

The Gendered Subject: *Tara*

As usual with Dattani, the present play *Tara* is also multilayered and explores as well as discovers multiple facets of curtailed issues -- some discerned by the author, some to be discovered by the readers. Here is an investigation into the meanings, motives and significations encoded in our unintended even unconscious “normal” behaviour. Dattani’s commitment towards and focus on the specific issues that are gradually coming out of the closet and influencing our time, found gender a potential site for exploration; but the prominent issue of disability complicates the subject yet further by adding another dimension to the play. Apart from the hyper-real presence of a disabled female-cum-feminine[d]-cum-asserting- female figure, the play merges the two marginalized identities (the woman and the disabled), sometimes replacing one another, sometimes making one the metaphor for the other -- both ways undermining the individuals outside the matrix of “mainstream” constituted by “patriarchy” and “able-bodied”.

It is in this specific point, where both discourses of disability and femininity intersect, lies the special charm of Dattani’s play. Both gender and disability are the conceptual frames which give meaning to the body. For years, biological destiny was the accepted rationale behind the exclusion of women, coloured and disabled people from the life they desire and deserve, and, compelling them to a particular social role as subordinate and dependent. The same mechanism that fits biological sex to social gendered role renders the atypical body of impaired people invisible or assigns

oppositional identity (outsider). The mass identity imposed on women showing a strong disbelief in their individuality is replicated in the identical historical response to the physical impairment and cognitive, emotional and psychiatric disability. The same mechanism that holds women physically, intellectually and emotionally frail and weak to have the control over property and custody of children, certifies disabled persons biologically too inferior to execute responsibility and therefore unqualified to enjoy privileges of citizenship and perform reproductive role. Hence, impairment turns out to be no more neutral than the sexual characteristics by which our consciousness of the world gets permeated.

The issue gets farther problematized by the gender role which becomes the site for contestation between patriarchy and various feminist groups—the very role deterring the disabled women from entering within its ambit. The traditionally dependent position of disabled persons excludes women from the role of care-giver and men from the domain of masculinity making them feel feminized. Here Dattani's concern is not to prove that some disabled people are as productive as the able-bodied, valorizing health over illness (illness is an undeniable factor of the life of many impaired people), and autonomy over dependency, but to challenge the biological determinism without devaluing or obliterating the biological difference.

At other levels, the concept of colonization ranges from cultural imperialism of the west, parental domination, financial subordination, hegemonic control of the regime of truth by science to the narrator's control of textual meaning and many more. However, this is also a story of resistance, a tale of the circular flow of power, a narrative of

harmony. Notably, as a contemporary dramatist --with his focus on urban India --, Dattani precisely deals with the workings of the issues fabricated within the “complicated dynamics of modern urban family” (Mee, “A Note on *Tara*”, 319).

Moreover, as queer theorists hold, the people deviating from the specific typicality are undermined by being excluded from the usual epistemic standard of knowing. The non-disableds’ diagnosis of difficulty in disabled people’s life is also prioritized over their own account, ignoring the normal standard of epistemic expertise. Dattani, by making Dan acknowledge and voice his own disability, challenges normative criteria and by dissolving the author into the text, subverts the aesthetic standard of artistic representation.

The Aesthetics

“From the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing can ever be made”

--Immanuel Kant (quoted in Silvers, “The Crooked Timber of Humanity”, 228).

“Beautiful art ... describes as beautiful things which may be in nature ugly or displeasing”

--Immanuel Kant (quoted in Silvers, “The Crooked Timber of Humanity”, 231).

The paradox which remained unresolved for centuries of aesthetic history is that, while disability has always been thought as undesirable, abnormal, unacknowledged and repulsive in real life, it has been a frequently explored subject for artistic representation. In fact, the normal holds so much less sway in art than in ordinary life, that it often failed to evoke the sense of shocking novelty which is so much valued in art. The sociocultural narrative of practical life is disturbed by anomaly, whereas in art, the shock awakens the blunt sensibility of the observer to new understanding of aesthetics, and helps the work to be popular by creating gimmick and sensation. While the lesser artists find photographic limitation in the depiction of “normality”, the regime of disability offers vast scope for imagination and representation. Interestingly, however, the representation omits the disagreeable aspects of the original, obscures the experiences of persons with disability and uses disability as the signifier of something beyond and besides itself. Thus, while feminists complain of omitting the writings by female writers from canons, disabled artists from Homer to Vangogue have always been highlighted specially and held unusually/unexpectedly talented as opposed to the other talented mortals.

Transformational art, thus adding significations to the phenomenon of disability transcending itself, reinforces the metanarrative that dictates knowledge by leveling terms to the veiled, undervalued and ignored. The level of deviant and other authenticate the ontological validity of the superiority of the mainstream and “normal”. By associating it with destiny, and making it represent incompetence, sin, moral depravity, burdensomeness etc, the discourse colonizes impaired people and exploits their image to nourish non-disabled’s fiction about their own perfection. The very image of helplessness

and dependency is instrumented to test the nobility and grandeur of humanity. With another fine paradox, the aesthetic of disability conceals disability by mirroring it within discourses of attractiveness; the act of borrowing something from the “beautiful” normal world to be agreeable and pleasing, helps the “normal” to bolster their confidence about their superiority and completeness.

