

A Study of Gender Stereotypes in Mahesh Dattani's Play *Tara*

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  <https://doi.org/10.26572/tc2613527>

Reviewed and accepted version first published on August 5, 2026

Abstract: This article is an attempt to look at the fortune of women in general and the destiny of a girl baby in a male chauvinist society in exacting detail. In short, it dramatizes the women of history and the position of women in the current society and shows the women of the future. This is relevant because it sheds light on the circumstances in which women are forced to proceed. They have a particular responsibility forced on them and silently accepted by them to remain silent. This play is an attempt to reach the minds of women today and reinforce them. Tara is not only a fictional character but powerfully emerges as an epitome and a symbol of the Indian girl child who is required to be compressed and remains meek in a male-ruled and powerful world.

Keywords: Gender, patriarchy, traditional, male chauvinist, archetype

Introduction

Contemporary Indian English drama in translation has made brave improvements and productive experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical aspects. It has gradually revolved more towards history, legend, myth, and folklore, drawing its springs of vivacity and vocal cords of reputation with imposing outcome. Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar, and Girish Karnad are the most striking figures of contemporary Indian drama, not only in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, and Kannada in that order, but also on the pan-Indian level. Significantly influenced by Marxism, Mohan Rakesh waged a persistent struggle against the conventional, fangled hold of Hindi drama, and forever endeavored to project something incredibly new and tough. His plays dramatize the sufferings of men and women who are prey to socio-economic sequences of commands and artistic authority, mainly in his plays like *One Day in Ashadha* and *The Great Swans of the Waves*.

Gender can be understood as a social construct. The concept of 'Gender' is developed by feminists to contest the naturalization of sexist culture that lays bare the hierarchy and antagonism inherent in it. Ruthven in *Feminist Literary, An Introduction*, claims that "Gender is a cultural meaning attached to sexual identity. The purpose of making this distinction is to free women from sexist stereotyping based on limiting conceptions of their nature. We can reject the notion of biologically rooted fixed essence for men and women. For him, both masculinity and femininity are linguistic concerns, and it is language that has erased the distinction between the terms 'female' and 'feminine', which has led to the inferiority of women. The struggle over the term 'Gender' is crucial to feminist scholars, as it is the focal point of women's oppression, which not only denotes the sexual differences but also highlights the inequality between the two sexes. Further, it determines the socially acceptable behavior for both men and women. Men and women are associated with a hierarchical value system that always privileges the male. Gender oppression in India takes on different dimensions. Compared with 'developed' countries, the problems of women in India have had a different history. The system of Sati, though thought to be ancient, is still a burning issue. So also are female infanticide, dowry, etc. Child marriages, thought to be eradicated, are still in vogue. The plight of widows is still critical and pathetic. The possibility of widow marriage is very low.

This indicates a very bad plight of widows. They are even treated as untouchables in orthodox families. Women were denied the right to enter the 'masculine' public domain. So there is a long tradition of questioning the social position of women. Further, gender is now one of the busiest, most restless terms in the English language. This word crops up everywhere, yet its uses seem to be forever changing, always on the move, producing new and often surprising inflections of gender; it is a much-contested concept and has become such a vital, but intensely problematic word. All sociological studies of gender relations in society rely upon the "heterosexual" a way of thinking which conceals the operations of heterosexuality in structuring gender and closes off any critical analysis of heterosexuality as an organizing institution. Heterosexuality is thus taken for granted. In the 19th century, the word "sexuality"

eventually moved away from its association with the purely biological aspects of 'Sex' and came instead to refer to someone's sexual feelings or sexual preferences. Sexual identity is no longer linked to either internal or external genital organs - Now it's a matter of taste, aptitudes, satisfaction, and psychic traits.

