

A Clash between Science and Ethical Values in Mahesh Dattani's Tara

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Abstract

The present paper deals with the exploration of the deep-rooted theme of a clash amid science, humanity and morality in Mahesh Dattani's play Tara. The play Tara also incorporates with the theme of gender-discrimination, marginalized and the patriarchal system of the male-dominated Indian society. The play is a dramatic presentation of the lives of conjoined twins— Tara and Chandan. Both of them are immorally separated both physically and emotionally through a smooth and competent surgery by Dr. Thakkar. He happens to represent the modern scientific growth and material temptation. Mr. Patel and Mrs. Bharti, the parents of the twins, are very rich and prosperous and well-educated as well but highly gender-biased. Mrs. Bharti, with the help of her father, an M.L.A., happens to bribe Dr. Thakkar before the surgical operation to separate the twins, favouring that the third leg, medically more suited to Tara, gets adjoined to Chandan's body. But Chandan's body rejects the leg resulting in their permanent disability. The play is widely discussed for displaying a clash between advancement of medical science and ethical and human values. It does make an earnest appeal for maintaining a balance between the aforesaid.

Mahesh Dattani, born in 1958, stands as one of the most competent and serious contemporary playwrights as Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Tanveer Habib, Mahasweta Devi and Nissim Ezekiel etc. He remains naturally-gifted with originality of his dramatic talent and magical power of play-writing. The audience feel enchanted with his power of language, wonderful characterization, bold themes, hidden issues and stage techniques. He is credited to be the first playwright, having written in English to receive the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for his 'final Solution and other plays' in 1998. He has written more than a dozen plays, having enriched the golden treasury of Indian English Writing. He is very bold, enthusiastic and highly passionate to the most sensitive, controversial and reactionary, issues such as unnatural and unusual love-affairs, homosexuality, agony of the eunuchs, gender-discrimination, child sexual abuse, scientific innovation and Indian mythology etc.

Keywords: Medical-science, ethical, marginalized, conjoined twins, gender discrimination, patriarchal, deformity.

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Mahesh Dattani presents the play 'Tara' fundamentally as a critical mirror on the medical science and unethical practice of a greedy doctor, known as the second God to save the lives of the patients struggling between life and death on the earth. He is treated as creator or destroyer, saver or slayer. It reveals the disastrous picture of conjoined twins – Tara and Chandan. The medical and emotional condition of the conjoined twins is the back and backbone of the plot of the play. God or nature has made them equal but it's man who discriminates them sexually by giving more preference to the male rather than to female. Tara as a great female figure is one of the best and the most impressive characters out of all female characters beautifully portrayed by Dattani. The play also concentrates our attention to the faulty and defective culture and system of the male-dominated society where a woman is sexually discriminated, underrated and underestimated in comparison to a man everywhere in the every walk of life.

As beautifully displayed in this play, Mahesh Dattani's plays frequently are deeply concerned with the most challenging and invisible issues of the modern urban family life where the gender-discrimination is psychologically creeping up and very deep-grounded in our patriarchal Indian society. Such characters have been portrayed in almost all of his plays who are surviving in the mental conflict and dilemma suffering from repressed desires and unjust and conservative gender-biased tradition of the society. He picks up the hidden and the most

challenging issues of the Indian society being usually tabooed subjects. In one of his interviews, Dattani pointed out very impressively — “Our culture is so rich with tradition, and that’s a great advantage and a great disadvantage as well, because we are living in the present and there are so many challenges facing us you just have to cross the road and you have an issue, I think it is very important for our country to spawn new playwrights who reflect honestly and purely our lives, because that is our contribution to the world”.¹

The play ‘Tara’, rotates around the physical and later the emotional separation of the two conjoined twins Tara and Chandan. The physical separation is manipulated in a discriminatory way by their mother Bharti and their maternal grandfather by attaching more preference and priority to the male boy Chandan. Before the surgical operation is done to separate them, the twins had three legs between them with the major blood supply on the girl’s side. Their condition is too much critical and disastrous. As per conservative tradition, survival of the male child was the most essential by hook or by crook, having two legs essentially. Consequently after the medical surgery, the twins were separated in such a condition that Chandan had two legs, while Tara was bound to stay with only one. Destiny had something else. Chandan’s leg was unsuited to his body following some natural and medical technicality.

Dattani’s Tara exposes the picture of the helplessness of a woman in our society. This one has been globally appreciated even in the foreign countries where students have taken up Tara and Chandan as the two faces of the same coin being interdependent upon each other reciprocally. Dattani is aimed at writing this play in order to display the preference given to a male child over a female one whenever the question of choice strikes between male and female, the male is the most-chosen and the most-preferred.

