

Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's Tara: Analyzing how societal expectations and patriarchal norms influence the lives of Tara and Chandan

DR. M. G. SHAIKH

Abstract

The play Tara by Mahesh Dattani is a compelling study of social conventions, gender discrimination, and the challenges of identity within a family. The play explores the lives of Tara and Chandan, conjoined twins who undergo surgery to separate, with Tara suffering the most from the psychological and physical fallout. Dattani challenges the patriarchal systems that uphold gender inequity and women's marginalization in this story. This essay explores the topics of gender discrimination in Tara, examining the ways in which cultural norms, familial dynamics, and societal expectations all play a part in women's oppression. The study emphasizes Dattani's criticism of gender bias and its disastrous effects on people and relationships by analyzing the characters, story, and symbols.

Introduction

One of India's most well-known modern playwrights, Mahesh Dattani, is well known for tackling societal themes in his plays, including gender, sexuality, and identity. His 1990 play Tara, which centers on the lives of conjoined twins Tara and Chandan and the social and familial factors that influence their fates, is a potent critique of gender inequality. Set in metropolitan India, the drama captures the deeply rooted patriarchal norms that give preference to male offspring over female ones. Dattani reveals the systemic nature of gender bias and its far-reaching effects through the characters and their relationships.

This paper explores the theme of gender discrimination in Tara, focusing on the following aspects:

1. The societal and cultural context of gender bias in India.
2. The portrayal of gender discrimination within the family structure.
3. The symbolic significance of the conjoined twins and their separation.
4. The psychological and emotional impact of gender discrimination on the characters.
5. Dattani's critique of patriarchal norms and his call for gender equality.

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The purpose of this research is to analyze these components in order to show how Tara acts as a mirror to society, reflecting the widespread and frequently undetectable nature of gender inequality.

1. Societal and Cultural Context of Gender Bias in India

In India, prejudice against women has profound historical, cultural, and religious roots. A common phenomenon, son preference is the desire for male offspring, which has resulted in sex-selective abortions, female infanticide, and the neglect of girl children. Because of the dowry system and the expectation that they will leave their parents' house after marriage, daughters are viewed as liabilities, whereas males are perceived as financial assets who will uphold the family name and support their parents in old age.

Through the role of Bharati, the mother of Tara and Chandan, Dattani draws attention to this cultural predilection for male offspring in Tara. The deep-rooted patriarchal mentality that prioritizes boys over daughters is shown in Bharati's choice to give Chandan preference during the twins' separation procedure. The expectations society places on women, who are frequently denied agency in decision-making and assigned to inferior roles, are also criticized in the play.

2. Gender Discrimination within the Family Structure

As an isolated aspect of society, the family is used by Dattani in Tara to show how gender inequality is passed down through the generations. The Patel family, which includes Bharati, her husband Patel, and their conjoined twins Tara and Chandan, is the focus of the drama. The choice to separate the twins, who are born with three legs, is rife with moral and emotional challenges.

It is immediately clear that Bharati has a preference for Chandan. During the separation surgery, she demands that Chandan be given the third leg, which is Tara's biological limb. This choice is motivated by the conviction that, as a man, Chandan has more potential and a better future than Tara. Tara is left emotionally and physically damaged by the surgery, but Chandan goes on to have a somewhat normal life.

The father, Patel, is involved in this discrimination since he does not oppose Bharati's choice or stand up for Tara's rights. The trend in society to put masculine interests ahead of female ones is reflected in his quiet acceptance of the situation. The tense relationship between Bharati and Patel is also examined in the play, emphasizing how gender norms and expectations fuel marital strife.

3. The Symbolic Significance of the Conjoined Twins and Their Separation

Tara and Chandan, the conjoined twins, are potent representations of the relationship between gender and identity. In a patriarchal society, their physical bond symbolizes the common hardships and tribulations of men and women. But their division represents the social forces that oppress and divide women.

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Furthermore to being a medical decision, the twins' separation serves as a metaphor for society's desire for male offspring. Bharati and the physicians successfully put Chandan's health ahead of Tara's by assigning him the third leg. Tara suffers long-term effects from this act of discrimination, including emotional distress and physical disability.

Additionally, the divide represents the identity disintegration brought on by gender discrimination. The fact that Tara was thought to be less significant than her brother had a significant impact on her sense of self. The difficulties that women in a male-dominated society encounter are reflected in her quest to define herself and find her place in the world.

4. Psychological and Emotional Impact of Gender Discrimination

One of Tara's main themes is the emotional and psychological effects of gender discrimination. The drama examines how prejudices in society and families impact people's mental health and sense of self, especially for women.

Tara's physical impairment serves as a continual reminder of the prejudice she experienced as a youngster. The fact that her own mother chose her brother over her adds to her sense of rejection and inadequacy. She finds it difficult to build meaningful connections and trust others as a result of this emotional trauma.

Though in different ways, Chandan is impacted by the bigotry as well. He gains from society's predilection for male offspring, but he also feels responsible for Tara's pain and is troubled with guilt. His inability to reconcile his luxury with Tara's subjugation is evident in his choice to leave his family and relocate to London.

Another example of the psychological effects of gender discrimination is Bharati's temperament. She makes decisions that hurt her daughter and strain her relationships as a result of internalizing patriarchal norms. The corrosive force of social standards and expectations is demonstrated by her final breakdown.

5. Dattani's Critique of Patriarchal Norms and Call for Gender Equality

Dattani challenges the patriarchal conventions that uphold gender inequality and injustice via Tara. The drama reveals how cultural customs and societal expectations oppress women and restrict their potential. Dattani urges a reconsideration of these standards and a dedication to gender equality by illustrating the terrible effects of gender bias.

Tara's character is a representation of tenacity and defiance. She refuses to let her gender or disability define her, despite the obstacles she experiences. She makes a strong statement against the forces that aim to marginalize her by being determined to claim her identity and follow her aspirations.

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Additionally, Dattani asks the audience to consider how they may have contributed to the continuation of gender discrimination. The play's examination of social and familial relationships challenges audiences to consider the principles and values that guide their choices and behaviors.

Conclusion

A profound exploration of gender prejudice and its effects on people and relationships may be found in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*. Dattani challenges the patriarchal conventions that uphold inequality and reveals the structural nature of gender bias through the tale of conjoined twins Tara and Chandan. The need for a more inclusive and equal society is highlighted by the play's depiction of family dynamics, cultural expectations, and the psychological effects of discrimination.

Tara is a dramatic appeal to action because it challenges traditional gender stereotypes and gives voice to the underrepresented. In the struggle for gender equality, Dattani's work serves as a reminder of the value of compassion, understanding, and unity. *Tara* continues to be a pertinent and provocative commentary on the human condition as we struggle with issues of inequality and discrimination.

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