



## Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*: A Mirror of Indian Society's Gender Discrimination and Patriarchy

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### Abstract

The present research paper focuses on patriarchy and gender discrimination. The play '*Tara*' written by Mahesh Dattani is studied as story of gender discrimination and patriarchy. Gender is a term which is cultural and created. It classifies the work, quality, status, responsibility of woman and man. Patriarchy is, in the country like India, has a curse over humanity which makes one part of society stronger and another weakest.

Key words: gender, patriarchy, masculinity, LGBT, discrimination.

Gender is rooted in social and cultural organizational institution which has been generated by the power structure. Now because of education and literary evaluation, women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender (LGBT) in India are transferring from traditional image. They are turning towards independent human being. The study focuses on the method of behaving and understanding the suppressed part of gender in India, mainly women who are suppressed in some part of the country. It also focuses and highlights on the social and political inequality based on gender in patriarchal set up through the play '*Tara*' written by a renowned playwright Mahesh Dattani.

It changes with the time, society, culture and family to family. It means it can be changed. Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary defines Gender as: 'The fact of being male or female, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences not differences in biology.' (Hornby 644) The term gender varies to different types of societies and cultures. It is created one and social as well. No one goes in the category of gender naturally or biologically but he or she is stereotyped

as male or female. Thus, the roots of masculine or feminine have been formulated. The concept of gender has made it possible for feminists to explain both the biological and social sex differences. Gender suggests the men and women are different by the creation of human subject only. In social-political world, they have to behave different according to their sex. And, only because of these they have to be parted in men and women or masculine and feminine. Cora and Kaplan also say about the term which seems to be a social and cultural one and has no relation with the biological appearance or differences. 'No one knows precisely when and where gender was initially used to refer to the social and cultural aspects of sexual difference.' (Glover 11). They say so because there are the differences in the society on the basis of the outer part of the body as well as the physical appearance.

It is the culture as well as family which creates gender and has their major role in it. One cannot be a female or male naturally but determined by social stereotypes that you are in the category of masculine or feminine. The status in

society, the behavior of a particular person his/her personality matters in the identity of the gender. In response to this Kate Millet, in *Sexual Politics*, argues, 'Gender is the sum total of the parents, the peers and the culture notion of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture and expression.' (Millet 31). It is right that the gender is denoted through the culture, tradition and the characteristics of particular society or country too.

In India, people often denote the country as the mother and *Bharatmata*, even there is a statue/image in the form of symbols of Goddess India and there is a worship of that particular image. Not only about the country but the rivers are also given the names of the female as *Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Tapi, Kavery, Brahmaputra, Tungbhadra, Godavari, Wainganga*, etc. These names are given to the female children in India. Means, the culture is the key factor in denoting the gender. Not even the country and rivers but cow is denoted as mother '*Goumata*'. This happens not only in Indian culture but across the world.

It is society which differentiates child in the categories, boy and girl, masculine and feminine. Boys are said to be stronger, brave and they are given the quality food to be healthy, but girls are told to be lovely, beautiful, shying and domestic one. From the early childhood the society tells them to wear particular type of clothes, even their works been categorized, they have been allotted do's and don'ts. Butler comments on the nature of gender, 'Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated act within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals overtime to produce the appearance of substance of natural sort of being.' (Butler 26) Every society has the gender system. This system generates the whole structure though it is political, economic, or social. All the structures run by the system. It has the frame which is made in some circumstances and condition.

Though there is a biological different in between male and female the society differs it in to gender. The structure makes binary opposition and allotted the categories in between them. As human is the social one but is parted in the category. Two

opposite walls have been made by the structure and it looks like the hierarchy and in Gayle Rubin's words 'Men and women are, of course, different. But they are not as different as day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact, from the standpoint of the nature, men and women are closer to each other than either to anything else- for instance, mountains, kangaroos or coconut palms.' (Cited in. Glover and Kaplan 15-16). In the religion, culture, society, caste, etc gender is different one. Gender denotes to wear clothing as their traditions are. People's rights, freedom, status, role, responsibility and all these are denoted through the culture and gender too.

