

## GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE PLAY OF MAHESH DATTANI: TARA

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In the present paper, it is proposed to study mainly the dramas of Mahesh Dattani with the reference to the Gender bias and Social consciousness in Indian social system. Contemporary Indian English drama portrays images of protagonists confined to rigid tradition and orthodoxy. The drama produced after independence show that the western culture has been partly assimilated by Indians.

In this study, therefore an attempt will be made to scrutinize Mahesh Dattani's drama to show how he is conscious of the social system and that have come up in the contemporary India. The study is based on the hypothesis that Mahesh Dattani's drama effectively depicts the gender discrimination and social consciousness of modern India. Today's modern Indian drama highlights on the some current social issues and the real life problems. The purpose of paper here is to discuss Mahesh Dattani's "*Tara*" (1990). and *Dance Like Man* His plays deal with the social and contemporary issues Dattani's plays are about the marginalized sections of our society: women, gays, and hijras (eunuch). His plays raise question of discrimination, including, gender discrimination and homosexuality. His plays not only bring up gender issues and the liberty fixed to women in a patriarchal society, but also they deal with gender biases and prejudices which influence the lives of girl-children even amongst middle class educated society.

Mahesh Dattani is one of leading and contemporary playwrights in English. A director, actor, and writer, in 1986, he produced first play ' *Where There's a Will*'. There are several plays written by him as "*Tara*", "*Night Queen*", "*Final Solutions*", "*Dance like a Man*" and many more. His plays deal with the social and gender issues. One of his films "*Dance like a Man*" has won the award for the best picture in English awarded by the "National Panorama". His plays focus actual life problems and sometimes cause controversy. Dattani's plays are "about the marginalized sections of our society: minorities, women, gays, and hijras (eunuch). Dattani once said:

The function of the drama, in my opinion, is not merely to reflect the malfunction of the society but to act like freak mirrors in a carnival and to project grotesque images of all that passes for normal in our world. It is ugly, but funny.<sup>1</sup>

"*Tara*" is a play deals with the theme of gender discrimination and social consciousness in modern society. "*Tara*" is not only the story of the hero of the play, but it is the story of every girl child born in society whether urban or rural. *Tara* is a touchy play which shows the partiality towards the male child in highly educated and an upper middle class Bangalore society. The story of the play is about the twins who are born with three legs and blood supply to the third leg was from the girl baby. Father, mother of the twins and doctor decides to fix the third leg on to the male baby's body so as to make male baby complete. The decision was taken to make male child physically fit and complete was not on the basis of medical ground but was influenced by the grandfather, a politician. Male domination reflected in the role of grand father who donates all his property and wealth to the male child. In our society, male child is considered as an asset and female child the liability. This is mainly due to certain misconceived religious beliefs and the problem of dowry. This discrimination against the girl child by family member shows attitude and mentality of the society. It is tragic that the mother is also support in the act of attaching the third leg to the

boy's body. It is our cultural heritage that boy is always superior to girl. The common method of obtaining higher death rate for girl children than boys is neglecting the girl child during early childhood.

"Tara" is a play that raises questions to the society that treats the children of the same womb in two different ways. It is a play about two children, joined together at the hip. One is a boy and the other is a girl, they can be divided only surgically. The partiality and injustice starts here. It shows that a woman herself is the enemy of women. The mother prefers the male child and thus strengthens the chain of injustice. The first thought behind selecting the male child is, he will carry forward the family name. It is an example of child abuse prevalent in the Indian society. Girl is an unwelcome intrusion, the cause of sorrow when she is born, a burden for parents who have to amass dowry. Every girl child born in an Indian family suffers from some kind of exploitation and if there is a boy child in the family, the mistreatment is very much noticeable as consciously or unconsciously all the privileges are offered to the son. This is because getting dowry is regarded as a male privilege. Erin Mee rightly pointed out that:

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 favours what is male...<sup>2</sup>

This play raises a few questions of discrimination, i.e. religious prejudice, gender discrimination. This play is not only deals with gender issues and the treatment of girl child in a male dominated society, but also this deal with gender biases and prejudices which still affect the lives of several girl-children even amongst educated, urban families. "Tara" is a play in two acts. It sets in London with, Chandan, a dramatist who is remembering his childhood days in the company of his sister Tara. He wants to write a story about his childhood but he has to write Tara's story. The play revolves around two twins. The play reveals a conflict between Indian families. and their traditional patriarchal mentality which has always favored a boy child to a girl child. Chandan wants to twist his grief into drama by writing about his sister's childhood. Even after their unjust and manipulated partition, which is made against the law of nature, they are emotionally united. They share the same agony, which Chandan tries to describe by writing autobiographical drama.

The root problem of discriminatory treatment being meted out to girls lies in the status of women in society. Dattani has presented the strange reality of women playing a secondary role to man. Male are seen as the providers and the role of the girls are neglected. This dirty practice is still present in some part of India. The drama also suggests supremacy of Patel when he insists that proper division should be made in the gender roles.

Tara's parents are educated even then they had made such discrimination. Bharati's father can also be considered responsible for this catastrophe. Bharati had been influenced by her father's decision Bharati is scared about the prospect of her daughter; she says:

"It's all right while she is young. It is 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! .....when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty, thirty is unthinkable and what about forty and fifty! Oh God! (349).

She also tries to show her love by the act of donating kidney to Tara, which ultimately turns useless. Dattani establishes that mother and daughter relationship proves secondary to the orders of patriarchy. Mr. Patel represents of male prejudice and domination.. He holds the supreme position in decision making of the family. Bharati has to follow his desiion. She has to accept whatever is given to her. She had favoured Chandan at the time of operation. Patel makes Bharati responsible for everything and gets an escape from his responsibilities.

Doctor represents supreme position in the play. He operates the twins, but he has done an unjust operation under the pressure of Bharati's father ,Patel . Dr. Thakkar, the god-like,

'life giver', he knows the reality. Tara was deprived of the leg,. Dattani appropriately shows that in this society it is an annoyance to be a girl. In India the male of the species is considered and treated as the first sex. This reflect worldwide phenomenon. Dattani highlights the real face of our political leader. He managed doctor is another part of corruption. Manipulation for monetary consideration or at times due to political influence has ceased to surprise many. There is a gross negligence of child patients in India. Tara realizes the real story of her physical disability during her life time. She made responsible to her mother .she cannot accept the truth. Even though she is more intelligent, and she is discouraged from the beginning of day of her life. Parents had not given proper support to Tara. This made her lose interest in life. Further, she refuses to go to college. It is significant that discrimination with Tara continues, even after her death. Chandan, who was fascinated in writing a story about his own tragedy,. Dan apologizes to Tara for doing this, "Forgive me, Tara .Forgive me for making it my tragedy." (380).

Mahesh Dattani revealed the issue of gender discrimination in this play. The social norms, economic values and cultural elements have been answerable for the inequality against the girl child. Tara is a victim of this social system, which controls the minds and actions of the people. In Indian society, woman is variously presented as a mother, wife, daughter and sister even goddess. Manusmriti and Dharma shastras have laid down specific rules for the conduct of women. The women were treated to secondary position in all walks of life. The literacy rate of women has improved. Now a day, they are given secondary status in household, offices, social and public places. Women are exploited and harassed in Indian society. Woman is subject to violence and harassment everywhere.

**END NOTES:**

1. Elizabeth Roy, Freak Mirror and Grotesque Image. The Hindu..15 March 2002.
  2. Mahesh Dattani, Collected plays, Penguin, New Delhi, 2000p-288.
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