

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue I (April- 2019)

Maresh Dattani's *Tara*: A Critical Study of Gender and Social Discrimination

Manoj Kumar

Research Scholar

Department of English & MEL,

The University of Allahabad,

Prayagraj, India

DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2019.4.1.11

Abstract

Maresh Dattani is a well known Indian English dramatist. He was born in 1958 in Bangalore, India. He is resourceful theatre artist, a drama teacher, stage director and a good dancer. He was awarded with the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for his plays; *Final Solutions and Other Plays*. It is the first Indian dramatist who received this eminent award. Apart from this, he wrote many plays like *Dance like a Man*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Tara*, *Where There's a Will*, *Thirty Days in September*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *The Tale of a Mother Feeling Her Child*, *Complete Plays*, (it holds 8 plays), *Morning Raja*, *Collected Plays 2 Vol.*, *Collected Plays*. The themes of gender discrimination and social upheavals keep a lot of implication in his plays. He is a very strong and genuine voice of the middle class society in India. Most of the characters of his plays belong to the middle and lower class family. He deals the issues of societal construct of gender, the position of patriarchy, the dilemma and problems of homosexuals, the institution of marriage, the hypocrisy of the middle class and some other which are directly related to the middle class sensibility. There is expression of everyday events. He does not endeavour to present an unfeasible realism.

Keywords- Discrimination, Feminism, Patriarchy, Inequality

The root of drama writing is very deep in India Literature whether it is Sanskrit or Hindi or any other language and it is a very wide-ranging form of writing as well. Indian playwrights like Kalidas, Bhavbhooti, Bhas, Magh, Sudrak and Sri Harsh have presented with diverse aspects of human life in their plays. Drama has a direct relationship with human's life as distinguished playwright i.e. Bharat Muni says in his *Natyasashtra* that drama is life. No art, no craft, no learning, and no action is there which cannot be seen in the theatre. A drama needs a stage and a reactive audience upon which it depicts the ultimate reality of life. As William Shakespeare says in *As you Like It*, "all the world is stage and man and woman are merely players."

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue I (April- 2019)

Indian English plays took impact from western playwrights like Shakespeare and Henrick Ibsen. Even though some Indian playwrights took their themes from the story of the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* yet their patterns of writing play based on the English plays. During the British period, big sophisticated towns had theatres, where dramas were frequently staged. There were Bombay Amateur Theatre (1776), and Grand Road Theatre (1846) in Bombay which well known at that time. Calcutta and Madras also had theatres where European plays were regularly staged. These theatres staged plays of only English authors. C. S. Nazir was perhaps the earliest Indian to write a verse play in English. It was titled *The First Parsi Baronet* (1866). Before him, Krisna Mohan Benerji wrote his renowned drama or *The Persecuted Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of the Hindoo Society* in Calcutta in 1831.

India has a rich and mottled dramatic convention and tradition. Drama is the fifth Veda for the earliest Hindu civilization. Indian orthodox play finds no assessment with its balance anywhere in the world. This custom was engrossed into folk play in provincial languages. Our English dramatists' did not draw upon the rich and varied Indian dramatic tradition. Unfortunately, the Indian English Dramatists model was not this folk tradition but first Shakespeare, then Ibsen and ultimately Bernard Shaw. It is regarded that the men of letters like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Harindranath Chattopadhyay and Kailasam were originators of dramatic writings. Tagore's was a Bengali writer who wrote his plays in his native tongue. Kailasam took his subjects from *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat*. There are some remote exceptions like Gurucharan Das's *Larins Sahib*, Karnad's *Hayavadana*, Vijay Tendulkar's *Gasi Ram Kotwal*, Dattani's *Where There's a Will* and Dilip Hero's *To Ancher a Cloud*. These earlier works of drama have various themes but the purpose of present paper is to observe the gender discrimination in Dattani's *Tara*.

Mahesh Dattani sees *Tara* as a play about the gendered self. In fact, Tara and Chandan are two sides of the same self. Dan has to write Tara's story in demanding to write the story of his own childhood,. Dan writes Tara's story to revive the ignored half of himself, as a means of becoming whole. He writes "Forgive me, Tara. Forgive me for making it my tragedy" (CP, p.380.). Dattani, here, focuses on the family as a microcosm of society in order to dramatize the ways we are socialized to accept certain gendered roles and to give fondness to what is 'male'. The play *Tara* opens with Dan. We've already been alerted by the stage directions to the fact that this is Dan's play, for his level is the only realistic level in the play. Dan is busy typing when the play opens and addresses the audience directly instantly. We are told that he keeps reliving an experience trying to put it on paper, that he lives in London mainly to put distance between him and his past, that the play he is writing is called "Twinkle Tara" (CP, p.324.) and is composed of his memories, that what he had tried desperately to suppress so far was the fact of having had a twin sister, *Tara*, who was inseparable from him. He also talks of his freakishness, that he is a freak. In this

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue I (April- 2019)

longish soliloquy, we are made aware of the pain and anguish caused to Dan by past events, events that have to do with his twin sister, Tara. We are also told that Dan and Tara had shared one body - that they were "Siamese twins" (CP, 331).

