

Tara by Mahesh Dattani

Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* comes across as a play that deals with twin aspects that are two sides of the same coin. It also presents the conflict between illusion and reality as echoed by the multi-level set. The house of the Patels are as kept in memory. The only realistic level is the part of the wall covered with faded wallpaper that has the writer writing the play in which he appears to the audience. In this sense, the playwright presents met-theatrical aspects as he talks of distancing oneself from the experience and writing about it. The Doctor as portrayed in the set, stands in contrast as the omnipotent Author with the Author-God like stance. It thereby underlines the clash between the subjective and objective author. Chandan discovers that even distancing himself physically "in a seedy suburb of London thousands of miles away from home" hasn't done the trick. He attempts as much as possible to alienate himself from the script, but suffers from a writer's block and everything remains stagnant on his paper just as his life is. Just as in his life, nothing changes but the dates. And the greatest irony is that Indo-Anglian literature isn't worth toilet paper in his own country. He neglects his own personal history to get over his guilt with what happened to Tara. Just as the lowest portion occupies a major portion of the stage, the memory of guilt haunts and dominates Chandan's personality. It is to deny this that he creates his alter-ego Dan. His being a Diaspora, this causes another divide in his self: the identity of the Diaspora caught between his native culture and foreign culture as signified by Chandan and Dan.

Our culture is so rich with tradition, and that's a great advantage and disadvantage a swell..(321)
The desperate immigrant (Mimes removing yet another..)(324)

The mysterious brown with the phony accent. The last being the hardest to drop having spent two whole years in acquiring it. And what remains is what I intend making capital of.(324)

The title 'Tara' is symbolic of a shooting star that is a temporary guest of a small fraction of time as the protagonist is. The idea also brings to mind the concept of the Binary star systems that consist of two stars that "are gravitationally bound, and generally move around each other in stable orbits. When two such stars have a relatively close orbit, their gravitational interaction can have a significant impact on their evolution." Just as the Siamese twins in this case have an interwoven identity; and has a great impact on each other, mentally and biologically in their evolution. They are spiritually inseparable. With the demise of Tara, Chandan experiences a sense of identity crisis. The inseparable twins very evocatively remind us of the celebrated pair Rahel and Estha in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* who are forcibly separated by choice. Just as they emerge from a zygote they get back their revenge on society as they go into a taboo method of fusion towards the end of the novel. The twins in the prescribed play are born as 'inseparably fused'- hugging each other emblemizing their emotional coherence at the very outset. Chandan envisages their reconciliation towards the end of the play as they get together in a tight embrace, back to their former fused form. They stand for two sides of the same concept. For instance, gender. How man and woman compliment each other, and how one is incomplete without the other:

TARA: And me. Maybe we still are. Like we've always been. Inseparable. The way we started life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out...(325)

Dattani sees Tara as a play about the gendered self, about coming to terms with the feminine side of oneself in a world that favours always what is 'male'. The quality of being effeminate is a reason for shame in India. (320). The playwright also seeks to portray science and nature in a similar manner. How Science and Nature complement each other. However Science cannot conquer everything and has its own lapses as Nature does. This is signified by the twins with impaired legs as they form a mirror image of each other. The play depicts how Science cannot always conquer Nature as the leg attributed to the boy is rejected by the body in a brash attempt at disregarding both Nature and God. Dan hits the nail on the head when he asserts "Conflict is the crux of life. A duel to death between God and nature on one side and on other –the amazing Dr.Thakkar.(330) This explains the God-like stance of the Doctor, who is seated with a seeming omnipotent presence representing Advanced Technology.

Behind, on a higher level, is a chair in which Dr.Thakkar remains seated throughout the play. Although he doesn't watch the action of the play, his connection is asserted by his Sheer God-like presence.(323) The drama has two sides to it with respect to the time frame-the past and the present. It also reflects the virtual and the real. An utterance sometimes refers to two different time frames with respect to time, occasion and the statement applicable to different characters. The following lines hold true for both Bharati and Dan as they are distant in time and space: If at all they must know, it will be from me. Not from you. (345)

The twins, especially 'Tara', are repeatedly referred to as "freaks". The term 'freak' has been conventionally used to refer to person who has something unusual regarding their appearance or behavior. The older usage of the word 'freaks' refers to the state of being physically deformed, or characterized by rare diseases and conditions. The word was utilized to suggest 'sideshow performers'. In such an instance, the word 'freak' represents the state of Women, who are marginalized. The female race who are not congenitally deformed but are so as society forces the handicap upon them. Just as it is presented in concrete terms in the play: Tara's leg is callously separated from her to render her twin brother normal, defying the tenets of Nature. It echoes Simone de Beauvoir's dictum:" "One is not born a woman, one becomes one."

