

## GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN MAHESH DATTANI'S DANCE LIKE A MAN AND TARA

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### ABSTRACT

*Mahesh Dattani is one of the eminent Indian English playwrights, who mainly deals with the contemporary Indian society. He considers gender bias unnatural and ethical and brings out complex and multidimensional nature of the issue. His plays Tara and Dance like a Man deal with the theme of gender bias in society. The play Tara touches on the issue of gender-based division of labor and how this division creates barriers in the way of creativity and talent for both genders. Though, both Tara and Chandan are differently abled only Tara has to face double marginalization being a girl. In his play Dance like a Man his character struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition and cultural constructions of gender. In this play, the theme of gender runs in a pathetic way in which the whole identity of the character Jairaj seems to be in a crisis. He feels like his wife has ruined him and has taken away his self-esteem. This paper attempts to highlight the gender discrimination seen in the novel Dance like a Man and Tara.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Gender Discrimination, Transgender, Gender Politics, Gender Bias and Patriarchy*

### INTRODUCTION

Literary studies encompass film studies, cultural studies, and Gender studies. Each has its own uniqueness and significance. Gender studies are a brilliant study of patriarchal culture. It is a part of social studies that examine the affinity between men and women in the gender system of patriarchy. Patriarchy is of paramount important in the domain of gender studies. Gender bias, gender politics, gender discrimination, gender status, transgender and gender identity come under the rubrics of gender studies.

Dance like a Man and Tara are considered to be the best examples of gender discrimination. While Tara talks about gender bias in a family, Dance like a Man talks about gender discrimination in the family. Gender discrimination is a kind of discrimination which eventually shows someone is biased. It is invariably found in India culture. It shows how man tries to show his upper hand in a family. Since he is the breadwinner of the family, he has a conviction inside that he is a bit superior to others in a family which is a microcosm of society. Hence, he cannot help thinking that he is the main pillar of the family. He strongly imposes his unreasonable restrictions. In other words, he looms large over in all spheres of life. In the realm of Literature, there are ever so many writers who present the concept of gender discrimination in the dynamics of writings. Mahesh Dattani is one such example. Inspired by the writings of Edward Albee, he showcases his creative acumen in the

form of his writings. Speaking generally, his plays address gender issues such as Gender culture, Gender status, and Gender bias.

Mahesh Dattani is one of the most dominant voices in the present Indian English Dramatic world. He throws a considerable amount of light on the burning issues of the modern urban Indian society ranging from communal tension, homosexuality and child sexual abuse, gender discrimination, marriage and career, a conflict between tradition and modernity, patriarchal social system, constraints of eunuchs, women, and children. He masters his courage to touch upon some of the taboo issues like homosexuality in his plays.

Here, Amrit Lal, the freedom fighter, who is known to conduct secret meetings with his fellow freedom fighters in his own house in the British regime, could not digest the breakage of masculinity. His basic understanding of Gender limitation does not allow a man to have long hair, Since Keeping long Hair is meant for women alone.

Sometimes his understanding of masculine limitation tells him the style of walking of a man. It should be straight like a soldier walks in an army parade. A mere change of walking style will check male one's own masculinity. Thus, Amrit Lal suspects the masculinity of his son's dance master and he substantiates his point by posing two masculine limitations, i.e. normal men do not keep their hair so long and the way the master walks.

In Act - 2, Jairaj and Ratna who went out of the house quarreling with Amrit Lal. Out of sheer helplessness return to Amrit Lal parekh's house within two days, their helplessness is exploited by Amrit Lal parekh who imposes a certain restriction on them. He tells Jairaj not to grow his hair any longer and asks Ratna not to learn any dance from anyone else he future informs Ratna that man's happiness lies in being a man. He assures Ratna that she would be allowed to dance if she helps him in making Jairaj an adult who would be worthy of a woman after this kind of agreement with Ratna. Ambition overtakes Ratna. In order to prove herself to be a dancer, she destroys Jairaj by undermining his masculinity by talking his profession dancing that does not profit them all. She knows well if she has to be a dancer. She deserves her husband, not as a dancer, but a mere spectator of dance and who does not arrange for his wife's dance programmes

The second part of Dance like a Man talks about a man in the women's world. The struggle of Jairaj does not end with Amrit Lal death. Even he enters the world where he has to struggle for each and everything. He slowly loses all that he has to Ratna. Ratna has snatched Jairaj's dream from him gradually. She makes him dance his weakest items. With the passage of time, Ratna gets an invitation to dance. Jairaj, on the other hand, does not get invitations to dance. He fails to support her family. It is she who feels and takes care of the need of the family. It is Ratna who supports her family with her earnings. Jairaj is living a miserable life in the woman's world. He has neither importance nor value in Ratna's world. He is of no use to her.

Tara is the most touching two-act play by Mahesh Dattani. It is a story about conjoined twins. Tara and Chandan who are surgically separated and yet remain entwined. Gender bias is the theme of the play. It also revolves around the theme of favoring the boy and depriving the girl with the exceptional originality of conception. The play begins with the mindset of Chandan. He changed his name to Dan. He actually narrates the story. Mahesh Dattani calls this kind of activity contests heteronormative sexual politics and expresses through the problematic of the body which bears the scourging letterings of the multipart dynamics of the urban middle-class Indian society.

