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GENDER DISPARITY IN MAHESH DATTANI'S *TARA*

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Mahesh Dattani being one of the greatest playwrights of India has written many plays like *Tara* or *Twinkle Tara*, *Dance like a Man*, *Final Solutions*, etc which deals with many fundamental social issues like gender inequality, gender roles, communalism, child sexual abuse, etc. He has won Sahitya Academy Award for his play *Final Solutions*. The play *Tara* deals with the gender inequality and gender injustice that women experience in every household of India. The plot is about the conjoined twins, Chandan and Tara who are separated through a surgery where Chandan is favored over Tara to have the third leg just because he is a boy. Even Bharati, mother of Tara favors the male child over the female. Mahesh Dattani had once told in an interview that:

Tara is about a boy and a girl, Siamese twins, I have taken medical liberty over here because Siamese twins are invariably of the same sex and they are surgically separated at birth. It was important for their survival and the play deals with their emotional separation. The play *Tara* is also a metaphor for the conjoined and separated male-female entities and the male given preference over the female (Dattani 19-26).

The story begins with Chandan narrating the story in London where he has destroyed his own identity and has created another identity as Dan to get rid of the guilt over the injustice done to Tara. Throughout the play Dattani has very well depicted the gender differences that are shown between Chandan and Tara. Dattani in another interview has told: "I see *Tara* as a play about the male self and female self. The male self is being preferred in all the cultures. The play is about the separation of self and the resultant angst" (Dattani 128-134).

More than gender discrimination, *Tara* is the best example to show us how women in India are trained to think that men are superior to them. Bharati, Tara's mother favours Chandan over Tara because of her father. This also shows how women are easily manipulated and suppressed in the Indian society. Tara is denied her right of owning the third leg which was actually best adhered to her medically than Chandan just because she is a girl. Tara faces many struggles from being a crippled girl and ultimately loses her life because of the surgery. As the story proceeds one could understand that Tara is active and wittier than Chandan but she is given no opportunities to improve her skills like Chandan. Bharati says: "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" (*Tara* 349).

Like Bharati most of the women in India, though very well educated strongly believes that women are inferior to men and that world only accept men being witty and smart. This is evident when she says to Chandan that the world will not accept Tara being witty and opinionated. She represents many women in today's society where they speak on and on about gender equality but never take any steps to bring equality.

The decision of Bharati to favour Chandan in the surgery was partly because of her father who was a very popular politician and also a hypocrite. He talks in the public about gender disparity and suggests ideas to bring equal rights to both men and women but behind the closed doors he acts as a typical male chauvinist favouring a grandson over a granddaughter. He manipulates Bharati to favour the male child because only a male child could carry on the family name and his legacy. This is evidence that women are not considered equal to men because with all the equal rights to property and equal job opportunities women are no less than

men in any aspect. Not only he manipulates Bharati to choose Chandan over Tara but he also draws a will leaving his entire wealth to Chandan and not a penny to Tara.

Patel: He left you a lot of money.

Chandan: and Tara.

Patel: Nothing (*Tara* 360)

This shows how people in India, though they talk about gender equality, never want to treat women as their equal. Chandan is sent abroad to study but Tara is not. If Tara had been given the opportunities that Chandan got, she would have shined brightly in her life. The central idea of the play is clearly understood with Mr. Patel's dialogue. He says to his children:

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 could not believe what she told me that they would risk giving both legs to the boy... the doctor had agreed (*Tara* 378).

The play depicts the picture of the modern India where women are made to believe that the situation is changing and that they are treated equal to men but in reality women are still suppressed and manipulated by men. Not only men even women treat other women badly. Though educated, women unconsciously still believe that they are inferior to men. Bharati is one such woman. Though she knew that the leg was biologically best suited for Tara than Chandan because the blood flow to the third leg was through Tara, she wanted to favour Chandan because he was a boy. She did not encourage Tara to develop her skills like she did to Chandan. Chandan himself is very guilty of the injustice done to Tara. Though it is not his fault he feels that he was the reason that she was in such a state. He says: "She never got a fair deal" (*Tara* 371). Chandan knows well that Tara is better than him in many aspects like studies, etc and he even asks his parents to support her and is seen very much concerned for her throughout the play but his parents treat Tara as an unwanted child which increases Chandan's guilt. When Tara comes to know that it was her mother who was behind the unfair separation, she is devastated and shuns everyone. She refuses to treat her medical condition. She also does not apply for the university. She eventually dies a sad death just because she is a girl. Just because she was born a girl. Dan says: "Forgive me, Tara. Forgive me for making it my tragedy" (*Tara* 380).

The story is neither Tara's tragedy nor Chandan's. It is the tragedy of every woman in the Indian society. Every woman in India is in one way or other treated unjustly by men. Tara's family represents every Indian family where the girl child is openly or subtly controlled by the male members of the family. In India, many women speak about gender inequality and how they would want to live in a society where everyone is treated with equal rights irrespective of the gender but with their own family they behave like a typical submissive women favoring a son over a daughter. To bring gender equality in India, first women should start believing that they are equal to men. This play clearly shows both the cases. In the first case men dominate women which is evident from the grandfather's dominance, and the second case women ill treat and make themselves inferior to men which is evident through Bharati's biased decision to favour Chandan disregarding the life of Tara.

Another important scene in the play clearly depicts the picture of gender roles that are very common in India. In one of the scenes, Patel gets angry seeing Chandan helping his mother to knit and scolds Bharati for teaching him to knit. He says: "...turning him into a sissy- teaching him to knit!" (*Tara* 351). All over the world specific roles are assigned to both the gender and when they do not follow the role they are assigned to, they are insulted and are shamed by the society. There is nothing wrong with a man stitching or knitting clothes but the society do not see it in the same way and brand him as feminine which is very wrong and unjust to men. This condition would change only when people change their mentality not to judge men when they cry and express their emotions. Not only women but also men are the victims of gender inequality. One should understand that both men and women are equal and same. Everyone can be whatever they want to and however they want to be.

The play serves its purposes of depicting the pain and sorrow of Tara in the world of male dominance. Dan lived because of her. She would have shined brighter than a star if she had been given the opportunities

like her brother. Tara's skill and potential is sacrificed in the name of gender. In India when the question of choice arises between a male and female, it is always the so called superior gender 'male' that wins.

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