Postmodernists have used freakishness to undermine the prevalent practice by foregrounding obscured and undesirable areas as well as to celebrate difference and exalt deviation to undermine power relation, from which aesthetics draws force. In spite of their claim that fidelity to nature is no criterion to judge the work of art, the practice remains no more natural or no less social, and participates in the history of “metaphorical opportunism” (Mitchell and Snyder, 17).

Though projected frequently as an artistic object, the corporeal and cognitive anomaly poses a threat to the non-disabled audience unless presented as frail, weak and dependent. Thus, impairment becomes palatable and veiled by being broadly symbolic. As Mitchell and Snyder put it, disability is embellished until it is the generalized symbol for undeserved misfortune. The image serves self-congratulatory for non-disabled and acquires appeal absent in the original, which they called the “representational double bind of disability” (Mitchell and Snyder, 6). The ignoble cultural predicament excludes disabled people, especially women (even the representation) from the belittling role of sexual and maternal role assigned to the black women.

Uniqueness, rather than typicality, holds the gravitation of attention: Uniqueness emancipates imagination and frees the exceptional individual from expectation to which

the group is held. For example, in Harriet Martin's "Life in the Sick Room" and Charlotte Young's "The Clever Woman of the Family", confinement to the couch rather empowered the women than limiting, freeing them from the reproductive role and therefore, redefining their productivity as intellectual. Hence disability becomes both liberating and exclusionary means, either way performing instrumental function which shadows the relational aspect of art with the real.

Beautiful work of art has been produced by using the expected properties of disability from time immemorial. This is precisely what Dan aims at in the beginning but a counter discourse comes into play and he fails. Thus Dattani attempts to set a different aesthetic standard for the representation of people whose actual appearance is repulsive by subverting the reading of the fact and turning the direction of the mirror. The lack of stability and coherence in Dan's narrative and various ideas rallying to decentralize his focus prove that renovation and revitalization of our moral and aesthetic criteria and the standard of knowing is possible. Finally, Dan discovers his inability to conform to any totalizing idea, any static and categorical metadiscursive commitment.

The Author

Smith observed, "Hegemony does not take the form of brute domination; it entails instead the delimitations of the intelligible... To fail to achieve an adequate fit within an officially recognized position is to be de-authorized – to be denied recognition as an

author of the text and to have one's text dismissed from the start as incoherent, illegitimate or unbelievable" (quoted in Ghai, 95).

Since the play attempts a re-reading of the aesthetic representation of the sister issues of gender and disability, it is very much in consonance that the only realistic level at which the play operates, is that of the attempting-to-be-an-author of the play *Twinkling Tara*. A generic destabilization is under process as the author's control over the text gets nullified dissolving the author himself into the text. The act of writing becomes a search for Dan's own identity which is incoherent, fluid, unstructured -- a "freak" (*Tara*, 324).

Dan consciously refuses to be the oriental writer which would have ensured a publication of his *Random Raj* (*Tara*, 324) had it been selling dowry, suttee or other oriental products to the Western customer having a preference for oriental flavour. Yet he had flown to London for two years and refuses to come back to India: "I don't think I can face life there any more... there's nothing left for me to come back to..." (*Tara*, 372). To be disabled in India has specific context, meaning and implication which he feels himself unable to be up to without Tara, the sharer of his identity, whom he tries to rejuvenate by writing. The Indian deterministic framework allows very few to escape the "erosion of agency", and hesitates to accord a disabled person "expert status of either his or her own life, or that of the dominant group" (Ghai, 95).

But Dan fails to give coherence to his narrative. He tries to locate the cause -- "In poetry, even the most turbulent emotions can be recollected when one is half asleep. But in drama! Ah! Even tranquility has to be recalled with emotion. Like touching a bare live wire" (*Tara*, 323). For him the act becomes all the more problematic since here

Dan's challenge is not to hold himself upright without losing his direction in the face of the stormy emotions hitting from outside, rather they emanate from within, putting his unified self in topsy-turvy.

Dan's failure of distancing himself objectively from his subject matter, questions the generic validity of his work, namely, drama. Of course, he took up his project of producing a play about Tara, his twin sister, as an omniscient "god", a narrator treating his subject matter objectively. But the project gets dumped as he finds it impossible to extricate himself from one "lying deep inside, out of reach" (*Tara*, 324), not as a component part of his existence and experience, but organically related. Consequently, the hitherto objective subject matter demands complete subjection of the subject-author to an authorless narrative with no narrator to "make" a story to edit, to interpret, and hereby, construct the "experience". Caught in the web of memory and experience, the act of writing dissolves into an act of remembering.

With a fine miming Dan removes the neatly arranged masks of that of the "handicapped intellectual", "the desperate immigrant" and the "mysterious brown with the phony accent" (*Tara*, 324). The mask falls off the omniscient author who "know'st", and who "from the first / Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread, / Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss, / And mad'st it pregnant" (*Paradise Lost, Book I* 1). Materials gets scattered, focus off-centered: "The mind wanders too much. Unnecessary details, irrelevant characters..." (*Tara*, 330). His attempt at stereotyping -- representing Tara, the heroin, as "Kind, gentle, strong" (*Tara*, 330), their mother as all loving and nurturing mother-earth, father as a typical patriarch, the fount head of the flow of power ,

fail. His inability to narrativise the story, of giving an objective perspective to a subjective tale, transforms into the death wish at inception of both the author (Dan) and the text (Tara): “We were meant to die and our mortal remains preserved in formaldehyde for future generations to study” (*Tara*, 330).

