



The Influence of Social Stigma on Individuals' Lives: A Study of Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man*

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Abstract:

This paper examines the influence of social stigma rooted in traditional values on modern Indian society, as depicted in Mahesh Dattani's play "Dance Like a Man." The paper explores how social stigma devalues and discriminates against individuals based on their qualities or ambitions, particularly within the context of mental health and societal roles. It underscores the harmful effects of such stigma, including reduced opportunities, diminished self-worth, and reluctance to seek treatment for mental illnesses. Through the "Dance Like a Man," the paper illustrates the pervasive influence of social stigma on personal freedom and societal progress, emphasizing the need for greater flexibility and acceptance of individual aspirations in modern Indian society. Further, the paper argues that while traditional values have historically shaped and civilized society, they must evolve to accommodate modern ideals of individual freedom and equality. The study calls for a balanced approach where tradition coexists with modern values to foster a more inclusive and progressive society.

Key words: Traditional Values, Social Stigma, Mental Health, Discrimination.

Introduction

This title brings out the modern Indian culture and how the tradition is dominating the modern Indian society. This paper also deals with how the traditional values have become a social stigma among the elders of Indian society. The story ***Dance Like A Man*** begins with the household head Mr. Amritlal who is supposed to be a strict follower of traditional values of Indian society, which makes him not to allow his daughter in law Ratna and his son Jairaj to become a classic Bharata Natya Dancer, which is a life time ambition of Jairaj and Ratna. But the social stigma ruins the mind of Amritlal and it becomes pathetic in the life of the young couple Jairaj and Ratna.

However, when they are ready to sacrifice the bondage of the joint family system, Amritlal tries to overcome the situation and he agrees to allow his daughter-in-law to become a classic dancer at the same time he denies the wish of his son Jairaj to become a dancer. Hence, Jairaj turns to be a full-time drunkard and it breaks the strong relation between the father and the son. This proves that the social stigma ruins the lives of many Indian young people and it creates a huge impact on each and every individual's life.

Social stigma refers to the devaluing, disgracing, and disfavours of individuals with particular qualities by the general public. According to the Government of Western Australia Mental Health Commission (2010), three out of four people with a mental illness experience social stigma. Individuals are often labeled by their illness, and are seen as a part of a stereotyped group created by negative attitudes and beliefs towards mental behavior. One of the most commonly held beliefs is that people with misogyny are dangerous and unpredictable- especially those with schizophrenia or substance use disorder . We could come across this stereotype from the play ***Dance Like Man*** by Mahesh Dattani an Indian dramatist who portrays the social stigma vividly throughout the drama.

The focus of this essay is to evaluate the impact of social stigma on people with mental discrimination resulting in individuals receiving fewer opportunities, and reduced access to resources. For example, social stigma could prevent an individual from securing employment, receiving higher education, or establishing relationships with others. This can then diminish an individual's self-esteem and self-worth (Corrigan, 2004),

as they feel that they cannot successfully integrate into society. Because of this, individuals often conceal their illness from others, and choose not to engage in treatment in an attempt to avoid social stigma.

According to the Association of Psychological Science (2014), forty percent of people with mental illnesses receive treatment due to the stigma related factors. Without treatment, an individual's mental illness can get progressively worse, drastically altering their quality of life. In the case of Amritlal, he sticks on with his traditional values and the orthodox life of an old Indian. He too was suffering from the social stigma so he never ever allowed his daughter in law and his son to pursue their ambitions in their lives, since they wanted to be classical dancers Amritlal said; "Why you must dance it doesn't give you any income. Is it because of your wife ? Is she forcing you to dance"(*Dance Like A Man* 37).

It is therefore important to reduce social stigma associated with mental illness in order to eradicate the barriers preventing individuals from attaining their passion . Social stigma refers to the devaluing, disgracing, and disfavours of individuals with particular qualities of the general public. Contact strategies can effectively reduce social stigma associated with mental illness by efficiently altering the general public's negative attitudes and beliefs through interpersonal interaction.

Social stigma involves prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviour towards people with mental illnesses. Discrimination results in individuals receiving fewer opportunities and reduced access to resources. Social psychologists have identified three strategies that can effectively reduce stigma - education, protesting, and contact strategies. Moreover the attitude of Amritlal made Lata to think he is uncivilized it also proved by this statement of Amritlal; "The sound of your bells coming from the courtyard of a prostitute"(*DLM* 42).

In today's society, the stigma around mental health has caused many people to fear about seeking medical treatment for problems they are dealing with. With an abundance of hateful outlooks and stereotypical labels such as: crazy, psycho, and dangerous, it is clear that people with a mental illness have a genuine reason to avoid pursuing medical treatments. Along with mental health stigma, psychiatric facilities that patients with a mental health issue should be attended to receive treatment.

