



Subversion Or Stereotypification?: Critically Analysing Gender Stereotypes In Dattani's "Dance Like A Man"

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Abstract: Gender discrimination is the unfair treatment or preconceived idea of a gender-specific identity. It is triggered by inequalities of unwritten societal norms for culturally framed roles. In gender stereotypification, one gender is deemed superior to the other; most of the time, males are considered superior to females, although men are sometimes oppressed at the hands of society due to societal expectations, as rightly demonstrated in "Dance Like a Man." The essay will focus on the issues of the gender stereotype that Dattani explores in his play. The study will concentrate on how despite possibilities of subversion, Jairaj's character falls back on the same stereotypical notions of masculinity.

Keywords: Gender stereotypification, Masculinity, Bharatanatyam, Patriarchy, Identity crisis, Domination

I. INTRODUCTION

India is predominantly a nation of rich lineage, with a magnificent tradition of art and culture. Mahesh Dattani, a champion of progressive thought, is considered an enthusiastic playwright within the wider perspective of the play, taken into account. He sees himself as the change, but he cannot begin his journey to build new hope and new traditions unless he turns the clock back in time. At times, it can be deceptive, contentious, and even subversive. Dattani is recognized as a pioneer of Modern Indian Theatre because he masterfully uses it to highlight concerns that have hitherto been kept hidden in order to maintain the existing system and avoid any form of rupture that may quest culturally built existence. Among these concerns is the issue of gender stereotypes, which is accentuated by situating it inside the complex structure of the Indian family system, which retains the father as the master of the house. For Dattani, 'man' is an intrinsic part of society, and the insidious effects of

societal construction determine the relationships around him, whether consciously or unconsciously. Dattani expresses his contempt for close-fisted gender stereotypes in the conventional social framework by using the play "Dance like a Man," where an artist's enthusiasm is subverted owing to the limitations imposed on an individual and respective performances according to gender. As Amritlal says, "A woman in a man's world may be regarded progressive, but a man in a woman's world is pathetic" (Dattani, 166). Consequently, it is evident that the protagonist seems to be straining under the weight of male regulation. These subliminal undercurrents of stereotypical gender roles are portrayed in the play. It also focuses on the authoritarian and post-independence structure of the world at large in which the play is set.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The strong heterosexual Indian society is the subject of a wide range of issues raised in the play "Dance Like a Man." The ongoing struggle of the protagonist to adhere to the oppressive patriarchal dominated society - the "dancing" man and the consequences of pursuing his supposedly "feminine" passion of dancing, the constant upholding his so-called 'maleness', and money-controlled power structures are all the issues vividly depicted in the various journal articles.

"Dance like a Man" by Dattani delves into the challenges faced by the husband and wife, the two Bharatanatyam dancers. Jairaj's authoritative, orthodox father, Amritlal Parekh, disapproves them following their passion and becomes the symbol of patriarchal tyranny throughout the play, just like the other plays authored by Dattani which cover unconventional subjects, such as male stereotypes and 'gendered identity' struggles. The title of this essay alludes to the main dilemma that the central character, Jairaj, faces: '(whether) he (can) dance like a man,' as the entire concept of dancing is a



threat to the narrow definition of 'masculinity' as it is only considered as a female activity (Dattani 2016). Jairaj's enthusiasm is rejected, his gender is put under trial, and his identity is questioned.

Judith Butler, an American Philosopher, through his theory of 'Gender Performativity' that talks about the stylised repetition of behaviour tends to boost the concept of stereotypification. In the play, the identity of the male character, Jairaj, is problematised due to the repetition of gender-based performance. Raewyn Connell, an Australian Sociologist, proposed the idea of masculinity emphasising male behaviours that challenge gender stereotypes. In the play, Jairaj's father (Amritlal Parekh) is exasperated and chooses to dominate his son because, much against his wishes, Jairaj wants to choose his passion as a profession; here the control of man over man is portrayed by the author. A conflicting quest for power between patriarchal norms and its victim is depicted, using the protagonist and his father, Amritlal. Again, the same point of conflict is pointed out between orthodox beliefs and modern society, and their contrasting ideals are represented by Jairaj and Amritlal several times throughout the play.

III. RESEARCH QUESTION

Attempting to challenge the traditional gender roles through a character like Jairaj in "Dance Like a Man," but by limiting his progress at the play's end, is not Dattani reverting to the same tropes of masculinity and femininity?

IV. BODY

The play "Dance Like a Man" focuses on the central theme of 'family.' This is primarily due to two factors: first, the family, which is nuclear in size, intertwines with other parts to form up an entire, i.e. the society, but the segment or the family is also a whole in itself, second, not compared to the joint family ideal in the sense that it tends to encourage stronger bonds of oneness through mutual support and sharing, Dattani draws attention to its underlying themes by exposing the authoritarian framework of the institution that has often denied the freedom to its individual members.

