



Search for Identity: A Comparative Study of Vijay Tendulkar's Kamala and Mahesh Dattani's Tara from Feminist Perspective

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Comparative literature is referred to as Global or world literature because it is an academic field dealing with the literature of two or more different linguistic, cultural or nation groups. However, in the context of Indian literature, comparative literature is used as a tool of unity in diversity. According to the famous scholar T.G.Manikar,

“Comparative literature does not mean a mere comparing of literatures with a view to setting one against another. The main idea here is to broaden one's perspective by discovering trends in the particular culture that serves as the background of literature and thus to understand the precise relation between literature and the other spheres of human activity” (Mainkar, “A Comparative Study of the Commentaries”)

On the other hand, Feminism started as a reaction to patriarchy and yearned to find a place for women in a male-dominated world. Feminism and feminist ideologies have left their mark on every area of discipline and every branch of knowledge. One of the profoundest influences that it had was on literature. And Indian English Drama has shot into prominence quite recently. The perspectives of Indian drama in English are bound by our history, lineage, folk-lore, mythology, social customs, and rituals and by our servility to the invaders. It has made a fresh ground both technically and thematically; enabling the audience to share a new experience not only of the external world but also of the internal world of psyche. It has become

a composite art involving the mind of the dramatist, action of the protagonists and the reaction of the audience. The substantial contributions rendered in this field by the noted dramatists like Girish Karnad, Nissim Ezekiel, Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani. Contemporary drama is generally in the realistic vein. The playwrights are preoccupied with projecting the social and political realities of our life. The present paper is an attempt to make a comparative study of Vijay Tendulkar's *Kamala* (1981) and Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* (1990) on a feministic view-point, in *Kamala* Tendulkar does not merely stop with ridiculing the urban middle class society alone, but raises his voice against the discrimination of women. In Dattani's *Tara*, the central character is the voice of every woman who questions her marginalized treatment at each step and wants to emerge as an independent female. Comparatively both these works present a type of 'New Woman' like Tara and Sarita having enough self-esteem to break open the iron-gate of patriarchal subjugation in order to liberate from their own suppressed soul.

Women in literature, through the centuries, have been based upon the mythic models from the Ramayana and the Puranas: Sita-the silent sufferer, the archetype of Indian womanhood; the Earth-Mother, forbearance personified; Savitri-the devotion and dedication incarnate, woman as mother and protector, woman as inspirer and cherisher, woman as the motivating primal force-"Shakti" protecting good and destroying evil, or as charmer or lurer. Womanhood in all its variety is equated with selflessness, powerlessness, chastity, docility, virtuosity etc.-that are quite antagonistic to 'me-ness', autonomy and self-definition. Simon de Beauvoir is of the view that the history of humanity is a history of systematic attempt to silence the female. She states,

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as feminine" (Beauvoir , "The Second Sex")

But the present concept is altogether changed, though our lot is different from that of the western culture and literature. The process of change has been slow and Woman's Liberation Movement supports the upliftment of woman in society.

Indian English Drama has produced two brilliant playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani who elevates Indian English Drama at its summit of success. A leading playwright, Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008), is fundamentally a social commentator. He feels profoundly involved in the problems of contemporary society. In an interview explained his position:

“As an individual- or rather as a social being- I feel deeply involved in the existing state of my society and in my own way brood it...As a social being I am against all exploitation and I passionately feel that all exploitation must end. As a writer I feel fascinated by the violent exploited-exploiter relationship and obsessively deep into it instead of taking a position against it. That takes me to a point where I feel that this relationship is eternal, a fact of life however cruel, and will never end. Nor that I relish this thought while it grips me but I cannot shake it off.”

Though he does not call himself a feminist, many of his plays present the position of women in the contemporary modern society. Plays like *Kamala* (1981), *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967), *The Vultures* (1961), *Sakharam Binder* (1972), *Kanyadan* (1983), *Encounter in Umbugland*, *Mitrachi Goshta* (2001) and *His Fifth Women* (2004) bitterly critiques the patriarchal values and institutions. He exposes the hypocrisy of the male chauvinists and severely attacks the sham moral standards of the so-called civilized urban middle class society of post-Independence India.

Mahesh Dattani is the only English language playwright who won the Sahitya Akademi award for his play ‘Final Solution’ in 1998. His plays have been staged to critical acclaim all over the country and abroad. Mahesh Dattani is a name that guided a faltering Indian English Drama on the path of reliability, steadfastness and distinct identity. He writes about the marginalized sections of our society such as minorities, women, gays and transsexuals. His works deals with burning social issues of contemporary Indian society. Dattani has used the contemporary sensational social issues as a theme for his plays such as - gender discrimination in *Dance like a Man* (1989), *Tara* (1990), and *Bravely Fought Queen* (1991); *Communalism in Final Solutions* (1993); Gay community in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998) and incest, gender bias, and death in *Brief Candle* (2009). All these plays embody many of the classic concerns of the dramatic world. His plays not only bring up gender issues and the space allotted to women in a patriarchal society, but also they deal with gender biases and prejudices which still affect the lives of many girl-child even amongst educated, urban families. Dattani is the true successor of Girish Karnad and largely responsible for the revolutionary progress of English drama. He in his plays keeps women at the center of his dramatic world and may be called an avant-garde feminist. According to Mithila Kumari,

“Dattani is pre-occupied with age-old prejudices, traditions, and the emergency of new woman in this play. He has focused on the relative status of male and

female child, and has shown how women are also to blame for their predicament.”

