

Patriarchal Hegemony in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*: A Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani in his play *Tara* projects the picture of Patriarchal dominance that victimizes the protagonist. The playwright compassionately deals with the emergence of a new woman who grapples with the autonomy and hegemony of male with an iconoclastic objective. Dattani attributes the imposition of bondage on women to Indian tradition and concept of value. He condemns the male on the charge of harbouring incompassionate attitude to women and subjecting them to domestic harassments. Women in India desperately resign themselves to patriarchal repression and suppression because of their instinctive modesty and spirit of endurance. However, the torture inflicted on Indian women transgressed its point of tolerance and incited them to raise their voice against subordination and marginalization. The play *Tara* Serves to awaken feminist sentiments in women and impels them to rebel against male dominance which is the source of their mental agony that persists in till the dissolution of their marital life. Now a day's many women organizations have emerged in India and abroad with the spirit of feminism that has emboldened women to shatter the citadel of patriarchal dominance. Thus, women in the present era enjoy equal rights and privileges and exercise their discretion in their social and familial life.

Mahesh Dattani stands outstanding as a modern playwright in the realm of Indian drama in English by virtue of his versatility in writing plays. He is the first playwright who invigorated Indian drama by producing a series of plays in succession imparts to Indian plays a new dimension and magnitude to them. Indian plays appear with a new apparel in the creative hands of Dattani who is unequivocally hailed as an accomplished artist and craftsman in the production of plays. As the first Indian playwright, he enjoys the credit and reputations of winning the highest literacy award at the national level.

Tara the third play of Mahesh Dattani projects the playwright's feminist thrust into the status of new women. He has effectively dramatized the emergence of a new woman

in the socio-cultural scene of India. According to M.K. Mishra, "Dattani reflects on the predicament and plight of Indian women in the past and contrasts their position in the present scenario". (1) The playwright has minutely observed and formed a new concept of a new woman who has emerged out of the age-old traditional prejudices. In his play *Tara* he attributes the plight of the traditional women to their passive resignation to male dominance and their acceptance of traditionalism and concept of old values. He exhorts the readers to oblivate the old-age prejudices towards women with a view to promoting peace and harmony in the family as well as in the society. In this play he depicts the central character *Tara* as a victim of social prejudices and animosity against women.

The position of women in Indian Society has been jeopardized due to clash of traditions and concepts of value. Dattani has sought to recount how inhumanly and brutally men have been persecuting women; how they disparage their ability and how modern women flout the decision thrust upon them by their fathers and husbands.

The women in the past did not feel the necessity of asserting their identity because they were complacent with their status as house wives. They derived pleasure from their engrossment in the household work. Their main objective was to keep their husbands satisfied, take care of their children and serve their in laws. By their devotion to service of the families they accentuate the importance of traditional values. A.K. Chaudhuri comments– “it is women who contributes to be willing instrument in the vicious cycle.” (2) Unlike these subservient women, “Tara is unusually and differently a new woman, who shatters the tradition iconoclastically and reformatively. She is entirely different as a woman in respect of her attitude, outlook and action. She is sagacious, confident, rebellious and ready to achieve her goal. She is not predisposed to put up with the nonsense of Rupa, Prema and Nailini. She waits with patience and alacrity for a propitious moment to retaliate them. Tara the twin sister of Chandan professes her qualities and characteristics as a new woman.

Unlike the traditional women with their of old values of life, Tara appears as a modern woman with her new concept of changed value influenced by modernism. She has altogether abandoned the beaten track along which Indian women have irrationally

walked. She asserts her identity as a new woman with modernist outlook. She wishes to choose her career independently and develop in her a new perspective of people and situation. Her assertion to her ailing mother at the cost of her missing physiotherapy is reflected in her insistence. Her intelligent and balanced perspectives manifest in her opinion about her father. Her ability to choose her career is reflected in Chandan’s comment on her, at the time when Bharati betrays her worries. In the words of Chanda, “She can do whatever she wants”.

Mahesh Dattani’s perspectives on new woman manifest in *Tara*’s reply to Chandan which is conclusive in its real sense of the term “yes, we do ! and we are more sensitive, intelligent and compassionate human beings than creeps like you and-and”. (3) There was a time when women accepted unhesitatingly the dos and don’ts men decided for them but Tara refuses to accept that somebody else should decide for them “Tara emerges as a new woman ready to demolish all odds and establish her identity. The characters of the play Bharati and Patel represent two different generations. The parents of Tara and Chandan represent old generation having old values of life whereas and Chandan represent new generation having radical values. Patel and Bharati prefer Chandan to Tara because of Chandan being a male. Chandan on the other hand recognizes and respects Tara’s talent and identity. Bharati is complacent in being a housewife and taking care of her family. She ignores her identity but *Tara* does not consider herself inferior to her brother; she on the other hand asserts her identity as a new women. Patel holds a

traditional view of women and thinks that women should be engaged in cooking, rearing children, knitting and seeking happiness out of the happiness of the family. But Chandan terribly resents such a traditional and conservative attitude of his father towards women. Patel ponders only over Chandan's career and negates the future of his daughter with a prejudice towards Tara.

