

Tear off the Mask from the Faces: The Politics of Society in Mahesh

Dattani's *Tara*

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Abstract

The word politics is related to power. The power is applied to the benefit of society. But now the black hand of politics is used for only the benefit of the particular class of society depriving the other class. This paper deals with the unveiling of the mask of suppression of woman under the male society. Women in society are treated as backward class as they have no right to get equal right justice from the head of society. Society creates a barrier to woman to remain within four walls of ignorance deprive of the light of education. Such kind of women oppression and deprivation are made vivid by Mahesh Dattani's play *Tara* where Tara, a girl is deprived of her right through surgical intervention because of the politics of male dominating society. This political intervention raised the development of a complex series of events and vivified the black hole in the constitution of male dominating society. My purpose in this paper is to highlight the politics of male preference over female child and to unveil black cover of biased and corrupt society through the play. In the present paper I focus my microscopic point of light on the character Tara, a representative of deprived female society, to point out the macroscopic problem prevalent in our society.

Keywords- *Suppression, Oppression, Deprivation, Corruption, Blind Politics*

Mahesh Dattani, a revolutionary playwright always protests for the aggrieved, marginalised and unprivileged sections of society like eunuchs and physically challenged. His pen always fights for the deprived and socially and economically suppressed and backward class. Basically, his play is heavily charged with socio-political, emotional, physiological and psychological issues. He has skilfully focussed his powerful lens camera on the theme of gender discrimination and maltreatment of female by male and degraded conventional custom of society in his play, *Tara*. He points out the

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black hole found in the system of society and it lays hidden deep in the blood of its people. *Tara* is a poignant play of two acts about a boy and a girl named Chandan and Tara respectively who are Siamese twins separated physically when they were infants. In spite of unjustified and manipulated division done against the law of nature, they are emotionally attached and united with each other. Through the prime characters of Chandan and Tara, Mahesh Dattani delineates the mental agony through the voice of Dan. Dan is the old and agonised form of young Chandan who discovered his hidden compunctions and the pangs of Tara's psyche after her death.

The whole story is narrated from the perspective of Dan and in conversation with Dr. Thakkar who had operated on Chandan and Tara. Dan exposed his past life through flashback where past and present fused together, telephonic conversations, old newspaper cuttings, snippet from a television interview with Dr. Thakkar – all make up the action of the play. The play begins from the end and the exposition is through the meta-theatrical dimension. The narrative is non-linear and the play is predominantly a recall of the memory. It moves back and forth in time and arrives at the starting with a point. The narrator is old Chandan who is writing about a play about his twin sister Tara. Chandan and Tara are joined together from breastbone to pelvic region, and they had only three legs. They 'looked like two babies hugging each other'; 'Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb' (Batra 5). But necessity separated them from each other yet they have a bond in heart. The hidden politics of male biased society makes a cruel rule against the girl as she was deprived of having the third leg. The leg was on the side of Tara. It was discovered that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl, and the chances were better that the third leg would survive better on the girl. But it was given to Chandan by Dr Thakkar, for the greed of money and even the political pressure of Bharatir's Father. Bharatir's father has played a villainous role in the play and he is responsible for the imbroglios, gender bias and class discrimination encountered by Patel's family. He is of belief that male should always be given golden opportunity and his penchant for male chauvinism remains unabated. The wrong placement of fateful leg was the cause of Tara's ultimate death.

The leg would have been complete success with Tara's body. It would not only have saved her life but also made her a complete person which she very much desired to be more than Chandan. Chandan was more complacent with his handicapped life while Tara craved every moment for a complete and normal life. The awareness that she is a handicap and the humiliation meted out to her by Roopa and her friends when she was

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forced to show her handicapped leg to them was like a dagger jibe to her heart. (Das 52)

The luck factor and the right to get equality from the society for the woman are strangled by the demonic forces of patriarchal institution. There is a long termed hidden disease of male preference going on in our society. In the patriarchal system it is only a son who carries forward the status, prestige of parents and keeps the generation continued. Male child is considered to be the only medium of salvation for parents after their death. Life of parents is meaningless without a son. The preference for male child makes the daughter secondary to the parents of son and daughter in a family. If a family consists of son and a daughter, the girl is mostly victimised from the right of equality in every angle. Even a father considers his son to be a perfect inheritor of the property of his family and a good partner of his business. And this is also occurred in the family of Patel also. Mr. Patel prefers Chandan to Tara to continue his business successfully,

Patel: I was just thinking ... It may be a good idea for you to come to the office with me.

