

Cultural Hybridity in Mahesh Dattani's *Dance like a Man*: An approach through Homi K Bhabha's theory

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Abstract: Tradition and modernity are always considered as two opposing forces. This paper investigates the connection between tradition and modernity through the play *Dance like a Man*. Mahesh Dattani is an Indian playwright, whose works generally depicts social issues and societal norms. *Dance like a Man*, shows the generational metamorphosis of three generations of Indian society. It depicts how the character navigates the expectations of their tradition while grappling the demands of contemporary society. The post-colonial theory deals with literature written after the colonial period and the aftermath of the colonization. The cultural hybridity is a concept under post-colonial literature, it speaks about third space where new hybrid culture is born. This paper explores how the connection between the tradition and modern create a new culture which helps the society to become better and equal.

Keywords: *Traditional and modernity, Cultural hybridity, post-colonial, social inequality, third space and Indian society.*

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Introduction

Mahesh Dattani is an Indian director, actor, playwright and writer, best known for his significance contributions to contemporary Indian theater. He is the first playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi award, India's highest literary honor. His works often explores themes of gender identity, and social norms, and he has gained recognition for his ability to deal with complex issues such as caste and family dynamics.

His notable works include plays like *Final Solutions*, *Bravely Fought the queen* and *where there's Will*. His works reveals the deeper psychological and emotional aspects of the characters.

Dance like a Man was first performed at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore on 1989. It talks about Jairaj and how he tries to achieve his dream to perform the art of dancing, Bharatanatyam, but he was forced to leave it behind because of his traditional father Amritlal Parek and his wife, Ratna. Later, his dreams are fulfilled by his daughter Lata, who was the mixture of both traditional and modern culture.

The story opens with Lata waiting with her boyfriend Vishwas for her parents Jairaj and Ratna. Classical dancers who went to visit an injured musician. After their arrival it became clear that they are not in harmonious relationship. They fight a lot and later it became revealed that Jairaj had to sacrifice his dream because of his father Amritlal Parek who don't want his son to become a dancer and his wife Ratna, who was ready to sacrifice her husband's dream to protect hers.

They also lose their first child Shankar because of their negligence and focus on their own professional life, Ratna never bring up the fact that her son has died, and after many years Lata

grow up to become even more talented dancer than her parent but Ratna was jealous of her and try to get the credit for her talent .She only stops after Jairaj reminded her that at least she still has a daughter to be jealous of and timeline shift to the old age where Jairaj and Ratna decided to sell the house and spend their last years in peace while reminiscing over their fights, arguments and love.

Post-colonial theory: Cultural Hybridity

Post-colonial theory is a study of the effects of colonialism on cultures and societies. It is concerned with both how European nations conquered and controlled "Third World" cultures and how these groups have since responded to and resisted those encroachments. Post-colonialism, as both a body of theory and a study of political and cultural change, has gone and continues to go through three broad stages: initial awareness of the social, psychological, and cultural inferiority enforced by being in a colonized state and the struggle for ethnic, cultural, and political autonomy. A growing awareness of cultural overlap and hybridity.

Homi k Bhabha is an Indian scholar and critical theorist, he contributed a lot to post-colonial studies. He deals with terms such as hybridity, mimicry, difference, ambivalence and third space. His famous works are *Nation and Narration*, *Negotiating Rapture: The Power of Art to Transform Lives*, *Edward Said: Continuing the Conversation and Without Boundary*.

In his essay *the location of culture*, he talks about several way in which the colonized people stand against colonizer such as mimicry, hybridity and cultural translation. Mimicry happens when colonized people starts to mimic the ways colonizers behave and their culture as a means of resistances, cultural translation happens when people change adapt culture of colonizer to fit their needs

and culture. Cultural hybridity talks about how when two different cultures meet, they start to create a new hybrid culture.

The colonizer's culture slowly starts to influence the colonized people's culture, and, in the end, a new hybrid culture is created. The space where this new culture was created is called the third space.

Traditional Culture restricts modernity:

Through the play, it became clear that traditional mind set of people restrict the change of modernity. They fear that following the modernity will destroy their reputation and fame in society, but change is an inevitable force to begin with. As one of the antagonists of the plays, Amritlal Parek, freedom fighter and a reformer of India but he fails as a parent because even though he cares about his son, he cared more about his reputation in society. This fact made him to join hands with his daughter-in-law by blackmailing to sabotage his son's dream.

