

## Gender, Disability and the In-Between: Marginalized Identities in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* and *Brief Candle*

Shachi Vijay & Rimika Singhvi

### Abstract

Marginalization of individuals and groups is a persistent problem that festers underneath a façade of socially inclusive reality. Mahesh Dattani, an Indian dramatist, director and actor, gives voice to the minority through his works. This Paper endeavours to analyse the identities marginalized on the basis of disability and gender in the plays of Mahesh Dattani. The selected texts, *Tara* (1995) and *Brief Candle* (2010), are examined in the light of the theories propounded by such philosophers as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. While Foucault conceptualizes the evolution of 'abnormality' and the 'technologies of the self' throughout history, Butler provides a fresh perspective into the study of gender as a construct beyond the body. With an intersectional approach to these aspects, the attempt is also to explore the problem of gendered disability thereby focusing on the minority within the minority.

**Keywords:** Abnormality; Biotechnological Intervention; Gender Performativity; Gendered Disability; Normalization.

Mahesh Dattani, the first playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi award, is well known for his significant contribution to modern Indian English theatre. Marked by the problem plays of Henrik Ibsen and G. B. Shaw, Dattani's plays approach grim contemporary realities and intangible issues bordering on taboo and almost all of them crack the veneer of normalcy or ignorance pervasive in Indian society. His oeuvre ranges from issues pertaining to gender, homosexuality and child abuse to disability, death and religion. However, one aspect that remains constant in all of his works is his concern with 'Indianness', a concern that drives his plays to resonate well with the Indian audience as well as readers.

A subtle combination of objectivity and subjectivity, brought about with the help of modern dramatic techniques, innovative stagecraft and deeply realistic characterization, makes Dattani an artist of renowned originality.

“Out, out, brief candle” (5.5.23), Dattani’s title immediately takes us back to this famous quote from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, where life, according to Macbeth, burns down like a trivial, inconsequential flicker. The dark after this brightness consumes everything, then what is left of the lived experience seems worthless to him. If one goes by this idea, life does start to seem daunting. This is where Dattani claims a different position as he re-examines death. The full title of his play reads *Brief Candle: A Dance between Love and Death*. Dattani views life as a dance, a movement, an expression of joy; he brings the comedy of life to the foreground, which paves the way for death’s tragedy. However, what happens when death approaches before life has completed its term? This early death is portrayed in the play through disability. Dattani takes the charge of presenting the plight of terminally ill cancer patients living in a hospice in Mumbai. These people represent the ‘brief candle’, reduced to their weak, disabled selves, and alienated from the ‘normal’ population. The patients are in the process of putting up a comedy play for raising funds for their hospice, simultaneously dealing with the conflicts of their real lives. Dattani’s attempt here is to work on “that thin line that defines comedy from tragedy” (Dattani, *Brief Candle* 3). The drama also touches upon issues related to gender, such as gender roles, stereotypes, sexuality and objectification. Dattani, thus, raises many questions of social concern, highlighting the marginalized identities in the Indian urban middle-class milieu.

*Tara* is one of the most successful plays of Mahesh Dattani. First performed as *Twinkle Tara* in 1990, the play was later published in 1995. As reflected in all the plays of Dattani, it also deals with the socio-political problems prevalent in the urban middle-class Indian society. The play revolves around Chandan and Tara who were born as ‘Siamese’ or conjoined twins and were separated at birth in a way that favoured the boy over the girl, as wished by their mother and her father. Eventually, Tara dies when she is sixteen years old and Chandan settles in London to escape the grief and guilt of his sister’s death. The story is narrated in the form of flashbacks appearing in the memories of Chandan, who has changed his name to Dan, as he tries to write a play about Tara. The twins, belonging to the Patel family, come to Bombay with their parents to undergo their remaining treatment. Being sixteen years old, they are trapped between their educational demands and medical requirements, while the secret around their birth dismantles the family dynamics. Many social issues such as class,

gender and disability are intertwined with the family relations examined in the play. The dramatist again employs psychological realism with a simple, conversational language to talk at length about them.

In his much-acclaimed lecture series *Abnormal*, Foucault lays down the historical developments of the labels and treatment associated with 'abnormal' people. He divides them into three categories, the earliest and the most important of which is the "human monster", an individual outside the limits of nature and challenging its laws, even transgressing them. This anomaly exists as a part of nature yet is completely against it, becoming, in Foucault's words, a "natural form of the unnatural." He describes Siamese twins as an example of this "human monster." While nature designs a person to have one body and one head, here it gives us a mixture, breaking its own laws. This "provokes either violence, the will for pure and simple suppression, or medical care or pity" (Foucault 55-56).

