

Parental Desire and Expectations in Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man*: A Study of Desire and Identity Formation

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Abstract

Mahesh Dattani's play *Dance Like a Man* skilfully depicts the intricate relationships between parents and children, emphasising how personal goals are influenced by parental expectations and desire. This study intends to explore how parental expectations and desire impact individual desire and identity formation with an emphasis on the complex relationships between parents and children through a critical analysis of the play's characters and their relationships. The effects of parental expectations on the relationships between parents and children are examined in this research paper, with a focus on how it affects and influences the children's sense of self. It also looks at how parental expectations and desire are portrayed in the play in an effort to better understand the intricacies of the human condition and the never-ending search for self-definition. The play portrays two generations of a Bharatnatyam dancer family, highlighting the change of parental expectations carried on by time. Jairaj and Ratna were the first generation of Bharatanatyam dancers from the family. Their daughter Lata belongs to the second generation. Jairaj's story highlights the ways in which gender expectations and lack of parental support influence personal desire and aspirations. Lata's story, on the other hand, reflects how parents try to fulfil personal desires through their children's success. This research examines the impact that tradition and legacy have on people's lives,

posing issues regarding how to strike a balance between personal preferences and family expectations.

Keywords: Desire, Dancer, Expectations, Identity, Parents

Introduction

The play illustrates the conflict between children's aspirations and parental expectations, illustrating the complexity of family dynamics. The character's identity formation is influenced by parental desire as they pursue their own interests and passions. Amritlal's expectations and Jairaj's interest highlight the intricacies of father-son relationships with issues related to identity formation and traditional beliefs. Their disagreement draws attention to larger social problems related to gender conformity and individual aspirations. Dancing is central to Jairaj's persona representing his identity, passion, and emotional journey. But his love of dancing frequently conflicts with both his father's strict beliefs and social norms. Jairaj's father Amritlal wants him to be a traditional masculine man, but he loves Bharatnatyam and wants to use dance to express himself. Jairaj battles the burden of his father's demands and the need to meet his expectations. To pursue his own dancing career, Jairaj aspires to escape the traditional expectations of Amritlal. With Amritlal standing for the past and Jairaj attempting to define his own identity, their relationship exemplifies a generational conflict between tradition and modernity. Amritlal's demands placed a great deal of strain on Jairaj, which had an adverse effect on their relationship and his capacity to follow his love of dancing at his own pace. Nevertheless, Jairaj's wife Ratna, who collaborated with his father to change him into a man, forced him to give up dancing. After being ignored by Ratna in his quest for dance, Jairaj's emotions are nuanced and multidimensional. Jairaj expresses how disappointed he was when he realised that his wife did not want him to remain a dancer. It reflected the intricate dynamics of their relationship and the societal pressures they faced. His experiences as a dancer shape his understanding of himself and his place in a society that promotes

masculinity. His life highlights aspects of how support and encouragement are always necessary to succeed in life.

On the other hand, Ratna's expectations of her daughter Lata are driven by her own unfulfilled dreams and ambitions. Ratna, as a strong-willed independent woman, projects her aspirations onto Lata. She hopes that her daughter will experience the freedom and fulfilment she herself was unable to. Her own aspirations for independence and self-expression are reflected in Ratna's wish for Lata. Ratna challenges conventional feminine roles. She specifically hopes that the same traditional expectations that limit her own life won't hinder Lata's pursuit of Bharatnatyam and her relationship with Viswas, her future husband. Ratna is portrayed as a self-centred, ambitious individual, and in Lata she sees an opportunity for vicarious fulfilment, especially in relation to personal freedom and artistic expression. By urging Lata to pursue her own interests, Ratna is subtly empowering herself and going against the social expectations that have held her back.

