



# An in depth study of the main characters in Mahesh Dattani's select novels : *Seven Steps around the Fire* and *Tara*

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## Abstract

Two plays have been chosen for study - Mahesh Dattani's *Seven steps around the Fire* and *Tara*. The very title of the play *Seven Steps Around the Fire* speaks of an important ritual of marriage where the bride and the bridegroom symbolically take seven steps or *sattapadi* around the fire. Mahesh Dattani has chosen to name his play *Seven Steps around the fire* to highlight the fact that marriage has been denied to a transgender. A transgender is not permitted to marry but whose presence is considered auspicious in a wedding. The second play chosen for study is *Tara* which demonstrates the discrimination that takes place in a patriarchal society. The boy is chosen over the girl by the parents and elders of the household. One crucial decision of the family affects the lives of the two characters - Chandan and Tara in ways that cannot be healed. It even goes beyond death. By using the theory of socialist feminism an attempt has been made to understand Indian society suffering under the powers of capitalism and patriarchy. Although socialist feminism primarily shows that women are the ones suffering in a society under the patriarchal set up, this study has been undertaken to show that it's not just the women but there could be minorities in a society such as transgender, men and children who could be silent sufferers of society.

**Key words:** Transgender, *Hijras*, injustice, gender discrimination superstitions and beliefs

## Introduction

The term 'Hijra' is of Urdu origin, a combination of Hindi, Persian and Arabic literally meaning 'neither male nor female'. There are a number of myths and beliefs regarding the Hijras. There are certain myths and beliefs regarding the birth and origin of the Hijras to the sacred ancient texts of Hindu religion. The myths has it that the divine Rama intended to cross the river and exile himself into the forest. Entirely individuals of the town sought to shadow him. He seems to have told all the men and women to go back. Certain of his male supporters did not understand what to do. They could not disobey him. So they sacrificed their masculinity to become

neither men nor women and followed him to the forest. Rama was pleased with their devoted and blessed them. There are transsexuals all over the world and India is no exception. Nobody actually knows much about the origin of the Hijras nor do they themselves know much. One may wonder if they came to India with the coming of Islam or are they a part of the glorious Hindu tradition. There are certain things still unknown about their practices-their obsession with weddings and childbirth, their knowledge of weddings and momentous occasions. One never knows if they are invited or if they are just extortionists. Why is the notion of fear associated with them? Do they really put a

curse on people if they are not allowed to sing and dance on auspicious occasions?

### **A study of the Play**

The play *Seven Steps around the Fire* begins on a note of suspense, the sound of Sanskrit mantras are heard- the ones usually chanted during a Hindu wedding. This followed by the sound of the fire- the sound of the swishing of flames and immediately the sound of someone screaming which gets drowned out in the sound of the fire- the burst of flames. The next scene is in the office of the Superintendent of Police. Uma Rao is a Ph.D., research scholar of sociology, is seated in the office hoping to get a chance to interview a Hijra. Uma's husband is the Superintendent of Police and she has obtained special permission to study a case in which a hijra is the accused. Anarkali, the Hijra is at the moment suspected of murder and has been imprisoned in the male section of Central jail in Bangalore.

Gajanana. R. Bhat writes

'The play is a study of the marginalized community in India, its suppression, its feminism.... gender related violence, crime and injustice on the hijras...' (p.20)

Uma Rao comes from an influential background. She is the daughter-in-law of a Deputy Commissioner of Police; her father is daughter of the Vice Chancellor of a University and her husband is the superintendent of police. She has been given a little time to interview the accused in the presence of a constable and in the office of the Superintendent. When Uma waits for the arrival of Anarkali, she asks the constable if Anarkali has agreed to speak to her. The very usage of Uma's words sends the constable into laughter.

'Munswamy: You may see the hijra now if you wish, madam.

Uma: Will she talk to me?

Munswamy(chuckling) : She! Of course, it will talk to you. We will beat it up if it doesn't.'(Dattani,2000,p.7)

Although Uma address Anarkali as 'she' and gives her the basic right of being a human being and addressing her in terms of her appearance, the others such as the constable refuse to give her even the status of a human being. He addresses Anarkali with the pronoun 'it' almost referring to her as a non- living thing not even giving her the right of a being that lives and breathes and moves about.

