

## Navigating Selfhood and Shattering Stereotypes: Mahesh Dattani's Exploration of Gender Discrimination

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**Abstract:** Mahesh Dattani is one of the best modern playwrights; he has provided us a wide range of works which displays many themes directly or indirectly connected to our life. He is India's first playwright who received the Sahitya Academy Award. Mahesh Dattani is a multit talented personality, he is a playwright, actor, director, dancer, teacher, and writer. He has nicely dealt the social problems prevalent in India. He has nicely and easily presented marriage of Convenience, Communal hatred, Gay characters, Generation gap, Emancipation of woman, Criminality etc in his works. In our present research we are trying to cover the various themes displayed by Mahesh Dattani. The paper will try to cover his works like: Tara, Final Solutions, Dance like a Man, Queen who fought Bravely, The Big fat City and Brief Candle.

**Keywords:** Selfhood, Suffering, Gender discrimination.

Mahesh Dattani has always tried to cover all the social problems and the dark side of our society. He has tried to cover the criminality, Gay characters, Communal hatred, Marriage of Convenience, hatred towards male dancers, Emancipation of woman, suffering etc. His characters go through mental and physical trauma. In his work *final solutions* Dattani has tried to present the tensions between the Hindus and the Muslim community of India. When the story starts we have seen that the female character Daksha was reading her diary, she was in habit of recording each and every moment of her life. She was reading about an incident when the Britishers left our country after partitioning. They divided India into two parts as India and Pakistan. They had inflicted the seed of hatred in the minds of both the Hindus and Muslim Community. Daksha has written about the atmosphere of terror prevalent at that time inside and outside their home. Daksha was living with her old mother, her mother was very terrified with the prevalent atmosphere of their place and she used to sit in the temple of her house and she prays regularly to God to protect them. Daksha's mother was very upset as her father was away from home. Daksha was reading about the outbreak of the riot, which took place on the day when Hindu Rath Yatra was going on. When the Rath of God was passing a few Muslim threw bottle bombs and they broke the Ratha's wheel. This incident turns the whole public very angry. When the situation got uncontrolled a curfew was imposed and nobody was allowed to move on the roads. In his other work Tara Mahesh has tried to portray the patriarchal society, where the male members were given more importance than the females. In another work of Dattani that is *Tara* the same theme of gender discrimination and search of selfhood is portrayed. In this play Dattani has also tried to discover some of the invisible problems prevalent in our Indian society. The play presents the story of two twins who were conjoined from their birth. These twins have total three legs. It was decided by the parents to separate them by operation, but it was very difficult for them to decide that to which child will have the two legs. As the story moves forward we are told that the parents decided to give two legs to their male child and the female child Tara was left with one leg. This decision shows the socio-cultural discrimination that was deeply rooted in our Indian society. Mahesh Dattani has always tried to present the dark realities of Indian society. Dattani's next play *Bravely fought the Queen* shows that although women were enjoying freedom now-a-days but at the end it was seen that they were still considered as secondary. *Bravely fought the Queen*, presents the subordination of females in the traditional Indian society. The female characters Dolly and Alka face the physical violence at the hands of their husbands. A typical patriarchal structure of Indian society is presented by Dattani. A perfect male dominated society is shown in this work. The female character not Alka not only suffers at the hands of her husband but her brother Praful also tortured her. An incident is recorded by us where Praful after getting annoyed, dragged her sister Alka into the Kitchen and pushed her face in front of the burning stove and burnt her hair. Her husband Nitin also used to torture her once he drove her out of the house after quarrelling with her. Jiten's father was also very cruel he used to beat his old aged wife. And Jiten also mistreats Dolly, he used to beat Dolly even when she was pregnant. Due to this torture their daughter Daksha was born invalid. Another theme which was highlighted by Mahesh Dattani was the theme of Homosexuality. Alka's husband was a homosexual man and he was having a relation with Alka's own brother. The act of prostitution is also highlighted by Dattani. The male characters Jiten and Shridhar were the merry making fellows, they used to visit the prostitutes and from time to time they also bring these prostitutes to their working places. They used to torture their own wives and fulfill their dirty and filthy purposes through these prostitutes. By presenting these type of issues Dattani has tried to bring out the conflict between the traditional and contemporary cultures. All the ill practices of the male partners had an adverse effect on their female partners and the females started to search these missing places by doing the odd things. Alka started taking wine due to frustration, Dolly was attracted towards Kanhaiyalal and Lalitha involved herself in growing the bonsai plants. All these activities adopted by the female characters in a shattered mood shows their deplorable

condition in a male dominated society. As the story proceeds all the male characters were unmasked by the author and their real faces were shown to the audience. Dattani has tried to give a message to all the females of Indian society that don't live in a darkness and raise the voices against the injustices done to them. The female characters also shows a change in them, Dolly brought a revolutionary change in her, she breaks her silence and raises her voice against all the injustices made against her. Alka also reveals her brothers ill intention that he planned to marry Alka to Nitin only to be near Nitin and to continue their gay relationships. Alka is the perfect example presented by Mahesh Dattani who raises her voice against all the injustices done to her. And She is the only Queen who fought against all the injustices, she is the living example for all the women's who were suffering at the hands of the male members of our society. Mahesh Dattani is the only playwright who has tried to deal with the multiple challenging themes in his plays. He has dealt with the themes like child-abuse, AIDS Victims, homosexuality, gender discrimination. His plays are perfectly made. Dattani has himself admitted that :