Expectations and Estrangement: The Complex Relationship Between Amritlal and Jairaj

Jairaj's father Amritlal did not want his son to be a dancer. Amritlal strongly opposed Jairaj's passion for Bharatanatyam, viewing it as unmanly and unsuitable for a man. However, dance holds significant importance for Jairaj, reflecting his passion, identity, and emotional expression. Through dance, Jairaj seeks personal growth and self-expression. Jairaj told his father Amritlal that his practice of dancing is a form of independence to do what he wants. Amritlal was not happy as his son chose dancing over other masculine professions. Amritlal expressed his displeasure by stating that, "I have allowed you to do what you have wanted to do. But there comes a time when you have to do what is expected of you. Why must you dance? It doesn't give you any income. Is it because of your wife? Is she forcing you to dance?" (Dattani 37; act 1).

Amritlal's question reflected his patriarchal mindset, which is rooted in the belief that—any unacceptable behaviour of a husband is generally because of the influence of his wife. Amritlal finds it very difficult to accept that his son Jairaj is interested in a craft that is considered feminine. He believes that it is his daughter-in-law Ratna's influence that had made Jairaj attracted to this profession, as Ratna is a dancer herself. Amritlal stated that, “She may be by influencing you. Maybe it's her, not you. That's one thing I regret. Consenting to your marriage” (Dattani 37; act 1).

Amritlal wanted Jairaj to pursue a more traditional masculine career, reflecting the societal norms and expectations of masculinity prevalent at the time. Amritlal's emphasis on masculinity and his concerns about Jairaj's manhood in the context of dance add to Jairaj's identity crisis. The tension between Amritlal and Jairaj highlights the generational conflict and the struggle for individual identity within the constraints of societal expectations. Jairaj grapples with societal perceptions of male dancers and his own sense of self. Jairaj tells Viswas—his son-in-law to be, how his father opposes his passion for dancing. Amritlal has orthodox views on male dancers, and Jairaj could not argue against his father's logic. Amritlal once stated that:

The craft of a prostitute to show off her wares —what business did a man have learning such a craft? Of what use could it be him? No use. So no man would want to learn such a craft. Hence anyone who learnt such a craft could not be a man. How could I argue against such logic? (Dattani 25; act 1).

Amritlal's disapproval stemmed from his own biases and stereotypes about dance being a feminine art form, particularly for women or those considered effeminate. According to Amritlal, dance is interlinked with prostitution. He believed himself to be a social reformer whose “...priority is to eradicate certain unwanted and ugly practices which are a shame to our society” (Dattani 37; act 1). Amritlal tells Jairaj that they are “building ashrams for these

unfortunate women! Educating them, reforming them..." (Dattani 37; act 1). Jairaj protested against his father's ideas. He asked his father to send the female dancers "back to their temples! Give them awards for preserving their art" (Dattani 37; act 1). Instead of calling them prostitutes and disrespecting them and their craft, Jairaj demanded respect for the temple dancers.

Dance is Jairaj's true passion and a fundamental part of his identity. It allows him to express himself artistically. His desire to carve out his own identity in dance puts him at odds with Amritlal. Despite Amritlal's disapproval, Jairaj continued to pursue his passion for dance, eventually finding support in his wife Ratna, who shared his love for the art form. However, their relationship with Amritlal remained strained due to his refusal to accept Jairaj's career choice. Amritlal had problems with the dance guru of Jairaj and Ratna. He tells Jairaj "I have no objection to your efforts in reviving the art, but I definitely do object to the people you are associating with" (Dattani 38; act 1). Amritlal had problems with guruji's long hair and the way he walks, as there was a feminine touch to it. When Ratna casually tells Amritlal that Jairaj was planning to grow his hair long, which would help enhance his abhinaya, Amritlal was quite unhappy. He tried to know whose idea it was, whether it was Jayraj or Ratna, as he somewhere believed that Ratna was influencing Jayraj to practice dancing. But it turns out that it was guruji who suggested Jayraj to grow his hair. Amritlal was angry; he asked Ratna to warn Jairaj that "...if he grows his hair even an inch longer, I will shave his head and throw him on the road" (Dattani 40; act 1). Amritlal was displeased with Jairaj's attire, long hair, and dance practices, which he believed were not befitting of a man.

