

## What is a 'MAN'? : *Dance Like a Man*

### Introduction:

Working with multiple dissonances, rather than unity, Dattani's plays become the contesting area of discordant forces within oneself, family and various informing orders in society. A project of de-stereotyping gender roles, *Dance Like a man* focuses on the damaging effect patriarchy exerts on the man who tends to keep outside the gender matrix. The play explicitly deals with the problem of dancing like a man in a normative pattern and invites disturbing "expectations". Of course, it wasn't the denotation, even the connotation of the four individual words; rather, what was disturbing, was the silent "fifth" signifier -- creating a rapidly shifting "meaning" ...The unusual cohabitation of the marginal words, "DANCE" and "MAN", creates a constant commotion, anxiously trying to find a definite order/"meaning" at the centre of signification, though constantly disturbing any fixity and creating space for contesting ideas.

Both gender and culture are discursively permeated and constructed, and the performance of dance by a man, especially *Bharatanatyam* -- loaded with the history of being performed by Devadasis -- offers a visible menace to gender normativity and breeds a strong fear of effminization of "man". Hence, the monolithic neo-Indian colonialism tends to subsume, suppress, subordinate and exclude the possibility of a mandancing, since in this context dance ceases to be an art form and enters into a

discourse. The performance, “doing”, and the agent, man, get categorized and are prohibited co-existence.

‘No other dance form’, observes Dattani “has such a fascinating history of oppression and Renaissance as *Bharatanatyam*” (quoted in Multani, “Politics of Production...” 59). The play, though in a passing glance, seeks to reevaluate our attitude towards this ancient dance form by making critical our complacent admiration ignoring the travails of the practitioners to keep it alive. The dance form, specifically associated with Devadasis had always burdened the performers with socio cultural signification and the lived experience incumbent upon it. The history of oppression ranges from their sexual exploitation by powerful ritual functionaries and political personae to the post-independence programme of rehabilitation which sought to destroy their art to fulfill the mission of purifying the temples. The seventy-five-year old Chennai amma, an exponent of an endangered dance form, is bound to earn her living by selling flower in temple steps. This was an accepted and regular custom until recently (1988), before the performers revived the art to a prestigious place in the cultural map of India.

In Dattani, “the focus is on the family as the representative unit of the corruption of culture and morality, in whose midst the politics of ambition takes on the most ruthless forms” (Ghosh, “Form and Content...”, 298-99). Jairaj’s choice of dance, a feminine pursuit -- more specifically the harlot’s pursuit -- disturbs the hetero-patriarchal normality. The play presents the complexities and intricacies issuing from its protagonist’s refusal to conform to the culture-specific genre of “man”, and the consequentially emergent complications in a modern post-independence urban India. As

in other plays, family is portrayed as a product of the value system the society stands for and the cultural discourse of which it is a part. The play records how the wide socio-cultural discomfort with the culturally disruptive image of a male dancer jeopardizes the intimacies and sense of belonging in a family, and how the members, in their “need to belong”, interrogate the deviation (Meena, 8).

With a fine mastery over stagecraft, Dattani makes the same actors play various characters and the alternate roles played expose the constructed nature of the ideologies they represent. Individual gratification turns to be the socio-economic extension. Rashi Sharma observes, “Gifted with the sensibility to see beyond the stereotype representations of man and woman in society. Dattani attempts to penetrate into the abstruse world of emotions and inner discords of his characters. This becomes the axis around which his characters move in order to realize their strength and prove their dignity” (Sharma, 100). The human relations degenerate under the cowering pressure of social set up and the sense of failure shimmering beneath surface erupts every now and then from the caldron of fuming emotions.

In the course of the play, we are shuttled between the two worlds – the peripheral world of art and the centre held by the mainstream “normal” going on -- each defying fixed/monolithic identity and policed border and often merging with one another to generate both tension and possibilities. However, the play also tries to find out a resolution of the conflicting forces and renovation of pestilent corrupting orders both on human and divine level. The vision of harmony emanating from the divine dance

movement which sublimates baser elements by the end of the play, at least envisions a possibility of harmony on human level.

### **The World of Art:**

If the play is about art, it is not about the aesthetics of the craft, rather about the world of art populated with artists and the life they live and the standard they live by and about the merging of borders and clash between the “normal” world and that of art. What we are faced with is the cultural policing initiated by the hetero-patriarchy in two time frames: in lately independent India while art gets marginalized by zeal to reclaim the core “Indian” identity, in the nineties the consumerism replaces its predecessor.

Very carefully Dattani introduces us to the world, in the company of a character who is out and out a citizen of the ordinary social life, and lives by the socio-ethical standard of upper-middle class people of modern urban India, Viswas -- the future husband of Lata. He accompanies his fiancé to their house to meet Lata’s parents both for an introduction and approval. Quite contrary to the expected anxious waiting of the bride’s family, Viswas stumbles on to both the physical absence and psychic unconcern. They are not yet home while the visit was pre-arranged with their prior knowledge and consent and a promise to their daughter. Lata divines the cause to be an “emergency” which strikes Viswas with a note of improbability. It is beyond the edge of his knowledge that the performance is not merely about the practice and acquiring the skill for stage performance, rather it is the arrangement of the whole thing which requires much stress, strain and strategy. Really surprised, he puts it in his own way: “Only doctors and firemen go out on emergencies. Dancers stay at home till it’s show time. They also stay at

home when they have invited their future son-in-law to their house” (*Dance...*, 387). All this is of course said in a very light and rather good-humoured manner, but the observation brings out the basic difference between the two worlds which bears such great impact on the life of the dancer couple and gains such serious and wide dimension in the course of the play. Another striking feature of this world is the priority accorded to the various aspects of life which varies from the “normal” goings on. Lata puts it in a half-serious manner: “Actually they couldn’t care less who or what you are. As long as you let me dance” (*Dance...*, 388). They can even overlook the threat that their son-in-law may whisk their daughter away to the Harem of an Arab sheikh if she is able to continue her dance there because dance is the very identity and staff of their existence.

In answer to Viswas’s wide-eyed astonishment, Lata only sums it all up by saying: “I told you, they are different” (*Dance...*, 388). She leads Viswas to the dancing hall and he fails obviously to gauge Lata’s sensitiveness and deep attachment to the art and all that is associated with it. He cannot feel the thrill she feels touching the dancing bell which her father wore for his first performance (“I get goosebumps every time I touch them”, *Dance...*, 389) and can only “hear” and not “feel” the vibration and the special atmosphere of the room whose floor felt millions of “adavus”.

