Chapter - 6

Life Takes Over Art
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Mute sufferings of individuals do not always spring from social apathy alone. The conflict between individual desire and self denial is constant amid changing realities and perceptions of life. Characters in Dattani’s plays learn to live with the immediate reality but the knowledge of the unavailable, and the absent, creates a hiatus that haunts them throughout their lives. The inner conflicts perceptible in personal as well as interpersonal relationships generally ensue from the ignored or compromised desires. The cultural dilemma and personal conflicts faced by the exponents of fading art forms seem to fascinate Dattani. He analyses the issue of mute individual suffering from different points of view in his plays. In *Morning Raga* a Carnatic singer comes to terms
with past tragedy and present exigencies through her association with the young and enthusiastic band. *Dance Like a Man* portrays the aspirations of two Bharatanatyam dancers, Ratna and Jairaj, in the declining years of their professional lives. Similarly, *Uma and the Fairy Queen* portrays two actors Nila and Michael. All these plays deal with the inner conflicts of the protagonists endeavouring to strike a balance between the realities of life and their passion for art.

With *Dance Like a Man* Dattani takes the audience /reader into the realm of the art world and the life of people who are forced to make deliberate compromises and adjustments owing to their adoration of Bharatanatyam. The play has five characters. Amritlal Parekh "the sethji of the city" is a Gujarati settled in South India. He is a social activist who had also participated in the freedom struggle. Jairaj is his only son and family member. He is obsessed with Bharatanatyam and wants to become a classical dancer. Ratna is a South Indian girl living “just five buildings away” (DLM:389) from the Parekh House. She practically lived and practiced Bharatanatyam in the Parekh house with Jairaj under the same Guru even before she and Jairaj got married to each other. They inherit the house and continue to live there until Jairaj turns sixty two and Ratna sixty. Lata is their daughter. She has inherited the tradition of classical dance by virtue of growing up in the Parekh house. She has deep veneration for dance and associates this respect for the house where she witnessed dance while growing up:
**LATA:** Some of these instruments are the same ones my parents used. Almost forty years old. *(Picks up a pair of dancing bells.)*

Can you believe it? These are the same bells my father wore for his debut! Ooh! I get goosebumps every time I touch them. This room has something special in it *(DLM:389).*

She too is passionate about dance and wants to become a dancer like her parents:

**LATA:** When I was a little girl, I used to stand near the door and watch mummy and daddy practice. It was magic for me. I knew what I wanted to be *(DLM:389).*

But she is not obsessed with dance like her parents. Viswas is her purported fiancé. He is the son of a wealthy ‘Mithaiwala’ and does not posses any background in Bharatanatyam.

Dattani uses only four actors in the play to play five character roles. The young man and woman, in their twenties play the roles of Viswas and Lata and alternatively the young Jairaj and Ratna. The old man in his early sixties alternatively plays the roles of Amritlal Parekh and the older Jairaj while the old woman in her early sixties plays the role of the older Ratna. The role switching is vital to the structure of the play. Lillette Dubey has done more than
productions of the play around the globe. Commenting on the play she says:

... it is an amazing script. When I first read it, I immediately fell in love with it. It is beautifully crafted. The way it moves back and forth in time, its use of one actor to play more than one role which really tests the actor's talent, and how seamlessly all this is done, and strong characterisation.

Metaphorically, the use of the same couple to play Lata and Viswas and alternatively young Jairaj and Ratna suggests that attributes and responses towards one's passions are similar at a young age. In other words the young Viswas is as passionate about his love for Lata as the young Jairaj was about his passion for dance. Similarly, Amritlal, also playing the older Jairaj, suggests that Jairaj has replaced his father in the societal role as the head of the family. He talks with equal authority to the young Viswas when he interviews him. He also becomes more demanding towards Ratna, as his father was. Similarly, the young Viswas encourages Lata as the young Jairaj encourages Ratna. Both men feel proud in their partner's achievement while they are young.

