Chapter III

Social Maladies in Tara

Like the previous play *Final Solutions*, *Tara* is also a problem play which centres round the theme of gender discrimination and identity crisis of a girl child in a family. It shows how women have been the subject of persecutions and sufferings right from the birth to death. The play tries to study the various aspects of human sensibilities which have become today the prime need of the hour.

Gender discrimination is one of the prominent themes in Indian Writing in English and in other Indian vernaculars. Anita Desai, through her novel *Fasting, Feasting* shows how women have to lead a life of suffocation and undeserved sufferings – both physically and mentally in a male-dominated patriarchal framework; how life in such a callous family trundles on at a slow pace under the prying eyes of the parents; how a girl child craves for parental affection but in the end, gets nothing but frustration, isolation and unhomely treatment and, above all, how the neglected child slowly develops the horrible sense of trauma and other associated psychological diseases. Arundhati Roy, in her beautiful novel *The God of Small Things*, portrays the truthful picture of the plight of the women in society and their marathon struggle for seeking the sense of ‘identity’ in a male-dominated conservative framework. Vijay Tendulkar’s *Kamala* also deals with the problem of women being treated as a commodity in the modern world. He shows that his two female characters, Kamala and Sarita, are commodities that can be sold off. This play universalizes the
predicament of women who are always subjected to a life of suffering and humiliations.

It is interesting to note that women have been the subject of perpetual tortures by male-dominating society. In our rich books and scriptures, sometimes women have been praised and admired in a hyperbolic terms. Manu, the great Indian saint of the Hindu, writes in his famous book, Manusmriti, that where there is worship of woman, there the gods dwell. But in most of the cases women have been treated as weaker sex or flower vase or a bird caught in the cage of patriarchy.

It is the matter of sorrow that for a woman, life is always a challenge and since ages she has been subjected to the many challenges thrown by society, customs, traditions and men. In all over the world, tradition has assigned a lower position to women in its social set up. However important the functions and duties of a woman are, she is always relegated to the back ground. And woman is obliged to subordinate her interests and desires to the collective will of her community, and in particular to the male members. Women are not considered as an equal gender but their position is reduced to an object. All male-members try to possess them and they can not tolerate even a slide deviation in women’s part. As Neena Arora observes:

“Man considers it as normal male behaviour to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and the physical level outside marriage while at the slightest hint of any deviation on her part which may not involve sex, man turns violent and hostile towards his wife and starts persecuting her.”¹
It is the matter of deep regret that verbally we provide the supreme position to woman. But from the time immemorial woman has never been in a position to demand or at least expect this ideal state from her male counterpart who deliberately expects the qualities of an ideal wife-Sita, Savitri - from his female counterpart. From the olden days to the present period women have been constantly under the pressure of living up to these expectations. Though nothing much has been changed in the status of women till now. This is what Mahesh Dattani shows through his play *Tara*. He tells the fact that we are living in the world of democracy but about half of the population of the world are not given their common rights to lead a smooth life. Here his presentation of women is very near to William Shakespeare who in his famous play, *Othello*, presents a very truthful presentation of a woman and feminine sensibilities. Emilia, a woman character, flings irony of male-domination and argues the freedom of woman, saying:

“Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like them; they see and smell,
And have their palates both for sweet and sour
As husband have. What is it that they do
When they change us for others? Is it sport?
I think it is. And doth affection breed it?
I think it doth. Is’t frailty that thus errs?
It is so too. And have not we affections,
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
Then let them use us well; else let them know.
The ills we do their ills instruct us so.”

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Women are still denied the rightful place in the society. They are subject to humiliations which reduced them to a position inferior to men. The average woman has always led a life not better than that of a slave. At all the stages of life, right from the birth to the death, she has been in a subordinate position to man. She has never been recognized as an independent entity free to select a course of her life at her own choice. Her goodness has always been said to be associated with the goodness of the husband whose service alone has been recognized as a way for her deliverance. To a wife, the only God-worth worshipping is her husband regardless of the fact whether he treats her well or ill. The irony is that man is born of a woman and yet the latter is dominated by the former. Our ancient scriptures say that the position of woman is above all relationships in the world. But in reality she has been enslaved, degraded and subjected to various types of atrocities and tyrannies in the hands of man and the male-dominated society. Even the modern age has not brought liberation for her.

The gift of democracy has not been fully presented to women. It is very recently they have got the right to vote. Education that enlightens a human-being, has always been regarded as the sole preserve of men. In the whole-life she suffers: as a daughter in the hands of her father; as a wife in the hands of her husband; as a mother for her children. No one cares for her feelings and wishes. We forget the fact that woman’s tenderness represents the constructive side of Nature. Her delicacy and the sense of dedication and devotion, her readiness to submit to the bitterest of trials and tribulations, her promptness to help and co-operate, have always been a source of inspiration to all humanity. It is common proverb that ‘behind all great achievements of men, there has been an unmistakable contribution of women.’ But at all places she met discrimination in society. Contributions of women through
the ages in different fields of human endeavour belie Shakespeare’s dictum “Frailty, thy name is woman.”

The above passages describe the miseries of women they face in this world. To raise the problems of women many authors have contributed through various genres—poetry, novel, drama, essay, article etc. Mahesh Dattani, who is an observer of society, raises such types of problem in his play *Tara*, perhaps, the most performed play of Dattani.

