

Women and Disability: Representation of Double Marginalization in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

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Abstract

Tara, a drama by Mahesh Dattani, is about gender discrimination in society. The purpose of this paper is to analyze and explain how Dattani portrayed the issue of alienation of women in the drama. The play emphasizes how an Indian family favours a male child over a female child through the touching narrative of conjoined twins, Chandan and Tara. Discrimination based on gender is immoral and unjust, according to Dattani, who emphasizes the complexity and multidimensionality of the issue. The drama illustrates the insidiousness and profound embeddedness of patriarchal beliefs in the collective psyche of society. Women imbibe these values as a result of socialization that make them more prone to exploitation and discrimination. Women serve as an instrument to maintain the patriarchal norms. In the drama, Tara's mother Bharati, ruins her daughter's life and suffers from remorse because of her monstrous deed. Chandan and Tara both are physically challenged but as a girl, she faces double marginalization. Dattani also highlights society's insensitive behaviour towards persons with disability.

Keywords: *Gender, Disability, Marginalization, Patriarchal Structure, and Conjoined Twins.*

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The term Indian film refers to a wide notion that encompasses all of India's culture and myths. Drama in India has a long history dating back to the Vedic period with Bharat Muni's *Natyashastra*. British and western theatrical patrons established Indian English drama in India. Indian English drama, both before and after independence, was notable for its quality and number. Despite the fact that Indian English theatre was merely a parody of British dramatists, it elicited genuine emotions and cultural ideas. As a result, a few dramatists such as Girish Karnad, Manjula Padmanabhan and Mahesh Dattani, hit milestone of success in Indian theatre with promising futures in both Indian and international theatre. Mahesh Dattani made a significant appearance in the field of drama when Indian English play was striving for subsistence and recognition. The accomplishment of the Sahitya Academy Award in 1998 for his play *Final Solutions* reinforced his cause even more. Before Dattani's rise to prominence on the theatre, Indian English drama was limited to various stages of emulation and adaptation. His plays became diversified in themes, subjects, skill, design, craft, form and styles as a result of his exploration, research and creativity with the existing core of the plays. Indian English drama, which was on the edge of extinction, has been nurtured in a wholesome manner under his canopy. His plays have received critical recognition both in India and overseas. "At last, we have playwright who gives sixty million English speaking Indians an identity," Alyque Padamsee said of him ("The Utterly Urban").

Tara (1990) by Mahesh Dattani deals with societal problems, in part, through addressing pertinent queries of how gender and disabled identities interact in an Indian environment. *Tara* is the narrative of conjoined twins Tara and Chandan who were clinically parted from each other as

infants, resulting in Tara's physique being weaker and her death as a youngster.

Tara, Dattani's third play, was written in 1990 and it was the most frequently produced drama. It was once known as 'Twinkle Tara.' Although it is a story about teenagers, the concerns are grave. It is staged in various places, including academic institutions, private groups. In New Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai, *Tara* was a breakout hit. In the play *Tara*, Dattani addresses the issues related gender and disability and becomes the voice for all the disadvantaged communities.

Dattani is thought to have chosen artistic style to depict the present urban India's ongoing effort to define himself in domestic, Societal and cultural arenas. Almost all of Mahesh Dattani's plays, including *Tara* are about this battle. The play depicts the challenges, successes, and disappointments of an Indian family with traumatized children and their survival. It highlights traditional Indian stereotypes, which always prioritized a boy over a girl. Tara is Dattani's perfect character who has been extensively praised and presented in a variety of ways. According to some reviewers, Dattani attempted to portray the feminine nature of oneself in this play, which must always peace with a system that prefers male in a society that is also governed by men.

The play *Tara* shows injustice of society towards women. It is also about the unjustness to men, particularly Chandan. It begins with Chandan transforming into Dan to free himself of the remorse of killing his sister. Despite the fact that the young child Chandan had nothing to do with Tara's sad demise, he is burdened by the inhumanity of his mother and grandfather. According to some critics, this play also refers to the agony of forceful division and its enduring bad repercussions which manifest in recurrent communal violence and uncertainty in our concepts

of modernization and our views on the social reality of Indian family and community.

