

The psychology of patriarchy in the scientific advanced Indian society: A study of Mahesh Dattani's Tara

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ABSTRACT

Mahesh Dattani's drama Tara discusses issues of gender discrimination in society. In the present study, Dattani attempts to discuss and analyze how the play presents the marginalization of women. Through the story of twins, Tara and Chandan, Mahesh Dattani wants to tell how an Indian family likes a boy over a girl. Dattani considers gender discrimination unnatural and immoral and exposes the complex and multiple nature of the case. He portrays the play as a broad and deep integration of feminist values into the collective consciousness of society. These values are internalized by a process of socialization that makes women vulnerable to discrimination and oppression. Women work as a tool in the hands of masculinity to maintain feminine values. In the play, Tara's mother ruins her daughter's life and later suffers guilt due to her inhuman act. Their guilt leads them to insanity and also causes problems in the family. The play also touches the issue of gender-based labor and this section hinders the path of creativity and talent for both genders. She and Chandan are both different, but to be a girl, she has to suffer twice. Dattani has thus highlighted the emotional attitude of the people towards the society. The play becomes more gruesome when one explores the misuse of science and technology through the character of Dr. Thakkar.

Keywords: Mahesh Dattani, patriarchy, Indian English drama, Tara, psychology, Indian society

I. INTRODUCTION

Mahesh Dattani was born on 7 August 1958 in Bangalore. His parents were originally from Gujarat. But later he moved to Bangalore due to business and settled there. Mahesh Dattani's teenage years were extremely prosperous. He received his early education at the Christian English Medium Institute, Baldwin Secondary School in Bangalore, where literal languages were completely banned. Mahesh Dattani is a prominent English-language playwright and has the honor of becoming an English-language playwright for several plays and winning the Sahitya Academy Award in 1998.

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The subject matters in his plays have presented in a very general style, which attract the attention of the audience. Mahesh Dattani has highlighted the evils and issues prevalent in society such as child sexual abuse, incest, transgender, female plight through his plays. Through his plays, an attempt has been made to sensitize the community, depicting the various shades of life against all the evils spread in society.

II. DISCUSSION

2.1 The Psychology of Patriarchy

Dattani's play, *Tara* suggests that gender discrimination ultimately brings havoc to humanity. In this play, both genders get into trouble due to gender differences in the Patel family. This play tells us that patriarchy, which is multi-layered and deeply rooted in our collective consciousness, has entangled in social fabric of our so-called modern society. The priority of a boy's childhood is not simply due to the economic factors. Actually many other factors also make their significant contribution to this priority and biased decision such as social, religious, and other factors. The financial and political power of the Patel family is obviously reflected in this play. As a social organization, this family is very loving and caring and supportive of its members and Tara is not an economic burden for this family, yet it reflects the priority of Chandan in family, which is more in this society, refers complex nature of this moderated and scientific Indian society:

Tara is thrilled that she does not use the 'cynical' case to address the injustice done to girls in a traditional Indian family, a play that comments on a society that shares children differently. And as usual, the conservative comes in friendly costumes, covering the ugly truth. Patel, on the face of it, looks like the ideal parent that special children like Tara and Chandan need to survive - in fact, they have survived because of their devoted parents. But there are other things which need to be disclosed. (Chaudhary, 2005: p. 38).

It is unfortunate that in Indian society there is pre-defined role based on gender. Patriarchal values require men and women to stick to their prescribed roles. Playing gender roles in other tasks can cause embarrassment. Mahesh Dattani in the play seeks to overcome the separation of roles through the characters of Tara and Chandan. In the play, Chandan prefers to be a writer while Tara wants to pursue a career like her parents. This goes against the pre-defined trends of Indian society. This unwanted situation makes Patel angry with his wife and accuses her of turning (Chandan) into a sister and teaching him how to weave! (Dattani, 2000: p. 350) This division of labour can affect not only women but also men. It can put a burden on men and limit their interest and talent. Further, this is the great irony of this patriarchal society that women play an important role in supporting discrimination with women. In this play, a woman favors a boy during surgery. Their desire proves that in the patriarchal structure, the biased value of the male has a profound influence on a woman's psyche because of prevailed social values and norms in Indian society. In the patriarchal Indian society, a woman acts as another tool of patriarchy against another woman. Patel's secret revelation about surgery decision in these lines tells the real psychology in Indian society:

A scan showed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl. Your mother asked for a reconfirmation. The result was the same. The chances were better than the leg would survive ...on the girl. Your grandfather and mother had a private meeting with Dr. Thakkar. I wasn't asked to come. That same evening your mother told me of her decision. Everything will be done as planned. Except- I couldn't believe what she told me that they would risk giving both legs to the boy. Maybe I had protested more strongly! (Dattani, 2000: p. 371)

After the failure of surgery, Bharati is full of guilt as she has spoiled the life of her daughter. She tries to overcome this guilt feeling by giving excessive love and care to Tara. Her concerns are explicit when she says, "Yes. I plan for her happiness. I mean to give her all the love and affection which I can give. It's what she...deserves. Love can make up for a lot." (Dattani, 2000: p. 349) Her guilt feeling makes her mentally disturbed. The quarrels between husband and wife also increase leading to tension in the family. She tries to lessen her guilt by transferring blame to her husband and proving that she loves Tara more than he does. Mr. Patel remarks, "You know she loves you. You're sure of that. Don't make her choose between us, for God's sake! You are ruining her life because you are sick. I want to help you, Bharati, please allow me to help you." (Dattani, 2000: p. 335) Bharati even bribes Roopa to play with Tara. Roopa says:

And to think I pitied you! Oh! I think you are disgusting! I only come here because your mother asked me to. No, she didn't ask me, she bribed me to be your best friend. Yes, your loony mother used to give me things.... Now that she's finally gone crazy; I guess she won't be giving me much. So goodbye. (Dattani, 2000: p. 369)

Her guilt drives her to insanity. The sufferings and guilt of Bharati show how women suffer in the patriarchal system and values. Later when Tara learns the truth that she was discriminated against by her mother, she gets shocked and emotionally broken.

Dattani deconstructs the myth that Nature and God have made males superior to the female. This myth justifies the subordination of women against men. Dattani tries to assert that male and female are equal in the eyes of Nature and God, but it is the patriarchal society which has artificially created gender inequality.

2.2 The Cult of Gender Differences

In this paper, Mahesh Dattani's play *Tara* has been chosen and simultaneously analyzed the evils spread in society. Mahesh Dattani has put the issues of atrocities on women in front of the society in the play *Tara*. The play *Tara* vehemently shows how women are discriminated in society. The play was first staged on 23rd October, 1990 in London by the group at Bangles Memorial Hall, Bangalore. The two major characters of the play, Chandan and his sister Tara remember their childhood. Chandan as a boy has tried to uncover the current patriarchal mindset of society. Being a girl, Tara focuses on an emotive part. The play shows a cruel mother and grandfather manipulating their physical isolation to favor the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara). Tara is a very feudal girl in this play, who was not even given opportunities that was altered to her brother.

Although very cunning, he is devastated, dies and Chandan escapes to London and starts changing his name and tries to suppress the guilt he felt at the death of his sister with a personal history. (Dattani, 2000: p. 319)

Mahesh Dattani denies discrimination in man and woman in his binary concept. He challenges the prevailed notion that man is better than woman and claims that naturally, both masculinity and femininity are part of personal identity. The concept of Ardhanarishwar in Indian mythology also supports an approach in which gender-based contempt and discrimination become unnatural and immoral. In this play, Tara and Chandan are twin children representing two sides of woman and man. This means that both women and men are equal to humans. Further, immoral surgery that took place symbolizes the separation of man and woman with Chandan's side representing a higher position than Tara's. Tara has the appropriate comment

and me. Maybe we still are. Like we always have been. Inseparable. The way we started in life. Two lives and one body, in a comfortable womb. As long as we were forced... and separated. (Dattani, 2000: p.325)

Gender plays an important role in building a society. In this society, men and women have to play their roles separately and they play these roles daily during their life. However, men are rated higher than women based on the superiority of their roles. In the play *Tara*, Mahesh Dattani portrays that Chandan in the Patel family is asked to support the business and Tara is expected to continue in her household chores. That is, the division of functions on the basis of gender is one of the root causes of discrimination in society.

2.3 Scientific Developed India and Patriarchy

The play *Tara* begins with the claim of Chandan representing scientific progress, social and cultural progress. Here it can be explained that despite heavy scientific and social progress one can observe imbalances and lack of coordination among them. The problem lies in both cultural progress and scientific and technological progress. However, the nature of the problem is different in both cases. To ensure balanced overall inclusive growth and development, scientific and technological progress must be combined with cultural progress and vice versa. The parish is primarily concerned with medical science and the unethical behavior of the physician. It sheds light on some mysteries of medical practice. There are many things that do not fall into the public domain.

