

Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's Play "Dance Like a Man" and "Tara"- A Critical Analysis

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Abstract— This paper highlights the notion of social issues like Gender inequalities, sufferings and depression faced by both men and women with reference to the Indian playwright Mahesh Dattani's plays "Dance Like a Man" (1989) and "Tara" (1990). Dance Like a Man has generously expressed the social issues of contemporary Indian society. The theme of the play is dealt with tradition, relationship, career, and society. The plot revolves around Jairaj and Ratna and their daughter Lata and her fiancé Viswas. A fine metre traces the past of Jairaj, Ratna and Amritlal Parekh, Jairaj's father through the technique of flashback concept. Jairaj and Ratna are exposed to the wrath of Amritlal Parekh who fails to understand their passion and their devotion towards dance and particularly of Jairaj. Mahesh Dattani indicates the typical Indian views about dance through Amritlal Parekh who believes that dance is made only for females. This paper is an attempt to study the gender discrimination in a society, the injustice done only on the term of gender and the preference given to a male child over a female in an Indian family. Here Dattani deals with the theme of gender discrimination in his another play Tara. The play also deals with the emotional and physical separation to conjoined twins. The play presents the deep rooted patriarchal system in the society. Women act as a key in the hands of patriarchy to perpetuate patriarchal values. This paper tries to discuss and analyse the issue of marginalisation of women in the play. Chandan being a boy child is preferred to Tara-a girl child in an Indian family. Bharati despite of being mother of Tara spoils her daughter's life and suffers in the longer run because of her inhuman act. Dr. Thakkar makes the misuse of his profession being the man of science and technology. He was bribed a piece of land by Bharati and her father for surgery that led to the death of Tara.

Keywords— Gender Discrimination, Inequality, Transgender, Patriarchy and Marginalisation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Mahesh Dattani is one of the popular dramatists in Indian English Literature, who has the honour of winning Sahitya Akademi award for Final Solutions and Other Plays in the year 1998. Mahesh Dattani is a Bangalore based dramatist and director. The themes of his plays have attracted the attention of a great number of readers and audiences in theatres. He has tried to bring hidden issues of society such as plight of women and transgender, gender discrimination, homosexuality child sex abuse etc. into light through his plays. He has shown the problems of city life in India in a significant manner in his plays. He has a striking artistic mind that makes him different from other dramatists. The Oxford Dictionary defines discrimination as "the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex". Gender based inequality has been the ancient practice in India and also across the world. Gender inequality has been in the roots of our society since the birth of civilisation. It is a practice which shows that

mankind is still in the hands of discrimination which is particularly leading to the fragmentation of the society in spite of the technological Improvement. Men and women are compelled to face the darkness of discrimination which often results in the suppression of their desires and subsequently the progress in life. The artist explains the dark side of life and creates awareness among people.

II. MATERIALS AND METHOD

This article has been prepared with the help of huge materials collected from various sources both primary and secondary. Information from various books of reputed authors also has been used as secondary source. Also efforts have been made to maintain objectivity.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dance Like a Man:

Dattani, in Dance Like a Man has highlighted that patriarchy is an element of Indian society. Men hold primary power and predominate in the culture of the

family. Men ignite to hold the reins of authority over women, children and other members of the family. Gender inequality has been present in society since the birth of civilization and up to date humanity is in its shackles. The Dramatist says “gender is constituted by some acts which when repeated come to form and give shape to a “coherent” gender identity”.

Amritlal Parekh, Head of the Family:

Dattani portrays an Indian family in which Amritlal Parekh possessed unquestionable power over Jairaj and Ratna. Parekh being the head of the family, he declared himself to be responsible head for taking important decision of all their life. He is a reformist and freedom fighter yet a prudish and conservative. He was supporting India to get free from the Britishers. Ironically he controlled and framed strict regulations over his own son’s wishes. He rejects the freedom of his son who wanted to become a Bharatnatyam dancer- “Do you know where a man’s happiness lies? In being a Man”. Father implements his wish on his son and wants him not to take up dance as his career because it is not a ‘male oriented’ profession. Man is declared to be the bread earner and he is expected to be in such a profession in which self-esteem is concerned with it, in Indian society. In the other term, man did not get freedom to undergo art form like Bharatnatyam. Jairaj’s father equates the art of dance with prostitution. “The craft of a prostitution to show off her wares- what business does a man have to learn from such a craft? No use when compared with dance”. Dramatist has clearly indicated that Amritlal Parekh felt really bad and ashamed of Jairaj because he being a ‘real man’ is in the profession of lower quality. He considered Jairaj a cause for the shame for the family, because he judged Jairaj on the floor of masculinity in which he didn’t allow himself to fit in. He says, “Well, most boys are interested in cricket, my son is interested in dance, I thought. I didn’t realize this interest of yours would turn into an obsession”.

Adverse Judgement and Inclination:

Dattani introduces ironic element but still an adverse judgement and inclination are always visualized under the surface. When Amritlal Parekh compares dance with womanly mannerism, it evokes comical work yet underlined with satirical work. He expresses his doubts towards “guru ji” who teaches dance in an effeminate ground which disgusts and irritates Jairaj - “I have never seen a normal man with long hair. I have also noticed the way he walks” (417, Act I).

Dance Separating Men and Women:

Dattani has pointed out the irony that on one hand Amritlal Parekh brings the equivalence of the dance with prostitution and withholds Jairaj from dancing and on the

other hand he accepts and permits Ratna to dance. This concept indirectly suggests that men and women are not given equal power and position in Indian society. The skill of dance is considered to be of least and inferior thing in India and hence it is said to be meant only for woman. Amritlal very smartly makes Ratna feel that Jairaj can never be as good as she at dancing and demands the grace and beauty to be only as the quality of womanly identification. He says, “A woman in the man’s world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman’s world is pathetic, yet being progressive is ... sick”.

Consequences and Repercussions of Gender Conflict:

Mahesh Dattani towards the end expresses the sad and very painful reality; the consequences and repercussions of gender conflict which overwhelmed Jairaj. Innocent Jairaj has been lowered to empty space and loneliness “spineless boy” as his obstinate father and the society made him realize that he is worthless and fit for nothing, not even for the dance, at last. He blames Ratna for taking away his self-possession, self-esteem, respect and confidence which once again adverts towards gender inequality as a husband without a single thought blames his wife for his decline. “You took it away bit by bit. You took it away when you made me dance my weakest items. You took it away when you arranged the lightening so that I danced in your shadow”.

Tara:

Mahesh Dattani has represented the issue of marginalised women in his another play Tara. This play manifests the discrimination against girl child in society. The play opens with Dan who is busy typing and addresses the audience directly. He is writing the play called Twinkle Tara and the play understudy is called Tara and that Tara means star. Chandan recalls the memories of his childhood with his sister Tara. Both had shared one body which means that they were conjoined Twins. He exposes the existing patriarchal mindset of society which prefers a boy child to a girl child. In Mahesh Dattani’s plays women ensure the continuation of tradition and ritual where men go to work. These are stereotypical gender rules of which Dattani makes full use. In this play Dattani outlines an immediate conflict between husband and wife regarding her father. Bharati also looks more concerned than Patel about Tara’s diet and health. Patel is seemed to be concerned about Chandan’s career. He wants him to follow his footsteps. Chandan seems to have different plans and wants to be a writer whereas Tara would like to be “Strong, Healthy, Beautiful”.