Stigma is a “collection of negative attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors that influence the individual, or general public, fear, reject, or avoid, be prejudiced, and discriminate people”. Mentally ill patients are encountered in all settings. Many of these settings are nonpsychiatric in nature and are staffed by nurses that do not have extensive training or comfort in dealing with seriously mentally ill patients. Individual stigmas and attitudes that nurses have regarding mental illness can have a direct effect on the level of care given to these patients. These stigmatizing attitudes toward the mentally ill can have very harmful effects on the individual themselves and their families. This made Amritlal to speak painful words towards his son and daughter in law. "Your husband happens to be my son. And you are both under my care.

It is my permission that you should ask for"(DLM 43).

The negative attitudes result in social isolation, reduced opportunities, and the lack of self-worth (Varcarolis, 2013, p. 18). Nursing graduates need to understand that psychiatric patients appear everywhere, not just in psychiatric settings. Knowing how to properly and appropriately care for them is vital to give the best care each patient deserves. The challenges of social stigmas about mental illnesses affect graduate nurses in developing a therapeutic relationship, and need to adjust and implement appropriate nursing social stigma exists in multiple forms that are mostly related to the culture, ethos, plumpness, race, color, creed, gender, disease and ailments.

Stigmatization can cause a negative impact on the lives of individuals. They not only impact the health of the people but also affect their mental stability and state of mind. This somehow makes these sufferers feel insecure and transforms them into insecure individuals. They develop a feeling of insecurity and their self-esteem is negatively affected. They believe that their worth is adversely affected. Such circumstances can occur in the place of work, educational environment like schools and colleges, health care centers, and even in one's own family. People are insecure in their family settings as well. Stigma may also be labeled as a tag that links an individual to unsolicited physiognomies:

Black-white, white-black, or mix? If the children think they are white, that's a problem.

Also, they cannot even think of themselves as completely black either. The stigma that arises here is psychological damage and a loss of identity in the long run. (Tizard & Phoenix, 93)

The essence of this quote is that mixed-race children often face a complex identity struggle. They may feel torn between different racial identities, which can lead to psychological distress and a sense of not fully belonging to either group. This struggle with identity can result in long-term emotional and mental challenges. Some people can navigate the quest for identity, while others, due to their mixed-race background, struggle to find a true sense of self. When a Hindu man marries a Muslim or Christian woman, social stigma and religious discrimination often arise.

Overcoming these biases is essential for creating a more inclusive and accepting world.

Social stigma stereotypes people to be unequal. People are suffering in many countries in different ways and they are ill-treated differently due to Race, Culture, Religion, Caste, Economy and Gender. But they are rooted from the social stigma. Still we have racial discrimination in the Western countries, political discrimination everywhere in the world. Many of the countries are suffering due to a kind of social stigma which could be crushed from the society. People forget to love their neighbors and they fail to shower the love on the human race. They held-up in war and destroyed human society. Social equality cannot be found in the character Amritlal, he blindly said that "A woman in man's world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman's world is pathetic" (DLM 50)

People should love and support each other to ensure a long and harmonious existence on this beautiful Earth. Inequality breeds social stigma, which allows outdated traditions to overshadow modern aspirations. When equality prevails, peace follows, as demonstrated by the character Amritlal in "Dance Like A Man." His rigid adherence to traditional values imposes a tragic and oppressive life on his daughter-in-law Ratna and her husband Jairaj:

"Talk about how you insult me in front of other people? How you make me feel ashamed of you ? How...How disgusting you are? Oh, for God's sake , Jairaj do something useful before it's too late"(DLM 69).

This demonstrates that traditional values may not be suitable for modern society and should not be enforced as a social stigma by the older generation. Instead, the youth should be allowed the freedom to pursue their own paths. Mahesh Dattani concludes "Dance Like A Man" by emphasizing this very point.

In Mahesh Dattani's play "Dance Like A Man," the clash between traditional values and modern aspirations highlights the pervasive impact of social stigma in Indian society. The rigid adherence to tradition by Amritlal creates a toxic environment that stifles the dreams and ambitions of his son Jairaj and daughter-in-law Ratna, leading to personal tragedy and strained relationships. This narrative underscores the broader issue of social stigma, which not only limits individual potential but also perpetuates discrimination and inequality. To foster a more inclusive and progressive society, it is essential to challenge and overcome these stigmas, allowing individuals the freedom to pursue their passions without fear of judgment or rejection.

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