

*Tara's* life). If this be normality, who wants it? Notions of normality and the implementation, the institution, of norms, are seen as vicious traps in the world-view of these plays. *Tara* declares that the rest of the world is ugly and she has a point.

What I haven't mentioned so far, and you must be wondering why, is that the play deals with disability and its consequences. At the surface level, the play seems to be about this in the beginning. The impact of the children's disability on the family and their own lives seems to be at the heart of the play. The problems others have accepting them for what they are – fun-loving, wisecracking growing children – and hence their struggle for acceptance and the levels of frustration that this brings on seems to be part of the central action of the play. The strain on the parents and the effect this has on their marriage seems to complete the picture. That the family has gone through tough times seems obvious and they seem to be reeling under the continuing strain. However, the play has other paths to traverse. But this does remain a major concern in the play, and Roopa's interaction with them is a thread that runs right through the play and is emblematic of how society receives them. Towards the end of the play, the last time we see Roopa, she is shown taunting them, calling them freaks and holding up a poster saying "We don't want freaks." We have a special ability to make various people unwanted, be it in terms of their religion or caste or community or different abilities.

*Tara*, like any other play, can be looked at in various ways. We have already looked at several themes in the play. But some approaches become apparent only in performance. Roopa can be seen as a merely comic figure on stage and the actress playing the role can walk away with the laughter and the applause. Hence Dattani has to work carefully in order to balance the play out in such a way that even if the audience roots for the actress playing Roopa, the play doesn't lose its impact. We'll look at the techniques that Dattani uses in *Tara* in the next unit. Obviously, techniques help to foreground his thematic concerns. So we may come back to some of our discussion in this unit once again.

---

### 3.5 LET US SUM UP

---

In this unit we have looked closely at the text of *Tara*, and discussed the various themes that inform the play. *Tara* is about disability and all that it causes in a certain social environment, it is about patriarchy, gender hierarchy and gender identity, about power play within the family, about middle-class morality, about the social role of medicine, about normality, about the pressures of the past, about sexuality, about youth and the imperfect world...

---

### 3.6 QUESTIONS

---

1. Would it matter if the medical information given in *Tara* were absolutely wrong in reality? Give reasons for your answer.
2. How important is the family in Dattani's plays? Answer with special reference to *Tara*.
3. What is Roopa's role in *Tara*?
4. What according to you are the major themes of *Tara*? Discuss whatever you consider to be the most important of them.

---

### 3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

---

---

## UNIT 4 APPRECIATING *TARA*

---

### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Techniques
- 4.3 Language
- 4.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.5 Questions

---

### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

---

The objective of this unit is to study *Tara* in order to identify the theatrical techniques that Dattani employs and their impact on our reading of the play. We will also examine the language of the play.

---

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

---

A play doesn't take too long to read. What I would like you to do is to re-read *Tara* as many times as you need to feel completely familiar with the text. This time around pay particular attention to the stage directions and the language. Techniques influence the ways in which we interpret any play. Music, costume, lighting – all help in shaping the way we receive characters and evaluate their motivations and actions. The language the characters speak help us in placing them in terms of their social and geographical environment(s).

---

### 4.2 TECHNIQUES

---

We have already looked at one of Dattani's evolving techniques – the division of the stage into various levels. The three levels are there throughout the play allowing Dattani to cut and splice action almost cinematically. Dan's level is described as the only realistic level and is furnished to represent a London bedsitter. We see the room of an aspiring writer. It is from this level that we watch the play. What I mean by that is that Dan is the narrator of the play, and in a sense the organiser of the action, much like a sutradhar. What we get to see at the other two levels is either imagined (Dr. Thakkar's level) or remembered, (the Patel household). This is Dan's play and we see it from his point of view. It is his remix version that we get of what happened in the Patel household more than six years earlier.