Foucault's concept of monstrosity as well as the reactions associated with it can very well be traced in *Tara*. The repeated use of the word 'freak' (an echo of "monster") throughout the play describes the twins' childhood as heavily stigmatized. Although both of them are smart, intelligent, fun-loving individuals, their capabilities are continuously questioned, and they are looked down upon by society. They are trapped in the identity of freak children, and their survival is deemed unnatural, "It is indeed a miracle that they were born alive. Twins with a conjunction of such complexity are, in most cases, stillborn" (Dattani 1.331). Further, when they grow up, the objectification of their bodies leads them to form negative self-images. Even their parents take part in this process as they constantly remind their children of their shortcomings. Bharati strives to give Tara special treatment because she wants to make up in some ways "for what she... doesn't have" (1.340). As a result, they become more concerned with the missing part of their bodies, along with losing a part of their identities. For instance, when Chandan jokes about their house being invaded by 'bodysnatchers', Tara replies: "They won't get much, will they?" (2.359). Similarly, Chandan is scared of going to college because he is "afraid they won't see beyond" his impairment (2.361). All these instances highlight the way Dattani portrays the ills associated with abnormality in ancient times as well as their lasting shadow on disabled people till now.

Dattani also questions the concept of 'normality' in *Tara*. The disabled twins are placed against Roopa, a representative of the 'normal' group of society. She is a hypocrite, seemingly foolish and loquacious girl who repeatedly becomes the reason for her own ridiculous portrayal. When

Tara describes herself as 'strong', 'healthy' and 'beautiful', Roopa instantly disagrees and assumes that these qualities belong to her because she is the normal one (1.329). She later calls Tara a "one-legged thing"; and this is where Tara retorts, "I'd sooner be one-eyed, one-armed and one-legged than be an imbecile like you. An imbecile with uneven tits" (2.369). Here, Tara's wit, anger, frustration, and revolt against Roopa make the situation more realistic. These feelings add to her character of liveliness as she is not the one to keep suffering. Moreover, by affirming that physical deformity may be present in anyone in different forms, along with a conceited personality in Roopa's case, Dattani seems to argue that 'normality' is ambiguous.

While Chandan and Tara become the prototypes for Foucault's 'monster', it is difficult to put the characters in *Brief Candle* in one of Foucault's categories. Foucault distinguishes between monstrosity and disability by illustrating that while the latter "may not conform to nature," it does not breach the law or question its structure because nature, in some way "provides" for it (64). Surprisingly, Foucault's second form of abnormality, "the individual to be corrected," comes quite close to the portrayal of the cancer patients in *Brief Candle* (Foucault 57). While Foucault based this idea in a narrow domestic sphere meant to contain and control the individual, Dattani presents how the need for correction in the bodies of the patients overshadows their entire lives. Shanti, Amarinder, Amol and Vikas are reduced to their disabled selves and reactions such as a need for control and pity follow. When Vikas puts the medicine in his pocket, instead of consuming it, Mahesh suspects him of collecting the tablets so that he could die by taking them all at once. But when Vikas confronts him by saying that there are better alternatives to die, Mahesh exclaims, "If you try to do such things... your hands will be tied to the bed. That is what we do to people who pull out their feeding tubes or run to the balcony to jump" (2.17).

Further, while discussing their responses to whether Amarinder should live or die, Mahesh tries to show him sympathy for his poor, tragic state, but Amarinder retorts with disagreement, "Enough! It is that kind of sympathy that I cannot bear to see in other men! I envy you. I envy you your life and your health. But please don't pity me!" (3.24). Dattani, in this way, creates a realistic environment where the original reactions to disability mark the individuals as insignificant, inferior, and weak. Even Deepika, who appears as a concerned doctor, tacitly accepts her view of a patient as a "rotting tree" with a worthless existence (3.25).

These individuals, whose only visible aspect is their need to be corrected, get trapped in a narrative obsessed with normalization. In *Technologies of the Self*, Foucault talks about the devices and methods of intervention that help individuals attain a greater standard of life by transforming their bodies, souls, or both. However, when these technologies are used as tools of power, they render disabled people even more helpless by making them “consumers” (Anders 15). In a detailed study of Foucault’s theories on technologies of the self, power, and societal control, Abram Anders writes: “One of the most perplexing aspects of engaging in disability studies and activism is that it is difficult to imagine doing without these forms of intervention. Yet, this difficulty only foregrounds the fact that disabled people are uniquely vulnerable to the control of disciplinary mechanisms through their dependence on medical care and intervention” (15).