Analysis and Discussion

Mahesh Dattani is one of the leading and serious contemporary playwrights in English. A director, actor, and writer, Mahesh Dattani was born on August 7, 1958. In 1986, he produced his first play, *Where There's a Will*. There are several other plays written by him, like *Tara*, *Night Queen*, *Final Solutions*, *Dance like a Man*, and many others. His plays deal with social, gender, and contemporary issues. One of his films, *Dance Like a Man*, won the award for best picture in English. His plays and writings focus heavily on real-life problems. *Tara*, a bitter example of child abuse prevalent in Indian society, is a two-act play that puts in the picture a tale of conjoined twins, a boy and a girl (Chandan and Tara), who are surgically separated, with more weightages given to the boy. The operation was intended so that, being a boy, Chandan had a clear advantage over Tara, as he would take the family name forward. In this preference, Tara is left disadvantaged, dejected, broken, and finally passes away. This simple narrative highlights the subordinate role of women in Indian society, where even in the developed modern world, the cultural traditions and the caste system don't allow a female to lead a normal life. Indians worship Durga, Kali, and Saraswati; Sita comes out to be a sham as India only ranks number one in female feticide, thus bringing the ingrained societal hypocrisy to the limelight. As mentioned earlier, Dattani's plays are about the marginalized sections of our society, minorities and women. They also present real problems and sometimes cause identity, gender discrimination, and sexuality. He takes the family unit as the locus of most of his plays, focusing on human relationships and personal choices, representing contemporary people with their predicaments and complexities, joy and anguish, which are the classic concerns of world drama.

Dattani makes abundant use of Indian mythology, rituals, and traditions, as well as the contemporary problems India is beset with. Hence, all his plays address social issues, not the obvious ones, but the deep-seated prejudices and problems that our society always hides. His characters reveal, belittling their families and neighbors, leaving each reader with a storm within as the consequence. By revealing this complexity, he makes the world a richer place for all of us. Dattani writes about the real-life situation of Indian society, and his plays are about the marginalized sections of our society: minorities, women, gays, and hijras (eunuchs). They are the weakest but integral part of our society and culture. Dattani has thus unfolded words of Beena Agrawal which are worth quoting here: "Theatre is not a mute and mechanical representation of social dynamics, but it is a lively representation of the voices resounding in the context of the totality of human experiences that consciously or unconsciously affect the existing dynamics of human sensibility. Dattani, in the process of *Bharati*, is quite fearful about the future of her daughter. She determines to donate her kidney to give a new life to Tara, which ultimately turns useless. "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 pair is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable, and what about forty and fifty! Oh, God!" (349). Gender Discrimination by maternal Grandfather Chandan and Tara's maternal grandfather was a wealthy politician and came very close to becoming the Chief Minister. Male domination is reflected in the role of Bharati's father, who donates all his property and wealth to the male child. This further strengthened gender discrimination by not leaving a single penny to Tara after his demise. Mr. Patel and Chandan are talking,

"PATEL: He [grandfather] left you a lot of money.

CHANDA: And Tara?

PATEL: Nothing

CHANDAN: Why?

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

Gender Discrimination by Father (Mr. Patel): Mr. Patel, an emblem of male chauvinism, allows Chandan to enjoy greater preferences, and Tara is left to enjoy the position of a subaltern. The fact that consciously or unconsciously all the privileges are offered to the son is obvious from Patel's planning for Chandan's education and future career. Even though Tara is more intelligent, he continuously favors Chandan when it comes to giving him higher education abroad.

"PATEL: You are turning them against the whole world.

BHARATI: I am doing that.

PATEL: Yes! Look at the way you treat Tara as if she is made of glass. You coddle her, you pet her, you spoil her. She's grown up feeling she doesn't need anyone but you!

Dattani, engineering the current of Indian drama by bringing it closer to real-life experiences, tried to articulate the voice of the oppressed sections of society whose identity is shrouded in the cover of myths and social prejudices. They have been dragged into darkness, doomed to survive in perpetual silence bearing the oppressive burden of hegemony of the elitist class. Dattani, within the framework of dramatic structure, tries to investigate the identities of those who occupy no space in the social order." (34)

Tara (1990) is a play that raises questions about the society that treats the children of the same womb in two different ways. It deals with the theme of gender discrimination and reveals a tremendous artistic amalgamation of Indian and Western cultures and concerns. *Tara* is a touching play that shows favoritism toward the male child in an upper-middle-class, educated society. The play describes community and the clash between traditional and modern lifestyles and values." (319). If her parents had given her moral support. She might have shone like a star, as her name signifies. Tara is killed by the social system, which controls the minds and actions of the people. This makes her life a burden on this earth, and consequently she loses interest in life.

The play *Tara* centers on the emotional separation of the Siamese twins, Chandan and Tara Patel, who are born with three legs. The probability of the third leg's

survival is greater with Tara, as Tara's blood system supplies it. But their physical separation was manipulated by their father (Mr. Patel), mother (Bharati), and doctor, who decided to fix the third leg onto the male baby's body to favor the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara). The decision was influenced by the children's maternal grandfather, a politician, who favors making the male child physically fit and complete. It is our cultural heritage that a boy is always superior to a girl. This discrimination against the girl child by family members shows the mentality of the society. The leg that had survived only for two days with Chandan could have been accompanied by Tara's forever. This operation to separate the twins at birth devastated Tara and left her crippled for life. It is tragic that the mother also supports the act of attaching the third leg to the boy's body.