Amritlal asked Jairaj to pay the artist and guruji and tell them never to set foot in their house again. Jairaj was very displeased. He tells Amritlal "you promised you would allow me to continue with my hobbies" (Dattani 45; act 1). But Amritlal replied "that was when you were a boy and dancing was just a hobby. Grow up, Jairaj" (Dattani 45; act 1). As a boy, Jayraj was

given the freedom to choose his hobby i.e. dancing. But as Jairaj grew as an adult, Amritlal couldn't accept his son's desire to choose dancing as a profession. He didn't provide Jairaj the freedom to choose his career as he wanted his son to choose a more masculine profession rather than being a dancer. Jairaj's search for validation and acceptance from Amritlal is important because his difficulty in identity formation is exacerbated by Amritlal's disapproval and lack of understanding.

When Jairaj and Ratna left Amritlal's house to move away from his control, Amritlal was left alone. However, Jairaj and Ratna returned to Amritlal's house again as they could not live on their own, and Ratna's uncle asked for favours in return for food and shelter. After they returned, Amritlal tells them that:

...I have changed my mind. I will allow you to dance. And I will be very happy if you can earn your livelihood from it. If you ask me for money, I shall not refuse but I will be disappointed. I have been wise enough to invest my money in the right place. But don't think you have a right to all my wealth. I have far better things to do with it than hand it over to you. You may carry on using my library as your practice hall and your guru may come here twice a week in the morning... (Dattani 48; act 2).

However, Amritlal asked Jairaj not to grow his hair any longer and Ratna not to learn from anyone else. This shows how conscious Amritlal is regarding his social image. He had somehow accepted his son's passion for dancing, but he could not accept him to have long hair as it would affect his masculine image in society. In addition, Amritlal could not accept his daughter-in-law Ratna to practice dancing in the courtyard of a temple dancer as he considered them as prostitute. The importance of family reputation in Amritlal's mind is evident here.

Amritlal tries to convince Ratna to make a man out of Jairaj in the true sense that he considers. He questions Ratna, "Do you know where a man's happiness lies?" (Dattani 49; act

2). He gives the answers himself by saying that a man's happiness lies "in being a man" (Dattani 49; act 2). He further questions Ratna, "how do you feel? How do you feel dancing with your husband? What do you think of him when you see him all dressed and ... made up" (Dattani 49; act 2). Ratna replied that she married Jairaj because he is a dancer, and so she had no problem dancing with her husband when he is all dressed and made up. But Amritlal was unconvinced with her reply. He questioned her "...did you marry him because he would let you dance?" (Dattani 50; act 2). To this Ratna agreed. Amritlal tells Ratna "... you are intelligent enough to realise now that the decision to let you dance is in my hands, not his" (Dattani 50; act 2). With this, Amritlal tried to reinforce his influence over Ratna. He tried to make her realise that it is him, who has the power over her dance career. He tried to assure Ratna that he would not stop her from dancing. He tells her "Don't worry. I have no intention of stopping you. I will let you dance". This shows that Amritlal had no intention to restrict Ratna from dancing. He only had a problem with his son who wants to pursue dancing as a profession. He tells Ratna, "A woman in a man's world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a women's world is pathetic" (Dattani 50; act 2). This line explains Amritlal's belief system. According to Amritlal, a woman in a man's world may be considered progressive because they were moving away from the limitations placed upon them. However, when a man enters into the woman's world, it is regarded as pathetic. It was only because entering into a woman's world makes the society question against his masculinity. Whenever a man does domestic chores, loves dancing, stitching, or cooking, he is considered unmanly and society makes fun of him. Amritlal eventually asked for a favour from Ratna. He stated that, "help me make him an adult. Help me to help him grow up ... It is hard for me to explain. I leave it to you. Help me and I'll never prevent you from dancing. I know it will take time but it must be done" (Dattani 51; act 2). Amritlal wanted Ratna's help so that Jairaj stepped aside from dancing and no longer remained a dancer. He wanted to trade Ratna's dancing career in exchange for Jairaj's