P.K. Jain writes

'The play 'Seven Steps Around the Fire' ...discusses the socio-psychological crisis of the eunuchs who are torn between the social taboos and their personal desires (p.84)

The constable tries to dissuade Uma from taking up the case study of the Hijra. The mere attempt to study the case is discouraged by the constable in a number of ways. He instead tries to offer other cases of study. He tries to tell Uma to choose murder cases or dowry death cases and is ready to get his poem to clean the dust gathered files for Uma. He also tells her that speaking to the Hijra is of no consequence. He labels them as liars and tries to persuade her from giving up the case of the case.

'Munswamy: If you don't mind me saying, what is the use of talking with it? It will only tell you lies. I will bring it.'(Dattani,2000,p.7)

In the portrayal of the character Uma Rao, Miruna George states

'Dattani credits her with intelligence, sensitivity and

determination enabling her to fulfill the task. Thus she becomes an agent of change. This social agent is characterized by an open mind, a consciousness that dares to think differently, reacts against social conditioning, questioning the existing social norms and their rationality and merit.' (p.147)

The name given to an individual is usually bestowed upon a child after great consideration and thought by the family. The name carries the sense of belonging with the family. The name formed or researched upon indicates the love and ownership associated with the child by the family-both the immediate and the extended family. But in the case of the Hijras, they are not even given a right to enjoy the name they own. One may not know who has named them-whether they were given a name by the loved one or a name they chose for themselves. But from their appearance to their gestures and mannerisms, to their names they are often made fun of, ridiculed and humiliated for no reason at all.

'Suresh: That is just the sort of a name a hijra would fancy!... Anarkali!' (Dattani,2000,p.9)

When Uma understands that Anarkali has been charged for the murder of Kamala, she attempts to find out the true culprit. She tells her husband that she needs to study Anarkali's case for her paper on class and gender related violence. With great difficulty she gets to meet Anarkali for a few minutes. When Anarkali gets to know that Uma is the wife of the Superintendent she has little hope in Uma. She confesses that she is not responsible for the death of Kamala as she always considered her to be her sister. Her life in the male section of the prison seems to be a living hell. She is

always in fear that she will die if she is left there any longer in prison. She requests Uma to bail her out. She also promises her to tell her the truth regarding the death of Kamala. She is in a desperate situation as she tells Uma

'Anarkali : They will kill me also if I tell the truth. If I don't tell the truth, I will die in jail.'(Dattani,2000,p.14)

Anarkali begs Uma to make up some excuse to try to bail her out. She tells her to meet Champa behind Russell Market, who can help in bailing her out if she can provide the bail money. When Uma asks Anarkali why she inflicted a scar upon her sister Kamala . Anarkali tells the sad fact that she scared her face as she was beautiful in appearance. She says that she had to scar her face to protect her from further unwanted attention and problems. Anarkali also says that it was Salim's wife who is responsible for the death of Kamala. It is Salim's wife who set her on fire and burnt her to death.

When Kamala's body was discovered by the police, they found that she was wearing a lot of jewellery. Even a bride would not wear so much. Moreover it was gold. When other hijras were contacted in regard to the body, the police said that they seemed only interested in the jewellery. They believe that all the gold must be stolen jewellery as the hijras beg for a living so owning that much of gold jewellery must be stolen ornaments.

The only source of encouragement and empowerment for the Hijras seems to be social workers in society. Social workers seem to be taking small strides at a time in order to make hijras a part of the main stream of society. It could be in a manner of monetary help or in an attempt to regulate laws in favour of the Hijras. When Uma

approaches Champa for the bail of Anarkali, Champa is reluctant to share any information about Anarkali. Moreover in the group of Hijras it seems that there is a head Hijras who takes care of all the other Hijras. She decides on who will take over after her. It had been decided that Kamla would be the chief guru but after the death of Kamala, there had no other choice but chose Anarkali instead of Kamala.

