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## **Filial Battles And Spousal Relationship In Mahesh Dattani's Dance Like A Man**

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### **Abstract-**

Mahesh Dattani is the first playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award. His play "Dance Like a Man" has won the award for the Best Picture in English awarded by the National Panorama in 1998. The present paper highlights the filial battles and spousal relationship in Indian society. The quarrels and spousal relations are inevitable. These human relations can be maintained and handled in a peaceful manner and mutual understanding. The conflict between them leads to destruction of family life. This article demonstrates a brilliant and hilarious study of human relationships of filial battle between tradition and youthful rebellion. It also reflects the high strung battles between Jairaj and Ratna which results in breaking the spousal relationship between both husband and wife. It prove harmful for their family life. They both meet their respective dooms because they lacked the brilliance and magic to dance like gods. Lata attempts to balance her parent's ambitions with her own needs and desires. The play "Dance Like a Man" conveys the message that if a man is trapped by circumstances and a woman is caught between ambition and family life, then reality wins and dreams remain unfulfilled.

### **Keywords:**

Filial battles, spousal relationship, conflict, struggle, overambitious goals, family clashes etc.

## **Introduction:**

Drama has a rich tradition in India. It is flourished considerably to compete with the other world literature. The earlier Indian dramatists, with the western influence, experimented with different forms like romances, opera, comedy, farce, tragedy, melodrama and historical lay. By 1920, almost all the Indian languages witnessed a new drama which was thriving and reflecting influences of Marxism, psychoanalysis, symbolist and surrealist movements.

Mahesh Dattani's plays meant for both the stage and page. He has written many plays including Tara, Night Queen, Final Solutions, Dance Like a Man etc. He writes his plays on the contemporary serious issues like Indian history, Indian myth and Indian scriptures. His plays vary from feminine identity, religious and communal tension, sexuality, pedophilia, problems of eunuchs etc. Bijay Kumar Das observes the remarkable feature of Dattani's drama, "What one loves in his plays is the fascinating ways in which he presents the dynamics of personal and moral choices while focusing on human relationships. Dattani's works robes entangled attitudes in contemporary India towards communal differences, consumerism and gender....a brilliant contribution to Indian Dram in English. His plays address the invisible issues of contemporary Indian Society. By invisible issues, Dattani means homosexuality, lesbian, gay, pedophilia, etc. His plays dive into human heart and create characters true to life situations His plays deal with the families whose inmates are bound together or broken apart through mutual disgust and suspicion, extra marital relations, religious fundamentalism, communal tension, political subjects, crimes of the society and failure of law and order are other noteworthy themes of his plays. The texts of his plays are replete with stage directions, reality and objectivity."

Mahesh Dattani's Dance Like a Man 1989 has won the award for the best picture in English awarded by the National panorama in 1998. "Jairaj Parekh and his wife Ratna, aging Bharatnatyam dancers, are engaged in finding a substitute mridangam player to accompany their daughter Lata at her performance at a high-profile dance festival. Lata, in the meantime, nervously awaits the meeting between her parents and Viswas, the young man she wishes to marry. When the four meet, and in the conversations and discussions that follow, the fissures in the relationship between Jairaj and Ratna begin to explode into high-strung battles which lead back to their own youth and the tragedy that lies at the heart of their discord. The younger couple have their own issues to contend with: the obvious mismatch between the two



sets of parents, the arguments over Lata's career as a dancer after marriage and most unsettling of all, Lata's attempt to balance her parents' ambition with her own needs and desires. A brilliant study of human relationships and weaknesses framed by the age-old battle between tradition and youthful rebellion, *Dance Like a Man* has been hailed as one of the best works of the dramatic imagination in recent times."

This paper highlights the human relationships in the form of filial battles and spousal relationship in the play *Dance Like a Man*. This relationship is framed by the filial quarrel and argument. The main protagonists, Jairaj and his wife Ratna, two Bharatnatyam dancers, are focused on their daughter Lata's upcoming performance at a high profile dance festival. Meanwhile Lata nervously awaits the meeting between her parents and the man she wishes to marry. The younger couple has their own issues to contend with, as Lata attempts to balance her ambitions with those of her parents. It is a battle between Amritlal, a conservative patriarchal father and Jairaj, the ambitious mediocre dancer. Their argument is for the issue of whether or not Jairaj should continue dancing in the context where the Indian society in 1940 was very much stringent and stern about the dogma of being a man and man taking dance as a career was a disgrace to his family. Dance was attributed and confined only to the women in general and prostitute in particular.

The minor character, Chennai Amma, is the perfect paragon of the custodian of the traditional dance form. She learned it in her youth and when she is unable to win bread and butter by her arts. She sells flowers at the age of 75 in the vicinity of the temple. Upon Ratna's interest in the dance, she wants to pass on the dance to next generation through disciple like Ratna. When Ratna secretly with her husband's permission attends Chennai Amma's coaching, it is sneaked out to Amritlal that his daughter-in-law dances in the yard of prostitute and the passersby peeped her dancing. To save the family name from humiliation, Amritlal manages Chennai Amma to bring to his house. This is how the dance is ascribed to the women and how the dance practitioners were treated.