With the arrival of the elderly Parekh couple amidst Viswas’s unaware antic, wrapping the antique shawl, the difference in standards and prioritization becomes all the more apparent. Viswas gets extremely embarrassed and apologizes, but the only response he gets is a command from Jairaj to put the shawl back and Ratna’s offering to fold it neatly and request to sit. Completely ignoring his presence, they engross in the crisis they

never faced in their whole life. Their helplessness in the face of the crisis makes Viswas uneasy for being identified as a problem but is assured by his future father-in-law, that he is not sufficiently known by them to be qualified as a problem. In a flash, a night at Moscow reveals another façade of this world as the curtain is lifted. At three o'clock in the morning Ratna comes to the corridor apparently in order to spy upon Jairaj's activity, Jairaj keeps drinking Vodka along with another troop and Seshadri sneaks into Chahndra Kala's room. Some questions remain unanswered as to why Ratna was in the corridor in such an hour of night and how Jairaj could identify the very night she is speaking about so quickly. The problem which is of paramount importance to the dancer couple is as follows: The mridangam player Srinivasa has broken his leg stripping over his dhoti, that Lata cannot perform without the mridangam, and they cannot ask Seshadri as a substitute since he practices with Chandra Kala and also maintains an illicit relation with her, who is a rival of Lata. Sabotage is apprehended. Hence, if sometimes Ratna contemplates to ask for Seshadri, she quickly changes her mind taking a lesson from the previous incident of Nalini's predicament.

The dancer parents, especially Ratna, thinks that their daughter's life is ruined and she is destined to become an "average human being": "If she can't dance, what else can she be?" (*Dance...*, 402) We find an absolute identification of the artists with their passion and art; they overlook the presence of their future son-in-law. How other concerns reside in the margin of the territory of an artist's consciousness become evident when Jairaj gives his consent to the marriage between Viswas and Lata based on Viswas's meager account of himself; Ratna shows her concern only to the extent of knowing whether he is well-off and would allow Lata to dance after marriage.

Though unable to gauge the depth of the problem, Viswas shows enough focus as to bring the Parekh couple back to their concern from straying away with the life style of Seshadri. He also shows tolerance, courtesy and common sense as to leave the place for the time being without spite, relieving them of his presence since he is not of any help. But at times both worlds meet as the value system of one gets applied to the other. Ratna reiterates and follows the criterion of the so-called mainstream world when she codifies Jairaj as the “spineless boy” (*Dance...*, 402) who ceased to be a “man” for her from the day he returned to the house of Amritlal and accepted his incapability to support his family by earning money.

The intrusion of the values of the other world vitiates the personal life of the dancer couple who, after forty years of marriage, can only be free and honest with each other if they can drink together -- the wife only makes sense to the husband when she is upset and loses control over the expression of her feelings. We meet them for moments at night before they go to sleep. As usual, they try to pretend to each other -- Jairaj feigns to give Viswas company in drinks while Ratna pretends not to know where the bottles are kept hidden. Confession of the truth reveals, one is drunk and the other knows the whereabouts of the bottles and takes it out to top them with water and put them back in place. They confess and drink together, decide to ask Chandra Kala to lend Seshadri. Ratna is quailed, but Jairaj can't forget the emasculated image of himself which his wife, and perhaps, himself, held for so long. He wants an explanation whether it was more “manly” to let his wife sleep with her own uncle than to return to his father's house. Ratna tries to avoid the issue by according it to her being upset, and tries to convince him that she prefers to overlook Jairaj's inability to support his family since he was pursuing a

“higher thing. Something better than just working for money alone” (*Dance...*, 411), taking blame on both Jairaj and herself for leaving the house impulsively. But in Dattani’s world, reconciliation is not so smooth. Jairaj insists her to be true and congratulates her on hiding her sentiment for so long, but beneath the veneer of the kindness, detects the snake under the flower – the guilt. It turns out to be an unspoken contract of mutual forgiveness: “...may be it’s not kindness. Something deeper than that. Like...guilt? You forgive me and I forgive you. Forgive what you did to Sankar” (*Dance...*, 411). Ratna now really feels weak and appeals not to bring the subject as promised by her husband.

For moments, the veil is lifted; Ratna sincerely wishes to undo some part of their life --“we could start again” (*Dance...*, 411). Both of them realize too many sacrifices have to be made and all these lead to nothing worthy: “It was too great a price to pay, Jai” (*Dance...*, 411). A sense of depravity is unmistakable since after the life-long pursuit of the art form, the artists find that it has brought them nowhere. In answer to Jairaj’s question why she is planning the same frustrating life for their daughter, Ratna first forwards the reason that Lata’s success will make all their travails worthy and then builds her hope on times being changed as well as Lata’s having parents to push her forward. She gets lost in her dream of Lata’s success -- which is her own too -- since Lata has talent, her parents’ experience, her mother’s skill of buttering up the foreign ministers to arrange foreign tour and journalist C. V. Suri (alluring to make him chief guest in Navaratri festival) to have rave reviews. The artist’s world gets lost in the uncertainty of consumerism.

The world of art suffered marginalization in various stages in Indian history, but the neo-colonial forces tend to obliterate and subjugate an identity by constructing a myth of monolithic Indian-ness. Performed by *devadasis*, female slaves of the Hindu deity, in the temples of southern India, the dance was an art offering to temple deities, and was considered as the best form of prayer. Symbolically married to the god, the *devadasis* were prohibited to marry any mortal man. However, in course of time their services became bound to the corrupt priests and other ritual functionaries, and they were degraded into prostitutes by the convenient duplicity of religious sanction. Their art is not recognized, their skill is not respected and the hegemony of “Indian” society subsumes and otherizes the cultural practice within its grand narrative. The old, sexually inactive Devadasis were reduced to beggars: the “seventy-five and dying” Chennai amma, “the oldest living exponent of the Mysore school ...the only link ...with the old school” (*Dance...*, 419), earns her living by selling flowers on temple steps.

The monolithic state, unable to interrogate the mode of practice of patriarchy, perpetuates it by the program of rehabilitation. Instead of promoting, de-stigmatizing and preserving the art, which could be a part of the process of reclaiming the identity of multicultural India, the monopolizing leaders triggered off the mission of reforming the practitioners and thus permanently affiliating their status as prostitutes. Even during a casual reading of the play, specially confronting the character of Amritlal, the state/nation of India (as conceptualized by post-independence authority), emerges as gendered, perhaps a version crafted by “man”. Independence is exposed to be a mere transfer of power from one colonial authority to another that tries to reduce the rich variety of Indian culture into a monolithic discourse of consumption. Amritlal: “...our priority is to

eradicate certain unwanted and ugly practices which are a shame to our society... I will not have our temples turned into brothels! ...Nobody is running down your art. It is the people who perform it and for what reason, that we are trying to ...” (*Dance...*, 416-7).