‘Champa: ...I will make her the head. Now that Kamala is gone, who else do I have? Kamala was everyone’s first choice.’(Dattani,2000,p.25)

Uma suspected Champa for the murder of Kamala because killing a Hijra was a lesson to the others Hijras that there was no way of escape from the group. If anyone challenged the authority of the guru and went away from the fold there could be moments of danger and death.

‘Uma to Champa: But the real reason you wanted her dead was to warn others, who may wish to leave the fold of the consequences....Anarkali couldn’t have killed her. Kamla was running away anyway leaving the way clear for her...One person who wanted her dead is yourself. He defied your authority.’(Dattani,2000, p.28)

Champa manages to get Anarkali’s bail but she is severely beaten up and her nose is broken before she is released on bail. She considers her worse than a living being with no right given not even one of respect and dignity.

‘Champa: They broke her nose.

Anarkali: One hijra less in this world does not matter to your husband.’(Dattani,2000, p.35)

Subbu, the minister’s son had fallen in love with Hijra and got married to her in a simple

temple wedding away from all the fanfare and the eyes of the public. However they had taken a photograph to show the others how happy they were indeed. Mr. Sharma, the minister and Subbu’s father could not accept that such a thing has taken place. He fixes his son’s wedding with another family and keep his son away from the public eye, saying that his son is unwell. However on the night of the wedding, the hijras appear on the scene. They want to sing and dance and bless the couple. There was also the age old myth that if the hijras are not given an opportunity to sing and bless the couple, a curse would fall upon the newly married couple. Anarkali wants to return the photograph of Subbu and Kamla to the rightful owner Subbu, When the hijras approach the couple, Subbu snatches the gun from the Mr. Suresh, the Superintendent of police who is standing close by. A lot of confusion is heard followed by the sound of a gunshot. However what follows gives the readers a glimpse of society as it truly is- a place where the rich and powerful are safe and secure, they are absolved of all crime in return for favours more than adequate.

Dr. Amita Agarwal says:

‘Doomed to live in dark, dusty, brutal world they are subjected to social parochialism, sexual abuse and power drives. (p.17)

Anarkali had Champa and all the hijra people knew who was behind the killing of Kamla. But they had no voice. The case was hushed up and was not even reported in the newspapers. Champa was right.

Uma: ‘The police made no arrests. Subbu’s suicide was written off as an accident. The photograph was destroyed. So were the lives of the two young people...’ (Dattani,2000, p.42)

Typical of the socialist feminism, here one sees patriarchy ruling the roost. Be it Mr. Sharma who is the prominent male minister. When he gets to know that his son Subbu has married the *hijra*, Kamala, he goes to any extent to safe guard the reputation of his family. He gets his man Friday-Salim to kill Kamala, burn her to death. Although his son loved Kamala, there was no place for her in society. Even an attempt to bring about a change in society is completely wiped out by the dominant patriarchy of society.

Subbu in fact has no say in his own life. He is shocked at the death and murder of Kamala but he is not given an opportunity to fight for himself or Kamala. He is not even given a chance to speak up not even to his family members nor to outsiders. Counseling and treatment seems to be far away from him. He is labeled as unwell and is kept within the confines of his house. He is not allowed to meet or talk to anyone. The one person he seems to trust is Salim who has been helping him in the past. Salim has been bringing Kamala to him on a regular basis. Salim stays in the servant's quarters and is a loyal and faithful servant of the household. He is sent time and again by the minister, Mr Sharma to Champa's house to get the photograph of Subbu and Kamala – the one evidence that could destroy the image of reputation of his family.

Salim being Mr. Sharma's right- hand man has done everything possible to get the photograph back from Champa. He has walked into their home uninvited, checked their belonging several times. Salim could be even responsible for the arrest of Anarkali. Since Anarkali considered Kamala her sister, they could have suspected that Anarkali knew the truth about them and wanted to get rid of them.

They managed to burn and kill Kamala and get Anarkali arrested. Only when he and his wife is suspected for the murder of Kamala, he is forced to tell the truth about Subbu and Kamala to Uma. Although he tell the truth it is against his wishes for his best interests lies in the welfare of Mr. Sharma's household.