The play *Tara* deals with prejudices imposed upon by the age-old social order of the Indian Society and seeks to condemn the discriminatory attitude of the parents towards their children. In the play *Where There's a Will* Hasmukh's wife Sonal realizes very late that she was being governed by her elder sister Minal. The latter dominates over her sister and regulates Sonal's activities. From this point of view it dramatizes a lady's dominance over another lady. In her reaction against Minal, Sonal expresses her prejudice in her own words "Even at my husband's funeral she sat beside me and told me when to cry". (4) She becomes vociferous before it is too late and asks her sister "go jump into a bottomless pit". (5) Besides, Sonal was always unhappy with her husband because of his unamiable and disagreeable attitude. She voices her reaction against her husband in the following words "he thinks, he is the king of all he surveys! And we are his subjects. He can put on all the airs he wants to, but he does not fool me". (6) Kiran Jhaveri, the epitome of Dattani's women makes her appearance as a smart, shrewd, calculating and wise lady in the play. She possesses those qualities that are necessary for a woman for her survival in the modern age. Like most women, who are

marginalized on the ground of sex difference, Kiran too becomes victim to such marginalization but terribly opposes such victimization. She becomes a part of Hasmukh's life with her eyes wide open.

Dattani's play *Bravely Fought the Queen* is based upon the story of Laxmi bai, the Rani. In this context M.K. Naik says "Her name is invoked as an ironic parallel to the women in the play, who are passive, helpless and vulnerable of the female tyranny." (7) There are three women victimized in their own way. Her elder daughter-in-law Dolly is a victim of her husband's persecution. The play dramatizes the dreariness and insipidity of conjugal life. Old Baa is neglected by the sons and daughter-in-law.

Another play *Thirty Days in September* is the story of a family that betrayed a daughter and remained indifferent to her torture. The mother knew that her daughter was being sexually abused by her uncle but nevertheless she kept deliberately silent and led the abused betrayed. The lady was sexually harassed because of her helplessness and lack of masculine power which is required for self-defence. Like many helpless Indian women, she became inextricably a victim to sexual abuse. Her mother did not betray any reaction to this kind of atrocity perpetrated on her daughter.

Tara, who gets modernized as a woman, closely resembles Ibsen's Nora the lady protagonist of his social play *A Doll's House* Nora was, subservient and obedient to her husband and acted like a doll up to a point of tolerance and when it became no more tolerable, she became recalcitrant and defiant to her husband. She decided to turn over a new leaf and left home to live independently. She was no more the same

woman who acted as a puppet in the hands of her husband who always subjected her to remain docile and submissive. But after a particular stage of her life, she rebelled against her husband's autocracy and arbitrariness and left home in order to emancipate herself from his bondage and subjection. Just as Nora is metamorphosed into an independent woman, so is Tara. Tara undergoes a temperamental and attitudinal change. In her familiar life she is no more than a traditional woman, who adheres blindly to tradition and remains passive. She too has her flesh and blood that cannot endure subjection to an unlimited extent. She evinces her spirit and mental strength to live independently. Nora in *A Doll's House* gives evidence of her emergence as a new woman, who defies the tradition and homely impositions. It is probably the first drama that sparked feminism and opened an avenue for writing on this new theory. Although feminism as a literary term is predominantly exploited in the postmodern works of art yet it had originated in the play of Ibsen in the nineteenth century. Ibsen had been a torch bearer to the subsequent feminists who introduced this new theory in their works

Notes and References:

1. M.K. Mishra. *The Emergence of New Woman and Clash of Attitudes : A Study of Mahesh Dattani's Tara*. Critical Responses to Feminism ed Binod Mishra, New Delhi : Sarup and Sons, 2005. P. 148-157.
2. A.K. Chaudhuri. Mahesh Dattani. New Delhi : Foundation Books Pvt. Ltd, 2005. P.225.
3. Mahesh, Dattani. *Tara : The Collected Plays*. New Delhi : Penguin, 2000. P225.
4. Ibid Where There's a Will – P446
5. Ibid ibid P458
6. Ibid ibid P472
7. M.K. Naik, *History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi, 1982. P97

with a view to emancipating women as a class and enfranchising this marginalized section of the society. In the twentieth century many works of art exploit the theme of feminism with the gradual awareness of the rights and privileges of women. Mahesh Dattani has deliberately woven the fabric of the story of the play *Tara* to strike an impression of feminist ideology in the mind of the people. *Tara* comes to be widely recognized as a play with a feminist trust and perspective. On account of its characterization and treatment of the protagonist as a crusader and a combatant in the social life, this play serves to bring about a revolutionary change in the matriarchal section of the society and provoke in Indian women an outrageous sentiment about their present position in the familial and social situation. The play *Tara* inspires Indian women to rebel against sex discrimination and shatter the old age-fabric of women subordination and marginalization. The play has created sensation in the realm of Indian drama in English on account of its revolutionary tempo and objective.