

The background of the cover is a detailed illustration of a futuristic classroom. In the center, a large, glowing globe of the Earth is suspended from the ceiling. The classroom has a curved, orange-tinted ceiling with several small, white, disc-shaped lights. Below the globe, students in orange shirts are seated at white desks, some working on laptops. Large windows on the right side of the room offer a view of a landscape with mountains, trees, and a sunset sky. The overall atmosphere is one of global connectivity and modern education.

ENGLISH LITERATURE: A GLOBAL CANVAS OF VOICES, VIEWS AND VISIONS

Dr. R. Kavitha



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**“TARA”: A STUDY OF FEMALE SELF – DISCOVERY AND
EMPOWERMENT**

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ABSTRACT

Mahesh Dattani, the first Indian English dramatist to win the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award, is known for his bold exploration of unconventional themes. His plays challenge societal norms by addressing sensitive issues like homosexuality, patriarchy, and gender discrimination. Dattani's work also delves into themes of child sexual abuse and the complexities of female sensibility, particularly in his play *Tara*, which poignantly portrays gender bias and the emotional conflicts women face in a patriarchal society.

In *Tara*, Mahesh Dattani vividly portrays the deeply ingrained patriarchy that governs family dynamics, where significant decisions are made by male members. In this patriarchal framework, a woman's identity is shaped and defined by her relationships with men, often limiting her autonomy. Patel, the father and symbol of patriarchal authority, embodies these societal norms by distinctly prioritizing his son over his daughter. This gendered differentiation in the treatment of his children highlights the systemic inequality women face, as they are relegated to secondary roles while men are given more value and opportunities within the family structure. The theme of female sensibility and gender discrimination are all dominant in the drama *Tara*. The issue of cultural discrimination with women has been elaborately and comprehensively dealt by Dattani in the play wherein female is subjugated and underestimated by patriarchal society and she remain only a care taker for household utensils, , children, husband, other domestic requirements and tasks of fatigue. Thus Dattani's drama showcases

the stark reality of the life and warrants the attention of the world towards the pressing needs of the time.

Key Words : emotional conflicts , sensibility, discrimination, roles etc..

“TARA”: A Study of Female Self – Discovery and Empowerment

Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian English dramatist to win a Sahitya Akademi award. He is a multi-faceted personality. He is an actor, teacher, dancer theatre and film director, producer, and writer at the same time. His plays are remembered for dealing with commonplace themes in the language of common people expressing their hope, aspirations, desire frustration, joy and anguish, and effort to cope with their day-to-day problems. He has the courage to discuss unconventional themes like homosexuality, patriarchal, men pursuing dance as career, pain and suffering of conjoined twins, gender discrimination, female sensibility and child sexual abuse. Especially his play *Tara* deals with female sensibility.

“The play *Tara* is misread and people tend to focus on the medical details but that’s really not what the play is about. It’s a metaphor either for being born equal as male or female and sharing so much more and with the surgical separation comes a cultural distinction and prejudices as well, but on the other level, it could also deal with the individual having the male and female self and half the self (female), whether your gender is male or female, is definitely given the lower priority.” It is suggested that unlike the radical feminists, who are seriously concerned with the tortures inflicted on the female in the patriarchal society, Dattani projects a world in which both the male and the female are losers as they are forced to stay under the illusion that being biologically different, the male and the female are also compelled to accept cultural polarities. To reveal the cultural polarities imposed on the male and the female in society, Dattani creates a real world—Indian society, infamous for bringing atrocities against its female members—and also introduces a dream world at the end of the play when *Tara* and *Dan* are seen hugging each other in some other place. A perfect combination of the real world and the dream world in *Tara* helps the dramatist pave a new way for projecting his views on gender discrimination.

A patriarchal society is perfectly presented in *Tara* where the important family decisions are taken by its male members. In a patriarchal society, a woman’s identity is defined by others in terms of her relationship with men. Patel, the representative of the patriarchal authority in the play, clearly differentiates the role of his son from that of his daughter. Certain

gendered roles are accepted in the society as natural and hardly does anyone bother to go beyond those accepted norms. Thus it is intolerable for Patel to see that Chandan is helping Bharati to sort out her mistake in her knitting:

The way Patel reacts angrily to Chandan's helping his mother in knitting highlights how certain roles have been confirmed as female roles in the society and how the representatives of the patriarchal society strongly oppose any sort of reversed role.

