

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**ANALYZING THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN MAHESH DATTANI'S DANCE LIKE A MAN**

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**Abstract**

The female characters in the plays of Mahesh Dattani have always been portrayed beautifully by the playwright. Dattani, being one of the leading Indian playwrights responded to the issues of sexuality on the set of Indian theatre and his plot revolves around the damaging implication of social constraint and patriarchy. His theme of the play focuses on traditions, relationships, career, and ambition.

This paper deals with the character of Ratna, Jairaj's wife and Lata, his daughter and their roles. We will examine whether their actions were the impact of society and surrounding or was it her own selfish thinking without any external pressure. Also, how they play a vital role in the career of protagonist Jairaj in the storyline. We will also explore the role of women in an Indian society and sometimes they must selfishly choose their ambition if they want to continue achieving their professional goals. This research paper deals with the aspect of how one person's beliefs and cultural values can have adverse effects on another person. Different moral values, point of view, society's perspective, patriarchy, generation gap, and gender significant roles as well as similarity and dissimilarity between the female characters.

**Keywords:** Ambition, gender discrimination, relationship, tradition, patriarchy.

**Introduction**

Mahesh Dattani is known as one of India's finest contemporary playwrights. His plays spotlight the problems of middle-class families and their problems and discusses about sensitive issues like sexuality, homosexuality, and transgender to ignored topics like patriarchy, social rules, gender difference, etc. Gender representation is a complex structure of Indian families and

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Mahesh Dattani has beautifully put forth this aspect of social constraint into his dramas. His drama *Dance Like a Man* is the focus of research in context to the development of female characters Ratna and Lata. Although the focus of the play is on the male character Jairaj who wants to be a Bharatnatyam dancer but is forced to quit as dance is not a man's profession in the eyes of society. Ratna being the lead's wife and also a professional Bharatanatyam dancer has to face and follow the set rules of society for every class while Lata being the third generation of the Parekh family has a different mindset and different environment from her parents Ratna and Jairaj. Indian society has its unsaid rules of gender significant roles and patriarch opinions. Even a classical dance form of art and prayer is claimed by stereotypical rules. One common thing that interconnects every character in a way is Bharatanatyam. Ratna and Jairaj wanted to be professional Bharatanatyam dancers, Lata is also a Bharatanatyam dancer, and Amritlal Parekh, the father-in-law of Ratna is against the Bharatanatyam.

Classical dancing have deep roots and meaning in India. Classical dance is not only an art of beauty and power but also prayer and meditation. The dancer acts out a story almost exclusively through gestures. Most of the classical dances of India enact stories from Hindu mythology. Each form represents the culture and ethos of a particular region or a group of people. All classical dances of India have roots in Hindu arts and religious practices. Bharatnatyam is a major genre of Indian classical dance that originated in the Hindu temples of Tamil Nadu and neighboring regions. Traditionally, Bharatanatyam has been a solo dance that was performed exclusively by women, and expressed Hindu religious themes and spiritual ideas. . Bharatnatyam and other classical dances in India were ridiculed and suppressed during the colonial British Raj era. Which was restored in the post-colonial period and many misconceptions like dancing is only for women or people of low class, started spreading.

The main research objective **Research Objective**

to study the female characters - through the text of Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like A Man* highlights the side of society with pre-described gender significant roles and the impact of unseen pressure on character of Ratna and Lata.

This research paper deals with the aspect of how one person's beliefs and cultural values can have adverse effects on another person. Different moral values, point of view, society's perspective, patriarchy, generation gap and gender significant roles as well as similarity and dissimilarity between the female characters. This paper will study the change in behaviour in Ratna or was it always the same as we were shown in further when she tries to push Lata with the same obsession and ambition of becoming a great classical dancer. Whereas Lata also has

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unconscious oppressive behaviour which were shown in her action while she server Vishwas Bonvita instead of tea which he usually drinks.

Another objective is to find out the difference of their thinking and similarities and dissimilarity despite the generation gap between them. With the passage of time how the characters respond to the uncertainty that surrounds them. The difference between the identities as they were before and after the incident with Shankar. The general interaction of the characters with each other when occasion of joyful and tense situation.