Dan is not only the narrator. He is also a character in the play. He is not just looking back but participating in the action. Dattani makes us very aware of the constructed nature of this narrative (as all narratives) by having a quick break in action and a re-start of the action to satisfy Dan's aesthetic (and is it only aesthetic?) requirements. Open your text to the page where the first episode in the Patel house ends with Patel expressing his worry about his wife. Read the stage direction: "*Cross cut to Dan who suddenly jerks as if woken from a nightmare.*" In the speech after that Dan talks of his mind wandering too much and tries again for a beginning and finds it in Dr. Thakkar. Dan is the interviewer at this level of action, where Dr. Thakkar holds forth proudly on his God-like intervention in the lives of *Tara* and Chandan. But action at Dan's

level does not consist of only direct address to the audience. Dan also receives a phone call from his father who is in India. This is the phone call that tells him and us of his mother's death. We see Dan's mental and emotional turmoil, his desire to put as much distance between him and India and the past as possible. But the past is within, just an ever present (memory) level away. When the play ends, we are back with Dan in his real time, a Dan who has imagined all that we have watched. He still hasn't managed to put it down on paper. This framing of the action ensures that we see this as Dan's play, that we realise that the action has been constructed from Dan's point of view.

In our very first view of the stage, Dattani breaks the unity of place. He disregards the other two unities as well – the unity of time and the unity of action. He cuts between different times (including one which perhaps is totally imaginary and attributed in terms of time to immediately after the operation – this is Dr. Thakkar's interview), and different actions (this is not a straight forward narrative). As I said in an earlier unit, Dattani plays around with the form of the well-made play, shaping and reshaping it like plasticine. And yet there is a strong sense of unity in his play, the action moves inexorably towards the crisis, the ultimate revelation. All the levels come together in a crescendo towards the end, when you see and hear all the characters that have been on stage. While Patel makes his revelation, Dr. Thakkar moves to his triumphant conclusion, Roopa plays out her spite, Bharati shows us her over-compensatory love for *Tara*, and Dan expresses his revulsion. Everything comes together as the play comes to an end.

Dattani moves from one level to another with lightning speed using (yes!) lighting, and music. When the play begins a spot picks up Dan. As he begins to imagine the past music begins to play faintly and then a spot lights up the stage level and *Tara* and Chandan walk into it. Then the lights cross fade to the Patel's living room and the action moves there. Again, when Dr. Thakkar is introduced to us, the light picks him up while Dan fades into darkness. But Dr. Thakkar's interviewer is Dan who continues to speak from his level. Thus, we see how just by clever use of lighting the action can be picked up at any level without any breaks for change of scene. It is this that gives the play the feeling of unity of action. You can see how Dattani handles this throughout the play.

Dattani uses music as well to both create a certain mood as well as to make a point about certain characters. If you've read the play carefully, you'll remember that the music played at important moments is by Brahms. There is a pointed exchange between Chandan and *Tara* about the music. Can you recall it? Who is the other musician referred to there? Why is he referred to, do you think? Pause here for a minute and work it out for yourself.

---

If you remember, the first reference to Brahms is in the stage directions in the first act, right after the interview with Dr. Thakkar that ends with Dan describing himself (and obviously *Tara*) as a freak among freaks. To the "explosive opening of Brahms' first concerto" as the directions put it, *Tara* is made to expose her artificial leg to the three girls in her locality. She enters the house and after a little while comments on the music, listening to it with pleasure. She then says, "Beethoven must have been a passionate man." When she is told that it is Brahms' first concerto that they are listening to, she says, "Stop it. Turn it off. I thought it was Beethoven." After a while, after she has revealed to Chandan what had transpired outside and told him that one day she would tell those girls "exactly how frightful they look", she says, "Oh, play the music real loud. Beethoven was never as good as this."

You may have thought that this was just an exchange between characters, much as people talk about liking various musicians or singers or groups in real life, of no real consequence. But a play is not real life. Every word spoken on stage is significant.

