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**Portrayal of the Protagonist as a victim of Patriarchal society in Mahesh Dattani's 'Dance like a Man'**

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**Abstract**

Mahesh Dattani's Dance like a man was the finest example of the dramas portraying the Patriarchal society and gender discrimination in that happens in the Indian context. This drama holds the themes like Man trapped by circumstances women caught between ambitions and family. A man shifted by his ageing Father's principles, must find a way to escape in order to create an alternative world that will enable him to practice one thing that he loves her most dancing. The son makes a mockery of his father revolutionary acts. The play deals with the self and significance of others in a manner of gender specific roles a manner of gender assigned by the society and how if you deviate from it, you are being sidelined by the people and the society. Their personal ambition their sacrifices, struggle and compromises, internal conflict and the way cope up with life and dance being the major topic of discussion in the house as it is a topic of

debate between the father and son and daughter-in-law. This Paper specially deals with the theme of the Portrayal of the Protagonist in the play where the protagonist is the victim of Patriarchal society.

**Keywords:** ambitions, protagonist, Patriarchal society, dance, conflict.

Dance Like A Man the title itself suggest that a man is supposed to do the work which suits the man and not pursue their career in anything else which makes less of a man. Here, literally the title itself means to say that the protagonist's father doesn't want his son to be become or behave like a women and that he should not pursue his career in dance. It is a two act stage play. The story involves around three generations. Mahesh Dattani in the very

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start puts a question on a man's identity. The title itself suggests so.

The play *Dance Like A Man* focuses on three generations -Amritlal Parekh, Jairaj, his son, his wife Ratna, and their daughter Lata and future son-in-law Viswas. It centres on an individual plight where a dying form of art serves as a backdrop. Amritlal, the autocratic father, a freedom fighter and reformist he is the representative of the society in the 1930's. Though liberal in thoughts he curtails the freedom of his son who wants to become a Bharatanatyam dancer. Jairaj seems to be having a passion for dance which is accepted by the society of his time.

“Jairaj: You promised you would allow me to continue with my hobbies. Amritlal: That was when you were a boy and dance was just a hobby. Grow up. Jairaj: I don't want to grow up! You can't stop me from doing what i want.

Amritlal: As long as you are under my care...” (42)

Ratna wanted her own career to proper and so she is willing to sacrifice her husband's career in the process. She was blind by her passion so much so that she joined hands with Amritlal. This subtly displays the relationship she herself shared with Jairaj which was more for her own personal motive than anything else. She married him because Jairaj himself was a

dancer and he would never stop her from dancing even after getting married. If she would have married another man, there was a possibility that she would be not been able to dance will not be continued by her.

Typical of the times, we see Amritlal fixed in the notions for gender roles acceptable in society. He feels that dance was the art of the devadasi's and no one else should practice it. Moreover speaking of 'dance' he believes that its his priority to eradicate certain unwanted and ugly practices which are a shame to the society. Such as educating and reforming them and he feels they have given up their 'art' and have taken to selling their bodies.

Although Ratna tries to convince Amritlal that dancing is a divine art of Shiva and Parvathi. Amritlal is more concerned about his own status and position in society. As soon as he gets to know that Ratna was visiting a devadasi, Chenniamma through one of his well-wishers Patel, he tells Ratna defends herself, but Amritlal did not want to passers-by to see his daughter in law dancing in the court yard of devadasi. He tells her that the people would assume the worst and it could tarnish the family reputation so he warns Ratna.

When Jairaj possibly know the about her motive the purpose was already achieved, that he was a failed dancer and that he did not make much of our life, he

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had become an alcoholic. She constantly took advantage of Jiaraj's love for her and being his wife. She pushed him into the world of dance and also knew that he was not a great dancer himself to reach among the top dancers, that he was just an ordinary one. She was responsible for Jiaraj's undoing as a character as well as dancer.