*Tara* was first performed as *Twinkle Tara* at the Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore on the 23rd of October 1990 by Playpen Performing Arts Group. Mahesh Dattani himself directed the play at first time. It is a stage play in two Acts. When Uma Mahadevan Dasgupta asked a question related to his most performed play and about his favourite plays, he replies:

“The most often performed play, I think, has to be “Tara”. It used to be “Twinkle Tara” but Alyque Padamsee suggested that this might make it sound like a children’s play, which it isn’t. It’s about young people but the issues are serious. It’s performed all over the place, in schools and colleges, amateur groups and repertories. As for the “best” play – I really can’t name any one – after all they’re all MY Plays!”

He is a ‘reluctant playwright’ who chooses to direct the first edition of his plays to whom he writes. He wrote *Tara* in 1990 and directed it. Although the title suggests that the play revolves round Tara, a female character in the play but it is not the final observation. In this play all the
characters get their due place. Dattani observes the society and exposes the maladies of gender discrimination and related issues through the play. As he writes in the Preface of his book *Collected Plays*:

“I also know that I have a lot to say and am probably not saying it well enough. But my characters have a lot to say too, and they seem to be doing rather well at having their say.”

The story of the play *Tara* is centered on the issue of gender discrimination. Dan who is now living in London remembers the story of his childhood. He is a Siamese twin. His third leg is joined by her sister Tara. She is a very intelligent, attractive and talkative girl. But her parents prefer Chandan, who is later on known as Dan. They plan to separate their children. They visit the doctor and know the fact that the third leg suits Tara. Bharati, Tara’s mother, likes Chandan. Bharati’s father, a big politician, uses his influence and anyhow persuades Dr. Thakkar for this operation. Under the influence of money the doctor becomes ready for this operation. He performs his job; but this unnatural act got natural justice and after two days the leg was separated.

After some time Tara’s kidney is damaged and Bharati tries to amend her mistake and becomes ready to donate her kidney. But Patel does not give her permission for this act. He even beats her. But at last Tara went to the place from where she had come. Dan who had experienced the whole actions recalls them and writes that he feels guilty for the act commented by his parents and so he makes an apology for this shameful act.
Dattani does not believe in setting a trend in society but he is a writer who sets the problem of society before the world and his audiences. He takes his subject the complicated dynamics of the modern urban family. In the play *Tara* he sets his play under the background of a middle class family in which a girl child suffers because she is not productive for the growth of a family. She wants to blossom in the family but is pruned by her own near and dear. She fades before becoming a flower. As Erin Mee, a theatre director, writes:

“*Tara* centres on the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins following the discovery that their physical separation was manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favour the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara). Tara, a fiesty girl who isn’t given the opportunities given to her brother (although she may be smarter) eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan, and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister’s death by leaving without a personal history. Woven into the play are issues of class and community, and the clash between traditional and modern lifestyles and values.”

Dattani is a genuine writer. He takes the theme that prevails in our society but the people do not want to confront them. He provides a platform for the issue, so that the people could aware of the fact that it is a reality and not just the fantasy of a playwright. In our society the women never get their due share although we always put them on the highest rung. In *Tara*, the
The dramatist puts the reality that Tara has no problem but it is male-dominated society that bars her to survive in the world. In this respect he is inspired by Ibsen who puts the problems of women before the world directly in his plays. As Tanu Pant writes:

“Dattani’s plays can be said to have been inspired by Ibsen, the Father of Realism. Ibsen dealt with a number of social problems in his plays like *The Pillars of Society*, which deals with women rights, *The Doll’s House*, which deals with an incompatible marriage and *The Enemy of the People* deals with political and municipal corruption.

In the same way Dattani handles every problem from gender issues to sexuality. In his play *Tara* he deals with the issue of gender discrimination.”*

Simply it seems that *Tara* is a play of a girl that suffers under the tradition of the society. It is a play which flings a very harsh and rugged satire on the male-dominating society that believes in of upgrading the male-child in place of a female one. It is a play about a boy and a girl who are joined together at the hip and have to be separated surgically, an operation which will mean the death of the one of the two. This injustice is perpetrated by their own mother whose preference is to the male child make the play more powerful. It suggests that it is woman who continues the chain of injustice. The play is very close of Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980) in which Saru’s mother does not get reconciled to the birth of a daughter. Saru’s birth is accompanied by terrible rain; the mother perhaps
sees the birth as a catastrophe. About his play *Tara* Dattani himself says to Sachidananda Mohanty in an interview:

“This *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 story of *Tara* is very simple absorbing deep meaning. The play opens with a scene in which Dan, changed name of Chandan, a playwright, recalling his childhood with his sister, a Siamese twin. He himself, like Dattani, and also seems the mouthpiece of Dattani, tries to distance himself from the experience which he has felt in his childhood. He prepares himself to express the incident truly. As he writes:

“DAN: In poetry, even the most turbulent emotions can be recollected when one is half asleep. But in drama! Ah! Even tranquillity has to be recalled with emotion. Like touching a bare live wire. Try distancing yourself from that experience and writing about it! A mere description will be hopelessly inadequate. And for me… I have to relive that charge over and over again. (Pause) Excuse me while I recharge myself.”
Although Dan is living in London but he has all the memories of his childhood. He begins to write his story of past. Bharati has two children-Tara and Chandan, Siamese twins. They share third leg. Now time comes for surgery and the big question is with whom the third leg will lie. All know that the third leg suits with Tara. It is not possible for anyone to operate and fit that with Chandan. Even Tara’s parents and her influential grandfather know the fact very well. As Patel, her father, tells:

“PATEL: 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.”

It is clear that all the members of family were familiar that the third leg can survive only with Tara and not with Chandan. Even the second god on the earth, Dr. Thakkar knows the fact scientifically. But under the influence of money he becomes ready for this unethical operation. Tara’s grandfather persuades him to do this crime and instead of this act he will arrange ‘three acres of prime land’ in Bangalore. For this he will use his influence. As Patel says:

“PATEL: ... The doctor had agreed, I was told. It was only later I came to know of his intention of starting a large nursing home – the largest in Bangalore. He had acquired three acres of prime land – in the heart of the city – from the
At last the doctor performs surgery and it is recognized that it has been an unequal, unfair operation. Bharati and her father with the collaboration with the doctor organize the whole act. They try their best to make the third leg suitable for the male issue. Even Dr. Thakkar knows that ‘it was a complex case.’ But he tries to make the unnatural act possible on the basis of modern technology. But all these thoughts proved wrong and God rejected this heinous act and the second leg of Chandan is removed after two days. As Patel again describes:

“A few days later, the surgery was done. As planned by them, Chandan had two legs – for two days.”

Although Tara is born in the society. She is born from the same womb from which Chandan is born. But in her whole of her life she never gets her due share. She never gets a chance to fulfill her desire. Her whole life is manipulated by her parents and grandfather. Even the second god shows his intention that he does not favor a girl child. He forgets her medical ethics. She is just like ‘an object in a cosmos, whose orbits are determined by those around. Moving in a forced harmony.’ But this forced harmony can remain for long only when one object does not disturb others. As Dan says:

“Those who survive are those who do not defy the gravity of others. And those who desire even a moment of freedom, find themselves hurled into
space, doomed to crash with some unknown force.”

It is very interesting that Tara is born in the society. But the society does not think that she is the other part of the same coin. A girl is not thought productive for a family as well as for society and Tara is doomed to oblivion. Tara’s parents use her for a male-child and doctor uses her for money and all where the looser is Tara whose only mistake is – she is a female. It shows the miserable condition of a female. Such act that stakes the life of the female child for the sake of the male child is pathetic. As Sangeeta Das writes:

“… The preference for the beneficence of the male child while staking the life of the female child is pathetic and takes to culmination the feeling of rejection felt by women in our society. So much for the educational policies framed but for the literacy of the women folk and the society as whole. After self-reliance attained by many women in almost all the field, if such differentiation is done as in Mahesh Dattani’s Tara, all the declarations and proclamations are bound to go to the drain.”

Tara is a beautiful girl. In any respect she is not less intelligent than Chandan. When Tara and Chandan play, it is Tara who wins the game. Even Bharati accepts that ‘Tara is a very nice girl.’ She has many qualities that excel Chandan. As Bharati, her mother, herself describes:
“… She can be very good company and she has her talents. She can be very witty and of course she is intelligent. I have seen to it that she… more than makes up in some ways for what she… doesn’t have.”

Tara is a cunning and talkative girl. When Roopa comes at her home and teases Chandan, he could not protect himself from her. But Tara teaches her lesson indirectly. She has many hidden facts to which she knows for time-being. When Tara thinks that Roopa may humiliate her, she says indirectly: “So how does it feel having one tit smaller than the other?” At the statement Roopa is stunned and comes under very sarcastic situation. She criticizes Tara’s mother and leaves the place forever.

Bharati knows the talent of Tara but she never leaves her free to flourish in the world. Tara is a young girl who is very cute and comfortable in all circumstances. Her remarks are full of wit. But Bharati herself is not optimistive about the future of Tara as she says:

“…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! Oh God!”

Bharati is herself a woman and she is familiar with the whole act of the society and that is why she says that she makes such remarks. Tara’s father is interested in sending Chandan to his office but he does not think to
call Tara to his office who is interested in learning the art of business. He agrees only when Chandan insists upon him to do so. As Dattani writes:

“PATEL (firmly): Chandan, I think I must insist that you come.

CHANDAN: We’ll both come with you.

PATEL: No!

_Tara looks at Patel, slightly hurt._

_(Softens)_ Yes. You may both come – if you want to.”

In spite of the fact that Indian culture is one of the most ancient and loftiest cultures of the world, India has not been able to progress on the sociological plane. So Tara gets secondary position in the society, it is all due to tradition. As Anita Myles says:

“… Tara is the portrayal of woman as a victim and she was denied the opportunity to become a normal human being because she was a female and preference had to be given to her twin brother. Dattani’s plays _Where There’s a Will_ and _Dance Like a Man_ portray Kiran and Ratna respectively who attempt at being new women but consequently suffer because of the tradition-bound Indian society. In another play, _Bravely Fought the Queen_’, the woman question is examined in greater detail and the suffering womanhood is
presented through two generations of the same family, Old Baa, Dolly and Alka.”

It is interesting to note that girls have become the most vulnerable section of our society. They need utmost support in the bad time. ‘Our Constitution’ does not make any differentiation between male and female and they want equal opportunities to develop in healthy, free and dignified way. It also asserts their protection against all sorts of exploitation. It is thus responsibility of the parents and society, to adhere to the principle of ‘First Call For Girl’. But in the play Tara we find that it is the parents and family member hatch up plan to give some thing more to male child. While in doing so they totally ignore the wishes and aspirations of the girl. A girl-be it wife, daughter, sister or mistress-is dependent on her family and at all where she is treated partially. She is always pushed at the edge. It shows that patriarchy and tradition dominate in the life of women and they have little freedom to voice their views against and again them. As Kamala Das criticizes these in her famous poem “An Introduction”:

“Dress in saries, be girl.
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in, oh
Be long cried the categorizers. Don’t sit
On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.”

It is the woman who brings man in the world but man always impose upon her various types of restrictions. She never gets freedom to decide her fate while man is free to do what he thinks. The society has made it tradition
that the place of a man lies outside the house while a woman’s inside. As Tara says:

“TARA: Not at all. The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave.”

Tara is a kind, gentle and strong girl. She is always encouraged by her mother. But all these qualities are not sufficient to survive a girl in the society. All treat her very badly. Nature has not given her chances to survive in the world freely. The earthly condition is more miserable. And ultimately she reaches to the place from where she had come. As Dan says:

“… What is Tara? Kind, gentle, strong, her mother has given her strength… She deserves something better. She never got a fair deal. Not even from nature. Neither of us did.”

The society is made of both man and woman. One is incomplete without other. If man is the symbol of vigour woman signifies love and affection. The position of man and woman can be compared with, the sun and the moon, the day and the night. One is incomplete without other. Without ‘Eve’, Adam had almost all the things but he was not happy. In the same way Dan has, in Tara, almost all the things but He is not happy. As Dan says that God never wanted them to be separated, but surgery made it possible to live separately. Tara says that they were separated. As Dan also admits:
“… I no longer desire that freedom. I move, just move. Without meaning. I forget Tara. I forget that I had a sister – with whom I had shared a body. In one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out…and separated.”

Tara is not merely an individual character. She is an archetype, an icon of the post-colonial Indian woman who is crushed in the mill of tradition and modernity. Dattani’s plays have been praised for their social realism and one such pinching truth about the Indian society presented in the play is that a woman is always subordinate to man and in spite of all claims of modernity, she is still a second grade citizen. This subaltern image of woman has been the focus of several recent Indian women fiction writers but Dattani is the first dramatist to observe the issue dramatically.

Man and woman, both live in the society. But man always gets better deal while woman generally gets partial treatment from the society. As a result woman becomes more mature before the time and she has more balance view than her male counterpart. When Chandan says that “Doctors. Nurses. A painful necessity in our lives.” Tara corrects his statement and gives her balance view that “Mind you, some of the doctors aren’t so painful to look at.” Tara has foresight what Chandan has not. She can adjust herself according to the situation and place. She assimilates herself wherever she lives. She talks ‘to marry that Irish doctor’ in London while in Bombay she says “I love Maharashtrians”. As Dattani writes in the play Tara:

“CHANDAN: How can you know at twelve?
How can you know at sixteen?”
TARA: We women mature fast…”

The relationship between man and woman is very close and the attraction between them are natural. If any one tries to disturb the balance it will certainly spoil the smooth movement of relationship. Chandan and Tara are separated but Dan is not satisfied with the separation. He does not want to be separated. As Dan says:

“I no longer desire that freedom. I move, just move. Without meaning.”

Dan thinks that his life has become meaningless. He has made material comfort in the world but in reality his journey is standstill. As he again says:

“My progress so far - I must admit - has been zero... But I persist with the comforting thought that things can’t get any worse. All I find every day is one typewritten sheet...with the tide of the play, my name and address and the date. Nothing changes… except the date…”

These statements show that Chandan lives with new name, Dan. He has all the materials of comfort but he is not happy. His heart is filled with the guilt which his parents have committed. Tara is killed but he never accepts the conspiracy. As Anju Bala Agrawal comments:

“Chandan has changed into Dan in order to absolve himself from the guilt of killing his sister.
Though he himself is not responsible for his sister’s untimely death, he suffers because of his grandfather’s and mother’s cruelty. He feels someway responsible for his sister’s death and decide to atone for it. Though the society is still male-oriented but Chandan’s atonement shows that there is a ray of hope for future generation of women. The future generation will consider women somewhat equal to men. In fact in the portrayal of Chandan, the agony of Mahesh Dattani for women comes forward. Like men, women need space to breathe freely and flourish.”

It is interesting to note that so far as the feminine sensibility is concerned Mahesh Dattani’s plays specially his Tara is worth noticing. Through some dramatic techniques Dattani tries his best to explore the various aspects of the miserable life of a woman, brought up on the lap of male-dominating society. In this respect Tara may be compared to Vijay Tendulkar’s well-known play ‘Silence: The Court is in Session’ which lays much stress on plight and persecution of a deserted woman struggling for her individual existence and identity. As Ram Sharma evaluates the play ‘Silence: The Court is in Session’:

“Silence! The Court is in Session’ is in reality a mock trial of simple and straight forward school teacher Miss Leela Benare. She is cross-examined in the court with full mockery. She is charged with infanticide and having illicit relations with a
married person Professor Damle and in this way her private life is exposed. All the other characters like witnesses Mr. Gopal Ponkohe, Mr. Karnik Rokde, Samant, Counsel for the Defence and Counsel for the Crown Mr. Sukhatme and judge, Mr. Kashikar and his wife Mrs. Kashikor all behave in a way of mockery. Miss Leela Benare is summoned merely as a written while Miss Benare remains the prime accused as the mother of an illegitimate child and having illicit relations with so many persons. As the trial go on all the witness and authorities become inimical towards Miss Leela Benare on the charge of unmarried motherhood and having illicit relations with so many persons. The judge, Mr. Kashikar orders the school authorities to dismiss such an immoral woman Miss Leela Benare tried to defend herself through a long soliloquy.”

