

# Mother-Daughter Relationship in the Plays Tara and Thirty Days in September of Mahesh Dattani

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## Abstract

The mother-daughter relationship is the most beautiful and innocent relationship in this world. A mother does every possible thing to make her child happy. The relationship between a mother and daughter has considered one of the sweetest relationships on the planet because a daughter reflects the character and nature of her mother. In most of the cases, daughter is just the carbon copy of her mother. A child rests well in the mother's lap because it is the safest abode for the child. A child, especially a girl child is always special to her mother and vice-versa, but the feeling of being an individual gets ruined when a relationship between a mother and her daughter loses the balance. Relationships are based on trust, belief and love, and these three aspects are essential for the survival of any healthy relationship. Connections can either be made or can be broken, based on these three elements. The plays Tara and Thirty Days in September, written by the dramatist Mahesh Dattani, talk about the relationship between a mother and a daughter and the games also deal with the psychological mindset of the mother(s) and the daughter(s) and their sufferings in the urban society of India.

**Keywords:** Mother, daughter, relationship, society, sufferings, india, survival, love, trust, belief, psychology.

## 1. Introduction

The plays of Mahesh Dattani, talk about the vital issues or the maladies of the society. This paper attempts to show the impact of the social ailments on the lives and relationships of the protagonists and other characters as well, concerning the plays *Tara and Thirty Days in September*. The plays of Mahesh Dattani, depict the Indian society in a very subtle manner. The dramatist has tried to show the problems which the people face, in the Indian community, through the characters in his plays. The plays Tara and Thirty Days in September, deal mainly with the issues of patriarchal hegemony, child sexual abuse and gender bias or gender discrimination, but they also speak about various relationships and the turmoils of the minds of the characters. The particular paper attempts to show the relationship(s) between mother(s) and daughter(s) and the sufferings of their life, which are the result or impact of the social maladies. The dramatist has portrayed beautifully, the relationship between a mother and a daughter, in his plays Tara and Thirty Days in September, but the links that are mentioned in the plays, are little different, compared to the usual mother-daughter relationships.

## 2. About the author

Mahesh Dattani is one of the eminent playwrights in the world of Indian English Drama. He has the first dramatist, who has been awarded by the Sahitya Akademi Award, for his Final Solutions and Other Plays. Dattani did not start his career as a writer, but destiny brings him to the field of writing. Apart from writing, Dattani directs the plays as well, which is not that easy task. Dattani has his own theatre house, namely Playpen. The dramatist has worked with several eminent personalities like

Alyque Padamsee, Lillette Dubey, Jeremy Mortimer and so on. Some of the famous works of Mahesh Dattani are, Final Solutions, Tara, Dance Like a Man, Thirty Days in September, Where There's a Will, Mango Souffle and so on. The first full-length play which the dramatist has written is, Where There's a Will. After writing this play, he never turned back again, and today he is the most dramatist in Indian English Drama. The plays of Dattani mainly deal with the urban issues of the society of India. The problems are mostly, gender bias, patriarchal hegemony, child sexual abuse, aspects of the transgenders and so on.

## 3. Tara

The play Tara mainly deals with the theme of gender bias, followed by patriarchal hegemony. The preference of the male child over a female one destroys the lives of the children of Bharati, the mother of the protagonist Tara, in the play. Tara, the protagonist of the play, has a twin brother Chandan and both of them are conjoined twins. The girl and the boy, take birth with three legs and the girl Tara mainly owned the third leg, till the moment of the surgery because, after the surgery, the boy gets the leg. Tara provided the primary blood supply to the third leg, but just because she is a girl, she loses the most important organ of the body, and that is her "leg".

A mother usually loves all her children equally. She understands the pain of her child, especially if the child is a girl because the mother knows that how much a woman suffers, in the society. Bharati is a mother and a woman as well. But, she doesn't do a fair judgement. She chooses her son over her daughter, and that is the reason why Tara loses one of the vital organs of the body. It is true that Bharati was provoked by her father, to take such a

decision. But this shows the weak character of Bharati. She fails to stand firm, and she fails to raise her voice against the injustice done by her father to her daughter. Here raises a question and the question is, "Had Chandan owned the leg, would Bharati have decided to give it to Tara?" The answer is probably a big NO. Bharati, being a mother, did love her daughter, but she did measure her love initially, which is why she and her father ask the doctor to favour the boy child with the third leg, which did belong to the girl. Bharati doesn't show unconditional love to her daughter when she (Tara) takes birth. She suffers whole life with this guilt, and that is the reason she tries to compensate her passion to Tara, in every possible way she can. Bharati at times gets over caring about her daughter, and she always keeps a watch on Tara.

