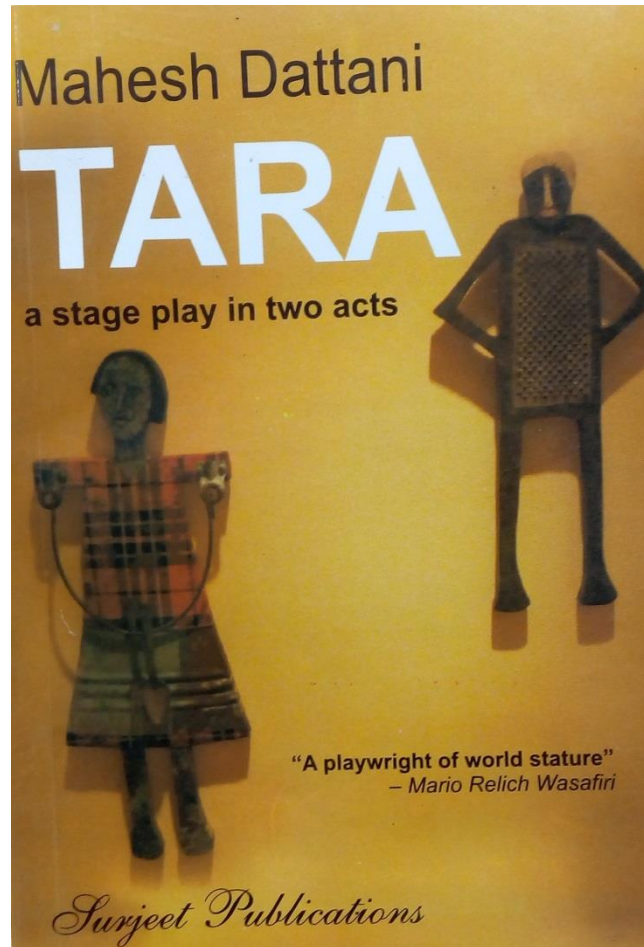


Gender Issues in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

S. ShunmugaPriya, M.A. English Literature



Abstract

Mahesh Dattani is a famous actor, playwright, director. His *Tara* is a famous play which deals with the gender issues in the society. Tara is the protagonist of this play who was born as a Siamese twin with her brother Chandan. The play moves around the separation of the twins.

Their family gives importance to Chandan and his future. Finally, Tara dies because of society, not because of her family. Dattani exposes gender issue in a deep manner.

Keywords: Mahesh Dattani, *Tara*, Siamese twins, Surgery, Gender.

Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

Mahesh Dattani is a powerful playwright, Actor, Director, Dancer and screenplay writer. His theatre group **Playpen** was formed in 1984, and he has directed several plays. His famous works are *Final Solutions*, *Dance Like A Man*, *Bravely Fought The Queen*, *On A Muggy Night In Mumbai*, *Tara*, and *Thirty Days In September*.

Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* is a famous play which deals with gender discrimination in our society. Gender discrimination, among other things, is suppressing one gender either female or male, and they are not allowed to express their own feelings, talents, etc. The title *Tara* means star. Stars always twinkle in sky. They are stable, immortal, loved by all. But the protagonist of this play named Tara is suppressed, hated by all because of her gender. In our Indian society, females are considered to be weaker than males and female babies may even be killed. Tara was born as a conjoined twin with a boy Chandan. The play focuses on how the society and family give more importance to the male than female. Dattani expresses this problem in his play in a deep manner through the character Tara. *Tara* was staged at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore on October 23, 1990 by Dattani's Playpen Performing Arts Group.

The Play

Tara is a two Act play with a few characters. Tara is a very talent girl who wants to shine like her name in the world. She looks beautiful and is always optimistic in character. The play draws light on stage by focusing on Bharati and Patel, Tara and Chandan, Roopa and shadow characters of Prema and Nallini, and interview of Dr. Thakkar.

Chandan

When the play opens Chandan changed his name into Dan and expresses his feelings through writings. He is a writer staying in London and writing his own tragedy.

“Dan: In poetry, even the most turbulent emotions can be recollected when one is half asleep. But in Dramas! Ah! Even tranquility has to be recalled with emotion. Like touching a bare live wire.”