For Ratna dance was a medium to gain popularity and status and for that she married Jiaraj who would never stop her from dancing, Ratna's selfish inner desires was so powerful that she cold-bloodedly plays with the emotions of Jiaraj by misguiding him constantly. In the guise of a true life companion she devices her husband and tries to curb his potential as a dancer. In order to gain personal aims she sacrifices Jiaraj's abilities. Ratna not only spoils Jiaraj's life but tries to mould her daughter Lata's life also by making her a traditional dancer. In spite of being a male member of the family Jiaraj never tries to command his authority over Ratna and instead, she, very deliberately plays with the emotions. When Jiaraj returned to his father's house, Ratna disliked it and she says in the play once,

"you! You are nothing but spineless Boy who couldn't leave his father's house for more than forty-eight hours".

Lata, her daughter, was used by her to fulfil her inner suppressed desires to carve fame

and money nationwide and abroad. Unknowingly Lata falls in the whirlpool created by Ratna and becomes the object only Ratna's endeavors seem very ambitious and manipulative. She was ready to establish her daughter's career on the right track right from the very beginning ambitious and manipulative. She was ready to excrete by Ratna and becomes the object only Ratna's endeavors seem very ambitious and manipulative.

Ratna was ready to establish her daughter's career on the right track right from the very beginning and for that she schemes, manipulates and uses all her contacts and links. It is very that Ratna saw her own self in her daughter Lata and therefore acted so violently to create a firm, concrete base for her. It is her quality that makes her different from others. For the Traditional dance was important but it never became a wild passion at any point of time.

Lata takes dance as a pure art form and does not link it to any gender. She wanted to pursue dance but her desire was not blended with any passion or force. For her, marrying Viswas was also important and she wouldn't sacrifice her love for the dance. Her balanced mind makes her likable and different from her parents. Actually she is always from the circle in which her because it is a hobby for her and not a way that leads to the part of success.

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There is no malice can conclude that Lata stands in stark contrast with other characters.

Dattani uses the technique of Traditional Dance as a medium portray the clash of gender issues in the play. Hence his plays are relevant and there even for years to come. Amritlal would never accept his son own becoming dancer, Ratna misguided him; Jairaj was blamed to be not being a man enough to earn and support his family. All these things lead to circumstance show how gender discrimination works in the Indian society.

There is no original or primary gender a drag imitates, but they have conflicts between the three generations. Dattani in the play, puts a few unlucky questions about the sexual construct that a man is the very constituents of a man's identity-in terms of sexuality, has head of the family and as an artist. The play deals with the self and the significance of the other, though he frame works of gender and gender roles-prostitute a dancer and an artist, the man as a dancer, the guru who sports long hair and has an effeminate walk are categories that the older generation, fed on its perception of the self cannot come to terms with.

Dattani uses traditional dance as a medium her creates conflict in the play with in the minds of the other characters. As the

play goes forward and the actions takes place. Dance takes the Centre stage and pushes characters outside. Traditional dance, in the play, is not only for a tool that enables writer to tell the story but it creates its own psyche that guides or misguides the actor on the stage. Dance is a very significant factor in his play that means different things to different characters.

Jairaj and Ratna wants to develop their career as dancers and for them dance is not only a form of art but also their life and soul. It is not only their passion but also a tool that will help them to gain desired success. The stereotypes of gender roles are set against the idea of the artist in search of creativity within the respective structure of the world that he is forced to inhabit. Jairaj with the obsession for dance dismantles stereotypes. This is the twist that the playwright gives to the stereotypes associated with 'gender' issues that views solely women at the receiving end of the oppressive power structures of patriarchal society. The play removes these nations and explores the nature of the tyranny that even men might me subject within such structures. Jairaj and Ratna live within a structure; the domain of the patriarch Amritlal, Jairaj's father.

Dance for him is the profession of a prostitute, improper for his daughter- in-law and absolutely unimaginable for his son. He forbids Ratna from visiting the old devadasi

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who teaches her the intricacies of Bharatanatyam; he cannot tolerate the sounds of the dancing bells that ring through their practice sessions, is astounded at the long-haired guru with an effeminate walk and cannot, most of all, tolerate the idea of his son- a man- becoming a professional dancer.