Chandan: What for?

Patel: Just to get a feel of it?

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

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Patel (firmly): Chandan, I think I must insist that you come.

Chandan: We'll both come with you.

Patel: No! (Batra 8)

In the field of education there is biased politics. The function of education is to remove the darkness of ignorance from mind of learner and society. It leads society to real progress. But educational politics persists in the society. There is a law for equal right of education to both man and woman in society. So Mr. Patel has to think of giving proper education to his daughter and son by the system of society. But his heart and brain works only for the future of his son not for his daughter. But he emphasises on the future plan of Chandan. Mr. Patel says "But this is certain, Chandan has to join. I have plans for him. Your Praful uncle will help him get into a good university in England" (Batra 40). He continuously and doggedly favours Chandan when it comes to giving him higher education abroad and a career. "Patel: Chandan is going to study further and he will go abroad for his studies". Through this one eyed judgement of a father like Mr. Patel hurts his daughter. She is discouraged and

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her dream is knocked by such behaviour of her biased father. Tara is more enthusiastic and full of zest and spark of life. Even though she is more talented and sharp, witty and would perform well if parents and society give her proper opportunities. Tara would have been a real star not only in Patel family but also in the society if she would be supported by family members. But today the girls in most of the time have to stoop down to the desires of their parents to see their brothers comfortably settled.

I just point out two opposite sides of society .In Indian society, the Goddesses are being worshipped like Kali, Durga, Saraswati and Laxmi to show woman as shakti . But society never thinks the woman of our society to be a power of shakti but a burden of a family to waste away the money. There are lot of programmes relating to brothers for the well-wishing of brother from the side of sisters like “Bhaifota” (a sandal wood dot is given by sister on the forehead of brother for the safety of brother from the God of Death) and Rakshabandhan (a string of flowers is tightened by sister to the wrist of her brother for his safety and the long relationship of brother and sister). Basically these festivals are for the welfare of male only but not the female. The sister always prays for the safe and healthy life of brother. But there are no such programmes of the blessing of sister from the side of the brother in society. In patriarchal society, there are no such celebrations of assurance of safety from male to female.

Tara may be born physically handicapped but she is a girl of talent, enthusiasm and spark of life. But the politics of severance is done against her, which not only made Tara handicapped but also endangered her life and consequently she met an early death. Who is responsible for her death? Is it because she was a girl? Is being a girl in the society curse? Is woman a machine of producing baby? But do not upholders of the society realise the fact that without girls and consequently women, the society come to stand still. Can a bird fly with a single wing? Of course, it is impossible to move. Likewise, a society cannot go on without women. Women are important half of society. Chandan and Tara are not only conjoined twins, but they share a unique male-female personality, Chandan the male side and Tara the female side. Together they make a force of love and communion, though separately they are weak and dependent. Tara is such a girl of the society belongs to proletariat community where the politics of bourgeois of male community always dominate over them.

Man cannot accept woman’s intellect as natural. Man always thinks that woman is inferior to man in respect of talent and intellect. Chandan is overwhelmed by her talent in the card game. Tara’s victory at the game is seen as through cheating and even Chandan is ashamed of admitting her victory. It is seen in the conversation between Mr. Patel and Chandan about the future of the business

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of Mr. Patel in the presence of Tara. Chandan considers Tara as the right business partner of his father. But it is clear in the following conversation-

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

Tara: How do you know?

Chandan: Because you always cheat at cards.

Tara: (crossly throwing her cards at Chandan) Just because I win doesn't mean cheat, okay!

