

***Unveiling Hidden Traumas: Examining Freudian Concepts in Mahesh Dattani's******Dance Like a Man***

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**Abstract**

Trauma is one of the strongest natural phenomena that nature has added to human lives. It is assumed that trauma shatters human beings in a way that recollecting the pieces of their personality makes it too difficult to stand up and lead a normal life for those who experience this phenomenon. In literature, the writers tried their hands at recreating the events that caused human lives to experience trauma. However, whether the text conveys the exact effect of the feeling or not that is another study but several novels including graphic novels like *Maus*, are referred to as good examples of this kind of writing in literature. According to psychologists, trauma is caused not only by events or the horrors that one faces in life but their memories about the events leading to the particular feelings. Like William Wordsworth's definition of poetry

*"Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of the powerful feeling; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in Tranquility"* – William Wordsworth.

The unpleasant feelings of past events get collected in memories, reflecting situationally or throughout life creating trauma for a lifetime. It could also be considered the part of Neurosis that makes the experiences turn out to be Traumatic and difficult to manage. Exploring the literature review Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man* is one of the Indian plays that discussed several issues including culture, gender discrimination, a sense of loss of identity, and much more similar. However, this paper focuses on the different angles of the play based on Freud's theory on Trauma; the traumatic experiences that the family goes through on an individual level without the knowledge of each other's pain. The concept of a typical family is exhibited in the play yet the couple leads their lives in the name of Love, Care, Support, and Ambition, which seem to be partially fake and hollow.

**Keywords:** Traumatic Hysteria, Traumatic Neurosis, Pathogenic Reminiscences, Depression.

**Introduction:** The plot of the play exhibits 1940, a typical Indian family of Mr. Amritlal who understands dance is a prostitute's job and not acceptable to be followed by a well-cultured family. However, his son Jairaj & daughter-in-law Ratna are the dancing couple. Jairaj has his ways of life to be suitable for his art of dance, like sporting long hair, and a slim body, and his practicing dance to be a successful renowned dancer for a promising career and identity in the field. But as the title of the play suggests, he has been criticized by his father Mr. Amritlal, who is the epitome of the typical society in the play, expects a man to be tough and rough to be considered as a MAN, masculine gender but Jairaj's way disappoints his father and makes him try that every way which makes his son be like the other men of the society and not a homosexual, though this understanding of homosexuality is never been mentioned anywhere in the text, but the character of Jairaj is misinterpreted by his father and is significantly indicated this approach with the title of the play itself. Mr. Amritlal dislikes his daughter-in-law practicing her dance at home with Guruji who comes home to train the couple with the skill. He dislikes the jingling of the bells that Jairaj puts on while dancing and roams around with them in the house. Ratna goes to Devdasi to learn the dance in a temple which is also perceived wrongly by Mr. Amritlal. The couple struggled a lot throughout their life in chasing and fulfilling their dream however throughout the time they do see their incomplete dream on the verge of getting fulfilled by their daughter Lata. The clash & conflicts that three generations go through with the essence of socio-political and domestic issues create disheartening experiences ultimately leading to the traumatic downfall of the characters.

### **Traumatic Hysteria in the play:**

Traumatic Hysteria according to Freud is unlikely from the events that this paper proposed to discuss further, however, it cannot be isolated from analogous feelings or the effects that the events caused the result. The discussed events are based on Breuer's *Studies in Hysteria*, according to which instead of events their memories cause the trauma. In *Dance Like a Man*, Dattani shows Jairaj and Ratana's discussion where they talk about the past, and through the memories, they express their frustrations, they also start blaming each other for their failures. The conversation turns quite a fact revealing that makes them feel relatively miserable and pathetic about themselves. Freud and Breuer's study further says that remembering the events leads to

psychological pain that triggers the repressed feelings collected unconsciously, which is termed Pathogenic reminiscences, which is seen throughout the couple's discussion while talking about the future of their daughter Lata.

