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The Culture of Patriarchy, Gender Bias, and Class Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's Tara

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Abstract--This research paper, which makes use of Mahesh Dattani's play Tara (1990), emphasizes the concept of social issues such as gender inequalities, suffering, and depression, which are experienced by both men and women in equal measure. Gender discrimination, injustice done solely on the basis of gender, and preference for male children in Indian homes are all issues that are the focus of this research. Tara, Dattani's other play, addresses the issue of gender discrimination. The play addresses the emotional and physical separation of conjoined twins. It exemplifies the society's ingrained patriarchal system. Women act as a key in patriarchy's hands, ensuring the survival of patriarchal values. The purpose of this article is to discuss and analyses the play's issue of female marginalization. Chandan, a boy child, is preferred to Tara, a girl child, in an Indian family. Despite the fact that she is Tara's mother, Bharati wrecks her daughter's life and ultimately suffers as a result of her harsh behavior. Dr. Thakkar makes an error in his capacity as a scientist and a technophile. Bharati and her father bribed him with a piece of land in exchange for Tara's death.

Keywords--gender bias, Indian English drama, Mahesh Dattani, male domination, marginalization, social issues, patriarchy.

Introduction

Mahesh Dattani directed a number of films, including Mango Souffle, Morning Raga, Dance Like a Man, and Ek Alag Mausam. Final Solutions and Other Plays, for which he received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998, has established him as one of the most well-known dramatists in Indian English literature. Currently based in Bangalore, Mahesh Dattani works as a director and playwright ([Banerjee & Dattani, 2004](#); [Joshipura, 2009](#)). It has piqued the interest of a large number of readers and theatregoers because of the themes explored in his plays. The difficulties faced by women and transgender people, as

well as discrimination against homosexuals and child sex abuse, are some of the issues that he has attempted to bring to light through his plays. In his plays, he has made a significant contribution to the depiction of the issues of city life in India. He possesses a distinct artistic mind that distinguishes him from other playwrights (Prasad, 2006; Chapman et al., 2001).

Gender is a relatively new way of conceptualizing men and women. According to gender studies, patriarchy has an effect on the lives of those who fall under its umbrella. When a man uses it on ladies and young men, it gives him a sense of dominance Connell (2005), coined the term "hegemonic masculinity" to describe the recommended actions that support men's dominating social position and women's subordination.

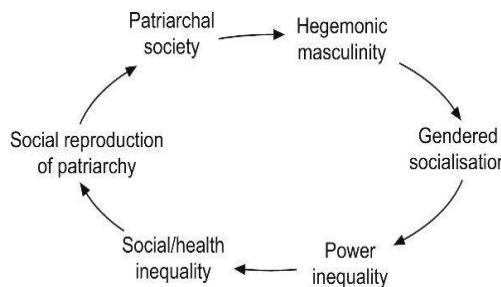


Figure 1. Representation of the perpetuation of R. W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity

Mahesh Dattani has demonstrated the patriarchal tendencies of men who see themselves as the head of the family. It was impossible for these family members to allow other family members, particularly women and young men, to achieve independence. As a leader, they have the authority to make important decisions about an individual's life and career choices (Yurkovetskiy et al., 2013; Ito, 2021). The difficulties that women and young men face within their own families are depicted in Dattani's Tara. In his plays, the subjects are handled quite extensively and draw the attention of the audience. Mahesh Dattani has highlighted social problems and subjects like child sexual abuse, incest, transgender and women's emotional turmoil throughout his plays. Through his play, he seeks to make people more aware of all the faults of society by representing the many colours of life (Ratra & Elias, 2014; Kaser, 2002).

Research Objectives

This research paper aims at the following research objectives:

- To discuss gender issues and women's roles in a patriarchal society as presented in Mahesh Dattani's play Tara.
- To explore class discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's play Tara.

Literature Reviews

Concept of patriarchy and gender

Feminists' theories and practices, as well as gender studies, have historically shaped the concept of gender, with feminist ideology encouraging gender critical thinking (Hester, 1990; Jahn et al., 2012). As a result, gender studies owe a great deal to the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir. De Beauvoir (2013), portrayed femininity as a gender in historically constituted societal structures. She demonstrates how patriarchal structures' women were produced psychoanalytically in the same way as others. The concept of gender is the most thriving notion in the world. It is used in a variety of ways to depict gender roles, gender disparities, and bias against women. Gender is inextricably linked to other social structures, including class, race, ethnic origin, generation, and disability (Kumar, 2020; Kumar & Khalaf, 2021).

