



Shadows of Patriarchy in Mahesh Dattani's Dramatic Universe

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Abstract

One of India's most renowned modern playwrights, Mahesh Dattani, is the focus of this study, which examines his portrayal of sexism in his plays. His writings illuminate the challenges faced by women and other marginalised genders within family and societal systems, as well as the power imbalances rooted in patriarchal society. Dattani's plays, including *Final Solutions*, *Tara*, and *Bravely Fought the Queen*, among others, address topics such as son preference, domestic abuse, suppression of identity, and silencing female voices. His works often explore themes like emotional neglect, limited autonomy, and societal expectations that restrict female characters to certain roles. Simultaneously, Dattani also depicts these characters as resilient, independent individuals who challenge authority and seek personal growth. According to the research, his plays both reflect and oppose the prevalent gender bias in contemporary urban Indian culture. By combining psychological depth with realism, Dattani transforms the stage into a platform for social critique and awareness-raising. Ultimately, his plays advocate for increased empathy, gender equality, and public acknowledgment of women's agency in both private and public spheres.

Keywords: Mahesh Dattani , marginalised , gender, discrimination, emotional

INTRODUCTION

Patriarchal traditions, cultural norms, and unequal power relations are the core causes of gender discrimination in Indian society, which continues to be one of the most pervasive social problems in the country. Theatrical performances and literary works have long been recognized as potent vehicles for bringing to light injustices and calling into question the norms of society. For his daring examination of disadvantaged identities and social taboos, Mahesh Dattani maintains a notable position among modern Indian playwrights. His work has garnered worldwide attention. Using

English as his primary language of expression, he depicts the realities of the urban middle class on stage and highlights the subtle and overt forms of gender bias that are present within families and communities.

The plays of Dattani portray women as multifaceted individuals who are confined within restrictive social frameworks that favour male authority and control. Issues such as son preference, spousal abuse, emotional neglect, unequal opportunities, and the suppression of personal freedom are highlighted in works like *Tara* and *Bravely Fought the Queen*. He explains how prejudice is internalized and perpetuated within the household, turning the home itself into a site of conflict and misery for women. Rather than presenting discrimination as solely an external problem, he demonstrates how it is internalized and sustained within the household. Additionally, his dramatic narratives explore how gender norms impose limitations on both men and women, leading to psychological tension and fractured relationships.

The theatrical work of Dattani is distinguished by the fact that he portrays current urban life in a manner that is both realistic and sympathetic, while also including psychological insight into his characters. Through his work, he lends a voice to people who are frequently silenced, so exposing the hypocrisy of a society that, on the surface, pretends to be progressing while, in reality, maintaining traditional structures. It is via the use of layered dialogues and symbolic scenarios that he invites audiences to confront truths that may be unsettling regarding gender inequity.

Therefore, a study of gender discrimination in Dattani's plays is essential for understanding how modern Indian drama engages with issues of identity, power, and social justice. Not only do his paintings reflect the realities that a great number of women have actually lived through, but they also call for understanding, empathy, and the necessity of a society that is more egalitarian.

‘Final Solutions’ by Mahesh Dattani

Mahesh Dattani's book, *Final Solutions*, focuses mostly on the sectarian conflict that exists between Hindus and Muslims. However, it also sheds light on less obvious but nonetheless significant patterns of gender discrimination that exist inside the family and community. The novel Dattani depicts the ways in which patriarchal views and religious conflicts interact to shape the lives, liberties, and identities of female characters. In the play, he reveals the confluence of gender bias with tradition, fear, and societal control through the characters of the women. Among the most important female

characters, Hardika (Daksha) is a representation of a generation of women whose lives have been characterized by repression of emotions, silence, and the fulfillment of their duties. She internalizes prejudice and then passes it on to the next generation because she was married at a young age and was expected to conform to traditional duties for her entire life. Her comments in her journal indicate feelings of isolation, a lack of autonomy, and emotional neglect, illustrating how women's voices are frequently relegated to private areas rather than being expressed in public.

Rigid orthodoxy and religious conservatism are two characteristics that Aruna, the matriarch of the home, exemplifies. On the other hand, her authority is founded not on the principle of empowerment but rather on the adherence to patriarchal principles. She is responsible for monitoring the actions of younger women, particularly Smita, and imposing restrictions on their mobility, clothing, and ability to interact with others. Through the maintaining of traditional conventions that restrict female autonomy, Aruna's character exemplifies how women can become agents of gender discrimination in their own right. Smita, on the other hand, is a representative of the younger, more contemporary generation that concerns itself with these limitations. She struggles against her mother's conservative ideals and confronts the animosity that exists throughout the community. She is educated and independent-minded. The fact that her independence is conditional, continuously examined, and restricted is illustrative of the pervasive control that is exercised over the choices that women make, especially in modern circumstances.