The character of Dr Thakkar with his “sheer God-like presence” in *Tara* perfectly embodies the power of this control (323). An example of medical, cultural and social corruption, he exemplifies how easy it is to manipulate two disabled bodies in exchange for wealth. Tara’s mother and grandfather are no less responsible for perpetuating gender discrimination in the name of medical surgery. Thus, Chandan’s impression of hospitals as a “painful necessity” (333) comes along with his hatred of the “smells”, the “people” and the “sterility” that the place reeks of (366). Similarly, in *Brief Candle*, Dattani gives an intense account of the horrors faced by cancer patients when they are dispossessed of their own bodies. Amarinder, who was a patient of prostate cancer, shares how he felt helpless when the medical equipment was “drilling inside” his body. The agony of that painful memory is captured in powerful words, “All that was under attack with a group of needles probing at my prostate, through the wall of my rectum. Like being sodomized with metal” (3.23). Being a patient of breast cancer, Shanti also undergoes medical operations where her breast is surgically removed. Devoid of her femininity, she becomes the ‘other’, viewing herself from an external perspective and struggling with the questions on her identity. She recounts her surgical experience:

I lay exposed to the technicians, my breast pushed against the X-ray plate. One of them marked my lumps, treating my breast as if it were already a piece of dead flesh... At least I could say no to Mukund, but the doctors, lab technicians... Their job was to invade my body and take out tumours, and they did. But they grew and came back till they took it all out. A part of me that I had barely felt. That I had never seen fully myself. Gone. (5.32)

Both Amarinder and Shanti's stories reflect upon the harrowing effects of biotechnological intervention on patients' bodies. Dattani's major concern with the marginalization of disabled persons is underlined with this treatment, where the human aspect is entirely lost and is taken over by the biomedical body that is meant to be controlled and exploited. The re-emphasis on the bodily descriptions and the focus on the material bodies as sites of torment is representative of the performativity of bodies. Dattani's use of performativity helps in examining the actual struggles of disabled people by giving a tangible form to their physical, mental and social distress. Moreover, to support this portrayal of embodiment in *Brief Candle*, Dattani uses the "Face of Cancer", which is "ravaged by the effects of chemotherapy and is now ready to give up the struggle" (7). On the other hand, Chandan and Tara's prosthetic legs become the sites for humour and insults targeted towards them, thus embodying the dehumanization that parallels disability. It is evident then, that the technologies incorporated in the discourse of disability come with their own ills.

Moving away from the historical aspects of abnormality and disability viewed only in the medical sense, the social model of disability that appeared in the second half of the twentieth century calls for a perspective beyond medical and technological terms. It views disability as a social and political problem, resulting from the discriminatory and oppressive practices prevalent in society. Such generally accepted ideas are being questioned now with the advance of disability studies. Adrienne Asch, an American bioethics scholar who worked for the inclusion of people with disabilities in mainstream discourses regarding end-of-life care, argues that for people with declining health, an affirmation of life with dignity, meaning, and celebration is as important as acknowledging the loss of capacity and eventual death. She highlights the importance of improving family relationships, social roles, and others' perceptions in maintaining the quality of life rather than assuming death to be the only viable solution (Asch S31- S36).

Dattani also highlights the economic problems faced by the disabled. In *Brief Candle*, Amol's cry for help and his desperate groping in the air is for all those people and memories that he has left behind. Yet, Dattani shows how his appeal to hide from them emerges due to the fear of burdening his family with his economic concerns, seen when he implores, "My insurance is not going to last long. And I don't want Rose to work any harder than she is. So, hide me. Please." (6.38). The hospice, the final place that is meant to care for patients turns him out due to a lack of money; he is only able to stay there because of Vikas' benevolence. But, not everyone

is fortunate to get such help and Dattani establishes the lack of economic support as supplementing the misery suffered by persons with disability as well as their families. The tragic state of Amol and its depiction provoke an urgent response for the need for developments in the field of disability.

