# Permission highlights contrasting struggles for women in Karachi and London



In Hunia Chawla’s poignant play *Permission*, the quest for liberation serves as a central theme, stirring deeper exploration of the internal and external conflicts faced by women. Set against the contrasting backdrops of Karachi and London, the narrative follows Hanna, a young Pakistani woman portrayed with intensity by Anisa Butt. As she embarks on her journey seeking independence, the audience witnesses her grappling with the weight of patriarchal constraints that govern her life in Karachi, where basic freedoms, such as walking the streets alone or dating, are fraught with danger.

Life in London, however, presents its own challenges, complicating Hanna’s pursuit of autonomy. Here, she encounters Anushe, a forthright third-year student played compellingly by Rea Malhotra Mukhtyar, who encourages her to engage in activism against the university’s ties to arms dealers. This undertaking carries greater risk for Hanna, who is navigating the complexities of immigrant life on a visa. The play illuminates how various systems of control manifest differently across cultures, creating a nuanced juxtaposition between Hanna’s experiences in Karachi and London.

Beyond the broader socio-political themes, *Permission* presents a touching platonic love story. While Hanna flirts with independence by moving abroad, her loyal friend Minza, also played by Mukhtyar, remains in Karachi, passionately engaging in the Aurat Marches against gender-based injustices. Their friendship transcends physical distance, maintained through phone calls that oscillate between typical teenage worries and profound discussions regarding women's rights. Directed by Neetu Singh, these intimate exchanges form the emotional core of the narrative. However, they also highlight the play’s inherent tension, demonstrating how the disparity between personal friendship and societal constraints influences their bond.

While *Permission* features moments of brilliance, it grapples with creative inconsistencies that detract from its overall impact. The initial setup, where Butt’s Hanna delivers a monologue that establishes the play's focus on female experiences, eventually gives way to male voices projected through speakers, creating a disjointed narrative flow. Audience interaction, introduced towards the play's conclusion, feels somewhat forced rather than organic. Furthermore, certain character choices, such as a scene where Hanna is caught smoking by her father that lacks significant consequences, may leave viewers seeking a deeper exploration of the implications of rebellion within the framework of familial expectations.

Despite its flaws, *Permission* embodies the beginnings of a compelling exploration of identity, freedom, and the various expectations imposed on women. Chawla’s ability to weave personal stories within broader cultural contexts invites the audience to reflect on their own notions of liberty and the struggles that accompany the pursuit of autonomy in different corners of the world.

In reflecting upon the play’s development, Chawla herself has shared insights about its inspiration, drawing from the real-life struggles of women she encountered growing up in Pakistan. The narrative is not merely a tale of migration but a deeper commentary on friendship, agency, and the contestation of cultural norms. As this vibrant piece continues to evolve, it stands as a testament to the complex tapestry of women's lives, bridging cultural divides while illuminating the universal battle for liberation.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/03/permission-review-tara-theatre-london), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/03/permission-review-tara-theatre-london)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/03/permission-review-tara-theatre-london), [[4]](https://www.theatre-news.com/news/UK/108698/Permission-takes-centre-stage-at-London-s-Space-Theatre-from-28th-May-to-1st-June-2024), [[6]](https://www.easterneye.biz/hunia-chawla-permission-interview/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://loureviews.blog/2024/06/14/digital-review-permission-the-space/), [[5]](https://taratheatre.com/news/tara-theatre-2025-season-announced/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/03/permission-review-tara-theatre-london), [[6]](https://www.easterneye.biz/hunia-chawla-permission-interview/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/03/permission-review-tara-theatre-london> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/03/permission-review-tara-theatre-london> - An in-depth review of 'Permission', a play by Hunia Chawla, performed at Tara Theatre in London. The article discusses the play's exploration of liberation through the journey of Hanna, a young Pakistani woman seeking independence. It highlights the performances of Anisa Butt and Rea Malhotra Mukhtyar, the play's setting across Karachi and London, and its examination of patriarchal structures and personal freedom. The review also touches upon the play's creative inconsistencies and its portrayal of women's experiences in different cultural contexts.
3. <https://loureviews.blog/2024/06/14/digital-review-permission-the-space/> - A digital review of 'Permission', a play by Hunia Chawla, which delves into the conflicts faced by a young, modern, respectable Pakistani woman. The reviewer praises the performances of Anisa Butt and Rea Malhotra Mukhtyar in this two-hander. The play is noted for its exploration of cultural norms, freedom, and identity, with settings including a Karachi rooftop and a university protest. The review commends the play's coherent narrative and effective use of props and lighting to depict various locations.
4. <https://www.theatre-news.com/news/UK/108698/Permission-takes-centre-stage-at-London-s-Space-Theatre-from-28th-May-to-1st-June-2024> - An announcement about 'Permission', a play by Hunia Chawla, taking centre stage at London's Space Theatre from 28th May to 1st June 2024. The article provides details about the play's themes, focusing on the trials of Hanna as she navigates the expectations of being a 'respectable Pakistani woman' while moving to London. It highlights the performances of Anisa Butt and Rea Malhotra Mukhtyar and mentions the play's development from a previous scratch performance.
5. <https://taratheatre.com/news/tara-theatre-2025-season-announced/> - An announcement of Tara Theatre's 2025 season, featuring 'Permission' by Hunia Chawla. The article provides details about the play's themes, focusing on the exploration of liberation between two Pakistani friends, Hanna and Minza. It mentions the play's run from 30 May to 7 June 2025 and its direction by Neetu Singh. The article also highlights other productions in the season, including 'I Dream of Theresa May' and 'Sweetmeats'.
6. <https://www.easterneye.biz/hunia-chawla-permission-interview/> - An interview with Hunia Chawla, the writer of 'Permission', discussing the inspiration and themes of the play. Chawla explains that the play is inspired by the lives and struggles of women she knew growing up in Pakistan. She describes the story as focusing on a newly immigrated Pakistani woman in the UK, balancing friendship and filial duty with a newfound sense of agency. The interview also touches upon the play's exploration of liberation and identity.
7. <https://southasianheritage.org.uk/events/permission-new-london-play-from-pakistani-rising-star-playwright-hunia-chawla/> - An announcement about 'Permission', a new London play by Pakistani playwright Hunia Chawla. The article provides details about the play's themes, focusing on Hanna's journey as she moves to London and navigates the expectations of being a 'respectable woman'. It mentions the play's run at The Space Theatre from 28th May to 1st June 2024 and highlights the performances of Anisa Butt and Rea Malhotra Mukhtyar. The article also provides ticket information and venue details.