Chandan and Tara are conjoined twins, joined at the hip with three lower limbs. It clearly shows the discrimination against the girl child in contemporary urban society. Both conjoined twins are an extremely rare phenomenon. In many cases, when they are surgically separated. Only one of the two survives. Chandan and Tara carry with them the promise of living as two separate individuals. They have very good chances of surviving after surgery, with each important organ present in each body. In a cruel judgement, the mother of the twins, with the help of her father, convinces Dr. Thekkar to graft the leg onto Chandan's body, where it does not survive for long. The decision that was taken to give the third leg to the boy between the two conjoined twins has shown unethical decision is taken by Bharathi, the mother and their powerful grandfather that leaves Tara crippled, though Bharati's guilt later drives her to insanity that does not lessen the crime that was committed on Tara.

Mahesh Dattani wants to say that even scientific considerations are not free from social stereotypes. Parents and their views of gender led to being the death of her own daughter and it is also the reason why Chandan flees to London to escape the harsh and crude memories that burdened him in also be held responsible as he gave into the decision of his wife.

The play is in a broader sense, a story for the injustice done to a woman by the patriarchal society. In spite of technological advancement in the human field, one has remained the same at the root of our mind. The play has revealed how the devil of gender discrimination kills all other bonds of familial relationship and how socio-cultural myths and conventions control and construct the cause of human life. Bharati's love for Tara is pure and unceasing, but her maternal love is marginal as a woman and her sub altering compels her to sacrifice her maternal love to cope up with social expectations. The patriarchal code pushes a mother-daughter relationship on the periphery.

One could see Tara as a play about the male self and female self. The male self is being preferred in all cultures. The play is about the separation of self and the resultant angst. Tara is revealing in nature. Dan feels the pressure of the past. He is weighed down with the pressuring tension resulting from past deeds. At the time of the gruesome decision of giving the third leg to Chandan, the doctors opined no chances of survival of leg were move with Tara then Chandan. Gender hierarchization comes in the way of science. Bharati and her politically powerful father without takes Mr. Patel in confidence decided to give to the third leg to Chandan.

Bharati realizes her sin and stigmatizing motherhood by doing injustice with her daughter. She suffered nervous breakdown and metamorphosis. She developed compassion for Tara in an effort to seek salvation from unforgivable sin. She exhibited sympathy towards Tara and did all attempts to bring ill for Patel in the eyes of her daughter. Females are discriminated not only biologically but also culturally. The biological difference has been more or less created by nature but cultural difference is solely manipulated by patriarchal society. Such an atmosphere is created for them so that they could do nothing other than quenching the thirst of husbands, children, and youngsters. For Dattani, a biological difference is bearable for time being but the cultural difference are totally fabricate and can be curtailed, curtained and averted.

Bharati's excessive love for Tara results from her past guilt; she feels the pangs of her past guilt. Allying with her father, she did great injustice of Tara. Now she wants to give more and more love and comforts to Tara. It is because of this she wants to give her own kidney to Tara when there is a donator available. She wants to give part of her and craves satisfaction. She shows her concern to the expert that she loves Tara.

But Patel disapproves her idea of giving her kidney to Tara. So, she pretends that it will involve expenses. Mr. Patel disapproves her view saying that her father's wealth has always been her strength against him. Bharati tries to assert her moral superiority over her husband. She struggles hard to come out of her space in the family. Bharati's final decision of giving her kidney to Tara may be seen as an act of expectation. Bharati said that her deceased father is responsible for the inhuman act of denying the third leg to Tara. After her father's death, Bharati's condition grows worse. She tries to make up by taking excessive care and immense exposure to Tara. This is also the result of her past blunder. She is quite conscious of her past blunder. She is quite conscious of her past wrong deed and feels full pressure and this ultimately leads her to the mental breakdown. Thus, Bharati keeps striving to construct her maternal love until she undergoes mental breakdown.

Her guilt feeling makes her mentally disturbed. The quarrel between husband and wife also creates unnecessary tension in the family. She tries to lessen her guilt by transferring blame to her husband and proving that she loves Tara more than he does.

Tara, the unlucky-girl who has not been given enough opportunities like her brother, finally dies. Chandan attempts to repress the guilt he feels over Tara's death. His sense of trauma and anguish is so intense at the end of the play. Chandan explores his psyche over his sister's death. Tara dies in a shock when she learns that it is her mother Bharati (whom Tara trusts more) who involved in the conspiracy of her unfair separation from Chandan. Though Chandan physically survives this trauma, he can never lead a peaceful life. He migrates to the suburbs of London, changes his name and attempts to create a new identity. He also tries to write his autobiographical play, though a futile attempt. In the end, Mahesh Dattani brilliantly points out the theme of gender discrimination in the play. To look son and daughter with biased and discriminating eyes has been traditional and age-old custom in India and Tara is a victim of this social system which controls the minds of the people. In Indian society, a woman is expected to play various roles such as mother, wife and daughter and sister even goddess. Ironically, in the patriarchal structure of Indian family, women and girls are trained to remain confined to the kitchen and courtyard. Be it daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, all are dependent on man for financial and physical security. Thus, everywhere women are considered to be the secondary position in all walks of life.

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