

DATTANI'S DANCE LIKE A MAN: CHARACTER SKETCH OF RATANA AS A FEMINIST FIGURE AND HER FIGHT AGAINST PATRIARCHAL SOCIAL SETUP

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Abstract: In a patriarchal social set up , it very difficult for a woman , especially , career oriented woman to exercise her free will and it leads to eventually , psychological abnormalities: frustration , anxiety , depression and lack of mental piece. What choices does a society offer to a career woman , especially in post independent India? Where does such woman posit herself in such an unfavourable circumstances? 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 . Amrital Parekh , a typical patriarchal figure in the drama who opposes his son's choice to take up *Bhartanatyamas* full time career . Ratna, a Tamil wife , (of Jiaraji) who is equally talented , in the same dance form faces wrath of Amritala who curbs her free will and attempt to restrict her career choices. 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 and a typical feminist 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 . The researcher intends to do character analysis of Ratana , and decode her strategy to fight against the patriarchal norms .Strong headed Ratna is fights against all social restrictions, and later pushes her daughter ,Lata to fulfil her unfulfilled dreams to be a renowned dancer. The researcher concludes that the patriarchal norms/rules which attacks 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

Keywords: Bhartanatyam ,Devdasi , Feminism, 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 Berneand Show, Dattani Wants to use the theatre as a powerful tool for bringing about the necessary social charge. His plays reflects realistic and contemporary social issues .In an interview "Person Agenda" published in Bounch 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).

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

Bipin R. Parmar comments on the characters of Dattani as below :

His character are fully rounded men and women, and guys with a past behind them. His character are looked in the urban cosmopolitan setting of modern middle class India. His character struggle for same kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition cultural construction of gender and repressed desire (4 Das)

Further he adds Jermy Mortimer's comment Comments in a in a rate on the plays: "Mahesh plats often features character who are questioning their identity and who fed isolated in same way.

Commenting on the characters and themes (*Dance Like A Man*), Dattani writes:

Dance Like A Man deals with the lives of the people who feel exhausted and frustrated due to the hostile surroundings and unfavourable circumstances. The story is unfolded in time past and time present. (21 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 Parkh, Jiaraj, Ratna, Ratana's daughter Lata, and her fiancée Vishwas. It deals with the themes of marriage, children a woman's career and a man's place in the professional field (*Bharatanatyam* dance) which is usually, dominated by women. 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: Dattani, in one of the interviews, asserts:

Thematically, I talk about the areas where the individual feels exhausted. My plays are about such people who are striving to expand this space. They live on the fringes of the society and are not looking for acceptance, but are struggling to grab as much fringe space for themselves as they can." (4 Das)

***Bharatanatyam*:**

Bharatanatyam originated in southern India in the state of Termination. 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, Amrital 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) Jiaraj'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 Amrital's head and avenge his humiliation. But Shankar dies in childhood because of an overdose of opium

***Patriarchy*:** 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. Amrital a wealthy freedom struggle cannot tolerate his son opting for *Bharatanatyam* as a full time profession. Amrital Parkh 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) Amrital doesn't like Ratana and Jiaraj's Guruji who comes home to teach them dancing. Amrital asks Jiaraj not to invite his *Guruji* at their house because he strongly dislikes ways and manners of the *Guruji*. Amrital even doesn't like his son's long hair. As Amrital is adamant in his decision as long as you they are under his care He objects converting library hall into the dance practice hall. Amrital 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 your lawn if you were interested in cricket. Well, most boys are interested in cricket, my son is interested in dance,..(DLM 33) Further Amrital and Jiaraj verbal fights became frequent. Amrital Parkh upholds the traditional values, whereas his son, Jiaraj, seeks to overthrow it through his course of action.