The generic destabilization gets unavoidable when Tara, as a text, promising an effect of “high tragedy and romance, youth ready to burst forth into the world with spring-like freshness”, withers away. The unreliability of the metanarrative provided by science proves the point of failure in any attempt at a grand narrative -- sometimes it is fraught with pain (as Chandan’s) or guilt (as Bharati’s) or deployed to assert control (as Patel’s) or motivated to hold at the centre by marginalizing other (as Roopa’s) or securing practical advantages (as Dr Thakkar’s). Hence Dan discovers himself unequal to the role of the self-content author, but rather, a mere functionary trying to organize the materials with his artistic “craft” (*Tara*, 379). Here we have a conscious rejection of any “story”, resisting of the temptation of taking “something from Tara -- and give it to myself” (*Tara*, 379) like Dr Thakkar to “make” “capital” of his “trauma” and his “tragedy” (*Tara*, 379) in order to capitalize her to further his own interest.

This is a regression from the act of “writing” to the oral rendition of stories leaving only the voice in a primitive manner, a voice that may be imitated, interpolated, edited, omitted, given different meanings and interpretations like that of the older bards. This is an attempt to obliterate the conscious controlling of a unique -- therefore free -- individual: “The voice is all that will remain. No writing...that once belonged to an object. An object like other objects in a cosmos, whose orbits are determined by those

around. Moving in a forced harmony. Those who survive are those who do not defy the gravity of others” (*Tara*, 379). The ego withdraws into the domain of personal memory and fantasy. The boundaries break; the authentic/hyperreal world of science cooking up a fantastic tale, the real proves infertile. Chandan produces only another title sheet with a changed date. As the memory proves too realistic to be structured in a story, fantasy metaphorizes the real: the twin, the voiced Dan/disabled, scared Chandan and the rebellious, assertive Tara/ disabled, oppressed feminine hug and complete each other without a limp, ignoring the forces to separate them.

The Narrative

The play endorses a sharp disbelief in any neutral narrative and explores points of conjunction and disjunction of various narratives challenging, omitting, destabilizing one another. The forced disjunction of the siamese twins through surgery is ironically contrasted with the forced united existence of their parents -- at every turn confronting each other with a different narrative for the children. From the very beginning we find Bharati as an over-caring mother nervously eager to procure nourishment for Tara, even denouncing Patel’s reasonable leniency for her strict diet. She is even unwilling to accept that Tara is growing up steadily and gets irritated at the hint of unusual/beyond-expectation in the “surprise” (*Tara*, 326) showed by the doctor at their progress. Their narratives differ even in regard to the trifles like willingness for using the brass tumbler of Bharati’s father as well as the important issue of using his house-- each claiming the other to be reluctant.

The narrative of course becomes a powerful tool for exercising power. Bharati, unable to regulate the situation according to her will, finds it an effective means of confronting her husband: "I will tell her. I will tell them everything" (*Tara*, 345). An immediate and spontaneous reaction to the threat comes in the form of Patel's slapping Bharati on the face (which is not a usual trait in his character); the look of triumph in latter's eyes confirms the explosive potency of the hidden story. After the initial stimulus to overcome the fear of disclosure of the "fact" by violence, Patel recurses to other more effective modes of silencing like appealing to her motherhood, pleading for the cause of the welfare of children themselves: "You wouldn't dare tell them. Not you...Not yet" (*Tara*, 345). At last he determines to have the full control by taking up the role of narrator himself conveying the fact: "If at all they must know, it will be from me. Not from you" (*Tara*, 345).

Throughout the play, we have myriads of master strokes of interweaving of counter narratives, one disqualifying the other. In the implied narrative of Bharati, her father was a loving influential grandfather who left enough money for both his grandchildren while Mr. Patel is only bothered about Chandan's future making plans for his education and career. But Patel's tale proclaims that "nothing" (*Tara*, 360) of their grandfather's property was conferred on Tara. He even claims that it is Bharati, who "make[s]" him -- by positioning and representing -- a "liar", "wife-beater", "child abuser" (*Tara*, 353). As the counter move of Bharati's attempt in creating a loving corner to shell the children from the roughness of the outside, Mr. Patel reacts against the cocooned existence into which they are gradually getting withdrawn: "You are turning them against the whole world" (*Tara*, 352).

In a like manner, Mr. Patel's pathetic appeal to Tara to believe his concern for her ("I love you very much and I have never in all my life loved you less or more than I have loved your brother", (*Tara*, 354) is countered by an almost hysteric/beatified devotion of Bharati to Tara to make her remember that "You are my most beautiful baby! I love you very much" (*Tara*, 355). She remains always preoccupied with cooking her favourite dishes, fretting about her hygiene, buying friends for her, appealing to Chandan to take care of her, countering the insensitive attitude of the world by lavishing her care and pride ("my most beautiful baby", *Tara*, 355), even making up for her father's tyranny of indifference by unusual show of care -- thus building a protective shell of love around her because "Love can make up for a lot" (*Tara*, 349). However, a covert but constant working of a motive becomes unmistakably obvious behind all Bharati's projection (action and narration), that of proving to Tara that she is not only "loved" but is "loved" by her mother, and her mother alone, and convince her of her father's lack of affection.

