

MAHESH DATTANI'S *DANCE LIKE A MAN* : A TALE OF REBEL AGAINST PATRIARCHAL WEB

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Abstract: In the modern times, the act of women invading the professional fields, especially, those dominated by men, is perceived as a sign of progression and women empowerment. However, what if a man attempts to enter the professional field of women, how does he posit himself in such a situation? By using flash back technique, Mahesh Dattani, in the drama, *Dance Like A Man*, set in 1940s, depicts the cultural clashes between father, Amrital Parekh and his only son Jiaraj, who belong to rich, affluent Gujrathi family. All hell loose break, when Jiaraj decides to step out of father's shadows in order to pursue a career as the full time *Bhartanatyam* dance performer, along with his Tamil wife, Ratna who is equally talented in the same dance form. Amrital equates his son's obsession for dance to his lack of manliness and also objects his daughter-in-law's curiosity to learn *abhinaya* from an old *devdasi*, in a Shiva temple. Both Jiaraj and Ratna fight against patriarchal norms. However, ambitious Ratna, to be in the good books of her father-in-law, betrays her husband by, secretly striking a deal with him to discourage Jiaraj from dancing. With hardly any scope for his passion for dancing and being caught in a loveless marriage for forty years, Jiaraj; in due course time, develops low self esteem. The researcher intend to do character analysis of Jiaraj and Ratna, and decode their attempts to fight against the patriarchal norms. It is Jiaraj who is the actual victim of Patriarchal norm because he is expected to take certain responsibilities, in a given social set up, to perform his roles as a son and later as a husband, by his father and wife, respectively. Strong headed Ratna is hardly affected here, but pushes her daughter Lata to full fill their unfulfilled dreams to be renowned dancers. The researcher concludes that the patriarchal norms/rules which attack the free will of any given individual, are harmful to the emotional and social growth of mankind. Art and dance are free spirited elements which don't need to be curbed by notions which promote gender bias. Both Ratan and Jiaraj, turn out to be the victim of patriarchy.

Key words: *Bhartanatyam*, *Devdasi*, Flash Back Technique, Patriarchy.

Introduction: Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian-playwright to be awarded the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for *Final Solutions and Other plays*, a book of his plays. Like Berne and Shaw, Dattani Wants to use the theatre as a powerful tool for bringing about the necessary social change. His plays reflects realistic and contemporary social issues. In an interview "Person Agenda" published in Bunch on March 21, 2004, Dattani confessed "the love of my life was drama and I want to write more plays". John Mc Rae acknowledge Dattani's "The voice of India" and states about his plays.

"They are the play of today some times as actual as to cause controversy but at the same time they are the plays which embody many of the classic concern for world drama." (9 Joshipura)

In his plays, Mahesh Dattani deal with many themes like sexual abuse, homosexuality, Trading Vs Modernity conflicts, communal tension etc. As he once mentioned:

I write for my milieu, for my time and place middle class and urban Indian ... tension arises from people who appears to freedom from society... We have to understand the marginalized.. Enclave of his has a sense of isolation within given contest That's what makes is individual (2 Das).

Alyque Padmassee always appreciated Dattani's daring to venture into realistic themes and therefore, he states: "At least we have a playwright who gives sixty million English speaking Indian an Identity". (1 Das)

Dance Like A Man: It is the play about human relations: strengths and weaknesses. This play is divided into two acts. It deals with characters like Amrital Parekh, Jiaraj, Ratna, Ratan's daughter Lata, and her fiancée Vishaw. The play deals with the lives of people who feel exhausted due to unfavourable circumstances. It also deals with the themes of marriage, children a woman's career and a man's place in the professional field (*Bhartanatyam* dance) which is usually, dominated by women. Both, the position of a career orientated man and women, in the given patriarchal social norm, is reflected in a critical sense. As in case of this play, Dattani states: "Thematically, I talk about the areas where the individual feels exhausted. My plays are about such people who are striving to expand this space" (4 Das)

Flash Back Technique: Flash back technique is used in narratives, to introduce events that are not happening in the story's current moment. While flashback, as suggested by the name, takes the reader back into a past moment, foreshadowing hints at or

presages an event that has yet to come. Done well, it can increase a story's dramatic tension and deepen a character's development. All the action of the play takes place at the present living room of Jairaj Parekh. Since the play oscillates between oldtime present, the present living room often changes into a rose garden, which denotes past events and presents, Amritlal Parekh, the father of Jairaj, as the head of the patriarchal family system.