Patel (firmly): Chandan, I think I must insist that you come. (Batra 8)

Tara gets hurt at the remark as it holds no truth. Even Patel ignores the future plan of Tara in spite of having talent. Like Indian woman, Tara's only address is domestic activities. Thus women and girls are trained to remain continued to kitchen and courtyard. Such barricade is created for them so that they could do nothing other than quenching the physical thrust of their husband and nursing their age old in-laws, elders, husband and children.

Woman is a great enemy of a woman only. Swami Vivekanada once said that the problem of woman could be solved by woman only. Society is being a man's world and the reins being in their hands, it is difficult to fight against in their own way. But women should cling to each other and in consolidation fight out stranglehold of the men. In the play, over excessive fondness of Bharati towards her son becomes the source of Tara's pity and her final doom. Before the separation of Siamese baby, Bharati and her father decided the whole matter. Both Bharati and her father had a personal meeting with Dr. Thakkar. Mr. Patel was excluded from the discussion at the end of which it was decided to give the third leg to the boy. If she had not shown so much preference for the male-child and had justice with her female-child then both the children have been established themselves in their own way in the world. Dattani also wants us to interpret it along the lines of social system being the culprit in the matter of cruelty to the girl children. The following conversion between Chandan and Roopa serve as on points.

Chandan: What would you do if you had to choose between a boy and a girl? Who would you choose?

Roopa: A boy definitely? (Batra 44)

There is a division of works in society scheduled for man and woman separately. There is a conversation between Tara and Chandan about the placement of woman in society. Tara said "The men in the house where deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked

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after the cave” (Batra 8). Dattani highlights the plight of women who are presumed to be suitable for the domestic domain only and their world is household world only. Men think that there are certain activities prescribed on them and women are prescribed to do different other works. Men are ridiculed for doing what they are not supposed to do. Chandan helps her mother knit but his father does not like his son doing what he considers a girl’s activity. It is clear in the following conversation

Patel: what are you two doing?

Chandan: Mummy’s knitting and I’m helping her sort out her mistake.

Patel: Let Tara do it.

Chandan: Why?

.....

Patel: Chandan, leave that damn thing alone! (Batra 31)

Thus Patel thinks household works as ‘damn thing’ that is only considered to be done by woman only. Chandan believes in cooperation and equality. He thinks the division of work as ‘unfair’. Mr. Patel represents the attitude of his generation that believes in blatant discrimination and ridicules the advocates of equality for women in society. So Patel thinks that Chandan would ‘rot’ if he stays at home.

There is a blaming quality from male side to female end naturally. It is a notion in society that man never makes any mistake but woman’s life is full of mistakes. If the children in a family make any mistake or any kind of wrong work, it is the mother who is fully responsible for the wrong deed of children. Mr. Patel always blames Bharati for his son and daughter if they do not do the work according to the wishes of their father. The nature of blaming will be clear through the conversation between Patel and Bharati.

Patel: Can’t you even look after the children?

Chandan: Look, daddy, its...

Patel: What did you do the whole day . huh? Watch video?

Bharati: I can’t think of things for them to do all the time!

Patel: But you can think of turning him into a sissy – teaching him to knit! (Batra 31)

Chandan and Tara’s grandfather was a wealthy man and influential person. He was in politics and came very close to becoming the chief minister. He is all in all in the family. His words are the last words. His will is a testament of the kind of treatment that is meted out to girls in society. It was

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he who along with her daughter Bharati perpetrated the injustice on Tara and he left all his wealth to Chandan as it is clear in the following conversation between Chandan and his father.

Patel: He (the grandfather) left you a lot of money.

Chandan: And Tara?

Patel: Nothing.

Chandan: Why?

Patel: It was his money. He could do what he wanted with it.

The hurting matter is that all the incidents happen in the presence of Tara. Even Mr. Patel never considers the heart of Tara at that very moment while his brain and heart concentrate on his son only.

