MAHESH DATTANI’S TARA - A FEMINISTIC STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

The earliest form of drama was the Sanskrit drama. It began after the development of the ‘Greek’ and ‘Roman’ drama and before the development in other parts of Asia. It emerged sometime between the 2nd Century, BCE. In addition, the 1st Century CE, which was a relative peace in the history of India during which hundreds of plays were written?

The Mahabharata by Patanjali contain the earliest reference to what may have been the seeds of Sanskrit drama. This provides a feasible date for the beginning of theatre in India. A Treatise on theatre’ a compendium whose date of composition is uncertain and authorship is attributed to Bharat Muni. The ‘Treatise’ is the most complete work of drama in the ancient world. It addresses acting, dance, music, dramatic construction, architecture costuming, make up, props, the organisation of companies, the audience, competitions, and offers a mythological account of the origin of theatre.

In modern Indian drama, Rabindranath Tagore, is probably India’s best-known modern playwright. He was awarded Nobel Prize for his collection of poems Geetanjali. He has written mostly in Bengali. His plays were written in Bengali and translated in English include Chitra (1892). The King of the Dark Chamber (1910) the post office (1913) these plays were deeply rooted in the Indian ethos and display a unique blend of simplicity and complexity. Shri Arbindo was a major Indian English playwright and an accomplished artisan in verse. His dramatic genius is revealed through his five complete blank verse plays.

FORMS OF DRAMA

(A) OPERA: Western opera is a dramatic art from which arouse during the renaissance in an attempt to revive the classical Greek drama tradition in which both music and theatre were combined. The opera form has undergone enormous changes in the past four centuries and it is an important form of theatre until this day. It should be noted that Richard Wagner, the German 19th century composer has main influence on opera form. To restore the connection with the traditional ‘Greek Drama’ he renewed the operatic format, and to emphasize the equal importance of music and drama in these new works, he called them ‘music dramas’.

(B) PANTOMIME: These stories follow in the tradition of ‘Fables and ‘Folk Tales’. This kind of play uses stock characters seen in masque and again commedia and dell ‘art. These plays usually have an emphasis on moral dilemmas and good always triumphs over evil, this typeplay very entertaining as well effective.
(C) CREATIVE DRAMA: Creative Drama includes dramatic activities and games used primarily in Educational settings with children. Its roots in the USA. Began in the early 1900s Winifred Ward is considered the founder of creative drama in Education, establishing the first academic use of drama in EvanstonIllinois.

There are other forms also performed by the theatre people around the world, such as, Applied Drama, Augustan drama, closet drama, costume drama, crime drama, Flash drama, Falk play Heroic drama, Melodrama and Modern drama.

Emerging Trends in Indian English Drama-

The 1920, a new drama in almost all the Indian languages came to the force, it was a drama largely influenced by prevailing movements like Marxism, psychoanalysis, symbolism and surrealism. Many literary giants like Rabindranath Tagore, Shri Arbindo, and Bharti Sarabhai tried to overcome those difficulties and opened up new vistas in genre.

Indian drama got a new footing when Kendriya Natak Sangeet Akadami’ was started in January (1953). National school of drama setup Sangeet Natak Akadami in 1959 was another development. Badal Sarkar, Vijay Tendulkar and GirlishKennard have contributed to the modernization of the face of the Indian theatre those ply wrights have made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical virtuosities. They are using legends, folklores, myths, history with splendid results.

As NiradChaudhuri points out , ”with Mohan Rakesh Hindi drama makes a departure of pseudo-modernism and traditional symbolism to the drama of ‘Non communication ‘modern man’s failure to understand each other which is real tragedy of human life’”.

GROWTH OF FEMINISM IN INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

Feminism in India can be traced down to the days of Ram Mohan Roy and the Almiya Shobha started in 1914. The earliest feminist were men who had set out to introduce reforms in upper caste Hindu society addressing social evils like child marriage, dowry, female illiteracy and the practice of sati. Social reformers believed that education was the key to social change for improving the position of women.

In the changed atmosphere of the mid-to late 1970s, socially relevant theatre and the women’s movement began to show the way forward. A number of tabooed issues found expression and acceptance through theatre in 1980s and 1990s women’s question entered the Indian theatre scene in a large way. The form of the experimental theatre and the agenda of the women’s movement shaped the content and mounting of plays. It sought a definition and found several features:

1 Production and script characterized by consciousness of women as women

2 Dramaturgy in which art is inseparable from the condition of women as women performances that deconstructs sexual differences and thus undermines patriarchal power.
3 Scripting and production that present transformation as a structural and ideological replacement for recognition and creation of women characters in the subject position.