Throughout the play, she bears some grudge against society. She seems to dislike the outside world, though her world consists of only her parents and her brother, whom she was ever close to. The play explores the typical Indian mindset which has, from time immemorial, preferred a boy child to a girl child. "Tara, a feisty girl who isn't given the opportunities given to her brother (although she may be smarter), eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan, and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister's death by living without a personal history. Woven into the play are issues of class, and Tara symbolizes modern society, which claims to be liberal and advanced but, in fact, has a crippled mentality. It is a society where mothers are educated today, and women are considered and worshipped as Devis like Durga, Kali, Saraswati, etc. Still, there are differences between male and female children. All the promises of equality between male and female, equal opportunities to women in all the fields are false. The play is about the separation of self and the resultant angst" (134). Tara's parents are educated; even then, they made such discrimination. Bharati's father can also be considered responsible for this mishap.

Nevertheless, the question that arises here is, if Bharati had been influenced by her father's decision, then why didn't Patel come forward and stand against that? He was the father of both the children, and he should have been strong enough to fight the discrimination. The relationship of Bharati and Tara becomes weaker on the discovery of the truth. Although she loves Tara a lot, her subjugation to society's expectations and her preference for her son weaken her compassion for Tara. When Chandan enquires whether she has any plans for Tara, she says, "Yes! I have plans for her happiness. I mean to give her all the love and affection I can give. It's what she deserves. (9). Bharati is quite fearful about the future of her daughter;

"It's all right while she is young. It is 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! When she sees herself at eighteen or twenty, thirty is unthinkable, and what about forty and fifty! Oh God! (349)."

To shed her burden of guilt and to assert her moral superiority over her husband, she shows extra maternal love and concern towards her daughter. She also tries to expand her love by donating her kidney to Tara, which ultimately proves futile.

Dattani establishes that the mother-daughter relationship proves secondary to the orders of patriarchy. Mr. Patel, Tara's father, is an emblem of male chauvinism. He holds the absolute position in decision-making about the family. Bharati must follow his wish. She is a pathetic victim of patriarchy. She exceptionally cares for Tara to overcome her own guilt. Tara represents the subaltern and the subjugated. She does not have any choice; she must accept whatever is given to her. The suffering of Tara and Chandan symbolically validates the perception that the elegance of the relationship exists not in their separateness but in their moving in coordination or interdependence. Erin Mee says

"Dattani sees Tara as a play about the gendered self, about coming to terms with the feminine side of oneself in a world that always favors what is "male", but many people in India see it as a play about the girl child." (320)

In our culture, a male child is often measured as an advantage and a female child a problem. This is largely due to deeply rooted, sacred misconceptions and the difficulty of dowry, which is entrenched in Indian society. To name a few, injurious practices like female defacement, feticide, gender-based violence, child marriages, and gender-based marginalization are some of the wicked practices that triumph in our society. It leads to preventing women, of any age, from realizing their human rights and prerogatives and ultimately succumbing to the harms obtainable in the male-dominated society in the Indian situation. Pre-natal sex choice and extinction lead to the death of countless girls every year.

Conclusion

The frequent method of obtaining a higher loss rate for girl children than boys are neglecting the girl child and their rights to survive and live throughout early childhood. Every girl child born in an Indian family suffers from the same type of exploitation. If there is a boy child in the family, the maltreatment is very much obvious, as deliberately or mechanically all the privileges are offered to the son. This is because getting dowry is regarded as a male freedom. Throughout the play, she bears some complaints against society. She seems to have some abhorrence towards the exterior world. Her world is packed in; it consists of her parents and her brother, whom she is very close to. In addition to revealing the characteristic Indian state of mind and preference for a boy child over a girl child, the drama looks at the triumphs and failures of an Indian family, comprising Father Patel, mother Bharati, and two children, Chandan and Tara. Tara is an energetic girl who does not get sufficient opportunities like her brother and finally dies. Chandan escapes from the truth and settles in London, where he changes his name to Dan. Dattani has presented the strange truth of women playing a minor role to men.

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