The term patriarchy relates to the power in the hands of the masculine only. The power structure in the society economic, political, social, etc. powers are constructed in masculine's hands only and they have the rights to handle the family as well. Traditions have been made up in the shadow of masculinity and patriarchy. The culture is also developed through their own wishes. There is politics in it which is started from the family itself. Again, we come to know that there is the society based on the sex. Heterosexual-patriarchal mind set up generates the place to discrimination; and this discrimination is based on the sex. Those who are not masculine in the patriarch and heterosexual, have to be marginalized. Mainly, women and LGBTs are under pressure and given the secondary position in such societies. Male dominated societies do not pay attention on women's problem. Patriarchy becomes the dominant, in the country like India where it is assumed as prominent one, whereas women have to be subordinated.

The life of females is totally dependent in the shadow of traditional attitudes of the society. From childhood to old age they have to be marginalized and dependent. In the childhood girl is escorted by the parents, after marriage she has to be guarded by husband and in the old age, woman has to seek the help from son. This is what happened in family and society with the traditional approach. It is happened due to the excessive pressure of patriarchy. Patriarchy sees woman as sexual labour, gives secondary status in the social, economic and political life. Caring for the children and doing the

household works is woman's whole life. She doesn't have other world to feel free. Not only the social life but also sexual life becomes secondary under the pressurized rules. Woman is become machine in patriarchal family and society because of the worst and traditional thinking of some patriarchal mind set up of the people who suppose woman is to produce the children for the family. And, patriarch family doesn't want the female child, it prefers male child so that he can be the forerunner. Only because of this thinking the family turns to killing female infants. This is what going on in the patriarch mind set up societies. This is the hate towards the women and the activity is done so because of the patriarchal mind set up. The people are under the pressure of patriarchy of the traditional approach to see towards the world. The creative artist always narrates the reality though it is bitter or against the traditions and cultures. The worst situation of the women is the reality in the society.

It is the responsibility of man and woman to nurture their children or do such things, but not by separating or avoiding their responsibilities but by coming together. When both Jairaj and Ratna realize themselves that they were very good in unison. In society also, there is need of equality in between husband and wife, male and female. There is need today to do work in unison whatever the males or the females do. Every work needs the unity and the difference in gender creates chaos but nothing else. The play focuses gender bias discrimination and patriarchy in the family.

*Tara* is the third play of Mahesh Dattani, performed as *Twinkle Tara* at the Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore, on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1990. It has performed by Playpen Performing Arts Group, has been performed in India and foreign too. The play is a family tragedy and shows gender differences and suffering of members in the family. The play has many aspects relates to gender, mother-daughter relation, father and other family members relation, the twins, their attachment to each other, grief over separation and so on. Twins who were joined together, separated through surgery but it was only physical separation not mentally or emotionally. In the play, Patel and Bharati both are husband and wife and their children Tara and Chandan are Siamese

twins. The parents decide surgery for the separation of conjoined twins but before surgery, twins have three legs. A girl child has two but it was decided to replace it Chandan only because of gender bias. Bharati and her father favored Chandan and neglected Tara though she was more capable to get another leg. The play is very emotional in tone. The title *Twinkle Tara* was given first of all but *Twinkle* was removed and it was called *Tara*.

It has the issues of class and community; Patel is from Gujarat and Bharati from Kannadiga. The use of flashback gets effect to show the reality, impression and past events in the play. It shows the tradition and patriarchal oppression in the society. The play is not only about the issues of gender and the girl child but also the issues of self-expression and self-identity. Everyone has to know about themselves and should have their own identity because it shows the way of living. In response to the play many people assume that it's a play of a female side but self, search for self is being done by the playwright. Erin Mee, in Dattani's interview asked a question about the play, 'And if you look at in terms of the self then it becomes a play about....' (Mee Erin B 21). Dattani answers, '... about the male denying the female and how the cultural construct of gender favors the male whether it's a biological woman or biological man, the favor it to the male,' (Mee Erin B 21). Mainly, the society also gives more importance to male and many cases happen of female infanticides.

Family is an institution to develop the culture, tradition to develop the personalities of children as well it is the root for gender differences. It is an institute where human mind progresses from child to male or female. The process of being something starts from the family. It is society and family which show differences in between the females and males on the basis of physical appearance. Chandan, now changed name as Dan in London, wants to write a play. He thinks about his past but write the story of not his but Tara, he writes the play entitled *Twinkle Tara*. It's like play within the play and flashbacks have been used many times. Though he left India before so many days ago, his heart is still here with Tara's memories. He accepts his attachment with Tara and says '...to tell you the

truth. I had your forgotten I had a twin sister. (Music fades slowly) Until I thought of her as subject matter for my next liter any attempt. Or maybe I didn't forget her. She was lying deep inside, out of reach' (Dattani 324).