You may or may not know western classical music well or know it at all, but just looking up the names of these composers in an encyclopaedia should reveal a few things to us. Both these composers were German and Beethoven is said to have influenced Brahms. But the important point to notice about them is that Beethoven started going deaf in his twenties, and wrote some of his greatest music when he was completely deaf. *Tara*, in her moment of deep hurt and resentment caused by the 'normal' world wants to hear only Beethoven. She identifies herself with the musician with a disability, the musician who established his greatness in spite of being unable to hear his own creations. The same music that she has enjoyed she wants to reject once she learns that it is not by this composer. But Brahms' first concerto is described by Chandan as having "his quality of high tragedy and romance – of youth bursting forth in the world with all its claim. A spring like freshness..." (He says this was written on the record cover!) After she gets rid of her feelings by talking things through with Chandan, *Tara's* natural longing for a fulfilling life reasserts itself and she demands that Brahms be played loudly again. Youth is once again making its claim on the world loudly and clearly. We seem to be discussing the theme of the play once again. This is why we say that technique and theme are wedded together. Could we say that Brahms' first concerto becomes the theme music of *Tara*?

When I started this discussion about music, I did say that many of us may not have heard of these composers or have heard western classical music at all. Even in the play only *Tara* and Chandan seem interested in this music and informed about it. What does this do to our evaluation of them as characters? Obviously they are more 'westernised' than the other characters in the play. (Notice that the older Chandan is an English Dan.) It also shows them at a tangent to the society around them; they have been pushed into a different trajectory of life. Does it make them stand out in the world of the play, showcase their status as misfits? Does it also make them appear more intelligent, more cultured than the rest of the characters? You do realise that your answers will also depend on your real life views. If you think that people who listen to western classical music are snobs, you may not see the characters in a better light for having the taste for such music. If you think it shows taste, you'll look at *Tara* and Chandan with a degree of more sympathy.

How else is music used in the play? You do realise that it is up to the director to choose what music to play when, except what has been written in by the author. There is at least one other instance when Dattani specifies a piece of music to be associated with one character. When Dr. Thakkar is introduced to us, A television style signature tune is played to set up the interview format as also to signal a different movement in the play. Dr. Thakkar will show us his public documentary self, be the revered modern icon. He'll share information with us – information that will show him in good professional light – and claim his fifteen minutes of fame. The information age has no sympathy for the humanity it claims to serve. Just like the television intrudes into people's lives, Dr. Thakkar intruded into their lives. By playing a signature tune, Dattani makes us ready for the TV interview format (and the voyeurism that it brings out in us).

We have already seen how Dattani uses a technique he has used earlier, the presence of two actors playing the same character but at different stages of life. This was through role switches in *Dance Like a Man*, but in *Final Solutions* the characters had been present at the same time on stage. In *Tara*, this technique is repeated, and we see Dan as well as Chandan on stage at the same time even if at different levels. This obviously underlines the fact that Dattani isn't writing a realistic play but it surely is meant to do more than that. One thing that strikes me immediately is that Dattani picks for portrayal that stage in a character's life in which some crisis has occurred. The person who undergoes that crisis continues to live in the older person, continues to haunt the action even much later in life. Chandan's life reached a crisis point when they were in Mumbai for *Tara's* kidney transplant operation. What Chandan realised then was not something he could come to terms with easily. However much Dan may

move away from that past in terms of distance and time, Chandan is there along with *Tara*, just below the surface.

You must have also noticed how Dattani deftly sketches in the social environment and geographical locale. This is a play set in Mumbai and London with a past (that is referred to) in Bangalore. The multicultural nature of Indian cities and especially Mumbai is easily worked into the play with the names of people – Narayan saab in the neighbourhood, Dr.Kapoor in the hospital, a kannadiga Roopa ... It is revealed to us that Patel and Bharati themselves belong to different states. And while on names, Chandan and *Tara* can be from many different places in India, but Chandan also stands for the coveted sandalwood. This resonates with his wooden leg, which is hardly an object of desire in the play. *Tara* means star and Twinkling *Tara* has hardly been treated as the star of anyone's eyes.