Jairaj is a man by gender but is not seen or perceived by his father as a man owing to his willingness to pursue *Bharatanatyam* as a career. In a patriarchal society, he seemed to be the victim of his choices and dependency on his father. After marriage when he was asked to leave home, he left it immediately without a second thought however he had to come back when Ratna's feminine security was threatened by her uncle. He seemed to fail as a man in the eyes of society to protect his wife, enhance his pride by being independent, and be firm enough to be a successful Dancer. Moreover, he was always reprimanded and demotivated by his father, in addition to this his wife Ratna took the privilege to put him down occasionally and later on regularly which can be perceived as the process of trauma, ultimately when he was ridiculed and blamed by Ratna for his being jealous of his wife's success and responsible for his son's death, he was completely traumatized. This is an unusual and a bit different part of the play as it's been set in the patriarchal society in the conventional family, not so much of the modern time yet the woman's voice is raised and dominated, making Jairaj victim of the unsuccessful scenario.

Jairaj was supported by Ratna until she conditionally dealt with her father-in-law, Mr. Amritlal. Jairaj dared to argue with his father sometimes opposing his imposition on him considering support from his wife, in one of the scenes he argues with his father about the obsession he had. Mr. Amritlal confirms his freedom fight as an obsession for him, on this Jairaj, answers him back by saying dance is his obsession. When Vishwas his to-be son-in-law comes home he offers him a drink and a casual talk, throughout his talk with him, he exhibits his maturity and manly behavior over menial things and family. Jairaj's caring and loving nature & behavior attribute him as a good man however considering the cultural part of the patriarchal society it is perceived as if he dances to the tunes of his wife and father. But towards the end of the play, Jairaj blames Ratna for the biggest loss of their life, their son Shankar, he blames her for her not being a responsible mother, as she chooses her dancing career for full-time ignoring her motherly duties towards their infant,

resulting the sad demise of their son. This was quite shattering to Ratna after which she gave up her career. These events are evidence of traumatic hysteria in the play throughout their discussion

### **Traumatic Neurosis in the play:**

According to Freud, Traumatic Neurosis is the result of external traumatic events rather than the internal conflicts that a psyche experiences. Jairaj's character is apt to be considered the victim of Traumatic Neurosis. When he returns to his father's house his wife ridicules him by calling him a spineless boy who cannot stay away from his father even for forty-eight hours. Ratna knowing or unknowingly again ridicules Jairaj when she is in search of a musician to play Mridangam for her daughter's performance; Jiraj's reaction to this scene is his strong question asking her if it makes him man to find a musician. On several occasions, Ratana's superfluous talks exhibit her possessiveness for self-importance that overshadows Jairaj. His continuous tolerant behavior to those talks is a kind repetition of those unpleasant feelings causing Traumatic Neurosis.

Ratna, on the other hand, is shown as a successful lady in her ways but it didn't seem to be easy for her. Like every individual, she deserves to be happy and successful. She is shown a successful personality contrary to her husband yet she thinks she hasn't reached the pinnacle of her career, she has earned a good name and reputation along with it, and she knows many good personalities in society to get her work done. When she prepares her daughter for the international performance she uses her influence for her daughter's selection. Such examples are evidence of her hardworking and ambitious nature, however, to reach this point she too had to face a lot of criticism and tantrums from her father-in-law and indirectly society. She had supported her husband until she was offered help by Mr. Amritlal to make his son a MAN, Ratna being intelligent understands the looming damage to her career of denying the offer, and to minimize the damage she chooses help over Jairaj's career. Conversely betraying her husband, she follows her career successfully. He on the other hand takes care of their young baby when Ratna is out on her performances. Jairaj on learning that Ratna is more in demand than him goes into depression and turns drunkard. During one of her performances, he was in charge of their son's care, he gave the dose of opium to the baby to sleep unfortunately baby died of an overdose of it, and that was the most hysteric event in the play. However, the event did not shatter the couple more than the time they recalled it while discussing

it at night after Lata slept and Vishwas left the house. This part of the play conveys another example of traumatic Neurosis in the play.

