

# **Dance like a Man: A Cinematic Exploration of Gender Roles and Biases Prevalent in Indian Society**

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## **Abstract**

*Dance Like a Man* (2004, English), an Indian film directed by Pamela Rooks, is adapted from a compelling drama of the same name written by Mahesh Dattani set in the post-independence society of India. The story revolves around the aspirations of a couple who choose their passion, dance specifically *Bharatnatyam*, to be their profession. During their search for the self-identity, they become the victims of gender roles and patriarchy. The present paper discusses the film, bringing to the fore the aching truth of gender discrimination and patriarchy victimising both men and women in Indian society. Patriarchy, as a phenomenon, cannot be separated from the structure of Indian society with ease. The man considered as the superior sex predominates every sphere of the society from family to workplace and woman considered to be the weaker sex is expected to be submissive to her male counterparts. Since the inception of the human civilisation, gender discrimination continues to exist while clutching the society with its claws. Particular actions and behaviours repetitively performed by different sexes form a gender identity, subsequently defining gender roles. Interestingly, it believed that it is only women who suffer from gender discrimination; ignoring the fact that men too are victims continuously judged on the scale of masculinity. The paper investigates the depiction of gender discrimination faced by both men and women in the film through content analysis in the form of qualitative research.

**Keywords:** Gender discrimination, Patriarchy, Cinema, Indian society, masculinity masculinity.

## Introduction

There is a long history of existing dissimilarity of the characteristics of women and men determined by their sex, and it is omnipresent in every society in a variety of forms. The distinction of genders is a result of their difference in physical attributes and abilities, and this has been the scene since the beginning of the human race on planet Earth. Men usually used to engage in work that required physical strength to be performed, like hunting and other essential outdoor deeds (Eagly, 1987). While women considered as the weaker sex were in charge of activities that were less demanding physically such as preparing food, picking berries, looking after the household and rearing children because they are physically capable of bearing them (Eagly, 1987), these gender roles have become uniform and concrete after their long existence since centuries and throughout the history. In present times as well, both the genders are anticipated to behave in a certain way distinctive to each other.

"The concept of 'gender' is typically placed in opposition to the concept of 'sex'. While our sex (female/male) is a matter of biology, our gender (feminine/masculine) is a matter of culture. Gender may, therefore, be taken to refer to learned patterns of behaviour and action, as opposed to that which is biologically determined. Crucially, biology need not be assumed to determine gender. This is to suggest that while what makes a person male or female is universal and grounded in laws of nature, the precise ways in which women express their femininity and men express their masculinity will vary from culture to culture." (Das, 2005)

One commonality amongst the people of all cultures stated to be their preference to live in a family, and every family has individual requirements majorly divided into two needs: financial and emotional. Working its way through like an organisation, different members are allotted different duties to perform amongst a family in our society. While the man of the family is required to fulfil the financial needs of all the members by going out and work; women of the family are supposed to look after the emotional needs of the rest of the members by providing them with food, care and motherly love. These duties ought not to be interchanged according to the unsaid rules of the society. The mentioned duties are allotted, keeping in mind the different characteristics of both the genders aiding them to perform their assigned duties rightfully. For example, men assumed to be physically stronger, thus making it easier for them to go out and earn the bread and butter and consequently gets dominance over the other gender. In contrast, women assumed to be emotionally more durable, thus making it easier for them to look after the

family and consequently become sacrificing in nature in order to fulfil others' needs on a priority basis. It is, in a way, a vicious circle where subsequently one is expected to acquire those particular characteristics associated with their gender and propagate the same to their younger ones.

A child, when born just possesses the physical attributes of either sex. During the growing process, influenced by the surroundings, family and society, children incorporate the distinctive characteristics of masculine and feminine gender; and these gender roles are further reproduced and developed throughout their lives (Galy-Badenas, 2015). Gender roles have now become a part of Indian culture. Another considerable part of the country's culture is cinema. It will not be incorrect to state that cinema is the mirror of society. Whereas on the one hand, it reflects its reality, on the other it gives aspirations and desires to people who make the society. In Indian cinema as well as society, stereotyping is not limited to the female characters; it also impacts the characterisation of a man. It is worth mentioning that to institute gender equality. A balance needs creating gender roles. *Dance Like a Man* (2004, English) is one of the few Indian films that address this issue of utter importance.

