

Mother-Daughter Relationship and Internalised Misogyny in *Tara* by Mahesh Dattani

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Abstract

This paper explores the complex mother-daughter relationship and the theme of internalised misogyny in *Tara* by Mahesh Dattani. The play centres around Tara and Chandan, conjoined twins whose surgical separation reflects the societal privileging of male futures over female well-being. Bharati, the twins' mother, is portrayed as loving and protective, yet her decision to favour Chandan in the surgery stems from deep-rooted patriarchal conditioning. Bharati's guilt over this decision manifests in excessive care and affection toward Tara, which ultimately reinforces Tara's sense of inadequacy and emotional detachment. Tara's growing awareness of her mother's betrayal creates emotional conflict, highlighting the psychological toll of internalised misogyny on female identity. Through Bharati and Tara's strained relationship, Dattani critiques the societal structures that reinforce gender discrimination and the emotional consequences of privileging male futures over female well-being. The paper argues that *Tara* serves as a feminist critique of patriarchal values and calls for greater gender equality and social awareness.

Keywords: Mother-Daughter Relationship, Internalised Misogyny, Gender Discrimination, Patriarchy, Female Identity, and Psychological Conflict.

Introduction

Mahesh Dattani is one of the most influential playwrights in contemporary Indian English theatre, known for his fearless exploration of social issues that remain deeply embedded in Indian society. His plays delve into complex themes of gender, sexuality, family dynamics, and social injustice. *Tara* (1990), one of his most acclaimed works, exposes the deep-rooted gender bias and patriarchal conditioning that shape personal

relationships and influence individual destinies. Through the story of conjoined twins, Tara and Chandan, Dattani explores how societal values infiltrate family structures, influencing parental decisions and creating emotional and psychological conflicts within the family unit. The play centres around the surgical separation of Tara and Chandan, which results in Chandan receiving the additional leg that was biologically more suitable for Tara. This medical decision, influenced by societal pressure to prioritise the male child's future over the female's, becomes the emotional and psychological core of the play. While Bharati, the twins' mother, is portrayed as loving and protective toward Tara, her decision to favour Chandan reveals the unconscious internalisation of patriarchal norms. Bharati's guilt over this decision manifests as excessive affection and care toward Tara, but this overcompensation fails to heal the emotional damage caused by the initial betrayal.

The mother-daughter relationship in *Tara* is characterised by a deep emotional bond, but also by tension and conflict stemming from Bharati's internalised misogyny. While Bharati's maternal love is genuine, her decisions reflect the societal conditioning that privileges male children over female children. Tara's growing awareness of this bias creates emotional distance between her and her mother, contributing to her psychological decline and tragic fate. This paper explores how Dattani presents the mother-daughter relationship as a site of conflict, shaped by internalised misogyny and patriarchal conditioning. It argues that Bharati's actions, though motivated by love, are ultimately influenced by societal values that reinforce female inferiority, leading to Tara's emotional and psychological downfall.

Background and Context

Tara is deeply rooted in the social and cultural landscape of Indian society, where gender roles and family structures are defined by patriarchal values. In Indian society, male children are often viewed as future heirs and breadwinners, while female children are considered economic burdens due to practices such as dowry and inheritance laws. This gender bias is reflected in various aspects of life, including education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Dattani exposes these structural inequalities through the intimate setting of the Patel family, highlighting how societal norms influence parental decisions and shape individual destinies.

The preference for male children in Indian society stems from economic, social, and cultural factors. Sons are seen as extensions of the family lineage and potential sources of financial security, while daughters are often viewed as liabilities due to the expenses associated with marriage and dowry. This preference manifests in unequal access to resources, opportunities, and even medical care. In *Tara*, this societal bias is reflected in the decision to give Chandan the additional leg during the separation surgery, even though

it was biologically better suited for Tara. The decision is not made out of malice, but as a reflection of deeply ingrained social norms that prioritise male futures over female well-being.

Dattani presents the Patel family as a microcosm of Indian society, where patriarchal values dictate family dynamics and interpersonal relationships. Bharati's decision to favour Chandan reflects the internalisation of these values, despite her genuine love for Tara. This tension between maternal instincts and societal conditioning forms the emotional core of the play, highlighting the psychological and emotional consequences of gender discrimination within the family.

The medical establishment's complicity in this decision reflects the broader institutionalised nature of gender bias. The doctor's willingness to perform the surgery in a way that favours the male child underscores how deeply embedded patriarchal values are within Indian society. By situating the conflict within a medical and familial context, Dattani exposes the intersection of personal and institutional patriarchy, showing how it shapes individual destinies and familial relationships.