The abolition of the devadasi convention is recoded as oppression and subjugation of an ideology. Viewed from a different angle, the panoptic vision gets disturbed: “Send them back to their temples! Give them awards for preserving their art” (*Dance...*, 416). It is in the hands of these reformers, as Ghosh points out, that “The transformation of ancient art forms into commodity is a common enough phenomenon in modern times where a certain cultural form which once formed an integral part of the social system is degraded into a quaint, ethnic and slightly shameful remnant of a lustful past” (Ghosh, “Form and Content...”, 298). Jairaj subverts the missionary zeal as a form of oppression and points out the need for patronage for this rich cultural legacy: “You have no knowledge of the subject. You are ignorant... If you really wanted any kind of reform in our society, you would let them practice their art” (*Dance...*, 416). An interesting negation of the state’s rhetoric of its welfare programme of eradicating poverty and illiteracy is made when Ratna changes the priority set by the state. Ratna: “She [Chennai amma] doesn’t mind at all being poor and lonely. What she is frustrated about is that in her youth she did not have the freedom to express her art” (*Dance...*, 420).

The regulating authorities of the market and the advertising agencies of the neo-colonial India like ministers and journalists, find foreign recipients as the chief consumer of Indian culture. Ratna, well adept in the art of “pushing” carefully chalks her strategy to

assure Lata's career: "If she does well, she will be a national figure. Then if we butter up the right ministers, we can even get foreign tours arranged" (*Dance...*, 411). The handling of public opinion after Lata's performance by Ratna brings out the insurgency of consumerism in the world of art.

Ratna's conversation with Mr. Gowda over the telephone throws light on the issue from multiple corners. She expresses extreme gratitude for being called by him on behalf of Lata who must be thrilled by both the present of flowers from him and the call, not because he is a minister, but because, he is so genuinely "knowledgeable about dance and also known to be so critical" (*Dance...*, 428). He deserves special thanks since he wasted so much time remembering Lata even after being so busy "organizing the Indian festival in Canada" (*Dance...*, 428). He is given the information of Lata having received a standing ovation from the president of India after completing the tillana and is offered any kind of help the minister needs from Ratna herself and Jairaj in his enterprise, since they are now like a "family". At this point Jairaj however cautions her for "overdoing" her part (*Dance...*, 430) and making herself obvious. But Ratna's shock comes in the form of hearing the name of Chandra Kala on the selection committee. Even after her great effort, she can't hide her jealousy properly and acquiesces to his observation on the latter's being a good dancer with the twist "twenty years ago" (*Dance...*, 429). Of course she tries to patch up by agreeing formally on Chandra Kala Devi's impartiality, but she has already made herself too obvious. Another phone call from Seshadri, however, confirms Ratna's fear about sabotage as Seshadri calls in order to apologize for the wrong "tala" (beat) given by him at the beginning. Yet after Lata succeeds in drawing huge admiration from all quarters, he tries to plead his innocence and keep in good favour with

them. Ratna plays her role superbly: she pretends to believe his pretensions, gives the news of Chandra Kala's being nominated as a member of the selection committee and takes the opportunity of his ignorance of the fact to cook up the story that she was asked personally by the minister but refused it on the ground of knowing all the dancers personally and proposed Chandra Kala's name instead.

It is Ratna who arranged things previously for Lata's acclamation by "sweet talking the critics" and promising some one to make the chief guest of Navaratri festival to extort rave reviews the following morning while usually the critics actually take time of a day. As jairaj puts it, the critics have to prepare the reviews beforehand in order to publish it the next day. Lata gets famous after the night – newspapers flooding with her praise – "the discovery of the decade", "one star which will shine bright in the sky of Bharatanatyam", "[h]er angashudha and grip over rhythm stand head and shoulders above the rest, even surpassing veterans like Chandra Kala Devi" (*Dance...*, 432) and so on. Some concentrate on her adavus, some on angashuddha, and some one on the tillana. Her "expressive face" and "subtle figure" work wonder, and the tearful expression and the "heaving bosom" during the ashtapadi create "tenderly intense and intensely tender" effect (*Dance...*, 434). By Ratna's skillful design, some papers even find her better than Chandra Kala Devi and rank her among legends like Balasaraswati and Rukmini Devi.

The entertainment revolution has converted culture into commodity, which requires homogenization of consumer products and market processes both in the realm of commodity and cultural symbols, styles and behavioral pattern. The commoditization of the art found the men as the chief consumer of the product, and the patriarchal market

demanded the constant supply of sexual gratification as the essential component. It is felt in Jairaj's sarcasm: "Is that why you like to dance? To have men admire your assets?" (*Dance...*, 442) A strong overtone is felt in Ratna's anxiety to please the minister and fear that "Chandra Kala is probably sitting on his lap!" (*Dance...*, 429) The entertainment industry, thus, dissociates sexual "sanctity" from the manufacturer of artistic pleasure, and makes the female performers Other than the woman accepted in different socially affiliated roles, and denigrates art from something creative into catering, from a vocation into a cultural commodity. As Indranee Ghosh rightly observes, "There is no actual performance of the Bharatanatyam by any of the actors although it is the context in which the drama unfolds. The musicians and teachers remain unseen, their presence suggested by the mimetic actions of the main protagonists – taking in a tray of coffee cups, commenting on the musicians' reactions, bidding goodbye with folding hands, all of which take place off stage. Such omission may be taken as deliberate, indicating the virtual loss of the value of the art itself in its transformation into commodity" (Ghosh, "Form and Content...", 298).

Apart from the visible threat to the signs of masculinity, the alienation of the art form of dance from the authentic male behavioral pattern thus gets a close link with the marketing strategy for the product. The male dancer is naturally marginalized (that would otherwise authenticate strong homo-erotic implication), since sexuality of the performer is required to serve ulterior purposes than mere artistic. Following the same discourse, "dance" -- broadly speaking culture --acquires feminine identity (since *Manusmriti* prescribes the constitutionally adulterous women to be man's property), that could be commodified and presented as a package for the global market, sanctified or

defiled or deified, and subjugated. Hence the association of the art with masculinity problematizes the monolith by transforming the commoditiser into commodity. A cursory look at the reviews of the ashtapadi poses of Lata makes it obvious that they are carefully mapped out by male critics to serve their target male consumers/readers. Naturally, they highlight the voluptuous aspects of the female dancer: “Lata’s tearful expression and heaving bosom conveyed all that was humanly possible” (*Dance...*, 433).

Jairaj’s pursuit of dance presents even a threat to the fixed gender construct. It also questioned the Victorian standard of utilitarian morality. Seen from outside, the Bharatanatyam reduced into “The craft of prostitute to show off her wares” (*Dance...*, 406); it becomes problematic as to “Of what use could it be to [a man]” (406) and then, “Hence any one who learnt such a craft could not be a man” (*Dance...*, 406).

