

Theme of Conflict in Mahesh Dattani's play Dance Like A Man

Dr. B.N. Ravan,

Head Department of English
Shripatrao Chougule Arts and Science College,
Malwadi-Kotoli, Tal. Panhala,
Dist.Kolhapur. (Maharashtra)
Email ID- ravanbaba52@gmail.com

Abstract:

This paper highlights the conflict, sufferings, depression and gender issue faced by both men and women. Mahesh Dattani is the most powerful dramatist in the present Indian English dramatic world. He is famous for his new experiments. He deals with sexuality and gender issues, religious tension and the working of personal and more choices as he explores gamut of human relationship.

Dance Like Man has expressed the social issues of contemporary Indian Society. The theme of the play is dealt with tradition, relationship, career and society. The plot revolves around Jairaj and Ratna and their daughter Lata and her lover Viswas. The play also highlights place of a woman in patriarchal social setup. The impact of patriarchal authority in a joint family and the rest of the family members before their decisions has been highlighted by Dattani here. Though nowadays nuclear families have become more prevalent in India, traces of joint families could still be found.

Keywords : Mahesh Dattani, conflict, patriarchy, inequality, family, gender discrimination.

Introduction:

Mahesh Dattani is one of the most distinguished, playwrights of Indian English drama. He is a versatile writer that covers the areas of writer, director, actor, dancer and teacher, all welded into one. Dattani was born on 2 August 1955, in a Gujarati family, settled in Bangalore, Karnataka. He was educated, like so many others of a similar class and background in an English medium school, and grew up comfortably at ease with several identities - Gujarati, Englishspeaking, Bangalorean. He is perhaps one of the very few, and certainly, one of the most commercially, successful Indian English playwrights. The playwright has written more than a dozen plays and these are concerned with contemporary social issues of India. He deals with sexuality and gender issues, religious tension and the working of personal and more choices as he explores a gamut of human relationship. Dattani's plays are dramatic reflections on the anxiety and restraints of the commoners. He dramatizes common man's efforts to have space and respect in society.

Dance, Like A Man was first performed in, Bangalore on September 22, 1989 as part of the Deccan Herald Festival with the playwright Mahesh Dattani playing young Jairaj/ Viswas.

In Dance Like a Man Dattani incorporates the traditional Bharatnatyam dance form and brings together the historic India and the property-minded, money-oriented, society of the 1990's, with a drama moving between generations and across time in ways which are "technically astonishing".

Dance Like A man is a Chennai - based play where dance is an integral part of life. The major characters in the play- Jairaj, Ratna and their daughter Lata are dancers. Jairaj Parekh and his wife Ratna, aging Bharatnatyam dancers, are engaged in finding substitute mridangam player to accompany their daughter Lata at her performance at a high profile dance festival. Lata wishes to marry with Viswas and is thinking the meeting between her parents and Viswas. When the four meet, and in the Conversations begins, Jairaj and Ratna blame each other and quarreled a lot, which lead back to their own youth. She accuses Jairaj for being a spineless boy who could not leave his father's house for more than forty eight hours. Both Jairaj and Ratna are

thinking about Lata's career as a dancer after marriage and Lata tries a lot to balance her parents ambition with her own desires.

Having watched all this Viswas tries to leave the house. But Jairaj stops him and offers him drinks. He also tells Viswas about his father, Amritlal Parekh. Even he informs Viswas that he is trying to remove all the memories of his father, including this garden. Viswas asks Jairaj about shawl and the reason for keeping it. Instead of giving answer to Viswas, Jayraj agrees to give this valuable shawl to Viswas, when he marries Lata.

The play depicts the struggle between issues such as marriage, career and the place of a woman in patriarchal social set up. The impact of patriarchal authority in a joint family and the rest of the family members before their decisions have been highlighted by Mahesh Dattani here. Though nowadays nuclear families have become more prevalent in India traces of joint families could still be found.

Dattani portrays an Indian family in which Amritlal Parekh possessed unquestionable power over Jairaj and Ratna. Amritlal Parekh is the head of the family, and according to the tradition he is taking all decisions of the family. He is a freedom fighter and social reformer. He was supporting India to get free from the Britishers. As far as family is concerned he framed strict rules and never considered anybody's wish. He is against dance which according to him, is the craft of a prostitute. He gave permission to his son to marry Ratna, a Bharatnatyam dancer to keep with his image of a liberal minded person. But when! Jairaj listens his wife Ratna and wants partner her in Bharatnatyam practice that time. Mr. Parekh opposed. He rejects the freedom of his son who wanted to become a dancer, - "Do you know where a man's happiness lies! In being a Man" Father tells his son that dance is not a vocation that can enable a man to earn his livelihood. Even it is not respectable for a man, Mr Parekh does not like his own son to become a professional dancer. Mr. Parekh provides money to Jairaj to pay musicians. But he opposes Jairaj for growing, his hair long and going by the dictates of his wife. Mr. Parekh suggests his son he should, think about his self-esteem, which is very important in Indian society. Mr. Parekh felt ashamed of his son when he thinks about the profession of his son. He considered his son a cause for the shame for the

family. because he judged his son on the ground of masculinity. He says "Well, most boys are interested in cricket, my son is interested in dance, I thought. I didn't realize the Interest of yours would turn into an obsession".