masculinity. He wanted Ratna to make sure that Jairaj moved away from dancing and pursued a career that is more suitable for a man. Ratna, driven by her ambition to succeed in the dance world, accepted Amritlal's demand. She looked at her self-interest and prioritised her career over her husband's. As promised to Amritlal, she kept Jairaj away from dance. She sacrificed her husband's passion for her own career.

Ratna's actions led to Jairaj's downfall as a dancer. He becomes frustrated, turns to alcohol, and eventually loses his confidence as a dancer. After Jairaj realised that Ratna manipulated him emotionally and limited his opportunities in dance, he expressed his displeasure. He tells her, "For one full year. For one full year I refused to dance—turning down offers because I didn't want to dance alone" (Dattani 69; act 2). Jairaj becomes resentful and angry towards Ratna, feeling like she's prioritising her own ambitions over his well-being and happiness. This resentment builds up over time, causing tension in their relationship. He even asked her to return his self-esteem. He confronted Ratna by telling her how she treated him during performances. Jairaj stated that:

Bit by bit. You took it when you insisted on top billing in all our programmes. You took it when you made me dance my weakest items. You took it when you arrange the lighting so that I was literally dancing in your shadow. And when you called me names in front of other people. Names I feel ashamed to repeat even in private. And you call me disgusting (Dattani 69-70; act 2).

Jairaj knew that Ratna kept him away from dancing because Amritlal wanted to ask her to do so. He knew that Amritlal had the power and influence over them, and so Ratna had to work according to him. Jairaj again confronts Ratna; he tells her, "Don't pretend, I am not blind. Why did he allow us to dance? He knew he had us in his hands when we came back to him. We would have listened to anything he said" (Dattani 70; act 2). Ratna agreed that she had

listened to Amritlal. She tells Jairaj "... Yes! He realised he couldn't stop me. But he could stop you—through me" (Dattani 70; act 2).

As a dancer, Jairaj's sense of identity is closely tied to his art form. When Ratna sidelines him, he feels like he's losing himself and his purpose. This loss of identity contributes to his emotional distress. He turns to alcohol as a coping mechanism, reflecting his despair and sense of hopelessness. Jairaj could not accept that his father Amritlal could watch him turn into a drunkard rather than see him as a dancer. Ratna tells him, "That is your own doing. He regrets it happened this way—and so do I" (Dattani 70; act 2). Jairaj could not believe that Ratna regretted, as it was her who made Jairaj suffer so much that he had to choose drinking. Jairaj stated that, "Do you? I think you prefer it this way. He lets you do what you want and you have me out of your way. He in turn is grateful to you. My father is always asking me to grow up. Well, this is a perverse way of thrusting me into adulthood" (Dattani 70; act 2). Ratna explains how she extremely regrets that by listening to Amritlal she had pushed Jairaj towards alcoholism. She tells him, "Agreeing with your father. Letting you off so that he could shape you into whatever shape he thinks a man should have. I should have guessed the result. When I say I regret it, I really mean that, Jai" (Dattani 71; act 2). However, Jairaj was so disgusted with Ratna that he did not want to forgive her for what she did to him. He feels betrayed by Ratna's actions, especially since she is his partner and supposed supporter. Her willingness to sacrifice his career for her own advancement hurts him deeply and makes him question their relationship. Jairaj taunts Ratna by stating that:

Oh, you are brilliant! I truly am jealous of you. You are quite a looker, quite a dancer and quite an actress! One has to hand it to you. You really have style. Not to mention brains. You destroy me first, then give the impression that there wasn't much to destroy in the first place, then blame it all on my father, then suggest I make myself useful by being your stage prop, then use words like

‘regret’ and expect me to shrug my shoulder, resign myself and believe that my calling in life is to serve you... (Dattani 71; act 2).