Bharati suffers from the fear of losing her daughter because she thinks that, if her daughter comes to know the truth, she might start hating her mother. Bharati doesn't even allow Tara, to talk to her father much, because he is aware of the fact. Tara loves everyone in her family, but she loves her mother the most. She even considers her mother as her idol. But Tara gets a jolt of her life when she gets to know the truth from her father, Mr Patel. Tara becomes speechless, and she fails to believe that her mother could do like this. But before she could speak to her mother regarding this, Bharati goes insane. Bharati decides to give her daughter, every possible happiness of the world. She even donates one of her kidneys to her daughter, so that she can survive in the world for some extra period. Bharati's wrong decision ruins the lives of both Tara and Chandan because the surgery couldn't bring success. The operation successfully separates the conjoined twins, but the choice of giving the third leg to the boy goes wrong as the leg did not work in the body of Chandan. Because of the operation, both Tara and Chandan become disabled.

Bharati doesn't encourage her disabled daughter, but as a mother, she should have helped her daughter, though Tara is strong enough to manage her life on her own. Instead, she says to her son Chandan, that, the world would accept him, though he is disabled. But the world is not going to take Tara. Bharati, shows discrimination again, at this point of view. Though it also shows her concern for her daughter, she fails to maintain an equilibrium in her relationships with her children. She ends up, in discriminating between her son and daughter, sometimes unknowingly and sometimes knowingly.

Bharati: 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 or fifty! Oh God! (Collected Plays, Tara, 349)

Bharati, is an educated woman, in the play. She is also from a wealthy and sophisticated family. Being a mother and being an educated lady, the decision of favouring the boy child with the leg doesn't go with her character. It is clear from the depiction of her character by the dramatist, that, she is a woman who doesn't have a strong personality. Though she has given her consent for the surgery, she is also the victim of patriarchal dominance because her father leaves no option left for her, but to say yes for the operation. Bharati's personal preference and her father's patriarchal dominance, ruin not only the lives of the twins but also the presence of Bharati because, she (Bharati), suffers whole life with the guilt that she has spoiled the life of her daughter, knowingly.

The relationship of Bharati and Tara, as a mother and daughter, is not a usual one, it is little different from the other mother-daughter relationships because usually, a woman becomes stable in her decisions when she becomes a mother. She becomes responsible as well. But, Bharati fails to show all these aspects in her character. Bharati loves her children. Instead, she becomes over caring and possessive about Tara. As Bharati, takes away a vital organ from her daughter, she, in turn, gives her an essential organ from her own body. She donates one of her kidneys to her

daughter, and the last stage of the life of Bharati ends up pathetically because she goes insane forever. The guilt and fear, leave Bharati nowhere. Tara gets a jolt when she comes to know the truth of her mother. She becomes speechless. Bharati used to address Tara, as her Tara, that is a star. Tara shockingly says just one statement at the end of the play, which is her last dialogue because she passes away after that. The previous report by Tara means everything. It clearly shows, that, how much agony she gets the moment she faces the truth. Tara's last statement in the play is for her mother where she says, And she called me her star! (Collected Plays, Tara, 379)

#### 4. Thirty days in september

The play *Thirty Days in September* mainly revolves around the story of two people, Mala and her mother Shanta, who are the victims of child sexual abuse. The character of Vinay has been shown as a medium, that connects the two people, Mala and Shanta, together, but negatively, because Vinay is the bane of their life. He is the one who abuses both Shanta and her daughter Mala, sexually. The sexual abuse hits the psychological mindset of both the women, directly. As a result of the violence, Shanta becomes dumb (not literally), and Mala becomes a sex-maniac. Both of them suffer not only physically but mentally as well. The agony was in the heart, which they fail to share with each other, initially. But towards the end of the play, with the help of Deepak, Mala's friend, who later becomes her husband, both the women open their mouths against the injustice done to them, by Vinay, the brother of Shanta and the maternal uncle of Mala.