Did you notice the number of movies named in the play? What does this detailing achieve? Do you remember which character mentions the name of a movie first? It is Roopa of course. Cinema is a part of popular culture and the 'normal' and 'common' Roopa would obviously be obsessed with movies. When we first see her, she is shown talking to Prema's mother who is (we guess) denying her access to her friend. This is because Roopa seems to have planned to see "Fatal Attraction" with her without the mother's permission. Roopa's choice of movies is also dictated by her awakening sexuality. It is with Roopa that the world of movies enters the play and thus we have references to "Sophie's Choice", "Twins", and "Children of Lesser God." The last movie is about deaf and dumb people while "Twins" is about twins with a difference. We've already looked at "Sophie's Choice." Each one of these movies comments tangentially on the central situation of the play. So while the VCR and these movies may actually detail in a time period, they also serve other purposes in the action of the play.

One of the techniques that Dattani uses to quickly and economically sketch in a dense environment in spite of using spare staging and fewer characters is reference to various unseen and unheard characters throughout the play. For example, Praful is never present on stage in *Bravely Fought the Queen* and yet he has a role to play in the action. Nor is the autorickshaw driver in the same play. This kind of reference allows a textual richness without dramatic excess and confusion. It suggests to us that there is a world out there in which the characters live. You can see this technique in other plays of Dattani's as well. Does he use this in *Tara*? Try and remember at least two characters who are named as being part of the world depicted in *Tara* but who are never represented on stage:

---

You must have thought of Nalini and Prema immediately even if you didn't remember their names correctly. Roopa is their representative on stage. But did you remember Praful? (Dattani does seem to have a fondness for certain names!) Praful is Patel's brother in England who is referred quite early in the play as the person who would take care of Chandan's future education. Chandan talks to his father later on, asking him not to talk to him through Praful but directly. There is also Narayan saab, the neighbour, with whom Patel speaks early in the first act. You should also remember Prema's mother with whom Roopa speaks before she talks to *Tara* and Chandan the first time.

Dattani tries to use all the resources of theatre at his command in order to make an effective dramatic statement. He is willing to experiment all the time, willing to use symbolism and stylisation if it can get an effect across. In the rapid movement of this play, as it reaches the climax, Dattani shows for a moment Bharati talking lovingly as if to an infant in her arms. Is this an image from the past, or an image from the dramatic present (she has had a nervous breakdown after all)? It doesn't matter for what we are meant to see is the image of a loving mother – an image she had worked so hard at making and maintaining. It is because of the way that he constructs the

play that Dattani can get away with the last piece of action in the play – *Tara* and Dan walking onstage without limping and then hugging each other in understanding and forgiveness. This is not a realistic play and hence it is not a mushy (Hindi film style) ending. I wonder if you remember the reference to the Hindi film style separation and reunion of siblings in the first act (this is in a conversation between *Tara* and Chandan, the same conversation in which they discuss Brahms). The siblings have been finally separated by nature and reunited by sentiment.

---

### 4.3 LANGUAGE

---

You could refresh your memory about language and Indian English drama by looking at earlier units. We have already looked at Dattani's views on language as well as the way in which he uses it in earlier plays. We see a similar sense of freedom in *Tara*, don't we? If Dattani had to use such a tag question ("don't we?"), he would have had his character say "isn't it?" for that is what is heard more often in Indian English. Dattani doesn't just make points with his use of English, he has moved far enough even to make points with his use of Kannada in *Tara*. Can you recall how he does it? It is Roopa who breaks into Kannada once she knows that the Patel family has come from Bangalore. But as a result of the incomplete hotch potch cultural education that we all get in this modern urban India, her Kannada is atrocious, as atrocious as her English. Her Kannada identifies her as presumptuous and half-baked.