The underlying fear is surely, that dance would make him effeminate so that the suggestions of homosexuality hover near, though not explicitly mentioned. And hence Amritlal must oppose, tooth and nail, Jairaj's passion for dance. This clash brings about the play of property and money in deciding the construction of identity that would confirm, but the result is tragic. He makes a pact with Ratna. He will permit her career in dance only if she helps him pull Jairaj out of his obsession and make him a 'manly' man. They too can then enjoy the security of his riches (Chaudhari 67-68).

Asha Kuthari Chaudhari writes "Dance Like a Man is a play that deals with one of Dattani's pet concerns- gender- through one of his principal passions, and dance". (p.67)

In the society everyone wants a male to earn that much so that the house would run properly. Not Amritlal that dance would not help Jairaj to earn enough money and that would make him unworthy in the eyes

of his wife Ratna. For Amritlal, dance was good as far as it remains a hobby but it was not proper to be taken as a profession. We should not forget the Traditional Dance, especially for males was not considered a respectable profession in the olden days in India. Asha Kuthari Chaudhari says,

"The underlying fear is obviously that dance would make him 'womanly' - An effeminate man - the suggestion of homosexuality hovers near," (68).

In the play the maleness of Jairaj was not that much a question of body than that of mentality. Researcher found that for Ratna maleness might have meant one's independent decision-making power, doing the work that one liked living on one's own conditions, standing on one's own feet without any support and some other that Jairaj was trying to prove himself an able male to Ratna. When Ratna was worried about finding a Mridangam player for her daughter he says,

"Will finding a musician make me a man?" (74)

Dance for Ratna, serves as an underlying passion that derives her character throughout all the actions of the drama. Behind all her moves in the drama, dance was the main factor. Her character has a negative shade and that makes her different from others. She involves herself

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in a relationship with Jairaj and that was a clear self-centered decision on her part. No love or attachment with Jairaj was on the outset of the relationship. Her over confidence and faith in her own talent was so much that she hesitated not even once to destroy Jairaj's career as a dancer joining hands with her father-in-law, Amritlal she single mainly follows her heart overpowered by mind; and tries to be famous using dance as a medium. Traditional dance a thing that will help her in earning fame and money along with respect in world of dancers.

For Ratna dance was a medium to gain popularity status and for that she married Jairaj who would never stop her from dancing. Ratna's selfish inner desire was so powerful that she cold-bloodedly plays with the emotions of Jairaj by misguiding him constantly. In the guise of a true life companion she deceives her husband and tries to curb his potential as a dancer. In order to gain personal aims she sacrifices Jairaj's abilities. Ratna not only spoils Jairaj's life but also tries to mold her daughter Lata's life, also by making her a traditional dancer.

In spite of being a male member of the family Jairaj never tries to command his authority over Ratna and instead, she very deliberately plays with his emotions. When Jairaj returned to his house, Ratna disliked it and she says in the play one's "you!".

You are nothing but a spineless boy who couldn't leave his father's house for more than forty-eight hours"(54).

Lata, her daughter, was used by her to fulfil her inner suppressed desire to earn fame and money nationwide and abroad, unknowing Lata falls in the whirlpool created by Ratna and becomes the object only, Ratna's endeavors seem very ambitious and manipulative. She was ready to establish her daughter's career on the girl's right track right from the very beginning and for that she schemes, manipulates and uses all her contacts and links.

It is very clear that Ratna saw her oneself within her daughter Lata and therefore acted so violently to create a firm, concrete base for her. It is this quality that makes her different from others. For her, traditional dance was important but it never became a wild passion at any point of time. The desire to take dance, as a hobby was very clear in her mind as she tells Viswas.

Wanted to pursue dance but her desire was not blended with any passion or force. Her balanced mind makes her similar and different from her parents. Actually she is away from the circle in which her parents were trapped which was too vicious to believe. She dances and continues to do so because it is a hobby for her and not a way

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that leads to the path of success. There is no malice, over ambition or misled want in her that keeps her interest in dance. Considering this aspect reader can conclude that Lata stands in stark contrast with other characters.