Tara is a twin sister of Chandan whose body was conjoined together. They had three legs. The blood supplies them through Tara's body. But it was just because of gender bias, Bharati, their mother and their maternal grandfather decides Chandan will have two legs just because she is male child but Tara will have only a leg, not on the basis of medical advice but due to gender discrimination of the patriarchal family. Though they were two lives, they conjoined together. But now, one is no more because of wrong decision taken by the mother, Bharati and of course her father. That decision was taken on the basis of gender. Gender discrimination is the current issue in India. Only because of male-centric favor of society foeticide have been committed and girls are being fallen down in number. Dan (Chandan's name in London is Dan) expresses his emotions while dealing with Dr Umakant Thakkar who operated his and Tara's surgery and wrongly suggested to their mother and grandfather only for the sake of his new hospital. There is partiality in treating the male and the female child in the country like India which has patriarchal system. Importance is given to boys, their education, health and career, etc; but what about the girls? Dialogue between Chandan and Bharati shows avoidance to Tara's education and career

'BHARATI. I wish your father would pay more attention to Tara.

CHANDAN. He does. He doesn't like to show his affection.

BHARATI. Don't tell me about your father. He is more worried about your career than hers.' (Dattani 348).

The world's quest or thinking is not good for the girls. Everyone has their own right to live, behave, to express opinion, agreements but this is not happening in male-centric society. The traditions oppose the girls. And, cultures are

developed in male centric society. Particular community is uplifting their own status. When male child be born that time people celebrate it as festival, distributes sweets but at the time of female child's birth same communities' people kill them. Dattani enlighten such issues in the drama, when Roopa says Tara about the Patels' traditions. According to Roopa, it was the tradition or maybe myth to drown the female child in milk, because of only dowry and what the society called them, others' property '*paraya dhan*'. It does so because one has to give dowry to son-in-law's family. Tara is the victim of this type of patriarchal system. Indian institution has given the equal rights to both boys and girls in the field of education, property, and career and in almost all the things. The statement by Jane shows how the women's thinking is similar to men. They have also equal minds and feelings too. They have their own ideas, their own world, how can one interrupt that without even thinking what will they assume.

Bharati's father leaves nothing to Tara from his property. He gives all the property, money only to Chandan. These are also the social conventions which they are fighting with. The society has nothing to do with the humanity when it comes to the matter of male child. The family's thinking is Male child as the after-bearer of the race. Here the discussion goes in between Chandan and his father revealed that Tara gets nothing from the property and even Patel don't have specific answer on it because of convention.

CHANDAN. That huge house. It gave me the creeps, I remember.

PATEL. He left you a lot of money.

CHANDAN. And Tara?

PATEL. Nothing.

CHANDAN. Why?

PATEL. It was his money. He could do what he wanted with it (Dattani 360).

He doesn't say Tara to go to college but for the sake of his son, the lamp of the race, he urges her to join the college with Chandan. Women have

equal rights, equal status in society but when patriarchal thinking arises, nothing happens in favors of women and girl child. It is revealed that the separation of twin through surgery was planned. A plan which was ruined the life of not only a single Tara but whole family. Patel himself agrees and apologizes whatever happened earlier when he confesses his guilt to Tara. '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 grandfather 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..., Chandan had two legs- for two days.... A piece of dead flesh which could have—might have—been Tara.' (Dattani 378).

It is the satire on self-sufficient Indian male-centralism. In such cases motherhood has also been subordinated in the suppression of patriarchy. It is the hegemony and power of the patriarchy which tries to marginalized, gives secondary position to mothers. Bharati surrenders herself to her father's patriarchy. She becomes subordinate that time. Not only patriarchal power he has but political too. Her father might have thought that if he gets grandson, will inherent him in his political power. She says so because the root cause of the gender bias is the culture. Culture develops the political and psychological atmosphere of the people. It is told so because her father told Chandan to come to the office though he is not interested and at the same time Tara will stay at home.

Gender is a partiality done on the basis of biological differences. The society has distributed man and woman's works separately. There is a separation which has been done through the physical and biological appearance of human. This favor has been, always, done on the basis of biological appearances. In the country like India, where women go to bed late at night after completing her chores and wake up early in the morning, more importance is given to the role of the males in every field. The setup of gender bias is in our mind, our culture, religion and tradition. Gender discrimination prefers male primary.

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