

## **Patriarchal Subjugation in Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man***

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Patriarchy literally means 'the rule of the father' and it comes from the Greek. In Greek 'patria' means father and 'arche' means rule. Patriarchy is a social system in which males hold primary power, predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and controls of property in the domain of the family, where fathers are father-figures hold authority over the members of the family.

Patriarchy was thought more dangerous than capitalism and there were serious attempts to liberate the women from patriarchal oppression. Women were slowly become acquainted with the ideas and the writers all over the world including the dramatists started providing the women with ideological tools in their struggle against patriarchal suppression.

Family relationship can be defined as the way in which a person is related to somebody else in a family. How they behave towards each other, how they differ from each other or how they are similar to each other, all these come within the ambit of family relationship. This is well portrayed in Dattani's plays.

Mahesh Dattani has played an important role in the evolution and enrichment of Indian English Drama through his dramatic outputs. Mostly, he concentrates on contemporary society and reality in the fast-changing world. His plays are typical dramas, and his themes are relating to feminine identity, religion, communal tension, sexuality and also human relationships.

Family is not only an important constituent of Indian society but the nerve centre of Indian life. Indian families are known for their pride, dignity and prestige. They are considered as the yardsticks for Indian culture. Rachel Bari and M. Ibrehim Khalilullah say, "What is interesting about Dattani is the fact that in every human drama of his .... everything is placed in the family mould" (61).

Though the family is an organization that is praised highly among all Indians and also by the others, it needs real analysis and attention. The presentation of family in the plays of Mahesh Dattani is different from this. None of his families are peaceful and they are known for their gap and unhappiness between husband and wife, misunderstanding between parent and children and disregards between father and mother. He focuses on the essential form of family relationship between husband and wife.

Dattani's plays deal with the pathos of human predicament. Likewise *Dance Like a Man* is a powerful drama which provides an insight into contemporary social scene in India. This play won the award for the Best Picture in English awarded by the National Panorama in 1998. Neeru Tanton says, "What one loves about them is the way he brings in the dynamics of personal and moral choices while focusing on human relations" (91).

Dattani has presented a good set of family relationship in his play *Dance a Like Man*. The play is mainly built around the relationship between Amritlal Parekh and Jairaj. Amritlal is an autocratic father who expected all the members of his family to face down themselves before him. This play mainly explores the life of a budding dancer Jairaj who loses his career, his passion, his dreams and his purpose under the control of his father. When his son Jairaj decides his career as a dancer, Amritlal does not try to understand the emotions, the feelings and the problems of his son. He tries to control and asses Jairaj according to certain absolute standards of masculine behaviour. Throughout the play the father and his son appear to be living in two separate worlds without any interaction.

This play set in Chennai where dance is an integral part of life. Dattani uses the passion for dance as the central motif in the play. Ratna, daughter-in-law of Amritlal, wants her daughter Lata to achieve fame as a dancer. Because, she had been dissatisfied to make herself as a dancer because of the repressive patriarchal dominance of her father-in-law, Amritlal.

The play focuses on the conflict between the older and younger generations. Amritlal represents the attitudes of the older generation and the younger generation represented by Jairaj and Ratna. They challenge the old man who has no good opinion about the art form. The social bias against the art of dance among men is highlighted in this play. This play is an argument of the idea of the gender identity that is a burden not only to woman but also to man.

Mahesh Dattani draws attention to the complexities of relationships under patriarchal hegemony in his play *Dance Like a Man* (1989). He unveiled the ill effects of patriarchy in Indian society through his portrayal of the sufferings of women characters as well as men characters. In this play Dattani examines the relationship among the members of the family with truth and genuineness. His presentation of the characters in the family situation is life- like and real. This play centres round the Indian families with intricate relationships among its members. Dattani focuses on the human relationship with reference to day to day's lives. He concentrates only on the Indian upper middle-class families here from he himself emerges.

According to Amritlal dance is "the craft of a prostitute to show off her wares". It is clear thought the conversation between Amritlal and Jairaj that he would not allow his son Jiaraj to practice as long as he is under his guardianship.

Jairaj: You promised you would allow me to continue with my hobbies.

Amritlal: That was when you were a boy and dance was just a hobby. Grow up  
Jairaj.

Jairaj: I don't want to grow up! You can't stop me from doing what I want.

Aritlal: As long as you are under my care. (422)

Amritlal has cut down all his son's passions. He has warned that Bharathanatyam is socially neglected art and only permissible for persons like 'Devadasi'. Jairaj is discouraged by his father's desperate comments. Amritlal was unhappy with his son, because he looked odd as a dancer. He tells Ratna, 'a woman in a man's world would may be considered being progressive. But a man in woman's world is pathetic' (150).