Viswas gets really excited at such wonderful reviews and of course for the performance which he enjoyed with his layman’s eyes. Overwhelmed with sincere joy, Jairaj and Viswas greet Lata ceremoniously and ransack the papers for every reference to her dancing. A hint of irony is discernible both in pushing needed for such rave reviews and in Lata’s own confession that her bosom was heaving because of her fatigue after the “varnam” and that she actually forgot the last “Jatthhi” and only gave a pose and finished with a flourish. Viswas, devoid of any pretence of knowledge of the art form, openly expresses his admiration since it reminded him of the picture on the post card of a dancer talking to a parrot though he is rather sharply reminded by Jairaj that during the Tillana, Lata was not expected to talk to a parrot.

However, a note of slight discord is heard at Viswas's mild discomfort with the item of ashtapadi and the description which appears a little bit too "erotic" (*Dance...*, 435). Jairaj clearly informs that he choreographed the item for his wife thirty years ago, and Lata demands why she shouldn't dance the number now. Viswas honestly confesses his inability to accept so easily that Lata is dancing the erotic number though he does not, unlike Amritlal, denounce the art form itself and openly admits his ignorance and refuses to pass judgement impersonally. However, he also agrees sincerely not to try stopping Lata if she wants to dance. Lata shows enough strength of character as to make it clear that he can't stop her from dancing and regulate the choice so far her passion is concerned, but while Viswas reminds her of the very promise she made about their children, by implication, their mutual consent to respect each other's individuality, she appreciates the sincerity of Viswas, and spending very few words, agrees to continue their mutual trust: "Thank you. I hope your father will teach you some more ... ashtapadi" (*Dance...*, 436). He rushes to the service of his mithai (sweet) shop and Lata remains in her world, but the possibility of a bridge gets brighter.

The only person, who perhaps was the most involved in making all this happen ("mostly mummy's efforts", *Dance...*, 433), strangely remains absent from the scene and is discovered to cry alone in the kitchen. She of course tries to explain it away by her usual headache. But Jairaj knows her too well to be convinced. All passions spent, she feels extremely depressed and her own failure to realize her immense potential crumbles her down. Pathetically she almost becomes uninterested in reading the reviews most of which, she claimed, was her doing, and felt, however, that he herself deserved it. But Jairaj makes it clear that Lata earned her fame by her talent: "Face it, woman" (*Dance...*,

440). Pathetically Ratna tries to compensate for her lack of opportunity to fulfill her dream by pasting the reviews in her album and being strongly opposed by jairaj, she breaks down. Here Dattani shows himself to be a subtle artist to capture this moment in Ratna's life which resists any definitional fixity. She is happy as a mother for Lata's achievement, she is all the more happy since it is mostly her doing – her guidance, persuasion of critics, using contacts, ensuring proper chance --, her unfulfilled dreams realized through her daughter, her frustration due to lack of proper channel, perhaps a hint of jealousy. But Jairaj's comment -- "At least you have a daughter to be jealous of" (*Dance...*, 440) --, hints at a history of humane failure to achieve absolute success.

### **The Mainstream World:**

#### *The Gender Issue*

*Bharatanatyam*, with its essential element of "abhinaya" (acting), offers Jairaj the opportunity to assume different subject roles that cut across gender. His transgressive performance of the female gender role challenges the idea of gender, being strictly rooted in sex. His presentation of 'ashtapadi' for the army is an example in point: "So I wore your mother's costume, a wig and ... whatever else was necessary to make me look like a woman, and danced" (*Dance...*, 435). Such performance, however, leads to graver identity disorder, and poses a threat to the heterosexist society. Amritlal categorically defines such activity as "sick". The covert implication of the word "sick" is a clear pointer to the sexist fear of homo-eroticism. In some institutions practicing extreme

sexual segregation like the army, such relations are tolerated under various cloaks: "...they only wanted a woman. ... They loved it even more when they found out I was a man. Of course, knowing the army, that may not be very surprising" (*Dance...*, 435).

A very significant departure from the "normal" behavioural pattern of man is initiated by dance with the visible signs, threatening to masculinity. Viswas' jocular reference to the choice of dress by the mridangamist is only a humorous version of the greater menace: "You've got to kick it [dhoti] out of your way. Like a sari" (*Dance...*, 401). The parallelism between dhoti and the woman's wearing goes deeper than visual with its strong suggestion of womanish-ness encoded in the costume. Dance drags it yet farther. Amritlal feels really embarrassed with the "woman"ly aptitude of male dancer: I have never seen a man with long hair... I've also noticed the way he [Jairaj's guru] walks" (*Dance...*, 417). However, his Indian brand of spirituality easily accommodates "sadhus" (*Indian saints*) with long hair in the narrative of normal man.

The most powerful ideology which dominates in the play is the hyperbolic version of masculinity. Amritlal locates the happiness of a man in "being a man" (*Dance...*, 426). His tolerance even of his daughter-in-law's learning the art form of the prostitute in exchange for ruining his own son's career as a dancer – the woman's pursuit --, brings out culture's fear of the effeminate man. Emasculation poses a greater threat than liberation of women: "A woman in a man's world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman's world is pathetic" (*Dance...*, 427).

The conversation between Jairaj and Ratna in the night of Sankar's death is a fair illustration of how the gender-construct is imbibed in the life of people who are

trying to defy and differ from the structure. Young Jairaj and Ratna have come home in the middle of the night presumably from a dance show of Ratna. Jairaj, in his drunken delirium does not sound much above the prevalent gender bias as he describes Ratna as the “Lakshmi-of-the-house” (*Dance...*, 440) and mocks her for “receiving claps” from audience at dead of night while his father had been receiving award for serving the nation – a project which included the rehabilitation/nullification of the devadasis and their art. The mockery is justified so far as Ratna’s conspiratorial action of destroying Jairaj as a dancer is concerned, but the gendered sarcasm is objectionable and takes its root in deep-seated patriarchy. Even art gets enmeshed in gender network as the fact of Ratna’s excellence as a dancer is superseded by her being a “young beautiful woman” (*Dance...*, 443) – an exotic object of desire for men admiring her “assets”. Ratna herself is not free from the bias and suffers from a sense of vacuum in the absence of a “man” in the family -- a proper husband for herself and a father for her son, a provider, a head: “Oh, you will be around all right. Where will you go? But all he will see is your exterior. It won’t take him long to realize that (points to his head) there’s nobody home!” (*Dance...*, 445)

The gender policing, however, takes on more catastrophic consequence than mere accusation. Amritlal’s obsession with the idea of emasculation of a man if he pursues an art form like dance makes him compel Ratna to strike an alliance with him in his perverse project to make Jairaj a “man”. Ratna serves her double purpose of continuing her dance career on condition that she will destroy Jairaj’s so that he is cornered absolutely to try his hand in other “manly” pursuits, secondly, proving her superiority and trying to find someone “worthy” of her. A woman with a brain, she marginalizes her husband in various ways: she makes him dance his weakest item

proving his inferiority, arranges the light in a manner so that he dances in her “shadow” while the light fixes on her, abuses Jairaj in front of others, and manages to receive invitations for her alone. Most importantly, she is successful in historicizing the fact that Jairaj had nothing worthy to be destroyed and it is his mediocrity which only prevented him from dancing alone for a full year during her pregnancy and the same thing breeds in Jairaj an inferiority complex drowning him in alcohol. It gradually gets registered that he is only good for choreographing and arranging music and light for her: “...my calling in life is to serve you” (*Dance...*, 444).

