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Gender Inequality in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani is one of the famous Indian-English playwright, actor and director. He is first Indian English playwright to be awarded Sahitya Akademi. His plays have been directed by eminent directors and mostly deal with some issues like child sexual abuse, gender discrimination, homo sexuality and communalism. This essay is a modest attempt to study the gender based injustice and how male child is given preference over the female child in Indian society. The play *Tara* deals with the separation of two conjoined twins and the manipulation of their mother and grandfather to favors of the boy over the girl child. This play also deals with the issue of class and community and traditional values. In this whole play Dattani spreads a bitter truth that child abuse is still prevails in our society. Here *Tara* is a typical woman character and she has been widely acclaimed and differently interpreted based on gender and race.

Key words: Parental authority, Gender difference, Gender role conflict, Society, Separation.

The play *Tara* has been inspired by Tennessee William's play *The Glass Menagerie*. It is based of Tennessee William's real life story. His father belongs to a middle class family like *Tara's* father Patel. Likewise Mrs. Patel also belongs to affluent family of bureaucrats like Williams mother.

The play opens in London with Chandan, he was recollecting his past and that too mainly his childhood; he recollects those happy days spend with his sister *Tara*. This story is not just about the protagonist of the play. It is about a girl child who is born in Indian society. The situation of a girl child becomes worse if she is

born physically or mentally challenged, and it is a best example that child abuse is still prevails in our Indian society.

Mahesh Dattani has very deftly revealed the theme of gender discrimination in this play. The social norms, economics standards and cultural factors have been only responsible for the injustice against the girl child. All these factors combined to create the social system in which the girl has to live or die. *Tara* is given injustice by not providing her needs and how she suffers because family does not want a girl because they want someone to carry forward the inheritance.

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Tara is an ethereally play that question the role of a society which treats the child of the same womb in different ways. Tara is a girl who wants to twinkle and shine just like her name. It is a play about two children joined together at the hip. In which one is a girl and another is boy, they can be separated only surgically, this surgery means that one life should be sacrificed. Here partial injustice starts. This play proves that women herself is the worst enemy of other women. The mother of Tara here prefers male child and thus strengthens the chain of gender injustice. Societies in India have always male dominated perception. All decision in a family is taken by the senior male members of the family. Even if there is a female member who is elder to male, she is not given much authority as the male.

In this play Tara one tends to feel that Tara bears some kind of hatred against the society throughout the play. Her world is compressed, it consist of her parents and brother to whom she is very close. Tara a lively girl who does not get enough opportunity as her brother gets. She is very much affectionate to her brother, she expressed it in her conversation with Chandan. She says

“May be we still are. Like we’ve always been, inseparable. The way we started life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we are forced out... and separated” (Tara 325.)

Tara expresses the typical Indian mindset which has down ages all the time preferring boy over girl child. The play depicts the triumph and failure of Indian family comprising of father (Patel), the mother (Bharati) and their children (Tara and Chandan) coping with the trauma of disability. The decision taken by Mrs. Patel’s leaves Tara crippled for life and it is unnoticed that Bharati guilt gets revealed repeatedly throughout the play.

Mr. Patel’s father-in-law, the eldest among the three members of the family he is also a powerful and affluent politician. He was the person who decided about the surgery to Chandan. Even Chandan and Tara would have been rescued if one leg had been given to Tara and one artificial leg to Chandan. But people are blind by their taboos and customs. He bribed the doctor with the sanction of a piece of land in Bangalore. Mr. and Mrs. Patel were warned by the surgeon that in almost all the cases of such kind one of the twins always died by the age of four, in spite of these fact they cause injustice to the innocent girl child Tara.

Tara was discouraged from the day she born. She was bubbly energetic girl who had all the qualities of a normal girl. If her parents had given her moral support

she might have shone like a star. It is noteworthy that discrimination with Tara continues even after her death, Chandan who was interested in writing story, he writes his own tragedy. Chandan emotionally feels guilty about the death of his sister Tara. So he,apologizes:

“Forgive me, Tara, forgive me,

For making it my tragedy (Tara 380)”

Tara trusted her mother so much but her mother only favored to Chandan so she dies in a shock. It was the reason that Chandan can never lead a peaceful life. He always thinks about her death and feels himself. He wants to change his life so he moves to London and changes his name (Dan), there he creates a new identity and then he tries to write his own autobiography.

Dan: give me a moment and the pain will subside. Then I can function again. (Pause, more controlled now) yes.

Tara is neither Chandan’s tragedy nor is it really Tara’s. This tragedy usually experienced in everybody’s life. Tara’s real tragedy lies in that scene where Tara is separated not only from her brother physically but also separated from the world. It is Dattani’s world where the playwright pics up various character from the society. There are all puppets in the hands of their creative artist. She thought that she lives in a place of hatred where everyone hates her because she is a girl.

Throughout the play Tara suffers a lot even no one teases her but by the conversation between parents made her to suffer; she is mentally broken and conquered.

The purpose of this play is to illuminate the minds of female gender for not to give preference to a male child over a female child. If we think, why is she killed? The answer is crystal clear that Tara is not wanted, because she is a girl. In our society, “Girls” are not wanted. For a moment, if we imagine that Tara’s mother had preferred her at the time of operation instead of Chandan. Would she have forgiven? No, Never! Because she is also a Woman. Here women are not made to think or decide but are made to submit to the wishes of man. This man can be a father, husband, brother or son, whoever he is; at the end, they have an identity. But a mother, a wife, a sister and a daughter at last turn out to be only “women, submitting to their wills and losing their own identity.”

This play also suggests many things to the mothers. As, for instance, not to feel upset at girls’ birth, not to treat girl contemptuously, and not to stop them from scaling newer highs in their life to come.

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