The present paper explores the theme of the film while studying the impact of the preconceived notions of society on its characters. It also investigates the effect that patriarchy has on the individual life choices of different genders as depicted in the film. The paper further examines the use of symbolism in a creative visual depiction of the film's theme.

### **Revising Literature**

Das (2005) states that the story of *Dance Like a Man* brings out the practice of patriarchal authority quite effectively. Patriarchy in the story pressurises Jairaj and Ratna, a couple passionate about dancing *Bharatnatyam*, which is a form of Indian classical dance originated in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Though it affects both of their lives, the one who is affected to a greater extent is Jairaj. Thus, Jairaj considers himself to be a failure and blames it on Amritlal's despotism and the ambitious nature of Ratna as well. Deb (2013) states that the primary focus of the story written by Dattani is the stereotypical gender roles asserted by society. She notes that to portray the clash between society and art, there has been active use of the flashback technique as a dramatic device in the story. Reddy (2014) opines that patriarchy is much ingrained in Indian society, and the story reflects the same where Amritlal, who is a representative of the earlier times, plays the agent of the patriarchy.

In contrast, Jairaj and Ratna are the oppressed ones. Manglik and Jalan (2015) with the discussion of the story, explore the concept of gender discrimination that not only women but men too have to face in society. They challenge the general idea that just women victimised through gender discrimination stating that men too have a particular benchmark of masculinity that they have to comprise of to be considered a true man. Sharma and Sharma (2017) examine the multi-layered story that unveils the stereotypes deep-rooted into society through the lives of its characters and how they are affected.

### **Method of Analysis**

The present study is in the form of qualitative research. The concerned film is analysed and discussed in the form of descriptive research conducted through content analysis. A film namely, *Dance like a Man* directed by Pamela Rooks in the year 2004 serves as the primary source of study for the analysis of the context. The analysis of the text of the film conducted through the narrative method. The study examines the film stylistically and thematically to collect data, keeping in mind of some parameters. The parameters chosen for the study are the connotative and denotative meaning of the image, vision, symbolism, themes, mise-en-scène, and narrative structure and technique of the film. The secondary sources of the study include books, journals, published studies conducted earlier by researchers in the field, and the internet.

### ***Dance Like a Man: Rook's Vision of Reality***

*Dance Like a Man* is a portrayal of conflict among three generations and their independent struggles. The characters present on screen the bathos of human predicament in a subtle way. The story outlines the gender discrimination faced by both men and women in Indian society and its effects on their lives. The film narrates the story of Jairaj and Ratna, a couple in an inter-caste matrimony who share their passion for dancing specifically *Bharatnatyam*; their daughter Lata, a *Bharatnatyam* dancer as well; and her love interest Vishal. Simultaneously runs the story of the dancing couple's past with Jairaj's father Amritlal Parekh in the scene using the flashback technique. These flashbacks intervened in the present tale throughout the film, taking the story forward and revealing the missing threads through past events. In the flashbacks, through the character of Amritlal, the stereotypical mindset of Indian society is depicted where a man cannot engage in activities like classical dancing, considered to be feminine. A real man who has self-respect, according to Amritlal, can never choose dance as a career, which is only meant for women to pursue as a profession and that too not for respectable women. Jairaj and Ratna are the

victims of this stereotypical viewpoint as they reside in Amritlal's house and under his patriarchal authority. Even when they move out in order to escape the authoritarian space, they eventually forced to return under the circumstances. As a result of not having any substantial earnings, the couple could not create a nest of their own, and only had to seek shelter from another relative. To their horror, their new provider, who was Ratna's uncle had a rather malicious agenda. His perpetual lurking over Ratna left the couple with no choice but to accept Amritlal's authority. On their return, Ratna is met with an offer by Amritlal to help him make his son a 'man', in order aid in following her passion. Ratna via this pact buys her freedom to dance at the expense of Jairaj's desire to become a male *Bharatnatyam* dancer. She does not hesitate to destroy Jairaj for personal gain by undermining his 'self-esteem' as an artist. She prospers as an esteemed performer while Jairaj left to his agony.

