

## PROJECTION OF SELF AND FEMININE IDENTITY IN MAHESH DATTANI'S PLAY TARA

MUNAZZA NEYAZ

**Abstract:** Literature indeed is a mirror of society because it attempts to present an image, rather a true image of the society. Literature mirrors the ills of the society with a view to making the society realise its mistake and make amends. The Indian English Drama has become a powerful medium to reflect the socio – cultural problems of the society and has become the voice of the unvoiced section of our society. Mahesh Dattani is one of the most prolific writers of the Modern Indian Drama. Through his remarkable plays he has made his own distinct place in the genre of Indian English Drama. The plays of Mahesh Dattani projects the issues related to social and contemporary times. His play poses questions on all kinds of discrimination prevailing in the society such as gender discrimination and homosexuality.

We live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where women are believed to be as equal as men, But is this really so? Men and Women are the two sides of the same coin. Women have faced discrimination and inequality throughout ages and it still exists even today in one form or the other. The gender biases and prejudices still affect the lives of many girl children not only in the lower strata of the society but also amongst educated upper middle class families.

The paper attempts to discuss Mahesh Dattani's play "Tara" to bring forth the question of self and cultural identity in the lives of the two conjoined twins Chandan and Tara and their emotional and psychological trauma which they go through after their forced separation. If Tara had been given a chance she would have performed much better than a male. She was treated as a burden and this made her to suffer from identity crisis. Tara is not only the story of a single girl but Tara is the voice of each and every girl in the world who suffers from the norms of discriminative social system.

**Keywords:** Gender discrimination, cultural identity, identity crisis, social system.

**Introduction:** The Indian English drama is a powerful medium of portraying the socio-political condition and issues as prevailing in the contemporary time. The birth of Indian Drama can be dated back to 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D when Bharat Muni propounded the theory of drama in his great work 'Natyashastra'. Drama can be regarded as one of the finest expressions of one's culture which can enacted before an audience involving the audio-visual elements. The enactment of play renders excitement and pleasure and makes it more appealing to the audience. The tradition of Indian English Drama began with the influence of the British culture. The first Indian English play was written by Krishna Mohan Bannerjee which is entitled as the persecuted or dramatic scences. Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society of Calcutta. India has been gifted with some great minds such as Rabindra Nath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, Harindranath Chatopadhyay, N T.P. Kailasan who have taken Indian English drama to the pinnacle of success and made it a cogent medium to express creative expression.

Indian English Drama strengthened its position and registered its own unique identity in English literature in the post independence era with the help of some outstanding playwrights such as G.V Desai, Lakhan Deb, Guruchan Das, Pratap Sharma, Asif currimbhoy, Girish Karnad, Badar Sircar, Mahesh Dattani, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahashneta Devi. Some of

the prolific playwrights became the voice of the universal revolt and anguish persistent in the society by writing about the problems and constraints of the marginalised section of Indian society.

Women playwrights like Mahashweta Devi and P .Dina Mehta are full of concern and commitment for the people who face gender and caste discrimination, exploitation (physical or mental), violation of basic rights. The playwrights in the post independence period have immensely enriched and expanded the tradition of Indian English Drama by touching various issues in their plays such as the social, political, economical problems which the disillusioned India was facing during post world war. Mahesh Dattani is a person of great dramatic calibre. He has presented the glorious heritage of India on the global stage. He has made use of his dramatic genius to depict feminine psyche, agony, physical and mental exploitation of women. Through his plays he has delineated feminine sensibility and plight of women in patriarchal set up.