The social model of disability also brings a shift to the way we perceive psychological disabilities. The dramatist explores the innate psyche of each individual coping with cancer in *Brief Candle*. He also talks about the disability that stems not from a physical condition, but from deep emotional and mental affliction. Deepika's inability to perform the drama and her lost demeanour can perhaps be ascribed to her psychological inability to cope with the internal turmoil arising because of her guilt and the tormenting memories of her past. Her relationship with Vikas did not end on a happy note. Moreover, the suffering undergone by Vikas after he contracted AIDS, his subsequent death because of cancer, and Deepika's helplessness in all this make her a victim of inner conflicts and distress. Dattani here projects psychological distress, the way it manifests itself in people as well as the strength required to overcome it.

The role of guilt in subsequent behaviour is also depicted in *Tara*. Bharati is seen as a doting mother, paying compensatory attention and love to Tara to the extent that it becomes pretentious. This compensation, as described by Patel, stems from her guilt of being involved with her father in the manipulation of the surgery to favour Chandan over Tara. Although Dattani allows only Patel's perspective in the play, Bharati's actions can be seen as her attempts to repent, and to prove and justify her love for Tara. The role of guilt here is quite different from how it plays out for Dan, whose way of dealing with it is escapism. However, in both cases, the consequences lead the characters to border on madness. Later, when Tara is being told about Bharati's nervous breakdown, her reactions are mimed over Roopa's speech. As Tara turns to Patel with a look of pain, Roopa tells her friends: "I tell you that whole family is crazy. And I always knew that mother of hers was bonkers. They say she had a nervous breakdown. I think she has finally gone completely loony. Stark naked mad" (2.358). Roopa's apathy is a strong commentary on the insensitivity of society towards persons with mental impairments. Dattani's technique of juxtaposing the family's pain and grief with the cold dialogues of Roopa running in the background sets forth his idea of highlighting the stigma and oppression associated with disability.

The root causes of guilt in both the plays remain, at least in some part, the deeply ingrained concepts of gender bias and discrimination. Many

conflicts introduced in the plays result from unequal treatment of men and women. In *Brief Candle*, for instance, when Vikas leaves college, he asks Deepika to come with her as if her dreams and desires do not matter. Deepika, however, refuses to go with him. Although she realizes Vikas' promiscuity and thereby seeks another partner, she is still expected to protect Vikas from this hurt by staying faithful to him. When Deepika finally confronts the dead Vikas, she underlines his hypocrisy while saying:

Oh come on! Regret? You just show up one day – sick. Deepika, nursemaid, take care of me now. Hug me now, and love me. Why? Because you were dying? Because you are a man and I am a woman? It's my job to nurture you? Because you have no one else? Where are all the whores, truck drivers, beggars you spent so much time with? Why didn't you ask them to hold you and touch you now? Why me? (6.39)

Deepika here does not question just Vikas but the entire framework of patriarchy that keeps women at a lesser place and demands them to be self-sacrificing and tolerant of men's problematic behaviour. Vikas thought about Deepika only at the end, when he had nowhere else to go, but Deepika's duty was still to accept him and nurture him as a woman should. These acquired gender roles are expected to be her defining characteristics, and her suppressed anger at Vikas' objectionable past has to struggle to find its way out. Dattani, thus, presents what Simone de Beauvoir claims in *The Second Sex*, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman." (qtd. in Borkataki 3). Woman's identity is not determined by her biology, but society and men define her roles, in turn rendering her subordinate and voiceless.

Similarly, in *Tara*, the Patel family is a typically Indian patriarchal family, with Patel being the head of the house and the rest of the characters his subordinates. He has a conservative mindset of following the stereotypical gender roles. Men should be strong, rational, and independent, whereas women are expected to be docile, sensitive, and dependent on their male counterparts. Patel's ideas and hopes for his children are definite. He is adamant about sending Chandan to college and taking him to office for experience. But for Tara, the priority is doing the household chores. When he finds Chandan helping Bharati with knitting, he gets furious and immediately asks him to let Tara do the work. When Chandan objects to leave, Patel starts blaming Bharati for "turning him into a sissy" and exclaims that he cannot see him "rotting at home" (1.351).



This single incident raises several questions on gender roles and identity. Firstly, Patel accusing Bharati for not raising the children in line with their gender norms reflects society's preoccupation with a mother's duty and neglect. Even though Chandan argues that it was his choice, Patel's anger bursts out on Bharati, and she is considered the culprit of propagating such distasteful practices in their house. Secondly, Patel's distinction of male and female territories of work brings attention to the limited sphere of opportunities allowed for women. While Chandan can go out and explore the world, Tara's ideal world has to be her home. A similar stereotype is also exhibited when Bharati's father leaves his entire legacy to Chandan as the male child is supposed to be the family heir. Third and perhaps the most important question addressed here and throughout the play is of heteronormativity. Butler's concept of "gender performativity" comes into play here as the accepted conventions of binary gender performances get reversed.