The play touches the innermost chord of our heart with the revelation of the tragedy which visits the family in form of the death of the first born to Jairaj and Ratna. The destruction of a male dancer gets multiple dimensions through the death of Sankar, the dancing god -- the unrealized fantasy of Jairaj of teaching him the dance of destruction, “tandava”, on his grandfather’s head that may destroy the oppressing hegemony of hetero-normativity and order of patriarchal policing. This results from again a failure of an artist-mother to perform her fixed gender role or rather failure to fulfill the two demanding roles which leads to the disaster. In a night of her performance, Ratna administers a doze of opium to her son so that the baby does not wake up before she returns, and puts him in charge of an ayah, who in turn, ensures her own peaceful rest by applying the same doze. The overdose kills the baby simultaneously finishing off the dreams of both his father and grandfather.

The hypermasculinity of the patriarchal society gets added with the sexist fear of gay men, and casts out the male dancers into the liminal space of the fringe section of the

society. It also reveals, as Mary Hawkesworth observes, “The intensity of effort and the power relations that produce this effect are hidden by the very naturalization at the core of the gendering process” (Hawkesworth, 156). However, Jairaj fails not only due to the secret nexus between his wife and father, but it is also a consequence of a subtler social condition. The patterns of posture, dress, speech intonation and other cultural manifestations, and cultural genitals having nothing to do with the “functional” reproductory organs, constructing masculinity/femininity, build up a pattern of constraint on practice of gendering and thereby affect individual potential.

Dance, thus becomes an important tool, destabilizing gender by the potential space it provides for the role playing. The word “abhinaya” suddenly lights up the figure of Sharad, (in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*), the camp, who theatricalizes, demystifies and thus finally exposes the constructed nature of not only the identity but of desire itself by assuming the performative quality of different gender roles. Thus the male dancer easily performs the role of Radha pining for her divine lover, unfixing the category.

#### *Patriarchy – Production, Reproduction and Resistance*

Amritlal is the most imposing version of “man” in the play, enjoying the status of a definition/category of “man”hood. He is the patriarch, the “normal” man – conforming to and confirming the perpetuation of normative pattern. The authoritarian patriarch is highly opinionated for whom any difference is deprecating. He is the money-earner, head of the family, authority over dependent son and daughter-in-law, patriot (holding secret

meeting during the British Raj and institutionalizing the monolithic structure of Indian-ness in independent India), trying every means -- by fraud or by force -- to normalize his son, social reformer, the “sethji” of the town (he made real profit by selling the bungalows after the British had left, which he bought real cheap), spending money in reconstructing India by giving out a lot of personal loans to friends and relatives. Naturally, he could tolerate the peripheral existence of dance in a man’s world as a strange hobby, but it proves outrageous as an “obsession” in an adult (*Dance...*, 415). Hence, the patriarch strictly banishes every disruptive possibility that could challenge the centrality of the pattern, from the adult world of “man”: “... there comes a time when you have to do what is expected of you” (*Dance...*, 415).

Amritlal is a family version of the dangerous implication/potential of the fractured narrative of independence which India achieved with so much blood and which earned for its architects so much glory. We see him calling out to Jairaj with all authority of the great patriarch and his son has to stop in the middle of a dance item breaking the continuity only to receive the order to evacuate the musicians and his guruji, since Amritlal is expecting some guests who certainly hold far greater importance for the authority. He gets infuriated with the very appearance of Jairaj in his dancing bells and repents his decision to allow his son to pursue his interest instead of compelling him to pursue man’s hobbies like cricket. The very discourse of independence gets exposed as Jairaj confronts his social reformer/freedom fighter father who turns out to be enslaved by the tyrannical norms -- “just as conservative and brutish as the people who were ruling over us” (*Dance...*, 416). Amritlal’s apparent liberalism to give Jairaj the leave to pursue his boyhood interest in dance which made his son rather distinguished from other boys

(“most boys are interested in cricket, my son is interested in dance”, *Dance...*, 415) and promise to let him do what he likes which suits his image as a participant in the independence movement, entraps him as Jairaj’s interest turns into an “obsession”. Insisted by Jairaj, he of course admits his involvement in the movement as an “obsession”, but he refuses to put his participation in the fight for freedom and the freedom to pursue an art form (a traditional “Indian” art) on the same plane for comparison.

The dichotomy re-reads the very ideology Amritlal fought for: “You didn’t fight to gain independence. You fought for power in your hands” (*Dance...*, 416). The Victorian morality which is an unfortunate colonial legacy proves compatible with feudal patriarchy. Independence turns out to be only transference of power. In the same manner, he repents his consent to his son to marry a woman from outside his community which so well suited his image of a “liberal-minded person” (*Dance...*, 415). With power in his hand, the proponent of independence (“you are both under my care”, *Dance...*, 420), finds every measure to impose his totalitarian ideologies: he threatens Jairaj against growing his hair (“if he grows his hair even an inch longer, I will shave his head and throw him on the roads”, *Dance...*, 418), commands Jairaj and Ratna to make the musicians even their guruji leave the house on a minute’s notice, prohibits his daughter-in-law’s training in old Mysore school in the courtyard of Chennaiamma – seventy-five years old poor devadasi, and finally forbids the dance training of Jairaj and Ratna altogether. Unable to sustain outside Amritlal’s house economically, Jairaj returns with Ratna, and Amritlal loses no opportunity to set down his own terms and conditions under the veneer of mutual compromise. No illusion of love and respect is created by the

younger couple and the patriarch is clever enough to understand the hatred in their silence and does not forget to mention it: “I realize, of course, that you have come back more out of necessity than any real intension of patching up what you have undone” (*Dance...*, 425). He tries to codify his triumph by his pretension of being hurt at being hated by his children, and rather unwillingly reminds them that they vowed never to come back. He makes himself clear enough on certain points: they will continue to dance but he will be happy if they can earn their living out of it; he is not going to refuse money but asking for it will disappoint him; they will not have any right on all of his wealth since it is invested in some nobler cause than dance, they will use his library as the dancing hall, guruji will come to their house twice a week, Ratna will not learn the art from the prostitute, Jairaj will not grow his hair and so on.