Jiaraj	:	I can't even have a decent rehearsal in this house.
Amrital	:	You can't have a decent rehearsal in this house? I can't have some peace and quiet in my house! It's bad enough having had to convert the library into a practice hall for you.
Jiaraj	:	Nobody's forcing me.
Amrital	:	She may be influencing you. May be it's her, not you. That's one thing I regret. Consenting to your marriage.
Jiaraj	:	Don't pretend. It suited your image that of a liberal minded person to have daughter-in-law from outside your community. (DLM, 37)

Devdasi System:

Devadasi 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. In this splay . Dattani introduces a character of Chennai Amma , who is the last on ehwoouldpramote the Maysorscholl of abahnaya. But Rtana’s act of learning *Abhinaya* from her has been objected by Amriitalal

Feminism:

Feminism is a range of movements and ideologies that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve equal political, economic, cultural, personal, and social rights forwomenThis includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. A **feminist** advocates or supports the rights and equality of women.**Jane Flax** observes: “We are born with sex but acquire gender”. **Simone de Beauvoir**, in the work*The Second Sex*

(1949),comments on the secondary treatment given to women in the patriarchal social set up claiming that a woman is a woman and she must remain , man’s “shadow-self”, an ally , an auxiliary , an ‘embedded rabbit’, the ‘inessential other’. (123).

In this play Ratna, a feminist daughter in law struggles to follow her passion of dancing (Bhartanatyama) even when her father in law , objects her decision to learn the form of abhainayas from an old devdasiAmritlal 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 .

Despite being a social reformer, Amritlala doesn't like his daughter-in-law Ratna's association with a '*devdasi*and learning art of dance at her house as he fears of spoiling his family reputation. Therefore he demands:

Amritlal	:	Where does she go every Monday ? (Pause) You know and you don't tell me.
Jairaj	:	Where are your progressive ideas now?
Amritlal	:	This is different.
Jairaj	:	Where is the spirit of revolution? You didn't tight to gain independence. You fought for power in your hands. Why, you are just conservative and prudish as the people who were ruling over us!
Amritlal	:	You are mistaken. Gaining independence was part of our goal.

And some one had to be in charge. It's what we do now that counts? As you know, our priority is to eradicate certain unwanted and ugly practices which are a shame to our society (DLM, 37)

Thus, the play also highlights the stigma that clings to the life of a '*devdasi*'

Amritlal	:	We are building ashrams for these unfortunate women! Educating them, reforming them.
Jairaj	:	Reform! Don't talk about reform. If you really wanted any kind of reform in our society, you would let them practise their art. (DLM, 38)

But Amritlal thinks that supporting and allowing them to practice their art is an indirect encouragement for open prostitution.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)
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Jairaj's decision backfires when, Ratna's uncle, demands sexual favour from Ratna in exchange to offer them roof over their head. Ratna and Jiraj opt to go back to Amritla'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)
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Amritlal wants Jairaj to be an adult, and asks Ratna to help him to grow up. He strikes a deal with his daughter-in-law to discourage Jiraj from dancing *Bhartanatyam*. He makes a pact with Ratna. He will consent to her career in dance only if she helps him pull Jairaj 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 Jairaj's. He also lets her realize that she married Jiraj not because he is a dancer but because he 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 Jiraj 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 Jiraj, Ratna agrees.

Ratna doesn't think much of Jiraj and calls him "a spineless boy" who could not stand up to his autocratic father. According to her, Jiraj 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 Jiraj 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 Jiraj 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 Jiraj's frustrations. As Jiraj 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 Jiraj'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.

Jiraj 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." (DLM73)

Conclusion: The play is a bitter commentary upon a patriarchal family system. The playwright tells us how the autocratic father tries to check the movements and manners of his son and his daughter-in-law, although the father is considered as a man of

progressive ideas and liberal views. Jiarj and Ratana , both fight against the patriarchy .However , Jiarj 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 . Unfortunately , The patriarchal norms that creates obstacles in letting people exercise their free will , are in danger of blocking their emotional and social growth .

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