



## MAHES DATTANI'S DANCE LIKE A MAN, A SCOPE TO STUDY "OUR OWN INDIVIDUAL SELF VERSUS CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS"

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### ABSTRACT

India is rich in dramatic performances and it can be traced back to as early as 200 B.C.E. These dramatic activities are regarded as exquisite achievements in Indian literature. These dramatic activities in India claim special attention because these were purely Indian in origin without any foreign influences. The credit goes to ancient Sanskrit Literature. These dramatic activities were rich examples of enrich Indian literature which attracted many eminent scholars all over the world and encouraged them to translate these plays into many foreign languages for the benefit of humanity. Among these scholars are Dr. Horace, H. Wilson M. L. Varadpande. Although these dramas had certain feedbacks but these did not mar their brilliance. The dramatists who contributed heavily are Kalidas, Ashwa Ghosh, Bhasa, Sudraka, Harsha, Bishakha Dutta etc. some famous works of that time are *Urubhanga*, A tragedy, Romance like *Abhijana-Sakuntalam* by Kalidasa. These plays enjoyed considerable freedom in the matter of subject choice, which varied according to the writer. These dramas mostly preferred subjects of Hindu scripture, mythology, saga, eminent persons or kings of that period etc. but these plays had a common fate that is they must end happily as because dramas at that time were a means of entertainment and must produce Rasa and fulfill the emotional and moral necessity of the people of that period.

### KEYWORDS :

#### Various Phases of Indian Drama

Literature including drama is a living art form and must undergo changes continuously keeping in view the progress of civilization and the socio-economic scenario of that period. But the irony is that civilization does not always progress in a liberal way. It may proceed in backward way also. The first phase as has been already discussed was very enriched and lasted up to 700 A.D. But with the rise of Buddhism it suffered serious jolt as the Buddhists thought the dramatic performances may disturb them in their spiritual pursuit. The Muslim rule in India was also not congenial to the flourish of Indian Drama.

#### Second Phase

The second phase covers a period of about 1000 years and some of its features continued up to the present day also. What distinguished it from Sanskrit drama that Sanskrit theatre was town based which catered specific spectators but these new plays developed in country side and gave importance to folk life and are often called 'folk Theatres'. These plays were nearer to the life to the life of common people and proved to be the important medium of entertainment. These plays laid overwhelming emphasis on music and dance. Behind the origin of such plays some degradation of social and moral life is responsible. The Bhakti Movement got a firm footing to that plays and opened a safe ground for expansion and almost every province of India like Bengal, Kerala, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu etc. These dramas were connected deeply with the fundamental concern of Indian social life.

#### Third Phase

The third phase of Indian drama is the result of encounter with the western culture and its vehement efforts of existence by way of modification. Because drama is to cater the emotional needs of the audience of present day. The British rulers considered Indian culture as well as Indian drama as inferior because they thought that drama is not a means for entertainment but the presentation of life struggle. Besides there emerged an elite class or better said 'Babu Class' who were not British by birth but by their airs. As a result Indian drama had to undergo some reformation to cater the new audience. All parts of India like Bengal, Madras, Kerala took part in this process of modification and a more comprehensive Indian drama emerged. Many theatre groups in the large cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Madras were established to cope with the new situation. The Indian dramatists like Habib Tanvir, Utpal Dutt, Sambhu Mitra, Ebrahim Akazi contributed to their own way to set the new Indian drama of a firm footing.

The dramatists comparatively junior to them startled the theatrical society with their ingenious talents and gave Indian drama a world stature. Dramatists like Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar tried their level best to make drama a vehement medium of expression. They often incorporated traditional scripts to cater the new vista of social problems. These plays are reflexive in nature and delineated the modern human predicaments in present day scenario. They are quite successful in their efforts and have been widely accepted all over the world and many Indian as well as foreign universities have incorporated these plays in their respective syllabus.