Jairaj's passion for dance is not just about the art form, but also about his identity and sense of self-worth. When Ratna undermines his dancing career, it affects him on a deeply personal level, leading to emotional turmoil and inner conflict. Ratna could not accept the blame that she is the reason behind Jairaj's current state in life. She was desperate to address her feelings so that she could justify her actions. She tells Jairaj that:

You can't blame us for your state and get away with it. What do you want? Ask yourself? Do you want freedom? You had it and you came back to your prison. Do you want to dance? Why didn't you accept those invitations when they came? Was it because of me or were you too afraid that if you danced alone, your mediocrity would be exposed? Yes, ask yourself your true worth and you will get your answer. Yes, I did cut you off but then you deserved it! So don't come to me saying I destroyed you. I didn't have to. You did it all by yourself. And don't expect me to feel sorry for you, because I'm too busy feeling sorry for myself and Shankar ... (Dattani 71-72; act 2).

Jairaj's journey as a male dancer is marked by struggles for acceptance, both within his family and in society. Jairaj and Ratna had a son named Shankar. Jairaj wanted to teach him dance, once he grows up. He states, "...when he grows up, I'll teach him how to dance—the dance of Shiva. The dance of man. And when he is ready, I'll bring him to his grandfather and make him dance on his head—the tandava nritya..." (Dattani 67; act 2). Jairaj wanted to teach his son Tandava, a dance where Shiva is the cosmic dancer, destroying what is stagnant to make way for new creation and maintaining the universe's balance. The mention of Tandava nritya by Jairaj can be symbolic. His son, Shankar, with his Tandava nritya over Amritlal's head might mean breaking the prevailing orthodox beliefs in Amritlal's mind to make way for new ideas

to be accepted by him, and he maintains the balance with changing times and society. By teaching his son Shankar how to dance, Jairaj might have tried to convince his father Amritlal that dance is a form of art which is for both men and women. But Shankar dies as an infant and Jairaj's desire remained a dream.

For Jairaj, dance serves as an emotional outlet, enabling him to convey his feelings and experiences through movement and expression. When Viswas was explaining Lata and Jairaj why he did not like a particular part of Lata's dance performance and ended up calling it too erotic, Jairaj was offended by Viswas. Jairaj tells Viswas that "my wife danced the same item thirty years ago" (Dattani 59; act 2). He also mentions how he himself danced the same item for the army. Jairaj stated that:

...A friend of ours arranged a programme and the money was good. Your mother was too scared and they only wanted a woman. So I wore your mother's costume, a wig and... whatever else was necessary to make me look like a woman, and danced. They loved it. They loved it even more when they found out I was a man..." (Dattani 60; act 2).

Jairaj himself choreographed the dance item thirty years ago for Ratna. He supported his wife Ratna to perform a dance item thirty years ago, which can be considered somewhat erotic by the new generation itself. This shows how Jairaj was far ahead of his time. He considers dance as a sacred form of art, and so he never considered any part of it erotic. Jairaj claimed that he himself dressed as a female and performed the same dance item for the army. This explains how he never bothered about his masculine image. He took pride in narrating this dancing incident in front of Viswas; he tells him how the army personnel loved his performance after knowing that he was a man.

Mother-Daughter Dynamics: Ratna's Expectations and Lata's Identity

Ratna's expectations of Lata are deeply intertwined with her own desires. She wants Lata to succeed in the dance world and is willing to push her daughter to achieve that goal. Ratna sees Lata as an extension of herself and wants her daughter to fulfil the dreams she couldn't achieve. She pushes Lata to pursue dance, hoping to vicariously live through her daughter's success. Ratna expresses her feelings to her husband Jairaj. She tells him:

You know how anxious I am about Lata's performance. 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. You know how hard we had to struggle. I just want to make sure Lata won't have to face the same difficulties. You should understand how I feel... (Dattani 31; act 1).