As the play progresses, we see Tara being asked to exhibit her artificial leg. In the ensuing dialogue between

Tara and Chandan we are made aware of lot of facts but most importantly that Bharati fusses over Tara and Tara shows what she sees as lack of interest in her father towards her. Roopa makes her re-entrance on the stage and inspected Tara's leg. Roopa is being bribed by Bharati to be friendly with Tara. Roopa runs off to tell her friends that Bharati wants to donate her own kidney. Patel does not approve of it that arouses quarrel between husband and wife and the husband bitter comment that her father's money was always Bharati's strength. Bharati herself seems to have lot of love for Tara and she says, "Love can make up for a lot." Bharati has been knitting sweater for Tara during this talk and Chandan mentions that she has dropped a stitch. During this course of action, Patel enters and sees Chandan helping his mother with her knitting, and this puts forth his views on gender identity. He has already made his plans for Chandan regarding his further study in abroad. He accuses his wife of having taken over Tara completely and deliberately. The roles that Patel seems to assume are natural to males and the roles that he assigns to women are vastly different. Why can't Chandan knit, and why can't Tara go to office? And another predominant question why are baby girls killed in our country? Dattani raises many more such questions regarding gender discrimination. The Act-I ends with Tara who is the bone of contention falling into a dead faint. The play presents Patriarchal system as multilayered and deeply rooted in the society. There are many factors responsible for preference of boy child to girl child. These factors are not only economic but also social and religious. In this play, Patel family is both economically and politically sound. Tara is not a burden on them economically. Still Chandan is preferred over Tara due to patriarchal nature of society. Tara is enthralling in that it makes use of a rather unlikely freak case to lay bare the injustices in the conventional Indian family meted out to the girl child, a play that comments on a society that treats the children who share the womb differently. As always, the stereotype comes in a friendly garb, covering the ugly truths. The Patels, on the face of it look like the ideal parents that special like Tara and Chandan need to survive indeed they have survived because of their dedicated parents. But there are more things that need to be revealed. On the basis of the roles assigned to males and females, male is accorded higher status than female. Patel asks Chandan to support him in business and wants Tara to do domestic work. This division of labour based on sex is one of the root causes of gender discrimination. Dattani tries to deconstruct this separation of roles through Tara and Chandan. Chandan wants to be a writer where as Tara is inclined to join a career like her father. Women play an

important role in perpetuating discrimination against women in patriarchal society. Bharati, as a woman favours Chandan, a male child during surgery. Dr. Thakkar tells us that the greatest challenge was to keep the girl alive. And Patel decides to tell the children the truth. He says that all three were to blame – the grandfather, his wife, and him. The twins had three legs and the third leg was fed by the girl's blood system. The chances of the leg's survival were greater with the girl. But Bharati and her father had decided to give leg to male child despite of the risk. Patel could not protest strongly enough and the doctor was bought off with sanction of land in Bangalore by Bharati's powerful politician father. The leg had survived for only two days while it could have been Tara's throughout her life. Tara is devastated by this revelation. We see Chandan apologising to Tara in most of the lines at the end of the play. "Forgive me, Tara Forgive me for making it tragedy." The play ends with the spirits of Tara and Dan hugging each other.

IV. CONCLUSION

The play "Dance Like a Man" brings to light the painful and hurting reality about men and women who are meant to be the victims of gender conflict. An individual's quality, their desires, capability and success are based on the yardstick of gender, particularly in the Indian society. Mahesh Dattani's another play "Tara" is considered as one of the popular works. He touches various issues related to gender discrimination by taking the subject of conjoined twins. Tara is not merely an individual character but emerges as an archetype, an icon of the Indian girl child who is vanquished and subdued in the factory of tradition and modernity. This play moves us deeply as Mahesh Dattani not only unravels how girls are subjected to discrimination in an educated society but also stresses upon the fact that how discrimination is encouraged by people in Indian society. The play is a mega success in depicting the plight of marginalized women. This play depicts the discrimination against women which starts from the womb of mother. The incidents of female foeticide are common in our society. The patriarchal society considers a girl as a burden on her parents not only financially but also socially and emotionally. It can be concluded that Mahesh Dattani's thinking that the man with the passion and love to dance is considered to be lower and inferior in quality and status whereas woman has no rights and voice in the family. Gender inequality is the social evil which has overwhelmed the Indian society and it can be erased only when the people change their support to gender inequality. We should understand that gender inequality is a 'mere social construct'. A person

should be judged based on his or her quality and capability, but not on the basis of gender only. Then the society will improve in true sense. Every individual has got their own purpose and rights and hence they deserve equal respect on earth.

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