Dattani's *Tara* questions the issues of gender bias, and is theatrical utterance of the ordeal of two Siamese twins-a boy and a girl. They are over and over again of the same sex, and they are surgically separated at birth but the surgery separated these two figures emotionally from each other. In this way the play *Tara*, contains two acts, deals with the conflicts of twins who born as a twin but separated by operation .The story of the play moves centrally around four major characters–twins named Chandan and Tara and their parents Patel and Bharati and Tara who is in her teens is the protagonist of this play . Patel has to give up his paternal place because his parents did not accept his wife Bharati. And we may observe in the play that the surgery of twins is symbolic because it makes Tara cripple, Bharati becomes insane and Patel becomes violent. The play opens with the guilt feeling of Chandan who holds the notion that because of him his sister is not in the world and he, therefore, gives up his native place. He settled in London and altered his name from Chandan to Dan and lived an isolated life. His pain is so deep that anyone can't depict his agony in one or two sentences. Tara and Chandan are Siamese twins and they are conjoined from chest down. The medical report suggests that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl, and in this way the leg would have been a complete success with the body of Tara. The plan to separate them was proposed by Bharati, and her father. The family members take the decision to save the boy instead of the girl because they would like to have an heir for their family. Dr. Thakkar, the surgeon, was afraid that lest the both legs of the boy should ruin but for boy any sort of foul thing does not take place except the misfortune of Tara. Tara was left crippled, for remaining life because of this gender oriented imbalance.

Here, the playwright focuses on the consideration of Indian society that male is superior to female. Man is all in all in the family. The family members of Patel do not take attention in the endurance of Tara because she was a girl. Here, we find a clue that Dan is a ingenious being who has given up India because of shame feeling. He, now, wants to write a story of his childhood in which he has to include Tara because without the story of Tara his childhood is lame. He writes the story of Tara to trace his deserted part. To understand the traits of the society of India is not very tricky because the Indian society wants to have the inequity between boy and girl. The people hold the notion that only boy can be the owner of their assets and for them girl is other's property. This activity of the Patel's family brought severe criticism for them and this is how a girl named Roopa satirised the Patel's family thus, "the Patel's in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies- you know dowry and things like that- so they used to drown them in milk."

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue I (April- 2019)

We may also observe in this play that Mr. Patel has an anxiety for a bright future of his son and has a lesser amount of worry for the future of Tara. Hence, when he sees that Chandan is associating his mother in knitting, he is wounded up and dismayed and says-

Patel- Let Tara do it.

Chandan- It's okay.

Patel- Give it to her

Chandan- Why?

Bharati- It's all right, I'll manage. Leave it.

Chandan- I will just roll all this and...

Patel- Chandan, leave that daman thing alone! . . . I can't see you rooting at home! (*Tara*)

Mr. Patel wants to send Chandan abroad in order to have higher education but he does not pay his heed towards the well education of Tara. Even though Tara is more intelligent than Chandan, the Patel's family underestimate her talent and the father supports his son rather than his daughter. He says that-

Patel- When you have ever allowed me to make any plans for her?

Bharati- I'm stopping you from making any plans for my daughter?

Patel- Don't lie, Bharati! You don't want me to, and you know it. You have told me so a dozen times. (*Tara*)

Another commendable point for gender bias in the play is that Bharati's father left ample of amounts for Chandan while he did not provide any single penny for Tara. He was a affluent man and a politician of great repute. Tara who is very bright and sharp may realize everything in a correct manner. She understands her father's nature very well when he (her father) does not allow her to see Bharati alone in the hospital and the staff of the hospital is strictly directed to do not allow Tara to see her mother. Though Tara raises her hand against the desire of her father yet her all attempts are in vain. Finally, she says to her brother-

Tara- Chandan, will you come with me?

Patel- Chandan, you can't.

Tara- Chandan?

Patel- No, don't go!

Tara- Will you come with me or do I have to go alone?

Chandan- We'll both go.

(*Tara*)

In this way, we may observe that how keenly Mahesh Dattani depicts the story of Tara. Here, in this play, we see that the protagonist Tara is a victim of male dominated society who possesses sharp mind and great intelligence but is ignored by her own father. Not only Tara but also many women of the world are suffering from the same problem. Hence, we can say that as a dramatist Dattani aims at social alteration through the medium of drama.

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue I (April- 2019)

He is great social reformer, objectively and impartially posing the problem. He always shows both rules of the question, and his audience to think out the answer. His plays aim at social reform. In the construction of his plays he shows a fine sense of form and the best of them are the excellent stage pieces. At the surface level, the play seems to be about this in the beginning. The influence of the children's disability on the family and their own lives seems to be at the heart of the play. The problems others have accepting them for what they are -- fun-loving, wisecracking growing children - and hence their struggle for acceptance and the levels of frustration that this brings on seems to be part of the central action of the play. The strain on the parents and the effect this has on their marriage seems to complete the picture. That the family has gone through tough times seems obvious and they seem to be reeling under the continuing strain. However, the play has other paths to cross. But this does remain a major concern in the play, and Roopa's relations with them are strands that run right through the play and are exemplary of how society receives them. Towards the end of the play; the last time we see Roopa, she is shown acerbic to them, calling them freaks and holding up a poster saying "We don't want freaks."

Works Cited

- Abrams, M.H. *A Hand book of Literary Terms*. New Delhi: Cengage Learning India Private Limited. Third Indian Reprint. 2009. Print.
- Dattani, Mahesh. *Collected Plays*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India. 2000. Print.
- *Collected Plays* (Vol.2). New Delhi: Penguin Books India. 2005. Print.
- *Final Solutions and Other Plays*. Madras: Manas (Affiliated to East West Press). 1994. Print.
- Das, Vijay Kumar. *Form and Meaning in Mahesh Dattani's Plays*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors. 1997. Print.
- Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited. Fifteenth Reprint. 2005. Print.