Although in the present setup, both Jairaj and Ratna seemed deprived of their desires. While Jairaj observed to be in terms with his failure; Ratna tries to impose her dream on her daughter. Towards the end of the film, the tragic incidence of Shankar's (the couple's firstborn) death revealed as it took place in the past, and changed their lives forever. It disclosed that Ratna was of a habit to dose baby Shankar with opium to calm him down and put him to sleep so that she could go on stage to perform without any worries. Although she was unaware of the fact that the *Ayah* (caretaker) appointed for the baby was doing the same. On one frightful night, engaging in an argument, the couple met with the unturned event of Shankar's death due to the overdose of opium. The incidence shatters them and eventually strips them off of all their desires.

Nevertheless, over time, everyone comes in terms with their reality and accept themselves as they are ultimate. As Vishal and Lata are expecting their first child, they set out for new beginnings. While Jairaj seen hospitalised in a seemingly critical condition, the film ends with Ratna reminiscing over the memories of the couple executing in complete harmony what pleased them the most, dancing.

### **Characters: Instruments of Exploration**

#### **a) Jairaj**

The male protagonist of the film, Jairaj is the only son of a well to do widowed father. He has a passion for dancing and is eager to take it up as a profession instead of doing any other routine job. He learns and practice as well as perform on stage with his wife the Indian classical dance form, *Bharatnatyam*. His mind does not seem to be corrupted by

the stereotypical norms of the society which lays specific gender roles to be abided by all. This brings him in a state of individual versus society; wherein Jairaj tries to establish his individuality in oppose to his father's demand for him to follow his 'gender role'. He is discouraged from following his passion only because it does not align well with his gender identity as a man. Jairaj suffers the most in establishing both his passion and desires and his identity due to patriarchy and stereotypical gender roles. He is an emotional and empathetic person, loving and respectful towards his wife and daughter, with an immense dislike for his father. He has no ambitions to acquire fame or money; all he wants to do is to follow his passion. As the story unfolds, frustrated by the failures of his life, Jairaj becomes an alcoholic and starts to blame his overpowering father and wife for everything. He, although momentarily, even becomes a bit stereotypical when he puts the blame of their firstborn baby Shankar's death solely on his wife.

**b) Ratna**

The female protagonist, Ratna, is an overly ambitious woman. She tied in matrimony with Jairaj out of love, but there are subtle undertones in the story which suggest a hidden agenda. She thinks that being with him rather than any other man would help her to follow and achieve her dreams of becoming the best *Bharatnatyam* dancer as Jairaj's mindset is not polluted like that of the society as he does not restrict her from solely following her passion. Moreover, both of them share the same passion. She is highly independent and immensely confident, unlike her husband. She is also a little manipulative trying to get what she wants without caring much about the emotions of others subconsciously. She also seems to get frustrated quite quickly and efficiently when things do not happen or turn out to be as desired by her.

**c) Amritlal**

The agent of patriarchy in the film and Jairaj's father Amritlal Parekh is a representative of the societal norms. Despite being a reformist himself, who served a nice amount of his life fighting for the freedom of the country and its people, he still restrains his own son's freedom to choose his passion for being his career path. He is a business-minded person with a thought process highly influenced by the persistent societal norms of his times, unwilling to change or understand the different point of view of his son and daughter-in-law. He believes in gender roles and wants his son to follow them as he has been doing

all of his life. He portrayed to be quite dominating, wanting to have a complete hold over the lives of his family members. Although he is not entirely insensitive and does not wish to command their lives; he just wants what he thinks is best for them. He to be homophobic while commenting over the appearance and behaviour of the couple's *Bharatnatyam* teacher and wants to prevent his son from becoming effeminate.

**d) Lata**

Jairaj and Ratna's only daughter Lata is a simple naive woman who is trying to follow the dreams of her parents' specially that of her mother's wanting Ratna to achieve what she could not because of various circumstances in her life. She stands out to be quite distinct from the other characters of her family as she did not acquire from them their characteristics, such as over-ambition and manipulation. She is no malice, and no wild passion drives her towards dancing. At the same time, she is a devoted daughter with much concern for her parents.