The play raises a very pertinent question regarding the independence of individuals to follow their passion as vocation. The play highlights social bias against classical dance, as a career, in the nineteen forties, and more so against male dancers:
. . . Mahesh Dattani forces us to examine our own individual and collective consciousness. Are we the liberal-minded persons we would like to believe that we are or do we blindly kowtow to unwritten laws of family conduct . . .? ³

The unwritten laws of family conduct require a man to behave in a manly fashion and adopt masculine behaviour and persona:

**AMRITLAL:** Do you know where a man’s happiness lies?

**RATNA:** No.

**AMRITLAL:** In being a man.

**RATNA:** That sounds profound. What does it mean? . . .

**AMRITLAL:** A woman in a man’s world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman’s world is pathetic (DLM: 425-427).

Amritlal, who represents the views of the society, cannot comprehend his only son in the feminine world of dance with long hair and effeminate walk. He is frustrated with his son’s choice and regretfully says:

I would have made a cricket pitch for you on our lawn if you were interested in cricket.
Well, most boys are interested in cricket, my son is interested in dance, I thought. I didn't realize this interest of yours would turn into an . . . obsession? . . . I have always 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 (DLM: 414-415).

This conflict between personal desire and social expectation creates tension between the family members. Amritlal is shocked to learn that Jairaj is planning to grow his hair to enhance his 'Abhinaya' and that he wants to learn Kuchipudi, a dance form that requires even the male dancers to “dress-up as women”(DLM:422). In order to induce Jairaj into male stereotypical roles expected by the society Amritlal restricts the movement of Ratna and Jairaj. He also refuses to allow their Guru; who grows long hair and has an effeminate walk, to conduct dance practice in his library. The heated argument between the father and son expresses two different views regarding art, i.e. Bharatanatyam. Amritlal, who is a liberal minded progressive social activist cannot visualize dance as an art form. He is expressing the view of the uninformed society when he compares the devdasi tradition to prostitution. Their conversation clearly brings out contradictory views regarding dance and both seem to be correct in their individual perspective:

JAIJAJ: You have no knowledge of the subject. You are ignorant.
AMRITLAL: We are building ashrams for these unfortunate women! Educating them, reforming them . . .

JAIRAJ: Reform! Don’t talk about reform. If you really wanted any kind of reform in our society, you would let them practise their art.

AMRITLAL: Encourage open prostitution?

JAIRAJ: Send them back to their temples! Give them awards for preserving their art.

AMRITLAL: My son, you are the ignorant one. Most of them have given up their ‘art’ as you call it and have taken to selling their bodies.

JAIRAJ: I hold you responsible for that.

AMRITLAL: You have gone mad.

JAIRAJ: Give them their homes and give them their profession.

AMRITLAL: I will not have our temples turned into brothels!

JAIRAJ: And I will not have my art run down by a handful of stubborn narrow-minded individuals with fancy pretentious ideals (DLM:416).
Amritlal also thinks that dance is not ideal for women belonging to respectable families. He also tries to stop Ratna from visiting Chenni amma, the oldest living exponent of Mysore school of dance, just because she was a devdasi. Ratna tries to convince him logically by saying that Chenni amma teaches the divine dance of Shiva and Parvati and there is nothing wrong in learning dance from a seventy-five year old withered and lonely lady. She also tells Amritlal that if he has objection to her going to Chenni amma's place she may arrange for Chenni amma to come and teach the art of dancing at Amritlal's house. This further infuriates Amritlal. Ratna is firm about her decision and boldly tells her father-in-law: "You can't stop me from learning an art!" (DLM:421). But when Amritlal cannot convince his daughter-in-law, he sends five hundred rupees to Chenni amma "in compensation for depriving her of her only student" (DLM:423).

This leads to another important aspect faced by passionate aspirants of dance. The harsh truth, that the world moves around economy and every passion requires economic support, is learnt by Jairaj and Ratna, the hard way. Their impulsive decision to leave Amritlal's house, boomerangs. For an alternate shelter they move to the house of Ratna's uncle. They are forced to return to Amritlal's house within forty-eight hours as Ratna's uncle, for his support, demands sexual favours from his own niece. Jairaj also loses respect in the eyes of his wife, Ratna, as he could not sustain on his own, even for two days. She blames Jairaj for all her failures and like her father-in-law questions his masculine role in the family. She has held this view about her husband for forty years. During an emotional outburst she accuses him:
RATNA: You! You are nothing but a spineless boy who couldn’t leave his father’s house for more than forty-eight hours.

