

## A STUDY ON SOCIETY AND INDIVIDUAL IN MAHESH DATTANI'S DANCE LIKE A MAN

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**Abstract**— The relation between society and individual is very close. Man is biologically and psychologically equipped to live in group in society.

Mahesh Dattani is the contemporary dramatist. He introduces the themes like homosexuality, gender issues, radical images of women, awareness about AIDS victims and the growing frustration and nothingness in the middle-class life and tradition. He portrays marginalized people's struggle for acceptance in the society.

His Dance Like a Man is a two-act play about a family dedicated to the art of dancing. But they are convincing human beings. Their hunt for fame at odds with basic household duties involves certain moral considerations. The primary focus is on the construction of malestereo types and the question of one's essential identity. It is about an old couple, ex- dancers, Jairaj and Ratna. They are looking back at the past where they struggle against the stigmas attached to Bharatnatyam. As Dattani deals with the various hurdles on the path of a progressive society, he employs symbolism and metaphors to communicate those truths.

The relation between society and individual is very close. Man is biologically and psychologically equipped to live in group in society. Society has become an essential condition for human life to arise and to continue.

Mahesh Dattani is the contemporary dramatist. He introduces the themes like homosexuality, gender issues, radical images of women, and awareness about AIDS victims and the growing frustration and nothingness in the middle-class life and tradition. Mahesh Dattani's plays are mostly cantered on the marginalized. He wants to bring the people in the periphery to the centre stage. All his plays question the accepted norms, politically generated attitudes, gender identities and social stereotyping. Dattani portrays marginalized people's struggle for acceptance in the society.

Dance like a Man is a two-act stage play. The story revolves around three generations, their personal ambition, their sacrifices, their struggle and compromises, internal conflict and the way they cope up with life. It is about an old couple, ex-dancers. They are in their sixties and they are

looking back at the past where they struggle against the stigmas attached to Bharatnatyam.

Dance is the major discussion in the house between the father and his son and daughter in-law. Dattani in the very start of the play puts a question on a man's identity and his sexuality. Dance Like a Man the title itself suggests that a man is supposed to do the work which suits the man and not pursue their career in anything else which makes them less of a man. The protagonist's father doesn't want his son to become or behave like a woman and he should not pursue his career in dance. The play deals with the self and the significance of others in a manner of gender specific roles assigned by the society and how if you deviate from it, you are being side-lined by the people and the society.

The story revolves around Jairaj and Ratna. They want to develop the career as a dancer. Dance for them is not only their passion but also the life and soul. They want to develop the careers in this field where the stereotypes of gender roles are set in the society. Despite that, Jairaj goes on to pursue his career as a dancer. This is the twist that the playwright gives to the stereotyped gender issue. The play shows that even men can be a victim to circumstances of being oppressed and suppressed by the society.

Dattani uses the flashback technique as one of his dramatic devices in the second part of act I to focus on the conflict between art and society. Young Jairaj and Ratna face tremendous opposition from Amritlal Parekh for their unflinching passion for

dance. When Ratna is prevented from learning the Mysore school of dance from an old devdasi, Chenni Amma, Jairaj's heated argument with Amritlal culminates in his abandoning of the house with Ratna. The first flashback ends with this defiance. Act II continues the flashback with Jairaj and Ratna's return to the mansion, within forty-eight hours, absolutely defeated. Their helplessness is exploited by Amritlal, who strikes a deal with Ratna, promising to allow her to excel as a dancer, only if she schemes to prevent Jairaj from evolving as a male Bharatnatyam dancer. As Amritlal buys her at the ambition of Jairaj's passion, he deliberately destroys Jairaj by undermining his self-esteem as an artist. In the second flashback, one sees how the neglected Jairaj is reduced to drunken impotency. But Ratna continues to deliver performances sponsored by Amritlal himself. The flashback ends with the death of their infant Shankar owing to an overdose of opium. Jairaj accuses Ratna of parental irresponsibility. The play finally ends with the union of Jairaj and Ratna. Jairaj admits that being human, they lack the grace and magic to dance like God. Jairaj and Ratna are ready to dance while music takes over and spotlights fade.

The father holds the financial and paternal authority to stop his son from dancing. He prohibits Ratna from visiting the old devdasi that might bring ill repute to his family. There is a power equation at work reminiscent of Foucault's theory, according to which all relationships are power relationships. Amritlal is the oppressive master while Jairaj is the victim whose long-cherished

dreams are crushed by the former's colossal power. Amritlal is also shrewd enough to manipulate his daughter-in-law. Amritlal Parekh is introduced to us as a wealthy autocrat who has left this sprawling bungalow to Jairaj and Ratna who carry out their dance practice.

Amritlal's character is associated with the theme of appearance and reality in the play. When Amritlal pleads to Ratna, he is exposed as a vulnerable manseeking aid to have his son discover his inherent manliness, which according to Amritlal is lost owing to his love of dance. He is revealed not as a liberal-minded person but a vehicle of subjugation and repression that he blindly patronizes under the facade of an upholder of progressive ideas. His mask is ripped off when Jairaj confronts his hypocrisy which reveals the discrepancy between what Amritlal is and what he pretends to be.

The concept of masking and unmasking is also evident early in the play. Lata informs Viswas with conviction that her father will never part with the shawl as it is a fond memory of her grandfather. But Jairaj promises to offer it to Viswas at his marriage with Lata and says to him self with a sense of relief, "Your last memory. Soon I'll be rid of you too". While Lata tells Viswas that her father hero-worshipped his father, Jairaj himself tells otherwise:

Houses bungalows. Bought them real cheap. When the British left there was a was real demand for these bungalows. He made a lot of money. One of the richest men in town. Amritlal Pareth. The

sethji of the city. Do you know what he did with all that? He spent it all in reconstructing India. Sounds very patriotic doesn't it? (DM 25)

As Dattani deals with the various hurdles on the path of a progressive society, he employs symbolism and metaphors to communicate those truths that cannot be talked in the traditional milieu of India. The shawl is a significant metaphor of autocracy perpetrated by Amritlal Parekh. But it stands for Jairaj's as an unfulfilled desire to be recognised as a dancer. Every time Jairaj puts on the shawl his tussle with his father is enacted. Thus, the shawl symbolises the menacing past. The antique mansion with its old furniture and the dead phone is a reminder of the authoritative past. The musical instruments and dancing bells suggest the culture of the house. Guruji's long hair is a defiant protest gender stereotypes. The shopping complex hints at the newer ways of life where commercialism replaces the traditional order. Ratna's album symbolizes her unfulfilled aspirations. Jairaj and Ratna's re-entry into the house symbolises eternal love. It seems to rekindle the old couple's love for each other as well as their love of dance. The maker-destroyer binary is epitomised by Shiva.

Dattani's plays is not anti-women. It exploits the mainstream female stereotypes to raise questions about the construction of male stereotypes. Gender construction affects both men and women equally. The construction of one kind of gender role is in opposition to those assigned to the other. It becomes impossible to look only at one kind of

gender construction without taking the other representations into account.

Dattani's motive in writing this play is to force society to think about issues that it may not want to deal with. He deals with issues which are part of the educated urban society. The people do not want to confront them. But Dattani provides a platform for these issues. People know that they are not just the fantasies of a playwright.

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