

Iconic Representation of Male and Female as Both the Sides of a Coin in Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like A Man*

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Abstract

This abstract spotlights the main theme gender discrimination of the play *Dance like a Man*. This play holds a several themes like patriarchy, passion, generation gap, quest for self-identity etc... This play tells the story of the dancing couple and their struggles. Jairaj and Ratna show a deep interest in bharathanatyam, one of the classical dances of India. Amritlal considers dance as a job of prostitute women who strictly warns his daughter-in-law Ratna not to be a dancer and it's unimaginable for his son Jairaj to be a dancer with a long hair. Lata, a daughter of Jairaj and Ratna wishes to become a bharathanatyam dancer like her parents and she gets the inspiration from them. Mahesh Dattani beautifully shows how each one looks the bharathanatyam, a classical dance with their individuality. As the title stands the play reaches the mind of the readers and its impact is greater than other plays.

Keywords: Issues - dance - approach of an individual - male domination

"Dance like a Man" is the play that made Mahesh Dattani famous. It was first performed on September 22, 1989, in Bangalore. Though now in Mumbai, Dattani is by upbringing a Bangalorean and the play is set ergo, quite naturally, in Bangalore. The "Gujju" reference in the play is withal from his background, if I read it correctly. But what intrigued me most in the play is the clash between the father Amritlal Parekh (a liberation fighter cum gregarious reformer who becomes opulent by buying up British bungalows when they leave and reselling them) - who represents the older generation who straddles pre-Independent India and early post- Independent India more than his son, and the son Jairaj who wants to be a dancer. The clash is inverted Freudian here of course but stands for much more in today's progressive and developing world; because it is a potent and subtle study of what it signifies to be a man, of masculinities and its attendant issues. To the detriment of other - and I do not gainsay this point - equipollent consequential issues in the play, I shall deal only with this one to give my paper focus, because of my interest in Otherness and in this clash Dattani deals with the Other in one of its avatars that people have not visually examined much, in my erudition. To "start at the very beginning" and in keeping with my maverick, and in some underground circles, prominent status as a revolted of an upbraided, I would relish to state that the denomination while it conspicuously references Shiva,

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the progenitor of the Tandav, withal equivocally nods at the hijra community in India, and implicitly enfolds the tradition of men dancing not only Bharat Natyam but Kuchipudi or other such art forms, dressed as women. These things would probably dawn on most Indians, but I cerebrate the job of a reprove is not only to verbalize of conspicuous connections but unearth subtle ones and sometimes to forge and make incipient connections that emanate from his own reading.

Coming as I do from a very post-modernist background in matters of literary reprehension and theory, such leaps of cerebrated foregrounding reader first and text second and authorial intention only last, are natural for me and I feel they require no justification. Dattani's designation reminded me of a famous hymn by Sydney Carter inscribed in 1967 called "The Lord of the Dance" and Fritjof Capra's popular "Tao of Physics." "We are only human. We lacked the grace. We lacked the brilliance. We lacked the magic to dance like God." (Page 74/2006 Penguin ed.) The play commences with an injunction to dance like/be a man and ends on a note of failure in that the man/men - and the woman/women in question in the play are unable to dance LIKE Shiva or Carter's Jesus who is what would make them/us authentically human or manly. Thus, the play is primarily tragic, dwelling on 'la condition humane' and authentically Ibsenian revealing what the "Pillars of (Human and Indian). Society" is genuinely composed of, but subtly so, seasoned and tempered by humor and the cognizance that life goes on all the same despite its tragedies, so that the revelation is bearable and doesn't ravage us, unlike the Shiv Tandav which preserves and eradicates concurrently.

Definitions of the male 'sex' which is predicated on the fact of having male genitalia, whatever species of male animal you belong to. Thus masculinity needn't be only found in the domain of men any more than its negative coloration in the gregarious world of stigma - effeminacy - (Amritlal: I've descried... the way he ambulates - page 39) need be traced or optically discerned only in the domain of men. It is against this rock-like figure that the father is that has the sanction of an entire unthinking society and nation behind it as to how it is an exemplary example of what masculinity and masculinity is, that Jairaj, the son, endeavors or has to assert himself to self-actualize his character.

His wife too visually perceives him the same way, to a lesser extent, shown by her putting him through the mortification of dancing in a woman's outfit to army men later, a very different thing from doing kuchipudi in woman's dress out of one's own cull. At many a step, Jairaj is misunderstood, as in when he leaves the house in pride and revolt with Ratna and comes back because Ratna's uncle was a leech and because a dancer can't find any kind of a job in India despite the spiritual and religious connotations of dance in India, and as in when he is not understood in his love for his son Shanker to the point where all decisions are taken by Ratna and

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Amritlal regarding him. Though Amritlal doesn't get the desired end result, he doesn't realize his folly. This is another part of the tragic note that pervades the book. Life only perpetuates mistakes and follies through generations of erroneous notions and power wielding, brokering and mongering and those who endeavor to break the pattern end up being crucified like Christ or Jairaj, which explicates why I brought in the Carter hymn in the commencement. Jairaj is more proximate to being a crucified Jesus, a man, a "genuine" dancer and philosophical artist extraordinaire, and a Shiva than we imagine at first reading!

Let me quote one or two concretely intriguing Amritlal dialogues, intriguing to me from the Regarding his son becomes a dancer: "Why must you dance? It doesn't give you any income. Is it because of your wife?" (Page 37) This is ironic considering liberation fighting additionally doesn't bring in any income. And the slur on manhood - hen-pecked husband - is always there, as customary. Regarding his son's inter-caste espousment: "And for that I repent." (Page 37). Fortuitously Ratna never overhears this one. Regarding power: "Gaining independence was a component of our goal. And someone has to be in charge. Jairaj (immediately afore): "You didn't fight to gain independence. You fought for power in your hands."

Dattani is very incisive here and immediately after too when father and son fight over what to do with the "certain unwanted and homely practices" that mar India's glory, like temple prostitution. How does Amritlal's ideology work out in practice? To Ratna, on Jairaj wanting to ameliorate his abhinaya and learn Kuchipudi: "Tell him that if he grows his hair even an inch longer, I will shave his head and throw him on the road." (Page 40) On the phone, regarding Ratna's devdasi guru: "Could you send a medico to optically discern her...Please give her five hundred rupees on my behalf."Ratna: "That was very benevolent of you."Amritlal: "That was in emolument of depriving her of her only student." (All on page 46)

The text eludes Dattani's hand remotely here in making Ratna out to be villainous additionally, albeit it is all a question of degrees, but that is justifiable in post modernism that a text sometimes apostatizes its author wholesome endeavor at politically correct considerations. To culminate with I opiate to deal with the two most lamentable or doleful moments in the play, according to me, that again dwell on the theme of masculinities, one where Jairaj narrates his peregrinating somewhere to dance as a woman - a far cry from the puerile hopeful man who wanted to grow his hair long to ameliorate his abhinaya and dress as a woman to learn Kuchipudi - and the other where he verbalizes of his desire as to what Shanker should grow up into Jairaj : "There's nothing crude about it. I danced the same item. The mazuma was good. (Italics mine)Your mother was trepidations and they wanted only a woman. So I wore your mother's costume.... and whatever else was compulsory to make me look akin to a woman and danced...They doted it." (page 60) One cannot avail feeling anger at Amritlal and Ratna here, at

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what they have made Jairaj into. Finally, on Shanker's future - the denomination is of course a synonym for Shiva (this side note is for occidental illumination).

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