JAIRAJ: Ratna! Don’t...

RATNA: You stopped being a man for me the day you came back to this house (DLM:402).

She blames him for both, his failures and for ruining her life. Her contempt and professional rivalry for her husband becomes amply clear when she says:

RATNA: 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 am too busy feeling sorry for myself and Shankar. When he is a little older, he will feel a need for a father. 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! (DLM:445).

The web of human relationships unfolds before the audience/reader as Amritlal allows Jairaj and Ratna back into his house. Amritlal’s fatherly
affection and concerns for his only son lead him to seek Ratna's help in pulling Jairaj out of dance:

**AMRITLAL:** Help me make him an adult.
Help me to help him grow up.

**RATNA:** How? . . .

**AMRITLAL:** Help me and I'll never prevent you from dancing. I know it will take time but it must be done.

**RATNA:** I will try.

**AMRITLAL:** You'll have to do better than that.

**RATNA:** *(more definite).* All right (DLM: 427).

Ratna's tacit support to her father-in-law further isolates Jairaj. The isolation of art aspirants and the psychological trauma they have to undergo becomes evident in Jairaj. He loses his self-esteem. He is forced to fight alone, not only the outer social prejudices but also the contempt, competition and rivalry at home:

**JAIRAJ:** I want you to give me back my self-esteem!

**RATNA:** When did I ever take it?

**JAIRAJ:** 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 arranged 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 (DLM:443).

Ratna is also not devoid of problems. She is an ambitions woman and would go a long extent to meet success. The frustration of failures and her unfulfilled desire of excessive success lead her into depression. The pressures in the art world and the insatiable hunger for success, rivalry within the family and competition from other dancers like Chandra Kala force her to secretly gulp down liquor to settle her nerves. Her situation becomes clear when Anacin and Aspro, tablets she regularly takes for headache, cannot relieve her pain. She becomes accustomed to secretly consume liquor in small quantities so that her husband and daughter do not know. She becomes more sober towards Jairaj when she drinks:

\textbf{JAIRAJ:} (Making Ratna sit). Sit down, Ratna Devi . . . can I get you a drink? (Goes to the cupboard.)

\textbf{RATNA:} Please, Jai. I’m in no mood for jokes.

\textbf{JAIRAJ:} Jai? You called me Jai? (Takes out the bottle and opens it.) You haven’t called me Jai in God knows how many
years. This calls for a celebration.

Here. (Offers Ratna the bottle.)

RATNA: I always use the glass.

JAIRAJ: (goes to the cupboard to get a glass). Good. We haven’t expressed ourselves to each other so well for a long time. Maybe we should drink together more often. (Pours.) At least we will be more honest with each other (DLM: 409).

But the frustration and rivalry in dance (art) is not limited to the family, in the play. The temperament of the artists and their inflated ego is hinted by Jairaj when referring to the musicians during a practice session. He says: "The older they get, the crankier they become" (DLM:421). The truth about the art world, where it is very difficult to gain appreciation and genuine support from peers, is brought up effectively by the dramatist. The cut-throat competition creates disbelief, dishonesty and disrespect amongst members of the art fraternity. Their reference to each other in derogatory and abusive language raises questions regarding their personal character and conduct. The purity of dance as an art form seems contaminated due to the excesses in human aspirations for fame and success. Referring to Sheshadri, a mridangam player, from the rival dance camp of Chandra Kala, Ratna says: "When he’s not rehearsing with her, he is sleeping with her" (DLM:399). The contradiction in Lata's dialogue also points towards the disrespect the followers of art have
earned within the fraternity and outside. She calls Seshadri 'uncle' and 'Lech' in the same breath, in the presence of her parents and her purported fiancé:

**LATA:** Have you asked Seshadri uncle?

**RATNA:** Certainly not!

**LATA:** Good. I hate that pot-bellied lech (DLM:401).

Even at other instance in the play when despite her sweet talk, Ratna is not nominated in the selection committee to organise Indian festival in Canada she is infuriated because her rival Chandra Kala has been nominated. Her sweet talk with the minister to promote herself and Jairaj for the tour does not yield specific results. The politics within the world of dance and the strategies to constantly promote oneself and disgrace the rival has bestowed authenticity to the play and extended its grasp to include universal human traits that contaminate the purity of art. Ratna's disgust becomes clear when she complains:

**RATNA:** He's put her on the selection committee! . . . (To Jairaj.) You say I'm pushing myself by talking to him, Chandra Kala is probably sitting on his lap! (DLM: 429).

