



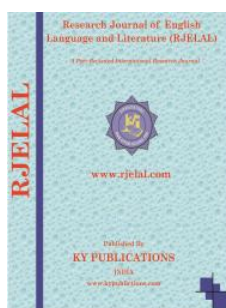
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GENDER- BASED INJUSTICE IN MAHESH DATTNI'S TARA

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ABSTRACT

Mahesh Dattani's genius as a dramatist, one can say that he focuses on difficult social themes whose moral dimensions are unmistakably clear and well marked; their controversial core questions draw audiences' attention in the manner of Henrik Ibsen or George Bernard Shaw. This paper is a modest attempt to study the gender-based injustice and how the male given preference over the female in an Indian family. The play deals with the emotional separation of two conjoined twins (at the hip) and the manipulation of their mother and grandfather favour the boy child over the girl child. This play also deals with the issues of class and community and traditional value.

Introduction

Gender bias is preference or prejudice towards one gender over the other. Bias can be conscious or unconscious, and may manifest in many ways, both subtle and obvious. In many countries eliminating such preferences is the basis of many laws including those that govern workplaces, family courts, and even the voting booth.

Tara is a reverting play that questions the role of a society that treats the children of the same womb in two different ways. Dattani's Tara is a poignant play about a boy and a girl who are joined together at the hip and have to be separated surgically, which will mean the death of either of the two. The fact that the injustice perpetuated by the victim's own mother whose preference is to the male child, makes the play more powerful suggesting that it is woman who continues the chain of injustice.

GENDER BASED INJUSTICE IN TARA

Tara, it is said, is not just the story of Tara, the protagonist of Mahesh Dattani's play, but is the story of every girl child born in the Indian family, whether urban or rural. Dattani has presented the problem of the girl child in an urban family living in a metropolitan city like Bangalore, where the parents have their bias towards the son and the daughter is neglected even though she might be smarter than her brother.

The situation is aggravated if the girl is physically challenged or there is any other physical and mental deformity in her – glaring example of child born in an Indian family, it is said, does suffer from some kind of exploitation. And if there is a boy child in the family as well, then the exploitation is very much visible as the privileges are consciously or unconsciously provided to the son.

But Mahesh Dattani does not believe in this "*conventional wisdom*". He says in an interview;

"I see Tara as a play about the male self and the female the male self being preferred (if one

is to subscribe to conventional categories of masculine traits and feminine traits) in all cultures. The play is about the separation of the self and the resultant angst”.

He is particular about his portrayal of women and he has no biases against them. To quote him “ *They are humans. They want something. They face obstacles. They face will do anything in the powerlessness if these people And I am not going to change my sensibilities for political correctness either. My only defence is to say that I am not biased against women.*” (Shakti Bara, 101)

In Tara Dattani picks up the issue of the preference of a boy child over a girl child which forms the infrastructure of the play. The girl may be more enterprising than the boy but what is the great deal in it, she nevertheless fail to be favoured. Both the twins revel in their love for each other and adoration of the parents.

The play also enlightens us that no matter how much a girl outshines a boy, she will remain in the background and can never be given an advantageous position. In being a man's world and the reins being in their hands, it is very difficult for a woman to fight the stranglehold of men. It is all the more deplorable when such characters as Tara's mother Bharati worsen the conditions for their own sex. If she has not shown indulgence for the male child over the female child, both Chandan and Tara might have flourished equally well. Tara thus point a picture of the helplessness of women in our society.

Tara is a multi-faceted play of Mahesh Dattani whose preoccupation with sociocultural questions is well-known. On the one hand one sees deep emotional attachment in the twin brother-sister relationship which stands out starkly against the acrimonious, and incompatible relation of their parents, on the other, it is quite clear that Tara is a victim of their parents, on the other, it is quite clear that Tara is a victim of discriminating thinking of her father. This is a family which lives in a metropolitan city of Indian, the middle class shows greater liberal approach and tolerance to girl-child issues. The attitude of a person who is a responsible

executive of a multinational company, manifestation of conservative thinking in his treatment of both his wife and daughter creates a considerable degree of tension in their lives. His mind appears to be anchored in values and concepts which put a clamp on free-flow of ideas and confine the girl's life to the limits set by the male head of the family. Patel thinking that even his wife's opinions are superfluous to his decision – making, and he is often seen trampling over them. He is portrayed as a person impatient of not being obeyed and irritable by nature. He likes to have his way. The whole family appears to be divided into two camps.

Tara is also a problem play. Tara's parents, Patel and Bharati, lack understanding. Bharati believes that Patel does not think about Tara's career, while Bharati believes that a girl has no future without a career. Bharati tells Chandan, “ Women have to do that as well these days. She must have a career... The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you, but not her !” Bharati believes that women should get an honourable place in the society and that is possible only when they are economically independent. But Patel still thinks that women should be restricted within the four walls of the house. This one point of difference has caused so much of dissension in the family that the husband and wife have failed to have any meaningful coordination between them. The wife threatens at one stage that she will give out his ailing wife, Chandan speaks curtly to his father, showing he has little love for his father. The playwright obviously wants to say that understanding between husband and wife is necessary for the happiness of the family.

To expose the corruption prevalent in the bureau critic society and the ethical deterioration of the medical profession.

Mr. Patel's conversation with his children, brings out the playwright's purpose:

A scan showed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl... The chances were slightly better that the leg would survive... On the girl. Your grand-father and your mother had private meeting with Dr. Thakkar. I wasn't

asked to come... I couldn't believe what she told me-that they would risk giving both legs to the boy... The doctor had agreed... It was later I came to know of his intention of stating a large nursing home-the largest in Bangalore. He had acquired three acres of prime land-in the heart of the city from the state. Your grand-father's political influence had been used... Chandan had two legs for two days. It didn't take them very long to realize what a great mistake they have made. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead fish which could have might have-been Tara (Tara 378)

This long speech by Mr. Patel gives the essence of the play. The play centers around the theme of physical separation manipulated by the mother and the grand-father to favor the boy over the girl resulting in the emotional separation between the two conjoined twins.

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 trauma and anguish is so intense that 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 sister's death.

Tara dies in a shock when she learns that it is her mother Bharati [whom Tara trusts more] who is 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. He also tries to write his auto biographical play, though a futile attempt:

DAN: Give me a moment and the pain will subside. Then I can function again. [pause, more controlled now] Yes. The material is there. But the craft is yet to come. Like the amazing Dr. Thakkar, I must take something from Tara and give it myself. Make

capital of my trauma, my anguish, and make it my tragedy. To masticate them in my mind and spit out the result to the world, in anger. [Slowly, as if in a trance, picks up the typed sheets and starts tearing them as he speaks]. My progress so far, I must admit, has been zero (Tara 379)

Tara is neither Chandan's tragedy nor is it really of Tara's. The tragic events depicted in the play are the kinds experienced in everybody's life. It is Dattani's world where the playwright picks up various characters from the society; they are all puppets in the hand of their creative artist.

CONCLUSION

Tara, Dattani's third play (1990), is about a boy and a girl, Siamese twins surgically separated at birth, and about their emotional separation. The play takes a serious look at the status of a girl child who is unwanted and discriminated against in a male – obsessed society like ours. It is a powerful metaphor for female oppression as the twins mother opts to take a limb and vital organ from the daughter in order to ensure the strength and physical perfection of the son.

Tara effectively serves its dramatic purpose---to bring out the sincerity and inclination of a girl to prove her mettle 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 limned as a female character with potential while her brother was not enterprising at all. The father of the two, however, was bent upon.

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