The roots of the injure against women have long been encapsulated in Ancient culture. The ancient Greeks advocated gender discrimination with a view that male is superior and female is inferior. In the centuries that follow, many philosophers and scientists continue such gender discrimination. Aristotle says, " The male is by nature superior ,and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is

ruled. Woman is matter waiting to be formed by the active male principle.....Man consequently plays a major part in reproduction, the woman is merely the passive incubator of his seed." Aristotle (384-322 B.C.B) page 169

In the *Descent of Man* (1871), Charles Darwin (1809-1882) announces that "Women are a characteristic of ...a past and lower state of civilization. Such beings he notes are inferior to men, who are physically intellectually and artistically superior." (p 171)

This notion of superiority among male is indebted in their minds since their childhood and the female is taught to accept those notions as a rule and a gospel truth. These norms created by the patriarchal society rule women as they are inferior and subordinate creatures to men. Mahesh Dattani is the voice of the common man and the socio-cultural problems which they grow through in their daily life. He protested for the basic human rights of the unprivileged section of the society like women, dalit, children, etc. Mahesh Dattani says"....social issues move me and I like to examine an idea from different angles. The plays where the content came first are on a *Muggy Night* and *Final solutions*. As for the later I was asked to write a play about the communal tension and I said what can one write about that other than platitudes, but out of that churning emerged 'final solutions' sometimes the characters spoke to me first as in *Tara* and on a *Muggy Night*. In *Dance like a man*, the plot emerged out of a flashback structure where the actors play different generations. Sometimes images make the first impact ; then , the set." (31)

**Gender Biased Society:** The paper attempts to bring forth the question as self and cultural identity in the lives of the two conjoined twins Chandan and Tara and their emotional and psychological trauma which they go through after their forced separation. The conjoined twins shared three legs and the supply of blood to the third was from the girl's body. The chance of survival of the leg were better on the girl. But Dr.Thakkar became a conspirator after being bribed by Bharati's father and does a biased act of performing the operation unethically and decides to give leg to the boy. Doctors are considered to be the life giver but here, Dr Thakkar disproves this notion, he could have made a wise decision and could have contributed in giving Tara a complete ,secured and happy life. There is exposure of male chauvinism in the play. Mahesh Dattani uses the play *Tara* as a medium to show the bizarre reality of women in the Indian society which claims to be advanced and liberal but in reality it is same as it was 100 years ago. If we look back to the stone age, we see that men assigned themselves the role of the bread earner and they would go for hunting whereas the women looked after the cave. This idea still persists even in

the 21<sup>st</sup> century where women are assigned the role of looking after the house and doing household works such as sewing, cooking, feeding children etc. And the man must come out of the house to do other works. People still cling to these myths and consider women as 'other'. There is one scene in the play where Tara explains to Roopa about the conversation between father and son, and says that: "The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to hunting while the women looked after the caves."

In *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter writes that," the middle class ideology of the proper sphere of womanhood, which developed in post industrial England and America, prescribed woman who be a perfect lady, an Angel, in house contentedly inner purity and religiosity, given in her own realm of the Home." (3). Gender discrimination is one of the bitter realities in a patriarchal society. The cultural injunctions and cultural imperatives are far more powerful than human concern. The majority of people whether men or women conform the stereotypical roles assigned to them which results in the ghettoisation within the society. Mahesh Dattani put forward cognizant efforts to understand the problems and silent battles fought among the members of the same family. Tara is an unhappy story of a girl child who is an innocent victim of the discriminative Indian society where a female child is regarded as a burden on the family. Tara is not only discriminated by the male members of the family but also by her mother who instead of playing the role of preserver becomes a destroyer of her own daughter's life. The sole root of gender discrimination lies in the patriarchal system of our society where women are always considered inferior to men. A man does what he wants to do and her woman cannot protest against his decisions. In the play *Tara*, the difference in the attitude of mother and father toward their children is shown. Bharati feels the biased behaviour of her husband towards Tara. She can do nothing but accept her husband's decision by becoming a so called 'good wife'. The conversation between Bharati and Chandan reflects Bharati's concern about her daughter.

Bharati: "I wish your father would pay more attention to Tara."

Chandan:" He does. He does not like to show his affection."

Bharati: "Do not tell me about your father. He is more worried about your career than hers is." (11)

Patel, the father of the kids is more worried about the future of his son, his career, his well being. He wants him to join college and accompany him to his office but he does not talk about any plans for Tara. Whereas Bharati go through mental torment in deciding about her responsibilities towards her daughter. Her guilt consciousness makes her to shower love on Tara. She is worried about her future.

