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THE EMERGENCE OF NEW WOMEN AND CLASH OF VALUES IN MAHESH DATTANI'S
TARA

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ABSTRACT

Tara is a victim of social prejudices. She has all the qualities of an emerging new woman ready to defy age-old prejudices and compulsions. Her emergence as a new woman is reflected in her ability to take decision and assert her identity. The present study focuses on Mahesh Dattani's concerns and perceptions of the problems arising out of clash of values, old and new, and it is an exploration of the dark secrets of human consciousness that creates tension and emotional turmoil in the present. Pressure of the past is the characteristic feature of Dattani's play. We find various revelations of past experience in this play, where each individual in his own way has to bear the burden of social values and their efforts to go beyond them, bring helplessness in their lives.

Key Words: Gender Identity, Discrimination, Middle-Class Life, Revelation and Generation gap.

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Mahesh Dattani is one of the leading contemporary dramatists in Indian English drama and is the first Indian playwright in English to be awarded the *Sahitya Academy Award* for his play *Final Solutions and Other Plays* in 1998. He deals with the burning social issues of the contemporary Indian society. He has examined issues of gender inequality, social exclusion, and fundamentalism. What distinguishes him from others is his courage of conviction in depicting the innovative themes like portrayal of gender preference by men and women, which were recently considered to be a taboo in Indian society. His realistic portrayal of human nature evokes both sympathy and empathy in the mind of reader. Mahesh Dattani's theatre group '*Playpen*' was formed in 1984. He made his directional debut with *Mango Soufflé*. He is the director par excellence who has directed many plays and his plays also have been aired on BBC radio which made him worldwide popular Indian playwright.

He juxtaposes various strands of Indian culture in his works. He has authored more than one and a half dozen plays differing in themes, tone and treatments. The entire plays of Mahesh Dattani can be classified into three categories namely *Stage Plays*, *Radio Plays*, and *Screen Plays*. They are as follows: The Stage Plays are *Where There's a Will*(1988), *Dance Like a Man* (1989), *Tara*(1990), *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991), *Final Solutions*(1992-93), *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998), *Thirty Days in September* (2001). The Radio Plays are *Do the Needful* (1997), *Seven Steps Around the Fire* (1998) *The Swami and Winston*(2000), *A Tale of a Mother*

Feeding Her Child (2000), Clearing the Rubble (2000), Uma and the Fairy Queen (2003) and The Screen Plays are Mango Soufflé(2002), Morning Raga (2004), Ek Alag Mausam (2005).

All these plays deal with the burning social issues of the contemporary Indian society ranging from communal tension, homosexuality, child sexual abuse, gender discrimination, marriage and career, conflict between tradition and modernity, patriarchal social system, constraints of eunuch, child labour, interpersonal relationship, workings of personal and moral choices, identity crisis, revelation of past, the problems faced by HIV positives, socio-political exploitation and people grieving under the stroke of destiny are rampant throughout the society and they have become a part of our culture. His dramatic techniques and stagecraft are superb. There are rapid shifts in terms of time and space. He has made use of different images, symbols, devices, techniques etc., to communicate his ideas in a very effective and concrete manner. Mahesh Dattani's theatrical genius is characterized by diversity, dynamism, and innovative urge.

Tara is Mahesh Dattani's third play. He wrote it in 1990. It was directed by Dattani himself and staged by his theatre group *Playpen* as *Twinkle Tara*. Like his other plays, *Tara* also reflects his concerns and perceptions of the problems arising out of clash of values, old and new. Dattani is worried with age-old prejudices, tradition, and the emergence of new woman in this play. He has focused on the relative status of male and female child and has shown how women are also to be blamed for their predicament. In this paper I am going to make an attempt to analyze his concern both from the social and psychological point of views.

Tara and Chandan are Siamese twins separated physically when they were infants. They are born with three legs; blood supply to the third leg is from the girl baby. The parents of twins and doctors decided to fix the third on the male baby's body so as to make him complete but this is not fruitful for them. Even after their unjustified and manipulated division which is done against the law of nature, they are emotionally united. Both of them shares similar mental agony which is delineated by Chandan when he grows to be called as Dan. Dan is the older Chandan, who explore his psyche/ Tara's psyche after her death. She dies in a shock when she learns that it is her mother who involved in the conspiracy of her unfair separation from Chandan. Though Chandan physically survives this pain, he could never lead a peaceful life and so, he migrated to the suburbs of London, changes his name and attempts to create a new identity. He also tries to write his autobiographical play called *Twinkle Tara*.