Ratna wants her daughter Lata to have the freedom to pursue her own passions and make her own choices, unlike Ratna, who faced societal and familial constraints. Ratna's father-in-law Amritlal believes dance is a profession fit only for prostitutes, reflecting his narrow-minded views on art and morality. He was against her when she went to Chennai amma—a temple dancer, to learn the art of abhinaya from her. According to Amritlal, Chennai amma is a prostitute and by dancing in her courtyard, his daughter-in-law Ratna is spoiling his family name. Amritlal's opposition to Ratna's dance lessons is driven by his desire to protect the family's reputation and social standing. Ratna explains to Amritlal that:

...Chennai amma is the oldest living exponent of the Mysore school and is the only link we have with the old school. She doesn't have a single student who is dedicated enough to absorb her knowledge. She is seventy-five and dying... When she came to know that I was a dancer, she greeted me and pleaded, yes, pleaded with me to learn the art of abhinaya from her. She even tempted me by offering to teach me some old dance composition which she knew by memory.

It was important for her that she should impart her knowledge to someone worthy of it. And it was important for me to learn what she had to offer...

(Dattani 42; act 1).

However, Amritlal remained in-convicted. He expressed his disapproval to Ratna's dancing in Chennai amma's courtyard. Amritlal stated that, "The sound of your bells coming from the courtyard of a prostitute...And people peer over her walls to see my daughter-in-law dancing in her courtyard" (Dattani 42-43; act 1). Ratna tells him that she was "dancing the divine dance of Shiva and Parvati" (Dattani 43; act 1). She also adds that, "My husband knows where I go and I have his permission" (Dattani 43; act 1). To this Amritlal replied that, "your husband happens to be my son. And you are both under my care. It is my permission that you should ask for" (Dattani 43; act 1). Amritlal influence on Jairaj and Ratna's dance career is evident through this statement. His reaction showcases his patriarchal authority and control over his family members, dictating what they can and cannot do. Ratna is under the care of Amritlal and so she had to agree to whatever Amritlal expects from her. Even though she was married to Jairaj and he supports her dancing, he is financially dependent on his father Amritlal. This financial dependence gives Amritlal the power to influence both Jairaj and Ratna's dance career. Ratna is a strong-willed woman and so she states in a protesting voice "you can't stop me from learning an art!" (Dattani 43; act 1). But Amritlal tells her that, "...if you promise me not to visit that woman again, I won't feel it necessary to restrict your movements" (Dattani 44; act 1). Ratna's dancing career is in the hands of her father-in-law, and she had no other way but to accept whatever Amritlal expected from her.

Ratna's expectations for Lata reflect her own desires for a life not constrained by societal norms. When Jairaj questions Ratna, "and yet you wish the same life for your daughter", Ratna replied that, "Times have changed and things will be easier for her in some ways. Of course, she is talented and can become famous" (Dattani 32; act 1). However, this

also puts pressure on Lata to fulfil Ratna's unmet aspirations. The relationship between Ratna and Lata highlights the evolving nature of women's roles and expectations across generations, with Lata representing a potential break from the past. Through Lata, Ratna seeks to re-live the opportunities she herself missed, while also navigating the challenges of passing on her values and aspirations to the next generation.

Ratna mentions how she experienced problems throughout her life, but now she wants her daughter to live the life she desired for herself. Ratna states that, "I did not go through all that to see our daughter's career finish overnight" (Dattani 21; act 1). When Ratna was finding someone who would play the mridangam for Lata she was being over possessive. Ratna tells Jairaj:

...Our daughter is giving a performance that will make her career and she is not going to have a mridangam playing for her. How do you expect her to give her best? How do you expect her to dance? What will we announce to the President of India? There will be no dance tonight? Tell those foreign diplomats to go home? In my life I've had problems... (Dattani 20; act 1).

