

Comparative Study of Women in *Tara* and *Final Solutions*

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Abstract

This paper shows how Mahesh Dattani, a contemporary Indian writer in English, draws his inspiration to write from the bitter realities of the world, particularly society. The society of India is based on patriarchy, where the male is the centre of power and authority, and his power is unquestionable. There is no freedom, space, voice and stand of other members of the house specially the women. The position of women is always ambiguous where she struggles. In the plays of Dattani the women characters are trapped in the clutches of patriarchy and suffer.

Keywords: Mahesh Dattani's plays, patriarchic society, women characters, women's freedom, Indian society, Indian English literature.

Comparative Study of Women in *Tara* and *Final Solutions*

Mahesh Dattani, a contemporary Indian writer in English, draws his inspiration to write from the bitter realities of the world, particularly society. The society of India is based on patriarchy, where the male is the centre of power and authority, and his power is unquestionable. There is no freedom, space, voice and stand of other members of the house specially the women. The position of women is always ambiguous where she struggles. In the plays of Dattani the women characters are trapped in the clutches of patriarchy and suffer. In *Final Solutions* and *Tara* the women who face the suffering and oppression under patriarchy are Hardika/Daksha and Bharathi respectively. These women who are the victims of suppression are also the prisoners of the past; their past has influence in their present too.

The life of little Daksha changes at an age of 15, when she is married to Hari, the first change she under goes is her name, with which her identity is associated. Her name is changed to Hardika just to match the name of her husband Hari along with her life. All her aspirations and dreams come to an end, her education is stopped and she now is a typical housewife of a Gujrati family. "All my dreams have been shattered... I can never be a singer like Noor Jahan. Hari's family is against my singing film songs. His parents heard me humming a love song to Hari last night. And this morning they told him to tell

me...I'm just a young girl who doesn't matter to anyone outside her home..." (116) Hardika is later stopped to meet her Muslim friend Zarine and is beaten on the account that she did not take his permission to go and eat with the Muslim family. "... I did not touch their food! Ah! Don't hit me (Angrily). Don't do that! I swear I didn't eat anything! Alright. I won't go there again. Please leave me alone." (222) Hardika is a victim of oppression and suppression in the hands of patriarchy. She is not able to live her life on her own terms where she is even denied to listen to the songs of Noor Jahan. Though India got free and got her independence, Hardika is still a prisoner in the hands of her own people.

The other character is Bharathi, the mother of Tara who loves and adores her daughter the most and is always thinking about her (Tara's) betterment and future. The mother is the only one in the play who actually worries and cares for Tara; she even is ready to do anything for her daughter. In a conversation with Roopa, a friend of Tara, Mrs Patel even tries to bribe Roopa by allowing her to watch DVDs anytime at their place, to be Tara's best friend, "...you can watch whatever you want! Just be my Tara's friend." (341) Mrs Patel is restless, impatient, stressed and even in pain at the thought of her unlucky child. The relationship of the husband and wife also suffers as Mrs Patel is overly protected about her daughter Tara. The reason behind the concern for the daughter is the guilt. Mrs Patel who had "Siamese twins" one boy and one girl preferred to have the "privileged

leg” for the boy even though the blood supply for the third leg was through the body of the girl child. This very incident by the family especially Mrs Patel and her own father shows a stereotypical view of an Indian family to have choices and preferences for the male child in a patriarchal society. The decision by the family leads the children of the family to have crippled life both physically and emotionally.

Dattani portrays in his plays the influence of patriarchy in the Indian family systems and in the characters Hardika and Bharati (Mrs Patel) who are the victims of patriarchy, who by no choice have to work according to it. The playwright takes up his subject from the tangled systems of modern families where the characters suffer by the weight of tradition. As in the case of Hardika who was married at an early age was assumed to behave in a certain ways according to the family of her husband. The first attack on her is the displacement of her identity by changing her name and then the list is endless. There is domination of her husband and in-laws which make her an object of exploitation. The same is the case with mother of Tara who deliberately wants her son to have the leg as he is a male and would be a heart and soul of the family, indirectly a figure of power and would later be a pillar to the family.

The two women also face guilt in their lives, both of them have history. The past lures in their present. In the *Final Solutions*, the character of Hardika highlights the

prejudices she has against the Muslims. Hardika is a survivor of the partition of India and Pakistan. She has seen and suffered during the period. Hardika in the present still has the memories of the past and has resentment towards the Muslims due to the events occurred before. In the essay "The Past Affects the Present", a traumatic past can shape a person's overall view on the world. Many times, the memories of the past negatively affect the person.