She says to Chandan, “ 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 or fifty!” (254)

Mr. Patel, Dr. Thakkar and Bharati’s father are the representatives of the hegemonic patriarchy. Tara’s mother Bharati too becomes a part of this unscrupulous act. Dattani brings out the scenario of the majority of Indian families by writing about the situation of a particular Indian family in Tara where a woman is responsible for the downfall of other woman . After 10 years Tara gets to know that her mother was also a part of this sin and she dies out of shock. If Tara had been given a chance she would have performed much better than a male child. She was treated as a burden and this made her suffer from identity crisis. Infact , all the major characters in the play, Bharati, Mr. Patel, Chandan suffer from an emotional dilemma and through the course of the play, they realize the sin they committed by going through the psychological turmoil.

After the death of Tara Chandan goes far from India in order to escape from the reality , he doesnot accept the reality and what has happened to him after the death of his twin soul Tara. He fails in his attempt to repress the guilt he feels after his sister’s death he lives without any personal history. He might be ‘Dan’ to the rest of the world but deep inside he questions his own self, his own identity, his own existence. A person living in a gender- biased society is ruled by

the social constructions and impositions which are external factors but slowly and slowly they make a profound space in the mind and heart of the person which later results to identity crisis. From the very beginning the Siamese twins are born and separated, the concern of all the family members are for Chandan and nobody thinks of Tara who is no less than his twin brother Chandan, she is the more intelligent of the two, more outspoken of the two, and the more talented of the two. But she is suppressed from the day she is born. Why? Just because she is a girl. A question that rises in the mind of the readers is that despite been receiving all the favours, Is Chandan really happy? Is he really satisfied with the decision his parents made for him? The answer is No. He is not only unhappy but also guilt ridden and finds himself responsible for the injustice done to her sister. He cannot tolerate this and goes to London to escape from the reality and becomes an escapist.

**Conclusion:** Mahesh Dattani’s play Tara poses on the discrimination prevailing in the society and Dattani lends breath to his thoughts through this play. Tara is not only the story of a single girl but Tara is the voice of each and every girl in the world who suffers from the discriminative social system. Now its time to realize that men and Women are equal, they must live in a way so that they can compliment each other to live a happy and fulfilled life.

### References:

1. Dattani, Mahesh. “ Collected Plays”. Penguin Publication. New Delhi, 2000, PP. 11
2. Showalter, Elaine. “ A Literature of Their Own: British Women Writers from Bront to Lessing.” Princeton, 1977, PP 3
3. *Dr.Sunitti Ahuja, Devika Ahuja, Education- A Liberating Force For Women Empowerment In India; Human Rights International Research Journal : ISSN 2320-6942 Volume 3 Issue 1 (2015), Pg 120-122*
4. Mahrotra, Arwind Krishn. “ A Concise History of Indian Literature in English.” Permanent Black Publication, 2006
5. Bresseler, E, Charles. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice.* Pearson Prentice Hall. Fourth edition, PP 169- 171
6. Kuthari, Chaudhury, Asha. “ Contemporary Indian Writers in English Mahesh Dattani.” Foundation Books Pvt. Ltd. Cambridge House, 2005
7. Nair, Anita. “An Unveiling of a Playwright in Three Acts: The Gentleman, May 2001, [http: / www. anitanair.net profiles/profile-maheshdattani.htm](http://www.anitanair.net/profiles/profile-maheshdattani.htm) ) accession date 01-03-2017, Time 8:15 pm
8. Vardhan, Manisha. “ I’m no Crusader, I’m a Theatre Person: Mhesh Dattani” June, 2004.
9. Beynon, John. “ Understanding Masculinities,” *Masculinities and Culture*, Open University Press, Buckingham,2002
10. Dutt, Vandana. “ The Dramatic Art of Mahesh Dattani. “ *Journal of Commonwealth Review*, Vol XIII, No. 02
11. *Saumya Parmarathi, Manu Gupta, Women Empowerment in the Indian Context: A Comparison of the Various Time Periods; Human Rights International Research Journal : ISSN 2320 – 6942 Volume 4 Issue 1 (2016) , Pg 93-96*

Munazza Neyaz  
Ph. D Scholar, Dept. of English  
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh.