



Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's Tara



Kulkarni S.A.

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English

Vivekanand College, Aurangabad

Email. sakulk2010@gmail.com

Abstract

Gender is a recent concept used to understand man and woman. In gender studies, patriarchy affects on the life of those who come under its umbrella. It gives the feeling of dominance to man to apply it on women and young men. R. W. Connell has popularized 'hegemonic masculinity' to show the proposed practices that promote dominant social position of men and subordinate position of women.

Mahesh Dattani has shown this dominant patriarchal nature of man who considers themselves as head of the family. These members could not allow freedom to other members of their family especially to women and young men of their family. Being a head, they take important decisions of an individual's and their career. His play portrays suffering of women and young men in their family.

Keywords : Patriarchy, suffering, domination, Mahesh Dattani, Gender

Research Paper

The concept of gender is originally situated with the feminists and gender studies theories and practices because the critical thinking of gender has been inspired by feminist theories. Thus, the study of gender owes an enormous debt to the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir. De Beauvoir presented gender of femininity in historically constructed through social systems. She shows how women were psychoanalytically constituted as 'others' in patriarchal construct.

Now gender is applied to male studies along with female and more recent critiques of Queer theory emerging from gender studies. Thus, the concept of gender becomes most flourishing term. Its use seems to change and produces new meanings every time. It is using variedly in depicting gender role, gender gap, gender biased or gender specific. Gender is always a factor enmeshed with other structures such as class, race, ethnicity, generation or disability.

Gender denotes cultural identity to person. It is not only a system to classify biologically male and female but also used to express inequality between male and female. The main biological difference between male and female is particularly in their different reproductive anatomies, brain structure, hormones etc. Though it is a fundamental difference but universal which provides foundation for male dominance. The social scientists look to biological difference and refer gender as 'attached to the difference with in the culture. To them sex is an identity as a male or female while gender is masculine and feminine identity. In some culture men are encouraged to be stoic to prove their masculinity while women are treated as weak and passive. From birth, men and women are treated differently to inculcate feminine and masculine traits in them. These traits are acquired from the moment of birth. Michael S. Kimmel in the introduction of 'The Gendered Society' says,

Gradually we acquire the traits, behaviors, and attitudes that our culture defines as "masculine" or "feminine". We are not necessary born different; we become different through this process of socialization. (3 Kimmel.)

The interplanetary theory assumes that men and women behave as they are. This behavior is supposed as gender behavior. The characteristics, which attributes to men as aggressive, physically strong and dominating are only male and no female, and no male are caring and nurturing. But these differences are mean differences in the average scores obtained by men and women. The anthropologist Gayle Rubin points out that these differences as,

Men and women are, of course different. But they are not different as day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact from the stand point of nature, men and women are closer to each other than either is to anything else – for instance mountains, kangaroos or coconut palms... far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. (179-80 Rubin)

Michael S. Kimmel states that boys and girls become gendered because they learn appropriate behaviors and traits because that is associated with hegemonic masculinity and exaggerated femininity. He also states that our social institutions like work place, family, school, politics are gendered institutions where the dominate definitions are reinforced and reproduced.

Sigmund Freud believed that anatomical differences of male and female led to different personalities. Freud's 'stage theory' of individual gender development has stated that each individual pass through number of stages on his or her path of identity. Among them, the 'genital stage' is a task in every one to become masculine or feminine. His theory of psychosexual development has challenged to assumptions of biological inevitability. In this theory, he saw that there is nothing inevitable to become masculine or feminine and not about heterosexual because sexual orientation and gender identity are individual achievements.

The sex role theory points out that it is impossible to establish one type of role either boy or girl because of the variety of masculinities and femininities depending on class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality and region. This theory is unable to account differences among men and women because it begins in the normative prescriptions of sex roles rather than experiences of men and women. The problem of this theory is that the group of privilege men has dominant power over other men who are marginalized by their position.

In Gender Trouble, Butler states, "Gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex." (8 Butler.) Thus, the subject permits, "gender as a multiple interpretation of sex." (8 Butler.) She says that De Beauvoir is correct to call one 'becomes' a woman but this is not compulsion of sex because one who becomes a woman is not necessary a female. Thus, gender is a cultural construction. When one becomes masculine or feminine is not by sex but by gender.

Mahesh Dattani deals with the contemporary issues of gender and sexuality. His plays explore gender with every possible aspect. In most of the plays, he deals with the issues related to identity - masculine, feminine or queer, and sexuality. In the play like Tara and Dance Like a Man he deals with gender role. In Bravely Fought the Queen, he deals with the

theme of domination and violence of women by their husbands. In *On a Muggy Night of Mumbai*, he deals with the taboos like gay and lesbian identities and their existential problem. In *Do the Needful*, he shows mutual understanding between a gay man and notorious wife to become needful to each other. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, he deals with the life of eunuchs and their problems. Here, the dramatist yearns for their love and marriage.

In this paper, the focus is on the Mahesh Dattani's popular play *Tara*. In a note on the play, Erin Mee told that one of his students points out on the theme of play, "... *Tara* and *Chandan* are two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities and that *Dan*, in trying to write the story of his own childhood, has to write *Tara's* story. *Dan* writes *Tara's* story to rediscover the neglected half of himself, as a means of becoming whole." (CP 320) It notices that there is a feminine trait in the men and masculine in the feminine but there is a need to identify them.

Tara is a most loved play of the Mahesh Dattani because it deals with the gender self of Siamese children with emotional touch. This play throws light on of the important issues of the contemporary society like gender discrimination. The title of the play suggests that this play focuses on the life of deprived girl *Tara*. She is a victim of social inequality in the siblings and becomes the pray only because she is born as a woman.

In the happy life of the Patel couple, problem starts with the birth of their Siamese children. The happy life of Patel couple ends because they concentrate on the health and survival of these children. Asha K. Chaudhuri points out the trauma of Patel',

The play looks at the battles, the victories and the defeats of an Indian family coping with the trauma of freak children and their survivals, while also exposing the existing patriarchal stereotypes of the Indian mindset, which has always preferred a boy child to a girl child. (37 Asha K Chaudhuri)

Both the children have their own sufficient organs to survive but the problem is that they have one leg each and the third leg is common. This third leg is suit on the girl child than the boy child because the main supply of the blood to this leg is from the girl's side. At the time of their separation, the partial decision of mother and firm decision of powerful grandfather makes *Tara* cripple. *Bharati*, the mother of these children belongs to the liberal community but she has made discrimination in her daughter and son. On the other hand, *Mr. Patel* belongs to the strict patriarchal community but he could not join them in this plan. They give preference to the boy than girl. *Bijay Kumar Das* has rightly shown,

It is an irony of life that a woman (to be precise, a mother) should work against a daughter to favor a son. Feminism which seeks to bring gender equality to society

unwittingly discriminates against women. But a brother's love for a sister transcends the gender bias. (49 Bijay Kumar Das.)

They give preference to the boy only because the reputation of masculinity is assessed on what man achieves. For to maintain this reputation man must be healthy, so they give Tara's leg to Chandan. In the conspiracy against Tara, they include doctor by giving some material benefit to him. But the doctor is also mere a human being and he could not go against the law of nature. So the leg on the boy within couple of days amputated. The result is that both the children of Patel becomes crippled and survive on the artificial Jaipuri legs.

Dattani has presented perfect patriarchal world where all the important decisions are taken by head of the family. He imposes his patriarchal authority on his children and wife though he himself became its victim. The parents of Mr. Patel had not accepted his inter caste marriage with Bharati. Tara informs Roopa as, "Yes. My father had to leave his parents because of the marriage, if you really want to know." (CP 338)

Mr. Patel implements his hegemonic power when he grows his children in different grooves to learn stereotypical gender roles. Asha k. Choudhari points out the treatment of Mr. Patel towards his children,

Their father goes about trying to push his male and female children into separate grooves, into the stereotyped gender roles that would help them, fit into society, at the cost of hurting them both, since their own preferences seem contradictory to these expectations. (71 Asha K. Chaudhuri)

Both the children wish to persuade career in their desired field. Chandan wants to become a writer while Tara whims to become like her father- a successful woman in business world. But the dominated nature of Mr. Patel doesn't allow it to pursue their aims. Mr. Patel expects from Chandan to learn the office work and he asks him to join office to identify with the office atmosphere than rotten at home. But Chandan advises him to take Tara with him. But Patel protest with his strong dislike, "Chandan, I think I must insist that you come." (CP 328) and says 'No' to Tara. Patel becomes soft when he notices that Tara feels hurt, "Yes. You may both come – if you want to." (CP 328)

Mr. Patel could not tolerate Chandan's help to Bharti in house work. He becomes angry and warns her, "How dare you do this to him? ... But you can think of turning him into a sissy teaching him the knit!" (CP 351) This nature of Mr. Patel shows highlights that he strongly believes in gender role. He has a plan for Chandan to secure his future but he has never thought about any such plan for Tara. He may learn that though women become educated but

their permanent place is in kitchen. He thinks that Bharti can teach household affairs to her. So he has concentrated only on Chandan's future. He tells about his plan,

You two are old enough to sort this out amongst yourselves. I won't interfere. But this is certain, Chandan has to join. I have plans for him. Your Praful uncle will help him get into a good university in England. I know he can get a scholarship on his own if he tries. But Praful will take care of the ...special requirements for him. With a solid education you just can't fail. 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 Banglore. (CP 360)

Bharti's father needed male heir to his property and he got it in his grandson. He had used his influence and agreed doctor to give leg of girl to the boy child. He had done discrimination to Tara by giving all his property to boy and excluded to girl. Tara also needs money for her survival but in the patriarchal society, women are boycott from property like her. Thus, father of Bharti was more responsible for making Tara cripple, which becomes tragedy of her life. Asha K. Choudhari says on this,

...Bharti's rich and powerful father is responsible for the terrible mistake that completely changed Tara's life; and ultimately drives Bharti insane in her efforts to make own ends. (88 Asha K. Choudhari.)

Mr. Patel tells Chandan when he asked him why his grandfather has not given his money to Tara. He says, "It was his money. He could do what he wanted with it." (CP 360)

Mr. Patel loves to Chandan but it is not true that he could not love to Tara. He makes plan only for Chandan and not for Tara, because he knows that man can survive in the world on his own ability. So, he attempts to make him independent to stand in his life as a successful person. Mr. Patel never like his son can be less masculine in this social assessment. He can earn sufficient money to perform his masculine role. The position of woman in our society is inside the household to look after their house. The girls can learn this role from their mother who can make them suit as woman. But the success of man is assessed by society and it is a challenge to father make him a successful man. The father like Patel could not consider it as also necessary to make women successful in the outer world because it is a field reserved for man only. Tara never likes this inclination of her father. So when Roopa comes she tells her that the men of her family are still believe in old traditions to keep women at home. She says, "The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave." (CP 328)

Bhari asks Chandan that their father must give attention to Tara. Chandan understands that his father loves to Tara but he could not like to make a show. He expresses it to his mother, “He does. He doesn’t like to show his affection”. (CP 348) Roopa tells gender discrimination in the families of Patel to Tara.

The Patel’s in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies – you know the dowry and the things like that – so they used to drown them in milk ... So when people asked about how the baby died, they could say that choked while drinking her milk. (CP 322)

Most of the people want son to run their name. Daughter is a property of others and she can give in the wedding as a gift to the bridegroom. But the father of daughter can give his daughter along with dowry and costly gifts to her husband. If he fails to give all these things to her husband and his relatives give trouble to her. The mentality of people also lingers around boy’s birth because it gives them salvation and girls birth is a trouble to father. So, there is a tradition in the society to kill a baby girl after her birth. Now people kill her in the womb of her mother. This tradition affects on the ratio of the girl child. But when any girl survives in her life, society could not allow her those rights which are given to a boy.

