



Research Paper

Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's Play Tara

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ABSTRACT: Mahesh Dattani deals with the theme of gender discrimination in the play Tara. This paper tries to discuss and analyse the issue of marginalisation of women in the play. Chandan being a boy child is preferred to Tara-a girl child in an Indian family. This paper is an attempt to study the gender discrimination in a society, the injustice done only on the term of gender and the preference given to a male child over a female in an Indian family. The play also deals with the emotional and physical separation to Siamese twins. The play presents the deep rooted patriarchal system in the society. Women act as a key in the hands of patriarchy to perpetuate patriarchal values. In this play, Bharati despite of being mother of Tara spoils her daughter's life and suffers in the longer run because of her inhuman act. Through this play Dattani exposes insensitive behaviour of society towards the physically disabled persons. Dr. Thakkar makes the misuse of his profession being the man of science and technology. He was bribed a piece of land by Bharati and her father for surgery that led to the death of Tara.

Keywords: Discrimination, Gender, Marginalisation, Patriarchy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Mahesh Dattani is one of the popular dramatists in Indian English Literature. He is the first English language playwright who has the honour of winning Sahitya Akademi award for Final Solutions and Other Plays in the year 1998. Mahesh Dattani is a Bangalore based dramatist and director. The themes of his plays have attracted the attention of a great number of readers and audiences in theatres. He has tried to bring hidden issues of society such as plight of women and transgender, gender discrimination, homosexuality, child sex abuse etc. into light through his plays. Dattani holds a very distinct status in the realm of Indian play in English. He has shown the problems of city life in India in a significant manner in his plays. He has a striking artistic mind that makes him different from other dramatists. His plays touch the minds and the hearts of the readers. Homosexuality is the predominant theme in his play Bravely Fought the Queen. Another concern of Mahesh Dattani's plays is gender identity. How are men and women constructed in terms of gender roles? For example, Hasmukh Mehta does not think manly enough in Where there is a will, and Amritlal does not think dancing for men in Dance Like a Man. Dattani raises these and a number of other questions regarding gender and social stratification.

Dattani is not a world of simple dichotomies. There is always a conflict in relationships and no one wants to be an easy victim. Through his plays, he throws light on the lives of marginalised sections of society. He tries to aware and sensitise mainstream people about their problems. This paper tries to analyse how Mahesh Dattani has represented the issue of marginalised women in the play Tara. This play manifests the discrimination against girl child in society. The play opens with Dan who is busy typing and addresses the audience directly. He is writing the play called Twinkle Tara and the play understudy is called Tara and that Tara means star. Chandan recalls the memories of his childhood with his sister Tara. Both had shared one body which means that they were Siamese Twins. He exposes the existing patriarchal mindset of society which prefers a boy child to a girl child. In Mahesh Dattani's plays women ensure the continuation of tradition and ritual where men go to work. These are stereotypical gender rules of which Dattani makes full use. In this play Dattani outlines an immediate conflict between husband and wife regarding her father. Bharati also looks more concerned than Patel about Tara's diet and health. Patel is seemed to be concerned about Chandan's career. He wants him to follow his footsteps. Chandan seems to have different plans and wants to be a writer whereas Tara would like to be "Strong, Healthy, Beautiful".

As the play progresses, we see Tara being asked to exhibit her artificial leg. In the ensuing dialogue between Tara and Chandan we are made aware of lot of facts but most importantly that Bharati fusses over Tara and Tara shows what she sees as lack of interest in her father towards her. Roopa makes her re-entrance on the stage who inspected Tara's leg. Roopa is being bribed by Bharati to be friendly with Tara. Roopa runs off to tell her friends that Bharati wants to donate her own kidney. Patel does not approve of it that arouses quarrel between husband and wife and the husband bitter comment that her father's money was always Bharati's strength. She has tried to prevent Roopa from saying something to Tara and it turns out that this was popular belief that Patel's did not want daughters they would drown the babies in milk. Bharati herself seems to have lot of love for Tara and she says, "Love can make up for a lot." Bharati has been knitting sweater for Tara during this talk and Chandan mentions that she has dropped a stitch. During this course of action, Patel enters and sees Chandan helping his mother with her knitting, and this puts forth his views on gender identity. He has already made his plans for Chandan regarding his further study in abroad. He accuses his wife of having taken over Tara completely and deliberately. The roles that Patel seems to assume are natural to males and the roles that he assigns to women are vastly different. Why can't Chandan knit, and why can't Tara go to office? And another predominant question why are baby girls killed in our country? Dattani raises many more such questions regarding gender discrimination. The Act-I ends with Tara who is the bone of contention falling into a dead faint.

The play presents Patriarchal system as multilayered and deeply rooted in the society. There are many factors responsible for preference of boy child to girl child. These factors are not only economic but also social and religious. In this play, Patel family is both economically and politically sound. Tara is not a burden on them economically. Still Chandan is preferred over Tara due to patriarchal nature of society. Tara is enthralled in that it makes use of a rather unlikely freak case to lay bare the injustices in 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 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.

(Chaudhari 38)

On the basis of the roles assigned to males and females, male is accorded higher status than female. Patel asks Chandan to support him in business and wants Tara to do domestic work. This division of labour based on sex is one of the root causes of gender discrimination. Dattani tries to deconstruct this separation of roles through Tara and Chandan. Chandan wants to be a writer whereas Tara is inclined to join a career like her father.

Women play an important role in perpetuating discrimination against women in patriarchal society. Bharati, a woman favours Chandan, a male child during surgery. Dr. Thakkar tells us that the greatest challenge was to keep the girl alive. And Patel decides to tell the children the truth. He says that all three were to blame – the grandfather, his wife, and him. The twins had three legs and the third leg was fed by the girl's blood system. The chances of the leg's survival were greater with the girl. But Bharati and her father had decided to give leg to male child despite of the risk. Patel could not protest strongly enough and the doctor was bought off with sanction of land in Bangalore by Bharati's powerful politician father. The leg had survived for only two days while it could have been Tara's throughout her life. Tara is devastated by this revelation. The social structure in which the girl child has to live and to die. Murdered by this social system that controls the minds and actions of the people. We see Chandan apologizing to Tara in most of the lines at the end of the play.

'Forgive me, Tara Forgive me for making it tragedy.'

The play ends with the spirits of Tara and Dan hugging each other.

II. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that Mahesh Dattani has effectively dealt with the questions of differently abled, gender and self identity in the play, Tara. Tara is considered as one of the popular works of Mahesh Dattani. He touches various issues related to gender discrimination by taking the subject of Siamese twins. Tara is not merely an individual character but emerges as an archetype, an icon of the Indian girl child who is vanquished and subdued in the factory of tradition and modernity. This play moves us deeply as Mahesh Dattani not only unravels how girls are subjected to discrimination in an educated society but also stresses upon the fact that how discrimination is encouraged by people in Indian society. The play is a mega success in depicting the plight of marginalized women. This play depicts the discrimination against women which starts from the womb of mother. The incidents of female foeticide are common in our society. The patriarchal society consider a girl as a burden on her parents not only financially but also socially and emotionally. That is why this patriarchal society prefers a boy child like Chandan to Tara, a girl child.

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