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1. Quoted by Erin Mee in *Collected Plays* by Mahesh Dattani (New Delhi : Penguin Books, 2000), P. 319

This play very transparently presents a clash between the scientific innovation of the medical science and loss of the ethical and human values. The play also unveils the unjust and discriminatory picture of the woman surviving secondary to the man. Tara, having lost her leg, has to die unfortunately because of the surgical transplantation of her leg to Chandan's body. Even this transplanted leg to his body proves to be useless and unsuited to his body later on. He feels somehow very much responsible for his sister's untimely demise. For this repentance he has to escape to London and change his name from Chandan to Dan. Consequently, he has to lead a self-disgusted and shameful life following his guilt of killing his sister Tara — coincidentally. The villainy of the grandfather and his mother not only destroys the life of the girl but also ruins the life of the boy who had been very much emotionally attached to his sister Tara.

The disastrous leg, being the root cause of Tara's ill-health and coincidental demise, could not be fitted suitably to the boy as it remained in vain and ended in smoke later on. It would have been completely successful to Tara's body, had it not been transplanted to his body. After the sad demise of Tara, Dan (Chandan) has to undergo isolation, repentance and frustration, while staying in London. He happens to telephone his father being in Bombay, telling him that he never wants to switch back to India. Being a very competent writer, he says —

“It is just that I don't think I can face life there anymore Tara has been dead for six years and now Mummy has gone as well, there is nothing left for me to come back to”.²

There occurs a very close reciprocal and emotional relationship between the twins — Tara and Chandan. The one is incomplete without the other. After Tara's departure, Chandan is baring in the blame of repentance and suffocation. Dan says, before choosing the topic of writing

2. Ibid, P. 372

his play —— “A freak does not have to look very far for inspiration”.³

Memories of the by-gone days start floating into his mind that he had a twin sister who could be a better possible subject of his play-writing. He utters ——

“Until I thought of her as a subject matter for my next literary attempt, Or may be I did not forget her she was lying deep inside, out of reach”.⁴

Dattani is much better known to have picture up the most sensitive and the challenging issues creeping up in the modern Indian society as displayed in the play ‘Tara’. It’s very unfortunate, shameful, painful, discriminatory and disgusting to pay more preference to the male child psychologically for his benefit (benefit), while snatching away the life of the female child. Too many social and academic programs are being conducted in the society for the removal of the gender-discrimination to frame out the atmosphere of social equality and the woman-empowerment, but if such discrimination and differentiation is done as in Mahesh Dattani’s Tara, all the declarations and proclamations would fall flat and remain in vain.

Mr. Patel and Bharti are intellectuals and well-educated, but even then they are committing a very guilty and unjust practice. It is a great shame on the modern society. Such practices must be eradicated in the society; otherwise such social issues would exist everlastingly. Even Bharti’s father, a very resourceful and sensible person, is also supposed to be accomplice in this mishap. There strikes an interrogation, if Bharti had gone misguided by her father’s overambitious suggestion and decision, why didn’t Patel oppose it strongly? He should have refused and rejected this partial and discriminatory action. Such parents and their parenthood are deeply cursed, disgusted and regretted in the society. They are the big barriers in

3. Ibid, P. 324

4. Ibid

formation of an ideal healthy society. Both sexes have equal importance. Both of them have their own self-esteem and freedom. They should be equally treated. Partial and gender-discriminatory behaviour must be nipped in the bud. Both of them are the two wheels of the same chariot of the society. Without their mutual co-operation, building up the healthy, wealthy and strong society is never possible.

As a writer, Dan happens to resolve to pen down a story about his sister Tara, just merely to pour out his actual experience to show sympathy for her after the unjust surgical operation. He looks irresolute, while recording his biography, but each time sitting on his typewriter. He can hardly type his name, address and date because of the strong phobia caused by the disastrous demise of his sister Tara. While unveiling the secrets, he says —

“Someday, after I die a stranger will find this recording and play it. The voice is all that will remain. No writing, no masterpiece. Only a voice— that once belonged to an object. An object like other objects in cosmos, whose orbits are determined by those around. Moving in a forced harmony. Those who survive are those who don’t defy the gravity of others. And those who desire even a moment of freedom, find themselves hurled into space, doomed to crash with some unknown force. I no longer desire that freedom. I move, just move. Without meaning, I forget Tara. I forget that I had a sister with whom I had shared a body”.⁵

Mahesh Dattani in the same play happens to expose the misfortune of a female child in the conservative tradition and the unjust social system. For example, Roopa, a neighbour, intends to describe how Gujratis used to drown a girl child into milk and later on declared that infanticide occurred because, of choking with milk. Mrs. Bharti, the twins’ mother is deeply perplexed between dirty traditions and her motherly affection to provide the best possible