The labyrinth of contesting narratives terminates on a dead end with the disclosure of a long-hidden history. The secret explodes with all its force shattering the microcosmic universe of the family. The authentic narrative of science is superseded by a different story told by another, whose authenticity/authority is assured by the suppression of the dissenting voice of the projected victimizer. The fact of the existence of a third leg, veiled under secrecy so long, is now revealed. As Mr. Patel recounts it, the twins were born with three legs, each having one and the third one having greater supply of blood from the girl. The obvious, ethical and medically feasible choice of providing the third one to the girl was dumped to create an unethical and improbable alternative in the interest of the power holders. A secret nexus between their grandfather and Bharati and

Dr Thakkar, decided that the leg should be given to the boy. In exchange of three acres of state land for the nursing home as a gift from the influential industrialist and MLA, science was socialized to deviate from its course. The leg clang to Chandan like a dead cell for two days and it had to be amputated by representing it as a “natural rejection” (*Tara*, 378).

The narrative of the beatific devotion of Bharati to Tara gets different layers of interpretation (“she called me her star!” -- *Tara*, 379). The whole universe of Tara falls apart, as the gravitation provided by the love of her mother, the refuge for all her humiliation, pain and loss, compensation for all wrongs done to her by nature and the society, shelter from all fears, get removed throwing her into a void -- dark, unknown, unsympathetic. The structure of her experience, Thought and vision by which she could interpret, participate and belong to her little world was gone; she loses all will to live and face life itself. The twinkling Tara withers into a shooting star.

Interestingly, the catastrophe of the play follows no action, rather, like *Oedipus Rex*, it results from the anagnorisis itself -- narration of a long-hidden secret -- and like it, the present play also turns out to be a tragedy of knowledge. However, unlike the Greek one, the revelation of “truth” does not come from Delphi, standing naked in the open day light, rather, the narrator here reveals the dark secret to submerge a dissenting voice having the potential of giving another version of truth. Remarkably, Mr. Patel only dares to reveal the truth when Bharati is told to have reduced into eccentricity for having suffering from a nervous breakdown. Perhaps there was reason enough in her speech which Patel could not risk passing as lunatic incoherence. The zeal of “telling” himself

on part of Patel and the hints dropped in words like having “satisfaction” and “confession” (*Tara*, 344) in relation with Bharati, supplemented by the meta-narrative by Dr Thakkar lead to an open ended perennial confusion about the actual fact.

The narrative sets devastating forces in motion, opens up destructive possibilities, inspires plethora of questions unresolved. It cannot explain why Bharati could have an upper hand over Patel by offering to disclose the truth (I will tell them”), why Patel pleaded pathetically and oppressed violently and always anxiously guarded the secret, why did he prohibit the children to see their mother on their own, why did he fear a “confession” by her. It remains unanswered whether the arrangement of a donor was an act of expiation on his part because of which he could not allow his wife a grater and more effective penance that may unstable his position or may be it would amount to Bharati’s getting cleansed off the guilt and cementing her bond with her children -- himself loosening his grip yet farther with no hope of recovering it by disclosing the secret. The secret was a powerful weapon for Bharati to challenge his authority and he almost obtains a sadistic pleasure in using the story to assert it. Or it may be, to eradicate any farther possibility of being overridden he places his final card to ensure his centrality for ever.

The Science

While on the realistic level, Dan grapples vainly with the very possibility of losing control, a coherent narrative is provided by Dr Thakkar on a hyper-real level. The sheer god-like presence of Dr Thakkar itself is a powerful signifier of the absolute supremacy of science (ousting religion in a modern secular world) that alone can attest the authenticity of fact/truth.

The facts recorded from the medical bulletin may be catalogued in following manner:

Generally, when one fertilized egg instead of developing into two different embryos, “fails to do so fully” (*Tara*, 331), a Siamese twin is born

Naturally, the twins are almost “invariably of the same sex” (*Tara*, 332).

Rarely, one in a fifty thousand twin conception becomes conjoined.

Very rarely, as in this case, the conjoined twins are of different sex.

The twins were conjoined from the “breastbone down through the pelvic area” (*Tara*, 331).

Only seven such twins were recorded to have survived through birth.

“In all cases, so far, one twin has always died by the age of four” (*Tara*, 332).

Unprecedentedly, the twins are still alive in their teens.

Separation of the twins through “surgery was their only chance of survival” (*Tara*, 331).

The operation was conducted for the first time in India under the leadership of Dr Umakant Thakkar in Queen Victoria hospital in Bombay.

They will be completely sterile.

Extreme care was taken and repeated rehearsals were conducted (though parents were warned against the worst) since the babies were only three months old and the surgery was very complicated. It was expected that I. each would have one kidney, II. The only bladder and rectum belonged to the boy (the girl's would be developed artificially), III. The boy's lungs was weak, IV. Conjoined livers were to be separated without hurting the bile ducts.