*Tara* by Mahesh Dattani is based on the Post Modern Criticism in which writers are paying their attention much on the cause of the deserted and down-trodden including the women. The position of women in our country, in spite of our best effort, made by constitution for the improvement of the plight of women, most of the women especially living in the remote villages are bearing the brunt of patriarchal domination everywhere.

It is very interesting that a girl child could not inherit the properties of her forefather. The blood relationship exists but Tara is denied from the house and money of her grandfather. Her grandfather left his wealth for
Chandan. When Chandan wants to know about the share of Tara, his father convince Tara and Chandan differently. As Mahesh Dattani writes in the play *Tara*:

“PATEL: … Not to say that Chandan will have to work for a living. Your grandfather has left all his wealth to you. Since your mother was his only child, you and Tara inherit their home in Bangalore.

CHANDAN: That huge house. It gave me the creeps, I remember.

PATEL: He left you a lot of money.

CHANDAN: And Tara?

PATEL: Nothing.

CHANDAN: Why?

PATEL: It was his money. He could do what he wanted with it.”

Although circumstances never permit a girl child to grow up, we see that women are raising their voice for freedom, liberty and equality with men everywhere. Today there is no field without the entry of women. Of late, women have been accepting many challenging tasks in many fields like-engineering, architecture, aeronautics, military etc. They have reached on the moon. In the present day literary world, there are several great creative women writers in all Indian languages and many of these writers have taken up issues related to the status of women in India. If a woman is capable of making a mark in her profession, she should be recognized and
treated as an equal member. The contemporary woman does not want to confirm the traditional image anymore. She wants her due and her rightful place alongside her male counterpart in Indian society.

The discrimination of ‘Tara’ in the play *Tara* is not new. From ancient textual scripture we find that they are being remained an object in the hands of men. Male members in the family always remain unconscious about the psyches of women of the family. They always try to possess her. Instead of giving them freedom to grow, the male-members always try to cut the privilege of women so that they could not breathe the fresh air of liberty. It would be appropriate to recall what Manu, the great Indian sage, has to say about women. In his own words:

“In childhood must a female be dependent on her father, in youth, on her husband, her lord being dead, on her sons, if she has no sons, on the near kinsmen of her husband; if she be left no kinsmen, on those of her father; if she has no paternal kinsmen, on the sovereign; a woman must never seek independence.”

Mahatma Budha, the most dynamic and intelligent prophet of his time was not ready to give freedom to women to be admitted in the Sangha. He thought that women were an obstacle in the attainment of higher power in man. He says about women:

“Women are soon angered, Ananda,  
Women are full of passion, Ananda,  
Women are envious Ananda,
Women are stupid.
That is the reason. Ananda, that is cause,
Why women have no place in public assemblies,
do not carry on Business, and do not earn their
living by any profession.”

Tara is not only a girl of our society but it is a glimpse into the modern society which claims to be liberal and advanced in its thought and action. But still in the world, the action confirms that male chauvinism prevails in the present society. Such actions take place in the society that worship woman as ‘Devi’ (goddess). But it seems that all the propagandas of equality between male and female, equal opportunities to women in all the field are belied. Mahesh Dattani, who always raises such ‘fringe issues’ in his play, attempts an uphill task of pulling out all the taboo subjects from under the rug and putting them on the stage for the public to view. It is very remarkable for the playwright who raises such issues. As Sangeeta Das evaluates:

“Considering his foresight, it can be said that young playwright like Dattani, having guts to bring forth such poignant issues and present them threadbare, should be spawned and encouraged.”

In *Tara* we see that how a girl child is discriminated by an entirely cold and indifferent society that always favours the male-child in place of the female one. Dattani’s presentation of *Tara* seems to be very much close to the feminist sensibilities of Simone De Beauvoir, a great French writer. She, in her pioneer work, *The Second Sex*, seeks primary inquiries of modern feminism. In a critical venture when a woman tries to seek her identity, she
tries to define herself by saying, “I am a woman”. The factual analysis suggests the basic asymmetry between the terms ‘masculine and feminine’. In fact both these terms feminine and masculine represent ‘social patterns of sexuality and behavior imposed by cultural and social norms’. Present day feminism is a historically specific movement, rooted in French-English thought and in British liberalism and consequently wedded in deeply critical style to notions of truth, justice, freedom and equality. The ideology is political because it is concerned with question of power—“the position to dictate and direct action and thinking of others from men and it is possible because in modern times strength is all powerful and can be achieved through intellect rather than through physical strength”. The ideology is revolutionary because it is against the status quo. As Beauvoir sums up:

“[Women] have gained only what men have been willing to grant; they have taken nothing, they have only received.

The reason for this is that women lack concrete means for this is that for organizing themselves into a unit which can stand face-to-face with the correlative unit. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and they have no such solidarity of work and interest as that of the proletariat. They are not even promiscuously herded together in the way that creates community feeling among the American Negroes, the ghotto-Jews… Women can not ever dream of exterminating the males, The bond that unites her to her oppressors is not comparable to any other…
Male and female stand opposed within a primordial Mitsein and woman has not broken it”.  