According to Kimmel (2004), in some societies, men are expected to be stoic in order to demonstrate their manhood, while women are seen as weak and docile. From infancy, men and women are treated differently to foster the development of female and male trends. These characteristics are inherited at birth. We regard 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes as acquired. We do not necessarily become different as a result of our socialization; we develop differences.

According to Rubin (1975), "men and women are, of course different. But they are not different as day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact from the stand point of nature, men and women are closer to each other than either is to anything else – for instance mountains, kangaroos or coconut palms far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities".

Butler (1990), states "Gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex." Thus, the subject permits, "gender as a multiple interpretation of sex." While De Beauvoir is true in asserting that one becomes a woman, she maintains that this is not an issue of sex compulsion, since one who becomes a woman is not forced to be a female. As a result, gender is a cultural construct. The gender of a person, not their sexuality, decides whether they are masculine or feminine.

Patriarchy and gender role in "Tara"

A number of researchers researched on the treatment of patriarchy and gender role in Mahesh Dattani's play Tara. This is one of the reasons that audience/readers feel connected to his plays. "Mahesh Dattani's plays have variety, and his themes are of contemporary interest. He has dived deep into human heart and re-created characters with authenticity and a sense of liveliness" (Das, 2008). The well-known critic on Mahesh Dattani Chaudhury (2005), illustrates that "Tara is enthralling 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.”

According to [Kulkarni \(2016\)](#), “Tara is a most loved play of the Mahesh Dattani because it deals with the gender self of Siamese children with emotional touch. This play throws light on of the important issues of the contemporary society like gender discrimination”. Talking about this play [Mee \(2000\)](#), remarks “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 favors what is ‘male’; but many people India see it as a play about the girl child”.

Materials and Method

This research was based on a wealth of primary and secondary sources. More information was used as secondary source from other works by renowned authors. Furthermore, efforts to maintain objectivity have been made ([Tschakert & Singha, 2007](#); [Klassen & Vereecke, 2012](#)).

Result and Discussion

The culture of patriarchy Mahesh Dattani’s play “Tara”

Dattani’s play, *Tara* suggests that gender discrimination ultimately brings havoc to humanity. In this play, both genders get into trouble due to gender differences in the Patel family. This play tells us that patriarchy, which is multi-layered and deeply rooted in our collective consciousness, has entangled in social fabric of our so-called modern society. The priority of a boy’s childhood is not simply due to the economic factors. Actually many other factors also make their significant contribution to this priority and biased decision such as social, religious, and other factors. The financial and political power of the Patel family is obviously reflected in this play ([Jones & Issroff, 2005](#); [Nehru, 2016](#); [Nasution, 2016](#)). As a social organization, this family is very loving and caring and supportive of its members and Tara is not an economic burden for this family, yet it reflects the priority of Chandan in family, which is more in this society, refers complex nature of this moderated and scientific Indian society:

- “Tara is thrilled that she does not use the ‘cynical’ case to address the injustice done to girls in a traditional Indian family, a play that comments on a society that shares children differently. And as usual, the conservative comes in friendly costumes, covering the ugly truth. Patel, on the face of it, looks like the ideal parent that special children like Tara and Chandan need to survive - in fact, they have survived because of their devoted parents. But there are other things which need to be disclosed”. ([Chaudhury, 2005](#)).

It is unfortunate that in Indian society there is pre-defined role based on gender. Patriarchal values require men and women to stick to their prescribed roles. Playing gender roles in other tasks can cause embarrassment. Mahesh Dattani in the play seeks to overcome the separation of roles through the characters of

Tara and Chandan. In the play, Chandan prefers to be a writer while Tara wants to pursue a career like her parents. This goes against the pre-defined trends of Indian society. This unwanted situation makes Patel angry with his wife and accuses her of turning (Chandan) into a sister and teaching him how to weave (Dattani, 2000).

This division of labor can affect not only women but also men. It can put a burden on men and limit their interest and talent. Further, this is the great irony of this patriarchal society that women play an important role in supporting discrimination with women. In this play, a woman favors a boy during surgery. Their desire proves that in the patriarchal structure, the biased value of the male has a profound influence on a woman's psyche because of prevailed social values and norms in Indian society. In the patriarchal Indian society, a woman acts as another tool of patriarchy against another woman. Patel's secret revelation about surgery decision in these lines tells the real psychology in Indian society:

- “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 better than the leg would survive on the girl. Your grandfather and 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 legs to the boy. Maybe I had protested more strongly” (Dattani, 2000).