Dattani demonstrates, by means of these opposing female characters, that gender discrimination is not always overt violence but rather frequently insidious, expressing itself as emotional control, moral policing, limited freedom, and the expectation of obedience. The play implies that it is impossible to create communal harmony without addressing inequities within the domestic domain, particularly those that are based on gender. As a result, *Final Solutions* goes beyond the dispute between religious groups to reveal the multifaceted injustices that are ingrained in everyday life. In the end, Dattani emphasizes the importance of self-reflection, discussion, and empathy toward others, highlighting the fact that genuine social progress necessitates the elimination of both patriarchal oppression and communal prejudice.

‘Tara’ by Mahesh Dattani

Tara, which was written and directed by Mahesh Dattani, sheds light on the patriarchal ways of thinking that are prevalent in a culture that places a higher value on sons than girls and that is centered on gender inequity. Because Chandan is a male, a heartbreaking medical decision is made to give the third limb, which is biologically Tara's, to the boy. There is no other option. Tara and Chandan, who are conjoined twins, are the protagonists of the drama that tells their story. Tara is permanently disabled as a result of this cruel judgment, which serves as a symbol of the way in which girls' rights and prospects are sometimes sacrificed for guys. When it comes to topics pertaining to the family, Chandan is granted more advantages and encouragement than Tara, who is provided with less assistance, less possibilities, and does not inherit anything. Bharati, her mother, gives in to the pressure of society and becomes complicit in this bias, which leaves her with a great sense of sorrow despite her actions. Through Tara's narrative, Dattani demonstrates how gender prejudice can be harmful to even the most educated households and how it may have an effect on every member of the household. At the conclusion of the play, the subtle but lethal prejudice of patriarchal culture, which favors male offspring, is condemned.

One of the most influential social dramas written by Mahesh Dattani is titled Tara, and its primary focus is on discrimination based on gender. It sheds light on the deeply ingrained patriarchal mentality that exists across society, which considers male children to be of greater worth than female ones. It is through the tragic story of conjoined twins Tara and Chandan that the play illustrates how gender bias acts inside the family, the medical system, and the social structure, ultimately resulting in the destruction of lives within these institutions.

Upon the twins' birth, the most horrifying case of sexism is revealed. As a result of Tara's medically-determined third limb, Chandan is born conjoined to her. Nevertheless, with the help of Bharati (the mother), their grandfather arranges to have Chandan's limb surgically reattach to him because, being a male, he is more vital for passing on the family name. The decision is driven by societal preference for a son rather than medical necessity. Although both kids will be crippled after the operation, Tara will feel the pain of losing a leg that was rightfully hers the most. The act represents the common practice of sacrificing girls' rights, health, and future opportunities in favor of boys. Respectable family judgments hide brutality, which is exposed as well.

Gender inequality is institutionalized in the Indian household, according to the play. While Chandan receives both emotional and material assistance, Tara does not. The family views Chandan as their heir apparent, whereas Tara is considered a liability. The fact that the grandfather's will favors the son

demonstrates his prejudice even more. These customs reflect the long-held view that daughters "belong" to another family and sons are everlasting members of the family.

Bharati is a tragic and complicated figure. Despite being Tara's mother, she gives in to societal and parental pressure and makes the prejudiced decision. As a result of her subsequent feelings of remorse, she attempts to make up to Tara by showering her with presents, special treatment, and an abundance of love. Nevertheless, the wrongs done to her daughter cannot be rectified by this reparation. Women can internalize patriarchal values and become tools of discrimination, as Bharati's role demonstrates. The psychological toll of her collapse is on display.

Tara feels discouraged from following her dreams, even though she is bright, energetic, and driven. Patel, Tara's father, discreetly limits Tara's ambitions by concentrating on Chandan's schooling and future. What is deemed suitable for each child is determined by gender roles. While Tara is supposed to accept reliance, Chandan is prepared for freedom and success. The idea that prejudice might manifest in more subtle forms, such as social and psychological bias, is bolstered by this uneven upbringing.

Tara, the girl of the twins, has it worse than the other because of her physical disability. Being unmarried and dependant for the rest of her life, society sees a girl with a disability as an extra burden. Being aware of being underestimated as a disabled person and a female is the root cause of Tara's irritation and rage. Her plight illustrates the ways in which disability and gender bigotry interact to further marginalize her.

Gender discrimination has consequences that extend beyond Tara. As a child, Chandan is haunted by feelings of shame, Patel struggles with suppressed stress, and Bharati succumbs to her guilt. Due to his inability to overcome the trauma, Chandan eventually moves abroad and attempts to recreate his past through his memories and imagination. As the family disintegrates, it becomes evident that patriarchal practices hurt everyone.

Tara stands in for the innumerable girls whose potential is stifled by prejudiced societal standards. Others' choices limit her life despite her intelligence, sensitivity, and strong will. She represents all women whose voices are silenced at home, and her tragedy is a symbol of that. Mahesh Dattani's Tara is an incisive indictment of patriarchal society's ingrained gender bias. His depiction of inequality inside an urban, college-educated household demonstrates that gender bias is pervasive and does not

discriminate based on a person's socioeconomic status. Preference for male offspring causes physical violence, psychological distress, and relational disintegration, as seen in the play. The play is a powerful commentary on the necessity to confront long-standing social biases because, through Tara's pain, Dattani demands more consciousness, equality, and compassion.

