

Lecture - 22

Dance Like a Man

Good morning, let us now, complete our discussion of Mahesh Dattani plays with the final play, called 'Dance like a Man'. And that, like the title of the play suggests, it again is a comment on, the association of, the exclusive association of dancing with women and femininity. And here, in this case you have a man, who is a Bharatanatyam dancer, man and his wife. So, the, the characters of the play include Jairaj and Ratna Parekh, were both 60s, when the play begins and they both, you know, especially the wife, Ratna Parekh more, more than a husband is a renowned Bharatanatyam dancer. They have a daughter called, 'Lata, who is also a young dancer, who wants to aspire to make it big, in the foreign dance festival

circuit'. And you have an outsider named, Viswas who is the son of, the owner of a sweet store, in Commercial Street again in second Bangalore, the play opens with the possibility of an inter caste marriage between, Viswas and Lata. The, the play is largely set in, the ancestral home, of the Parekh's and it's a home which has a lot of antique furniture, it's an old house and it, you know has best memories of, rich ancestral past. 'And Lata hopes that we should that her parents will, will, will, will permit how to get married to Viswas'. And she also hopes the Viswas, will allow her to get married, I will allow her to dance, after their marriage. Right? that's the only condition that she has', Lata own parents of course belong to different castes and regions, her father's Gujarati, while her mother is Ratna Parekh is a devadasi women. Right? A woman who has, who belongs to a family of women, who have dedicated their lives, to local temples, for they whom perform. Right?

So, the and so there's a lot of association that, historical association of, the devadasi with prostitution, which is not entirely correct, right. So, 'devadasi are women who belong to different castes groups, who are from very young age dedicated, dedicated to local deities and temples, where they perform as dancers and they may choose to live outside the normative, fold of the patriarchal heterosexual family. Or they may also choose to, actually have a male patron, to whom they may not necessarily they may not be married, right. So, they have to get financial support from there, male patrons'. And so, 'Jairaj his father on Amritlal, who's this very renowned and famous businessman is completely against, his son Jairaj getting married to davdas, the daughter of the davdas, which doesn't want him to get married to Ratna, initially and there's again these, interesting flashbacks across time, across a period of 40 years, from the time Ratna and Jairaj being, put to the present when they're in the 60s. And now, there are parents of Lata'. and so, 'the house is full of antique furniture, in the present um rattler is dead and the front room is recent, the front room which is an extension of the house is recent, when it's meant for outsiders. But, the, the inner part of the house is the original house, which is full of Antiquities'.

'Jairaj and Ratna we discover later, once lived with Amritlal, but they had to leave because Jairaj father Amritlal was against his, wish to become a dancer, to be a dancer'. Right? So, he Amritlal disapproves of Jairaj desire to be a dancer', Jairaj when Jairaj grows his hair long, you know that, Amritlal begins to think that his son has become rather effeminate and probably even homosexual and so, he stigmatizes and justice is his son, for his desire to become a dancer. And she, but he has no choice, so Jairaj nests and Ratna once again married, they moved to Ratna's uncle's place. But, then Ratna's uncle begins to, make sexual advances to Ratna. And so, then they return to their father and by this time the father Amritlal, has to take them in and he has no choice, but to give in to his son's desire to marry this woman, to be woman. And also, to become a successful dancer'. Ratna of course on the, other hand also constantly resents Jairaj for not standing up, to his father, she always shy you know berates Jairaj for not being, you know an upright man, who stood for his, principles and his desires, in the present, the first act in the present moment, both Lata and Jairaj unable to I mean, both Ratna and Jairaj unable to find someone, who can play the Millennium for a Lata's new foreign performance, performance that Lata will have to give, before a committee, selection committee that will, will select the best dancers to perform in Canada'. Right? So, they are trying to, digest her to find someone, who can play the vilagam for Lata's performance, because the vilagam play has slipped, over his dhoti and you know and injured himself, so he cannot be part of the performance. So, but Lata, 'Lata is mother Ratna is desperate to find, someone who can play for, her daughter's performance, in fact she's desperate that her daughter should, gain the fame and renown that she won that, she had when ,she was younger'. And so, she thinks that, she is solely responsible, through our efforts in, in actually securing her daughter's future, as famous dancer. But and

then Ratna much to her disgust and disapproval has no choice, but to ask Seshadri, a man who is having an affair with, another dancer. Jairaj also thinks that Ratna is his right, in her judgment of Jairaj, she, he also feels that, perhaps after 40 years, of being or done so he has accomplished nothing, Jairaj is also an alcoholic, he drinks a lot, he spends all of his time drinking.

And there are constant flashbacks in the play, would suggest, which develop Jairaj his relationship with his father Amritlal further. Amritlal who was a, was a freedom fighter, who fought against untouchability and dowry. But, then also is you know, ironically regrets, marrying his son to devadasi. And he did that only out of his liberalism, so if you remember the character of Dominic in, the earlier play we discussed by a, Dattani final solutions, we have a similar character here, called on, 'Amritlal', who is a liberal freedom fighter, who fought against untouchability in dowry. But, is now on unwilling to marry his son devadasi'. But, then only did it finally chose to do it or I 3/2 it, only out of his liberalism and like, many other people, many of the freedom fighters many other social reformers of his generation, Amritlal assumed that, Ratna was at the devadasi, who had to be reformed by, by getting her married to his son. So, there's an assumption that, she must be, she must have been a prostitute like her four, for our like our ancestors, for which she has to be reformed into marriage'. 'Amritlal of course constantly also, cannot tolerate his son's appearance right, he constantly makes fun of, his sons guru, who is seems to be effeminate and, and probably homosexual like, his son for growing his hair long, this kind of constant perception in this prejudice against, male dancers as being effeminate and in gay'. But, then finally Ratna you know is , determined to actually further, her own career as a dancer, despite her father-in-law's disapproval and she wants to learn dance, initially from an old dancer ,an old woman, who never had the opportunity to perform, because she's also devadasi and so, she wants to learn, from old devadasi, much to her father-in-law's disapproval and Jairaj also won't start learning Kuchipudi, this is of course a flashback to, when the port began dancing and Jairaj against, monsoon on sardonic Kuchipudi, where men dress up as women and perform. Right?

So, that becomes another, another challenge to a Amritlal liberalism. And but, 'the Amritlal has no choice, because his son Jairaj is adamant, to be coming here to become a dancer'. And finally he Amritlal makes sure that, he pays the old Devadasi off, in fact he bribes her, to prevent Ratna from seeing up right, so you almost give the old poor Devadasi woman'. The teacher, money bribes her into to prevent, prevent her from eating and talking to Ratna and therefore, then later on Ratna and Jairaj decided to leave, Amritlal. Right? But, finally Amritlal gives in and allows them, to practice, to practice in his own house, he allows their guru to visit his house, to teach them dance, although he's still ashamed that his, son is growing his hair long and isn't manly enough. But, he also knows that, Ratna married him, because he's a dancer and will allow how to dance. So, the only reason Ratna marries are just, because he's also an aspiring to dancer. And also, because he will allow how to dots, but you know in the world of dance we realized that, a lot of moral compromises have to be made. So, Ratna realized that she has no choice, but to flatter the different you know, the, the, the VIPs the, the patrons of the dancing field, in order to actually secure her daughter's career, as a dancer. And so 'Dr. Gowda who's one of these very important, lawyers and clients and patrons of, of dance, puts Chandrakala on the selection committee'. And 'Chandrakala is the same woman with whom; the Mridangam player Seshadri is having an affair'. So, he puts a Dr. Gada Put's play Chandrakala on the selection committee to do to choose dancers, to dance at the foreign Dance Festival at Canada'. So, Ratna against, much against her own principles has no choice, but to flatter Dr. Gada and to win his favor, for the success of our daughters. Show, then of course later on, rave reviews of Lata's performance, which appear in the daily newspapers. And then ,there's a discussion and an argument,

which borders an argument, between Jairaj and Viswas, where Viswas discovers the very excited to see the rave, reviews of latter's performance in the papers and he shares, them Jairaj was read them and Viswas is not very comfortable, with Lata you know, doing performing erotic dance items, right. So, he in fact Jairaj then or has it, has an argument with Viswas, rather defensive one way he tells, Viswas that he performed the same erotic dance, performances before the army, for which he was highly appreciated.

So, there is this again this, this moment of tension between Viswas and Jairaj over in autism and performance, interplay Rowley is about performance itself and about the stigma of men performing and the stigma of women performing ,erotic system on stage. Ratna is convinced that, it's basically hard, hard efforts at flattering the critics and the patrons that and the sponsors that have made, the papers, that have enabled, that have compelled the papers, to write good reviews of Ratna performance. We also discover later on, through many flashbacks or the conversations between Ratna and Jairaj that, Ratna had probably tried to, Jairaj accused Ratna of eclipsing her, eclipsing him, in all the performances, until she out shown him, right. So, you know it's not; it's on ease on a level playing field for men and women, the world of dance. 'Men do not have it easy, because when they have a wife or they're competing with, with women who are you know, experienced dancers, it's not easy partly because of the perception, the common prejudice against men who dance'. So, he, he does feel rather insecure, which is why he turns to alcoholism, he turns to drinking because he cannot bear the fact that, his wife, he feels has in some sense, eclipsed turn him betrayed him, by outshining him by competing with him, by being, by being his, his primary rival. And there's also, another secret which is revealed, towards the end of the second act, of the play where, we discovered that Ratna and Jairaj once had a son called, 'Shankar'.

And that, that the son, 'Shankar was a baby, who had been neglected, by Ratna during her heyday as a dancer. So, there was apparently no one to feed the, baby on the nights, when Ratna had to perform, so the baby was often put to sleep, by the nanny. By, by being fed with, with opium', right. And so, the nanny she discovers later, we discovered later that, then they lost the son to excess of opium, the child was made to sleep, by the ayah with, with opium. And so, we discovered that, that is how they lost his son and so Jairaj accuses, Ratna of, of being a negligent mother, for losing their son and by choosing her carrier, over her son. And so, that is something that he always uses, as a weapon, against Ratna for to make her guilty, for having most fulfilling, out shown him. Right? For having completely eclipsed him, in their performances. But, then Ratna has a different perspective, she thinks that Jairaj has not taken on the rest, put in the hard work, to actually be a good dancer. He has given up, to Audrey in life and has turned to alcohol, simply because he could not; take up the challenge off of practicing and of becoming a good dancer. Jairaj thinks that his father used Ratna, to dissuade him from dancing, while giving her the freedom to dance. But, Ratna thinks a Jairaj is responsible for his own alcoholism and turned down invitations, to dance, because he did not want to dance alone. Or because, perhaps he could not acknowledge his own mediocrity. And so that is the, the tension the friction between husband and wife, both of whom, our dancers. So, while, while Jairaj think that his father used Ratna, do dissuade him from dancing and while giving her the freedom to dance, Ratna things, Jairaj actually responsible for is all alcoholism and for his own inability to actually, work hard at his own dance. Or perhaps also, because he cannot acknowledge, his own mediocrity as a dancer when compared to her. And towards, the end the preservation of Ratna and Jairaj dying, there's a vision kind of an almost imagined, fantasized vision of them, reaching heaven, where they seem to learn from their own past, mistakes as dancers. 'And in the present Lata has married Viswas and now has her own child'. And so, Lata seems to be a fairly successful dancer, also because she's married to a man who allows her to dance, while the previous generation of

Ratna and Jairaj, learn launched known mistakes, as they seem to be reaching heaven and they realized that, it was their own insecurities and their own, inability to actually make their marriage work or even their dance, the careers work, that has made them, the failures that they are at today. So, that's how the play, the play, the 'Dance like a Man' ends, it ends on this, this, this nor, this note of this generational, intergenerational difference. Between, couple and old couple, who are both eminent dancers, but due to their own insecurities, their own desire, for their own ambition. That, they are not able to actually, make it over together, a successful dancers'. And 'Lata who is now married to a man, who allows you to dance, who has her own child. But, has also made it, big in the field of thoughts. That ends our discussion of, the Dattani place. Thank you.