This is the same case with Ratna even though she is a very talented dancer, she was restricted and confined in her homes by her father-in-law because she is a woman and she cannot dance, which according to him is a job of Prostitute And this is our traditional culture restrict both Ratna and Jairaj from achieving their dreams and force Amritlal to takes some serious actions to save his fragile frame and reputation.

The growth of modernity is not an effortless process

Life was Ratna and Jairaj explained why the growth of modernity is not an effortless action. They are the example of a second-generational people who struggles to move away from the traditional mindset of the country and they were given and shown various marvelous opportunities of modernity but they are also expected to fulfill the duties of their traditional culture and customs.

The norms of the society oppose them while the modernity welcomes them with open handed for their talent, this contrast nature of society makes their life hard to live and forces them into several emotional and physical struggles. "You promised you would allow me to continue with my hobbies. That was when you were a boy and dance was just a hobby. Grow up, Jairaj." (*Dance Like a Man*). His father only considered dance as a hobby while jairaj considered it has his lifetime goal and dream.

Not everyone get the results of their hard work and it is revealed through Jairaj in order to satisfy his father's mindset of patriarchal society he was made to sacrifice his dream by his own father and wife and retina also was supposed to make this choice they are the people who saw the opportunities of modernity and strives to achieve it while they may not have achieved it during their time they paid the path to success for their future generation.

The creation of the hybridity in the third space

Home K Bhabha's theory on cultural hybridity discusses that when two different cultures come in contact together it creates a new hybrid culture which combines the element of both cultures, the space where this kind of creation of hybridity happen is called the third place. In Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man* the third space is the House of Amritlal Parek , by substituting the tradition and modernity as a two different culture it can be seen that by combining the traditionality and modernity of the people and new different culture was born.

The culture which doesn't sacrifice the dream while also retaining the authentic element of traditions. here Amritlal Parek was a traditional representative and Jairaj was the representative of modernity while Lata, daughter of Jairaj is a product of the cultural hybridity. Lata was not afraid of living out her dream while also following the path of her parents. She had both the elements of traditional and modernity by combining both she lives a very happy which is also societally accepted.

This is possible because over the years the borders of the traditional and modernity blurs and combine together, where people can get what they want from both the cultures and by challenging the norms. The dreams which are once considered as a job for a specific stereotypical category of people became a dream which can be achieved by anyone who put their heart in it.

The cultural pressures of masculinity and the expectations

Jayaraj gave up his dream because of the pressure of society which have a standard manual on how a man should be and what should he do. It is a stereotypical practice that a man should do a manly job and he should have a masculinity in him. The society except men to have masculinity and have a control over women. In the society even if a man treats his wife better than it is seen as being feminine and losing the control over the women. Jairaj suffered a lot because of this societal pressure and their expectation. The culture pressure prevented him from achieving his dream. "A woman in a man's world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman's world is pathetic." (*Dance Like a Man*)

While the society except masculinity from Jairaj, the same society expected obedience and submissive behavior from Ratna while she is a complete opposite of it. She was ambitious and she had a clever mind to achieve her dream and because of the societal expectation she was forced to make her husband sacrifice his dream and she also lost her son.

The hybridity of culture is important

The hybridity of culture is important and crucial because rather than hating and forcing someone to follow the single culture it can be beneficial for them if they can take what they want and combine two different cultures together and follow it. Lata was such character she followed the traditional methodology of dancing that is Bharatanatyam while also retaining modernity by following her dreams which could have been considered as a taboo in her grandfather's time. She also achieved a life of marriage which her mother hoped to achieve where she and her husband are in equal stand in their marriage rather than compromising and sacrificing dreams in order to achieve their own ambitions.

by combining different culture people will learn about the history and the process of how it was created and they can learn the important aspects of the culture which was not achievable before.

Conclusion

By using Homi K Bhabha's cultural hybridity theory in Dattani's *Dance Like a Man* it became clear that culture is formed by society according to the time period and their method of living it can change or evolve over time and people should be able to accept the fact that change is inevitable and it cannot be stopped. By this people can comprehend different cultures and their importance and they can also learn to respect cultures other than

their own culture and could he prevent the situation of becoming a blind follower of the societal norms.

As in the play rather than following the traditional method with rigid mind and following the modernity by leaving behind the culture it takes Lata took a different path in which she was able to achieve her dreams while holding on to two different culture she paved a part to a success not only because of her dreams and hard work but also because of that society and time which change over time and accepted the hybrid version of cultures.

People should always be ready to adapt different things rather than following the rigid methodology of life. While the culture is a very important aspect in people's life, it is not a manual to be followed strictly.

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