After the surgery, Bharati is filled with guilt since she has ruined the life of her daughter. The way she tries to get rid of her guilt is by lavishing Tara with affection and attention. Her worries are obvious which is apparent in her words: “Yes. I plan for her happiness. I mean to give her all the love and affection which I can give. It's what she deserves. Love can make up for a lot” (Dattani, 2000). Her sense of guilt causes her to become mentally unstable. There is also increasing tension in the family as husband-wife disputes arise. To alleviate her guilt, she puts the blame on her husband and demonstrates that she adores Tara more than he does, among other things. It is obvious from the words of Mr. Patel: “You know she loves you. You're sure of that. Don't make her choose between us, for God's sake! You are ruining her life because you are sick. I want to help you, Bharati, please allow me to help you” (Dattani, 2000). Bharati even bribes Roopa to play with Tara. Roopa says:

- “And to think I pitied you! Oh! I think you are disgusting! I only come here because your mother asked me to. No, she didn't ask me, she bribed me to be your best friend. Yes, your loony mother used to give me things. Now that she's finally gone crazy; I guess she won't be giving me much. So goodbye” (Dattani, 2000).

Her guilt drives her to insanity. The sufferings and guilt of Bharati show how women suffer in the patriarchal system and values. Later when Tara learns the truth that she was discriminated against by her mother, she gets shocked and emotionally broken. Dattani deconstructs the myth that Nature and God have

made males superior to the female. This myth justifies the subordination of women against men. Dattani tries to assert that male and female are equal in the eyes of Nature and God, but it is the patriarchal society which has artificially created gender inequality.

The culture of gender bias in Mahesh Dattani's play "Tara"

In this research paper, Mahesh Dattani's play *Tara* has been chosen and simultaneously analyzed the evils spread in society. Mahesh Dattani has put the issues of atrocities on women in front of the society in the play *Tara*. The play *Tara* very vehemently shows how women are discriminated in society. The play was first staged on 23rd October, 1990 in London by the group at Bangles Memorial Hall, Bangalore. The two major characters of the play, Chandan and his sister Tara remember their childhood. Chandan as a boy has tried to uncover the current patriarchal mindset of society. Being a girl, Tara focuses on an emotive part. The play shows a cruel mother and grandfather manipulating their physical isolation to favor the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara). Tara has been portrayed as a noble and docile young lady in this play. Unfortunately, she was not even given the same opportunities that her brother was given to pursue his dreams.

- “Although very cunning, he is devastated, dies and Chandan escapes to London and starts changing his name and tries to suppress the guilt he felt at the death of his sister with a personal history” ([Dattani, 2000](#)).

Mahesh Dattani denies discrimination in man and woman in his binary concept. He challenges the prevailed notion that man is better than woman and claims that naturally, both masculinity and femininity are part of personal identity. The concept of Ardhnarishwar in Indian mythology also supports an approach in which gender-based contempt and discrimination become unnatural and immoral. In this play, Tara and Chandan are twin children representing two sides of woman and man. This means that both women and men are equal to humans. Further, immoral surgery that took place symbolizes the separation of man and woman with Chandan's side representing a higher position than Tara's. Tara has the appropriate comment. Maybe we still are, like we always have been inseparable. The way we started in life. Two lives and one body, in a comfortable womb. As long as we were forced and separated” ([Dattani, 2000](#)).

Gender plays an important role in building a society. In this society, men and women have to play their roles separately and they play these roles daily during their life. However, men are rated higher than women based on the superiority of their roles. In the play *Tara*, Mahesh Dattani portrays that Chandan in the Patel family is asked to support the business and Tara is expected to continue in her household chores. That is, the division of functions on the basis of gender is one of the root causes of discrimination in society.

The play *Tara* begins with the claim of Chandan representing scientific progress, social and cultural progress. Here it can be explained that despite heavy scientific and social progress one can observe imbalances and lack of coordination among them. The problem lies in both cultural progress and

scientific and technological progress. However, the nature of the problem is different in both cases. To ensure balanced overall inclusive growth and development, scientific and technological progress must be combined with cultural progress and vice versa. The parish is primarily concerned with medical science and the unethical behavior of the physician. It sheds light on some mysteries of medical practice. There are many things that do not fall into the public domain.

Mahesh Dattani attempts to portray Thackeray's character as a physician with a sense of hope one who can survive as a creator and destroyer. It shows his control and power. He was given a high level on stage to show his authority and control the plot. Doctors are representatives of modern science and technology which play an important role in contemporary society. The kind of science and technology Indian society possess that has no direct impact on our social and moral life. The virtues of scientific innovations, which may be used to create utopian society by our doctors, had corrupted by money mindedness and lust for better life. These so-called scientific inventions have nullified the social fabric and rhythms of society. This groom reality of Indian society tells the real status of doctors in India. It is unfortunate that these doctors most of time works for money and not for service. Doctors are important for and civilized society and country. To emphasize their importance, Dattani decided to retain the character of Doctor Thackeray throughout the play. But reality is something else.

