

Patriarchy Power and Expectation Causing Destruction in Mahesh Dattani's Play "Dance Like A Man"

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani's play "Dance Like A Man" portrays, how a patriarchal father governs his family with autocratic power that leads to the destruction of his son's dreams and career life. The play projects the suppression of family members leading to crises in the 1940's Indian society. During this time males had a dominating and controlling power in the family and society at large. Mahesh Dattani in this play portrays three generations, Amritlal Parekh, father Jairaj Parekh, his son, Ratna his wife and their daughter Lata and Vishwas future son-in-law. Amritlal Parekh father of Jairaj Parekh holds the patriarchal power in the family. He does not understand the interest and passion of his son Jairaj and daughter -in-law Ratna for Bharatnatyam dance. Amritlal represents the patriarchal voice of the society which does not accept male dancing and believes that dance is only meant for females. This paper discusses the patriarchal views, opinions, and expectations playing a key role in suppressing and destroying Jairaj's passion for dance. Jairaj struggles to take up dancing as a career. He faces opposition from his father, and struggles to achieve success as a male dancer. He becomes a victim of his father's patriarchal power play. This power play leads to the destruction of Jairaj's career, and his personal life too gets devastated.

Keywords: Destruction, Gender Crises, Patriarchal Expectation, Patriarchy, Power Play.

INTRODUCTION

Mahesh Dattani's "Dance Like A Man" mirrors patriarchal power and oppression leading to destruction of a son's life, passion and career. He has tried to portray the real problems faced by the family members who are living in a home that has a patriarchal culture. The title of the play is a simple statement but it has a deep-rooted meaning creating a conflict in the minds of the readers. In the play "Dance Like A Man" Mahesh Dattani showcases three generations of the Parekh family, a patriarchal power play creating conflict and destruction. The play mirrors the conflict between Amritlal (patriarchal father) and Jairaj (son) over Jairaj choosing dancing as a career in his life. Amritlal as a father cannot

accept his son's decision. His patriarchal expectation from his son is that Jairaj needs to choose a manly career and not a feminine oriented career. According to Amritlal dancing was an art practiced only by female gender. Amritlal is an autocratic father and with his patriarchal power and oppression, he controls his son's life. Amritlal is a father who holds primary power in his family and expects all other family members to live life according to his expectation and choice. Amritlal has established a patriarchal culture in his family so firmly that he crushes his son's dreams, passion, and career. Jairaj is a victim of his father's patriarchal expectations and oppression. Many men and women face patriarchal oppression and control in life and have to suppress their own choices, desires, and passion. Mahesh Dattani brings to light the unspoken dark side of life and thus creates a sense of awareness among people.

DISCUSSION

Dance Like A Man:

Exhibition of patriarchal expectation and power causing destruction in an upper-middle-class Indian family of the 1940s is portrayed by Dattani in "Dance Like A Man". Men had supreme dominating power over children, and wives and controlled their family in every aspect of life (social, moral, economical, interpersonal relationship, decision making). This supreme authority or power is called patriarchy and Dattani has projected how a patriarchal father Amritlal Parekh governs his son Jairaj and daughter-in-law Ratna's life and crushes his son's passion to become a Bharatnatyam dancer ultimately destroying his life. The patriarchal father's expectation subsequently leads to the destruction of his son's emotions, dreams, and final career.

Amritlal Parekh father of Jairaj Parekh is the head of the Parekh family. He is the only person who has supreme power over the family. He governs and controls his family without bothering other family members' feelings and emotions. As a patriarchal father, he keeps tight control over his son and daughter-in-law's life and career. He was a freedom fighter who supported India to get freedom from the Britishers. But as the head of the family, he behaves like a conservative who does not give his son Jairaj the freedom to choose the career he wants to pursue. Dattani has brilliantly showcased the realistic human nature in this play. Dattani projects how a man behaves differently in a social circle and personal life. Actions and behavior shown in the external and social world are different from the actions in personal life.