In the past, Daksha's father is killed during the partition of the country, she tells Javed and Bobby about her father's murder in the present. "He was beaten up on the streets! While we were waiting for him at home to take us away from the hell, he was dying on the streets!" (61) She is forced to leave Hussainabad with her mother. The partition is the biggest reason of tension between the Hindus and Muslims. As Tarun Saint, writes in *Witnessing Partition: Memory, History, and Fiction*, "The partition of India, one of the most traumatic and disruptive events of the twentieth century, ushered in an era of uncertainty and dislocation, following widespread collective violence, rape, arson and the displacement of millions of refugees across South Asia." (Saint 2010, 1)

In the beginning, Daksha does not reveal about her father's death, though it is one of the causes which causes her to form negative opinion about Muslims. According to her, the most dreadful thing that

happened to her during the partition was the damage to her gramophone. Her entire record collection was destroyed by a stone. Daksha is married at the age of fifteen and now lives with her husband and in laws in Amargaon. She dislikes her in laws and finds her husband stupid. The only peace she gets there is from her friend Zarine, who is a Muslim but she is very much like Hardika. They share same love for music and even same singers like Noor Jahan. The murder of her father, does not affect the friendship of the two. Zarine too likes Daksha and genuinely cares for her unlike her family. The friendship of the two does not last long as misunderstanding comes into the action between the two. When Daksha finds out that Zarine's family needs help as their shop is burnt into ashes. She asks Hari if he could help the family and hopes that her father in law will help them. Zarine talks to Daksha aggressively, one day which disturbs her. Zarine asks Daksha, one day to have lunch with them though knows Daksha is a vegetarian. Due to love Daksha sits on the table but later vomits as Zarine and her family consume meat. The Hindu-Muslim rift arises between the two also Daksha tells her audience that Kanta told her family that she ate with the Muslims. Daksha has thrashing from her husband which cause further anger towards Zarine and her people. As scholar of English literature Anjali Multani notes, "The anguish and bitterness and pain of the last encounter with Zarine makes an abiding impression on Daksha/Hardika. Henceforth, and for the most part of her

life, Hardika stays trapped and cocooned in her blinding prejudice against Zarine and her community." (Multani 2009, 75).

In the present, Hardika's resentment towards Muslims is mainly due to Zarine's betrayal. She cannot digest, the two Muslim boys at her place. She is furious and is angry on her son to protect the two Muslim boys. Later she has an argument with Javed, and blames "his people" for the death of her father. During the heat of the conversation Hardika shouts the name of Zarine where she says, "Zarine deserves..." (222). It is visible that Hardika rage is with Zarine and not with Muslims in general. In the end, truth is out to Hardika, where she comes to know that in the past it was Wagh and Hari who burnt the shop of Zarine's father initially. As they wanted to possess the shop as they heard that the Muslim family wanted to start a mill like theirs. Daksha was unaware of the truth when she met Zarine and Zarine lashed out at her. Hari had beaten Daksha not for the reason that she ate with Muslims but because she may get to know about the actions of her husband. Hardika learns the truth in the present when it is too late to amend. She suffers from the feeling of guilt. She had lost a dear friend because of the doings of her family not because of Zarine's religion. "Do you think those boys will ever come back?" (64), Hardika questions her son, Dattani here gives a hope to his readers and audience with Hardika's last dialogue which is the first measure towards a solution.

In *Tara*, the mother of Tara Mrs Bharathi is the one who suffers from guilt in the present because of her actions in the past. In the beginning of the play, Mrs Bharathi is portrayed as an ideal mother, who is dedicated towards her family and children. She loves her children who are handicapped and give special attention, love and care to her daughter Tara. Tara and Chandan are twins who are born as conjoint twins. A surgery separates them where the privileged leg is given to the boy, a male. The leg soon dies as it was naturally Tara's. Mrs Bharathi in the present cares and worries for her daughter more than the so because she suffers from the sense of guilt. She cares for her happiness and makes sure her daughter gets everything in life. She is also concerned for her daughter's future, as she knows being a female she will have to bear and tolerate more than her son. In a conversation with her son, Chandan:

Bharathi. It's all right while she is young. It's all very cute and comfortable when she makes witty remarks. But let her grow up. Yes, Chandan. The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you-but not her! Oh, she pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable. And what about forty and fifty! Oh God! (348-349)

The mother is imbued with the past and it haunts her in the present. She gives all her love to Tara. She cooks food for her. She tries to win friends for Tara. She also wants to give her a part of her, her kidney as Tara needs a transplant. Mrs Bharathi believes that giving her a part of

herself will less her guilt to some extent. She feels angry and irritated all the time. Mrs Bharathi feels helpless as she is not able to help her daughter the way she wants. She lashes out at her husband at times. The anger that grows within her is the result of her past which she is unable to speak out or digest and remains under the influence of guilt that is within her. The mother of Tara is the one who is complicit in the society or rather in her family. She is not able to fight the conflict inside her and later has hysteria and neurosis. The mother finally dies in the end without any word of expression with her daughter. She dies with the guilt inside her.

The two women are the prisoners of the past, Hardika and Mrs Bharathi Patel who in present realise their guilt. The anger, irritation, resentment and prejudice they have in the present is because of their past. Hardika shows vindictiveness towards the Muslims as she has a past; same is in the case with Mrs Bharathi who is angry on her husband, her own father and somewhere with herself too. The future of these women suffer and with it the future of the present generations too. The shadow of the past lurks in the present of the two women which affect the present.

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Akansha Barthwal is a poet and writer. Her poems have appeared with many journals including The Taj Mahal Review. She is a post-graduate in English Literature and a graduate in German Honours. The areas of her research and interest are Indian Writing in English, Literary Theory and Criticism, British Poetry and Drama, Feminist Literary Theory and Gender Studies.

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