Mr. Suresh, Uma's husband and the Superintendent of Police knows the truth but does not want to abide by the truth. Seeking name, fame and promotion like his father, he just wants to climb the ladder of success at any cost. He sees things the way he wants to without giving any room for facts and the springing of truth. He gives permission to Uma to study the case only as a favour to her. He tells her many times not to believe the Anarkali's statements as they are all lies. When Anarkali is arrested as a suspect for the murder of Anarkali, she is treated very badly yet she is of no concern to anyone –be it the constables or the supervisors.

'Mr. Suresh ( to Uma): 'Don't believe a word of anything it says. They are all liars., What's that you said? Sister? They are all just castrated degenerate men. They fought like dogs every day. ....Look it is one thing that I am allowing you to go through these cases for your thesis, but don't feel any compassion for them. They will take

advantage...' (Dattani,2000,p.9-10)

Moreover he admits that there was no real proof against Anarkali, yet they had to arrest her because they needed someone to lay the blame on.

'Mr. Suresh: ...If she runs away to another town, who can trace these people? Anyway we only arrested her because there was no one else.

There is no real proof against her. It could be any one of them.'(Dattani,2000, p. 33)

Towards the end of the case, on the occasion of Subbu's death, everything happens in from of Mr. Suresh's eyes. In fact his gun is taken away from him by Subbu which he uses to threaten everyone that he is going to kill himself. However, when his wife Uma explains the entire case in great detail he only asks her.

'Mr. Suresh to Uma: 'I don't know...(Pause) How do you know all this? (Dattani,2000,)

Moreover, when the case is being discussed with the higher authorities, Mr. Suresh takes the side of the minister and convinces others also to do so.

'Mr. Suresh: Sit that is the truth. I have my resources to verify all this. Of course, they are all sworn to secrecy so...And Mr. Sharma's gratitude will be expressed in ways that will be, I am sure, more than adequate...(Dattani,2000,p.42)

An Indian society is mostly patriarchal in nature. From generation to generation and from time immemorial, a boy child is preferred over a girl child. An Indian society is largely conservative and traditional in nature. Although the society is in the process of change one cannot say that the society has completely changed from ancient religious practices, beliefs and traditions. Indian society has a large number of joint families so greater emphasis is laid upon the boy child than over the girl child. A boy is usually given the benefit of education; he is better fed and provided for than a girl child of the family because the family believed that it was the boy who would support the family in the long run.

Subhash Chandra writes

'The play presents a mirror to the Indian society to see its true face.It tries to shock the society out of its grooved thinking'(p.67)

A boy ought to be educated because he would shoulder the family responsibility when he grows up. A girl might not be sent to school or even given three meals a day while a boy would be provided for despite the poverty and status of the family. Moreover it was also believed that a boy would carry forward the family lineage and a boy was also needed to perform a father's last rites. So greater emphasis is laid upon the birth of a boy. The birth of a boy is often welcomed with open arms leading to an increase in female feoticide and infanticide. With a majority of India's population still living in villages this notion of choosing a boy over a girl still prevails. The play *Tara* takes the dynamics of the modern urban family and showcases the members suffering under the patriarchal standards of society.

Rozario Ignatius says:

'Discrimination against the girl child (a microcosm if the world of woman) is handled boldly by Dattani in the play '*Tara*'.(p.108)

*Tara* centers on the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins following the discovery that their physical separation was manipulated by their grandfather and mother to favour the boy over the girl. Years have passed but the pain trauma and emotions remain as fresh as ever.

Tanu Pant says;

'*Tara*' is not just the story of the protagonist of the play *Tara* but it is the story of every girl child born in the Indian family whether urban or rural' (p.29)

Patel and Bharati had a love marriage. However Patel's parents were not happy with his marriage to Bharati. They were orthodox in nature and they didn't approve of their marriage. So he broke away from them. They were overjoyed when they come to know that they were going to have twins, however certain tests revealed complications. At birth they were Siamese twins-conjoined from chest down. The doctor Dr. Umakant Thakkar revealed that sometimes a fertilized egg destined to separate and develop into two different embryos fails to do so fully. The result is the conjoinment-in this case from the breastbone down through the pelvic area. It was a miracle that they were born alive. Twins with a conjunction of such complexity are in most cases stillborn.

