

## PATRIARCHAL HEGEMONY AND POST-COLONIAL DICHOTOMY IN MAHESH DATTANI'S *DANCE LIKE A MAN*

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### **Abstract:**

*Mahesh Dattani occupies a very distinct place in the realm of Indian drama in English. Among other Indian play wrights he shines with immense dramatic guts. He prefers serious problems prevailing in urban India. He gives voice to the problems and suffering of marginalised people of our society. Through his plays, Dattani emerges as a humanist who cares for the marginalised section of the Indian society. His plays excel the new currents of Indian ethos, such as traditions, customs, psyche, culture, domesticity, Hindu guilty conscience, caste system and the plights of subalterns such as harassment and bullying and so on.*

**Key Words:** *marginalised, Indian ethos, Caste system, subaltern.*

Mahesh Dattani occupies unique place in Indian English Dramatic world. His play *Dance Like a Man*, a stage play with two acts, is one of the finest plays of Mahesh Dattani. The stage performance of the play has won great fame and name in India and abroad. It is the embodiment of human relationships and human weaknesses. The play depicts the clash between domestic and social issues such as profession, marriage and the place of woman in patriarchal society. It deals with the lives of the people and it elucidates how the people get frustrated due to unpleasant circumstances. The story unfolds past and present scenario.

The play was first performed at Chowdiah memorial hall, Bangalore on 22nd September 1989 as a part of the Dcecan Herald theatre Festival. Later on, it was staged at the NCPA Experimental theatre, Mumbai on 14<sup>th</sup> February, 1990 under the directorship of Mahesh Dattani. It was also enacted by prime Time in 1995 under the directorship of little Dubey.

The first act opens with the conversation between Lata and Viswas and ends with Jairaj's are revolt against his father, Amritlal Parekh. Jairaj and Ratna leave the house of Amritlal Parekh to overcome the rigid, rules imposed upon them by him. The second act begins with Amritlal *censuring* Jairaj and Ratna who have endured up the verbal attacks. Two days cater Jairaj and Ratna have left home and they have comeback. In the play domestic conflict revolves around the lives of 62 years old Bharatnatyam dancer, Jairaj Parekh and his wife, Ratna, who is also a Bharatnatyam dancer. They are living with their only daughter Lata who is aspirant young dancer. She falls in love with a young man named Viswas and decides to get the consent of her parents to marry him. As the play wavering between time past and time present, the presence of Jairaj and Ratna in their sixties represents the time present whereas rose garden indicates Jairaj and Ratna as a young couple represents time past with the change of spot light, the scene keeps on changing.

When the play begins, Vishwas has arrived at Jairaj's house for seeking consent from Lata's parents about his marriage with Lata. But Jairaj and Ratna have gone out to see their musician, C.V. Srinivas, who has broken his arm. In the opening there is a lovely conversation between Vishwas and Lata. Like Lata,

Vishwas's also the only son of his parents. Vishwas doesn't have the aesthetic heart for art and dance. His father runs mitthai shop on the commercial street in the town and owns half of the building on the road. Vishwas helps his father in the business of sweets.

We come to know that Jairaj and Ratna were good friends before marriage. There is a big dance hall in the house of Jairaj where Lata's parents get dance practice. The play reveals their past discontent life of being average dancers. They like to achieve more than that to earn great fame. They are very ambitious and they want to get done through Lata. When Vishwas visits Lata's house, he is disappointed for their absence. He might have thought that Lata's parents will be anxiously waiting to see their future son-in-law. But Lata tells him that they are different parents. They are very much interested in Lata's career as a dancer than in her marriage. They don't pay more interest to see their daughter's settled in happy married life.

Lata's parents look tense for Lata is going to perform her maiden dance performance in the following week very important people like the President of India; state ministers' foreign diplomats etc. have been invited. In the crucial time, unfortunately, Srinivas, their 'mridangam' artist has broken his leg in an accident. Their worry and query is who will play the 'mridangam' for Lata's performance? They are not at all concerned over the wounds of the 'mridangam' player. Ratna highly gets nervous. She is badly craving for reputation which they lost in their past life.

Ratna: Yes; I wish Lata more fame than we had why she can be the best! We just have to push her a bit and with our experience behind her, she can't fail. Yes, I'll do anything to see that she reaches the top. Even if it means being sweet to that bitch Chandra Kala,

Jairaj: Good, you sound normal again.