Jairaj wants to live on his own by creating a boundary between him and his father. He has taken an impulsive decision that he decides to leave his father within his wife and resolves never to come back, as he says to his father: "As from now we are no longer under your care. And will never be again. Never" (424). But soon after he finds himself unable to support his family of his own. So, he comes back to his father's house within two days and he also makes a compromise with his father. But his father makes that situation to arrest the individual freedom of Jairaj by imposing certain restrictions on them. He tells Jairaj not to grow long hair and asks Ratna not to learn dance from anybody else. He also informs Ratna that a man's happiness lies in being a man. He believes his son and daughter-in-law gets happiness if they follow his instructions. But he really doesn't understand where his son's happiness lies.

Through then portrayal of the conflict between Amritlal and Jairaj, Dattani expresses the hollowness of the traditional patriarchal authority and also expresses such stubborn narrow-minded ale patents in Indian families.

Amritlal wants to make Jairaj as a man who could be worthy of a woman. At a stage, Amritlal induces the desire of Ratna to dance and assures Ratna that she would be allowed to dance if she helps him to make Jairaj an adult. Amritlal asks Ratna, "Help me make him an adult. Help him to grow up" (427). Ambition overtakes Ratna. She gets her freedom by giving up her husband's desire without the knowledge of himself. She is ready to destroy Jairaj's self- esteem as an artist.

Jairaj and Ratna started their lives with a dream to perform their art. But Ratna concentrates all her hopes on the performances of her daughter, Lata. Anxiety about her daughter's performance has created a great expectation in Ratna. She wants to achieve through her daughter what she had lost in her life. It has been a hopeless attempt to challenge the patriarchal authority. She strengthens herself with a success of Lata but makes her husband Jairaj, very hopeless.

The passion for dance helps Ratna to discover the masculinity in the personality of Jairaj. But he has failed to realize his perfect stature as an individual and as a dancer, because of the dominance of his father. Ratna also humiliates Jairaj that he has always been a 'spineless boy' who would not leave his father's house for more than forty- eight hours.

Amritlal shows his authority towards his son even in growing his hair as he wishes. He does not allow his son to have long hair, because he thinks that long hair meant for women alone. This is well expressed in the conversation between Amritlal and his son, Jairaj.

Amritlal: I have never seen a man long hair.

Jairaj: All sadhus have long hair.

Amritlal: I don't mean [ ... ]

Jairaj: What are you trying to say?

Amritlal: All I am saying that normal men don't keep their hair so long. (417)

Amritlal thinks that growing long hair is the checkmate to his son's masculinity via prejudice to his family pride. His underlying fear is that dance would make his son Jairaj 'womanly' and so tells Ratna: "Tell him that if he grows his hair even an inch longer, I will shave his head and throw him on the road" (418). He is ready to throw his son away from his home, though Jairaj is his only son. As the sole proprietor of his property, he threatens his son that he will throw his son out of home if he does not follow his instructions. Amritlal is a wonderful example to the male dominated society that creates and preserves the patriarchal code. Rebellion surfaces in the family the very moment Amritlal breaths his lost.

Jairaj is isolated both as a victim of social prejudice and parental authority. The irony in the life of Jairaj is that his life is shaped and reshaped according to the desires and dreams of others. Amritlal shapes Jairaj in whatever shapes, as a man should be. This makes Jairaj's life as a tragedy. The internal and external self of Jairaj is divided. In his external self, he is in conflict with his father. In his internal self, he is in conflict with his wife, Ratna. The conflict in the life of Jairaj with his father is a social expectations and individual choices. The traditional bondages of Amritlal do not permit Jairaj to exercise his own will. Amritlal stands for social accessibility and Jairaj wants to stand for his own identity.

Jairaj wants to fulfil his desire as an artist through his son, Shankar. Jairaj wants to teach his son the dance of Shiva, the dance of a man. He wishes that Shankar would dance 'tandava nrityam' right on the head of his grandfather when he becomes a young man.

Jairaj: [...] Then when grows up, I'll teach him how to dance- the dance of Shiva. The dance of a man. And when he is ready, I'll bring him to his grandfather and make him dance on his head- tandava nritya. (441)

But this desire of Jairaj also reminds unfulfilled because the child dies.

Amritlal also exploits the womanhood of Ratna with his power of money. He has an insight into a weakness of Ratna. He grants his permission to Ratna to dance with a condition that Ratna should prevent her husband from dancing. When Amritlal permits her to dance she feels very happy. But she is the double sufferer. In the failure of Jairaj, she too lost her 'womanhood' and the passion

for dance. Later, when her daughter, Lata emerges as the shining star of Bharathanatyam, she identifies her own image in the success of Lata. She seeks consolation in the success of Lata outwardly, but her inner self remains unfulfilled.

As a result, Amritlal's son Jairaj, a budding dancer, who loses his career, his passion, his dreams and his purpose under the control of his father. Though, Amritlal is a freedom fighter, fight for the nation's freedom doesn't care for his son's freedom. This article deals with the problems faced by the members of the family caused by the father and the father figure in the family and how the other members of the family made an attempt to come out of the patriarchal subjugation.

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#### Colophon

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