The relationship between Mala and Shanta doesn't go well. They are mother and daughter for namesake, but in reality, the relationship between them doesn't go smoothly, and there is a valid reason behind that. Mala has anger in her heart for her mother, which is deep-rooted. She has lots of allegations against her mother, and these allegations did not crop in a day or so. Vinay starts torturing Mala, at a tender age of seven. Vinay abuses his sister as well when she was only six years old. Shanta remained silent when she was, and she also remains silent, when Vinay torchieres her daughter, in front of her eyes. Mala complains against her mother, to her mother, because her (Mala's) mind is loaded with thoughts and allegations and her heart is filled with agony and uneasiness, which do not allow her to breathe properly.

Shanta fails to become the friend of her daughter. She did allow her brother, to abuse her daughter, both physically and mentally. She never really tried to listen to her daughter. Mala did try several times to share her feelings with her mother, but whenever she decided to open her mouth, Shanta stuffed her mouth with food, so that she can't speak anything to her mother. The dramatist has shown the pathetic condition of a victim of child sexual abuse, and he has also portrayed the mother-daughter relationship, where the mother shows negligence towards her daughter. Whenever Mala, tried to speak to her mother Shanta, she avoided her, either in the name of prayer or work in the kitchen. Mala: That is the trouble! That has always been the trouble! You were never there for me. You were too busy praying! (Thirty Days on September, 20)

Shanta avoids her daughter. Instead of supporting her and soothing her mentally, she increases the pain of her daughter, knowingly. Shanta spoils her own life, with her eternal silence and she also ruins the experience of her daughter, with the same silence. She teaches her daughter as well to remain silent and tolerate everything without questioning anything. Committing a crime is a sin, but enduring the offence is also a sin, and that is what Shanta does, in her life. She spoils not only her own life and the life of her daughter, but she also destroys the relationship of a mother with her daughter, because of her silence. The negligence and the ignorance of Shanta, towards her daughter, breaks the

heart of Mala into pieces. Mother is the one, who protects her child from the all the evils of the world. At least a mother tries to protect her child from the crimes, but Shanta, being a mother, fails in her duty of protecting her daughter from the demon, who is none other than her brother, Vinay. Shanta tolerates everything silently, doesn't raise her voice against anything. But, she accuses her daughter, instead of punishing her brother. Shanta avoids her daughter and says to Mala that, she is merely telling some stories, which are not real. Shanta: Mala, my daughter. What all you have been thinking all these years? You have always been so bold and frank. But sometimes, you tell stories. (Thirty Days on September,22)

Shanta is also the victim of child abuse, but she is partially responsible for the injustice, done to her by Vinay. She fails to protest against him at the right time, and that paves the way for him to continue doing his crime. The relationship between a mother and her daughter is based on love and trust, but if the trust gets broken and love disappears, then the relationship becomes fragile. Every link in the world is precious and vital, but there are certain relationships which are quite sensitive and must be handled with care and love. Otherwise, they may break into pieces like glass, in no time.

The relationship between a mother and a child, especially a mother and a daughter, is compassionate. If the link doesn't get importance, from both the ends, it leads to the destruction. Destruction of the ties are the removal of the thoughts and most importantly, disposal of the emotions and the feelings. In the play, Thirty Days in September, the root of the relationship between Shanta and her daughter Mala, is not strong enough.

The relationship between the two people lacks in certain aspects of love, care and trust. Shanta has worries about the future of her daughter. She wants her daughter to get married soon to Deepak, the friend and wellwisher of Mala. She is concerned as a mother for her daughter, but she fails to show her concern for Mala, at the right time and the right place, had she revealed that the life of her daughter would have been different. Mala always yearned to be loved and cared for by her mother, in the right way, rather the way she wanted her mother to behave. But Shanta, always ended up, in doing something, that vexes and hurts Mala, to the extreme. Mala, as a daughter, wanted the solution of her problems and agony from her mother, but she never indeed received, what she wanted from her mother, Shanta. Society, societal issues, always deprived Shanta, from doing what is right for her and her daughter. Shanta still suffered from one thing, and that is a question, "what people will say?" Shanta led her life with the fear that what people or society would think and say if they get to know everything?