“The Patel twins made medical history today by being the longest surviving pair of Siamese twins” (*Tara*, 355).

“Nature wanted to kill her. We couldn't allow it” (*Tara*, 376). Consequently, the girl is undergoing her seventh prosthesis and kidney transplantation at the age of sixteen creating a history of the longest living Siamese twin in India.

Thus, in some areas, medical science like an equal-footed partner finishes off nature's “near-complete job” (*Tara*, 356). But in some other, it took up the challenge and turned victorious by performing the “marvels in the world of medicine” (*Tara*, 330). However, the complications climaxed in regard to saving the life of the girl child “unless this miracle” had “might”, (Shakespeare, sonnet no. 65) -- by a classic peripeteia -- to

reverse nature's intension, it would have completed its "unfair deal" (Cf. "Even nature gave her a raw deal", *Tara*, 356). However, the newspapers and daily journals supplement the medical journal by shifting the focus on to the psychological factors: "the will to survive has proved to work more miracles than the greatest of science" (*Tara*, 356).

The Gender

Butler rightly observes that the disciplinary society in its production of normalized subject attempts to affect "a false stabilization" by making biological characteristics determinates of fixed gender role and privileging a gender role over the other (Butler, 125). Gender politics of course varies with specific sociocultural contexts. Multiple ways of oppressing women are visible issues in rural and conservative India, but in the "complicated dynamics of modern urban family" the issues work in far subtler ways as underlying motives of many of our common behavioral patterns. Primordial practices, mentioned jokingly in the commentslike , "Men in the house were deciding on whether they are going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave" (*Tara*, 328), or in reference to incidents of killing girl babies by drowning them into milk, have got refined through the complicated sensibility of an upper middle class family.

Gender categorization works through the father's indifference to the daughter's career as a businesswoman who might have proved smarter and more intelligent than her introvert brother, already privileged by the sole inheritance of his grandfather's property.

Mr. Patel shows strong inclination towards Chandan's coming to the office with him to have a feel, but finds no word of encouragement for Tara's prospect of joining him: "You may both come -- if you want to" (*Tara*, 328). He insists on Tara's filling in the form for college, only because "Chandan refuses to join college without you" (*Tara*, 360) and makes plans for the former's career and arranges for sending him abroad.

Following the discursive practice of dividing the domain of power between outside and inside home, Mr. Patel asserts his authority outside home: he decides Chandan's career, makes arrangement for the donor and Tara's surgery and withholds his wife to "have the satisfaction..." of donating her kidney to Tara with as much zeal as she wants the contrary. He exhibits genuine care and concern about Tara's health whether by responding to the emergency or by continuing prolonged treatment. But when it comes to the plan about her career, he shirks away from his responsibility by accusing his wife: "When have you ever allowed me to make any plan for her?" (*Tara*, 352). It is this lack of liberality of accepting any alternative gender role that makes him shudder at the sight of Chandan's helping his mother to disentangle the knitting: "But you can think of turning him into a sissy – teaching him to knit!" (*Tara*, 351)

However, the delicacy of Dattani as a chronicler of a modern urban Indian family gets evident in points where patriarchy is exposed to operate by making the victim its agent and vice versa. The duplicity negates the fixity of the role of "man" and "woman", makes their position unstable, but always ensuring the stability of heteropatriarchal ideology. The woman incorporated into its network is made a party to the ineffectual decision of grafting the third leg of the twin onto the boy, while in the

girl's case it had greater possibility of survival. Lacking in the marker of masculinity -- in the present case -- the financial self-sufficiency or superiority to his wife, Mr. Patel is reduced into nonentity with no opinion in matters of his children.

Most importantly, the play is a story of the forced separation of the feminine and the masculine self resulting in the symbolic lopsidedness, about the “gendered self, about coming in terms with the feminine side of one's self in a world that always favors what is ‘male’” (Dattani, quoted in Mee, 320). Tara wastes away after losing her tie with Chandan. Chandan, the dramatist, of course tries to make “capital of” Tara as “subject matter”, but fails to create the objective distance from his own feminine self, “lying deep inside out of reach....” However, Dattani's comic vision of the cosmos envisages a possibility as the play, to follow the playwright himself, “...ends with them [male and female] sort of dissolved into the cosmos and in a cyclical sense finding union again” (“A Dialogue...” 130).

The Freak

The cultural discourse celebrates the centrality of the “normal” body by marginalizing the atypical disabled body in various ways: artistically devaluing it into negative symbols, politically making it “invisible” and socially Otherized -- yet never absents it from its narrative. It acts as a depository for the centre to expel its anxiety, irrationality and contradiction unto the subordinate, filling it with the antithesis of its own identity. Hence, the other represents what is deeply familiar to the centre but projected outside, leading to

antagonism and aversion. Thus “[d]isability is more than a background ... it is ... the basis on which the ‘normal’ body is constructed... disability defines the negative space the body must not occupy” (Davis, 68). As Thomson observes, the “subject position of cultural self [is] the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate’s boundaries” (Thomson, 7). Normal body, conceived as unified and consolidated whole, is foregrounded by its oppositional relation to the shattered, limited and anomalous. Hence normalcy is dependent on the discourse of Disability. While the privilege of normal is to have commonness respected, the privilege of Disabled is the acknowledgement of pain and to have difference respected (Silvers, “Disability”, 415-27).

