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Mahesh Dattani's 'Tara': The Perspective of Gender Discrimination

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Abstract:

Mahesh Dattani is the foremost Indian English Playwright today. He has received the Prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for his contribution to English Drama. His choice of theme is quite wide, encompassing the subjects like gender identity, homosexuality, human relationship and communalism. The present paper focuses on Gender Issue as dealt in the drama 'Tara'. English Drama was lagging behind Poetry and Fiction because of lack of audience and stage facilities. Young writers like Mahesh Dattani has imparted vigor to drama by producing forceful plays like 'Tara', Dattani writes about mean, unhappy and ugly themes of life and his plays are meant for stage Production and have universal appeal. To look son and daughter with biased and discriminating eyes has been traditional and age old custom in India and it has been tagged with rites and rituals of life. Parents think their daughter of alien home as one day she would be married and would live her husband. They have superstitious and mythical beliefs of being ultimately emancipated at the hands of their son. This fact pertaining to illusion life is optimally exploited by Dattani in this play. The drama circles around one dark secret and its revelation. The themes of gender discrimination are all dominant in the drama, Tara. The issue of cultural discrimination with women has been elaborately and comprehensively dealt by Dattani in the play wherein female is subjugated and underestimated by patriarchal society and she remains only a care taker for household utensils, children, husband, other domestic requirements and tasks of fatigue. Thus Dattani's drama showcases the stark reality of life and warrants the attention of the world towards the pressing needs of the time.

Keywords: *Indian English Drama, Mahesh Dattani, Gender Discrimination*

In this play Tara, Dattani has highlighted the issue of gender discrimination. This discrimination is prevalent amongst the urban educated middle class families living in metropolitan cities like Bangalore and Mumbai. Dattani is a spokes-person of all marginalised group. In this play he has questioned the role of society that treats the children of same parent in two different ways. The play seems to be inspired by Tennessee Williams play 'Glass Menagerie'. In 'Glass Menagerie' and 'Tara', father of the Protagonist comes from a middle class family and mother belongs to quite well off family. Just like Tennessee Chandan is too much attached to his sister. In the beginning of the Drama we find that Chandan is in London and has become a famous playwright under the assumed name of Dan. He remembers his childhood days and Tara, his sister who is no more in this world. Tara and Chandan are two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities. Dan writes Tara's story to rediscover the neglected half of him, as a means of becoming whole.

The Play is about Siamese-twins, Tara and Chandan, Co-joined at birth. The twins must be separated successfully to survive. A decision needs to be taken on who shall have third leg. An unethical and powerful decision was taken by Bharati, the mother and her powerful grandfather which leaves Tara crippled for life. Dr. Thakkar was well aware that third leg would adhere better to the female half and yet becomes a party to the decision. Mahesh Dattani admits in one of his

interview to Lakshmi Subramanyam - "I see Tara as a play about the male self and female self. The male self being preferred".

Chandan, a living person can't forget the happy moments spent with his sister and gives vent to his resentment and anguish in the drama based on his sister's childhood. Tara nurtures a grudge against society. She seems to have some kind of aversion with the outside world and her world comprises only her parents and brother. Tara's attachment to her brother and the internal anguish is expressed in her conversation with her brother, Chandan, when she says: "May be we still are, like we've always been. Inseparable. The way we started life. Two live an one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we are forced out.... and separated."

The play has successfully exposed typical Indian mindset which has from time immemorial preferred a boy child to a girl child. It is conspicuous that a decision by mother left Tara crippled for life. The surgery was carried out by Dr. Thakkar at the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital at Bombay. The parents were warned of the odds against survival and in almost all the cases of such kind, one of the twins has always died by the age of four. Mrs. Bharati Patel experiences pricking of her conscience and throughout the play she tries to overcome the guilt by showing excessive concern for her. Her guilt is so intense that she agrees to donate her kidney to her daughter so that she can survive for some more years. As the play progresses we come across another character, Roopa. Bharati imposes her sense of regret on Roopa when she bribes her to be her daughter's companion and says to her "You can watch whatever you want! just be My Tara's friend."

In this play Dattani has exposed the conventional Pattern which is being practiced in so called urban educated families that is the preference for something which is masculine. He has also unearthed the corruption prevalent in the bureaucratic society and at the same time the ethical deterioration of the medical profession. The play centers around the theme that how the physical separation manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favour the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara) results in an emotional separation between the two co-joined twins. Tara's brother was favoured; Eventually Tara leads a life of paralysed child and dies away. Chandan experiences the guilt though no fault of her, eventually escapes to London, changes her name and at the end of the play apologizes to Tara in the most moving of all lives- "Forgive Tara. Forgive me, for making it my Tragedy" Bharati suffers from pangs of guilt but Patel has no compunction for being the party of wrong decision by his wife and father in Law. He tries to accommodate his son Chandan and plans out his education and career. Bharati's father also shows his preference for Male child by leaving her property to Chandan and not a single penny to Tara. Patel's attitude is also of indifference towards Tara as he is a mute observer of everything thus tacitly subscribing to the ideology of patriarchal world. He blames his wife and father in Law in the damage done but his complicity in the whole operation cannot be denied. Dattani has highlighted that attitude for a girl child is far from satisfactory. All the claims for women's emancipation and equality are being belied by the social fabric of our society.

Thus Dattani focuses on contemporary issue of gender discrimination in an urban family but like Bernard Shaw he presents the problem but fails to provide any solution. Dattani has successfully exposed existing patriarchal stereotypes of the Indian mind set. Tara is captivating that it makes use of a rather unlikely 'Freak' case to lay bare the injustices, in the conventional Indian family, meted out to a girl child, a play that comments on a society that treats the children differently. Bharati's role in surgical operation highlights the fact that women continue to be willing instruments in the vicious circle. But Tara shows amazing resistance and fights back against the injustice. She stands strong and

does not perturb when people make fun of his physical disability. However educated and well off one is the situation of girl child is far from satisfactory and she always gets a treatment of second class citizen in home as well as in outside world, This patriarchal mindset is responsible for rising graph of female infanticide.

Conclusion:

Mahesh Dattani has symbolically and metaphorically presented harsh reality of woman having a secondary role in day to day affairs and major decisions affecting family life. Modern Society's claim of being liberal and progressive is being belied. All the propaganda of equality between Male and female are sham. Bharati and Patel are soft instruments in the hands of social system which is incapable of getting rid of shackles and innumerable chains being created and strengthened. Bharati is exceptionally conscious and becomes a soft target in our society which is incapable of maintain harmony and balance and fails to provide due share to human being. A person is respected as a human being. She is discouraged openly, not withstanding her feeling in the matter. She is agonized after coming to know that injustice was perpetrated by her mother as she is a helpless instrument in the hands of social system which has invented new shackles for female in spite of all tall claims made by pseudo egalitarian society. Economics and cultural factors have been responsible for the apathy towards girl child. All these factors combine to create a social system in which the girl child has to live and die. Tara is victimized by so called advanced social system. Identity arises becomes a chain with which a female is filtered when the question of choice between male and female arises.

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