Patriarchal Expectations & Patriarchal Power:

Amritlal Parekh as a controlling father could not accept his son as a man to be a Bharatnatyam dancer in his life. Amritlal considers dancing as a career meant only for women. His patriarchal views could not accept his male son accepting a female career and see him dancing in society. Amritlal considered it a shame for a man to be a dancer. He considered dancing as a lower and not respectable profession for a man. This shows Amritlal's patriarchal views and expectations of the male son. He could not accept Jairaj

being male - dancing because dancing was equated as a female-oriented role and linked to prostitution. This is evident when Amritlal speaks these words to his son Jairaj:

Amritlal's words, "Do you know where a man's happiness lies? In being a Man?"

These words mirror Amritlal's patriarchal expectations from his male son.

As a father he expects his son to behave like a man and choose a career meant for man and leave dancing which he regarded as female career.

So, Jairaj being a man, his choice of getting into a dancing career is not acceptable to Amritlal because he considers dancing to be meant only for females and he correlates dancing to prostitution. Amritlal as a father with unquestionable patriarchal power has wrong views and opinions about dance professionals. His patriarchal expectation from his male son is male-centric and thus he does not give his son the freedom to choose his career in his life. Amritlal discourages Jairaj to continue dancing. Jairaj is suppressed under his father's supreme patriarchy. Jairaj's passion and career dreams are crushed by his father. Dattani here projects how patriarchal power can suppress family members' desires when they are living in a patriarchal home. Patriarchal expectations and power suppressing and dominating Jairaj's life are seen in the play.

Patriarchal Power and Suppression:

Mahesh Dattani intelligently portrays patriarchal power and authority suppressing Jairaj's passion. When Amritlal realizes that his son's dancing is not a hobby but a passion and future career choice he gets upset and blames himself for it. Amritlal at no cost can accept his son to become a dancer. Jairaj and Ratna are financially dependent on Amritlal. Dance as a career does not fetch them a decent income. Knowing this fact Amritlal exercises his patriarchal authority to suppress his son's dancing. He makes a shrewd plan and takes his daughter-in-law Ratna by his side by convincing her through these words:

"A woman in a man's world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman's world is pathetic, yet being progressive is.... Sick".

Amritlal is able to convince Ratna that Jairaj may not be a great dancer as she can be as a woman. Amritlal buys her ambition at the cost of destroying his son's passion, dream, and career. Amritlal convinces Ratna that if she discourages Jairaj to be a dancer, he will allow her to continue her dancing profession. Dattani in this play shows the suppression and oppression of Amritlal's patriarchal power on his son and daughter-in-law.

Consequences of Suppression:

As Ratna restrains Jairaj to continue dancing, he is suppressed. Amritlal crashes his son's dreams even without thinking about how they will destroy his son Jairaj's life. Ratna purposefully underestimates Jairaj's self-confidence as a dancer and neglects him. Jairaj gets addicted to drinking and is left lonely. Jairaj feels he is good for nothing and

becomes an alcoholic. Jairaj is made to sacrifice his career and passion. Ratna as a wife makes sure that Jairaj will never excel in dancing. He is caught in a terrible plan of manipulation. Jairaj is the suppressed victim. Jairaj's career and future are destroyed by his father Amritlal collaborating with Ratna.

Conclusion:

Dattani in this play brings to light the realistic and painful fact that patriarchal power and suppression cause destruction and crises in the family. The patriarchal authority existing in an Indian family and its consequences are eye-opening and boldly presented by Dattani. The message is crystal clear that patriarchal suppression can destroy own family members. Dattani awakens the readers to the realistic issues of patriarchal suppression existing in society. He beautifully portrays the consequences and damage caused by patriarchal power often unnoticed in society. Dattani highlighted the social condition of an Indian family post-colonization in 1940. The papers bring to light the plight of family members who are vulnerable to patriarchal power. Thus, this paper awakens us to the dark side of patriarchal power, expectations & suppressions in our social structure.

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