Dr. Umakant Thankkar had been associated with many major hospitals in the USA, most notably the Children's Hospital in Philadelphia. He was visiting India and had done a lot of research abroad on such cases. He informed the parents to bring to children to Bombay and during his stay at the Queen Victoria Hospital; he was the surgeon-in-charge of the complicated surgery. Moreover the conjoined twins –Siamese twins-developing from one fertilized ovum are invariably of the same sex. Well, almost invariably. But here these two were from different fertilized eggs. The twins were of different sexes-that was very very rare.

Bharati and Patel were warned of the odds against survival. They were understanding, totally disheartened in the beginning. But soon, even the remotest chance for survival was received with hope once they were made aware of the facilities offered by modern technology. A conference was held with a very efficient and competent team of resident doctors at Victoria Hospital. The X-rays, scan result were observed and

discussed. The twins were flown in from Bangalore hospital. Further tests were conducted on the twins and the results were encouraging. The twins did not share any vital organs. There were two hearts and two livers although joined. Each twin would have one kidney- which meant there was a possibility of both twins surviving.

However the pelvic region had one problem. There was only one bladder that it belonged to the boy. So did the rectum. It was decided that any artificial one would be made for the girl and later on when she grew up, one could be made with her intestinal tissues. The boy's lungs also were not completely developed but that seemed to be a small problem which could be corrected in the course of time. There seemed to be another problem. Both the twins had only one leg each but a total of three legs. It was at this time that family and notions of the Patriarchal Indian society had a big say in the lives of the twins.

Amarnath Prasad in his book states

'A patriarchal society is presented in Tara where the important family decisions are taken by its male members.' (p.101)

Bharati's father was a wealthy man, an industrialist and an MLA. He could have become chief-minister if he had lived. He had power and influence. He got personally involved in the case of his grandchildren. He along with his daughter met the doctor privately on several occasions in regard to the case. The scan of the twins showed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl. The chances were slightly better that the leg would survive on the girl. However being the typical Indians who thought that the boy should be favoured over the girl, even though Tara's father tried telling them that

it was not ethical, it was money that had the upper hand.

Sangeetha Das writes

‘...The preference for the beneficence of the male child while staking the life of the female child is pathetic and takes to culmination the feeling of rejection felt by women in our society...( p.51)

The grandfather and the mother bribed the doctor to grant both the legs to the boy. In return the doctor was gifted three acres of prime land-in the heart of the city from the state to start a large nursing home-the largest in Bangalore. The grandfather's political influence had been used.

Dr. Madhu Bala Saxena says:

‘Gender discrimination may be stated as the most crucial theme in the play’. (p. 102)

As planned by them, Chandan had two legs-for two days. It didn't take long for them to realize what a grace mistake they had made. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead flesh could have been Tara's leg. With the unusual nature of the operation, it was easy to pass it off as a natural rejection. However if it was granted to the girl, she would have had both her legs.

Asha Kuthari opines

‘...that the injustice is perpetuated by Tara's own mother who professes to belong to the more ‘liberal’ community, rather than the father who actually belongs to the more patriarchal social gives immense power to the play. It suggests that it is the women who continues to be willing instruments in the vicious cycle. (p.38)

Many years had passed the play begins in the present where Chandan now known as Dan, is writing a play- he has titled it – ‘Twinkle Tara’ after his sister-a drama in

two acts by Chandan Patel. Using the flashback and the stream of consciousness technique, Mahesh Dattani constantly moves from the present to the past. Chandan's mind recollects the time when the family had just moved to Bombay. Both of them have just completed their tenth standard. They make friends with Roopa, their new neighbor a girl who has just completed her ninth standard. Roopa represents the outside word in the play. Her views/ opinions and thoughts are the thoughts of the society. Roopa tells Tara what society thinks of the Patels. She tells her that the Patel community is known for female infanticide.

‘Roopa (to Tara): You would have had plenty of milk ebing a Patel and all that

Tara (to Chandan) : Did you get that ?

Chandan: No. Did she?

Roopa: You mean you don't know about Patels?