The emergence of new women has been a recurrent theme in Dattani's plays. It is Tara in *Tara*, the main character of the play, has been a victim of the social prejudices, fighting for her identity: against women, she has all the traits of an emerging new woman. Chandan, her twin brother, represents the new generation of male having respect for women's identity and recognition of their talent. Dattani's depiction is not limited to a new woman only. He has analyses various situations, which give rise to conflict between husband and wife. He shows how preferential treatment is given to a male child, how medical professionals are bribed to keep silent, how a man feels helpless if in-laws interfere, and how a mother prejudices her children against their father.

"the status of women in society and the attitude of women managing the kitchen, the existing dowry system that spells doom for girls and the difference in the attitudes of girls belonging to two different classes, the attitude of modern educated girls and the discrimination perpetrated against women, the activities man has earmarked for women and the concept of equality that is gaining ground, a woman's unethical preference for a male child and the status of a married man in a family that allows the in-laws to interfere and decide for them, the difference in the attitudes of two generations to women and the emergence of career women in society, the qualities of women which they have to learn to use for the proper growth of society and human beings and his understanding of how love ensures domestic peace and happiness."(Mishra-148-157)

It shows that the sad effect of the dowry system, which results in female infanticide even in the modern days.

In patriarchal society, a women's identity is defined by others in terms of her relationship with men .Bharati represents the old generation of Indian women, who used to stay at home managing the house, rearing children, and preserving the family tradition. Her old values make her to take decision in favour of Chandan. So she takes her father's help to get it executed. Dr Thakkar is there to accomplish the work. But this operation proves to be a curse both for Tara and Chandan. Tara loses her leg, and Chandan remains crippled as

his body rejects the leg donated to him. Chandan suffers emotionally also. He has a feeling that he is responsible for Tara's suffering. Bharati develops a guilt-complex, which is reflected in her compensatory behaviour with Tara. Dattani has presented this in Bharati's concern for Tara's career and future. She tells Chandan what she expects women to do these days:

BHARATI : It's time Tara decided what she wants to be. Women have to do that as well these days. She must have a ' career.

CHANDAN : She can do whatever she wants. Grandfather's trust will leave us both money, isn't it?

BHARATI: Yes. But she must have something to do! She can't be—aimless all her life.(Dattani-348)

The women of new generation have come out of the shadow of the old generation when they gave importance to physical beauty. Today's women give importance to intelligence and confidence because these are the qualities, which make them lead their life meaningfully and respectfully. It is this change, which makes Tara replay angrily when Roopa reminds her of her leg:

ROOPA: How dare you! You one-legged thing!

TARA : I'd sooner be one-eyed, one-armed and one-legged than be an imbecile like you.(Dattani-369)

Not only that, she hates even the thought of being pitied for her physical shortcoming. She is confident of her strength, which is reflected in her reply to her father, "I am strong. My mother has made me strong."(Dattani-330) She goes to the extent of saying that she does not care for the person who does not care for her. She is conscious of her self-respect and identity. Tara, the twin sister of Chandan is an intelligent girl. She can understand people well she comes in contact with. She understands well what Roopa means when she lets her know about the tradition of killing girl child by drowning into milk in the houses of Patels. Her reaction is that of a mature girl who knows how to handle such information. She says, "How absurd!...Absolutely hilarious...Is that what mummy was trying to stop you from telling me?"(Dattani-349)

Tara represents new generation therefore, she is a responsive or sensitive girl. She wants her love, care, respect for her parents and other to be reciprocated. She is hurt to find her father lacking in his expression of his love and care for her. She thinks him to be an insensitive and partial person, always caring for Chandan only. She reacts to her father's order when he instructs Chandan and Tara not to visit their mother alone. Tara is extremely pained when she is told about Patel's instruction and says that she will go to her mother even if she has to disobey her father's order. She loses her temper when Chandan advises her to care for people around. She is now ready to pay everybody in the same coin. She says that people should not expect respect if they do not respect her. She is all the more bitter in her reply to Chandan when he says that she should not be selfish. She does not hesitate to say that she hates her father. She is candid in her acceptance when she says that she does not care for anybody except her mother, "I don't care! I don't care for anyone except mummy!" (Dattani-370)