Jairaj wants to dance at any cost. Amritlal craves for his son leaving it and being a man. If he continues dancing, Amritlal feels, it will feel disrespect to their family which has earned a great respect and honour due to Amritlal's being freedom fighter and social reformer. Though he allows his son marrying a girl out of their caste to show off his being liberalist, he prevents both the dancers from interests. Finally capable of convincing his stubborn

daughter in law, he allows her when, in return, she helps Amritlal preventing Jairaj from dancing and making him a man. Jairaj cannot win over his opposition allies of his father and his wife plotting against him. He succumbs to the drinking. In this filial battle, Dattani made both father and son loose. Though Amritlal succeeds in turning him to be a man but not the man he expected to be, rather he turns to be a drunkard. Nor does Jairaj achieve his aspired goal to be a dancer, even if he goes against his fathers wish to continue dancing. Thus the filial battle is one of the important It is originally inspired by a struggle of a young man desperately wanting to be a dancer. It deals not merely with the tragic story of a young man, but a couple who struggle in their dancing career. Later on wife nourishes her dreams through the success of their daughter. Ratna takes credit of her daughter's success because she thinks that Lata succeeded due to her mother's efforts in both the preparation for the competition and in manipulating the final result. Dattani's central character Jairaj falls a prey to his father's view about the dance when his father and his wife hatch a strategy to prevent him from dancing.

The play centers on an individual's plight. Mahesh Dattani explores two key aspects through this play- the general inhibitions to a man taking dance as a career and the relationship between husband and wife who have grown apart and have done enough harm to each other, how their own thwarted ambitions and frustrations affect their own daughter who is in love with a man who has nothing to do with the art scene at all. This play depicts the hidden pathos and irony of human predicament. It deals with the dogma of being a man in the forties of Indian society. Man taking dance as a career which was attributed to women in general and low cost prostitute in particular. In the conversations that follow, the crack in Jairaj's and Ratna's relationship explodes into high strung battles. The story revolves around a dancer couple and their family, but the emotions of the play lies in the emotional and social dance. The story focuses on various characters and their filial relations such as Jairaj and Ratna, Lata and Vishwas, Jairaj and Amritlal etc. Jairaj, Lata's father and Ratna's husband, is a central victimized character. He is a loving father ethically correct man. He becomes liberal when he allows his wife and daughters erotic dancing. He revolt against his conservative father, Amritlal for continuing dance. His dancing career is soiled by his wife and his so called liberal father- the plot to prevent him from dancing and trying to make him a man in the society. Jairaj did an inter-caste marriage with Ratna, an ambitious dancer. Ratna also wants to marry him because she would be allowed to continue her dancing after marriage. Jairaj is interested but he is an ordinary dancer as compared to his wife. He is an economically and socially dependant man. He could not



leave his father's house. He is unable to feed his wife of his own. They both have to live on the property of his father. After the death of his father, Jairaj and Ratna became local celebrities. Ratna failed to shine in the field of dancing. She learnt the lessons of dancing from Chennai Amma. Ratna compelled her father-in-law to bring Chennai Amma at their house for dance training. She wants to see her success in the win of her daughter Lata. Lata helped Amritlal in preventing Jairaj from dancing. She made Jairaj's career as a scapegoat. Due to ambitious nature in making career, she lost her first son and neglected her family responsibilities. Whenever anything goes against her wishes, she turns into frustration and depression. Lata softens Ratna when she becomes depressed. Lata keeps balance between her dancing and her relationship. Lata's husband, a business man, supported Lata in her dancing career. The climax of the emotion is when Ratna cries over her daughter's national acclaim by her dance performance. Ratna's breakdown shows the jealousy and the mourning over her own failure. When Lata wins dancing competition and the next day the leading newspapers published her success news, Ratna cuts the news and wants to paste the clippings in her own album, Jairaj says to her not to do it. It's not fair, it's Lata's success, not hers. Thus Jairaj reflects his ethical manners. Jairaj is a tragic and sympathetic character. Later on he becomes a frustrated drunkard and his life is crumbled by his own people.

Another stand of human relationship claimed by Dattani in *Dance Like a Man* is the spousal relations, the relationship between husband and wife. This paper highlights the human relationships in the form of filial battles and spousal relationships. This relationship is framed by the filial quarrel and argument. The main protagonists, Jairaj and his wife Ratna, two Bharatnatyam dancers, are focused on their daughter Lata's upcoming performance at a high profile dance festival. Meanwhile Lata nervously awaits the meeting between her parents and the man she wishes to marry. The younger couple has their own issues to contend with, as Lata attempts to balance her ambitions with those of her parents. It is a battle between Amritlal, a conservative patriarchal father and Jairaj, the ambitious mediocre dancer. Their argument is for the issue of whether or not Jairaj should continue dancing in the context where the Indian society in 1940 was very much stringent and stern about the dogma of being a man and man taking dance as a career was a disgrace to his family. Dance was attributed and confined only to the women in general and prostitute in particular. In this filial battle, Dattani made both father and son loose. Though Amritlal succeeds in turning him to be a man but not the man he expected to be, rather he turns to be a drunkard. Nor does Jairaj achieve his aspired goal to be a dancer, even

if he goes against his father's wish to continue dancing. Thus the filial battle is one of the important plays - Jairaj and Ratna and Vishwas and Lata. The relationship of former couple intrigues the attention of the audience for both the souses do harm enough to each other so much so that not only their relations but also they themselves fall apart and their daughter Lata is sandwiched between her parent's expectations emanating from their ambitions and her own wish. At the end of the play, they realize that their capacity to dance fall short to achieve their overambitious goals. They finally agree that – We are only human. We lacked the grace and brilliance. We lacked the magic to dance like God.

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