*"Drama is not like a poetry that one can frame even while sleeping"*

If we talk about his play Tara, it begins with an address by Dattani, and supports his aspects of Drama:

"In poetry, even the most turbulent emotions can be recollected when one is half asleep. But in drama, Ah! Even tranquility has to be recollected with emotion. Like touching a bare live wire. Try distancing yourself (will be hopelessly inadequate) from that experience and writing about it? And for me ..... I have to relieve that charge over and over again."

Mahesh Dattani has always presented the human situations very realistically. He has tried to capture them as it is. He has presented minutely all the complexities of our society. He has also talked about the family relations like the relation of father and mother, Father and son, husband and wife, brother and sister, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. He has presented these relations by unmasking the real emotions. He has called these relations as weak, jealous, selfish, cunning and he has tried to explore a fact that all were struggling and wants to achieve the complete happiness. His play Tara was first performed with a name 'Twinkle Tara', it is a tragedy of man and nature. The play has tried to present the harsh reality of patriarchal society. When the play begins we see that the twins were born with only three legs and both were conjoined, the parents were happy to have them. Dr. Thakkar was the Surgeon who has written in his report that the twins have one kidney each and Tara has no bladder and no rectum.

*"Cutting the two lives apart was an extremely delicate job." (342)*

Chandan the male child has weak lungs. Nature has made the two innocent lives as 'freaks'.

When the parents decided to separate both the twins, they decided to give two legs to their male child and the weaker child Tara who has no bladder, no rectum was left with only a single leg. This decision made the female child's life more miserable. She became weaker day by day and one day she was dead. The decision taken by the parents shows that the female child was not welcomed in our Indian society, everybody wishes a male child. Tara died and when Chandan was sent to London to live a better life. After coming to London Chandan changed his name as Dan but he was filled with the guilt of his sister's death. He started writing his life story in the form of a tragedy. He wrote a Drama in Two Acts named as "Twinkle Tara, he throws off his mask in this drama and announces that:

"But that's all done with. Tonight I drop everything, I have desperately wanted to be in my years in England..... The Handicapped immigrant..... The mysterious brown with phony accent. The last being the hardest to drop, having spent the whole years in acquiring it. And what remains is what I intend making capital of my freakishness. I am a freak..... Now, a freak doesn't have to look for inspiration. (342)

Before her death Tara also faced mental trauma when she came to know that her mother and grand-father manipulated their physical separation. Her situation becomes very worst as she became weak, as she has no bladder and rectum she has to face many operations. When Tara's brother came to know about all this he was filled with guilt and he was very sad for Tara. Tara led a tragic life just because of her mother's wrong decision. Her mother Bharti was also carrying the burden of what she has done with her daughter. She was becoming a psychic. In order to save the future of Tara Bharti decided to donate her kidney to Tara and She told Tara that she was trying to make her future a better one. Tara's father Patel also supports his male child. Both the children's were handicapped and they were both struggling but Patel was busy in making plans for his son Chandan. He was not at all worried for Tara. Bharti was worried for Tara's good and secure future. After donating her kidney to Tara Bharti became psychic and was admitted to hospital, she requested Tara's father to let her reveal the truth what she has done with Tara. But Patel did not let her do so and after some time he himself revealed the truth and shattered Tara. As Tara was more connected with her mother, it became very hard for her to believe that she was suffering due to her mother's decision. Tara's father doesn't allow Tara to meet her dying mother. Mahesh Dattani has also tried to reveal the attitude of society towards the handicapped people. He has presented a character Roopa who only became friends with Tara's family in order to snatch the secret of the family. And she used to spread that secret in the neighborhood. Both the children's were fed up of their treatment and it had a negative impact on them. Tara was not given any special privilege like Chandan so she died one day. All the plays of Dattani reveal the problem of female characters like: Tara in (Play Tara), Ratna in (Dance like a man), and Uma in (Do the Needful). All these plays show the gender oppression. The playwright has also tried to show the war between Nature and Science. As now-a-days science is progressing at a fast pace and Science challenges Nature in many ways. Nature has produced Tara and Chandan as conjoined but with the help of science they were separated. As the parents were not at all worried about their female child Tara she left them one day. But science had tried its best to save her. Here destiny

is also responsible a little bit by giving two conjoined child with three legs to Mr. Patel. The neighbors mock and laugh at them, they were not able to take their children to public places as everybody stares at them. The parents were also suffering and they were struggling to give a good future to their handicapped children. Mahesh Dattani's plays also show that how a female feels and experience the world is very different from what a men see. The females characters shows us a shocking truth about our Indian society. Our playwright is a male author but he has tried to feel and present the world from a females point of view, he has tried to reveal the hidden dark side of a women in a male dominated society. He has become a voice for the female sufferers. He has given a message to our society for providing an equal treatment to all the females.

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