

ISSN : 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



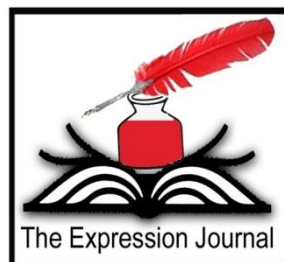
Impact Factor 3.9

Vol. 7 Issue 6 December 2021

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : editor@expressionjournal.com

www.expressionjournal.com



INJUSTICE BASED ON GENDER IN MAHESH DATTANI'S PLAY *TARA*

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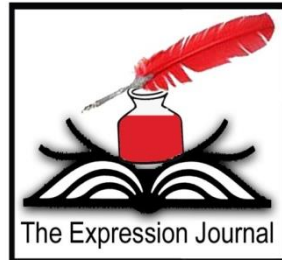
Abstract

The discrimination based on gender refers to the health, education, economic, and political inequalities between men and women. The inequalities based on gender and their social causes, not only impact sex ratio, while also women's health, their educational attainment and even their economic conditions too. Such violence is often considered a form of hate crime, committed against women or girls explicitly because they are female, and it can be in many forms. Such violence is often seen as an instrument for the subjugation of women, whether is society in general or in an interpersonal relationship. Such violence may arise from a sense of prerogative, superiority, misogyny or similar attitudes in the perpetrator or his vicious nature, especially against women. Gender inequality in India or in any other country is not merely concerned about females while it is multifaceted issue deeply rooted in our so-called cultural structure. The discrimination affects many aspects of the lives of a victim from career development and progress to mental health disorders. The present paper is an endeavor to inspect the gender-based injustice in the play *Tara* by Mahesh Dattani. The play deals with the painful physical and psychological separation to Siamese twins and how their separation was manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favor the boy. The present study is an attempt to discuss and analyze the deep-rooted gender differences in the society and how the injustice is done only on the term of gender. How the preference is given to a male child over female in a family. The paper is not only an attempt to inspect about differences, it also inspects about the deep-rooted patriarchal values in the collective consciousness of society.

Keywords

Gender, Discrimination, Injustice, Patriarchy, Guilt.

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Mahesh Dattani, a leading Indian actor, director and playwright holds a very distinct and eminent place in the realm of Indian English drama. He is the first Indian playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in the year 1998 for *Final Solutions and Other Plays*. His other important plays are: *Final Solutions*, *Dance Like a Man*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, and *Tara*. His most often performed play *Tara* was written in 1990, it is Dattani's third play. The play first performed as *Twinkle Tara* at the Chowdhiah Memorial Hall, Bengaluru, on October 23, 1990 by Playpen Performing Arts Group.

Dattani is mainly known for his unusual style and bold themes for his plays, which has fascinated a huge attention from the audiences and readers. In his plays, Dattani takes on what he calls the 'invisible issues' of Indian society. Through, his plays he brings into light the issues such as child sex abuse, gay issues, incest, plight of marginalized communities, etc. In his plays his characters often struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, cultural construction of gender, and repressed desire.

The term *gender-based violence* refers to "any acts or threats of acts intended to hurt or make women suffer physically, sexually or psychologically, and which affect women disproportionately." Although, the history of violence against women is closely related to the historical view of women as property and a gender role of subservience. Violence against women is manifestation of factually unequal power relations between men and women. Which have led to control over and discernment against women by men and to the prevention of the complete development of women. It can be said that violence against women is one of the critical social instruments by which women are enforced into a lesser position compared with men. Even today many kinds of violence against women particularly; rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence, are under informed due to common norms, taboos, humiliation, and the sensitive nature of the subject. According to the Oxford Dictionary 'discrimination' is "the

unjust or prejudiced treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex”.

Gender based inequality has been the ancient practice in India and also across the world. The discrimination against woman is very common practice in our daily-to-daily life, even it starts from mother's womb as the female foetus are aborted, education has been denied for them and are forced to act as slaves in their own houses. The incidents of foeticide are very common in our society. A female child is considered burden on parents financially, emotionally and socially which leads to murder of a girl child. Even in the play this point comes when Roopa's remarks about it to Tara,

“Since you insist, I will tell you. It may not be true. But this is what I have heard.

The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies-you know dowry and things like that-so they used to drown them in milk.” (Collected Plays 349)

The present paper will seek to discuss and analyze, how Dattani has put into light the issues like; gender discrimination, injustice, patriarchy and marginalization of female characters in the play. The play opens with a multi-level setting in the suburbs of London where Dan (Chandan) is busy in typing and he directly addresses to the audience. He is writing a play called *Twinkle Tara*. Chandan recalls the memories of his childhood with his sister Tara. Both are Siamese twins and have shared one body. The play *Tara* is not just a story of a protagonist of the play, but it is the story of every girl child in Indian family. Commenting on the theme of the play *Tara* theatre director Erin Mee comments: “Tara centers on the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins following the discovery that their physical separation was manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favor the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara).

Through the help of this play, Dattani has tried to expose the prevailing patriarchal mindset of society which favors a boy child over female child. Commonly, in all his plays Dattani has presented women to ensure the continuation of custom and procedural where men usually go to work and women are responsible for home-based task. These are the conventional gender rules. These divisions of labor are one of the major root causes of gender discrimination. In this play Dattani outlines the struggle between husband and wife, their anxiety about their children. Bharati (Mother) is more concerned than Patel about Tara (Daughter) while, Patel (Father) muchworried about the career of Chandan. He wants him to follow his footprints. While Chandan (Son) has some different plans for his life, he hopes to be a writer, although, Tara would like to be strong, healthy and beautiful.

In a male dominated society, paradoxically, women play an important role in perpetuating discrimination against women. Commenting on the play *Tara* Asha Kuthari Chaudhari remarks:

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. The Patels, on the face of it look like the ideal parents that special children 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. (Chaudhuri 38)

Patriarchy is a social system in which men embrace primarily power and predominate in roles of social privilege and control. It is a set of ideas, a patriarchal ideology that acts to clarify and defend this dominance and characteristics it to innate natural differences between men and women. So, in a patriarchal culture a woman becomes merely a tool against other woman in malicious series. In this play Bharati, the mother and a woman, favors the male child over female during surgery. This specifies how a female plays an important role against a female in the extension of this injustice. It cleared by Patel when he discloses secret about decision regarding surgery:

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 that 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! (*Collected Plays* 378)

After the failure of surgery, the sense of guilt and remorse has mentally disturbed Bharati, she always thinks that she has spoiled the life of her daughter. She tries to overcome from this guilt feeling by giving excessive love and care to Tara. Her worries are clear when she says,

"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." (*Collected Plays* 349)

Her guilt has made her mentally upset even sometimes she tries to reduce her guilt by transferring blame to her husband and demonstrating that she loves Tara more than he does. Patel remarks,

"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." (*Collected Plays* 353)

After all these happening one can understand the situation and the mental status of Bharati, how much now she cares about Tara, even at one point she bribes Roopa for to just play with her daughter Tara as Roopa remarks:

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. (*Collected Plays* 369)

Her sense of guilt drives her to mental insanity. The sufferings and guilt of Bharati shows how women suffer in patriarchal organization and morals. Later when Tara learns the truth about her that she was victimized by her mother, she gets shocked and emotionally broken.

Dr Thakkar characterizes the scientific acquaintance which has also become a tool in the hands of patriarchs for oppression and suppression of women. Dattani shows how various social establishments contribute in continuation of gender inequality and discrimination making them prevalent and deep-rooted. But he considers gender inequality insensitive and unethical. Dan considers injustice against Tara a peculiar iniquity:

She deserves something better. She never got a fair deal. Not even from nature. Neither of us did. May be God never wanted us to be separated. Destiny desires strange things.... But even God does not always get what he wants. Conflict is the

crux of life. A duel to the death between God and nature on one side and on the other-the amazing Dr. Thakkar. (*Collected Plays* 330)

Both Tara and Chandan are physically challenged. Both feel marginalized on account of this, but being a girl, Tara is even more marginalized. In patriarchal society, physical beauty is respected more than her intelligence or inner beauty. Dattani exposes two-fold standards of society showing how society discriminates between two physically challenged persons on the basis of gender. This two-fold 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)

Chandan feels inferiority complex due to his physical deviation. He says,

"They are not the ugly ones. We are. Horrible one-legged creatures." (*Collected Plays* 369)

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 show 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" (*Collected Plays* 361)

To conclude, it can be said that Dattani has successfully negotiated with the questions of gender, disability, and gender-based injustice in this play. He has successfully explored the role of a family in shaping the self-identity and inequality in the play *Tara*. The play is not just about an individual, who is the victim of this particular mindset while it's about the each and every Indian family who are facing this kind of injustice in their daily-to-daily life.

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