Mr. Patel is not any outside member of the society. He denies freedom to his daughter Tara. He never likes that she can come to the office to break her traditional role to become a businesswoman in the outer world. It is his wife who thinks that he never loves to Tara. Mr. Patel also feels that Tara can think same about him. So, he says her, “Tara, please believe me when I say that I love you very much and I have never in all my life loved you less or more than I have loved your brother. ...” (CP 354) Mr. Patel has not only shown his patriarchal authority on his children but also on his wife. He prohibits his wife for not too much shower of love and to take utmost care of Tara by treating her as she is made from glass. He never allows Bharati to donate her kidney to Tara. He finds out donor. But she tells him that it is expensive to give her that kidney, Patel says her, “When have expenses ever bothered you? Your father’s wealth has always been your strength against me. Don’t talk about expenses to me!” (CP 344) Mr. Patel doesn’t want Bharati can get satisfaction from her guilt. When she insists on her decision, he warns her, “You will have to obey me. It’s my turn now. (CP 344) He doesn’t allow Bharati to tell Tara the story of her disable. She requests to Mr. Patel frequently, “Then let me do what I want to do.” (CP 345) But Mr. Patel has never given this satisfaction to her and finally she dies in that anguish.

Thus, Mr. Patel has achieved his position and success in the society. But he imposed his hegemonic power on his family which becomes the cause of their suffering.

In the patriarchy, not only women but the younger men also become its victim. So, Chandan also become victim of the patriarchy. He desires to become a writer but Mr. Patel has planned different to him. He desires to send him in England to become a successful man. But Chandan in England changes his name as Dan and attempts to write a play on Tara.

Chandan loves to his sister too much and never wants to free separate from her. But he is separated from her when he goes to England. He always feels guilty for he becomes the cause of her tragedy. He knows that the injustice happens with Tara only because she is a girl and his mother and grandfather favors to him because he is a boy. Their case is rare only because they are born Siamese with different sexes. If they can born as a same sex children then there would be no problem. Here, Dattani has shown that mother herself makes difference in her children on the basis of their gender. She agrees to give the leg of her daughter to her son because he is a boy. The difference in the boy and the girl is not made by society but mother also makes such a difference in her children. Here, mother makes her daughter cripple only because she loves more to her son.

Chandan knows the discrimination happens to Tara. So, he shows more affection towards Tara. Tara, in return loves in same intensity to her brother. Thus, in their life separation becomes the cause of trouble to them. They are separated physically but they are emotionally remained attached. They say,

Tara: ... It's all the same. You. Me. There's no difference.

Chandan: No difference between you and me?

Tara: No! Why should there be?

Chandan: That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me.

(CP 2361)

The tragedy in the life of Chandan and Tara is only because they are short of one leg. The neighboring girls Nalini, Roopa and Prema are worldly symbolic who without help to disables laughs on them. Both Chandan and Tara wish another leg for each than anything else. They wish it to the shooting star.

Chandan: Make your wish anyway.

Tara: Oh, I would wish for the stars! And You?

...

Tara: Me?

Chandan: Yes.

Pause

Tara; I would wish for both ... I would wish for

two of them.

Chandan: Two Jaipur legs?

Tara: no, silly, the real ones.

Mr. Patel has never allowed Bharti to tell Tara about the injustice happened with her. He doesn't like to give this satisfaction to her. But he tells to them the conspiracy against Tara by Bharti and her father. Tara doesn't believe this because her mother loves her too much. But it is a fact; she loves Tara only because she desires to get rid of her guilt but he has not allowed this to her.

Bharti has no power to resist against these social forces. Her motherhood is subordinated to the expectations of patriarchal society. She has paid more for her one mistake. She wants to restore happiness in the life of Tara by showering love on her. But Mr. Patel, as an agent of patriarchy, has never allowed this satisfaction to her.

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