Chandan is guilty conscious in his heart. He has lot of memories and is trying to change that memory into a play. He locks himself in a bedsitter in a seedy suburb of London. He is a Siamese twin born with his sister Tara. After Tara’s death he becomes very sad and thinks that he caused her tragedy. He wants to write about her life as a drama, recollecting his memories. Chandan had already written a work *Random Raj* which was about British Raj. “The publishers here in India ignore them because none of them deal with Sati, Dowry, deaths or child marriages- all subjects guaranteed to raise the interest of the average western intellectual (*Tara*: p. 4)”.

“Dan: To tell you the truth, I had even forgotten I had a twin sister. Until I thought of her as subject matter for my next literary attempt. Or maybe I didn’t forget her. She was lying deep inside, out of reach... (*Tara*: 4)”

Parents of Tara

Patel and Bharati were parents of Chandan and Tara. They had a happy married life. Bharati’s father was a famous political person who had an opportunity to become Chief Minister if he lived. They felt happy when Bharati had twins in her womb. But they were born as conjoined twins by hugging each other. Every mother loves her children. Bharati also loved Tara and Chandan. They looked like a freak. They had to be separated by surgery. The babies had three legs but the major blood supply of third leg was provided to the girl. The family supported boy child because males take their family forward but females are considered to be weaker. Parents have to give dowry for girl child. So, Tara’s family chose the male child. Bharati and her father personally met Dr. Thakkar and bribed him to make surgery unnatural. These

incidents show how Bharati didn't like Tara and favored the boy child. No mother does like this position, but Bharati wanted boy baby. So the surgery was not done properly, made the operation wrongly. This shows woman is first enemy to another woman.

“Patel: 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 slightly better that the leg would survive...on the girl. Your grandfather and your 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 leg to the boy... (Tara: 58)”

After Surgery

After surgery the children were separated. They walked with the help of *jaipur* legs. Tara was very active and enjoyed her life. She had one more operation to transfer kidney. So they went to Mumbai for surgery. There Tara and Chandan had no friends. They simply stayed in home. Roopa is a neighbour girl. Years on, Bharati realized her mistake and showered love on Tara. Bharati bribed Roopa to become best friend with Tara.

“Bharati: you will be her best friend?”

Roopa: well, I don't know. Nalini and Prema are my best friends.

Bharati: if you promise to be her best friend- what I mean is if you would like to be her friend-I will be most grateful to you and I will show it... in whatever way you want me to (Tara: 21).”

Question about Kidney Transplant

Bharati was ready to offer one kidney to Tara. But Patel refused to give it. Bharati wanted to be part of Tara but Patel did not allow her. Patel showed male power over Bharati and slapped her and said “you are in no condition to be taking major decisions.”

“Bharati: Everything will be all right. Now that I am giving you a part of me. Everything will be all right.”

Patel gives more importance to Chandan. He always cared about his studies and his future but not about Tara. He wanted Chandan to study in London and work with his business.

“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 will make a great business woman.

Patel: Chandan, I think I must insist that you come (*Tara: 8*).”

Dr. Thakkar

Dr. Thakkar plays a major role in this play. The work of a doctor is to give life. Doctors are compared to God. But here Thakkar made unnatural surgical operation to Twins because of getting bribery. Tara’s Grandfather and Mother provided a large nursing home, three acres of prime land, in the centre of the city to Dr. Thakkar. Finally no one supported Tara, neither Mother nor Nature. Later Bharati realized her mistake. She always said “Tara! My beautiful baby! You are my most beautiful baby! I love you very much.”

Chandan and Tara

Chandan had lots of affection for Tara. He never went anywhere without Tara. He said about Tara as “What is Tara? Kind, Gentle, Strong, her mother has given her Strength. And daddy? Silent? Angry? (*Tara: 10*)” Chandan is a sweet character who always felt guilty about his sister’s death. He expressed his tragedy as a drama. He did not type the drama in paper. He recorded his voice in recorder, “No writing. No masterpiece. Only a voice (*Tara: 59*)”. Chandan ends his voice by saying,

“Chandan: Forgive me, Tara. Forgive me for making it my tragedy (*Tara: 60*)”.

To Conclude

Tara is a wonderful play about gender. The main work of a writer is to identify and present the social problems. Dattani has done his job in a skilful manner. In India, females do not get freedom from males. Girls are considered as a family burden because of dowry. Tara lost

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S. ShunmugaPriya, M.A. English Literature

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her shine because her family was under the sway of the values of the society, which is mainly pro-male. Stars are stable and immortal, Tara is not allowed to shine in the world but she always shines in the play.

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S. ShunmugaPriya, M.A. English Literature
Sri S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College
Sattur 626203
Tamilnadu
India
umashunmugapriya@gmail.com