**Trauma – Causing depression in the play:**

*Does Trauma cause Depression or does continuous Depression cause Trauma?*

In the two-act stage play *Dance Like a Man* Traumatic Hysteria causes depression in the characters leading them to face a so-called unsuccessful life and unhappiness. However traumatic Neurosis led them to be in the condition noted throughout the study. Somewhere the question arises that the continuous feelings of depression that Jairaj goes through make him recall the events either through discussion with Ratna or in his thoughts leading him to face the trauma. Or he was in trauma throughout his life for being the victim of gender criticism for the choices of his career and his way of life that made him depressed for life?

These two are interdependent conditions. Depression is caused by several issues like Events, Gender, Conflict, Death, Failure, being the victim of a devilish act, and many more. Jairaj and Ratna both on the individual as well as on the family level are the victims of Depression & Trauma. However, Mr. Amritlal was in a continuous attempt to make his son a more socially acceptable MAN than a so-called man, which was one of his unsuccessful attempts; which led him to spoil his son's career and thrash him to unsuccessful life. The despondent life for Jairaj was extremely traumatic and he finally bursts out on his wife holding her responsible for the mishap in the family, making her feel depressed and unworthy. Her giving up on a full-time dance career was one of the results of the depressed & traumatic feelings that she carries in the play.

**Traumatic Approach:**

The traumatic approach in Mahesh Dattani's "Dance Like a Man" focuses on exploring the psychological and emotional impact of past traumas on the characters and their relationships. Dattani delves into the themes of gender roles, societal expectations, and the destructive consequences of repressed emotions.

One of the central traumatic experiences explored in the play is the patriarchal structure of Indian society and its effects on the characters' lives. The male characters, Jairaj and Viswas, represent different generations and their struggle with societal expectations. Jairaj, being the younger

generation, is torn between his passion for dance and his father's strong disapproval. This conflict between personal ambition and the need for societal approval causes Jairaj significant psychological distress.

Jairaj's trauma is further exacerbated by the presence of his overbearing father, Amritlal. Amritlal's rigid adherence to traditional gender roles and expectations creates a hostile and oppressive environment for Jairaj. The traumatic impact of this emotionally abusive relationship is evident throughout the play as Jairaj battles with his own identity and struggles to find a way to live authentically.

The trauma extends beyond Jairaj's struggle as it affects his relationship with his wife, Ratna. Ratna, too, is plagued by her traumas, stemming from a loveless marriage and societal pressure to conform to gender norms. The play explores how these traumas echo through their relationship, leading to a breakdown in communication, intimacy, and trust.

Dattani also highlights the intergenerational trauma and the cycle of pain passed down from one generation to the next. Jairaj's father, Amritlal, himself suffered under the weight of societal expectations, leading to his uncompromising stance on gender roles. This traumatic inheritance further perpetuates the cycle of trauma and affects Jairaj's ability to break free from the constraints imposed upon him.

Overall, Mahesh Dattani's "Dance Like a Man" employs a traumatic approach to delve into the emotional and psychological wounds inflicted by societal expectations and gender roles. Through the characters' struggles and traumas, the play offers a poignant commentary on the destructive consequences of suppressing one's true self and the importance of finding the courage to break free from societal constraints.

**Conclusion:**

Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man* has been studied on several topics like Gender Discrimination, Cultural studies, post-Independence literature, and many more like topics, but studying it with the application of trauma theories by Freud and other psychological theories relevant to Trauma is tried upon for the first time in this paper. Traumatic Hysteria and traumatic Neurosis are the two psychological elements that are tested through the plot & characterization of

the play. The study reveals enough good scope for further research in this regard. The play exhibits the scope for different angles and approaches to be studied with than repeatedly seeing it with similar approaches and elements.

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