Mahesh Dattani attempts to portray Thackeray's character as a physician with a sense of hope — one who can survive as a creator and destroyer. It shows his control and power. He was given a high level on stage to show his authority and control the plot. Doctors are representatives of modern science and technology which play an important role in contemporary society. The kind of science and technology Indian society possess that has no direct impact on our social and moral life. The virtues of scientific innovations, which may be used to create utopian society by our doctors, had corrupted by money mindedness and lust for better life. These so-called scientific inventions have nullified the social fabric and rhythms of society. This groom reality of Indian society tells the real status of doctors in India. It is unfortunate that these doctors most of time works for money and not for service. Doctors are important for and civilized society and country. To emphasize their importance, Dattani decided to retain the character of Doctor Thackeray throughout the play. But reality is something else.

Dr. Thakkar represents the scientific knowledge that has also become a tool in the hands of patriarch for oppression and subjugation of women. Dattani shows how various social institutions contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality and discrimination, making them pervasive and deep-rooted. But he considers gender inequality inhuman and unethical. Dan considers injustice against Tara an unnatural sin:

She deserves something better. He never got a fair deal. Not even by nature. Neither of us did. Perhaps God never wanted us to separate. Luck wishes for strange things.... But God doesn't always get what he wants. The struggle is the cruelty of life. On the one hand the duality of Death between God and nature and wonderful on the other hand Dr. Thakker. (Dattani, 2000: p. 330)

Both Tara and Chandan are physically challenged. Both feel marginalized on account of this, but being a girl, Tara is doubly marginalized. In a patriarchal society, physical beauty is valued more than her intelligence or inner beauty. Dattani exposes double standards of society showing how society discriminates between two physically challenged persons on the basis of gender. This double standard is reflected when Bharati says:

It's all right when you are young. It is all very cute and comfortable when he makes a funny comment. But let him grow up. Yes, sandalwood. The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you - but not him! Oh, the pain when he sees himself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable. And what about forty and fifty! Oh God! (Dattani, 2000: p. 348-49)

Chandan feels inferiority complex due to his physical deformity. He feels, "They are not the ugly ones. We are. Horrible one-legged creatures." (Dattani, 2000: p. 369) However, Tara, a strong and sensitive girl, faces the girl bravely and even pushes his hesitant brother to participate in mainstream society with confidence and shows his worth, "You are afraid. Afraid of meeting new people. People who don't know you. Who won't know how clever you are? You are afraid they won't see beyond you." (Dattani, 2000: p. 361)

The discrimination against women starts from the mother's womb. Women's fantasy and female child murder cases are common in Indian society. A girl is considered a burden on parents financially, emotionally and socially which leads to the murder of a girl child. The play brings forth this point through Roopa's remarks, "Since you are an assistant, I'll tell you. Maybe it's not true. But I heard this. In the old days, Patel was sick of getting the girl innocent - you know the dowry and the things like that - so they threw them into the milk." (Dattani, 2000: p. 349)

Dattani has smartly used a multi-level set in the play. The lowest level represents the house of Patel's. On the highest level, there is a chair in which Dr. Thakkar remains seated throughout the play. His presence represents the unethical act of surgery which haunts and affects the lives of Patel family members. He becomes a part of the partisan decision in agreeing to give the leg to Chandan despite the leg medically suits more to Tara.

Dattani uses his characters finely to portray the psychology of Indian social norms. His art of characterization, in this light, can be said remarkable in the play *Tara*. His characters seem authentic due to his deep understanding of society and human psychology. This is one of the reasons that the audience/readers feel connected to his plays. "Mahesh Dattani's plays have variety, and his themes are of contemporary interest. He has dived deep into the human heart and re-created characters with authenticity and a sense of liveliness." (Das, 2008: p. 123)

III. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it is conceivable to say that Dattani has successfully negotiated with the questions of gender, disability, the family and self-identity in the play. The play has got success all over the world and is one of the most loved works of him. Taking an unusual subject of conjoined twins, he realistically touches various issues related to gender discrimination. He presents a bitter reality of society without being didactic and touches various themes with a sensitive heart. The play highlights the light of marginalized women in the male-dominated society. Erin Mee Comments, “Dattani sees *Tara* as a play about the gendered self, about coming to terms with the feminine side of oneself in a world that always favors what is ‘male’; but many people in India see it as a play about the girl child.” (Dattani, 2000: p. 320).

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