In *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande projects such gendered roles with which the protagonist Jaya is acquainted after her marriage. She learnt that when her husband found a button in his shirt missing, it is the sacred duty of his wife to mend the shirt; a male in Indian society is not expected to sew or even to attach a button in his shirt. Jaya reflects, "Man and woman... . I realized the deep chasm between the two. They are separated forever" (98). In *Tara* we find a similar mind set. Patel becomes so angry that he orders Chandan to go to office with him instead of rotting at home.

The celebrated book *Biological Women: The Convenient Myth* discusses the tangled interconnection of women and myth and it is observed that according to such myths our behaviour is biologically determined³. Hence, it is taken for granted that a woman has to do all the odd jobs at home such as sewing, cooking etc. and the man must come out of home to be engaged in other works. Tara taunts this age-old concept when Roopa enters the room and asks if she disturbs them.

Here is an obvious reference to the Stone Age and Tara wants to say that man still follows the norms of the Stone Age when women were usually staying inside the caves rearing children and the men remained busy in hunting outside. Though the world has advanced in so many ways, people still cling to the myths of active male and the passive female.

Though Tara is no less intelligent than Chandan, Patel thinks only about Chandan's career. When Chandan says that he will not go to college without Tara and that if Tara has to lose one year for kidney transplant, he too will lose one year, Patel is really unhappy. He repeatedly says that he has some future plans for Chandan, but he hardly shows any interest in Tara's future. Though both of them are crippled, Tara's position is precarious. In Bharati's comment on Tara, her helpless condition becomes clear. Bharati says to Chandan, "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!” (349). Bharati’s father, who gave all his money to Chandan after his death, did not bother to think about his crippled granddaughter who badly needed some financial help for survival. What Bharati does not utter is that despite her intelligence and optimism, Tara has been rejected by the male community because of her physical deformity.

In Tennessee Williams’s *Glass Menagerie*, set in America in 1930s, one hears almost a similar anguished voice of a mother for her crippled daughter. The mother wants her daughter Laura to be smart and graceful forgetting her physical defects so that she may marry a gentleman and get settled. She tells her daughter, Why, you are not crippled, you just have a little defect—hardly noticeable, even! When people have slight disadvantages like that, they cultivate other things to make up for it—develop charm and vivacity—that is all you have to do!” (247) The mother’s concern for her crippled daughter remains the same in any patriarchal society, be it America of the 30s or India of the 90s. The girls are viewed as consumer goods and defective goods are rejected altogether.

If Tara were like any crippled girl (like Laura in *Glass Menagerie*), her story would be a pathetic one, drawing sympathy from others. But Tara’s case is tragic as it is revealed to her that there was a conspiracy behind her deformity and that her mother whom she has loved most and who has so long expressed her concern for her daughter, contributed to that conspiracy. It is indeed a tragic revelation that the Siamese twins, Tara and Chandan, possessed three legs and that the third leg, which was naturally related to Tara’s organs, was transplanted on Chandan’s body at the time of operation but his body could not accept the leg, which had a better chance of survival with Tara. Tara was denied the chance of having both natural legs only because she was a girl and her guardians wanted to give the boy a chance instead, at the cost of being unethical. The preference for the male child is so common in that society that the surgeon could be easily managed to do the wrong to the girl child. The conspiracy was the master plan of Bharati’s father, who being rich and influential in the society, badly needed an heir and as he was without son, his grandson was the next preference and he tried his best to see his heir standing on two natural legs. The surgeon was bribed for doing the unethical job and since the medical science has not yet been able to have a total control over nature, the operation was unsuccessful and both the twins had to depend on artificial leg. Surprisingly, Bharati agreed to the proposal of her father and Patel too, did not protest. Bharati was tortured by a sense of sin only after the leg was wasted on Chandan’s body and she behaved hysterically.