While on the use of other Indian languages, there are jokes and wisecracks in this play which presume knowledge of Hindi, especially Bumbaiya Hindi. In the little long lost sibling act that *Tara* and Chandan play, when *Tara* calls out "Bhaiya" to her brother, Chandan retorts that she has just called him a milkman. Only that he doesn't even say milkman, he says "doodhwalla". If you don't know Hindi, 'bhaiya' means 'brother', and if you don't know Mumbai Hindi, 'bhaiya' would refer to a milkman there, a 'doodhwalla'. This isn't a major part of the play but it is refreshing to see an Indian English play move into other Indian languages and not just for local colour.

What did I mean by Dattani making points with his use of English? I explained about his use of Kannada and how that helps to characterise Roopa, as also how her English characterises her. As a matter of fact, Dattani makes cruel fun of the girl's lack of control over English. A number of jokes in the play are at the expense of her English starting off with "two peas in a pot." It would be an interesting exercise for you to mark all the jokes cracked at her expense. The last one is when she says that she and Chandan are not 'combatible.' The 'b' in the middle could also gesture to an inability to distinguish between 'b' and 'p' which is characteristic of some South Indians. This English places Roopa as a character inferior to *Tara* and Chandan. Roopa could also be shown as speaking strongly accented Indian (Kannadiga) English. So she would be an object of fun the minute she opens her mouth. This is certainly a class attitude in operation and perhaps that is the reason Dattani introduces the little Kannada that he does – to show her as linguistically and intellectually deficient in any case.

The English spoken in this play (perhaps even the fact that it is in English, or even the fact that it is a play to be performed in urban closed auditoriums) marks it as a play about the middle class, for the middle class (and the upper class as well!). What Dattani establishes and exploits theatrically is the fact that there is a certain level of acceptability to standard middle class Indian English. The stress and intonation need not be British, nor need the language be absolutely grammatically correct. There can be Indian words as well as allusions and metaphors. But this does not mean that any kind of English is acceptable. Deviations from this English are necessarily comic (almost all the humour in this play is linguistic) and point to the class aspiration and lower status of the characters speaking this deviant English.

Is the English spoken in the play limiting in any way? Remember that this is a family formed by an interstate marriage, the mother is Kannadiga and the father Gujarati. The children have obviously been to public schools where the medium of education and, more and more, the medium of all interactions is English. The medium of communication in such a family would be English. They have also moved around a bit – there is mention of an earlier stay in Mumbai and another in London. Again this makes it natural that they would speak English. Not that they do not know other languages but English is what they would be and are comfortable in. This is the new global world of the middle class and the lingua franca of this world is English. Having said all that, the question asked at the beginning of this paragraph still needs to be answered. Did you feel when reading the play that the language inhibits, limits, the dramatist in any way? Does it stop him from reaching certain emotional levels that are more natural to other Indian languages?

It is interesting here to recall the conversation between Karnad and Dattani that I referred to in an earlier unit. Talking of the performance of Karnad's play *The Fire and the Rain* in Karnad's own English translation, Dattani says, "...what was really refreshing...was that you gave so much to a group to work with, the language and the sheer simplicity of words...at no point did I feel that it was slipping into rhetoric or self-indulgent poetry." (*Indian Review of Books*, Vol. 8, NO. 6) Karnad's reply is that English is particularly sensitive to pomposity. What I am directing you to is the fact that Dattani may be deliberately eschewing 'high' emotion – "rhetoric or self-indulgent poetry". Hence if English is seen as limiting then in that particular case both Dattani and Karnad see it as a positive rather than a negative characteristic of the language – it imposes a certain emotional discipline on the writer.