**e) Vishal**

The love-interest of Lata who she later marries, Vishal is a happy go lucky man. He brings some light-hearted humour in the otherwise intense story. He is quite loving and supportive of Lata and her interest in dancing. He is hyperactive yet ever ready to listen to and comfort Lata. He tries hard to seek approval from Lata's parents which shows his compassion towards her.

**Text: The Perception of Visual Realism**

**i) Dance**

The central theme of the film, 'Dance' appears as an initiator of the clash between the characters and the conflict within their selves. It leads forward to take centre stage, leaving characters in the background as the story goes further. Eventually, 'Dance' starts to form a psyche of its own guiding those involved in the story. Ratna and Jairaj want to follow their passion for dancing and turn it into their profession as well; for them, *Bharatnatyam* is not merely an art form, but it is their soul as it is what defines them. The stereotypical gender roles try to obstruct the creativity of an artist wanting to express himself through his art and force him to live within the walls of this restrictive structure of society. Here man is the victim of oppression by patriarchy and not solely a woman. Jairaj is the one affected by gender bias and stereotype to a greater extent in the

story. It is noteworthy that dancing altogether and individually for men was not considered to be a respectable profession in Indian society at earlier times.

A significant character in the story 'Dance' has a different stand in each of the character's lives. It is a medium for Jairaj to express himself, his emotions. Dance for him is also a rebel tool utilised to revolt against the will of his father to control him, to fulfil the standards he has set for him. Dancing for Jairaj started as a hobby or rather a fancy that he had as per Amritlal which he thought would not survive for long. However, Jairaj despite his father's reluctance continues to practice *Bharatnatyam* and is further willing to learn *Kuchipudi*, another form of Indian classical dance originated in a village Kuchipudi situated in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Ratna, his wife, lends him more courage to stand against his father by supporting him being his dance partner. Jairaj shows a sign of rebel even after years of Amritlal's death when, despite his receding hairline because of ageing, he still does not cut his hair short as what his father always desired. Amritlal who is known to be progressive and liberated among the members of society fails to apply the progressive mindset at home as he cannot accept his son dancing and wants him to act according to the gender role assigned to him by the society. Both father and son differ profoundly in their idea of independence, progressiveness and freedom. This variance in their viewpoint noticed in a sequence where Jairaj asks his father if he had never had any obsessions, to which Amritlal replies saying "*If you mean my involvement in fighting for your freedom.... yes, it was my obsession.*" (Rooks, 2004). Jairaj then exclaims, "*You had yours. Now allow me to have mine!*" (Rooks, 2004)

Amritlal is never in favour of pursuance of dance as a profession. The couple's practice sessions disturb him as the sound they make hinders his meetings; he is taken aback by the sight of their guru's effeminate physical features like his walk and long hair; but most importantly he cannot stand the idea of Jairaj, his son becoming a dancer by profession. Other than the lack of ability of dance as a profession to fetch enough money, another reason for his resistance to letting his son dance is the fear of Jairaj acquiring effeminate characteristics like his guru because of practising the art form. He even forbids Ratna, his daughter-in-law from learning the intricacies of the art form of *Bharatnatyam* by visiting Chinniamma who is an old *devadasi*, a woman considered in marriage to God who would learn music and dance in order to perform in the temple. Amritlal was of the notion that his daughter-in-law visiting such a woman will ruin the family's reputation. This way of thinking might be a result of the colonial history where



*devadasis* who used to perform classical dance forms were forced into prostitution and started to be looked down upon by society. Those women, who were respected and held a high social status in medieval India, were later reduced to be mere sex slaves. When Amritlal could not persuade Jairaj to quit dancing by words, he brought forth his play of money and property to manipulate both Jairaj and Ratna. He finalises a deal with Ratna– "*...You know where a man's happiness lies... in being a man..... help me make him an adult..... help me, and I will never prevent you from dancing.... it must be done*" (Rooks, 2004) says Amritlal to which Ratna asks, "*and once he stops dancing what will you do with him then?*" (Rooks, 2004) Moreover, Amritlal replies, stating, "*make him worthy of you!*" (Rooks, 2004). According to Amritlal, passion not followed as a career path. He followed his passion for fighting for the freedom of the country and pursuing social service but did not choose that as his sole career. He, alongside his passion, ran a business to earn money. Likewise, he wanted his son Jairaj to pursue dance as a hobby if he may want but alongside should do something more job oriented to earn money because a man is the sole earner of bread and butter for his family. Moreover, he wanted his son to pursue a job more dignified than dancing to have a career, which shall make him worthy in the eyes of society and especially his wife, Ratna.