Jairaj and Ratna pay a heavy price for pursuing a passion, not of dance, but of personal fame. Both are frustrated, not because they cannot find aesthetic pleasure in dance but because they cannot sell themselves enough to supersede their rivals. It is their unquenchable greed for individual success that leads them into the vicious cycle of rivalry and frustration. But the greatest loss is the loss
of Shankar, their son. It is only towards the end of the play, we learn that Jairaj and Ratna had a son, Lata's brother. He died as an infant due to the overdose of opium. Ratna gave the baby opium before leaving for a stage show performance so that he may sleep until she returns, late in the night. The babysitter also administers opium to the baby so that she too may have a sound sleep while the parents are away. With the death of Shankar, Jairaj also loses his chance of realising his dreams through his son. Thinking about the infant Shakar, he murmurs to himself:

**JAI**R**AJ**: ... when he grows up, I'll teach him how to dance – the dance of Shiva. The dance of a man. And when he is ready, I'll bring him to his grandfather and make him dance on his head—the tandava nritya.

*(Strikes the Nataraja pose and hops about wildly.)* The lord of dance, beating his drum and trampling on the demon (DLM:441).

This loud thinking clearly points towards his desire to impose his aspirations onto his son, when he grows up. It also brings out his vindictiveness towards his father, Amritlal, and his desire to avenge himself through his son. Metaphorically, the death of Shankar (also known as Shiva) means the refusal of Shiva the God, to dance like a man. It becomes amply clear when Ratna and Jairaj realising their mistake confess:
We were only human. We lacked the grace. We lacked the brilliance. We lacked the magic to dance like God (DLM: 447).

Dattani creates an intricate web of human relationship, spanning three generations, through the seamless movement of time and space. Family-home, with its tangible and physical presence, becomes the defining element of space for three generations. The meaning of this space shifts with each generation. Amritlal carries the baggage of his times and endeavours to influence the life of Jairaj and Ratna. As the sole possessor and owner of the family house, he is aware of his authority. He dictates the movement of Jairaj and Ratna both inside the house and in the outer world, in lieu of shelter and food. He makes it very clear to Jairaj and Ratna:

**AMRITLAL:** ... 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 mornings. I hope I have made myself clear. *(No response.)* Have I made myself clear?

**JAIRAJ:** Yes. Very clear. *(Moves to the stairs.)*

**AMRITLAL:** And Jairaj. *(Jairaj stops.)*

Don't grow your hair any longer. *(Jairaj 202*
exits. To Ratna.) And you need not learn
from any one else. You understand?

(DLM:425).

Ratna and Jairaj make very little alterations in the house they inherit from Amritlal. They only get the living room extended for formal meetings with outsiders. The library which was used for practising dance is converted into the practice hall with antique furniture and props used during stage performances. The third generation comprising Lata and Viswas have veneration for the family house. They move to Viswas' house after marriage. The family home is sold and Ratna and Jairaj move to a flat in a posh area. The family house happens to be the ideal setting in most of the plays by Dattani but in no other play is the family house sold and the occupants decide to move to other premises. The selling of the family house suggests the discontinuity in hierarchical transference.