Tara knows how to care for the emotions of people who care for her. She is touched by what Chandan decides in case she cannot join college due to her surgery. She tries to convince him not to waste his year for her. She breaks down while expressing her pain. She is pained to see Chandan suffering for her. She holds herself responsible for the suffering of the whole family. Her pain aggravates when she thinks that all their effort and expenditure are going to be used just to keep her alive. She does not find any charm in her future. Tara is a new woman ready to assert her identity. She does not think she is inferior to Chandan. She does not accept the tradition of treating male child and female child differently; Chandan also does not think that she is different. He recognizes her ability to take decision. Chandan refers to her qualities when he suggests his father to take Tara to his office instead of him: "You can take Tara. She'll make a great business woman."(Dattani-328) Tara is a new Woman; hence, she does not like the discrimination she is subjected to by her father. This is obvious when Patel asks her to wash the bag.

The clash of values is one of the important themes in Mahesh Dattani's play *Tara*. The characters of the play represent two different generations. Bharati and Patel represent old generation having old values,

where as Tara and Chandan represents new generation having radical values. Patel and Bharati prefer Chandan to Tara, whereas Chandan recognizes and respects Tara's talent and identity. Bharati is brought on old values and satisfied to be a housewife taking care of her family and does not think of her identity, whereas Tara is ready to assert her identity, and does not consider herself different from her brother.

Patel has all the qualities of a traditional Indian male, who is a firm believer in old values; He has a fixed opinion regarding women's position, whereas Chandan has an opinion just opposite to his father. He knows Tara's ability and talent and does not hesitate to tell his father to accept it. He asked his father to take Tara to his office, but Patel is not ready to accept this. He loves to see women knitting, managing the kitchen, rearing children and seeking happiness of their families. He belongs to old generation when knitting was assigned to women only. He thinks that this is not the job of a boy. He asks Chandan to concentrate on his studies. He says that he would appreciate if he joins the office till his college starts and leave such work to Tara. But Chandan differs. He does not find any harm in it. He reacts to his father's charge that Bharati has asked him to do this:

PATEL (to BHARATI): How dare you do this to him?

CHANDAN : Wait a minute, daddy, she never asked me to do any—

PATEL : Can't you even look after the children?

CHANDAN : Look daddy, it's—

PATEL : What did you do the whole Jay, huh? Watch video?

BHARATI : I can't think of things for them to do all the time!

PATEL : But you can think of turning him into a sissy—
teaching him to knit!

CHANDAN : Daddy, that's unfair. (Dattani-351)

It clearly shows us that how the values of younger generation have change towards women through the character of Chandan. He has shown how the male of new generation believe in equality and co-operation. He does not categorize the work and he does not hesitate to help to his mother. Chandan is not ready to go anywhere without Tara. He has complete faith in her potential. He is ready to lose one year if Tara cannot join college due to surgery. But Patel has planned something else for him. He has talked to his brother about Chandan's further studies in a foreign country. He does not want to allow Chandan to remain under the influence of his mother and sister. But Chandan is so much attached to Tara that he refuses to go either "to college or the office without Tara:

CHANDAN : I don't want to go to college! (Fighting his tears.)
Not without Tara! If she is going in for surgery,
I'll miss a year too!

PATEL : You will not. I won't allow it.

CHANDAN : I will not go to college without Tara! (Dattani-351)

Dattani's subtle use of irony can be found in his depiction of Bharati's pain to see Patel giving preferential treatment to Chandan. The audience is aware of the fact that it is Bharati who is responsible for Tara's condition. But her sole aim is to compensate the loss, that also at the cost of Patel. She alleges him of lack of concern for Tara and extra care for Chandan. Bharati has been brought up on old values. So she prefers Chandan to Tara. She takes her father's help to accomplish her decision. She does not seek her husband's advice which clearly shows us that how the lives the member of family are affected by social gender preference. Bharati and Patil are guided by old values which make them suffer. All the characters in the play suffer in his/her own ways. This happens because of prejudices which can hardly be removed even from the minds of educated persons.

Dattani shows how women are also responsible for the discrimination perpetrated against them and the situation they find unpleasant. He shows how their preference for the male child spells disaster for them in society but they are yet to understand the ramifications of this deep-rooted preference. Through Dattan's Tara, we come to know about the sincerity and inclination of girl to prove her courage in the world of male supremacy.

Thus, Mahesh Dattani's play Tara depicts different mental states, emotions and ideas, desires and aspirations, strengths and weakness, basic moral and social questions as well as individual predicaments. They also present a many-layered, fascinating picture of the social, political, economic and cultural life of present times.

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