‘Dance’ is a passion for Ratna, an undying one that propels her character since the beginning and throughout the story influencing her actions. It is a device to gain success and become famous for her. There is a hint that she married Jairaj in the first place just because he too was interested in dancing and thus would let her dance without causing any trouble. Driven by the pact she had with Amritlal, she does not even hesitate to demolish the career of Jairaj as a classical dancer and consequently destroying his life as well, just for self-benefit. Where Jairaj only follows his heart, Ratna here follows her mind as well, which is sometimes overpowering her heart. She sees dance to be a source of earning money as well as fame. She perceives it to be a basis of establishing respect among the peers and the world of dance. She continually plays with her husband's emotions and tries to guide his life in the manner best suited for her. She does not merely stop at controlling the life of her husband consequently leaving him to become just a soul-less zombie; she tries to take over the life of her daughter Lata as well, moulding her into a reflection of herself. Ratna wants Lata to become whatever she desired for herself and could not be, to get whatever she could not get and tries tooth and nail to establish her as a *Bharatnatyam* dancer without even asking her once if she wanted all of this or not. Ratna never seems to worry

much about what others want; her desire is always the priority. Somehow in the very particular house of Amritlal, years after his death, the agent of patriarchy seems to be shifted from being a man to a woman. Jairaj, despite being a man holds no authority and neither tries to; instead, Ratna fits in part quite well and seems to be running the legacy of Amritlal's patriarchy in the household.

On the other hand, dance for Lata holds importance, but it never turns into a wild passion for her. She wants to dance but just for her self– “*I wish I did not have to dance to please them (parents). I want to dance to please me.*” (Rooks, 2004). Her relationship with Vishal holds as much significance for her as dance. She is not trapped in the vicious circle of passion and desire as her parents specially Ratna where she could go to any extent to fulfil their wants; instead, she seems trapped in another vicious circle created by her parents for her:

*... before I could walk they (parents) put ghongrus (dancing bells) on my feet..... all my life everything has been so cultivated. Sometimes I wish I could just breathe..... Vishal... I am lucky it does not matter so much to you.....Well, it is like I have got to be everything they could not be..... the most important thing in their (parents')life was to make me a dancer..... It is just that I owe them everything; I do not want to let them down. (Rooks, 2004)*

## ii) Patriarchy

Patriarchy, as a sub-theme, has been highlighted in the story to be a component that is inseparable from society. The system of patriarchy runs on hierarchy. The male controls the power relations of the genders where men and women are unequal, and the female, the ground of this system (Esnasshri, 2014). This unjust power relation where a man enjoys complete authority over the lives of women associated with him strengthened by gender stereotypes imposed by the patriarchal culture in society (Esnasshri, 2014). In the concerned film, Amritlal serves as the agent of patriarchy where he possesses and enjoys an authority over his son and daughter-in-law unquestionably. He assumes that being the eldest male, he is the head of the family. Also, as he is the one who earns the bread and butter, he consequently appoints himself as the sole decision-maker for the whole of the family. He is a reformist and a modern person for the country but unfortunately conservative and prudish for his own family. He took part in the freedom struggle of India but ironically restrains his son from his freedom of choice. Amritlal curbs Jairaj's wish to become a professional *Bharatnatyam* dancer and enforces him not to pursue his passion as it is

not a masculine trait to be a dancer in his opinion. Moreover, dance couldn't earn him much money and being a man one has to financially support his family being the sole bread earner as per the norms of the society. There is also an underlying indication that Jairaj's dancing concerns Amritlal of his sexual orientation as he hints the guruji (teacher), who teaches Jairaj and Ratna *Bharatnatyam*, to be homosexual. In an argument with Jairaj, Amritlal says –

