



**Reality of Indian Woman in Contemporary Indian  
Drama: Tara by Mahesh Dattani and Wedding Album  
By.... Girish Karnad**

**Dr. Jaysukh D. Hirpara**  
Associate Professor  
Department of English  
Y.s Arts & K.S. Shah Commerce College  
Devghadh Baria, Distt. Dohad. Pin-389380  
Email. [jdhirpara@gmail.com](mailto:jdhirpara@gmail.com)

---

**Abstract**

*The present paper deals with two famous plays written by Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad. The main objective of the paper is to compare the two plays namely Tara by Dattani and Wedding Album by Karnad. The effort is made to bring out the similar issue by both the dramatists. Both the plays deal with the different issue of the contemporary Indian society, but there is an urge to bring out the suppressed conditions and emotions of the woman. The gender bias is also at the center of both the plays. Dattani emerges as the advocate of the New Woman while Karnad exposes the suppressed natural instinct of the woman with the addiction of the Internet and technology of the present time.*

During the ancient period as the Rigveda mentions “women were fully the equal of men as regards access to and capacity for the highest knowledge, even the knowledge of the Absolute or Brahma” [Mookerjee, p. 1). It has been mentioned in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad also that women were given equal rights, freedom and opportunity in the religious debates to express their views. Sita, Shakuntala, Savitri and Draupadi, though were stated under patriarchal control and were never meek and docile at the mercy of the dominating male consciousness. There has been enough literature, glorifying the enslaving value and deifying the women characters to observe it faithfully. As in the Ramayana, Sita undergoes the fire ordeal to prove her chastity to Rama which has been a cultural guide to Indians. In many religious texts and Dharmashastras woman’s place is described not only as a deity, but also as an essential part of man’s development and existence, which is also deified as ‘Adi Shakti’. The proverbial saying

‘Yatra naryastu pujiyante, ramante tatra devatah’

brings the message that God lives in the place where woman is worshipped. Besides her exalted place as 'Prithvi', she has to play the role of an advisor, slave, partner, mother, whore and friend.

Karyeshu mantra, Karmeshu daasi  
Rupecha laxmi, Kshmaya dharitri.  
Bhojeshu mata, Shayaneshu rambha,  
Shat karma yukta, Kula Dharamapatni.

In the later period, such glorious concept of woman disappeared slowly and patriarchy started making control over her position and suppressed her identity. The Hindu concept of marriage usserly demands a 'commitment' where she has to be faithful, playing subordinate roles, child-bearing agency, paying respect to elders in the family and remaining truthful to her husband to preserve the honour in the society. Her extra- marital relationship condemns and she is ostracized.

SilviaWalby in 'Theorising Patriarch', observes, it is "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. Girish Karnad as a true culture-smith intends to awaken the contemporary Indian intelligentsia from cultural amnesia. He has emerged as a living legend in the contemporary Indian English drama. His output, which ranges from *Yayati* to *Wedding Album*, marks the evolution of Indian theatre since four decades. Karnad transmutes and transforms his source material to such an extent, being an actor and theatre man himself, that the modern, contemporary, individual talent incorporates the tradition into a trans-creation that is rich and strange. social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. The present paper discusses various philosophical and theoretical aspects of a woman who struggles audaciously against patriarchy, male dominance and gender discourse.

Girish karnad is a writer, playwright, actor and director in kannad language. His rise as a playwright in 1960s marked the coming of age of Modern Indian playwriting in Kannada. He is a recipient of the 1998 Jnanpith Award, the highest literary honour conferred in India. Girish Karnad has attempted to give a panoramic view of the women ranging from pre-modern times to the modern day with respect to their social surroundings. Altogether these plays can be read from the perspective of women resisting patriarchy and their urge to rise above it. As we know, Women constitute one half of the humanity. They have been given the place of goddess in Indian mythology, folktales and legends but ironically they have never been given the equal status. Hence their presence in literature is inevitable. It is another story that they hold neither the literary space nor the grandeur befitting their number. It is easy to explain that largest number of books have been created by men. Women's situation seems to be in a mess where submissiveness and resistivity goes side by side.

*Wedding Album* is a modern play and is the most recent one by the dramatist. For the first time we are introduced to a fully fledged family of nuclear tradition in industrial times which is in contrast to the ancient traditional agrarian family of Rani in *Naga Mandala*. Vidula, Hema and their mother are the leading ladies and Radhabai, their housemaid with her absconding insane daughter, Yamuna. Like any other modern play this play also offers psychological ups and downs. The society depicted in this play is reflective of the whole Indian society. The story revolves around a necessary evil i.e. marriage and the functions associated with it. Vidula, twenty-two and a half, graduate in Geography worked for a travel agency is a practical girl belonging to a Brahmin family is going to have a 'technologically arranged' marriage with an

NRI Ashwin Panje, the suitable expat Saraswat boy. As expected in this contemporary world she enjoys the freedom to choose her own life partner. So, she has a self-arrangement via video, email and telephone, the modern day modes of communication. She feels getting into it when she thinks she is mature enough. Actually she is not exactly as is pictured. Like any other common modern girl, she leads a secret life. She is resourceful enough to find herself a surrogate Swami, flesh and blood stranger to help her work her way through hopeless desire. In a darkened cyber café, out of her hysterical rage, she screams her `sexual harassment' to make her moral tormentors run away. She is not a girl for whom their family is their priority, she is individualistic. The subjugation she seeks in her secret erotic world can after all be served as well through man and marriage and to higher purpose. After her initial hesitation she resolves to stay committed despite the frightening in communicating and arrogant side of Ashwin to her.