There is a blind politics which corrupt the medical profession. It is a proverb that the service of a doctor is next to that of God. God gives us life on earth and Doctor cures the life from any kind of disease and gives a new life to live happily. So people believe that doctor is next to God. But the noble profession of doctor is discredited by bribe. Dr. Thakkar is a real culprit in the noble profession of service to ailing people. He is a payer of such kind of bribe. Sometimes when ordinary human beings falter, it is the doctors who show them the right path. But when doctor becomes blind by such kind of bribe, who will show the right path to common people? Bharati and her father had a private meeting with the Dr. Thakkar and they decided to take risk of giving the third leg to the boy. But it is an unethical medical practice on the part of a doctor to agree what Bharati and her father wanted. He has committed this crime in order to further his own career prospect and to enrich himself financially. But the greedy doctor forgetting his ideal profession agreed to do this heinous act because he wanted to set up a private nursing home – the largest in Bangalore. Using the influence of Bharati's father, he acquired three acres of prime land in the heart the city. Thus Dr. Thakkar belied his godly profession and this greed converted him into a bank of hoarding property only. His greed not only thwarts Tara's dreams but fills her life with dejection and depression. This depression leads her to negligence of her dream and life. This wrong decision of Dr. Thakkar is responsible for the death of Tara. This wrong action plants a seed of destruction in the family of Mr. Patel.

There is a politics in the name of the title of the play, 'Tara'. The author names the play after the female child whose identity is demoted otherwise. The woman has always been hailed in philosophy but in practice she is treated as an object to be over looked. As Virginia Woolf asserts in her 'A Room of One's Own': 'Imaginatively she is of the highest importance, practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover. She is all but absent from history'.

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The family of Mr Patel is shown as microcosmic oppressed family in our society. This kind of oppression over women is seen in every corner of our society. All types of discrimination Tara faces at the hands of her family members are results of their imprisonment of old conventions of unconsciousness that arrest their heart and head. The source of unconsciousness is the cultural convention going on for ages in society. It would be appropriately to recall what Manu, the powerful Indian sage has said about women.

In Childhood must a female dependent on her father, in youth on her husband; her lord being dead, on her sons, if she has no sons, on the near kinsmen of her husband; if she be left no kinsmen, on those of her father; if she has parental kinsmen, on the sovereign; a woman must never seek independence. (Chandra 64)

This kind of convention applied through politics in our society for ages. The freedom of thinking is being suppressed by such convention.

The cruel tragedy of Tara for her unnatural death produces a great shock in family of Patel. The separation of Tara from her natural third leg separates the bond of Patel family between husband and wife and also brother and sister. It is significant how physical separation results in family separation. Even in the mind of mother, the sense of guilt and regret is so deep that she is willing to donate her kidney to Tara so that she may survive for a few more years. She tells Chandan: "I plan for her happiness. I mean to give all the love and affection which I can give. It's what she... deserves. Love can make up for a lot" (Batra 29). On the other hand Chandan wanted to forget the whole incident and delete the whole memory relating with Tara through changing the place and name. So Chandan escaped to London, changed his name to Dan and attempted to repress the guilt over his sister's death. His compunction and anguish is so acute that, at the end of the play, we see Chandan apologised to Tara from the shocked heart, "Forgive me, Tara. Forgive me, for making it my tragedy." (Batra 60)

The characters of the play are not different from the real life. They are representatives of reality of right and wrong. Sometimes the wrong decision of a person hurts others in a family the rest of their lives. Tara is a window into our life and reveals to us that we are prey of our prejudices and system made by us. The play's theme may be "freaks among freaks". A natural freak refers to a genetic abnormality, while a made freak is a once normal person who experienced or initiated an alteration at some point in life (such as receiving surgical implants). Here both the terms can be used to describe Dan and Tara.

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The drama is not only for reading and enjoying but there is a message to society. This play is the reflection of society where one is deprived by another like wife by the husband, patient by the doctor, daughter by father, daughter by mother, grand-daughter by grand-father and overall woman by social system. In the paper I have pointed out the black hole of hypocrisy of the modern educated urban family's adherence to the conventional attitude of favouring anything that is masculine. The most important thing in the medical profession that is the pillar of a country is to reveal the deterioration of ethics in the medical profession and to expose the corruption prevalent in the bureaucratic society.

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