Does Dattani manage to individuate characters by the English they speak? You have Roopa as well as Dr. Thakkar who are characterised by the language that they speak. We've looked at Roopa's language already; Dr. Thakkar's is the formal public speech English, the English of a scientist speaking to ordinary viewers. Chandan plays with the language more than the others (after all he is an aspiring writer); *Tara*'s English is that of the educated young people's (with its quota of slang); the parents speak a more studied English but even here Bharati is more apt to use Indian words. By the time Dattani came to write *Tara*, he is quite sure of what he can achieve with Indian English and *Tara* is a good example of what such theatre can achieve.

---

#### 4.4 LET US SUM UP

---

In this unit we saw how Dattani uses the theatrical resources at his command to control the way we view the action. We saw how he uses the segmented stage in *Tara* and how effective use of lighting and music allows him to use this stage to cut and splice the action almost cinematically. We saw how his techniques help him to present a character in a certain light and direct us to a certain response and evaluation. We saw how he plays with the structure of the well-made play and how he gives us a feeling of the real world without the features of theatrical realism. We also saw how he uses the language with great dexterity in order to individuate characters as well as to detail a social milieu. We saw that Dattani's humour is an integral part of his play.

Let us end with a question. Do you think *Tara* is a bleak play or an optimistic, essentially comic, play? Your answer by now will be as good as mine.

---

#### 4.5 QUESTIONS

---

1. How does Dattani use music in *Tara*?
2. Discuss the use of stage levels and lighting by Dattani in *Tara*.

*Tara*

3. How does Dattani give texture to the play? In other words, how does he give you a sense of place, and time? How does he make you feel that these characters belong to a certain world?
4. Do you agree with the view that all Dattani characters speak the same homogenised convent English? Discuss Dattani's use of English in *Tara*.

## Conversation with Mahesh Dattani

- Anjali: Hi Mahesh Welcome to Delhi
- Mahesh: Thank you.
- Anjali: And congratulations for The Sahtiya Award.
- Mahesh: Thank you Anjali.
- Anjali: And I think this is the first time an Indian English playwright has won this prestigious award.
- Mahesh: That's right it's unprecedented
- Anjali: So, What do you think this is going to do to the Indian English Theatre in this country?
- Mahesh: Well, I think this has been really the kind of endorsement that Indian English Theatre in the country has been looking for because up till now it seems as if it belonged to a fringe section of a society and that it was seen as not quite theatre, not quite art, that it was more of a kind of a theatre club kind of thing. And perhaps justifiably so. I am not saying that its not entirely unwarranted that feeling and opinion. But I think since so much has actually happened and there has been a serious attempt to, you know, have a kind of movement in this direction. Because there are enough English speaking people and there are enough people who want to do theatre, and right in the language, so this has been a kind of endorsement of that effort.
- Anjali: So what made you enter this fringe activity almost because when you started writing there was not really an active history of Indian English Theatre that was being performed at any rate in our cities?
- Mahesh: Well, I had no choice because my interest lies primarily in drama. So I didn't have a choice, that, oh, I'll write for drama, I will write a novel or I will write poetry. It has always been drama from the beginning because that's where my focus is and I began writing for the stage quite later, later on in my career so to say in theatre. I began as an actor, then I moved on to direction and then finally because there is a dearth of scripts written originally in the English language, Indian scripts. That's why I decided to try my hand at it.
- Anjali: How would you differentiate your work from the only other English playwrights who are known for original writing in India such as Currimbhoy and Nissim Ezekiel?
- Mahesh: Well, they are the forerunners of the Indian English writing for the stage movement and I think Nissim Ezekiel is really known as a poet and Asif Currimbhoy is extremely prolific and I think they were writing for their times in the sixties and early seventies I think and I am writing for my time so I think that's what we have in common and lot happened in our country in these thirty years, - almost forty years. And so I guess I am dealing with contemporary issues, which perhaps are different from the issues that were dealt with in sixties by these playwrights.
- Anjali: But the contemporary issues that you deal with also are not limited to just the eighties and nineties in this country for example one of your major theme is that of gender which you dealt with, in almost all your plays from *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Dance like a man*, right down to *Tara*. These are really limited to the nineties. But your treatment of this is very thing so. How did you change? Do you think, from the first play you wrote to *Tara*?
- Mahesh: Well, it changed quite a bit. Although I did deal with gender. It was really very much within the conventional set up and it was the housewife who had no option but to you know exactly follow her husband's instructions even after he died and he was literally ruling from the grave and she is just not the kind of woman who would have said to hell with you, I am going to leave you. You know ale