“I will never divorce Ashwin,”[Pg-86]

She breathes fiercely to her worried siblings driven by their anxiety to even suggest it on the eve of her departure from India. She willingly resolves to subjugate herself and to have given up eating fish is a symbolic affirmation of her aesthetic resolve to stay committed. In modern world with the barriers between castes seems to be done away with, Vidula keeps thinking in that circumference and shows no trace to rise above them and chooses to stay in the safe haven.

Likewise, Hema, her elder sister being married to a NRI and a resident of Australia again a modern and one of the technically advanced nation is opposed to Rohit's entanglement with a Christian girl, and angrily says,

“It doesn't seem to bother any of you that he's going out with a Christian girl.”[Pg-43]

Rohit, her only brother calmly answers,

“Is this what going to Australia does to people? You are in the twenty first century,

you know.”[Pg-43]

Hema, being mature enough to decide, does not view marriage as an elevating experience but in contrast a suppressing one,

“We Indian women are obedient Sati Savitris, ever willing to follow in our husband's footsteps. Look at me-Melbourne, Johannesburg, Singapore and now Sydney. Our men may get all top jobs, but I am in no better position than Ma,” [Pg-17] indicates at the male chauvinism persisting even in the contemporary world where marriage is just reduced to a fair bargain.

Karnad shows the role technology plays in our daily lives. Today's generation considers it their duty to keep themselves updated with the latest technological developments and cannot imagine life without it. Karnad also shows how today's youth get trapped in the cyber world and have relationships. Through Vidula's childhood memory Karnad also addresses the issue of child abuse which is widespread throughout the country. Through Vidula's wedding, Karnad reveals the deepest secrets which the characters have buried within themselves. All the characters in the play are perverted in one way or another, thus giving a microcosmic view of the damaged moral fabric of society. Karnad offers a solution to the crumbling value system through Ashwin. The male has voice, presence and power, whereas the female is silent, absent and powerless. indeed, *Wedding Album* deals with contemporary Indian reality effectively and it turns into a modern myth. The play also displays new woman, as Manju Kapur's Astha. The play represents the marriage theme which is considered a gamble by Indian families. His woman is contemporary, „new“ woman in search of identity in the society which secures freedom to female sex on a par

with male counterpart. The present play also throws new light on the psyche and behaviour of these new women. The mother, Hema, Vidula, Pratibha and even Radhabai are new women in the true sense of the term. Their lives are full of anxieties and resentments while facing the mental, psychological and emotional hardships of life.

We agree with the views of Showalter that “we have seen our foremothers as mindless, down-trodden souls, accepting century after century the fetters of their lot with passivity unheeding or incapable of perceiving their exclusion from society. Women’s relationships to themselves and society have been essentially static, as fixed as to render women of the past mute and dumb, unable to write, speak or even see the truth” [Bennet p229]

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 Miller and Gayatriplaywright Madhurye. At one phase he says, “the playwright Madhurye influenced me a great deal in his portrayal of middle class hypocrisies”<sup>4</sup>. *Tara* is a play deals with the theme of gender discrimination and social consciousness in modern society.

*Tara* is not only the story of the hero of the play, but it is the story of every girl child born in society whether urban or rural. *Tara* is a touchy play which shows the partiality towards the male child in highly educated and an upper middle class Bangalore society. The story of the play is about the twins who are born with three legs and blood supply to the third leg was from the girl baby. Father, mother of the twins and doctor decides to fix the third leg on to the male baby’s body so as to make male baby complete. The decision was taken to make male child physically fit and complete was not on the basis of medical ground but was influenced by the grandfather, a politician. Male domination reflected in the role of grand father who donates all his property and wealth to the male child.

In our society, male child is considered as an asset and female child the liability. This is mainly due to certain misconceived religious beliefs and the problem of dowry. This discrimination against the girl child by family member shows attitude and mentality of the society. It is tragic that the mother is also support in the act of attaching the third leg to the boy’s body. It is our cultural heritage that boy is always superior to girl. The common method of obtaining higher death rate for girl children than boys is neglecting the girl child during early childhood.

