men predominate. She puts up a mirror to show herself that her youth, beauty, and sexual attractiveness are still intact because she is constantly concerned that her beauty may deteriorate with age" (p-62).

Women who "enjoy their misery," according to Kaplan (1985), "become responsible for significant and far-reaching emotional and physical injury to daughters" (p-1). Tara paints a picture of how powerless women are in our culture. Tara, the main character, is rendered useless since she has a disability and is subsequently denied access to life's comforts. But, as her name Tara well denotes, the girl was a brilliant and sparkling star who brought the family cheer and happiness. Tara is more than just a one-off character. She represents postcolonial Indian women who are crushed by tradition and modernity, serving as an archetype and an icon. Fredrickson and Roberts, (1997) demonstrated that the "women's presence in society is determined by their looks and beauty rather than abilities and proficiencies. This objectification of women in media can lead to gender inequality". While Tara yearned for a full and normal existence every moment, Chandan was more content with his crippled life. She was compelled to reveal her disabled limb to Roopa and her friends, and the humiliation she endured as a result of their treatment of her was like a knife to her heart. Even if Patel and Bharati are educated parents, their action is regrettable. Through Dr. Thakkar, Dattani has also attempted to demonstrate how his prudent choice could have provided Tara with a safe, secure, and complete existence if he had maintained his godly profession. His nastiness not only thwarts Tara's goals but also fills her life with dejection and melancholy. Because of her sadness, she preferred to die than spend money on herself needlessly.

After the death of Tara, the unconscious in Chandan thrusts forward creatively. As he says in the beginning of the play that he wants to write a drama, and he is in search of a suitable subject. As a writer, Dan wants to record his life-story and opens his heart when he says:

"Someday, after I die a stranger will find this recording and play it. The voice is all that will remain. No writing. Only a voice that once belonged to an object. An object like other objects in the cosmos whose orbits are determined by those around. Moving in a forced harmony'. Those who survive are those who do not defy the gravity of others. And those who desire even a moment of freedom, find themselves hurled into space, doomed to crash with some unknown force. I no longer desire that freedom. I move, just move without meaning. I forgot Tara. I forget that I had a sister with whom I had shared a body" (Dattani, 379).

In the conclusion of the play, Dan apologise to Tara: "Excuse me, Tara. I apologise if I made it my misfortune" (Tara 380). Dattani has only recently made the effort to draw attention to one of the crimes against women, despite all the clamour for the emancipation of women and their equality with men on all grounds. The way they are handled by a culture that prioritises men and male characteristics above women and female characteristics offers Dattani's, Tara, a startling new angle. "Women's representation and physical attributes are regulated, and they are frequently used as commodities, displays of physical attractiveness, and sources of charm and pleasure for males. The expression of women in the media has always been restricted." (Isanovi, 2006). The Play, however, succeeds in gripping our attention; in Dattani's play Tara's agony is short-lived in male and female towards a continuous discussion of social values as well as of the relationships between the sensitive individual and an insensitive society. On the whole, if the social noose is tighter around the woman's neck, she herself is to be held responsible for perpetuation of male subjugation. In order to establish the belief that equal treatment in the family and society is the only way to elevate the status of women and bring about their fulfilment, they still have a long way to go before they are accepted as equal beings in the prejudiced society where discrimination against women is practised from birth. Women are rarely portrayed as dynamic, significant, and proactive members of

the family and society, according to Gallagher, (1979).

One of Dattani's most cherished and well-known ideal figures is Tara. Dattani himself has made an effort to depict the feminine side of oneself, which must continually navigate a patriarchal society, in a world where men predominate. All women are intuitively aware that they still have a long way to go before they can break free, regardless of how much the world talks about woman enfranchisement and feminine emancipation. When males will see women as equal to them is a crucial subject that has to be addressed. Zia, (2007) described that the "media is biased against women in many areas which affect their images and hamper women's development in society".

We get a peek of contemporary society through Tara, which prides itself on being liberal and progressive in thought and deed. So, it is clear enough to support the masculine chauvinism that pervades modern culture. In a society where it is claimed that mothers today are educated and where 'Devis' such as Durga, Kali, Saraswati, Lakshmi, etc. exist to whom both men and women pay obeisance; it is important to distinguish between a male and a female kid. According to Lin (1998), media portrayals of women place a greater emphasis on their physical attributes and looks than on their productivity and skill levels. All claims of gender equality and giving women the same opportunity in all professions are untrue. Dattani has attempted the difficult task of bringing out all the taboo matters and putting them on display for public discussion. With his foresight, it may be claimed that new playwrights like Dattani, who have the fortitude to tackle such delicate subjects in such a vulnerable way, should be produced and supported.

Tara by Dattani paints a picture of the utter powerlessness of women in our culture. It has garnered a lot of praise from students in other nations who have identified Tara and Chandan as two facets of a particular personality. In order to find the forgotten aspect of himself, Chandan writes about Tara when he writes about himself. Yet, Dattani wanted to emphasise how a boy was preferred over a girl when he wrote the play. The unusual fact of the woman always taking a back seat to the man whenever a male and female are faced with a decision to make is also highlighted in the play Tara. In the first scene, Chandan transforms into Dan in an effort to shed his sister-killing remorse. The cruelties of his mother and

grandfather are most severe on the unfortunate soul despite the fact that he had nothing to do with his sister's untimely death. He decides to make amends because he feels some way responsible for his sister's passing. Because of this, he runs away to London, changing his name from Chandan to Dan, and lives a life of self-loathing. The child, who was deeply linked to his sister Tara, had his life ruined by the cruelty of his grandfather and his mother in addition to taking the life of the girl.

The tragic leg that led to Tara's ill health and eventual death could not be handed to the boy because it lost its usefulness after a few days. With Tara's body, the leg would have been a complete success. In addition to saving her life, it would have allowed her to become the whole persons she so desperately wanted to be more than Chandan. While Tara yearned for a full and normal existence every moment, Chandan was more content with his crippled life. She was compelled to reveal her disabled limb to Roopa and her friends, and the humiliation she endured as a result of their treatment of her was like a knife to her heart.

CONCLUSION

Dattani is well known for spotting fascinating social issues, of which this is a persistent and obvious one. The pitiful preference for the welfare of the male child while taking the life of the female child brings to a head the sense of rejection that women experience in our society. The educational plans designed to increase the literacy of women and the general population. If such differentiation is made as in Dattani's *Tara*, all the statements and proclamations are destined to be for naught after many women have achieved self-reliance in nearly all sectors. She goes insane as a result of her guilt. Bharati's pains and shame serve as a metaphor for how patriarchal society and morals harm women. Later, when Tara finds out the truth that her mother had treated her unfairly she is startled and devastated. The idea that males are inherently superior to females has been busted by Dattani. This myth explains why women should be treated less favourably than men. Although Dattani makes the claim that men and women are equal in the sight of God and nature, it is patriarchal society that has unintentionally contributed to gender inequity. The drama *Tara* addresses both forms of discrimination on an equal footing. Dramatic portrayal of gender inequality in modern Indian society is found in Dattani's *Tara*. Halder, (2009) proved that "the image of the woman holding the 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 her youth, beauty and sexual attractiveness remain intact" (62). The first is discrimination based on class, and the second is discrimination based on gender, however Dattani thinks gender issues are more obvious and serious than class issues. The cruel portrayal of female characters in the drama is caused by class struggle or prejudice, which is another manifestation of identity crises in modern society.

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