Nora or whatever started on to discover herself, but if you look at say *Bravely Fought the Queen*, the battles are far more visible, but at the same time they still can't leave, that's their battleground, that's their home and they are going to fight those battles and they are going to stay right there. But there has been a change even then - those five to six years between those took place and I think *Tara* although that came earlier to *Bravely Fought the Queen* actually is more rebellious in that sense.

Anjali: Yes, *Tara* in that sense is almost a final word on the gender issue because where a *Dance Like a Man* explores the stereotyping of gender for both man and woman, *Tara* really shows you the serious side of that discrimination. So *Tara* is a more extreme play, but was written before *Bravely Fought the Queen*.

Mahesh: That's right, yes

Anjali: So what gave you the idea for *Tara* I mean how did that come about? Well, basically, it began with, you know, reading an article in a medical journal about Siamese Twins being separated, and, of course, they were invariably of the same sex and there was this thing about a fused leg and which had the qualities of both left and right so there had to be some careful consideration as to which twin was supplying the blood to the leg and the journal went into the detail because obviously it was a very unique operation and separation. Although that was the inspiration but I think by then having written *Dance Like a Man*, I was prepared to take on the gender issue head on, and I think that was a powerful metaphor. Again, you know, the play is misread and, you know, people tend to focus on the medical details but that's really not what the play is about. It's a metaphor either for being born equal as male and female and sharing so much more and with the surgical separation comes a cultural distinction and prejudices as well, but on another level, it could also deal with the individual having the male and female self and half the female self is, whether your gender is male or female, is definitely given the lower priority.

Anjali: Yeah, in the sense the distinction between the two between *Chandan* and *Tara* comes up even before they are born.

Mahesh: That's right.

Anjali: Because they are seen as two distinct children who are hugging each other in the womb and once they are born, of course, a process of gender discrimination carries on but what do you think is the most explosive scene in the play which makes it completely clear.

Anjali: Well, I think it is the revelation in the end about, you know, *Tara's* love for her mother which until then was unquestionable. She suspected her father for having done something, you know, was in some way, but she had no idea what it was, but her love, her mother's love was unquestioned and she did not question that, so when she comes to know of the truth of what we, I mean, we only have the father's version. We don't know whether that is the real truth or no. Again, but it does sort of break her away like a shooting star from the mother, and I think with that she - that's the tragedy, she dies. We don't know how she dies, but we know that's the end of *Tara*, and I think that's somehow all the attitudes towards *Tara* and the relationship between her mother, her father and her brother, which we see through the play. In hindsight you could see where it was coloured or where it was blinkered or where it was being compensated for.

Anjali: Right, in any text there are also other scenes which somehow seem to actually coalesce all the major things after you have seen the whole play and those scenes are the ones that stand out as representative of

all different things that anyone text is trying to convey at the same time. For you which would be those scenes in Tara.

**Mahesh:** Well, that's a little difficult because you do have various forms of prejudices which are, which come, which recur as a variation on a theme. So, you know, in one sense gender prejudice against feminine gender is a strong thing but you also have the class differences coming and, of course, all these prejudices are interrelated because ultimately it is about power, the patriarchal system, it's to, you know, to acquire and appropriate power, you know, for-for you know, what I call what Dan says in the end to live in the forced harmony. It's forced because it's not equal but at the same time there is a harmonious existence because as long as, you know, your status and you continue to play and stay within your station, then there is harmony. But there is also discontent and that's why needs the kind of ferment, which Tara is able to bring about but it still is a tragedy.