Our culture valorizes perfection, rendering the impaired body unnatural, inherently deficit and lacking. In India, disability is seen as personal tragedy and levels like “bechara” (poor thing) accentuate the victim status. Having strong foundation in the theory of destiny, it is either seen as resulting from wrath of fate and consequently beyond redemption, or as the retribution of past Karmas, in both cases, essential and individual. Hence, the reaction ranges from pity, charity to hostility, anger, banter and ridicule.

Indeed a paradigmatic shift came with the medical explanation of the phenomenon of disability, but it continued to replicate its predecessor in recognition of it as “disease”. Naturalness gained sanction as “[m]edical constructions encouraged cure/overcoming theories” (Ghai, 91). Consequently, excessive reliance on medical explanation tends to disregard the disabling non-pathological factors like self-abnegation,

mental stress and the social and culture-relative role allocation. It justifies the predominance of health professionals, rehabs and support needs ignoring the importance of culture's power mechanism. The stress on biological destiny also holds environment neutral in abnormalizing impaired people.

In the play, the collapse of the escape cum defense mechanism of Dan, consequent upon the recognition of the oppressive strategy of capitalizing the freakishness of Tara, which leads to his discovery of himself as a "freak", (*Tara*, 324) also powerfully interrogates the representational strategies by which disabled persons are identified in society and art.

On realistic level, the freakishness/disability of Chandan and Tara is introduced against the backdrop of a so-called "normal" world represented by Roopa. A dialogue between the centre and the margin commences from the very beginning, redefining and readjusting their respective positions. The short colloquy between Roopa and Prema's mother sets in motion the workings of feelings like mutual betrayal (both friends blaming the other for provoking to see "Fatal Attraction"), falsehood, selfishness (Roopa avoids seeing Prema in fear to catch cold), hypocrisy (Roopa's pretension of cordiality by using broken Gujarati "Kem chcho", "Majhja ma", *Tara*, 327) etc and so on. And yet the bonding of normalcy, ensuring superiority, keeps them tied together. However, the instability of any given position gets apparent when, in order to belong to the superior class -- sometimes with intelligent Tara excluding Prema and Nalini and sometimes to that of able-bodied society of the latter two excluding Tara and Bharati--, Roopa uses the word "wandu tarah"/odd type (*Tara*, 340) as the most humiliating term.

The individuality of Dattani is stamped on his treatment of the issue of disability. He takes a different course from representing them as the innocent-helpless-victims of fate and “bad” elements of society or the grateful recipients of the noble charity of the able-bodied, in both ways passively confirming the latter’s superiority. Rather, a Foucauldian mechanism of resistance is at work. It is at work in the acknowledgement of the comparative dullness of Roopa (evident in her calling “ogres” as “oglers”, *Tara*, 329) as well as her infatuation with monster story rather imbecilic for her age), Tara’s declamation of herself as “[s]trong. Healthy. Beautiful” (*Tara*, 329), and Chandan’s assertion of including Roopa in his story as an “ogler” (*Tara*, 329) and like trifles. However, every act of resistance is a painful reminder of being marginalized: Tara boldly pulls up her trouser to show the artificial leg to the curious peers to satisfy their pleasure of oddity and mocks their idiotic gaze with a laugh, but feels a sharp anguish and pain for being compelled to display herself as a look-at-able object. She becomes aggressive and calls them ugly, “frightful” and “duckling” (*Tara*, 335). Her defense mechanism includes the tool of “exaggeration” as she herself offers to show her Jaipur leg, thanks for admiring them, shows even Chandan’s, and as if to revert the object of shame into that of pride, advertises it “the very best of Jaipur, made in Paris”; and finally makes Roopa feel not up to the joke of two Ps in a pot.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the body is a “grouping of lived-through meanings which moves towards its equilibrium” (quoted in Iwakuma, 78). Therefore, by embodiment i.e. the extension of bodily synthesis, the body extends to an object absorbed

with environment/umwelt. By the same process, the artificial legs become the part of the twin's body. This search for equilibrium forms the core of adjustment for the disabled persons which does not pose much problem for them since they get accustomed to it from their very childhood. They develop a love-hate relation with the prosthesis.

In the private sphere, the embodiment gets completed and the twins enjoy the consciousness of a healthy body image; but the public gaze separates the aids from the unconscious body image and qualifies the body as incomplete. When alone, they usually remain as indifferent to the extensions as any other body parts, but in public, that body is no longer taken for granted, axiomatic or implicit, and the focus is shifted. The whole body reduces into the extension, which becomes the object of conscious thought, focused, therefore meaningful. Tara's encounter with the girls in the street, curiously gazing and knocking at her leg, is a fair example in point. Even their father Mr. Patel thoroughly fails to understand the issue and blames his wife for "turning them against the whole world" (*Tara*, 352). The twins keep alive, jovial and absorbed in adolescent pleasures in the private circle. But in public sphere whether in the company of Roopa, Prema and Nalini or the physiotherapist, they become shelled like Chandan or bleed like defending/offending and resisting Tara.