Dattani highlights in the play that Mr. Parekh opposed his son for dance by saying it is the craft of a prostitution, but on the other hand he accepts and permits Ratna to dance. This shows men and women are not given equal treatment in the society, and it also throws light on Mr. Parekh's negative approach, thinking towards Bharatnatyam dance. There are so many people in the society they think like Mr. Parekh and gave lower treatment to men and even women. Amritlal very cleverly points out in front of Ratna that Jairaj can never be as good as dancing and demands the grace and beauty to be only the quality of woman. He says "A woman in the man's world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman's world is pathetic, yet being progressive is.... sick"

Ratna and Jairaj decided to rebel against the ideology of Amritlal by leaving his house. For Jairaj this house is very important because this house is bought by his father in Bangalore. This house is quite old. The house of the royal built of the British raj. It is known for its old architecture Jairaj loves the house as he loves his dancing wife. Jairaj and Ratna shifted to her uncle's place. When they went there they faced one new problem that is Ratna's uncle want to sleep with Ratna. Jairaj became very angry and Ratna also opposed this dirty idea of her uncle, and after all they came back to Amritlal Parekh's house. This is the conflict not only of Ratna but also Jairaj. This conflict underlines the father son relationship in the play, Jairaj hates his father. Amritlal dies, he destroys all that was very close to his father. He removes the gardening to show his hatred for his father. Thus the relation between the father and son shows critical one as it focuses on the question of inherited values and assumptions. This is the struggle between two generations.

Jairaj suffers a lot. Patriarchal power suppresses his dreams and desires. Even social prejudice also causes turmoil and suffering in the life of Jairaj. So, his self is divided and his pride is in stake. Jairaj is depressed and suppressed. He is frustrated as far as family relations are concerned: He

struggled with his father and now he is struggling with his wife. No one is ready to understand the emotions, feelings of Jairaj. Jairaj is inwardly isolated.

Jairaj cannot achieve the success as comparing to his wife as a Bharatnatyam dancer. Even Ratna starts neglecting him in her stage performances till he is reduced to a 'Stage prop'. Thus humiliates Jairaj a lot. His only ambition in life is now to train his son Shankar as dancer so that Shankar can dance Lord Shiva's, tandava nritya on Amritlal's head and avenge his humiliation. His son Shankar dies in childhood. He never blames Ratna for the death of their son Shankar, that was the result of her carelessness. Jairaj as a father, husband and son is inwardly tattered and broken.

Amritlal very skillfully controls the manners of Ratna. In the play Dattani shows there is a conflict between Amritlal and Ratna that shows conflict between tradition and the modernity. Amritlal is a clever person he knows the Ratna is going to visit a devdasi instead of going to temple.

Amritlal: You know very well where, because that's where you go every Monday. [Ratna does not respond.] It was fortunate for me that it was Patel, who saw you going there. I can trust him to keep his mouth shut. He called me, out of concern for our family name.

Ratna: I haven't done anything to spoil the family name [DIM:419]

Further ,

Ratna : Yes, My husband knows where I go and have his permission.

Amritlal : Your husband happens to be my son and you are both under my care. It is my permission that you should ask for (DIM420)

Dramatist shows there is a difference between Ratna and other family members, because Ratna is a dancer. She has a great stamina and confidence about her career. She works hard but she couldn't be a famous dancer under the patriarchal powers exercised by her father-in-law.

Here is a true clash between tradition and modernity.

Jairaj : Didn't you have your obsessions?

Amritlal : If you mean my involvement in fighting for your freedom, yes, it was an obsession.

Jairaj : You had yours. Now allow me to have mind.

Amritlal : How can you even compare the two?

Jairaj : As far as I can see, I can.

Amritlal: As far as you can see! "You can't see far, that is your trouble. Where is your dance going to lead you?"

Jairaj : If we hadn't gained independence, where would your revolutions have led you?

Amritlal: I would like to see what kind of independence you gain with your antics.

Jairaj : The Independence to do what I want.

Amritlal : I have always allowed you to do what you have wanted to do. But there comes a time when you have to do what is expected of you. Why must you dance? It doesn't give you any income. Is it because of your wife? Is she forcing you to dance. (P-36-37)

There is a strong influence of Ratna on Lata. She is always under pressure. She is very active in dance. Like her mother she was very ambitious. Viswas her lover is ignorant about Bharatnatyam dance. Viswas supports Lata, only because he is in deep love with Lata. Lata lays down a couple of conditions before she agrees to marry Viswas. They will not think about children immediately after marriage because she wants to concentrate on her career and make a name for herself first. Her focus is on the career. Like her mother she thinks about dance first; for that she can do anything. Viswas must support Lata for dance after marriage, this is also a condition laid down by Ratna. As far as Indian tradition is concerned we never force husband like this because marriage and family life depend on both. Lata speaks of her future aspirations :

"When I was little girl, I used to stand near the door and watch, mummy and daddy practice. It was magic for me. I know then what I wanted to be. Viswas, when we are married - you will let me come here to practice, won't you" (p.6)

Viswas gives consent to all only because of his deep love on Lata.

Lata's dance performance has been successful and the reviews are published in the newspapers. Ratna takes all the credit of Lata's success to herself; while Jairaj says Lata at least deserves some credit for her success. Viswas expresses his ignorance about Bharatnatyam dance. This Lata's success in dance shows a difference

between husband and wife. Viswas is very simple man. Like Jairaj, Viswas also adjusts all things. For both Jairaj and Viswas adjustment is very necessary to maintain smooth relations in the family. Dattani indirectly gives message that for happy family life adjustment is necessary. Here in the play dramatist gives more importance to Ratna and Lata for both, Jairaj and Viswas adjusts all.

The play displays its deep concern for family harmony and approach for social reformation. The play ends with following memorable words: "We were only human. We lacked the grace. We lacked the brilliance. We lacked the magic to dance like God." (DLM447)

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