The Mother-Daughter Relationship in Tara

The relationship between Bharati and Tara is one of the most complex and emotionally charged dynamics in the play. Bharati is portrayed as a loving and protective mother, but her decisions are shaped by patriarchal conditioning, creating an underlying tension between maternal love and societal values. While Bharati's affection for Tara is genuine, her actions are influenced by the internalised belief that Chandan's future is more valuable than Tara's. This creates a psychological conflict within Bharati and emotional vulnerability within Tara, leading to the tragic unraveling of their relationship.

Bharati's decision to favour Chandan stems from the societal pressure to secure the male child's future. The surgery, which results in Chandan receiving the additional leg, symbolises this prioritisation of male privilege over female well-being. Bharati's guilt over this decision manifests in her excessive care and affection toward Tara. She tries to compensate for her betrayal by giving Tara emotional and material comforts, but this overcompensation only deepens Tara's emotional wounds. Tara becomes increasingly aware of the unequal treatment and resents her mother's attempts to mask the injustice through indulgence.

Tara's growing awareness of her mother's complicity in the decision creates emotional distance between them. While Bharati tries to protect Tara from the harsh realities of societal discrimination, Tara internalises the belief that she is less valuable than Chandan. This realisation leads to feelings of resentment and emotional detachment, reinforcing Tara's psychological vulnerability. The emotional conflict between Bharati and

Tara remains unresolved, highlighting the destructive impact of internalised misogyny on familial relationships.

Bharati's eventual breakdown reflects the internal conflict between her maternal instincts and societal conditioning. She recognises the injustice of her actions but feels powerless to challenge the social norms that shaped them. This emotional tension culminates in Tara's tragic death, which serves as a symbolic indictment of patriarchal values and their devastating consequences on female identity and agency.

Internalized Misogyny and Its Manifestation

Internalised misogyny is a key theme in *Tara*, reflected in Bharati's decisions and the emotional consequences for Tara. Internalised misogyny refers to the subconscious acceptance of patriarchal values by women, leading them to reinforce gender inequality even within their own families. Bharati's decision to favour Chandan is not driven by personal malice but by societal conditioning that privileges male futures over female well-being.

Bharati's internalisation of these values reflects the broader cultural practice of valuing sons over daughters. Despite her love for Tara, Bharati's actions reveal the deep-seated belief that securing Chandan's future is more important than ensuring Tara's well-being. This conflict between maternal love and societal conditioning creates emotional and psychological tension within Bharati, contributing to her breakdown and emotional vulnerability.

For Tara, the consequences of internalised misogyny are profound. Tara's growing awareness of her mother's favouritism leads to feelings of rejection and emotional detachment. She internalises the belief that she is less valuable than Chandan, reinforcing her sense of inadequacy and psychological vulnerability. Tara's eventual emotional collapse reflects the destructive impact of internalised misogyny on female identity and agency.

Conflict and Resolution

The emotional tension in *Tara* builds gradually as the psychological conflict between Tara and Bharati intensifies. The conflict stems from Bharati's decision to prioritise Chandan's future over Tara's well-being- a decision influenced by patriarchal conditioning rather than personal malice. Tara's growing awareness of this betrayal creates emotional distance between her and her mother, deepening the psychological conflict that drives the play's tragic conclusion.

Dattani structures the conflict as a series of emotional confrontations between Tara and Bharati, interspersed with Bharati's attempts to reconcile with her daughter. Bharati's excessive care and indulgence toward Tara reflect her guilt over the medical decision to

give Chandan the additional leg. She tries to compensate for this injustice by showering Tara with affection and material comforts, but this overcompensation only deepens Tara's sense of inadequacy and emotional detachment.

Tara's resentment toward Bharati becomes more pronounced as the play progresses. She recognises the unequal treatment and questions the societal values that underpin it. Tara's emotional vulnerability stems from her internalised sense of inferiority-a consequence of Bharati's decision to prioritise Chandan's future over hers. This internal conflict is reinforced by Bharati's emotional breakdown, which reveals the depth of her guilt and the societal pressure that shaped her actions.

The turning point occurs when Tara confronts Bharati about the surgical decision. Tara's direct questioning forces Bharati to confront the emotional consequences of her actions. Bharati's admission of guilt underscores the tension between maternal love and societal conditioning. She acknowledges that the decision to favour Chandan was influenced by patriarchal values, but her emotional breakdown reflects the unresolved conflict between maternal instincts and internalised misogyny.