Ratna's expectations of Lata are a complex mix of her own desires for freedom, self-expression, and empowerment, and so she makes sure that her daughter Lata has a successful dance career. She makes arrangements with the critics so that Lata receives excellent reviews. She tells Jairaj:

Within ten days, you'll see. Our Lata will be the talk of the town. I've taken care of the critics already. I've promised C.V. Suri I'll make him the chief guest at the Navratri festival. That old fogey loves to be garlanded on stage. And if he gives Lata a rave review, the others wouldn't dream of doing differently... (Dattani 33; act 1).

For the sake of Lata's dance career, Ratna never mind being sweet to people she doesn't like much. She sweet talked with people so that Lata's performance reviews could be influenced.

Ratna tells Jairaj how their experience and connection could help their daughter's career. Ratna stated that:

Yes! I wish Lata more fame than we have had. Why, she can be the best! We just have to push her a bit and, with our experience behind her, she can't fail. Yes. I'll do anything to see that she reaches the top. Even if it means being sweet to that bitch Chandra Kala (Dattani 33; act 1).

After Lata's dance performance, when she received rave reviews from critics, Jairaj asked Ratna, "Are you happy for her?" (Dattani 64; act 2). Ratna replied that she was very happy and she was looking forward to more opportunities and achievements for Lata. Jairaj talked about Lata's performance and the reviews in the newspaper. He questioned why Ratna wasn't reading the reviews. To this Ratna replies that "I know what kind of reviews she got..." (Dattani 64; act 2). Ratna had managed the reviews regarding her daughter's performance, which is why she is confident enough. She already knew what was there in the newspaper. Jairaj wanted to know how she is aware of the reviews without even looking at it. Ratna replied that "I heard. Rave reviews! The star of the festival! The dancer of the decade! And why shouldn't she get reviews like these? I deserve it. Spending sleepless nights arranging things. Sweet-talking the critics. My hard work has paid off, hasn't it? Hasn't it?" (Dattani 65; act 2).

Ratna took pride in her daughter's success. However, she tried to take every credit for Lata's great performance. For Ratna, Lata's achievement became her achievement as well. Ratna wanted to paste Lata's reviews in their album; i.e. Jairaj and Ratna's album where they have collected and preserved their achievements and memories. Jairaj stops Ratna from pasting Lata's reviews in their album. According to Jairaj, Lata deserves an album of her own where her achievements could be collected and preserved. But Ratna desperately wanted to paste Lata's reviews in their album. Jayraj tries to convince Ratna. He tells her, "They don't belong there. Those critics gave her good reviews because she deserved them. They weren't doing you

any favours. Face it, woman” (Dattani 65; act 2). Jairaj tried to make Ratna realise that Lata’s achievement is the result of her hard work, and it has nothing to do with Ratna’s arrangements. Jairaj feels sorry for Ratna because he was restricting her from pasting these reviews in their album. He says, “I’m sorry, Ratna. I don’t want to see you pasting those reviews in our album—pretending they are yours” (Dattani 65-66; act 2). Jairaj could feel Ratna; he knows how hard Ratna worked to get recognised through her art of dancing. But because of social and family pressure Ratna could not achieve the success she desired. Through Lata’s achievement, Ratna relived those lost moments of her life and in a way experienced the success she herself could not achieve. Jairaj stated that “Ratna. At least you have a daughter to be jealous of” (Dattani 66; act 2). Ratna’s is jealous because her daughter Lata is able to have the success, she desired for herself. By pasting Lata’s achievements in their album, Ratna wants to make herself believe that she has a part to play in Lata’s success.