To begin with, feminist theatre thrived in cities and towns in India primarily in non-commercial spaces. Jan Nalya Manch Of Safdar Hasmi.(people’s front) formed in 1973 performed an agitprop street play Aurat, 1979, which dealt openly with issues like bride burning, dowry and wife battering. It was exciting because it dared to venture to the public with such diverse representations and expectations of women that it created a new audience for theatre.

During 19th century, many female authors carved out an important place for themselves. In the genre of fiction and poetry, the stage remained largely closed to them. The last twenty years or so have seen a significant change in this respect. The Indian theatre is no longer the male preserve it used to be women directors, previously a rarity, have come to the fore. Writers like Laxmi Chandra, Chaman Ahuja, Jasbir Chandra, Usha Ganguli, Neelam Mansing Chaudhary, Sheila Bhatia Jayshree, and Arundhati Raje, to list a few writers. New women playwrights are not necessarily to be lumped together indiscriminately as explicitly. Feminist authors there is a connection between the greater number of women authored plays in the Indian stage and upsurge especially during the 70s and 80s of feminism as a potent force in society. The women writers writing dramas in different languages are Poile Sengupta (English) Varsha Aadalja (Gujarati) Manjula Padmanabhan (English) Dina Mehta (English) Geetanjali Shree (Hindi) Neelam Chaudhary (Punjabi) Sushma Deshpande (Marathi).

The post-modern era seems to be productive for Indian English drama as it has received from impetus from young writers like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan R.K. Dhawan rightly observes, “Very recently Indian English drama has shot into prominence. Younger writers like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula have infused new life into this branch of writing.” 2 Dattani has won Sahitya Akadami award for English literature for his play ‘final solutions’. Dattani puts Drama on a very high pedestal and argues, “Well, I think this is a wrong perception prevailing among the academics, especially the view that writing for the stage is inferior to writing a novel or writing a poetry. I think it is important to keep in mind that the playwright is actually an artisan.” 3

Recently the country has given us some brilliant playwrights like Manjula Padmanabhan and Mahesh Dattani. Manjula was the first Indian to earn international fame with her ‘harvest’ a futuristic play that deals with the exploitation of human body in 21st century. Padmanabhan projects a dehumanized, terrifying world in which mothers sell their sons for the price of rice. However, Dattani is true successor of Girish Karnad and responsible for the revolutionary progression of English Drama. He emerges as a compelling playwright who projects the post-colonial dichotomy at various levels. He keeps women at the centre of his dramatic world and may be called avant-garde feminist. He is under the influence of Tennessee Williams, Arthur Millar and Gayatri playwright Madhurye. At one phase he says, ‘the playwright Madhurye influenced me a great deal in his portrayal of middle class hypocrisy’. 4

‘Tara’ gives us a glimpse into the modern society which claims to be liberal and advanced into thought and action. It speaks about male chauvinism prevalent in the present form and brings about the stark reality of the woman playing fiddle to man. Homosexuality is the significant subject matter chosen by Dattani. In ‘seven steps round the fire’, the most popular
day, dwells on the theme of eunuch, their identity, their constitution and their connotation. In ‘Where there is a will Dattani portrays complicated modern urban family where the old patriarchal code finds a formidable foe in the feminist ideas. He says ‘’change does not happen overnight, we grow liberal after not because we want to, but have to.’’5

He has an array of themes to offer us his plays and issues he chooses to project are the most topical but also the most controversial. A deep study of his plays lead us to an interesting study of stagecraft in Indian theatre using innovations introduced by Mahesh Dattani. There are multilevel sets so that whole interior of the house is visible to the audience. JohnMckee, Italian director, says, “Mahesh Dattani is always adventurous in his way of using the theatrical space at his disposal: multiple levels, breaking the bounds of proscenium, wondrously inventive use of lighting to give height, breadth and depth.”6

‘Tara’ was first performed at Bangalore, Dattani himself directed it, and later on in Mumbai, it was directed by Alaque Padamsee. In ‘Tara’ Dattani reflects the predicament of women in the past, comments on their status in the present dramatizes his understanding of whom considers responsible for their predicament and exhorts us to shed our age-old prejudices in order to have peace and harmony in family and society. There was a time when women accepted unhesitatingly the do’s and don’ts men decided for them but refuse to accept that that somebody else should decide and wants to shape her life and priorities the way she considers proper:

CHANDAN: If daddy wants to stop her from saying something to us, maybe it is not good for us to hear it.

TARA: And who decides what’s good for us to hear and what isn’t.7

The voice of the new woman Dattani captures in TARA. He reflects in its wake on the status of women in society and the attitudes women operating the kitchen the existing dowry system that spells doom for girls and the difference in the attitudes of girls belonging to two different classes.