#### Contribution of Mahes Dattani (1958— ) to the new Indian Drama

Mahes Dattani has been acknowledged universally as a playwright of innovative genius and claims to be original who very very brilliantly presented through his plays the nature of modern psyche and the predicaments of marginalized people in the society. He is the spokesman of people who are marginalized and suffer heavily for their own identity in a hostile society. He presented before us many issues which are dear to him like gender discrimination, the women voice, communal violence, search for vocation etc. He often deals with the subjects which attract controversy. Dattani through his plays secured an esteemed position not only in India but also in the world. His plays like '*Tara*', '*Dance like a Man*', '*Where there is a will*', '*Final solutions*', etc. are staged world-wide and attracted universal acclaim.

#### Some tributes to Mahes Dattani by eminent persons

'A playwright of world stature'— *Mario Relich Wasafiri*.  
'One of India's best and most serious contemporary playwrights in English'— *Alexandra Viets— International Herald Tribune*.

'Since Salman Rushdie swung open the door to the West, English language Indian novelists have wowed the world. Indian playwrights have been less conspicuous except for Mahes Dattani.'— *Vibhuti Patle, News Week International*.

Mahes Dattani is the first Indian dramatist to be awarded Sahitya Academy award. Dattani is the most unorthodox and contemporary playwright of Indian English Drama who has used the medium of stage to present the invisible issues and made theatre as the mirror of life. He takes issues that appal society all over the world. He has recorded the social victim and follies, foibles and prejudices of Indian society. He often defends persons who are social outcasts. He like Chekov writes plays which have universal appeal and can be staged to any country. According to Joh Me Rac, "They are plays of today, sometime as actual as to cause controversy, but at the same

time, they are plays which embody many of the classic concerns of world drama". Praising Dattani Alyque Padamsee says, "At last we have a playwright who gives sixty million English speaking Indians and identity". His plays deal with many living issues like homosexuality, gender discrimination, communalism and child sexual abuse.

### Issues in Dance Like a Man

As the title suggests this play deals with one stereotype system of society that a man should behave like a man and a woman like a woman. Any violation from any angle is neither desirable nor beneficial not only to the family and collective society but also produce shattering effects to the person concern. In the words of Amritlal—"A woman in man's world is considered progressive but a man in a woman's world is considered pathetic". The play raises serious question on the readers mind that how our actions are shaped according to the norms of society. People accept it without questioning. If somebody dares to defy it he must be a victim of fetal consequences. The society is a mighty institution where an individual has very little space for him. Dattani says "All of us want to be a part of society of the main stream but we must acknowledge that that is a forced harmony". In that society you can't survive unless you fit into the social stereotype. And here lies the real struggle.

### Why man pursues art

Art is the creative self of artist. An artist finds his satisfaction through art. Art eternalizes a moment and gives the artist an identity of his own. It is a integral part of human beings, which distinguishes human beings from animals. But a human being is not only an artist but he also a member of family as well as society. He has certain duties to perform. But artist neglects his duty and devote himself solely to pursue art. In that process a conflict of interest between society and the individual arises. Both can't survive in a single platform. One must be defeated. In that war society emerges victorious leading to the doom of artist. This play offers us a scope to study that with the progress of civilization individual should have some liberty otherwise civilization will be static.

### Plot in a nutshell

This play tells the story of free generation of India after independence. This play presents conflict between the historic India and the property minded, money oriented Indian society of the 1990 and the new generation of modern India. 'Dance like a Man' is Chennai based play where dance is an integral part of social life. In this play Jayraj and his wife Ratna are Bharatnatyam dancer which is the special dance form originated in Chennai and appreciated widely. They want to pursue the art and make a career out of it. They are the members of aristocratic family. Amritlal, father of Jayraj is the representative of the aristocratic society who fought for country's independence and considered to be a member of elite society. He although allows Ratna to dance but do not wants his son to pursue that craft. As because being a very pragmatic man he thinks that dancing can be a hobby but not a profession. Because Bharatnatyam is a symbol of Chennai culture but its acceptance is limited to only a cultural group of society but not by the common people. Jayraj must have a solid profession which will enable him to earn money to lead his life as well as family. In this profession he will not be able to earn for his livelihood. Besides Bharatnatyam is notorious as because it was practiced by the 'Debdasi'. Who are often called prostitute. A Bharatnatyam dancer keeps hair long and practice steps which are derogatory to a man. But Jayraj and Ratna are persistent to pursue the art and out of anger left house to fulfill their mission and took shelter to the house of Ratna's uncle. Here they first experienced the bitter truth of life. The aged uncle of Ratna wanted to abuse Ratna physically for exchange of shelter. So out of bare necessity of life they return home and compromise with Amritlal.

