

## THE ORTHODOX NOTION OF BHARATANATYAM AND MEN IN MAHESH DATTANI'S DANCE LIKE A MAN

YASHASVI.M.MAADESH

**Abstract:** Mahesh Dattani a profound Indian English playwright. He focuses on the contemporary issues of the modern day Indian society. In his play *Dance like a Man*, Dattani has focused on a family which has issues with Men dancing Bharathnatyam and how women have taken their roles in ruling the family. According to Judith Butler's *Theory of Performativity*, Performativity of gender is a stylized repetition of acts, an imitation or miming of the dominant conventions of gender. Bharthnatyam over the history of Pre-independence was known as a dance form of courtly dancers or the Devadasis (Sex Workers), but in the Postcolonial period Bharathnatyam is a dance form for every gender. There is no gender bias to this dance form

**Keywords:** Post colonialism, Patriarchy, Gender Bias, Bharathnatyam, Performativity, Sex workers (Devadasi)

**Introduction:** Mahesh Dattani is an Indo – Anglican and the most well reputed and potent contemporary Indian English playwright. His plays are originally written in English. Dattani plays has been produced on the stage very successfully. He has written all his plays with diverse themes, techniques and devices. He concentrates mostly on the themes related to the Modern Indian Urban Families. Dattani's plays constantly questions the norms and conventions of the society, the issues related to gender inequality such as Homo-sexuality, Lesbianism, Child sexual abuse and deals with issues such as Male-Female divide, the Patriarchal tradition and communalism. He is confluence of art and craft. The central concern stems from the opposition between the tradition and the modernity in perception of matters related to human relationships as well as human weaknesses such as love, sex, marriage and religious faith. The term 'Post Colonialism' is not the same as 'After Colonialism', as if colonial values are no longer to be reckoned with. It does not define a radically new historical era, nor does it herald a brave new world where all the ills of the colonial past have been cured. Rather, 'Post Colonialism' recognizes both historical continuity and change. It acknowledges that the material realities and modes of operation common to colonialism are still very much a part of us even today. Bharathnatyam was an art form for the Sex Workers (The Devadasis) or the courtly dancers before the independence period but in the post-colonial world Bharathnatyam is a dance form which is an open field for every gender and not just for "Sex Workers" or only Women. Patriarchy is that which is inseparable from the structure of Indian society. Basically, Indian society is male centered according to sociologies and the head of the family has immense power to exercise on the family members which is unquestionable. In the process of this power execution, often the head of the family overlooks the interests of the family members and decides according to the social norms. The freedom of choice

is hardly given to the family members especially to the women of the family. Under the pretext of being the head of the family, being more powerful than others, the decisions are taken in the important aspects of an individual's life and career such as education, marriage, property, etc. Judith Butler's Performativity theory is that One's gender is constructed through one's own repetitive performance of gender. Butler writes, "... if gender is constructed, it is not necessarily constructed by an 'I' or a 'we' who stands before that construction in any spatial or temporal sense of 'before.' Indeed, it is unclear that there can be an 'I' or a "we" who had not been submitted, subjected to gender, where gendering is, among other things, the differentiating relations by which speaking subjects come into being ... the 'I' neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within the matrix of gender relations themselves" (*Bodies that Matter*). . Performativity of gender is a stylized repetition of acts, an imitation or miming of the dominant conventions of gender. Mahesh Dattani's plays *Final Solutions*, *Where There's a Will*, *Dance like a Man*, *Bravely Fought the Queen* usually portray women suffering under the yoke of patriarchy and gender bias. Mahesh Dattani's '*Dance like a Man*' centers on an individual's plight, where a dying form of art serves as the backdrop. A man stifled by his ageing father's principles, must find a way to escape, in order to create an alternative world that will enable him to practice that which he loves – Dancing. The son makes a mockery of his father's revolutionary acts. Calling himself a reformer, a freedom fighter, he ridicules the reforms that freedom fighters fought for. However, his father has different plans for his son. As his father had a different plan for his son, he takes the advantage of his son's financial dependency on him; the father altogether stops his sons' dancing classes. He wants his son to become an adult. In anger, the son leaves home, only to return, as he cannot support himself or his wife. This works marvelously for the

father. He thinks of a new scheme. His father softly talks to his daughter in-law to discourage her husband from his passion and to criticize, albeit subtly, his mediocrity. The wife (Ratna) is overly ambitious, and she sacrifices her husband's career for her career to take off. *Dance like a Man* is a powerful drama of post-independence society involving the aspiration of a middle class South Indian couple, who by their choice of profession are Bharathnatyam dancers reflect the past and the present Indian culture, problems of identity and gender roles. The

primary focus is on the construction of male stereotypes and the question of one's essential identity. For example, as Anjali Multani observes, the simile contained in the suggestive of the central question put forward by the male protagonist Jairaj, is if he can dance like a man, as the very notion of dance is opposed to that of maleness. Amritlal Parekh, the autocratic father, views Bharathnatyam as a "Craft of Sex Workers", and thus a man must never learn it, or whoever learns it could not be a 'man'

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Yashasvi. M. Maadesh  
Student Of MA English With Communication Studies,  
Christ University, Bangalore, Karnataka