**Anjali:** Because, Tara deals as you rightly said with hierarchies of all kinds, also the hierarchy between the doctor with his knowledge as power which is set apart very clearly and the hierarchy between Rupa and Tara as well as between Tara and her twin, her otherself. So how did you deal with all these opposing things? How could you? What made the gender issue come up as most important over class, caste, religion and science. You know, mother and child and father and child.

**Mahesh:** Because I think that's the most visible form of discrimination in our country. Well, you could say that class is the most visible form, but in a way it is such, so ingrained the class system, that sometimes it remains unquestioned. You know, you can order your servants about nobody questions you. You know weapon to fight discrimination against her. If Rupa is going to stare at her when she walks across the road, when she limps across the roads. As she, you know, examines her artificial leg, and knocks on it and what not. Tara is going to pull her cards and say that, you know I speak English better than you do and hence you are inferior to me. It's such a you know, ridiculous system we have, but then that's the only weapon she has against Rupa, so in a way, she is buying a social perception of what is superior and what is inferior, the same way as Rupa is doing to her.

**Anjali:** And is the only possible end or harmony for Dan is to leave. Once he leaves the house, he still obviously is not free of the trauma of what happens.

**Mahesh:** That's right. That haunts him and continues to haunt him.

**Anjali:** But in the end the only reconciliation with Tara is possible after the mother has died.

**Anjali:** Yes, and after they have died as well because Tara has died and Dan dies, and then you have this vision of this union between the siblings of male and female uniting on a different time and plane.

**Anjali:** So what you are really saying at some level perhaps through Tara is that as long as we continue to do this kind of differentiation, there is no end possible in this world.

**Mahesh:** Absolutely, yes, because it is an artificial difference in that sense, you know, biologically there are polarities between the genders, you know, which is meant to seek the union of one another, but the cultural polarities are artificial, and actually the boundaries hinder the natural unions of male and female whether its body-to-body or within oneself.

**Anjali:** What would be the turning point you think where you in your play, when once you established that Tara is not a victim and that we have to look at her not as a girl who is physically handicapped but who is

just somebody who has been handicapped by the very fact that she has been born with gender she has.

Mahesh: Right, Well, we got to, there are several scenes in the play which deal with her furies and how she fights her battles when she talks about how she blackmailed her classmate into doing her homework for her and even very much earlier on when she shows up Rupa for her malapropism, her lack of usage of certain idioms and you get to know very earlier on that she is sort of fighting for superior position and then when she finally confronts Rupa and says how does it feel having one tit smaller than the other and let me see how it feels, you know, when other people stare at you. You know, the way they stare at my leg and how would you feel, you won't be able to come out of your house and what not. So those are the places where we get some insight into Tara's inner life and her anger basically. And you know, you, you, you know the idea is so easy to sympathise because sympathy is another way of polarising as well. You sympathise with someone, and you are saying they are not me you know, No I am in a different location, you know, I am the superior and I am the one to sympathise. So stay there and I will sympathise with you.

Anjali: Right, but you don't sympathise with Chandan. He does not call for that. Was that a deliberate characterization?

Mahesh: Again yes, yes, because I really felt that these, these, these people have their battles and they were fighting them and Chandan fought by withdrawing into his music, into his own world and later on he fights by again withdrawing, by going into another space entirely. So these you know are ways of fighting his battles and again I didn't want this entire notion of sympathy for them.

Anjali: Has Tara been your most successful play?

Mahesh: Well, actually its *Dance Like a Man* because that's somehow been commercially more successful but that does not mean that Tara has not had its share of success as such. So, it's a little difficult because the metaphor is so strong and overwhelming that sometime people get caught up in the metaphor and reject the play.

Anjali: Right, well, thank you very much Mahesh, it's been a real pleasure talking to you.

Mahesh: Thank you, Anjali.