The two plays under scrutiny i.e. *Kamala* and *Tara* belong to the post-independence phase of feminist movement. Tendulkar's women characters are in the process of evolution and in the course of play they gain knowledge and strive to gain freedom and dignity and the so-called modern, liberal-minded men are stripped naked and their true colours as selfish, hypocrite and chauvinist are brought to forefront. *Kamala* is a naturalistic drama, inspired by a real life incident. Jaisingh Jadhav is a career oriented and high paced journalist who is singularly focused on his promotion and does not care about humanity or any of its values. He tries to sensationalize his news to gain more recognition. Sarita and Kamala are two characters who are used as pawns and objects to be used for his enhancement in status and comfort. Sarita, his wife is an educated woman who looks after the household. In the play she is seen acting as if she is Jaisingh's secretary and is very careful in noting down his messages and takes care that everything Jaisingh needs is ready. The break in this unquestioned servility comes when Jaisingh brings Kamala home after buying her from flesh market. The ignorant innocent questions that Kamala asks Sarita awaken her to her present status at home. When Kamala asks her,

“How much did he buy you for?” (Tendulkar, Kamala 34)

Sarita realizes she is just a fancy slave Jaisingh brought or married and that too after receiving a handsome amount in dowry. She has to be there for him sexually, as a domestic servant and as a well-educated modern wife to show off in society. When Sarita asserts herself and objects to Jaisingh's decision of sending Kamala to the orphanage, Jaisingh very firmly shows Sarita her place and tells her like our ancient fathers that it is his home and what he wants will happen here. On the surface he wants to show that he is doing a good thing for Kamala and others like her, but intrinsically his private and selfish motives are what are making him take all the risk, though not well hidden. He is devoid of all humanity and it is apparent in his talk with one Jaspal, where he talks about Kamala in terms like “mission accomplished”, “ekdum Id-ka Chand!” and later while telling Sarita about her, he takes delight in shocking his wife by telling embarrassing details about the flesh trade racket.

When it is time to take Kamala to the Press Conference, he does not even allow her to wash herself, let alone wear decent clothes. He takes her there in tatters, to produce a more dramatic effect. And the way some men behave at the conference is utterly shameful. After coming home drunk with Jain he calls Kamala “evidence” (Tendulkar, 30). People laughed on

her expense, he laughs at her expense and thinks it's no cruelty as she can't understand anything. He literally tears away every human aspect from Kamala by calling her to have come from the jungle and saying that he has seen these

"Adivasis clawed to the bone by bears—coming to the Missionary Hospital on their own two feet...operate on them without an aesthetics...They have got natural endurance" (Tendulkar, Kamala 30).

Tendulkar shows the inhumanness of Jaisingh through Sarita and Kakasaheb. Kakasaheb's retort that

"And you sold a woman to them to do so" (Tendulkar, Kamala 31) And Sarita's shock-

"So while they were asking her those terrible questions, and making fun of her—you just sat and watched, did you?" (Tendulkar, Kamala, 30)

Show how morally bankrupt Jaisingh is and how he has no respect for a women.

On the other hand, 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. It is a comment on the predicament of women in the past, reflects the status of women in the present and dramatizes the complexities of the social setup. The play is an exhortation to the society to shed the age-old prejudices against women and have a progressive outlook. It is contextual and relevant in the light of the increasing incidents of feticide, infanticide and widening gap in the sex ratio of male and female child. It is not just the story of the protagonist of the play, but it is the story of every girl child born in Indian family whether urban or rural. One of Dattani's best loved plays the world over, Tara addresses questions of gender in many ways. Dattani prefer to say that this play is more about the 'gendered' self, about acknowledging the female side of one. The tale is, after all, narrated by Chandan, the male half of the whole of which the other is Tara. Tara and Chandan are born conjoined, Siamese twins who must be separated to survive.

"Like we've always been inseparable. The way we started in life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out...And separated" (Dattani, 325)

The problems begin when it is recognized that it has been an unequal, unfair operation, with the mother, Bharti, her father and the surgeon collaborating to afford the male with better chances:

physically - the second leg. Dr. Thakkar, the god-like 'life-giver' is aware that the third leg would adhere better to the female half, and yet becomes party to the decision. Dan tries to define his other half, the feisty Tara:

"She never got a fair deal. Not even from nature. Neither of us did. Maybe God never wanted us separated. Destiny desires strange things....But even God does not always get what he wants. Conflict is the crux of life." (Dattani, 330)

The play can be read/seen as one of the ways through Dattani wanted to reveal how the patriarchal society views and treats the female, but the point that Dattani misses out is that the female has the power to fight back and survive all odds. However, the death of both the female characters, Tara and Bharti can be seen as a representation of the females as misfit and failure.