The concept of heteronormativity can again be traced to Foucault's 'monstrosity.' Developing his idea of hermaphrodites as 'monsters' in the Classical Age, he goes on to argue that in the beginning of nineteenth century, the attribution of monstrosity shifts from "juridico-natural" to a "juridico-moral" domain, and a new "monstrosity of conduct" emerges (Foucault 73). He implies that the presence of a hermaphroditic body is not abnormal anymore; rather abnormality ensues when a person goes against the moral laws that define his or her sex and associated character. In short, individual conduct with regard to moral norms gains newfound importance at the start of nineteenth century. More recently, in her seminal work *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler came up with her profound theory of "gender performativity," where she argues about the social construction of gender as "*a stylized repetition of acts*" and imitative of the dominant conventions of it. In her view, when gender occupies a social distinction, sex itself becomes a social category, as it is subsumed by gender. Therefore, she maintains, gender cannot exist as a natural, pre-existing identity but is created and perpetuated through social and cultural norms which assume and dictate a gender-binary existence (179).

When gender is "performative," any deviation from its conventions becomes unacceptable. However, Tara and Chandan go against the gender norms, not just with their actions, but also through their personalities. Tara is outspoken, fearless, and protesting while Chandan is more reserved, sensitive, and accepting. We also see them at their strongest when they are together. Chandan and Tara form a world of their own giving each other the love and acceptance that they yearn. This strong connection can

also be interpreted to what Dattani sees as the gendered self; he remarks that the play is “about the self, about the man and the woman in self” and about coming to terms with “the feminine in the self” (Mee 21). From the perspective of this narrative, then, Dan’s forgetting of his memories of Tara can be seen as a rejection of his own feminine half that he had to hide because of the dominant gender binary norms; his guilt then may emerge from the suppression of his real identity. While this complex narrative looms in the background, it is also true that the twins try to seek out ways to live their lives outside the pervasive gender norms.

On the contrary, in *Brief Candle*, the characters strive towards acceptance by trying to fit in the conventional gender roles. Shanti is conditioned to be a shy and modest wife; let alone embracing, even acknowledgement of her sexuality was a remote concept for her. But after losing her breast to cancer, she regrets not loving her body (5.33). She becomes the ‘other’ in her own body as her vision is now controlled by others’ perceptions. When Amarinder accidentally sees her naked, he “*recoils involuntarily,*” tormenting her ‘self’ for being less of a woman (4.31). Similarly, Amarinder, suffering from prostate cancer, also goes through an identity crisis, indicated when he exclaims: “What made me a man? Climbing a mountain, playing a game of hockey, knowing I could satisfy a woman in bed... If I did have cancer, they will remove my prostate. A gland the size of a walnut that defines my maleness” (3.23). These reiterated questions of gender and sexuality depict the characters’ view of themselves as abnormal because they could not act out the culturally defined binary performances for each gender. They are stigmatized as disabled, not just because of their illnesses, but also as a consequence of their gendered identities. This depiction once again takes us back to the “Face of Cancer”, which is described as “an androgynous face that is melting” (7). It suggests their brief life as well as their identities melting away from the normal binary status of man and woman.

Dattani once again combines disability and gender issues in defining marginalization in *Tara*. A recent study talks about the theory of “biological reductionism” as a “tool to validate the patriarchal manipulations” in *Tara*. The study argues that by reducing them to their biological sexes, the biased characters “naturalize the gender inequality that Tara faces” (Nimisha 5399). Dattani’s concept of nature versus society exposes how societal and cultural prejudices are covered up by justifying the discrimination as a natural act of God. For instance, Dr Thakkar states: “Our greatest challenge would be to keep the girl alive. Nature wanted to kill her. We couldn’t allow it” (Dattani *Tara* 2.376). Even though it was his unfair sur-

gery that made Tara's health critical, he nevertheless explains it through nature. This entire journey of false attribution, pain, grief and guilt starts on the basis of gender discrimination.

Entangled in the complex problems of gender and disability, Patel family strives to maintain their social standards and family image. Education, progress, and development dictate equality, but the long-established rich Indian culture and tradition of male child preference doesn't seem to go away. Dattani juxtaposes Chandan and Bharati's conversation about women education with Roopa's exposure of an appalling Indian ritual of female infanticide:

ROOPA. Since you insist, I will tell you. It may not be true. But this is what I have heard. The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies – you know dowry and things like that – so they used to drown them in milk.