Shanta remains silent, whole life with this fear and that destroys the life of her daughter and the beautiful relationship between mother and daughter. Shanta opens her mouth, almost at the end of the play, with the help and support of Deepak. She does agree with the fact; she did not try to protect her daughter Mala. But it was too late to confess and accept everything. Writer, Catherine Thankamma, in the fourth chapter of the book, *The Plays of Mahesh Dattani: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*, edited by Tutun Mukherjee, states that people like Vinay, get chance to abuse or torture women, because of the so-called patriarchal norms of the society. The men of the community, know very well, that, women like Shanta, will never go against the society, no matter what happens in their life. They know to keep the things secret, within the four walls of the room, so that they don't get insulted, because of the injustice was done to them, by the men.

## 5. Guilt

The theme of sin is present in both of the plays. In the play, Tara, Bharati, the mother of the protagonist Tara, suffers from guilt, until she goes insane entirely. Bharati discriminates between her son and her daughter, and the sense of guilt haunts her throughout her life. She tries to show her love and affection to her daughter,

in every possible way, as compensation. In the play, Thirty Days in September, Shanta, mother of Mala, also suffers from the sense of guilt, because she fails to do her duty as a mother. She fails to protect her daughter, from her brother, who rapes her at the age of seven. Shanta does avoid her daughter and her problems, but she is aware of the fact that, she is not doing a fair judgement with her daughter. She thinks now and then about her daughter marriage, and that is why when she comes to know about Deepak, she thinks of their marriage because she wants to send her daughter away from hell, which is nothing but her own house.

## 6. Fear

The sense of foreboding is also seen in the characters of the plays. In the first play, Tara, Bharati suffers from the fear of losing her daughter, because she thinks that her truth will take her daughter away from her, forever. Mr Patel, the father of Tara and Chandan, did not get any chance to protest against the decision made by Bharati and her father when his children were infants. Mr Patel, was aware of the truth, that both his wife and his father-in-law, decided to favour the boy child with the third leg, though it did belong to the girl. He tried several times, to tell the truth to his children, but Bharati did not allow him to do so. Notably, she never really allowed him to talk to their daughter, Tara. She always tried to create an impression that her husband, doesn't love Tara much, though that is not the truth. Bharati even tries to prove that her husband lies. She somehow tries to save her relationship with her daughter. She gets agitated when her husband tries to speak out the truth about her to her children, especially to Tara. Bharati: (hysterically). Stop it! Don't fill her with nonsense about me. (Collected Plays, Tara, 354)

The sense or feeling of fear arises from many reasons, but in the case of Bharati, the sense of fear takes birth because of guilt, the guilt of destroying the lives of the children, especially the daughter.

The second play, Thirty Days in September, also deals with the theme of fear. Fear is such an aspect, which is present in the play from the beginning, till almost the end of the play. The lives of the two women, especially the presence of Shanta is bound in the shackles of fear. It is the sense of dread, that deprives her of raising her voice against her brother. Vinay, Shanta's brother, torments her in her childhood and he continues touching her sexually for ten continuous years. The sense of fear ruins the life of Shanta, and the same fear destroys the experience of Mala as well, because neither Shanta opens her mouth, nor she allows her daughter to do so. The fear of the society, the fear of Vinay, makes Shanta a mute person. The fear is such an aspect or element, that may act dangerous most of the times, in the life of a person. The sense of guilt, compels a person, to repent, most of the times, in life. Whereas the thought of fear, forces people to take wrong decisions in life, most of the times and the two plays, Tara and Thirty Days in September, are the perfect example of that. On the one hand, Bharati, both knowingly and unknowingly, tries to take away the children from their father, though she does not succeed. Whereas on the other side, Shanta becomes a dumb person and doesn't protect against the injustice done to her and her daughter, by the demon Vinay, who is, unfortunately, her brother and the maternal uncle of her daughter, Mala.