All the female characters remain confined within the four walls of their house and they seem to have no issue with it. Perhaps it is taken for granted that the perfect place for women is in the house and they enjoy this position. And when Tara expresses her wish to do something in life, to have a career of her own, she chooses to 'care' and 'sacrifice', the qualities that are known as feminine, the qualities the dominant culture expects every woman to possess and is conventionally attributed to the female.

"Tara: It cannot matter whether I live or die. There are thousands of poor, sick people on the roads who can be given care and attention, and I think I know what I will make of myself...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 Teresa and sacrifice myself to a great cause. That may give purpose to my existence." (Dattani, 273)

This also emphasizes that a physically deformed woman is no less than 'poor,' 'sick' and 'starving' human without any 'purpose' in life and it is difficult on her part to cope up with the harsh circumstances of life and survive. Break the silence

However, the time comes when these female characters start speaking and presenting the 'New Woman' of modern age. Sarita finally reaches the decision to live an independent and respectable life after Kamala, very innocently proposes to her that

"The master bought you, he bought me, too. He spent a lot of money on the two of us... We'll keep the master happy...The master will have children. I'll do the hard work, and I'll bring forth the children...You keep accounts...Put on lovely clothes

and make merry with the master...Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him. Agreed?" (Tendulkar, Kamala 35).

Sarita realizes that what Kamala is proposing, she already does all that. She is the slave to her master husband already. Sarita knows that she holds no power, no right in this home. She realizes that not just Kamala, even she is a pawn in Jaisingh's game of chess. In the Indian contemporary drama the female characters are developed from silent suffering to angry, explosive outburst. Their voice is the voice of the ultra-modern, liberated woman of the modern age in its assertion and determination. The following dialogue shows Sarita's state of mind:

"I am going to present a man who in the year 1982 still keeps a slave, right here in Delhi. Jaisingh Jadhav. I'm going to say: this man's a great advocate of freedom. And he brings home a slave and exploits her. He doesn't consider a slave a human being—just a useful object. One you can use and throw away. He gets people to call him a sworn enemy of tyranny. But he tyrannizes his own slave as much as he likes, and doesn't think anything of it—nothing at all. Listen to the story of how he bought the slave Kamala and made use of her. The other slave he got for free—not just free—the slave's father shelled out the money—a big sum. Ask him what he did with it" (Tendulkar, Kamala46).

Tendulkar, who presents Kakasaheb in contrast with Jaisingh, at the end of the play, seems to be trying to explain the conduct of Jaisingh. The patriarchal dominance, the institution of marriage, the rights of husband, the duty of the wife, all are stressed in his speech and it shows that though he does not approve of his mercenary journalism, he does not find any fault with how he treats Sarita. He says "Look Sarita, Jaisingh is no different from other men. He is not unusual. You're wrong to think that he is a bad man. A man is always too proud of his achievements..." (Tendulkar, Kamala47). Sarita rebels against such an explanation and asks that if a man is great, does that entitle him to keep a slave. Kakasaheb just answers by something which is no answer. He just says

"That's why he's a man. And that's why there's manhood in the world..." (Tendulkar, Kamala47)

Kakasaheb is asking Sarita to accept the way of the world and not try to change the way things are. The unpleasant things are in the share of women only. But Sarita stands her ground and says that this thinking must be changed. The manly ego Kakasaheb stresses upon is demeaning to women, as if they have no self-respect. But at the end of the play, Sarita acts as a loving and understanding wife when Jaisingh loses his job and is upset. But this does not mean

that Sarita will go back to her old life. She is humane hence can't bring herself to throw another storm on Jaisingh at that moment. She says

“But at present I'm going to lock all that up in a corner of my mind and forget about it. But a day will come, Kakasaheb, when I will stop being a slave. I'll no longer be an object to be used and thrown away. I'll do what I wish, and no one will rule over me. That day has to come. And I'll pay whatever price I have to pay for it” (Tendulkar Kamala52).

While in Tara, there was a time when women accepted unhesitatingly the do's and don'ts men decide for them but refuse to accept 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.” (Dattani, 345)

Here, one may get the impression that Tara is speaking like a new woman. She easily represents the status and the attitudes of women in society. Dattani has relentlessly shed light on the gritty realities of the society which is a hub of such issues which are quite noticeable but generally brushed aside under the carpet of civilization.

Conclusion

Thus, both, Tendulkar and Dattani are social realists committed to reveal evils present in the contemporary society. Like Tendulkar, Dattani has also depicted the marginal position of women and their struggle against exploitation dealing with the issues, such as gender discrimination, class-conflict, homosexuality, which is often brushed aside under the carpet of the society. To depict reality on stage Tendulkar has moved from a king to a dalit while Dattani has made subject of his discussion only to middle class urban family. With the help of his dramatic virtuosity and theatrical adroitness, which Tendulkar lacks, Dattani has presented hidden and burning reality on the stage split in various levels signifying the fractured personality and conscience of postmodern human beings who are mechanized to such an extent that human relations have no value for them.

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