*Uma and the Fairy Queen* is a radio play that portrays the compulsions and compromises of artistic pursuits and its impact on family. It is the story of Nila Ahmed, a famous television actress from Pakistan. Nila uses the art-world and stage as an escape from her immediate reality. She is the second wife of Aman Malik, who has married her because he does not have any child from his first marriage. Due to her role in a popular television serial Nila is looked upon as the ideal housewife across Pakistan. Knowing that her husband was impotent and incapable of producing children, she develops clandestine relationships with other actors and bears a son. Her husband is aware of his wife's infidelity but does not oppose as the birth of a son "suited him all right since he could then
save face." But Aman's first wife, Sohaila, produces Aman's medical report revealing his impotency to the world. Media smells the scandal and the very society that adored Nila, for her acting and role in the television serial, condemned and abhorred her. Nila confesses:

Overnight I became the adulteress from an ideal housewife! Public anger built up and there was a fatwa on me! That I should be stoned to death in public! (UFQ:462).

Nila escapes to England. With the passage of time she becomes a popular stage actress. But her desire to take her child, Feroz, with her is thwarted. Her husband and his first wife want to rear him as their own child. Nila marries Michael Forsyth, an actor, in England. He is understanding and proposes to support Feroz's education. Malik, who has lost his job moves to India with Feroz and accepts support from Michael and Nila.

When the play opens Michael Forsyth and Nila visit Bangalore, India, where incidentally Malik and Feroz also live. They are part of a famous theatre company from London. They have come to stage Shakespeare's *A Mid Summer Night's Dream* as a part of independence day celebrations. Michael plays the role of Oberon while Nila plays the fairy queen, Titania, on stage. But it turns out to be a nightmare as Michael Forsyth is kidnapped just before the starting of the play. He returns just in time to play his part as Oberon and is found murdered in the greenroom just before the curtain-call. Uma Rao the daring sleuth and wife of the Bangalore Police Superintendent, Suresh Rao outwits her
husband and solves the murder mystery with the help of Liam Tate, the British Cultural Ambassador and Munswamy.

But the main theme of the play is not the murder mystery. It is an intricate play that deals with human emotions and aspirations and depicts a yearning for family on three levels. On the first level, there is Titania and Oberon from *A Mid Summer Night’s Dream* fighting for the ‘Changeling boy’. On the second level, Nila and Malik confront each other for the possession of Feroz while on the third level, Suresh and Uma experience ego clashes largely because they are childless. They mostly squabble for the possession of Munswamy, a constable who is seen as the alternate ‘Changeling Boy’:

SURESH: Munswamy is my subordinate, and I won’t have him do your work.

UMA: What he does in his spare time is his business. He is not our changeling boy to fight over! (UFQ:439).

Probably, taking a clue from Shakespeare’s adage: “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players” 5 Dattani effectively correlates the on-stage action of the drama, *A Mid Summer Night’s Dream* with the drama of life represented by the characters and their desire for children. The real theme of the play *Uma and the Fairy Queen* finds its echo in the following words spoken by Nila as Titania. These words also reverberate. Uma’s position and situation: “... And this same progeny of evils comes from our debate, from our dissension” (UFQ:435). The words from the play, “I do but beg a little changeling boy” (UFQ:435) not only provide a clue to solve the murder mystery
but also hint at the ongoing conflict between the three couples. Just as Oberon wants to possess the ‘changeling boy’ and keep him in his fold, Malik too does not allow Nila to obtain the possession of Feroz. Suresh also accuses Uma for not having children. “The problem with you is that you have too much time and nothing to do since you don’t have any children!”(UFQ:439). His desire to possess a child, even a ‘changeling’ through unscrupulous means find a parallel with Oberon and Malik’s desperation:

SURESH: Would you be happier if we had children?

UMA: Don’t know, Suresh. Happier? I really don’t know.

SURESH: Well, a friend of mine – they couldn’t have children of their own – you know what they did? . . . they stayed in his village for a few months . . . a poor distant cousin of his was expecting a seventh child and they couldn’t afford to keep her . . . so my friend and his wife, they brought the child with them and . . . everyone acknowledged the baby to be theirs.

UMA: Why all the secrecy? Can’t they just adopt legally?

SURESH: You know how people are.
UMA: I am sorry Suresh. I am not ready for it.

SURESH: You don't want a child.

UMA: No. I don't think I do.

SURESH: That's not a very nice thing for a woman to say! (UFQ:447-48).