*I object to the people you are associating with..... Your guru... What kind of family is he from? Why does he wear his hair so long? I have never seen men with long hair..... I meant normal men..... normal men do not have long hair.... and what about the way he walks!*  
(Rooks, 2004)

Later in a sequence, he even loses his temper when told by Ratna about the desire of his son to grow his hair long as suggested by guruji to "*enhance his abhinaya* (expressive techniques used in Indian classical dance forms)" (Rooks, 2004), saying out loud– "*Tell him if he grows his hair even an inch longer, I'll shave his head and throw him on the road.*" (Rooks, 2004). Thus Amritlal wanted his son to opt for a career path that would bring him money and more importantly respect as a man, instead of opting for something of lower stature that could rip him off of his self-esteem. He considered his own son to be a shame judging him on his idea of masculinity in which Jairaj was a misfit. "*Well, most boys are interested in cricket, my son is interested in dance, I thought. I did not realise this interest of yours would turn into an obsession.*" (Rooks, 2004). – *Amritlal to Jairaj*

### iii) Gender Discrimination

Another sub-theme of the film is gender discrimination. The discrimination between genders is a product of gender role beliefs. It reflected by the differences and similarities of sexes in their behaviour which subsequently correspond to the perception of society about the social roles of men and women (Eagly and Wood, 2012). This initiates in the composition of the social role theory. According to this theory, men and women learn and acquire their masculine and feminine characteristics through social conditions and adapt to their gender roles performing various actions associated with their biological genders accorded with the social structures (Alsop, Fitzsimons, and Lennon, 2002). In *Dance Like a Man*, the irony of Amritlal's decision to let Ratna continue with her dancing and wanting to restrain Jairaj to dance is highlighted. It implies that women and men are not entitled to equal rights or status in society. Whereas in the majority of cases, women are the victims of this gender discrimination, here Jairaj, who is a man, is the

greater victim. Dancing as a profession could not fetch enough money at earlier times; this was not considered suitable for men but could be practiced by women as they were not expected to earn money. Amritlal manipulates the already convinced Ratna to think that Jairaj is not much of a good as a dancer and can never be, as dancing is a feminine territory and Jairaj has to be “*all made-up*” (Rooks, 2004) when he dances. He is of the opinion that— “*A woman in a man’s world may be considered progressive, but a man in a woman’s world is pathetic!*” (Rooks, 2004). This exposes the mentality which believes the gender of male to be superior to the female gender as progress mapped only when moved upward or forward and not when one moves downwards or backward. It notices a gender bias in the relationship of young Lata and Vishal as well, when Lata seeks permission from Vishal to allow her to come to her parents' house and practice dance even after marriage. Here the dependent-sex needs to seek permissions from the sex it is dependent on, as in Indian society a woman is not expected to do anything that her husband doesn't permit her to do.

It traces a chain of discrimination in the story where one victim victimises the other out of frustration. Jairaj holds his wife Ratna responsible for his failure in dancing and life. He accuses her of snatching from him his honour, self-esteem, his dignity and confidence to dance. Like any other chauvinist man, he blames his wife entirely for his downfall. He even questions his motherhood, blaming her of not taking good care of their baby Shankar, as if she just has to look after the baby because as a female it comes under her gender role to perform. Ultimately he even holds her accountable for Shankar's death. This is a result of the ideology propagated by the patriarchal society that creates the dogma of motherhood. The female gender exclusively has the capability of bearing children biologically, and the society consequently links this factor with the responsibilities of motherhood which burdens women solely with the duty of nurturing and raising children in a way devoting their whole life to their family (Jha, 2012). Moreover, even Ratna does not set back in questioning the masculinity of Jairaj in another sequence— “*You never left your father’s house and stood on your own two feet. You stopped being a man the day you came back to this house.*” (Rooks, 2004). Later in a sequence, drunken Jairaj indicates to Ratna that he came back to this house to protect her from prying eyes of her uncle. Here he is trying to set in the mould of a protector and saviour as required by his gender role, as a male. He time and again tries to vent out his annoyance on Ratna blaming her for his failure in the field of dancing. The failures in his life and the death of their son triggers extreme hate in Jairaj's heart

towards his father and disgust towards his wife. Subsequently, he engulfs himself in alcoholism being victimised by ambition and oppressed by patriarchy.

