

## GENDER APARTHEID: IMAGES OF IMPERFECTION IN DATTANI'S TARA

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The woman was not taken from Adam's head, we know,  
To show she must not rule him – 'T is evidently so.  
The woman was taken from under Adam's arm,  
So she must be protected from injuries and harm (Abraham Lincoln).

Mahesh Dattani can be placed on par with Ibsen and Shaw because he brings women's issues to forefront and gives a candid expression to women and their fantasies. Tara is an ambivalent picture of the modern society that claims to be liberal and progressive in thought but insipid and insolent in action on issues of children. On the one hand Indians worship and eulogise Goddesses like Durga, Kali, Sarasvathi and Lakshmi. On the other hand the birth of a girl child is considered intolerant. All pseudo propaganda of equality between the male and female, equal opportunity for women in all spheres of life are questioned by the play wright. Dattani has attempted to show on stage the grim realities of taboo to the public to review and react.

The treatment of women, their marginalised position in the society on account of patriarchal culture regards them the other' in the social structure. Simone De Beauvoir's path breaking book The Second Sex explains the dehumanisation of women as, "She is not regarded as an autonomous being ... She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not him with reference to her. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute and she is 'Other'" (270). Tara presents the question of choice between male and female in terms of parental preferences. Given a choice, the male child is always preferred and always gains an upper hand to the female child. Tara also talks about women who play a second fiddle to man in these blind preferences. The play outcries the sufferings and exploitations that every girl child undergoes in the every Indian family. Everybody is aware of the fact that women subservient to men and do have a long way to go to realise themselves from the shackles of subordination and slavery. In the patriarchal system, the son is the ambassador of familial tradition and structure. He is the one to provide the last rites and salvation to the parents after their cremation. Dattani is regarded as the voice of India because he brings to stage the problem of the unvoiced. The discrimination made against the female child has been pointed out by the Erin Mee in his introduction to Tara, against "the feminine side of oneself in the world that always favours what is 'male'" (320).

The feminine question for identity and dilemma of feminine sensibility describes women as a mere existent or non-existent. GayatriSpivak in her paper, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" analyses the issues of female subaltern where she describes as doubly marginalised, subjects in colonial and post-colonial discourses.

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject the track of sexual difference is doubly effects ... It is rather that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant, if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the female as female is more deeply in shadow (28).

Dattani's plays emphasise on family and relationships within family. He relates modern Indian families to social realities and recreates these characters in dramatic settings. Reality and objectivity remain the essence of his plays. *Tara* deals with ifs and buts of a modern Indian urban family. It is set against traditional, sexual and cast prescriptions that govern the social, psychological, emotional and intellectual insights. It talks of the prejudices against the female sex in a patriarchal society and also about a gendered self. Dattani like Carl Jung asserts that man's nature is comprised of male and female aspects to it. To validate on this idea he explores and chooses a path where he makes a medical improbability as an artistic possibility. *Tara* is a victim of patriarchal society. Her life like the lives of all women has been conditioned and manipulated by social codes of conduct, gender perceptions and idealism.

*Tara*, the play is set at many levels on stage. Dattani experiments with the flash-back technique to unravel the guilt ridden psychic of Chandan, the protagonist. The only realistic setting is shown with the bet sitter, who introspects his past by sharing the memories of *Tara*. The plot development is self-reflective and contributes to a greater intensity. They are better constructed and recreated when compare to the monologues of O'Neil and the soliloquies of Shakespeare. Chandan's introspection is not a mere revelation but a revaluation of the past so as to seek synthesis with the present. It is a meta-narrative used in a dramatic ambience under meta theatrical devices. He fuses the past with the present and the social with the personal. Davis Sykes in his *Realism in Drama*, comments on the concept of performance in *Tara* as:

The concept of performance is plural, dynamic and on certain occasion, it correlates with the illusions to arrive at real reality ... theatre audience is less disturbed by an actor fumbling for his words or speaking them boldly, than by hearing what his words or speaking them by hearing what it takes to be interfering voice of prompter who is the representative of author's control (74-75).

Dattani's representation of physical disability supports the idea that these disabilities supersede the literary narrative as a stock feature of characterisation and also a metaphorical device. These narratives rely on the potency of disability as symbolic and not as an experience of social and political dimensions. On the other hand disability provides an ease access for the authors to introduce into the play, the themes of marginalisation. In *Tara* the disability disappears not only literally but also discursively so that, the sympathy can be shifted to other issues. The disable people have been marginalised as a result of their proliferation and the fundamental questions of difference form a more universal perspective. Dattani's representation of disability is supported by the analysis and argumentation of Davis Mitchel and Sharon Snyder who have termed this "Narrative Prosthesis". They maintained that:

disability has an unusual literary history. Between the social marginality of people with disabilities and their corresponding representational milieus, disability undergoes a different representational fate. While racial, sexual and ethnic criticisms have often founded their critiques upon a

pervasive absence of their images in the dominant culture's literature ...  
images of disabled people abound in history (52).

Dattani writes about the invisible issues of Indian society and centres his play on the emotional separation that develops between two conjoined twins. It is a play about the twins who are born with three legs and during the physical separation the boy was given a third leg and the blood supply to third leg was given by the girl. The play is an unusual example of physical difference, a dizygotic conjoined twins separated surgically during infancy. Dreger in his article "One of Us: Conjoined Twins and the Future of Normal", remarks: "Monozygotic conjoined twins are a rare though regular occurrence, experts estimating that such cases happen once every 50,000-200,000 births (6). Available data indicates that 40% of all conjoined twins are stillborn, and 35% of those who survive birth die within 24 hours" (31). Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* does share a sense of harmony and is synchronic with Arthur Miller's *After the Fall*. Both these plays begin with confessions from the protagonist on their respective lives. These plays also present the futility of their endeavours and rest in mere memories of the past.

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