With the brand of social reformation, people like Amritlal try to promote the monolithic India which damages a culture so rich in variety and multiplicity. Motivated by the zeal of reformation, they destroy an indigenous and traditional art form and take away the basic human rights of certain citizens in independent India under the garb of rehabilitation. The noble mission of eradicating some “shameful practice” and preventing the turning of “our temple into brothels” is conducted by the ignorant power-holders who can neither understand nor respect the rich aesthetic tradition of India, and merely revitalize a colonial legacy. In their hand, as Ghosh puts it, “The organic relationship of art and sexuality is dissected until both become saleable” (Ghosh, “Form and Content”, 298). Amritlal shows the audacity to send a doctor and a donation of five hundred rupees -- adding a new feather to his crown of a nation-builder --, in exchange for robbing Chennaiamma of the single student to whom she could impart her art, the only thing she

lives for: “She doesn’t mind at all being poor and lonely... It was important for her that she should impart her knowledge to someone worthy of it” (*Dance...*, 420). The feudal patriarch could not allow his daughter-in-law to dance in the courtyard of a prostitute with passers by peering into the scene attracted by the

the sound of the dancing bell, neither can he allow the seventy-five year old woman in his house for social stigma because it affects his social image, because he also is enslaved by the social code -- “There comes a time when you should do what is expected of you” (*Dance...*, 415). The hetero-normative standard of Amritlal operates on an opportunistic level as he easily approves of sadhus growing long hair and can incorporate them within the narrative of sanctified India, but gets irritated at a male dancer with long hair and “the way he walks” (*Dance...*, 417) since it disturbs the narrative of “normal man”.

Amritlal remains a constant presence even after his death (like the ghost of Hasmukh Mehta in *Where There’s a Will*), not only through experience and constructed memories as well as the “antique show” (*Dance...*, 393) of the dummy furniture, but also as an ideology disaffiliating Jairaj’s manhood. The play is haunted by the reverberated echo of the past -- both as memory and the shaping mechanism of present: “Do you know where a man’s happiness lies? ... In being a man” (*Dance...*, 425-6).

We see Amritlal through the eyes of a generation as a glorified past: for Lata he was a great social reformer, a freedom fighter who, after the “big cause” (*Dance...*, 392) lost following independence, concentrates on handling his unruly son. Viswas can well conjecture a terrible fight between father and son, but Lata insists that her father has great

respect for his father, which is why he could not part with the house and the antique furniture even after the offer of ninety lakhs.

The part and perpetuator of patriarchy precludes dance from the normative design. Neo-colonial forces work through this medium destroying the multiplicity of the Indian pluralistic culture in both planes of family (as a patriarch) and state (in role of a pre-independent revolutionary and post-independent reformer). The figure, conspicuously absent in the family album, is Jairaj's mother. She is omitted not merely as a physical presence or felt influence, but is obliterated from memory, recollection or recapitulation except for once. The act of depriving Jairaj's mother any place/space is a pointer to the validation of monolithic male domination. The second generation shows a greater tension issuing from the anxiety to interrogate the monolith.

The woman/feminine is asserted and appropriated only to conceptualize and materialize the man-making process. Here the woman makes the most useful tool partly by conscious design/choice (itself part of and controlled by trans-individual network), and partly by collective ideological preference. Perhaps, it is through the peculiar victim/resistant/agent position of Ratna in the nexus, created to de-womanize Jairaj, that we see, to use Foucauldian vocabulary, how "technique of power, one which pervades everyday life, categorizes individuals, ...and attaches them to their identity, which in brief constitutes individuals as subjects in both senses of the word that is, "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to... (their) own identity by conscience or self-knowledge.'" (Quoted in Smart, 135).

The cultural construct of the dichotomy and its close alignment with economic forces (Jairaj and Ratna were financially dependent on Amritlal), presents layers of preference. Amritlal is given the alternatives between allowing his son to continue the woman's art and his daughter-in-law to perform the stigmatized art of the prostitute (implicated through the facts that *devadasis* had to take up the profession). Interestingly the Hindu patriarch – recognized “liberal minded” by accepting a daughter-in-law from outside the community --, could not allow his daughter-in-law to dance the divine dance of Shiva and Parvati in the courtyard of a seventy-five year old divine prostitute (*Dance...*, 415). His discomfort with Ratna's pursuit of the art form is only a family version of the state program of rehabilitating the *devadasis* to conform to its idea of sanctity even at the cost of damaging their art. However, he prefers to prevent the greater calamity. The woman's pursuit of the harlot's art is tolerated at the expense of the wife's strategic participation in deskillling her husband in woman's art in order to fulfill the alluring prospect of making him a man.

Ratna's character becomes a site for contesting ideologies and positions – a devoted artist with single-minded all-devouring passion for art and a schemer with the hawk's eyes fixed on success in social term and pursuit of career, a victim of socio cultural hegemony and an internalizer turned agent of the very oppressive normativity. The uncertainty of finding a suitable mridangamist for Lata's performance leaves her hysteric, and the frustration makes her map out her own life and her husband as a failure. She feels dance has brought them to nowhere. Unknowingly, she almost reiterates Viswas's' mock performance of Amritlal whom he had barely heard: “Where will you go being a dancer? Nowhere! ... People will point at you on the streets and laugh”

(*Dance...*, 397). The very ordinary coincidence points to the impersonal nature of the forces beneath and collective psyche of a particular culture. Infuriated by Jairaj's attempt at consoling her, Ratna erupts with all her fuming anger as she pulls off her mask of an artist and changes into a spokesman of the very world of Amritlal: "You stopped being a man for me the day you came back to this house" (*Dance...*, 402). Jairaj of course failed in the role of a "man", whose primary function is to be the money-earner, the provider of his family. The dancer wife of the dancer husband finds herself caught in the urge to find a "real man" in her husband. She couldn't escape the ideological trapping of masculinity: "You! You are nothing but a spineless boy who couldn't leave his father's house for more than forty-eight hours" (*Dance...*, 402).