Pause.

TARA. In milk?

ROOPA. So when people asked about how the baby died, they would say that she choked while drinking her milk.

Pause.

TARA. (*laughs suddenly*). How absurd! (1.349)

Ironically, Tara, who laughs at the absurdity of this practice, was herself a victim of such discriminatory actions, which ultimately led to her death. Bharati's attempts of preventing Roopa from telling this story demonstrate the façade of morality worn by modern families to hide their ugly truths. Dattani brutally mocks the superficiality of cultured societies and the pretence of civilization that people hide behind to justify their prejudices and crimes.

It is not surprising then, that the twins find the womb of their mother a much better world. Society has led them to this imperfect world where life is difficult and so much more for those who are marginalized. While disability leaves both of them as unacceptable "freaks," Tara's gender denies her even the opportunity to try and make her place in the world. Bharati also speaks out about her fear and apprehension for Tara:

It's all right while she is young. It's all very cute and comfortable when she makes witty remarks. But let her grow up. Yes, Chandan. The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you – but not her! Oh, the pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable. And what about forty and fifty! Oh God! (1.348-49)

In a way, the leg that belonged to Tara but was given to Chandan becomes a symbol of denied opportunities, which haunt both of them. In both the plays, the intersection of gender and disability creates deeper problems. As Shuchi Karim argues, women with disabilities are “marginalised and dis-empowered by two movements”. Their opportunities are restricted and even their efforts go in vain because they are treated “as ‘special needs’ group, which is viewed with pity and charity but with very little understanding” (Karim 70). Dattani takes up this case differently in both the plays. In *Brief Candle*, the objectifying attitude towards Shanti is a strong argument of her gendered disability, but, in the end, we also see her standing up against the injustice and there is a hope that she will choose the path to her happiness as we see her waltzing with Amarinder. On the contrary, Tara, although subverting the gender hierarchy by being equal, probably even better than Chandan in some aspects, has to lose her life under the heavy weight of patriarchy. However, the exclusion and neglect faced by women remain the same.

Through Dan's version of the story in *Tara*, Dattani also takes us closer to the solution required to change the dynamics of gender marginalization. In the end, Dan wishes for Tara's forgiveness and the stage fades into a spot where Tara and Chandan walk in, without limping, and embrace each other. Dan's dream is ideal; it is the perfect world like the one inside the womb; where gender doesn't dictate life and the self is not broken down into separate pieces. Dan finally asks Tara to forgive him “for making it [his] tragedy” (2.380). Dan's helplessness in Tara's injustice and death is the vulnerability of a part separated from the whole. Dattani, in this way, portrays the complete picture of gender dynamics and highlights the concept of androgyny as a real, potential answer to the regressive gender norms. He illustrates, in a beautifully tragic manner, that an equal status and recognition of both male and female within oneself as well as out in the world is a necessity that encourages justice.

Similarly, for any individual with disability, the main problem from a social context lies in the attitudes of pity, fear, horror, or disrespect held for persons with disability. However, studies have recently defined a con-

cept called the “disability paradox”, which defines the importance of the environment in the dealings of disabled individuals. Tom Shakespeare elaborates upon it, “surveys reveal how people with disabilities consistently report a quality of life as good as, or sometimes even better than, that of nondisabled people.” He maintains that although disabled people are disadvantaged in many ways, their tendency of “adapting” to those situations and to derive happiness from them is very often hindered by negative social attitudes towards disability.

It is clear from the above arguments that social and cultural contexts significantly determine the extent of marginalization. Whether it is against women, men, or persons with disability, prejudice plays a great role. The preconceived notions about their capabilities render them helpless as they are excluded from the ‘normal’ population and deprived of their well-deserved opportunities. The most fundamental solution to these injustices, then, has to be acceptance. Dattani seems to follow this route as well. The characters in *Brief Candle* follow a journey of realizing their own innocence against society; their acceptance and love towards each other make them believe in themselves. Although Dattani ends the play on an ambiguous note, there is a hope that the characters have found that ray of light which will give them a new life. Contrastingly, *Tara’s* ending is that of utter hopelessness. Although Tara and Chandan accepted each other, their innocent world was perhaps too small to resist the experience of the darkly real world outside. Dattani’s powerful take on marginalization poses several questions which move the audience and the readers to wake up and seek their answers, a much needed change in building a better society equally inclusive of every individual.

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