## 7. Strong women versus weak women

The plays which have been chosen for the particular research paper, talk about two different kinds of women, strong and weak. The characters of both the mothers are shown as weak, in the plays. Both the women, Bharati and Shanta, are soft and submissive, in nature. Both the women, are dominated by men, in their lives. Bharati gets provoked by her father, the patriarch of the play, which is a kind of male domination. She gets influenced

by the words of her father and takes the worst decision of her life. Instead of reasoning and thinking, she does what her father makes her do. The other woman, Shanta, is not only the victim of child sexual abuse but also the victim of the destiny and the time. Shanta is also a meek, submissive woman, more than Bharati. She gets sexually abused by her brother, thus becomes the victim of child sexual abuse. She fails to share and express her thoughts to anyone, because of the fear of the society and the fear of her brother.

The destiny of Shanta doesn't help her to escape from the clutches of Vinay and the time was also not in her favour. All the circumstances go against her, but the most dangerous thing that made her suffer was her long and everlasting silence. The silence of Shanta, actually paves the way for Vinay, to continue with his crime and that is what he does. He rapes his sister, continuously for ten years. Bharati and Shanta, both of the women, are partially responsible for their situations and conditions in their lives. Both of them, fail to raise their voices, fail to protest, at the right time, at the right place, for the right cause. Bharati fails to protest against her father's injustice, done to her daughter and Shanta also fails to raise her voice against the injustice done to her and her daughter, by her brother, Vinay. Both the women were taken for granted by the men, in their lives. One one side, Bharati's father and on the other hand, Vinay, brother of Shanta, ruin the life of the two women. The patriarchal dominance, hits directly, the psychological mindset of Bharati and Shanta.

The strong characters of the plays are Tara and Mala, respectively. Though Mala is not that strong as Tara, still she can be considered as a strong woman, when compared to her mother, Shanta. Tara is a healthy girl. Despite her limited life and certain physical complications, she chooses to be plump and jovial, which is praiseworthy. Tara knows, how to be happy and satisfied, with small things in life. She doesn't like to fight upon petty issues in life, because she knows, life is short. Mala, is not that strong like Tara, as discussed before, but she is not weak as well. Several times, she tried to speak out the truth about her maternal uncle Vinay, to her mother, Shanta. But her mother avoided her, ignored her, all the time. Mala, because of the continuous sexual abuse of her uncle and the ignorance and negligence of her mother, towards her, get irritated and upset.

Mala loses her self-confidence and faith in herself, and she also starts hating people around her. But, finally, with the help of Deepak, she unveils the truth of her uncle, Vinay. She would have protested long ago, had she received some support and courage, from the side of her mother, Shanta. The similarity is usually seen, between a daughter and her mother. Similarities in characters of a mother and her daughter is a common thing. But in the plays Tara and Thirty Days in September, similarities are hardly seen, between the mothers and the daughters. Differences are noticeable, rather than similarities, in the characters of the mothers and their daughters, in the plays of the dramatist.

## 8. Conclusion

Women Empowerment is an important thing, which could help women, to escape from the clutches of the patriarchal dominance. Patriarchal dominance is an integral part of the society, and most of the relationships get spoiled, because of the presence of male domination, in the life of a person. The link of a mother and a daughter is also of no exception because this particular relationship also gets affected because of the presence of male domination and this is evident from the two plays, Tara and Thirty Days in September. The relationships in the society, get complicated and spoiled, not only because of patriarchal dominance but because of the people, their mentality and character as well. Patriarchal dominance is one of the reasons, but it is not the sole reason, of the destruction of the relationships, in the society. If people decide to be keen on their part, they no one can do

anything. It depends upon the individuals, how they want to react, in unfavourable situations or circumstances.

As discussed before, the mother-daughter relationship is a very sensitive relation, and it must be handled with care and affection. Similarly, witty and strong character, is also necessary, to save a relationship and fight back, in difficult situations. The dramatist, Mahesh Dattani, has always given importance to women in his plays and this regard, he can be compared with William Shakespeare, the great dramatist of English Literature. Shakespeare has given equal importance to women in his plays. Similarly, Dattani has also given equal importance to the women of the society, and that can be understood from his plays. Though all the women are not of strong characters, still importance has been given by the dramatist to women, in general, which cannot go unnoticeable.

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