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## GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN MAHESH DATTANI'S PLAY TARA

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The word 'gender' refers to socio-cultural definition of man and women in the society. It is the society that distinguishes them from each other and assign them their roles. Gender is seen as a behavior assigned to men and women based on their sexual difference. The birth of a boy is celebrated with love and respect whereas the birth of a girl is filled with pain and suffering. The boys are brought up to be tough and ongoing whereas the girls are expected to be shy and homebound. These are the gender differences that the society has created. Gender inequality shows adverse effect on the economic growth by preventing women from participating in various activities and thus affecting the whole society. India displays gender inequality right from its early stages which resulted in the huge gap between the position of men and women in the society.

Mahesh Dattani is a well recognized playwright in India. He was one of the first Indian playwright to win Sahitya Akademi award for his work *Final Solutions* and other plays in 1998. Through his plays, he brings out evil issues of the society such as child abuse, gender discrimination etc. Being a sensitive playwright he focuses on the lives of marginalized sections of the society.

This paper focuses on the marginalization of women in the play *Tara*. The play throws light on the discrimination of a girl in the society. The play was first performed as *Twinkle Tara* by Playpen Performing Arts Group at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bengaluru on October 23, 1990. Dattani deals with the social issues that are prevailing in our society. The play begins in London. Chandan recollects the memories of his sister Tara, and speaks about the current patriarchal setup in India.

Tara centers on the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins following the discovery that their physical separation was manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favour the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara). Tara, a feisty girl who isn't given the opportunities given to her brother (although she may be smarter) eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan, and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister's death by living without a personal history. (Mee319)

The play focuses on the typical biased Indian society. The protagonist of the play Tara becomes the victim of social prejudices. She has all the qualities to defy age-old rituals and to emerge as a new women. Chandan is Tara's twin brother. They both are conjoined and were surgically separated. Chandan loves and cares Tara very much and he understands her potential and ability. Chandan represents the new generation of male society. Bharathi, the mother of the twins is a traditional woman who inherits both her father's property and his arrogance. She is the one who is solely responsible for the disadvantage that Tara undergoes. Bharathi compensates her guilt by showing too much love and care to Tara which leads her to hate her father Patel. This further leads to nervous breakdown resulting in Bharathi's death.

Chandan and Tara are separated through unethical surgery. They both undergo similar mental pressure where Chandan grows up and he reminiscence the psyche of his sister Tara. Tara dies in shock after

knowing her mother was behind all the conspiracy of the unethical surgery with the help of her grandfather. Eventhough, Chandan physically survives this trauma, he is unable to lead a peaceful life. So he moves to London creating a new identity for himself and he begins to write his autobiographical play.

Chandan is favored more than Tara which represents the higher position of men than women in the society. Tara rightly says, "And me. Maybe we still are. Like we've always been. Inseparable. The way we started in life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out... And separated (Collected Plays 325). Chandan and Tara face difficulties in life because of gender biased decision of their family members.

This play depicts how patriarchy has become apart of our collective consciousness and deep rooted in our society. The society gives importance to male child not because of economic status alone but also because of the other social and religious preferences. In the play, Patel family occupy a higher status in the society. The duty of the family members is to provide equal love and care to the children which the Patel's failed to do. This is clearly visible as they consider Tara as a burden and did an unethical surgery giving preference to Chandan. This shows the complex nature of patriarchy that is still prevailing in the society.

Tara is enthralling in that it makes use of a rather unlikely 'freak' case to lay bare the injustices in the conventional Indian family meted out to the girl child, a play that comments on a society that treats the children who share the womb differently. And as always, the stereotype comes in a friendly garb, covering the ugly truths. The Patels, on the face of it look like the ideal parents that special children like Tara and Chandan need to survive-indeed they have survived because of their dedicated parents. But there are more things that need to be revealed. (Chaudhuri 38)

Stereotyped gender plays a major role in the social construction of gender. Both male and female are given different roles to perform their day to day activity. The roles assigned to men are considered to be important than that of a woman. In considering the roles played both by men and women, men are held high in status when compared to women. Dattani throws light on this issue when Patel asks Chandan to help him in his business and expects Tara to do the household chores. This gender based division of labour is the main cause for the gender discrimination. Tara aptly quotes, "Not at all. The men in the house were deciding on whether they are going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave"(Collected Plays 328).