Tara: Don't know what?

Roopa: Oh so you don't know!

Chandhan: Unless you tell us what it is, how will we know whether we know?

Roopa: It's probably true. It's just an old saying. Prema told me when she came to know you were Patels. It's about milk.

Tara: What is ?

Roopa. They drown them in milk. ..Since you insist I will tell you. It may not be true. But this is what I have heard. The Patels 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. (Dattani,2000,p.349)

In the feminist reading of the story ‘Snow White’ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggests



‘...a mirror into which every woman looks, reflects not the woman’s own image but the patriarchal simulacrum of that image. A woman’s self-evaluation is ruled by the patriarchal; voice of judgment; the woman internalizes the male voice: his voice resides in his own mirror, her own mind.’(Dattani,2000,p.38)

Moreover Roopa and her friends she gives us a glimpse of how society looks at people who are differently abled. Tara tells her brother

‘Tara: You know who I met ? The ugliest girls in the whole world. Prema and Nalini. They live in the building opposite. They had a friend with them. Equally ugly. They were all running across the street, laughing their heads off over something. When they saw me get off the car, they stopped. They stopped running and they stopped laughing. And they waited, watching me get off and walk across the footpath towards them. Embarrassing me, making me go slower than I would. When I reached them, they grinned. ...We exchanged names...Then I showed it ti them. The duckling couldn’t believe her eyes. She stared at my leg. She felt it and knocked on it. Silly as well as ugly I thought...’ (Dattani,2000,p.335)

Anil Y. Katte writes

‘The plot of Tara is arranged around familial relationships where each individual in his own way has to bear the burden of social value and their efforts to go way beyond them, brings helplessness in their lives.’(Katte,2013,p.84)

Typical of the people ready to pass comments and give their judgment in regard to others-Roopa does the same in regard to the Patels.

Roopa(calling her friends urgently)  
: Prema! Prema! Come quick! Where’s Nalini? Never mind, you come here! My God! Oh my God! Guess what? I went to her house! Yes. Right inside. I met everyone there. She is a real freak of nature all right, but wait till you see her mother! Oh God! I can’t tell you-he is really...wandh tarah. Oh God! I’ll never go there again. (Dattani,2000, p.342)

Tara Patel seems to be very determined in life. Despite all odds, she has the will to survive. She seems to be the stronger of the two twins with the will to survive.

‘Dan (recollecting the words of Dr. Thankkar): ...Tara Patel who underwent her seventh prosthesis and a kidney transplant in the same month was smiling and jovial within hours of a complex surgery... in spite of the brave façade put up by her, Tara has far too many complications to be completely out of danger. However the will to survive has proved to work more miracles than the greatest of science.’(Dattani,2000,p.356)

She is determined of what she want to do when she grows up and she also advices her brother on life and ways to face life.

‘Tara: Oh, what a waste! A waste of money. Why spend all the money to keep me alive? It cannot matter whether I live or die. There are thousands of poor sick people on the roads who could be given care and attention and I think I know what I

will make of myself. I will be career for those people. I will spend the rest of my life feeding and clothing those starving naked millions everyone is talking about. Maybe I can start an institution that will...do all that. Or I could join Mother Theresa and sacrifice myself to a great cause. That may give...purpose to my...existence. I can do it. I can do it, can't I? (Dattani,2000, p. 370)

Tara seems to have a better understanding of the world around her and encourages her brother to face time despite their challenges.

Tara ; you can't hide behind all your jokes all the time. Face it. You're a coward.

Chandhan (angrily): Well, I'm sorry. Not everyone has your strength.

Tara: You are afraid. Afraid of meeting new people. People who don't know you .Who won't know how clever you are. You are afraid they won't see beyond your...(Dattani,2000, p.361)

Despite her will power, her co-operation, her ability to face life with a smile, there are moments where she is neglected. Although her mother and grandfather chose the boy over the girl in case of the surgery and granting of two legs to the boy, as she grows up as well there are times when her dad prefers her brother over her. It almost looks that he would survive and live longer than her that plans are made for his future than her future.

'Patel: I was just thinking. .It may be a good idea for you to come to the office with me.