The master stroke of Amritlal comes in form of ensuring his triumph of his mission of making Jairaj a "man" by establishing collusion with his opposition secretly. He is of course quick-sighted enough to detect a clever and ambitious woman in Ratna. Unable to draw her consent on not liking Jairaj in womanly attire, he makes her confess that she married Jairaj more because he will allow her to dance than because she admires him as a dancer, and reminds her that now it is he who is the authority to take the decision since Jairaj's incapability to act as a provider robbed him of the authority of a husband. He also draws Ratna's confession that she thinks jairaj a merely "good" dancer and not brilliant (*Dance...*, 427) and she herself has a greater potential to be famous. Now he places the trump card and the secret nexus is established to stop jairaj dancing in whichever way Ratna thinks best in exchange for making Jairaj "worthy of you" (*Dance...*, 428).

Ratna's initial freedom from ideological trapping in finding Jairaj a suitable husband because he is a dancer is exposed by her acquiescence to Amritlal's conjecture "because he would let you dance" (*Dance...*, 426). The conjugal relation topples down like the house of cards by the temptation: "Help me and I'll never prevent you from dancing" (*Dance...*, 427). Ratna is faced with the alternative of sacrificing her pursuit of her career on the one hand, and sacrificing Jairaj's career and thus ensuring financial security on the other. The self-regarding instinct plays its part. The artist committed to and being the involuntary agent of art, chooses the obvious.

The character of Jairaj becomes the site to situate, de-situate and re-situate the contesting discourses in the play. His father approved of his pursuit of dance only as a boyhood hobby, and now when he is grown up, the former tries every measure to make him an adult, a "man even to the extent of seeking a secret connivance with his daughter-in-law. Protesting against his father's tyranny against his dance, Jairaj left his house with his wife, but was compelled to return defeated. His manhood getting de-affiliated by his inability comes at per with the imperative of his biologically determined role of the provider. Ratna pushes him away from the woman's pursuit by subterfuge and finishes her promise as a dancer to repay her father-in-law, so that the state/man builder could make him "worthy" of her. Ratna's fear of Jairaj's incapability to fulfill for their son the "need for a father" (*Dance...*, 445), is ironically balanced by the "perverse way of thrusting [him] into adulthood" (*Dance...*, 444) initiated by Amritlal. Jairaj's failure as dancer, though primarily contrived, however, does not expectedly lead to his success as a man. Though the former (failure as dancer) is accepted, the latter (failure as a man) goes

on haunting his existential status throughout the play. In fact, Jairaj himself internalizes the norms as much as to confess to Viswas that he thinks his wife right.

The inner contradiction of the discourse of “man”hood is exposed with the surfacing of the hidden alternative given to the financially weak dancer couple. Jairaj questions the validity of the essentially superior masculinity of Ratna’s uncle – the supplier of the basic accommodations of life. Ratna’s accusation of Jairaj for lacking in foundational “man”ly virtues like self-sufficiency and toughness meets a challenge in his bitterly sarcastic interrogation: “While your uncle asked you to go to bed with him? Would I have been a man then? Giving my wife to her own uncle because he was offering us food and shelter?” (*Dance...*, 410) Jairaj resisted not only by being a dancer and pursuing what he liked, but also by reconstructing that portion of the house which he did not like. Jairaj makes it clear he did not sell the house because it contained his childhood not because, as Viswas put it, it was something like a “shrine in memory of him” (*Dance...*, 406). Jairaj knocks over and over, paradoxically complicating the methodology of the man-making process by over-simplifying the definition: “Will finding a musician make me a man?” (*Dance...*, 402)

Interestingly, the gendered culture affiliates the masculinity of Ratna’s uncle by emphasizing his economic independence and self-sufficiency and obscuring his predatory design, and disaffiliates Jairaj’s, by emphasizing his inability to support his family financially and by obscuring his comparative independence from oppressive ideology of patriarchy, companionship (he refuses to dance alone during Ratna’s pregnancy) and

commitment to his art, to the convenience and comfort of the ambivalent mainstream society.

Really poignant is the identity crisis which Jairaj undergoes. He falls prey to the dichotomy between his own chosen identity of a “dancer” and the forced but failed identity of “man” that precludes his former identity. The only time Ratna recognizes Jairaj’s masculinity is his capacity not to cry: “That is because you are a ...man!” (*Dance...*, 437).

### **The Two Worlds Meet:**

Often in our life the worlds meet; they merge, mingle, confront and collide. With introducing an apparently incompatible couple of Lata and Viswas, Dattani attempts to visualize any possibility of the coalition – both retaining and sacrificing something of their own while the dancer couple fails to resist the hegemonic values from spoiling their life and relation.

Viswas is awestruck of course at the lack of expected eagerness on part of Lata’s parents to meet their future son-in-law, but imagines their worry at the failure (“Excuse us, we must rush. We have a son-in-law to meet” *Dance...*, 388) and accepts their inability to show any hospitality resulting from some unavoidable crisis which he cannot understand. We see him trying to share Lata’s sentiment as she recounts her childhood days: when a little girl, she used to watch the “magic” of her parents dancing together. Beneath the jovial veneer we can feel the adjustment both are making on their part -- one with his socio cultural standard and the other with her passion and career. He of course

does not have the passion, but has the patience to sympathize and appreciate Lata's. Rather jokingly, he quickly adheres to Lata's request to let her come here after marriage to practice, since their "floor can't tolerate millions of addavuss". And almost in an unconscious strain of thought, Viswas was on the verge of agreeing to Lata's statement "And we won't have children" (Dance..., 389) and only stops just in time. Viswas can well visualize the reaction of his father – already quite disturbed at the event of his son marrying outside his caste --hearing the resolution of his future daughter-in-law. He wants many and Lata asks him to marry some one else and Viswas now settles for two at least. He even makes a funny suggestion of adopting one right now after their marriage and practicing the art of child-rearing -- a kind of dress-rehearsal, before having their own. Lata smilingly agrees on the number two -- one right away and another latter on, and earns Viswas's overwhelming gratification: "We might get twins. Love's labour saved" (Dance..., 390).

The simple incident of making a "Gujju" (Gujrati) leave the habit of tea appears cruel to Viswas. And, almost unknowingly he cracks jokes about Lata's mother being dominating. But Lata designates Viswas as "pliable" like her father but she promises not to take advantage. In the same light-hearted manner, Viswas acts the butler and announces Jairaj's unwillingness to sell the house in answer to the phone call from a promoter, but keeps open the offer after ten years when he himself will be able to do it. His opinion is different but he respects the other.

Various points of merging of borders are explored in the play. While Lata and Viswas try to strike an understanding based on each other's interest and faith in mutual trust and dependence in order to keep a balance between the demands of both worlds, Ratna and Amritlal collude to merge the interest of both art and hegemonic society so far it addresses the individual. A victim/agent of patriarchal values, Ratna internalizes the norms of feudal patriarchy and deploys art to forward her own interest. Her inability to accept her position as a dancer in the world of art makes her re-live her failures in memory whenever she is frustrated at any point. Jairaj refuses to stay in her room in such times and Lata is extremely unwilling to hear her misery and failure throughout the night: "That's one thing I'll never do. Bore my children talking about the failures in my life!" (Dance..., 404) We have a glimpse the hell Jairaj had undergone from the slipping remark, "You'll only hear them. I've lived through them" (Dance..., 404).