Thus Beauvoir highlights the fact that the relation between women and their oppressors, men, is the only form of bondage that has its origin in a biological fact rather than in a historical process. She also says that women have not created a gender-based society for themselves as some groups have done for themselves. Even in the play Tara we see that Bharati, the mother of Tara, prepares herself for the operation. She knows the fact that third leg suits Tara but she prefers that the leg should lies with Chandan, her male issue. In this matter she is fully under the grip of her male-partners. She does not oppose the act but she is included in that inhuman act. She does what her father and her husband direct to do. So there still seems to be little sense between women and men of a level playing-field in terms of the ability to choose one’s life. Amrita Pritam, the great Punjabi poet and fiction writer, describes the realistic condition of women in her famous poem ‘I am The Daughter of The Land of Dravida’:

“The red veil of honour
the black veil, of disgrace.
Both colours have fluttered in the air.
This was my body’s earthly stage.
Where I wore both colours.
And then discarded them.
I have merged myself in the depths of.
My own being”.

Unlike Beauvoir who advocates for women community and religion, Dattani, on the basis of Indian experience, claims that even a woman makes
difference on the matter of gender-discrimination. She likes a male-issue as Bharati does in the play, *Tara*. She realizes her mistake at last but it is too late. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri writes:

“That the injustice is perpetuated by Tara’s own mother who professes to belong to the more ‘liberal’ community, rather than the father, who actually belongs to the more rigidly patriarchal social milieu, gives immense power to the play. It suggests that it is the women who continue to be willing instruments in the vicious cycle. Dattani, however, counters one woman with another: Tara herself – spirited, tough, a survivor with a sense of humour and delightful repartee – fighting against prejudices the society has against the crippled, and the female.”

The role of doctors is very high in our society and they are expected that always they will provide right suggestion at right time. But in the play even the doctor, the second God on the earth, shows the same human greed, as an ordinary man thinks. It is due to doctors, the ratio of girl child is declining in our society. It is they who under the influence of money are doing the crime of female foeticide. Sangeeta Das writes about this:

“Like men, women need space to breathe freely and flourish. Mahesh Dattani has tried to show this by bringing in Dr.Thakkar as a social element with the play. Doctors are thought to be messengers of God because they save lives on the earth.
Sometimes, when ordinary human beings falter, it is the doctors who show them right path. Female foeticide has become very common of late. People have degraded themselves to such an extent that they kill the foetus of the female child even before it takes shape in the uterus.

… In the play Dr. Thakkar belied his godly profession and led himself to be bribed by Bharati’s father into becoming an accomplice in the bizarre act of severing the leg. He should have upheld his profession by denouncing the decision at its inception whereas he in a way took Tara’s life by severing the leg. His wise decision could have given Tara a safe, secured and complete life.”

The dramatist lashes out at the hypocritical moral code of society; which makes a great difference between men and women. As a matter of fact, both men and women are the two wheels of the same chariot or the two aspects of the same coin. But it is a greater fault in the man’s nature that he fails to understand and appreciate the nobler and purer side of a woman’s love. Man’s love is just like a torrent which spends its force quickly, but a woman’s love is a stream, which flows steadily and smoothly forever. Love for man is a passing phase, for woman it is the essence of her being. To quote again Anees Jung:

“In this complex pantheon of diversities the Indian woman remains the point of unity, unveiling through each single experience a collective
consciousness prized by a society that is located in mortal combat with the power and weakness of age and time. She remains the still centre, like the centre of potter’s wheel circling to create new forms, unfolding the continuity of a radical life which in turn has encircles and helped her acquire of concentration.”37

Women, in modern world, are facing a type of tyranny in the society. Their status is decreasing day-by-day although they have established a milestone in various fields. But still female foeticide is prevailing. Young girls continue to be trafficked regularly from the poorest parts of the country. They never get the equal share in the family where they are brought. There is little doubt that dowry has been the driving force behind many crime against women and the girl child. As Deputy Commissioner of Police, Crime (Women’s) Cell, H.P.S. Virk, ‘told Frontline that Indian marriage has become economic transactions between families.’38 Government has made a law ‘Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, (PWDVA) in 2005. But still cruelty by the husband and his relative accounted for the highest number of crime against women. But in the majority of cases Police work as a broker and persuade parties for compromise. It is also strange that the government has made a law against ‘Dowry’. But due to ‘social acceptance of dowry’ it prevails in its bigger form. H.P.S. Virk accepts that ‘implementation of even the PWDVA was tardy as the police themselves were unaware that they were empowered to help the victims who came to the police station’.39

Generally it has become tradition that the case related to violence against women are not taken seriously. In most of the cases the matter is
settled by lower police officials and as a result the crime continues in its real form. As a police official in Delhi says:

“Police stations are mainly concerned with maintaining law and order. Terrorism and riots get first priority. Women’s issues are always treated casually.”40

In this matter the statement of Sudha Sundararaman, the general secretary of All India Democratic Women’s Association (AFDWA) is very remarkable who says:

“One would have assumed that given the constitutional framework, things would have changed in favour of women. That has not happened… the economic reforms currently under way had not created the conditions for the eradication of violence against women; if anything, it had generated more violence against women.”41

Violence against women has to be a national issue and not just a matter to be taken up by women’s organization. Modern world is the world of politics and this problem also demands political stage. Now women are suffering from various kinds of tyrannies in society – female foeticide, dowry, fundamentalism, child marriage, girl trafficking, domestic violence, etc. Now the time has come that the system should not look at the victim as a victim but the crime should be given a political stage to strengthen gender issues. It should get political priority because number related to gender
discrimination is at its pinnacle. As Brinda Karat, National vice-president of All India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA) and Rajya Sabha member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) said to T. K. Rajalakshmi in an interview “If one simply adds up all the victims of terrorist attacks, the figure would be much less than (that for) crimes committed against women in this country.”