As reported by some experts, the play depicts the deep cracks and contradiction that one has learnt to accept, with almost all identification indicators- gender, religion, language, class, culture and sexuality - serving as barriers to one's self-realization. Some argue that Dattani will not overlook that the drama is about one's perceptions of normalcy and disability as well as gender. Despite the fact that the play is about the causes of specific characters and the formation of gender identity. Some critics believe it is also about family as a battleground. Relationships are complex, familism is a farce built on sacrifices and adjustment, and middle-class morality is a ruse, according to Dattani.

There are a variety of ways to approach *Tara*, but no one can refute that the central issue is how Indians differentiate between female and male offspring. Discrimination against women and female feticide have a shameful history in India. It's about science's objective barbarity and the bizarre application to which it might be put. It can be categorized as a quest for one's true self or as a reflection of one's family bonds. The researcher would like to consider it in the context of forced unity. Everyone strives for a stable life, but no one is stable.

The drama begins with a scenario that takes place in London. Chandan recounts his early childhood experiences with Tara, while also exposing society's age-old patriarchal attitude that favors a male child over a female child. Erin Mee, a theatre director explains the theme of *Tara*:

Tara is about the emotional separation that develops between two Siamese twins after their grandfather and mother tries to influence their physical separation to prefer the male (Chandan) over the girl

(Tara). Tara, a spirited young girl who is denied the same possibilities as her brother Chandan (despite the fact that she is sharper), gradually rots away and dies. Chandan leaves to London and strives to live without a past reality in order to conceal his grief over his sister Tara's demise. (319)

Dattani dismantles the gender binary of man versus woman. Man is supercilious to woman in this paradigm. Dattani appears to refute this concept claiming that femininity and masculinity are innate aspects of a person's identity. In Indian tradition the idea of *Ardhanarishwar* validates this view point. Therefore, discrimination based on gender is undesirable and immoral. The Siamese twins Chandan and Tara symbolize two faces of a self-feminine and masculine. It signifies that man and woman are equal in the eyes of humanity. The unlawful operation represents the split of feminine and masculine in the drama. The preference for Chandan indicates a man's dominant position than women. Tara properly comments:

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. (325)

Tara, according to Dattani, is a drama about the gendered self and it appears to suggest that differentiation based on gender eventually causes calamity to humanity. The Patel family's gender prejudiced choice has caused problems for both Tara and Chandan. Patriarchy is shown to be prevalent multi-dimensional and firmly ingrained in the social system in the play. It has become imprinted in our collective conscience. The predilection for male child is not just associated with economic considerations. Culture, so-

ciety, religion and other variables also play an important role in this decision. The Patel family is stable both politically and financially in the drama *Tara*. As family is a social establishment, it is meant to cater affection, concern, love and comfort to its members. Tara is not a financial strain on the family. Despite this, the family prefers Chandan during operation that demonstrates the multi-layered character of patriarchy in the social structure. Asha Chaudhuri comments:

Tara is enthralling in that it makes use of a rather unlikely 'freak' case to lay bare the injustices 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)

Stereotypical gender roles perform a significant part in the social formation of gender. Females and males are allocated different duties, which they are expected to fulfil in their daily lives. The duties that are expected to be undertaken by men are regarded crucial. Males are given a higher stature than females because of the excellence of their roles. In the play, Dattani addresses this problem when Patel invites Chandan to help him with his trade while expecting Tara to stay at home. One of the major causes of gender discrimination is sex-based division of work. Tara utters, "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" (Dattani 328). Female and male are supposed to continue their allocated duties solely in patriar-

chal standard. Taking on another person's gender role may bring humiliation. Through the roles of Chandan and Tara, Dattani aims to dismantle this division of duties in the drama. Chandan is fascinated by what are regarded as feminine duties. Chandan tells, "I haven't decided yet (looks at Patel). I might stay back in the cave and do my jigsaw puzzle" (328). Chandan aspires to be an author, and Tara appears to be more interested in pursuing a job similar to her dad's. Patel gets enraged and blames his wife of "turning him (Chandan) into a sissy-teaching him to knit!" (350). Both female and male get influenced by this distribution of labour. It also places a strain on men, limiting their abilities and interests.