Dattani talks of the concerns and perceptions of the new woman and shows how they are not satisfied with the status of a homemaker bestowed on them by the male dominated society. He shows how those stood discrimination in the past, want their daughters not to do what they had to do. He also delineates their aspirations when he shows how Bharti insists that Tara and not the members of her family must decide what she wants for herself. She tells Chandan what she expects to do these days:

Bharti: It is time Tara decided what she wants to be women have to do that as well these days. She must have career.

CHANDAN: She can do whatever she wants. Grandfather’s trust will leave us both with money, isn’t it?

BHARTI: Yes, But she must have something to do! She can’t be aimless all her life.”8
The women of Bharati’s generation were eulogized by men for their beauty and they also loved to bask in their appreciation of their charms but the new woman gives importance to her intelligence because this is what she thinks she requires now to live meaningfully.

Dattani talks of female infanticide, shows how new born girls are killed, how insensitive we have become. Roopa and Tara belong to two different classes, and hence their perceptions differ. Roopa accepts the predicament of girls in society and hence she narrates what the Patel’s did matter-of-factly without sounding concerned or alarmed but Tara is surprised when she learns from Roopa the fate that waits a new born girl child.

ROOPA: “Since you insist, I will tell you. It may not be true. However, this is what I have heard. The Patel’s in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies. You know dowry and things like that. So they used to drown them in milk.

TARA: In milk?

ROOPA: So when people asked about how the baby died they could say that she choked while drinking her milk.”

Men think that there are certain activities, which are meant only for women and hence if a boy is seen doing a work earmarked for girls, they are ridiculed for doing what they are not supposed to do. Chandan helps her mother knit but her father does not like his son doing what he considers a girl’s activity. Chandan believes in co-operation and equality but Patel does not share the enthusiasm and vision of his son’s generations. He represents the attitude of his generation that believe in blatant discrimination and ridicules the advocates of equality for women in society. Patel thinks that Chandan would ‘rot’ if stays home, but he refuses to go to office without Tara. His father desires does not share each other’s perceptions, hence the son does not consider his decision unusual but his father does; one wants him to come without her and other refuses to go. Chandan and her father are poles apart when Patel tells Chandan that his grandfather has left him a lot of money, his immediate query is how much has left for Tara to which he replies nothing. Chandan’s father does not find the decision wrong but he finds it unpalatable:

Patel: “And Tara?

Pate: Nothing.

Chandan: Why?

Patel: It was his money. He could what he wanted with it.”

Dattani’s dialogues are so simple and facts so common that viewers are likely to miss the gravity of what he says. Patel gives bag to Tara and ask her to wash it Tara repents her father’s instruction. She feels hurt and this feeling of hers that Dattani projects through an incident that too common to catch the attention of viewers and critics. Chandan appreciates Tara’s perception that there is no difference between a boy and girl. He listen her because he treats her as his equal.
and talks of her qualities but her father does not. This discrimination has been subtly interwoven in the story.

Dattani reflect on the difference in the attitude of mother and father to a girl child and shows how a woman feels when she finds her husband neglecting, ignoring, undermining or belittling their daughter. However, woman status is that of a homemaker does not protest to make her husband realise that he does that what he should not do. Bharti does the same when she tells her son that his father does not pay attention to his sister.

Bharti: “I wish your father would pay more attention to Tara.

Chandan: He does. He does not like to show his affection.

Bharti: Do not tell me about your father. He is more worried about your career than hers is.”

As Mahesh Dattani in one of his interviews with Laxmi Subramanian: “ I 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.”

Bharti tries to shed her burden of guilt by showing maternal love and concern for her daughter and to assert her moral superiority over her husband. She also tries to expiate by the act of donating kidney to her daughter, which was ultimately futile. Dattani establishes that mother and daughter relationship is ultimately subordinated to the directives of patriarchy. All cultures and all countries by establishing values, gender perception and prescribe unequal means to achieve. Tara and Chandan conjoined, Siamese twins who must be separated to survive. The dichotomy between the twin-gendered selves is recognised and a physical separation is made through surgery. ‘Like we have always been inseparable. The way we started in life two lives and one body in one comfortable womb, until we were forced out --- And seperated.”

CONCLUSION

Being a 19th century Indian writer, Mahesh Dattani’s plays have different issues that Indian society had faced time to time and in the same way this play too is a collection of miscellaneous indifferent chapters. Tara, as daughter experiences maltreatment and partiality from her mother as compared to her brother Chandan. As if his other plays addresses the misdial class. Mahesh Dattani in this play has also presented the bizarre reality of the woman playing a secondary role to man.

Mahesh Dattani has very skilfully revealed the theme of gender discrimination in this play. The purpose of this play is to illuminate the minds of female gender for not to give preference to a male child over a female child. He stresses women to look back at their journey of life. They were like Tara, before they became women in real sense. This play also suggests many things to the mothers. As for instance, not to feel upset at girl’s birth not to treat girl contemptuously and not to stop them from scaling newer heights in their life to come.
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