

Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani, a leading playwright in English, portrays one of the serious issues which are prevailing in India. The present paper deals with the gender issues and discriminations in the play *Tara* by Mahesh Dattani. And also this paper highlights how a boy child is preferred than a girl child in an Indian family and how the male and female division acts as the barrier of their creativity and talents in both the male and female children. Dattani brings out the social issue which were once prevailed and now prevailing in India – female infanticide. This issue is brought out through the life of conjoint twins named Chandan and Tara. Even though they are differently abled children, Tara suffers more than Chandan only because she is a girl. The paper also looks on the role of society in female infanticide.

KEYWORDS: gender issues, female infanticide, society, social issue, discrimination.

Mahesh Dattani, an actor, playwright and director is well-known as the best playwrights in India. Dattani is India's most successful playwright whose plays are well known for the social issues that society tries to hide. Dattani's plays convey the social issues which is the deep-seated prejudices and problems that the society is conditioned too turned away from. Each of his plays deals with social issues like gender identity, gender discrimination, and communal tensions. The play *Tara* deals with the gender discrimination, *30 Days in September* deals with the issue of Child abuse, and *Final Solutions* deals with the painful reflection of partition. Dattani is the only English playwright who was awarded with the Sahitya Academy Award. He won Sahitya Academy Award in the year 1998. His plays include *Where There is a Will*, *Tara*, *Final Solutions*, and *Thirty Days in September*.

Dattani's two-act play *Tara* revolves around two conjoined twins, a boy and a girl named Chandan and Tara. It was published in the year 1990. The play *Tara* is narrated by Chandan. It is about the courage and spirit of a handicapped girl-child, who were born in a Gujarati family. The story tells about the twins who are surgically separated in an unequal manner in order to make the boy a perfect one. Tara's mother had allowed a leg to be amputated from her conjoined twin even though there was a great probability of the survival of the girl. According to Chandan, the surgery which separated him and his twin sister Tara was preferential because Tara was unable to survive and he felt disadvantaged while growing up and also in her early death. In order to hide his

feelings, he moved from his native place to England, where he attempts to begin a new life in a new name by changing his name from Chandan to Dan.

Gender discrimination is a bias which is based on a person's sex that leads to defining the roles he/she should play in society. The word "Sex" refers to the biological and physiological traits and the word "gender" refers to the roles which society assigns to people based on their sex. Male and female are assigned different roles and they have to do these roles during their day to day life. The roles supposed to be performed by male are considered to be important and also male is given higher status than the female. All the female babies born in an Indian family suffers some kind of exploitation.

In the society, the male and female are expected to stick to their assigned roles. In *Tara*, Dattani brings out this issue with the help of Patel. Every time Patel asked Chandan to support him in business and expected Tara to remain in domestic sphere. In this play Dattani tries to analyse the issue of the separation of roles through the characters of Tara and Chandan. Chandan is interested in so called 'feminine roles' because he wanted to spend his time within the domestic sphere and also he preferred to be a writer. Whenever Patel asks him to help him in business, he says, "I haven't decided yet. I might stay back in the cave and do my jigsaw puzzle." (Collected Plays 328), While Tara was more inclined to get into a career of business similar to her father. When Patel hears these statements, he gets angry with his wife and accuses her for turning him (Chandan) into a girlish boy. This division of labor affects not only female but male also. Both Tara and Chandan are physically challenged. Both feel marginalized on account of this, but being a girl, Tara is doubly marginalized.

In the patriarchal society, physical beauty is valued more than the intelligence or inner beauty what they possess. Dattani shows these double standards of society and how the society discriminates between two physically challenged persons on the basis of their gender. This double standard is reflected when Bharati says:

"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)."

Tara, the unlucky-girl who has not been given enough opportunities like her brother, finally dies. Chandan attempts to repress the guilt he feels over Tara's death. His sense of pain is so deep at the end of the play, Dan apologizes to Tara thus:

"Forgive me, Tara, Forgive me,
For making it my tragedy" (Tara 380)

Chandan explores his psyche as well as Tara's after his Tara's death. Tara dies in a shock when she learns that it is her mother Bharati, whom she trusted very much, has involved in the conspiracy of her unfair separation from Chandan. Though Chandan physically survives this trauma, he can never lead a peaceful life. He migrates to the suburbs of London, changes his name and attempts to create a new identity.

At the end, Dattani tries to say that the discrimination against female child starts from mother's womb. The incidents of female foeticide and female infanticide are common in our society because a girl is considered to be burden for parents, financially, emotionally and socially and this leads to the murder of girl child. Tara effectively serves its dramatic purpose in order to bring out the sincerity and inclination of a girl to prove her spirit in the world of male supremacy. The name 'Tara' rightfully suggests a star; the child was a bright and a shining star that was a source of happiness for her family. Dan couldn't have a complete life but for Tara. Tara has been depicted as a female character with potential while her brother was not enterprising at all. The father of the two, however, was bent upon securing the future of the boy. Her potentiality was sacrificed on the altar of the gender discrimination.

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