Women, ironically, perform a vital part in continuing discrimination towards women in patriarchal system. During surgical procedure, Bharati, a woman, prefers the male infant in the play. It demonstrates that in patriarchal structure, male-biased values are firmly internalized by female psyche as a result of social upbringing. Therefore, women in this system, becomes an instrument used against other women in a destructive manner. Patel uncovers the truth about his judgment in regard to 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! (378)

Bharati is filled with guilt after the failure of the operation since she has ruined her daughter Tara's life. She makes effort to get rid of her wrong decision by lavishing Tara with extreme care, love and attention. Bharati 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" (349). Her guilt is causing her emotional turmoil. Arguments between Patel and Bharati are also on the rise, causing domestic stress. Bharati tries to reduce her remorse by accusing Patel and showing that she values Tara much more than her father. She also pays off Roopa to become Tara's best friend. Her guilt is making her insane. Bharati's struggle and grief reveal how women are affected by patriarchal attitudes and ideals. Tara is started and mentally shattered when she knows the truth about her mother's discrimination.

Dattani's depiction of physical impairment advocates the belief that these disabilities replace the textual narration as a common aspect of portrayal and a symbolic technique. These discourses focus on the symbolic power of disability rather than on the social and political implications of impairment. On the contrary, disability makes it easier for the playwrights to incorporate issues of marginalization into the play. The concept of disability dissipates in *Tara*, allowing sympathy to move to other causes. As a result of its ubiquity, disabled individuals have been marginalized, and primary core factors of difference have taken on a more universal approach. The portrayal of disability by Dattani is also advocated by Sharon Snyder and Davis Mitchel who have titled this *Narrative Prosthesis*. It is mentioned that

disability has an unusual literary history.
Between the social marginality of people

with disabilities and their corresponding representational milieus, disability undergoes a different representational fate. While racial, sexual and ethnic criticisms have often founded their critiques upon a pervasive absence of their images in the dominant culture's literature ... images of disabled people abound in history. (52)

The reality of disability in India, which is distinguished by a multifaceted amalgamation of class, gender, and caste issues, is frequently overlooked in Western disability studies. The key to driving disability studies and research toward an understanding of the pluralities that characterize the experience of disability in India is feminism, with its emphasis on much oppression (Ghai 53). Furthermore, studies and associated discourse on disabled women's lived experiences in India are still in their infancy.

In the extrapolation of the available statistics, they have indicated that disabled women are marginalized much more than the disabled men. Disability legislation also adopts a gendered approach, with the result that out of twenty-eight chapters outlining various issues, not a single one addresses the problems of disabled women. This approach reflects the general attitude toward disabled women in India in general. In Hindi the phrase, 'Women with disabilities' (Ek to ladki oopar se aapahij) means, 'one a girl, and that too disabled.' This intermingling of disablement and gender marks the reality of a woman with disability in India (Ghai 53).

Chandan and Tara both are physically handicapped. Both feel alienated as a result of this, but Tara is twice discriminated as a girl. External appearance is regarded more than intellect or internal beauty in patriarchal society. Dattani reveals the hypocrisy of society by exposing how society differentiates between two disabled

people based on their gender. The hypocrisy is displayed when her mother remarks:

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! (Dattani 348-49)

Tara's survival is doubtful from the moment she is born. Accepting Tara as normal will be impossible once she reaches adulthood. Tara is a passionate and clever young lady. The other girls frequently labelled Tara as monstrous. She defies the social structure by using the same instrument that level her as such. When Tara initially joins Prema and Rupa, she understands they really wish to look her prosthetic leg. The social fabric of the established order is disrupted when Tara displays her prosthetic leg to the girls. Tara does not hide or cover up her impairment; instead, she embraces it. The image of Tara and her prosthetic leg has a lot of power, and her move set a new law of the being, over and against the girls attempt to tear herself down into its pieces.

In the play *Tara*, Dattani has expertly addressed the issues related to disability, gender, self-identity and family. The drama has been a worldwide success and is one of his well-known works.

Dattani effectively focuses on numerous themes related to gender stereotyping by using the unique theme of conjoined twins. He portrays a harsh truth of society without being preachy, and he touches on a number of topics with compassion. In a different manner, this drama brilliantly portrays the predicament of underprivileged women in patriarchal society.

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