"...in the relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance... that reverses the situation", observed Foucault (quoted in Champagne, 5). A "resistance" is made by conceptualizing the possibility of the deconstruction of the monolith through Sankar (Lord Shiva – the god of dance and a classic Hindu symbol for androgyny): "Then when he (Sankar) grows up, I'll teach him how to dance – the dance of Shiva. The dance of a man" (Dance..., 441).

Here is an appropriation of an alternative Indian myth contesting the myth of effeminacy of male dancer. The myth also challenges the hegemonic appropriation of India's pluralistic religious tradition (accommodating tales of gender confusion through linguistic subterfuge and circumlocution) by leaders like Amritlal, who try to obliterate

deviants either by denial of difference or by foregrounding conformists. Jairaj dreams of teaching his son the *Tandaba nritya*, breaking the worn out establishment, the dance of the same god -- "...Nataraja, the god of dancers --, the god whose primal dance created the vibrations that set the world in motion" (Narayan, 198).

Interestingly, the highly loaded scene of Sankar's death is kept at abeyance until the last but one scene – practically the last of the real and mortal scenes. Apart from fitting in the schema of the discovery of the skeleton in the cupboard, the scene qualifies our response to the divine vision of peace and harmony which the ending otherwise aims at. The death of Sankar signifies the death of Jairaj's fantasy of teaching his son the art of dance, the "tandaba", the dance of the male dancing god. It may also have a fearful connotation of the impossibility of the idea of coherence/unity in the human world, a view supported by the post-mortem speech of Jairaj: "We were only human. We lacked the grace. We lacked the brilliance. We lacked the magic to dance like God" (Dance..., 447). The death also signifies the failure of Amritlal to perpetuate his authoritarian patriarchy (evident from his unusual concern for his grandchild) which faced a discontinuity in his son.

The third generation, however, takes a step farther to affiliate and conceptualize a new facet of the relation between the genres of "man" and "dance". Lata, herself a promising dancer and the child of the dancer parents, is, to some extent, able to balance her art and different gender roles. Secured and sheltered in history (faith in Jairaj's respect for her granddad and in her mother's selfless affection), confident in present (herself being extremely talented and her parents - especially Ratna - knowing the art of

“pushing”) and assured about her future (her husband showing respect for her artistic pursuit), she incarnates the happiest possible equilibrium in the world of this drama. In the course of the play, perhaps it is Lata, who valorizes Jairaj’s status as a “man”. By accepting Viswas as her suitor (though without a scrap of the understanding of the art), she shows her preference for the kind of masculinity embedded in the image of her father: “daddy is a bit more ... pliable than usual. Like you” (Dance..., 392).

The impression is also strengthened by her commendation of Jairaj’s “courage” to choreograph the ‘Asthapadi’ for her mother thirty years ago. It almost validates a more desirable version of “man”hood, embodied in the male dancer, more conspicuous by its absence in Viswas, the otherwise “normal” man.

Viswas, belonging to a newer generation, provides a fresh “man”ly outlook of the art of “dance” as the layman husband of a talented dancer and the son-in-law of dancer in-laws. A bit antic but sensitive, not of much deeper understanding but patient with the “different”, he maintains a strange relation to the art and artists. Here Viswas is confronted with a different value system, even a set of different socio-ethical criteria of judging “man”. He of course lacks both the deep emotional attachment to and the intellectual understanding of the art. Being a complete stranger to the world of performance – except for the role of spectator --he fails to share Lata’s imaginative identification with her world. Viswas’s conventional status of “man” is accepted by giving him the power to “let” his wife dance. But at the same time, he is restricted by the condition. A variant of priority/preference in constructing the idea of masculinity is

sought: “[a]ctually they [the parent] couldn’t care less who or what you are. As long as you let me dance” (Dance..., 388).

Viswas of course shares the uneasiness about the covert “too erotic” connotation of the reviews, proliferating praises like “tenderly intense and intensely tender”. Instead of valorizing his “man”ly possessiveness about his wife’s sexuality, his inability to accept the display of the eroticism, necessary to the artistic purpose, is discouraged as a lack of courage, at least in comparison to Jairaj encouraging -- thirty years ago -- his wife to perform the same numbers from “Geetagoindam”.

Though Viswas is presented as, Ghosh remarks, “parodic version of what Amritlal might have looked for in a son – a comfortable financial position, immense property and complete innocence about the arts” (Ghosh, “Form and Content”, 299), his honest flexibility gains a visible advantage over the rigid orthodoxy of Amritlal. He shows sincere respect for Lata’s passion, and is reciprocated equally sincerely by Lata’s promise to sacrifice her career for a time being to fulfill his dream of having one child “right away”. It is through this couple that a compatible, though not complementary, partnership is projected.

However, the mastery of Dattani is visible in working out the open-endedness of the meaning the play tries to produce. Jairaj’s suspicion that Ratna might have died out of boredom throws some doubt whether Lata was compelled to compromise with her artistic pursuit since it is her career which kept Ratna so much busy in her old age. Doubts arise whether really Viswas’ mother will inspect Lata’s leg to verify whether she wears skirt, or Viswas will be comfortable with Lata’s erotic numbers and Lata will be

able to live a schizophrenic life (Ghosh, "Form and Content", 300). With another parody/irony, unlike the first born of Jairaj and Ratna -- embodying the fantasy of male dancer -- who fails to survive, the first born of Lata and Viswas articulated his first word which sounded like "jalebi" (a dessert). A fear creeps in, as Ghosh observes, "The art may be lost but peace will remain, at least on the surface. If not, the plot becomes cyclical suggesting that we are doomed to live out our miserable lives again and again through the succeeding generations in a kind of frozen catastrophe, because we are 'human' and not 'God'" (Ghosh, "Form and Content", 301).

"The grace" unattainable in this world, is dramatized through the vision of the dramatist -- never aiming at the impossible realism but exploring all possibilities that the fictive mode provides to address reality. Finally, the play conjures up a vision of the dancer couple -- both male and female --complementing each other as they "dance perfectly. In unison" (Dance..., 447). The demolishing of the house, especially the older portion, envisages a possibility -- if not actuality -- of bringing a new order which is less oppressive and less hegemonic. The epiphanic vision of the couple dancing together in perfect unison "Not missing a step or a beat" (Dance..., 447), gain a greater dimension when it becomes metaphorical of life in the way Shakespeare metaphorized the stage as an equivalent of life itself.