The play *Dance like a man* tells the story of three generations their personal ambitions, sacrifices, struggles, compromises, internal conflicts and the way they try to cope up with the life and mainly focuses on a dancing couple. In this play reader comes across many emotions and is taken virtually into the world of characters that is flooded with the dreams, success, failures, frustrations, anguish, manipulations, conflicts and unseen hopes that are too far to achieve. Every character manages to come to terms with the situation and eventually creates an individual ivory tower to live in.

Jairaj and Ratna wants to develop their career as dancers and for them dance is not only a hobby but also life and soul. It is not only their passion but also a tool that will help them to gain desired success. Personally for Jairaj, dance is a form or a means to express emotions and stands as the tool of defiance, revolt, negation of a particular way of life that was decided by his father, Amrita. He starts dancing as a hobby or rather a fancy that his father thought would perish after a period of time but it does not happen that way.

Jairaj continues his practice of traditional dancing in spite of all the opposition from his father and overtly presents himself as a rebel. He becomes more head strong because of the support of his wife, Ratna who also interested in the traditional form of dancing. The reason behind Amritlal' sopposition suggests that his mind was not ready to accept his son as a Bharatanatyam dancer. More than that he was shocked on knowing the fact about Jairaj was planning to grow his hair long just like his guru, which could enhance his abhinaya. Amritlal saw dance as something that was practiced by prostitutes, which was turning temples into brothels.

In the society everyone wants the male to earn that much so that the house would run properly but Amritlal knew that dance would not help Jairaj to earn enough money and that would make him unworthy in the eyes of his Ratna. For Amritlal dance was good as for as it remains a hobby but it was not proper to be taken as a profession and we should not forget the traditional dance, especially for male was not consider a respectable profession in the olden days in India. Asha Kuthari chawdhuri says, "The underlying fear is fear is obviously that dance would make him womanly- an effeminate man - the suggestions of homosexuality how overs near, although never explicitly mentioned,"(68)

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Dance for, Ratna, serves as an undying passion that raise her characters throughout all the actions of the drama. Behind all her moves in the drama, dance was the main factor. After reading the play one may coin her character a selfish one as she lives only for herself and uses others as mere tool or a step to go ahead. She involves herself in a relationship with Jairaj and that was a clear self- centered decision on her part. No love or attachment with Jairaj was there on the outset of the relationship. Her Overconfidence and faith in own talent was so much that she hesitated not even once to destroy Jairaj's career as a dancer joining hands with father-in-law, Amritlal. She single mindly follows her heart overpowered by her mind, and tries to be famous using dance as medium. In a way she took the advantage Jairaj's love for her and her status as a wife. In the process of having name and fame she sacrificed Jairaj's life and his substance as a male.

Dattani in the very start of the play puts a question on a man's identity and his sexuality. The title itself suggests so. The play deals with the self and significance of others in a manner of general specific roles assigned by the society and how if you deviate from it, you are being sidelined by the people and the society. Dattani, in the very start of the play puts a question on a man's identity and his sexuality. The play deals with the self and the significance of

others in a manner of general specific roles assigned by the society and how if you deviate from it, you are being sidelined by the people and the society.

This play is of great importance of south India, especially Chennai, as the main protagonist or two Bharatanatyam dancers, past their presence Mahesh is exploring through his play to key accepts general ambition to a man. Taking dance as a career and that too dance which is usually have performed by women, relationship between human and wife who have contrary to all public impression of being a happy and well suited couple grown apart and have done enough harm to each other. How the own thwarted ambitions and frustrations affects the own daughter who is in love with man who has nothing to do with the art seen at all.

Irrespective of the gender this play conveys the fact find that human cannot survive in this world with an independent wish. A human is totally dominated by the society's expectations. This makes the human to have depressed way of life to lead without the fulfillment by sacrificing his ambition or passion to be dumped beneath the ground and work for the family and the useless society which is not responsible for an individual only to tell or to criticize them for their way of living.

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