*Tara* is a play that raises questions to the society that treats the children of the same womb in two different ways. It is a play about two children, joined together at the hip. One is a boy and the other is a girl, they can be divided only surgically. The partiality and injustice starts here. It shows that a woman herself is the enemy of women. The mother prefers the male child and thus strengthens the chain of injustice. The first thought behind selecting the male child is, he will carry forward the family name. It is an example of child abuse prevalent

in the Indian society. Girl is an unwelcome intrusion, the cause of sorrow when she is born, a

burden for parents who have to amass dowry. Every girl child born in an Indian family suffers from some kind of exploitation and if there is a boy child in the family, the mistreatment is very much noticeable as consciously or unconsciously all the privileges are offered to the son. This is because getting dowry is regarded as a male privilege. Erin Mee rightly pointed out that:

Dattani sees Tara as a play about the gendered self, about coming to terms with the feminine side of oneself in a world that always favours what is male...

This play raises a few questions of discrimination, i.e. religious prejudice, gender discrimination. This play is not only deals with gender issues and the treatment of girl child in a male dominated society, but also this deal with gender biases and prejudices which still affect the lives of several girl-children even amongst educated, urban families. “*Tara*” is a play in two acts. It sets in London with, Chandan, a dramatist who is remembering his childhood days in the company of his sister Tara. He wants to write a story about his childhood but he has to write Tara’s story. The play revolves around two twins. The play reveals a conflict between Indian families. and their traditional patriarchal mentality which has always favored a boy child to a girl child. Chandan wants to twist his grief into drama by writing about his sister’s childhood. Even after their unjust and manipulated partition, which is made against the law of nature, they are emotionally united. They share the same agony, which Chandan tries to describe by writing autobiographical drama.

The root problem of discriminatory treatment being meted out to girls lies in the status of women in society. Dattani has presented the strange reality of women playing a secondary role to man. Male are seen as the providers and the role of the girls are neglected. This dirty practice is still present in some part of India. The drama also suggests supremacy of Patel when he insists that proper division should be made in the gender roles. Tara’s parents are educated even then they had made such discrimination. Bharati’s father can also be considered responsible for this catastrophe. Bharati had been influenced by her father’s decision Bharati is scared about the prospect of her daughter; she says:

“It’s all right while she is young. It is 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! .....when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty, thirty is

unthinkable and what about forty and fifty! Oh God! (349).

She also tries to show her love by the act of donating kidney to Tara, which ultimately turns

useless. Dattani establishes that mother and daughter relationship proves secondary to the orders of patriarchy. Mr. Patel represents of male prejudice and domination.. He holds the supreme position in decision making of the family. Bharati has to follow his desiion. She has

to accept whatever is given to her. She had favoured Chandan at the time of operation. Patel makes Bharati responsible for everything and gets an escape from his responsibilities. Doctor represents supreme position in the play. He operates the twins, but he has done an unjust operation under the pressure of Bharati’s father ,Patel . Dr. Thakkar, the god-like, ‘life giver’, he knows the reality. Tara was deprived of the leg,. Dattani appropriately shows that in this society it is an annoyance to be a girl. In India the male of the species is considered and treated as the first sex. This reflect worldwide phenomenon. Dattani highlights the real face of our political leader. He managed doctor is another part of corruption. Manipulation for monetary consideration or at times due to political influence has ceased to surprise many. There is a gross negligence of child patients in India. Tara realizes the real story of her physical disability

during her life time. She made responsible to her mother .she cannot accept the truth. Even though she is more intelligent, and she is discouraged from the beginning of day of her life. Parents had not given proper support to Tara. This made her lose interest in life. Further, she refuses to go to college. It is significant that discrimination with Tara continues, even after her death. Chandan, who was fascinated in writing a story about his own tragedy,. Dan apologizes to Tara for doing this,

“Forgive me, Tara .Forgive me for making it my tragedy.” (380).

Mahesh Dattani revealed the issue of gender discrimination in this play. The social norms, economic values and cultural elements have been answerable for the inequality against the girl child. Tara is a victim of this social system, which controls the minds and actions of the people. In Indian society, woman is variously presented as a mother, wife, daughter and sister even goddess. Manusmriti and Dharma shastras have laid down specific rules for the conduct of women. The women were treated to secondary position in all walks of life. The literacy rate of women has improved. Now a day, they are given secondary status in household, offices, social and public places. Women are exploited and harassed in Indian society. Woman is subject to violence and harassment everywhere. 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 endeavour. 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 regarded 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 21st century, even when in India girls repeatedly prove themselves in every field, the deep rooted gender discrimination continues among even the affluent and educated people living a so called modern life in the metro cities. Dattani deems the gender issues more prominent than the class discrimination, though both issues are prominent in today’s society.

**References:**

- (1) Mookerji, Radha Mukund: “Women in Ancient India, in Women of India,” New Delhi, 1957
- (2) Walby, Silvia. *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. . 1990
- (3) Bennett, Betty T. *Feminism and Editing Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*: Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1993
- (4) Karnad, Girish. *Wedding Album*. New Delhi: OUP, 2009.
- (5) Elizabeth Roy, *Freak Mirror and Grotesque Image*. *The Hindu*. 15 March 2002.
- (6) Dattani, Mahesh. *Collected plays*, Penguin, New Delhi, 2000p-288
- (7) de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books, 1973.
- (8) Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1989.