It is possible that Bharati was guided by the age-old myth of women's masochism according to which the girl child should come forward to sacrifice her leg for her brother willingly as sacrifice is in the very nature of women. In her book *The Myth of Women's Masochism*, Paula Kaplan discusses how the myth that "women enjoy their suffering" becomes "responsible for profound and far-reaching emotional and physical harm to girls."

Dattani is thus concerned not only with the issue of gender discrimination in Indian society but also with the contribution of the female to the injustice towards women. Though the women are no more treated as objects of exchange in a modern educated society and apparently, there are equal opportunities for both the male and the female in every sector, the advance of modern science has shown novel ways of depriving women of their right and the women themselves are often involved in crimes against women. When science was not so advanced, baby girls were murdered just after their birth. Roopa, Tara's neighbour in Bombay, explains to Tara how the Patels would drown their new born girl child in bowls of milk:

Thanks to the inventions of science and the availability of medical practitioners who can easily be bribed for any unethical job, there is no need to drown the baby girls in milk any more. The unwanted girl is better killed in her mother's womb and there is no scope of her seeing the light of this world. Tara's fate is no doubt better than that of an unborn fetus, but she is denied the right of having two legs of her own, as medical science provided her guardians with an opportunity to deprive her of her natural right. She survives to receive the shock that her mother had joined the conspiracy against her and perhaps, this knowledge hastened her death. She has already been turned a feminist as she found that her grandfather gave away his entire property to Chandan and her father was always concerned for Chandan's career. Her conversation with Chandan brings out her despair as she finds herself deprived in the male dominated society.

Tara bursts into despair for she does not know as yet that her mother accepted her grandfather's proposal to deprive Tara of her right to her own leg. It can be imagined how shocked she will be when the secret is revealed. Dattani brings out the role of woman in inflicting torture on womenfolk through dramatic suspense. To quote a famous anthropologist in this context, "The supposition that a society's rules of conduct are exclusively or predominantly male-made is preposterous. The fact that the codification of the rules and the supervision of their observance very often are male prerogative should not lead us to make the mistake of the cock perched on the hedge crowing because the hen laid an egg."⁶ Dattani makes

Bharati responsible for Tara's fate and also shows how Bharati becomes hysterical for carrying the sense of guilt within her and how she dies after a prolonged suffering.. She is also rudely treated by her husband and is denied a scope for confession. Her husband proclaims that he cannot allow her to get the satisfaction of confessing her sin to her daughter. This is another side of male supremacy exposed in the play.

Tara badly needs moral support from her parents and brother. When she feels that she is denied moral support, she loses interest in life. She suffers from an identity crisis and searches for a positive role in life. Tara possesses potential which Chandan does not possess. Tara is intelligent, energetic and without fear. When Chandan says that he will not join college without Tara, she is not at all sentimental but tells the truth on his face that he cannot do very much on his own and is therefore afraid. Chandan admits with aiyanger that everyone is not supposed to have her strength. Tara tells her, "You are afraid. Afraid of meeting new people. People who don't know you. Who won't know how clever you are" (361). When such a girl fails to do anything positive and it is learnt that she was denied her right to stand on her own feet only because she was a girl, Dattani succeeds in showing how her potential was sacrificed on the altar of gender. But Dattani's purpose is not only a presentation of the tragedy of gender discrimination in Indian society. He believes that a perfect human being must have both the masculine qualities and the feminine qualities. The concept of the Siamese twins, one girl and one boy joined together, acts as the symbol of such a union. in an interview Dattani explains how the theme of the Siamese twins was adopted by him for projecting his views: "*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." Tara and Chandan were joined together by nature and it is the interference of the society that caused the separation in such a way that becomes fatal for Tara.

The theme of female sensibility and gender discrimination are all dominant in the drama *Tara*. The issue of cultural discrimination with women has been elaborately and comprehensively dealt by Dattani in the play wherein female is subjugated and underestimated by patriarchal society and she remain only a care taker for household utensils, , children, husband, other domestic requirements and tasks of fatigue. Thus Dattani's drama showcases the stark reality of the life and warrants the attention of the world towards the pressing needs of the time.

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