Tara's emotional detachment following this confrontation signifies the psychological toll of Bharati's actions. Tara's awareness of her mother's betrayal reinforces her sense of alienation and emotional vulnerability. The psychological consequences of this betrayal culminate in Tara's tragic death, which serves as a symbolic indictment of patriarchal values and their impact on female identity.

Bharati's emotional breakdown at the end of the play reflects the tragic consequences of internalised misogyny. Her maternal love is genuine, but her actions were shaped by societal values that privileged male futures over female well-being. The unresolved emotional tension between Bharati and Tara underscores the broader societal failure to value female identity and agency. Tara's death symbolises the structural disadvantages faced by women in patriarchal societies and the emotional consequences of internalised misogyny within the family.

Dattani leaves the conflict unresolved, highlighting the cyclical nature of gender discrimination and societal oppression. Bharati's breakdown signifies the psychological toll of internalised misogyny, while Tara's death reflects the tragic consequences of societal failure to value female identity. Through this unresolved conflict, Dattani critiques the societal structures that reinforce gender inequality and the emotional and psychological consequences of patriarchal conditioning.

Feminist Reading of Tara

A feminist reading of *Tara* reveals Dattani's critique of patriarchal values and their impact on familial relationships. The play challenges the societal privileging of male

futures over female well-being and exposes the emotional and psychological consequences of this structural inequality. Through Bharati's decision to favour Chandan, Dattani highlights how patriarchal values are internalised and reinforced within the family, creating emotional and psychological conflicts that shape individual destinies.

Bharati's decision to prioritise Chandan's future reflects the broader societal practice of valuing male children over female children. This preference is rooted in patriarchal structures that define male children as future heirs and economic providers, while female children are often viewed as economic burdens due to practices such as dowry and inheritance laws. By situating the conflict within a medical and familial context, Dattani exposes how societal values shape personal decisions and emotional relationships.

From a feminist perspective, Bharati's internal conflict reflects the tension between maternal instincts and patriarchal conditioning. Her guilt over the surgical decision reveals the emotional toll of internalised misogyny and the psychological consequences of privileging male futures over female well-being. Bharati's breakdown at the end of the play signifies the emotional consequences of this internal conflict and the societal failure to support female identity and agency.

Tara's growing awareness of this inequality reinforces her emotional vulnerability and psychological decline. Her sense of alienation stems from her internalisation of societal values that devalue female identity. Tara's eventual death symbolises the structural disadvantages faced by women in patriarchal societies and the emotional consequences of societal failure to value female lives equally.

Dattani's feminist critique extends beyond the personal to the institutional and societal. The medical establishment's complicity in the surgical decision reflects the broader institutionalised nature of gender discrimination. By exposing the intersection of personal and institutional patriarchy, Dattani highlights the systemic nature of gender inequality and its emotional and psychological consequences.

The unresolved conflict between Bharati and Tara underscores the cyclical nature of patriarchal oppression. Tara's death serves as a tragic reminder of the societal failure to value female identity and agency. Bharati's breakdown reflects the emotional toll of internalised misogyny and the psychological consequences of privileging male futures over female well-being. Through *Tara*, Dattani critiques the societal structures that reinforce gender inequality and calls for greater gender equality and social introspection.

Conclusion

Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* is a powerful exploration of gender bias, internalised misogyny, and maternal conflict. Through the story of Tara and Chandan, Dattani exposes the deep-rooted patriarchal values that shape parental decisions and create emotional and

psychological conflicts within the family. Bharati's decision to favour Chandan reflects the societal privileging of male futures over female well-being, highlighting the structural disadvantages faced by women in patriarchal societies.

The mother-daughter relationship in *Tara* is characterised by a complex interplay of maternal love and societal conditioning. Bharati's guilt over the surgical decision creates emotional tension and psychological vulnerability within Tara, reinforcing her sense of inadequacy and emotional detachment. Tara's growing awareness of this inequality deepens the emotional conflict between her and Bharati, culminating in Tara's tragic death.

From a feminist perspective, Tara critiques the societal structures that reinforce gender inequality and the emotional consequences of internalised misogyny. Bharati's breakdown at the end reflects the psychological toll of privileging male futures over female well-being, while Tara's death symbolises the structural disadvantages faced by women in patriarchal societies.

Dattani challenges the audience to confront the oppressive structures that shape gender roles and familial relationships. By exposing the emotional and psychological consequences of patriarchal conditioning, Dattani calls for greater gender equality and social introspection. *Tara* serves as a poignant reminder of the societal failure to value female identity and agency, highlighting the need for greater awareness and social change.

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