5. Ibid, P. 379

nourishment to the girl-child. She is guilty of being accomplice in Tara's sad demise as she had to lose unnecessarily her one leg caused by initial surgery ill-intentionally done by Dr. Thakkar, as hush money was paid to him for committing unethical practice. Mrs. Bharti has to suffer a nervous breakdown following her guilt. Simultaneously, she also starts showing overaffection to Tara by loving her, by bribing young girls in the neighbourhood, tempting them to come and chat with her. When Chandan starts interrogating her if she has any future-plans for Tara, Bharti responds —

“Yes, I plan for her happiness. I mean to give her all love and affection which I can give. It's what she deserves. Love can make up for a lot”⁶

Being a woman, Bharti understands her daughter's needs and feelings. She feels very much emotionally attached with her by showering her love and affection on the child. Bharti's concern for Tara's future is very much clear in the following statement —

“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 !”⁷

So far as age is concerned, it does not matter too much, but the gender of the child does more so, when she gets physically disabled.

‘Tara’ is not only a play by Dattani to have taken up the question of Identity Crisis of a woman’ in the contemporary modern Indian society. Among several challenging issues —

6. Ibid, P. 349

7. Ibid, PP. 348-349

“His themes are the Indian joint family and its impact on the individual : the plight of woman in Indian society”⁸

Having evaluated the secondary position and the neglected life of Tara, we come to know the justification about the truth of the above statement. Tara’s portrayal is represented as a victimized woman who was neglected and deprived of the opportunity to become a normal human-being as she was a female and more preference and importance had to be given to her twin brother. The same picture is drawn even in Dattani’s other play— Where There’s a Will and Dance Like a Man. In these two plays— the two dominant female characters— Kiran and Ratna respectively tend to expose themselves as the modern ladies, very much progressive-minded, but unfortunately and consequently they have to suffer because of the defective and corrupt tradition-bound Indian society. In the next play—‘Bravely Fought the Queen’, the woman-question is examined in greater detail and the painful suffering of the womanhood is touchingly presented by virtue of the two generations of the same family— Old Baa, Dolly and Alka.

Tara is not only an archetypical and individual character, but also an icon of the post-colonial Indian women who are getting crushed in the mill of faulty tradition and modernity. Dattani’s plays have been globally applauded for their pinching truth and the bittermost reality about the Indian society as revealed in the said play. That is— a woman is always subordinate and secondary to man, despite all the claims of modernity. She is bound to make her survival in the phallocentric Indian society as the second grade citizen. This subaltern image of woman is presented by many Indian women fiction-writers but Dattani happens to be the first playwright to have taken up the same issues very challengingly and effectively.

8. M.K. Naik and Shyamala : A Narayan Indian English Literature 1980 – 2000 : A Critical Survey (New Delhi : Pencraft International, 2004), P. 206

Dr. Saroj Kumar, in his research paper entitled — ‘Clash of Nature, Culture and Science in Mahesh Dattani’s play ‘Tara’ logically writes ——

“If they are separated by any unethical practice, it would be a threat to their survival. However, the conjoined twins may also be symbolically interpreted as the mutual relationship between science and humanities or culture”⁹

(2017 : 73)

Dr. Thakkar, contrastingly, happens to remind us of a doctor in the Ramayana, known as Susain Vaidh who was a true patriot to his motherland ‘Lanka’, Ravan’s kingdom. In the battle against Meghnath, when Laxman was too seriously injured and fainted near death with Meghnad’s arrow, it was Susain Vaidh, who saved Laxman’s life, struggling between survival and death, having observed all moral and medical ethics. Though it was just contrary to the king’s will and he could have been hanged to death for it, yet he entirely discharged his moral and professional duty to save patient’s life without any temptation or phobia. But here in this play something different and opposite has occurred. Dr. Thakkar has done his job unethically and greedily. He sold away his soul for the lust of “three-acre of prime land, in the heart of the city, from the state. He committed a shameful and hateful crime of depriving Tara of her own leg. Medically he is very smart, sound and competent surgeon.

Thus coming to the conclusion, it can be obviously pointed out to say that the present play unveils the loopholes of the modern society where ethical values are slaughtered by the scientific innovation. Such malpractices must be eradicated from the society and this is the clear message of the play.

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9. Dr. Saroj Kumar (2017), “Clash of Nature, Culture and Science in Mahesh Dattani’s Play— ‘Tara’, published in International Journal of Marketing & Financial Management, ISSN : 2348-3954, Volume No. 5, Issue No. 6, June 2017, PP. 72–76, Web. Accessed on Nov. 5, 2020

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