Patrarchy: Patriarchy is a social system in which males hold primary power, predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property; in the domain of the family, fathers or father-figures hold authority over women and children. The playwright tells us how the autocratic father tries to check the movements and manners of his son and his daughter-in-law, in the past. Amritlal a wealthy freedom struggle cant tolerate his son opting for *Bharatanatyam* a full time profession. Amritlal Parekh is disappointed because his son's ideas of happiness do not fit in with his. He says: "I have always allowed you to do what you wanted to do. But there comes a time when you have to do what is expected of you. Why must you dance?" (DLM 35) Amritlal doesn't like Ratana and Jiaraj's Guruji who comes home to teach them dancing. Amritlal asks Jairaj not to invite his *Gurujit* their house because he strongly dislikes ways and manners of the *Gurujit*. Amritlal even doesn't like his son's long hair. As Amritlal is adamant in his decision as long as you they are under his care He objects converting library hall into the dance practice hall. Amritlal wishes if his son would have shown more interest in cricket than dance. As he states I thought it was just a fancy of yours.: I would have made a cricket pitch for you on won lawn if you were interested in cricket. Well, most boys are interested in cricket, my son is interested in dance,..(DLM 33)

Devdasi: Devdasi system is a religious practice in parts of southern India, including Andhra Pradesh, whereby parents marry a daughter to a deity or a temple. The marriage usually occurs before the girl reaches puberty and requires the girl to become a prostitute for upper-caste community members.. Amritlal even disapproves the fact that his daughter -in -law learning few the form of *abhinaya*, in the Shiva temple from *adevdasi* called Chennai Amma, while passer-by watch his daughter - law - dance . He fears that her act might bring disgrace to the family .He demands her to stop visiting temple but Ratna remains adamant. Chennai amma, who is the oldest living exponent of the Mysore school and is the only link they have with the old school. Moreover, she is of seventy-five and dying. Hence it was important for both Chennai amma and Ratna to impart and to receive knowledge of art, Ratna asserts: You can't stop me from learning art (DLM, 43) .But

Ratna calls her dancing as divine activity. As she puts: Yes, Dancing the divine dance of Shiva and Parvati (DLM, 43)

Jairaj and Ratna leave the house as the protest against traditional notions and restrictions imposed upon them by Amritlal. Jairaj resolves to never set a foot in the house again. Ratna requests him to leave next day but Jiraj doesn't listen to her .

Jairaj: We don't need anything fancy. (Turns around and speaks defiantly) As from now we are no longer under your care. And will never be again. Never. (Exits, followed by a bewildered Ratna. (DLM, 46)

Jiarj's decision back fires when ,Ratana's uncle , demands sexual favour from Ratna in exchange to offer them roof over their head . Ratna and Jiraj opt to go back to Amritlal's house , within forty eight hours .After this incidence , Jairaj turns into a very submissive and polite person

Amritlal : Have I made myself clear?

Jairaj : Yes, very clear. (Moves to the stairs)

Amritlal : And Jairaj (Jairaj stops) Don't grow your hair any longer.

(Jairaj exits. To Ratna) And you need not learn from any one else. You understand?