Thus Dattani again explores the relationship between art and life. As an artist Nila is twice cursed. She lives with the reality of losing her child to her impotent husband, Malik, the patriarch and she is also damned to relive the agony of losing her child in each performance on stage as Titania. But her agony is unique and experience limited. It is a transnation phenomenon perceptible in all cultures and societies:

UMA: . . . I guess all our cultures have one.

Yours, mine, Nila’s.

LIAM: What?

UMA: A fairy queen.

LIAM: Yes. I suppose so.

UMA: And we all want to pin her down. We just won’t let her fly in peace . . .

UMA: It’s the same for us isn’t it? In your part of the world too.

LIAM: What do you mean?

UMA: Damned if you have children, and damned if you don’t (UFQ: 466-67).
Another play that portrays the affiliation amid art and life is *Morning Raga*. It is the only play by Dattani that was originally written for the screen and not adapted from a stage play. It skilfully presents the emotional crisis of individuals, belonging to two generations, who are passionate about music. Shabana Azami, the well-known actor and social campaigner, in her comprehensive note to the play reveals Dattani's vision by citing her conversation with the playwright:

'It's about a meeting of two worlds,' he explains. 'A story that brings together the modern and traditional, unites the past with the present, Carnatic music with Western music, fate and coincidence with individual choices.'

The beginning of *Morning Raga*, is very symbolic. The playwright creates two ambiance 'exterior' and 'interior' to denote two different musical temperaments, Indian classical and Western pop. In the exterior ambiance he captures a village bus stand. Swarnalatha and her friend Vaishnavi are boarding a bus with their children and tamburi, a traditional musical instrument. They seem to be heading to some city, probably for a musical concert. In the interior frame Mr. Kapoor, a city dweller, is captured driving a car and listening to a popular Western number on his stereo. He seems to be bound towards the village. Their destination and purpose of their journey remains unspecified. But it is clear that Swarnalatha and Vaishnavi, representing the classical Indian temperament and Mr. Kapoor representing the
Western musical attitude are travelling in opposite directions, both literally
and symbolically. The bus that carries Swarnalatha and Vaishnavi, and
the car that is driven by Mr. Kapoor converge and collide with each other
on a bridge that symbolically separates the city and the village. As a result
of this headlong collision the bus keels over the bridge killing passengers
including Swarnalatha’s son and Vaishnavi. Mr. Kapoor also succumbs
to injury and dies. But the music from the car stereo plays on and the
camera focuses on the violin case flowing in the river.

The floating violin case and the sound of Western music
emanating from the car stereo, visualised on the screen, hint towards the
further course of action. Music as an art form and its effect on the life of
characters becomes the main theme of the play. The action of the play
changes to a scene twenty years hence. Vaishnavi’s husband has remarried
and now despises music but her son, Abhinay is very passionate about
music. He lives in a city. When the play opens Abhinay quits his job in an
advertising company to follow his dream. He returns to his village after a
long gap on the twentieth death anniversary of his mother. His father is
annoyed when Abhinay says:

ABHINAY: I want to start a music
group.

His father stares at Abhinay.

FATHER: . . . Will you be able to
support yourself?
ABHINAY: I will be spending what I have saved.

FATHER: You have also gone mad! Like your mother! She is controlling you from the other world!

Swarmalatha is guilt ridden and accuses herself for the death of her friend, Vaishnavi. Though her own son had also died in the fatal bus accident, twenty years ago, she is more grieved for the death of Vaishnavi. She has remained confined to the village for the last twenty years and has never endeavoured to cross the bridge. Her passion for Carnatic music remains buried in her heart and does not find any vent or release, forcing the artist within her to remain submerged under the guilt.

The fatal bus accident, twenty years ago, also looms large in the memory of the villagers. It creates a divide and revulsion for the city dwellers, in the mind of the villagers. Coincidently Pinkie, Mr. Kapoor’s daughter also visits the same fatal bridge, twenty years after her father’s death, inorder to pay homage on his death anniversary. Her car bangs into the wall of the same bridge, in a bid to avoid a collision with Abhinay. Though their accident is not as fatal as that of their parents, twenty years ago, yet an old woman curses the driver of the car and abruptly bursts out:

OLD WOMAN: Don’t let him go! He is a murderer!