A natural freak refers to a genetic abnormality, while a made freak is a once normal person who experienced or initiated an alteration at some point in life (such as receiving surgical implants). Here both the terms can be used to describe Dan and Tara. But Tara is less of a natural freak; as Nature was more in her favour. "Freak" has also been employed to describe genetic mutations in plants and animals, i.e. "freaks of nature." "Freak" used in the verb form, implies: "to become stressed and upset". Here, the twins are in a state of depression owing to their predicament but utilize a curtain of sarcasm and wit to shield the same.

Man cannot accept the woman's intellect, and gets intimidated by her intelligence. Tara's victory at the card game is seen as thorough cheating and Chandan is ashamed to admit her victory. He sees her as a good business woman as she cheats at cards; not attributing it to her business acumen, but to her shrewdness. Tara gets hurt at the remark as it holds no truth value. Even Patel ignores her future prospects and the need to engage her in any meaningful endeavor. She is forced to conform to the stereotype of the Indian Woman-devoid of any intellect, deemed fit only to perform mechanical household chores. In other words, a domestic animal, which can be cared for, but not regard with respect.

Tara quips at this: "The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going hunting while the women looked after the cave." (328) She highlights the plight of women who were presumed to be suitable for the domestic domain only. The play as a whole thus depicts the relegation of the relevance of the Woman, and her upper edge whenever it does assert itself in a male-dominated society. This is why the Grandfather and the Mother who represent tradition prefer the male over the female; the Male is the archetypal successor or prototype of cultural progeny. This explains why the author names the play after the female child whose identity is demoted otherwise; in order to invert the dialectical pair male/female. The woman has always been hailed in philosophy, but in practice she is treated as an object to be overlooked. As Virginia Woolf asserts in her *A Room of One's Own*: "Imaginatively, she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history."

In the prescribed play, though Bharati dotes on her daughter Tara, she insensitively attributes a piece of her daughter to the son. The conflict between illusion and reality is yet again echoed here. What is actually a public display of attention on part of the mother is actually a screen to shield her guilt. The context also serves as a satire on the self-sufficient Indian male, for whom, to accept anything feminine is beneath his dignity, and an indelible question mark on his masculinity. Even Dan acknowledges the same, as he writes the play. Though the craft of the play is his, he has to borrow the material from Tara. Aristotle had declared that 'the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities' and added that 'we should look upon the female state, as it were, a deformity, one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature. On account of its weakness it quickly approaches its maturity and old age since inferior things all reach their end more quickly' (Generation of Animals trans. Peck) In Tara, the deformity of the Woman is caused by the Man, and caused in order to complete the Man. The playwright utilizes the motif symbolically as well. This is the reason why Tara approaches her end more quickly, and it is not owing to her inferiority. The handicap also symbolizes the predicament of girls in Indian families who are made to forsake their chances of getting educated as the edification of the boy becomes a priority.

There is a reference to the Lady of Shallot, who is imprisoned within a building made of "four gray walls and four gray towers." It runs parallel to the plight of Tara who is jailed in her handicap and the constraints of tradition. Just as the Lady of Shallot foresees her impending doom in the mirror, Tara senses her end too in the mirror represented by the expressions of her closest relatives. Both Tara and the Lady of Shallot, find a release from their predicament only in death.

The death of Tara has a more powerful impact than her existence. Just as the death of the Star gives way to the Black Hole. The Black Hole stands for the God in the World of Physics, it being linked to the Male Gods in Hinduism like Shiva, Krishna, Ram. etc. who are black. Religion has also been predominantly patriarchal. Christianity professes: "Men are God's stars." (Genesis 15:15-18.) By naming his female protagonist as 'Tara', Mahesh Dattani puts it otherwise.