The girls' interest in Tara's leg almost replicates Roopa's avidity for the stories of monsters -- beings outside the ambiance of "normality". Feeling cornered, Tara craves for identity and passionately urges Chandan to turn of Brahms's concert only because it is not by Beethoven -- the disabled musician. They find only shelter in the world of the two guarded by their anxious parents. . Bharati's desperate attempt to find a friend for Tara by

seducing Roopa with her adolescent infatuations, snatching a promise by making her recognize Tara's companionability and even by hysterically pressurizing for it, is foiled by the indifference of Prema's mother (the mother of a "normal" child) to the extent of accusing Roopa of spoiling her child.

The exclusion from "normalcy" operates in the regime of sexuality acting through a dichotomy: either the able-bodied regards the disabled as asexual or, more often, thinks it convenient to develop a sexual bonding but finds it more suitable either to hide it or represent it as a mark of their charity and large-heartedness. Roopa, herself infatuated with Chandan, provokes and indulges him and pretends to be hurt. The latter's claim that she has led him on, undermines her centrality, both as the able-bodied superior and the feminine privileged to be bending graciously to the prayer of the crazy male (to perform gendered role secures normalcy). Being injured, the mask of the pitiful giver falls off: "You actually believed that I would want you to... You have some hopes! ... personally I don't think we are -- ... combatable" (*Tara*, 367). As it nullifies her gesture of stooping out of pity, the wounded pride asserts itself by a contrary move: the "transferred resentment" works its way by exhibiting the sheer incompatibility of the "normal" and the "abnormal" and thus trampling down Chandan's self-respect.

However, the power flows the other way, as Tara turns to hit back, first with mocking Roopa's Malapropos use of the "combatable" and then bringing into use the tool often used against them by the disablist society: "It's good to know what hurts other people...Knowing their secrets is useful" (*Tara*, 369). She tells the tale of building up of a relation of best friendship with Deepa, a girl of her former school. Being compelled by

the class teacher to be paired off with Tara, with whom she never spoke in spite of sitting next to her for so long, Deepa got to take Tara to her home. The latter discovers a rubber cloth under her bed and laughs loudly at her habit of wetting her bed even at thirteen. Since Tara did not tell it to any one and since she could tell it at the slightest provocation, Deepa becomes her friend.

As Gilman identifies beauty with politically constructed ideals that are meant to be exclusionary, Tara, being a desperate resisting instrument, recurses to the discourse which has remained powerful in hands of dominant group. Now Tara points out the uneven tits of Roopa and threatens to show how ugly she looks if seen from a certain angle to her friends Prema and Nalini: "I'd sooner be one-eyed, one-armed and one-legged than be an imbecile like you ...with uneven tits ...They are going to look at your tits the same way they looked at my leg!" *Tara*, 369) Struck at the face back by the margin, the venire of civilization falls off: Roopa shouts at Tara, calls her names and pastes a poster with the words: "We don't want freaks" (*Tara*, 378). The act shows how it bleeds and how barbaric and rude one becomes at the slightest possibility of losing the centre of being "normal".

The dialectic between the centre-margin apart, various other issues come under the impasse of the discursive practice which subordinates disabled persons. The oppressive mechanism of homogenization of a marginalized community has operated historically through an identical response to the physical, emotional, cognitive and psychiatric disability. The concept of biological separatism is at work in Roopa's comment: "If you really want some who is -- you should meet Freni Narangiwalla. ...

She is mentally retarded!” (*Tara*, 367) A sharp retort comes in the form of Tara’s ironic correction of the Malapropism (“very much combatable”) as well as Chandan’s retort to the physio-therapist’s observation on her previous experience of working with “mobility impaired” (*Tara*, 358) children: “I haven’t worked with brain cell impaired people...we cannot have a true cultural exchange” (*Tara*, 359).

The overwhelming clinical focus in the twins’ life and in media representation, tries to neutralize these sociocultural factors regulating their existence. We feel an all-pervasive presence of medical paraphernalia in the daily course of the family (doctors and medicines are painful realities in their life). But with the exposure of medical science as serving the need of patriarchy through the impairing of Tara, that marks the cultural subordination of the impaired into “disabled”, we feel a pressing need of a different reading of the phenomenon of disability.

Notably, in practical life, the Jaipur legs effectively aided the independent mobility of the twins, but the peculiar manner of walking with the limp categorizes them as “mobility impaired” by the socialite lady and “horrible crippled thing” by more coarse Roopa. Hence, while impairment, to some extent--Tara’s case proves otherwise, so do other instances of hygienic callousness of the state--results from physio-psycho anomaly, disability results, to a large extent, from the socially constructed attitudinal, physical and structural barrier created by dominant ideology of the disablist society. Thus, by a different representation of the construct of disability, Dattani poses a challenge to the categories of disabled and able-bodied as fixed and permanent, or internally homogenous and oppositional.