### Hindrances to the path of artist

#### 1. Generation gap:

It is a terminology which occur when a difference of attitudes between people of different generation leading to a lack of

understanding. Famous sociologist Carl Mannhein upheld the view in 1966 when the younger generation latter known as 'Baby Boomers' seem to go against everything which their parents previously believed. Both have their respected understanding and in this process the members of family isolated and lead fetal estrangement. This drama tells story of three generation their personal ambition, sacrifices, struggle, compromises, internal conflict and the way they try to cope up with life. As has been stated earlier this drama projects the issues like marriage, career, individual freedom and place of woman in a property minded society. Amritlal representative of older generation wants his son should choose carrier which are supposed to be called manly. He wants that Jayraj should be a cricket player and he is ready to make pitch of cricket in his house. But strongly opposes Jayraj to be a dancer. There are social stigmas also to the person who practice this dance form. He may be called a homosexual. So Amritlal dissuade Jayraj and tries his level best to bring back his son from this craft.

Jayraj says to Amritlal, "Did not you have any obsession?"

Amritlal: "If you mean my involvement in fighting for your freedom, yes, it was an obsession".

Jayraj: "You have yours, now allow me to have mine".

Amritlal new if Jayraj can not choose a right profession he will be degraded to the eyes of Ratna. Jayraj can't emulate Ratna in this dance form. Besides a stigma of homosexuality, it will also stain him. In this regard Asha Kuthari Choudhury says—"The underline fear is obviously that dance would not make him womanly— an effeminate man— the suggestion of homosexuality hovers near, although never explicitly mentioned" (P-68). Both Jayraj and Amritlal don not compromise and the result is very bitter. Jayraj says—"I have always allowed you to do what you wanted to do. But there comes a time when you have to do what is expected of you. Why must dance". After returning from the house Ratna's uncle Jayraj is compelled to make a partial compromise with his father. But his desire is still alive. He accompany with Ratna to his programme.

### Dominating Wife

Ratna although a dance partner of Jayraj and his wife she suffers from superiority complex. She also neglects her family duty and her child dies in an overdose of opium by the maid servant who was engaged to have the child a sound sleep. She tries her level best to be successful but only a partial success is achieved by her which is called a 'modicum'.

### Shattering Dream of Jayraj

Jayraj after compromising with his father converted into a non entity. He internally suffers and broken. His dream is shattered into pieces. Now he is only a stage partner of Ratna and accompany with her in programmes. He is a 'stage prof'. Ratna spares no scope to humiliate Jayraj every moment. She says him as a 'Spineless boy' who can't resist his dominating father. Ratna is also exhausted and she wants to fulfill her dreams through her daughter Lata and gives her special training in dance mode called 'Chandrakala'. Jayraj being the victim of circumstances is addicted to alcohol. He regrets that he could not dance like a man. He wants to fulfill his dance in dreams and says—"We are only human, we lacked the grace. We lacked brilliance; we lacked the magic to dance like God".

### Conclusion:

Dattani being the eloquent voice of marginalized people very brilliantly presented before us through this drama *Dance like a Man* the plight of a protagonist in a hostile environment. Dattani's pet concerns like gender issue, marginalized voice, and freedom of individual all are addressed in a very critical way. This play presents before us that although there are outstanding developments in science and technology, economy, state craft, globalization, liberalization in social life but there exist some prejudices or age old notion and code of conduct in society which need to be corrected. An individual in a society must have a room for his own so that he can express himself. Society need to be justified in light of the modern psyche. Otherwise society will be static. This play is a

brilliant study of human relationship and weakness framed by the age old battle between tradition and youthful rebellion. *Dance like a Man* has been hailed as one of the best works of the dramatic imagination in recent time. The play has a universal appeal and it is valid not only in India but also to the whole world. It has been translated into many languages and universities all over the world gave tribute to Dattani by introducing this play in the respective syllabus of many universities of the world.

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