**Female Characters**

Ratna who is a young married woman and her husband Jairajare Bharatanatyam dancers. Jairaj has no other manly occupation other than dancing and thus he is dependent on his father. The generation gap and patriarchal opinions affect and meddle in the life of Ratna lead to affects her character as a supportive wife to selfish women whereas Lata's character is on the positive side and she sees male and female dancing as a normal thing. Ratna or was it always the same as we were shown further when she tries to push Lata with the same obsession and ambition of becoming a great classical dancer. Whereas Lata also has unconscious oppressive behavior which was shown in her action while she served ViswasBournvita instead of tea which he usually drinks. The general interaction of the characters with each other when an occasion of a joyful and tense situation. Another crucial aspect of Ratna's relationship with her husband is that they had many errors as a couple which they were only able to solve in very last days of their life. As a woman in the Postcolonial period, Ratna as an individual was only Jairaj's wife Daughter in law of Amritlal Parekh. As an individual, she was nothing much without her dance. She was not independent enough to make her career without making any bad choices. Classical dance is not just a thing of beauty and elegance but also meditation, prayer and power. At the time of British Raj era Bharatanatyam and other classical dance forms were ruined and suppressed. which was restored in the post-colonial period and many misconceptions like dancing is only for women or people of low class, started spreading.

The character of Ratna developed after he and Jairaj were partially responsible for the death of Shankar, their first baby. The circumstances and the situation surrounding them and other factors like opportunity and scope. Differences in relationship with their family and different environment, especially with their parent. Also, both the characters have learned dance forms and the dance form is temple dance that is regarded for spirituality. Both the characters are proficient in their fields of dancing. In the Indian culture, the way of Indian people's beliefs regarding the gender-specific jobs regarding womanhood and stereotypical manhood sometimes

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obstructs the drive to chase your dream. Importance to achieving one's dream by any means as Ratna and enjoying the journey while reaching the dream as Lata. Lata also proves this point as she has never regarded dance with gender roles.

The play starts and we were shown Ratna and Jairaj in their sixties worried about their daughter's big upcoming performance as they were looking for midranges. She could have asked Chandra Kala but instead, Ratna backbites about her. She is so worried about it that she starts arguing with her husband starts calling him names. She makes such remarks about her husband which shows that she was unsatisfied with what she had. Her ambition, her starve was bigger than what they seemed and because she couldn't achieve her dreams, she's pouring all her ambition onto Lata and wants to live her dream through her daughter. When she goes on to paste the newspaper cuttings of her daughter's successful show in her album to which Jairaj stops her and tells her not to as they are their daughter's hard work and not yours. Even at this age, Ratna is still bound by her undying ambition of achieving a professional place in dance. She doesn't want to be reminded of her past mistake when Jairaj mentions the name Shankar and says it was the partial fault of both, she ignores him because she knew it was her ambition to dance that led Shankar to die on the dose of opium in the hands of an ayah. When Amritlal makes a deal with her to let her dance in respond she makes her husband leave dancing.

Lata, the daughter of Ratna and Jairaj is the total opposite character of Ratna. When the play starts, we see Lata bringing Viswas home to meet her parents. He is the man that Lata wants to marry and tells Jairaj that her parent won't care much about other things but one thing is that after marriage you will not stop me from practicing dance. She shows him around the house and the room of dance and music where she set off her dreams of being a classical dancer. In the gradual development of the play, we learn two things about Lata, first, she considers dance as a neutral art, and every gender can learn and practice this profession. Secondly, she knows how much her parents love to dance as she practically grew up watching them dance. She respects that profession and would like to continue even after marriage. Lata is an excellent Bharatanatyam performer but she is not obsessed with it, she enjoys dancing and it's a part of her. Later after marriage she decides to quit dancing and give her time to her new life.

**Findings**

Lata is an excellent Bharatanatyam performer but she is not obsessed with it, she enjoys dancing and it's a part of her and later after marriage she decides to quit dancing and give her time to her new life.

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The similarity between both the characters is that they both were hardworking and skilled in their profession, they both have dominant nature but it's not harm to other people. They both are strong women and can decide from good to bad on their own.

The differences between the characters were only that they both were born in different timeline and were raised in different environment. Lata was privileged since the beginning Television also plays a huge role in portraying female roles that only follows hero around and even fall in love for their stocking behaviour and a huge number of populations in India watch television, people follow this ideology of patriarchy everywhere and condemns its fine.

**Conclusion**

Finally, it can be said that Ratna was a woman of great ambition and dreams which she couldn't achieve partially because of patriarchy and partially because of her own decisions and second is that even if she wanted to make better choices her selfishness to keep herself first overcomes her good deeds and make her a not so likable character. However, it also shows the part of society where if women don't decide on their own, other people will restrict them. Nowadays people are changing their old ideology and are more welcoming of new things without considering the gender roles stereotype. Feminist activist around history till now has made many efforts to bring the position of the female in society to be equal as men. Women have started taking themselves more seriously and more as an individual and no more follows the old path paved by patriarchy. As an individual human being, women have every right to decide on their dreams and person they want to spend their life with.

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