In the play, Amritlal Parekh portrays the tyrannical father in "Dance Like a Man," attempting to restrict his son Jairaj's movements and manners despite being socially considered a man of progressive ideas and liberal beliefs. The play begins with Jairaj and Ratna in their sixties, reflecting in a flashback on their days of struggle, especially in the 1950s, when there was a societal

stigma associated with the Bharatanatyam; that it is a dance style of the devadasis. It is a prostitute's dance, and no one from a "respectable" family performs or practices it. As a result, it is difficult for a 'man' to pursue a profession in a dance form that has traditionally been reserved for women. As a consequence, Jairaj puts into weight the notion of dance being a feminine art, rather than about pure creativity. The struggle of Jairaj's intentions with his wife and father involves the issues of identity, the stigma of gender binary lying at the center of the socio-cultural ideas, and the eternal clash of man's aspirations and forces of fate. Dattani pushes us to "examine our own individual and collective consciousness" ("Collected Plays" 383). Women were often shown as the dominant dancers, most notably in advertisements and media, even in social dancing, where men lead the dance. Some observers believed that dance's physical freedoms mirrored women's newly attained social and political liberation (Funkenstein 164, 166). Because these cultural spaces were not as explicitly divided or rigidly determined by gender, rather it permits us to rethink and assume new forms of gendered cultural engagement in which femininity, like masculinity, grows across time.

Jairaj is discouraged from continuing to pursue a profession in dance by the arbitrary rules of gender stereotyping that still prevail in our dominant society. This is how gender stereotypes function in a patriarchal society is demonstrated by the protagonist's father Amritlal's refusal of his son to become a dancer, Ratna's expectation of blind disobedience from her partner, earning enough to maintain a standard way of living, and subsequently, his failure to be the provider for his family. Gender is not really a process, as Butler defines it, "a sequence of recurrent acts under a highly rigorous regulatory frame" (Salih 56). Jairaj resides in the domain of Jairaj's father, Amritlal, the 'patriarch.' The patriarchy has such deep roots that Dattani's character Jairaj is unable to break free even after his father's death. The shawl that belonged to Jairaj's 'late' father actually hangs from his shoulder, symbolizing the burden of the "patriarchal code of conduct" with which he has suffered his entire existence. Amritlal believes that 'dancing' is a job that males like him engage in as spectators, and his heir shouldn't learn it and turn it into a source of livelihood. Amritlal uses vehemence in his reaction to making Jairaj into a 'man.' He tries everything because he can't accept his son's ambition to become a dancer as a profession, to be realised. Dattani's character Amritlal has a plethora of possible methods for preventing him from achieving



his objective, including disdain, agony, hatred, manipulation, and capitulation. To get his son back, he does everything in his power.

Connell's idea of masculinity as a "combination with two" becomes incoherent due to a specific hegemonic pattern in the extremely biased interplay between masculinity and what it debunks, which is essential to its persistence as a stabilising factor of multiple patriarchies in what Butler refers to as a "phallogocentric worldview" (Singh 108). Throughout the play, there is continuous power control between the genders. However, the protagonist Jairaj seems to be the one who suffers throughout the play because he took his own, unbeaten path. Because long hair is only for women, according to Amirtlal's core theory of gender inequality, men are not allowed to have it. The dialogue between the father and his son effectively conveys this:

Amirtlal: I have never seen a man with long hair.

Jairaj: All sadhus have long hair. .

Amitlal: I don't mean....

Jairaj: What are you trying to say?

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

Dattani's character 'Amirtlal' feels that his son's long hair will be the death knell for his manhood by eroding his feeling of family pride. Despite the fact that Jairaj is his only child, he is willing to exile him, away from his home. As a result of gender constraints and presumptive gender stereotypification, he is gradually asked to take control of his son. He threatens to evict his son if he does not follow all the rules and standards of what it is to be a 'man' that has been established by the male-dominated society because he is the only owner of the land.

Here, Dattani puts Amirtlal acts as a magnificent role model for the stereotypification culture that develops and upholds masculine ideals and boundaries. "Bharatanatyam is the craft of a prostitute to show off her wares in his dictatorial father's eyes, hence a man has no business learning it, and anyone who has learned such a craft could not be a man" (Mohammed 235). 'Jairaj' was masculine enough for his family members, it was his mentality rather than his physical self that was lacking. Being a man, according to Ratna, meant having the autonomy to make decisions and the ability to live life on one's own principles, stand on one's own two feet without approval, and possess

other attributes that Jairaj lacked. "You! You are nothing but a spineless boy who couldn't leave his father's house for more than forty-eight hours" (Dattani 147). Dattani's gender inequality is well-represented in this play. His subaltern genders are subdued by co-genders. Despite the fact that the oppressions have social reasons of their own, gender supremacy. This runs against society's view that a man should not pursue the 'feminine' activity of dancing. 'Society' amuses, so it recognizes a man dancing, but it still fosters prejudice against his passions and desires. Throughout time, this hinders Jairaj's ability to advance in his desire to become a dancer, and as a result, Dattani reverts to the same gender stereotypes.

V. CONCLUSION

The play "Dance Like a Man" makes the reader think about several important issues. It causes one to reevaluate how one's actions are tried shaped by society and how one accepts them without question. Likewise, Jairaj's self-esteem is seriously impacted as he tries to prove himself a 'man' to his family members. It ultimately shows that the artist must be beyond human weakness in order to preserve and advance in any artistic form. The idea of males and females as one entity, or 'totality,' marks the gender gap. Jairaj discovers through 'self-realization' that the divine heart of a person is neither masculine nor feminine. Anyone's social and self-identity can be impacted by 'gender discrimination,' which is more than just a cultural and societal construct. It has a significant effect on a person's character, thus eradicating it would be dreadful. The protagonist Jairaj in Dattani's "Dance Like a Man" likewise explores his inner self through this. Despite this Jairaj's character falls back on the same stereotypical notions of masculinity.

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