It is interesting to note that Mahesh Dattani’s Tara which deals with gender discrimination is very close to Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things which also rings the same note. As Dr. Amar Nath Prasad writes:

“One of the themes which rings the note of The God of Small Things is the truthful portrayal of the plight of the women in society and their marathon struggle for seeking the sense of ‘identity’ in a male dominated conservative framework. The social structure of an Indian woman is full of many ups and downs, ifs and buts. Life offers little choice for a forsaken woman like Ammu, the central character, who yearns for pleasure and happiness and a life far from shackles or constrains. The narrator portrays a detail picture of the lady’s childhood to adolescence, to the experience of marriage to a sympathetic and affectionate mother, to a rebel wife who challenges the age long hypocritical moral stand of a patriarchal family. As a little girl, Ammu had to face a lot of cares and anxieties, fret and fever of life. She had seen the cruelty of her father,
Pappachi, who used to beat her and her mother, Mammachi with a brass vase. Once it so happened that her father tore apart of the shoes she had brought for herself. She was also deprived of the higher education because, according to Pappachi, college education is not at all useful for a girl. This shows that Pappachi is a man of schizophrenia. He behaves like a decent man but demonstrates his male ego and bourgeois mentality when he tyrannizes his wife and child: “not content with having beaten his wife and daughter, he tore down curtains, kicked furniture and smashed a table lamp.” Marriage for him is the male’s domination over woman and women are nothing but the flowers in the hands of man.”

It is to be noted that women have been the subject of great mystery and controversy in our history and traditions, myths and legends. She is allegedly charged with so many drawbacks mostly imaginary. It is said that she is temptation symbolized; more a Fury than a Fairy. Her charms are irresistible but they invariably spell ruin and disaster. She is wily like a serpent, domineering like a tiger and fickle like weather cock. Moreover, her passion is unquenchable and she gets pleasures in casting her net on her victims. Like a queen Bee she draws her lover into her web only to crush him in the end. She is always conscious of her dress, jewel and frippery. A woman is also generally termed as one who loves ease and pleasure, wants attention and slavish devotion. She is empty-headed, narrow-minded, obstinate and vain.
But we should not forget that most of the charges cited above are mostly concocted. A woman is generally more emotional, sensitive and tender though she is also endowed with a greater power of endurance and patience. She can be viewed in numerous ways, but none of her facets is so overwhelming as the physical attraction she arouses for herself in the heart of the male sex. In this field of love and mating, she plays a role so exceedingly significant that the very basis of creation and procreation will come to a standstill. It is here that we find her in the role of a beloved, a wife and a mother. She forms the pivot and nucleus of family life. She may be less adventures than man, more prone to stay at one place and stick to a regulated pattern of existence. Without the presence of the woman, home is not home but a dreary wilderness. A good daughter, an affectionate mother, a loyal wife it is these that create a heavenly atmosphere in our earthly life. G. B. Shaw, in his famous play, *Candida* has given a high pedestal to the woman. So, it is not the woman but men who are fickle in their opinion. Shakespeare in his famous play, *As You Like It* says: “Men are April when they woo, December when they wed.” History is replete with numerous examples of the physical prowess and endurance of woman. So it is wrong to say that women are the bundles of evils. Actually speaking, she has a great place in the life of man. If man is a flower, the fragrance is woman. If man is ship, the radar is woman. She can be sweet as well as bitter; kind as well as cruel; tender as well as rough, soft and seductive at time but elusive and hard to please also.

The modern Indian women writers highlight the position of women in their writings and those can not be called bleak. As Saru, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* by Shashi Deshpande, completes her M.B.B.S. course. Mikki in Shobha De’s *Sisters* completes her Master in Business in Management in the U.S.A., Pramila, in Shobha De’s *Sultry Days*, becomes a freelancer in
newspaper. Astha, the main protagonist of Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman*, holds the job of a school teacher. These examples show that women are now occupying almost all the areas of life. But still they feel being discriminated against. As Sujata Bhatt writes in her poem ‘Voice of the Unwanted Girl’:

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“Mother, I am the one
You sent away
When the doctor told you
I would be a girl.”
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To solve the problem and bring equality, feminine movement is making its important place. Feminine movement aims at overthrowing social practices that lead to the oppression and victimization of women lock, stock and barrel. Women come to realize the inauthenticity of the lives they lead and struggle to discover themselves and their own impulses, reactions, desires and needs. Their quest for self-knowledge and self realization can lead to the relationships based on mutual understanding and respect. Individual change and social change, both are desired goals, together with an eventual change in made perceptions and attitude.

Mahesh Dattani is not a writer who brings up the causes of women before the readers. So many Indian women writers like Arundhati Roy, Eunice De Souza, Imtiaz Dharker, Mamta Kalia, R. P. Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Shobha De, Manju Kapur, Kiran Desai, Kamala Das have uphold the cause of feminism in different ways. The great Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar also deals with feminist concern in a remarkable distinct way. His dramas *Silence! The Court is in Session* and *Kamala* project women as victim. He shows the
sociological conditions and traditions those inhibit and restrict the full development of a woman’s personality.