‘Bravely fought the Queen’ by Mahesh Dattani

Bravely Fought the Queen deals with sexism as a major issue. Through emotional control, neglect, and societal expectations, the drama depicts how patriarchy operates, shedding light on the hidden suffering of women in an upper-middle-class metropolitan family. The women of the Trivedi home are confined and unhappy due to the dominance of men, even though they are well-off socially and materially. In the play, male domination and inequality are prominent features of the marriages. The two brothers, Jiten and Nitin, exert authority over their wives, Alka and Dolly. Even though they may be going through a lot, the women are supposed to keep quiet, keep the peace at home, and defend the family's reputation in public. As a result of a long-standing patriarchal mindset that values male power, their spouses regard them more as property than as equals.

Emotional neglect and loneliness plague Dolly, Jiten's wife. Her loveless marriage is a result of her husband's lack of respect and devotion. Similarly, psychological abuse and humiliation abound throughout Alka and Nitin's marriage. A symptom of her oppression and a way out of her unpleasant reality, her alcoholism is a battle she struggles with. These pairings illustrate how marriage may institutionalize sexism and the suppression of women's identities. There is talk of psychological and physical abuse of women throughout the play. The women's actions and emotions reveal the effects of the assault, even though most of it happens offstage. Both Alka's insecurities and dread point to a past of abuse, and the normalizing of emotional abuse in marriage is mirrored in Dolly's silent suffering. Silence in the face of such violence exemplifies how society frequently chooses to disregard or hide women's suffering in order to maintain social acceptability.

The economic reliance of women on men is another facet of discrimination. Due to their lack of autonomy and financial resources, Dolly and Alka are unable to stand up to their abusive husbands or escape their toxic situations. The institution of marriage serves as the primary determinant of their social identity, perpetuating the idea that women are only valuable in their duties as spouses and not as persons. An example of a woman who perpetuates gender inequality is Baa, who is Jiten and Nitin's mother. She reinforces male dominance in the home by adhering to conventional norms and displaying

little empathy toward her daughters-in-law. Her actions show how patriarchal rules are internalized by women and passed down through the generations, making it harder to oppose the system.

A potent emblem of female marginalization is Daksha, Jiten's crippled sister, who is largely unseen. Like Dolly and Alka, she is emotionally confined by her physical deformities and lives in solitude. She embodies the pinnacle of female silence: being recognized but utterly ignored. Daksha is a symbol of how society rejects and marginalizes women who do not fit societal norms. A title that is humorous is *Bravely Fought the Queen*. It brings to mind the legendary Rani Lakshmibai, a personification of bravery and defiance throughout history. Nevertheless, the play's female characters are unable to publicly defy their oppressors. The disparity between idealized portrayals of strong women and the difficult realities faced by everyday women is emphasized by the fact that their challenges are contained inside the domestic domain.

Frustration, sorrow, and emotional breakdowns are outcomes of gender discrimination in the play. Long-term oppression causes psychological damage, as seen in Dolly's silent resignation, Alka's drunkenness, and Daksha's solitude. Although they are not physically confined, the women are nevertheless confined by societal norms, anxieties, and reliance. Modern urban families are not immune to the subtle but ubiquitous gender prejudice that Mahesh Dattani reveals in *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Education, money, and social standing are not determinants of gender equality, as the play shows. Dolly, Alka, Baa, and Daksha's plight exemplifies how patriarchy suppresses women, denies them agency, and prevents them from reaching their full potential. The piece is a scathing indictment of a culture that puts on a progressive front on the outside but keeps women trapped in invisible cages on the inside.

CONCLUSION

Mahesh Dattani's plays expose the patriarchal dynamics at work in Indian families, marriages, and society as a whole, painting a stark and realistic picture of gender inequality in modern India. Dattani shows in novels like *Tara* and *Bravely Fought the Queen* that sexism is prevalent in modern urban life, concealing itself behind veneers of respectability and tradition. As long as male domination is accepted, his female characters will continue to face societal expectations, emotional neglect, domestic oppression, and unequal prospects. Additionally, the author demonstrates how women might internalize patriarchal values, which in turn can lead to the transmission of inequity from one generation to the next.

Gender bias has physical, emotional, and psychological effects, as shown in Dattani's tragedies, and it hurts not only women but their families and communities as a whole. To drive home the point that patriarchy is an entrenched cultural attitude and power structure problem, he presents multi-faceted individuals instead than stereotypical victims or villains. By drawing attention to the unspoken struggles of women and the critical importance of achieving gender parity, his writings encourage readers to feel compassion, introspection, and societal transformation. As a result, Mahesh Dattani is portrayed as a politically engaged playwright who challenges inequality and promotes social justice through his work.

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