In the play *Tara*, Dattani tries to deconstruct the roles of male and female through Chandan and Tara. Chandan shows his interest in doing feminine roles. Chandan states looking at his father: "I haven't decided yet. I might stay back in the cave and do my jigsaw puzzle."(Collected Plays 328). Chandan aspires to become a writer whereas Tara dreams of becoming an entrepreneur. Patel scornfully accuses Bharathi for "turning him (Chandan) into a sissy-teaching him to knit!" (Collected Plays 350).

In the patriarchal society, women play a major role in discriminating other women. In the play, Bharathi was biased and she preferred male child during the surgery. This proves that the patriarchal values of preferring male child is deeply rooted in the psyche of women. Patel reveals the secret to Tara about the decision of the surgery.

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 that 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. May be I had protested more strongly!. (Collected Plays 378)

After the failure of the unethical surgery, Bharathi is filled with the sense of guilt for spoiling her daughter's life. She tries to show too much love and care to her daughter and 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" (Collected Plays 349). Bharathi becomes mentally disturbed because of the guilt and also because of the tension in the family. She blames her husband and proves that she loves Tara more than Patel. Patel says, "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" (Collected Plays 353). Bharathi is mentally disturbed because of the guilt and she goes to the extent of bribing 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" (Collected Plays 369). Bharathi's guilt drives her to madness. Later when Tara comes to know that her present state is because of her mother, she is emotionally broken and later she dies. The revelation of the past proves fatal for their love. Tara shows hatred and bitterness through her words: "And she calls me a star!" (Collected Plays 379). Discrimination for Tara continues even after her death. Chandan fascinates in writing about his own tragedy but as Dan apologizes to Tara: "Forgive me, Tara. Forgive me for making it my tragedy" (380). "This is thus a play about the injustice done in the name of construction of gender identities – this hierarchisation and demarcation of roles as much harm to men as to women. Dan carries as much harm of the unfair burden this imposes as Tara" (Prasad 141).

The scientific knowledge acts as a tool in the hands of patriarchal society to subjugate women. Various social institution contributes to gender inequality and Dattani considers this to be unethical and inhuman. Dan speaks about the injustice done to Tara:

She deserves something better. She never got a fair deal. Not even from nature. Neither of us did. May be God never wanted us to be separated. Destiny desires strange things.... But even God does not always get what he wants. Conflict is the crux of life. A duel to the death between God and nature on one side and on the other-the amazing Dr. Thakkar. (Collected Plays 330)

Both Chandan and Tara are marginalized because of their physical disability. But Tara is doubly marginalized being a girl. Dattani throws light on how the society discriminates people with physical disability as well as gender basis. This is reflected in Bharathi's words:

It's all right while she is young. It's all very cute and comfortable when she makes witty remarks. But let her grow up. Yes, Chandan. The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you-but not her! Oh, the pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable. And what about forty and fifty! Oh God!. (Collected Plays 348-49)

Chandan feels inferior because of his physical disability. He feels, "They are not the ugly ones. We are. Horrible one-legged creatures"(Collected Plays 369). Tara a strong and sensitive girl forces her reluctant brother to participate in the society with confidence: "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 your" (Collected Plays 361).

The inequality of women begins in mother's womb itself. Female infanticide is common in our society and the girl child is considered to be burden for the parents. These are brought out through the words of Roopa: " Since you insist, I will tell you. It may not be true. But this is what I have heard. The Patels 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" (Collected Plays 349).

Dattani's characters makes the readers connected to the play. "Mahesh Dattani's plays have variety, and his themes are of contemporary interest. He has dived deep into human heart and re-created characters with authenticity and a sense of liveliness (Das 123)". With the theme of unusual subject of conjoined twins, Dattani beautifully brings out the tale of discrimination. He brings in the bitter reality of society by highlighting the tale of marginalized women in the patriarchal society. Eric Meeputsforth: "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 India see it as a play about the girl child"(320).

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