### **Symbolism: Construing the Sub-Text**

Alcohol is used as a symbol of masculinity in the film. Jairaj regularly consumes alcohol to reassure himself of his manliness. There is a scene in the film when Jairaj meets his son-in-law Vishal, for the first time and takes him to a bar where only men seem to be visiting. Vishal does not expect a person like Jairaj is visiting such a place because a person so passionate about an art form consumed in alcohol does not seem so usual. Another purpose for Jairaj to take Vishal to that place was to have a man to man conversation with him while sharing alcohol.

Another symbolism in the film shown through the shawl of Amritlal presented to him by the *Maharaja* (King) of Mysore which now has a place in the drawer of antique furniture in Jairaj and Ratna's household. It is the symbol of Amritlal's pride, and particularly for Jairaj, it is a haunting memory of his authoritative father. The corrupt memory of a father who shunned his own son's desires and curbed his freedom of choice, making use of his manipulative mind. However Jairaj is of mixed mind, on the one hand, he does not want to part with his father's house and the shawl, maybe because of the pride attached to them which he wants to inculcate in himself, and on the other hand he wants to get rid of his last memory by giving away the shawl to Vishal as a present after his marriage with his daughter. Later after returning from the bar with Vishal, Jairaj when left alone drunk in his living room picks up Amritlal's shawl wraps it around and mutters– “*Your last memory. Soon I will be rid of you too. Then I will not see you wearing this shawl and walking about this room.*” (Rooks, 2004). He keeps on saying this with his expressions turning sad and then he fades into a memory of his past.

With all the symbolism and themes running in the background, the primary focus of the film remains to be the showcase of stereotypes attached to the identity of the male gender as its title, *dance like a Man*, self explains. It is suggestive of the vital query of Jairaj, the male protagonist 'if he can dance like a man' or simplify if he can be a man in the eyes of the society acting according to the gender role assigned to him because dance not included in that role. Though for Jairaj dance is a medium of self-expression and a means of discovering and establishing his identity, he is often criticised and looked down upon for choosing it as a career because conventionally classical dance considered to be a feminine art form and even the men

who perform it are effeminate. He seeks joy in his passion, satisfaction in his art, and freedom in his life, but he instead rewarded with bias, oppression, manipulation, and he left with his repressed desires. Thus, what seems to be the general theme playing all through the movie is of the individual versus the society as also suggested by Deb (2013) about the theme of the storyline of the play of which the film is an adaptation. The film has a subliminal message indicating the need to establish gender equality in society for a prosperous living. According to Marinova (2003) in a study conducted for the United Nations, gender equality would be rooted deeper in society when men are allowed to explore rather more options regarding their career and lifestyle. Then men would not have to concentrate on proving their masculinity by dominating other men and women while adopting a hyper-masculine façade and in consequence, engaging in life-threatening lifestyle activities (Marinova, 2003). This would result to be beneficial for both men and women.

### **Conclusion**

*Dance Like a Man* as a film brings forth the harsh reality of gender discrimination in Indian society which affects both men and women. It tries to establish the fact that men too suffer as they are stereotyped into being a figure built with the characteristics assigned by a gender role formatted by the society, as opposed to the belief that only women are the victims of gender bias. The film tries to incorporate a new characteristic of masculinity where men break the stereotype of bearing only manly traits fulfilling the duties assigned to them by society as a male, and preferably do whatever they please. Here masculinity is not just an antonym of femininity, but the term serves to be an individual identity with a different meaning to different people. Gender discrimination as an issue of concern is a socio-cultural phenomenon developed by the people itself. Every person has been on both ends of the discrimination being the victim and the victimiser at one point or the other in their lives. The person who accepts others' biased behaviour towards them and acts according to the norms of the society just to please everyone around, is somehow encouraging the discrimination. The social-evil crushed with a change in the mindsets of people. Just like the real world, *Dance like a Man* does not display its characters to be completely black and white; instead, the film shows them to be grey in different extents. The film poses an important question: whether we as a society are progressive or do the liberated ones need to escape it in search of a utopian world where there exist no gender roles; where art like dancing does not attach itself with a particular gender and enjoys in its purest form.

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