In the matter of raising the problem of women, Mahesh Dattani seems to be influenced by Mahatma Gandhi who may be called the “greatest feminist of the world and real emancipator of woman. He denounced the age-old practices, customs, rituals, pardha system etc which suppressed woman and worked for woman’s upliftment. Gandhi applied his mind to a large number of human concerns and lefts an indelible impact on the social, economic and political forces of the day.”

Gandhiji wrote, spoke and worked for the gender justice directly and indirectly. He was an ardent lover of humanity and an inveterate foe of gender injustice. He said, “I passionately desire the utmost freedom for our women”.

In general terms, the play *Tara* centres on the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins following the discovery that they were born with three legs. At the time of physical separation through sophisticated operation the boy was given the third leg, though the blood supply to that third leg was provided by the girl. But the leg did not suit the boy and twins grew up with one leg. All these events come in a flashback as Dan writes a play, after the death of Tara. It seems that Dattani innovates the way of bringing the feminist issues on the stage through “realist/illusionist” play. He is also influenced by Absurd drama that deals with the metaphysical anguish from the absurdity of the human condition. Dan in *Tara* suffers from an anguish that comes very close to metaphysical anguish that everything in the cosmos moves in ‘forced harmony’. Dan explains:

“Someday, after I die, a stranger will find this recording and play it. The voice is all that will
remain. No writing. No masterpiece. Only a voice – that once belonged to an object. An object like other objects in a cosmos, whose orbits are determined by these around. Moving in a forced harmony. Those who survive are those who do not defy the gravity of others. And those who desire even a moment of freedom, find themselves hurled into space, doomed to crash with some unknown force.”

Dan’s anguish is caused by his consciousness that he has desired no freedom, and that he has accepted his fate without defying the gravity of others. Dan accepted the role imposed on him by his surrounding and has not protested against the plan of his father. His self–analysis causes pain and he feels that only after his death it is possible to have a vision of a union between the siblings of male and female uniting on a different time and plane. Dattani seems to send the message that gender discrimination is artificial and as long as we continue to do this kind of differentiation, we live in a meaningless condition. Santwana Haldar writes:

“… 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 loser 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 the 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 out a new way for projecting his views on gender discrimination.”

Dattani is concerned not only with the issue of gender discrimination in Indian society but also with the contribution of the female to 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 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. This happens because of the prejudices which can hardly be removed from the minds of the educated persons. When science was not so advanced, baby girls were murdered just after their birth. As Roopa, Tara’s neighbour, says:

“The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting babies – you know dowry and things like that – so they used to drown them in milk... So when people asked them how the baby died, they could say that she choked while drinking her milk.”
But thanks to modern inventions in the field of science, the medical practitioners are doing such unethical job to kill the girl child in womb. This is what Sujata Bhatt writes:

“When the doctor told you
I would be
A girl – In the end they had to
Give me an injection to kill me.”50

Not the unwanted girl is being killed in her mother’s womb and there is no scope of her seeing the light of this earth. Tara sees the light of the earth but she is denied the right to walk on the earth. All her near and dear conspire against her and at last she is denied the right to share in the property of her grandfather. To know all the discriminations Tara, at last says: “Oh, what a waste! A waste of money. Why spend all the money to keep me alive? It can not matter whether I live or die.”51

In the play Tara Dattani makes Bharati responsible for Tara’s fate and, and also shows how Bharati becomes hysterical for carrying the sense of guilt within her and how she is 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. Dattani also shows through this fact that Tara is not to be treated as a girl who is physically handicapped, but who has been handicapped by the very fact that she has been born with gender she has.

Dattani is a very sensitive writer and considers the whole aspects of a coin. In the play Tara he presents not only the tragedy of gender
discrimination in Indian society but also believes that a perfect human being must have both the masculine and feminine qualities. The concept of the Siamese twins, one girl and one boy joined together, acts as a symbol of such a union. Tara and Chandan are joined together by nature and it is the interference of the society that caused the separation in such a way that proves fatal for Tara. As Dattani explains:

“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.”

Although the play Tara shows the tragedy in the life of Tara, a girl daughter, Chandan calls it his tragedy. But the playwright seems to show that it is the tragedy for both. No one is happy due to that separation. As Dattani writes:

“TARA: You. Me. There’s no difference.
CHANDAN: No difference between you and me?
TARA: No! Why should there be?
CHANDAN: That is the nicest thing you’re ever said to me.”

The sacred quotation from Brihadaranyaka Upanishad may be cited in this context:
“In the beginning, this universe was nothing but the self in the form of a man… He was as large as man and woman embracing. This self then divided itself into parts; and with that, there were a master and mistress.”

Thus this critical analysis of the play *Tara* very clearly shows the dramatist feministic bend of mind and his great concern for the development of the issues related to gender discrimination of patriarchal domination of modern society. The plays of Mahesh Dattani in general deal with some various drawbacks or demerits of this modern materialistic world. But so far as *Tara* is concerned, it is primarily based on the much discussed theme of gender discrimination, which is gaining its root strongly in every nook and corner of the world. The message of the playwright is to develop our humanistic sense of love and affection for the down – trodden and the deserted, the disabled and the diseased. He also seems to appeal to the general man to have a very mutual relation between man and woman in society. But the beauty of the play lies not simply in the presentation of social fact about feminine sensibilities but it also lies in its metaphoric and dramatic presentation of those facts of society. Dattani has quite lived up to his primary ideals of dramatic art suffused with the elements of poetic sensibilities and aesthetic charms.
References


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39 Ibid, P-7.

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