The Intersection

Dattani exhibits a rare insight into hidden areas of subordination where both the gender issue and the issue of disability merge with and intensify one another. Complications arise from the dynamics of gendered role allocations. The patriarchal logic of the grandfather which holds women too frail and unproductive (though reproductive) to inherit property and excludes Tara from his inheritance, is replicated in the twins' expulsion from normal intercourse with the able-bodied world assigning even the male the victim position: "You are afraid ... of meeting new people... who won't know how clever you are... They won't see beyond your..." (*Tara*, 361) In the same manner, women with disability are excluded from the gender role of care-giver adapted by their sex. Great value is placed on womanly art of giving care to the dependent, but the traditionally dependent position of disabled women prevents them from perfecting this art. The assumption, however, follows not from any particular case where the function is deterred due to specific reason, but the assigned alternative social role makes nurturing virtually inconceivable for them. And it is the much lower rate of disabled women's socio cultural participation than their male counterparts that makes Bharati shudder: "The world will accept you – but not her! Oh, the pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable" (*Tara*, 349). On the other hand, as Silvers points out, men and women with disability react differently when it comes to the point of having denied access to certain performances: when gender and disability

intersect, women generally deny gendered identity, but men feel feminized (Silvers, “Disability”, 415-27). Hence, while Tara finds it incumbent to cross the boundary of submissive femininity and face and fight the outer world, Chandan feels scared to do the same without his sister and prefers an existence cocooned in his world of writing.

The gender issue gets entangled with the disability in yet another way. The adaptive functioning of the artificial body parts, which is disruptive to the valorization of the wholesomeness and autonomy of “normal” body, as well as culture’s fear of prosthesis, gets another dimension when it threatens to make male body “imperfect”. Consequently, medical treatment intervenes “in their bodies to eliminate or discipline (to use Foucault’s term) those parts that mark their identification with a purportedly inferior group” (Silvers, “Disability”, 423); and given choice (though Tara was nature’s own selection), attempts were made to complete the body image of Chandan, the male.

The rhetoric of marginality brings the issues yet closer as both the women characters in the play finally come under control of the agents of patriarchy. The imbalance of power in the asymmetric relation between the care-giver and the receiver, which may breed oppression by giving the help-giver a choice that the receiver cannot enjoy, gets farther complicated by the intervention of patriarchy. Here both Bharati, the care-giver and Tara, the care-receiver, (“Do you really want to do that... Because you love me so much”, *Tara*, 355) are controlled by Mr. Patel who, to keep up the delicate balance of power intact, rather finds a donor even at a great expense., Interestingly, both of them become subject matter to be narrativized by their male counterparts. The story line of the play ends with a complete marginalization of the two female figures -- Tara

(breaking her off from the greatest bonding of love with her mother and the normal society/Roopa rising in violent humiliation) and Bharati (robbed of her power to “tell” them). The former offends Roopa by choosing not to acknowledge the superiority of the giver and the latter infuriates her husband by trying to interpret history in a different way. As Silvers observed, “non disabled people relate to disabled people primarily by caring for them, it becomes socially incumbent upon the former to profess incompetence even where they are more competent than the latter... It was not too long ago ... when all women were expected to dissemble this way to make men more secure in their masculine role” (Silvers, “Disability”, 420).

Conclusion

The play thus becomes a process of deconstruction of the absolute justification of the position of both disability and femininity. Disability, like gender, is exposed as social construction -- a representation and cultural interpretation of physical transformation or configuration. Apart from structural and institutional relation that restrict opportunity and material resources to the impaired people, cultural imperialism denotes a form of social oppression in which a group experiences symbolic devaluation in ways that set them apart as other, submerged in negative stereotypes. Historically medical discourse has been preeminent in redrawing boundary between able-bodied and disabled others and the otherness has been exploited as a source of entertainment as well as to steer the sphere of emotion of non-disable population. Though dangerous diseases like tuberculosis, got

romanticized being associated with artistic sensibility, disability remained fundamentally alien and present in stereotypical ways.

Tara's declared preference for being one-legged and one-eyed over the ugliness of Roopa is a subversive effort of justifying the wholeness of the disabled body by proving the incompleteness of the "normal" body if it is seen from a "certain angle". Patel's narrative replaces Tara's position as biologically impaired body with artificially disabled female, and, the image of Bharati as the possessive mother making up for all unfair dealing from society and nature with the agent/victim of patriarchy, expiating her own guilt. Thus characters turn out to be not the unified individual self, but the indeterminate subjects constituted and reconstituted by multiple ways.

It is expected that the crippled, unable to create a self, must accept definition from outside the boundaries of his own existence. Media represents a one dimensional life as dependent, unproductive and in need of care. Dramatic focus is centered on their interaction with health, care or welfare professional. The tenets of ordinary life like love, romance, sex and other such common emotions are largely absented from the story of their personal tragedy, in programmes on special achievement evoking pity, fear or admiration. In artistic sphere, the voyeuristic gaze maintains the rhetoric of insider and outsider of culture.

Therefore, Dan fails, concepts and memories lapse into artistic tantrum, narratives break into voices; because he wanted to write something nonconformist and non-committal to the regime of artistic representation of the "freak", and because, lineage determines normalcy. However, we may conclude by saying that, the narrative of the play

itself succeeds in refuting biological determinism without obliterating biological difference and at least creating a possibility of interrogating as well as redefining the relation of the centre and the margin.