Ratna: within ten days, you'll see our Lata will be the talk of the town. I've taken care of the critics already. I've promised C.V. Suri I'll make him the chief guest at the Navaratri festival. That old fogey loves to be garlanded on stage

Evidentially the play focuses on their unbound involvement in dance which leads the death of their own baby, left to the care of an 'ayah'. Most of the time, Jairaj and Ratna would come late at night. Due to their involvement in dance, their baby was not given proper caring by them. So that carelessness causes the death of the baby, Shankar. In order to attain the high reputation they even lost their own baby.

Jairaj and Ratna take many possible efforts for the success of their daughter. Lata gives the best performance and wins the public's praise. Jairaj and Ratna get unbound happiness for their daughter's performance. Lata receives enthusiastic appraisal even beyond this expectations. Moreover she is described as the 'shining star'. Ratna is the main cause of Lata's performance. The performance was appreciated by the chief minister. They want Lata to perform at national festival in Canada to gain the same success. Ratna feels proud of herself to make her daughter a successful dancer. This makes Jairaj jealous of her. Dattani elucidates how the situation creates an unpleasant and unfriendly atmosphere even, among the family members. Jairaj obviously shows his jealousy over his wife Ratna. The play apparently depicts familial harassment. It also displays psychological conflict to become national celebrities. Dattani's diction is simple and realistic, by using words from regional language such as 'abhinaya', 'tillana', 'abhitiya', 'Bharathanatyam' etc.

Jairaj sets free himself from the hold of his autocratic father. We can find a change with Jairaj's attitude. Rapid and determined Jairaj becomes yielded to his father's desire. Ratna too turns into a subservient woman.

Being a social reformer, Amritlal doesn't like his daughter-in-law Ratna's connection with 'devadasi'. He doesn't allow them to have dance rehearsal at house as it will harm the name and fame of his family. He thinks that permitting them to practise will be likely to, encourage them for 'prostitution'. But Jairaj is not at all a person of disliking art. Actually 'Bharathanatyam' has an association with temples. It was performed by 'Devdasis' who were paid for their services by the temple authorities. This kind of

service destroyed image of 'devasis'. 'Devedasis' were abused and exploited to gratify the physical pleasures of the priests and other rich people. In such way a mark of disgrace associated with the lives and profession of 'devdasis' have given a frightening effect for Amritlal that his daughter-in-law will fetch the harm for the reputation of his family.

Dattani's *Dance Like a Man* embodies the theme of clash between the tradition and the modernity along with the issues of gender, marriage and career in a very interesting and artistic manner.

Identity crisis is often reflected idea in the plays of Dattani. In this play, he dramatises the Identity crisis in the life of Jairaj Parekh, a dancer. Amritlal Parekh, his father, is very conservative and a rigid person. He has his own notions and ideology, which he imposes upon Jairaj who protests, but Jairaj yields to the desires and dreams of his father and also of his life. He yields but doesn't kill his own desire. He longs for self-identity and self-esteem.

There are anxiety and depression prevailing in the minds of characters. One character is not cheerful and in joyous mood except Viswas who is helping his father in family business. The three Jairaj, Ratna and Lata are the artists, *Bharatnatyam* dancers. They are caught up in mental anguish and tension. The play reveals that they are facing many issues in the field of competition. Dattani also introduces theme of gender identity in this play. Jairaj jumps over to *Bharatnatyam* dance which is generally, performed by women. He likes to establish himself in the field.

The play shows how patriarchal social set up deprives the other members of the families from being celebrity as a dancer. Ratna could not be a famous dancer under the patriarchal powers exercised by her father-in-law. Dattani seems to assert that individual talent can never flourish under the domination of patriarchal family system. Ratna thwarts in her dream of being celebrity. After the death of Amritlal Parekh, her daughter Lata has become an excellent star of *Bharatnatyam*.

Clash between tradition and modernity, divorce problem of career and marriage, child sexual abuse, prostitution, extra-marital relationship, harassment and bullying, suppression and violence, problems of hijras and communal tension are connected and covered within the range of family lands cape. In the play *Dance Like a Man*, Dattani examines interpersonal human relationship within the range of familial territory. *Dance Like a Man*, a masterpiece of Dattani, deals with the host of issues like problem of marriage and career, conflict between the tradition and modernity, patriarchal domination, plight of *devdasi*, gender roles etc.,

In India, literature of all languages have penned down the pathetic plight of women. And thereby have raised voices against this inhumane treatment to women. Indian writing in English is no exception to this. One thing should be noted here that feminism has got mixed responses from all over the world the patriarchal hegemony and post-colonial dichotomy is highlighted in the play.

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