Ratna's feelings about Lata's career are driven by a mix of maternal ambition, personal unfulfilled dreams, and a desire for a family legacy. That is why when Jayraj asked Ratna what she thinks of Viswas as he had already agreed to Lata and Viswas’s marriage, Ratna enquired about Viswas’s financial status and question — “And he will let her dance?” (Dattani 33; act 1). With her question Ratna tried to make sure that her daughter Lata had a husband who supported her in her career. Ratna didn’t want her daughter to sacrifice her career due to family pressure. She herself had experienced social and family pressure in her pursuit of a dance career, and so she doesn’t want her daughter to go through the same by marrying someone who doesn’t acknowledge her craft. When Jairaj assured Ratna that Viswas would let Lata dance, Ratna instantly agreed to their marriage.

Ratna is portrayed as ambitious and determined, with a strong passion for dance. However, Lata's interest in dance stems from observing her parents' passion, which is presented as a hobby rather than a driving force, distinguishing her from her parents' intense ambition

and desires. Lata's interest in dance is ignited by watching her parents, Jairaj and Ratna, practicing their classical Bharatanatyam, which Lata considers as magic. She tells Viswas, “When I was a little girl, I used to stand near the door and watch mummy and daddy practise. It was magic for me. I knew then what I wanted to be. Viswas, when we are married-you will let me come here to practise, won't you?” (Dattani 6; act 1). Her willingness to integrate dance into her life after marriage—asking her fiancé, Viswas, if she can still practice—shows a desire to balance her professional aspirations with her personal life. Unlike her mother Ratna, who sacrifices her husband’s career for her own dreams for dance, Lata shows a balanced desire to pursue her passion while also valuing her married life. Lata desires to marry and in a way tries to plan a family with Viswas. She tells Viswas, “And we won’t have children ... I mean, not right away. We can have them later, can’t we?” (Dattani 6; act 1). This shows she does not want to sacrifice a traditional life for dance, distinguishing her from her mother and the societal pressures her parents faced. She wants to integrate dance into her life after marriage and is also willing to compromise it for her family. Her dance career indicating a more progressive, less forceful approach to art compared to the rigid gender roles that dominate her parents' generation.

Lata sometimes gets frustrated by her mother Ratna. Lata tells her father Jairaj that, “...she'll tell me the miseries of her life. I don't want to hear that all night (Dattani 23; act 1)”. In addition, she mutters to herself, “that’s one thing I’ll never do. Bore my children talking about the failures in my life!” (Dattani 23; act 1). Lata is less affected by her parent's frustrated dreams and deserted ambitions compared to their fervent desire to keep the art form alive. Lata possesses a balanced mind, allowing her to see dance as a pure art form, separate from the emotional baggage her parents carry.

Conclusion

By examining the intricate web of desires and expectations in the play, this research sheds light on the human quest for self-expression. This study demonstrates that parental expectations can have a profound impact on an individual's sense of self, leading to a struggle for autonomy, self-expression, and identity formation. It is clearly evident in the case of Jairaj, who struggles to assert his masculinity through dance. His relationship with his father highlights the complex dynamics of identity formation within the confines of familial obligations. Amritlal's expectations destroyed Jairaj's individual aspirations. Jairaj forever lacked Amritlal's support in his pursuit of dance. Amritlal's expectation acted as a burden on Jairaj, which affected him emotionally and psychologically that he had to find solace in alcoholism. However, his downfall is a direct result of Ratna's manipulation and his own emotional vulnerability. *Dance Like a Man* serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of acknowledging and respecting individual desires, rather than imposing parental expectations that can stifle personal growth and identity formation. Through the lens of Ratna and Lata's relationship, the play underscores the importance of recognising and respecting individual aspirations, rather than imposing parental expectations. Ratna's unfulfilled ambitions and desires are projected onto Lata, but Lata was not forced to follow a profession she herself doesn't have an interest in. She chose to consider dance as a profession and gave her best. She fulfilled her mother's expectations from her, but she did not limit herself to her mother's ideas and worldview. Through the characters of Amritlal, Ratna, Jairaj, and Lata, the play reveals the tensions between individual aspirations and parental expectations, underscoring the ways in which familial desires can both shape and suffocate personal identity.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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