Chandan: What for?

Patel: Just to get the feel of it.

Chandan: You can take Tara. She'll make a great business woman...

Patel (firmly): Chandan, I think I must insist that you come.

Chandan: We'll both come with you.

Patel: No!

Tara looks at Patel, slightly hurt.(Dattani, 2000, p. 328)

Patel tells Tara and Chandan that they cannot afford to miss their physiotherapy sessions especially Chandan since Patel had a lot of hope for Chandan's future. A plan had already been drawn up and he wants both the children to abide by the plans he has made for them

'Patel (to Chandan); You filled up your forms ?

Chandan: Tara?

Tara : Of course not. There's no point in my going to college if I have to drop out halfway through or stay away for days not knowing when...No!

Patel: I understand. (Goes to Tara). But we have a problem here. Chandan refuses to join college without you...You two are old enough to sort this out amongst yourselves. I won't interfere. But this is certain, Chandan has to join. I have plans for him. Your Praful uncle will help him get into a good university in England. I know he can get a scholarship on his own if he tries. But Praful will take care of the...special requirements for him. With a solid education you just can't fail... (Dattani,2000, p.360)

Tara puts on a brave front as much as she can but there are moments when she breaks down too. It's like she's too tired of wearing a mask, smiling and being brave at all times. Doing as much as she can, she is human too and the trails she faces seem insurmountable at times.

‘Tara (suddenly acting cheerful) : Right! Let’s get the act going. Come on, Chandu, let’s hear some more of your gags. I promise to laugh at all of them even if I’ve heard them before. I promise to be cheerful all the time. I promise I will eat whatever Ida cooks for us and I promise not to mention mummy at all.

Chandan: You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do.

Tara ( in tears) Very well. I don’t want to go to college. I don’t want to listen to your wisecracks. And I don’t want to eat dinner. All I want is to stay with mummy in the hospital’. (Dattani, 2000)

However Tara is most shocked when she hears that her mother whom she doted on so much has played a key role in not granting her both her legs. She feels cheated and betrayed that she too like the others had chosen her brother over her. She feels betrayed since her mother was one person she counted on, whom she knew loved her apart from her brother. When she realizes the truth about her mother, she is angry and heartbroken that her relationship with her brother also gets severely impacted in a way that probably was not patched till her life’s end.

Bijay Kumar Das views

‘It is an irony of life that a woman (to be precise, mother) should work against a daughter to favour a son. Feminism which seek to bring gender equality to society unwittingly discriminates against women’ (Dass,2012)

Tara recalls to mind the words used by her mother when she was growing up and feels cheated, betrayed, insulted and hurt

‘Bharati( as if to an infant in her arms) ; Tara! My beautiful little girl. Look at her smile! Smile, Tara. Smile again for me! Oh ! See how her eyes twinkle. You are my most beautiful baby...

Tara: And she called me her star!

Tara stands alone in a spot in a daze. Chandan moves to her and gestures to her to hold his hand. Tara turns away from him. Chandan is crushed.’ (Dattani,2000)

### Conclusion

Thus it can be observed that the sense of patriarchy reigns supreme in society. People who come forward in support of the suffering trans- genders are few in number as in the case of the lone crusader Uma against her husband and society as well. Moreover even if people do come forward to help the community of the transgenders, their help seems to be little. The transgenders are seen as people who are ignored and left to remain as outcastes of society. Few steps have been taken for the upliftment and empowerment of the Hijra community however the process of change has been a slow one. Only with awareness and conscious steps of empowerment can lives be helped, altered and changed. Education, employment and empowerment welfare measures can help a long way in the betterment of the lives of the transgender community. In the second play *Tara* one observes the choice one is forced to make under the pressure of societal beliefs and practices. Families are torn and individuals are broken under the impact of this patriarchal setup. The mother and the grandfather feel that they are not wrong in favouring Chandan over Tara. It seems to be the norm of the day and bound by ancient customs they find nothing wrong in

favoring the boy over the girl. Therefore only if there is a change in one's mindset can one see equality in society and it will probably take a very long time for a traditional and conservative society to be completely free from the shackles of a patriarchal mindset.

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