Ratna : You are very kind. (DLM, 48)

Bharatanatyam: *Bharatanatyam* originated in southern India in the state of Tamilnadu. It started as a temple dance tradition called *Dasiyattam* (the dance of the maid-servants) 2000 years ago and is perhaps the most advanced and evolved dance form of all the classical Indian dance forms. In the drama, Amritlal doesn't like his son , along with his daughters- in- law learning *Bharatanatyam* as hobby and later which turns into obsessions. For him, *Bharatanatyam* is the "craft of prostitute to show off her wares". (DLM 37) Jiarj's only ambition in life is now to train his son Shankar as a dancer so that Shankar can dance Lord Shiva's *Tandavanritya* on Amritlal's head and avenge his humiliation. But Shankar dies in childhood because of an overdose of opium

Amritlal wants Jiaraj to be an adult, and asks Ratna to help him to grow up. He strikes a deal with his daughter -in- law to discourage Jiarj from dancing *Bharatanatyam*. He makes a pact with Ratna. He will consent to her career in dance only if she helps him pull Jiaraj out of his obsession and make him a 'manly' man. The two can then enjoy the security of his riches. Amritlal convinces Ratna that the decision to let her dance is in his hands, not in Jiaraj's. He also let her realize that she married Jiaraj not because he is a dancer but because her would let her dance. He also asks;

How do you feel? How do you feel dancing with your husband? What do you think of him when you see him all dressed and... made up.

He also says: A woman in a man's world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman's world is pathetic.

He lets her realize that Jairaj is not a brilliant dancer in comparison to her and strikes a deal with Ratna:

Help me make him an adult. Help me to help him grow up. Help me and I'll never prevent you from dancing. I know it will take time but it must be done. ..(DLM 56)

Amritlal's deal is that the couple can enjoy his wealth and he will allow her a brilliant career in dance only if she helps him destroy Jairaj, Ratna agrees

Ratna doesn't think much of Jairaj and calls him "a spineless boy" who could not stand up to his autocratic father. According to her, Jairaj stopped being a man the day he returned to his father's house and accepted all the conditions imposed on them by Amritlal Parekh. Ratna hardly encourages Jairaj for public performances and mostly reduces him to being a prop on the stage or makes him occupy her as a husband for national and international public shows. Ratna regrets that Jairaj has turned into a drunkard and she blames his father for him. Ratna never tries to realize this very fact that she is responsible for Jairaj's frustrations. As Jairaj blames: You destroy me first, then give the impression that there wasn't much to destroy in the first place, then blame it all on my father.."(DLM 52)

Ratna never accepts that she is the cause of diminishing Jairaj's dancing career. She says:

Why didn't you accept those invitations when they came? Was it because of me or were you too afraid that if you danced alone, your mediocrity would be exposed? Yes, I did cut you off but then you deserved it.(DLM 53)

Later Ratna wants her daughter Lata to achieve distinction as a dancer as she herself had been thwarted in her desire to make an excellent career as the *Bhartanatyam* dancer. Ratna achieves a modicum of success as a dancer and her ambition in her later years is to push her daughter Lata so that Lata can excel her.

By the end of the play the family mansion is demolished, and new flats are made. The demolition of the old family mansion is the symbol of cultural conflict between generations

Jairaj can match Ratna in dance only in his fantasy (as revealed at the end of the play). In real life he is no match for, either his father or his dominating wife. So he can neither behave nor dance like a man. That is the tragedy of his life, which he tries to explain away at the end: "We were only human. We lacked the grace. We lacked the brilliance. We lacked the magic to dance like God." (DLM 73)

Conclusion: Jairaj and Ratana, both fight against the patriarchy. However, Jairaj being a man is expected to behave in a certain way when it comes to his professional choices. Ratna is, at some point, forced to curb her ambition, fearing a possible blot on the reputation of the family she married into. Both are the victims of the unfavourable external circumstance. Unfortunately, this curbing of their respective ambitions and careers in the long term, turns them into two frustrated souls, who are keen that their dancer daughter Lata will fulfil their dreams. The patriarchal norms that create obstacles in letting people exercise their free will, are in danger of blocking their emotional and social growth. This is exactly what happens with Ratana and Jairaj.

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