Dr. Thakkar represents the scientific knowledge that has also become a tool in the hands of patriarch for oppression and subjugation of women. Dattani shows how various social institutions contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality and discrimination, making them pervasive and deep-rooted. But he considers gender inequality inhuman and unethical. Dan considers injustice against Tara an unnatural sin:

- “She deserves something better. He never got a fair deal. Not even by nature. Neither of us did. Perhaps God never wanted us to separate. Luck wishes for strange things.... But God doesn't always get what he wants. The struggle is the cruelty of life. On the one hand the duality of Death between God and nature and wonderful on the other hand Dr. Thakker” (Dattani, 2000).

Both Tara and Chandan are physically challenged. Both feel marginalized on account of this, but being a girl, Tara is doubly marginalized. In a patriarchal society, physical beauty is valued more than her intelligence or inner beauty. Dattani exposes double standards of society showing how society discriminates between two physically challenged persons on the basis of gender. This double standard is reflected when Bharati says:

- “It's all right when you are young. It is all very cute and comfortable when he makes a funny comment. But let him grow up. Yes, sandalwood. The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you - but not him! Oh, the pain when he sees himself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable. And what about forty and fifty! Oh God” (Dattani, 2000).

Chandan feels inferiority complex due to his physical deformity. He feels, "They are not the ugly ones. We are. Horrible one-legged creatures" (Dattani, 2000). However, Tara, a strong and sensitive girl, faces the girl bravely and even pushes his hesitant brother to participate in mainstream society with confidence and shows his worth, "You are afraid. Afraid of meeting new people. People who don't know you. Who won't know how clever you are? You are afraid they won't see beyond your" (Dattani, 2000).

The discrimination against women starts from the mother's womb. Women's fantasy and female child murder cases are common in Indian society. A girl is considered a burden on parents financially, emotionally and socially which leads to the murder of a girl child. The play brings forth this point through Roopa's remarks, "since you are an assistant, I'll tell you. Maybe it's not true. But I heard this. In the old days, Patel was sick of getting the girl innocent - you know the dowry and the things like that - so they threw them into the milk" (Dattani, 2000).

Dattani has smartly used a multi-level set in the play. The lowest level represents the house of Patel's. On the highest level, there is a chair in which Dr. Thakkar remains seated throughout the play. His presence represents the unethical act of surgery which haunts and affects the lives of Patel family members. He becomes a part of the partisan decision in agreeing to give the leg to Chandan despite the leg medically suits more to Tara. Dattani uses his characters finely to portray the psychology of Indian social norms. His art of characterization, in this light, can be said remarkable in the play *Tara*. His characters seem authentic due to his deep understanding of society and human psychology. This is one of the reasons that the audience/readers feel connected to his plays. "Mahesh Dattani's plays have variety, and his themes are of contemporary interest. He has dived deep into the human heart and re-created characters with authenticity and a sense of liveliness" (Das, 2008).

Conclusion

To conclude, it is conceivable to say that Dattani has successfully negotiated with the questions of gender, disability, the family and self-identity in the play. The play has got success all over the world and is one of the most loved works of him. Taking an unusual subject of conjoined twins, he realistically touches various issues related to gender discrimination. He presents a bitter reality of society without being didactic and touches various themes with a sensitive heart. The play highlights the light of marginalized women in the male-dominated society.

Tara is a play that is equally concerned with both types of discrimination. The first is class discrimination, and the second is gender discrimination, although Dattani believes that gender concerns are more apparent and grave than class concerns. Class conflict or discrimination, which is another form of identity crisis in contemporary society, is the source of the drama's vicious portrayal of female characters. "The kind of themes, topics, and treatment reminds the Victorian Era in British literature, where women started getting free recognition after rejection and criticism" (Kumar, 2020; Kumar & Khalaf, 2021).

Dattani expressed himself during a conversation about the subject. Bharati admits she had committed a sin which stigmatises her parenthood by injuring her daughter. Her mistreatment of Tara is causing a nervous breakdown. She shows false sympathy and empathy with Tara in order to atone for the heinous sin and makes numerous efforts to displease Patel's name in her daughter's eyes. Not only biologically, but culturally, women are discriminated against. The kitchen and courtyard is taught to women and girls. The vicious portrayal of women in the drama is the result of another identity crisis in society known as class conflict.

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