*Pinkie is perturbed by this remark.*
You city people! You are a curse to us.

How many more people do you want to kill! Was my husband not enough?

(Pointing to Abhinay.) Was his mother not enough? (MR:349).

But Abhinay and Pinkie, who belong to the second generation, are more understanding and helpful to each other. Their convergence on the same bridge where they lost a parent each, twenty years ago, suggests a ray of hope when they are pictured:

. . . walking in the rain holding the umbrella, followed by a bullock cart dragging Pinkie's Santro through the rain (MR:350).

During their conversation Abhinay mentions his dream of starting a music group and Pinkie offers to help him as she can sing. The ill-fated bridge that divided the city and the village becomes a starting point for a new venture that has the potential to fuse Western and Carnatic music and thereby wipe away the divide between the city and the country.

Just as Abhinay blames his father for being apathetic towards the loss of Vaishnavi, Abhinay's mother, Pinkie blames Mrs. Kapoor for being cold hearted and emotionless at the death of Mr. Kapoor. In fact it is Abhinay's affection for his deceased mother and Pinkie's affection towards her late father that fascinates them towards music. Abhinay's contempt for his father's apathy towards the deceased Vaishnavi can be gauged when he
questions him: “Does my mother’s twentieth death anniversary mean anything to you?” (MR:344). Pinkie also accuses her mother:

PINKIE: . . . It doesn’t seem very important to you does it? That I lost my father on that day twenty years ago?
(MR:365).

But their accidental meeting on the bridge gives them the purpose of their lives. They form a band called ‘Pratibimb’, meaning shadow or reflection. The band practices in the store of Mrs. Kapoor’s boutique. They get their first assignment to perform in a coffee house, through the efforts of Mrs. Kapoor. But the group does not click at the first performance. The guests at the coffee house don’t even bother to applaud their performance. The manager tells them bluntly:

There are hundreds, thousands of young musicians in this city and they all think they are different or unique, but they are not . . . you are one of them (MR:363).

Depressed and dejected the band leaves the Coffee house. Next day Abhinay receives a parcel from Swarnalatha containing, his mother, Vaishnavi’s violin. As he holds the violin in his hand and feels its texture, he visualises his mother playing the violin. He immediately returns to the village and meets Swarnalatha, thanks her for preserving his mother’s violin for twenty years and requests her to join their band and sing for them. Swarnalatha is reluctant initially but when Abhinay insists and her
husband, Mr. Shastri, implores her she consents. The band moves to the village and practices at Swarnalatha's house. Swarnalatha teaches them Carnatic raga. Symbolically, she appears to be the preserver of art, the Carnatic music. She transmits the traditional knowledge of music to the younger generation just as Chenni amma in Dance Like a Man transmits the traditional knowledge of classical dance to Ratna. Swarnalatha preserves Vaishnavi's violin as also the spirit of the Carnatic music. As soon as Abhinay learns the secret of the violin, Swarnalatha and Violin become synonymous for him and represent the music of his mother:

*We see the picture of his mother bathed in moonlight transforming into a memory of Abhinay's mother, Vaishnavi playing the violin* (MR:370).

With the return of Abhinay, the past starts flashing through the consciousness of Swarnalatha. It helps her to gradually emerge from personal bouts of depression and share the emotional crisis of Abhinay and Pinkie. She motivates them to invoke the spirit of Goddess Saraswati:

I can teach him raga. I can teach him tal.

Let us see whether he has inherited some bhava from his mother (MR:396).

When Swarnalatha sings the morning raga for Abhinay he is elated with joy:

That's the raga I want! That's what I was looking for. don't you see! (To Pinkie.)
My mother never played that for me! She only played it for her (MR:406).

Swarnalatha, Pinkie and Abhinay share a common yearning to express their inner self. Their passion is rooted in their common past and irreversible loss:

The dramatic structure of *Morning Raga* moves in the direction of breaking the duality of past and present and the distinction of personal and impersonal.  

It denotes the recess of human psyche where past and present invariably converge on in each other and efface distinct territories. Music possesses the power to heal and unify splintered souls. Even in *Final Solutions* Dattani presents music as a remedy and hope to bring together the divided communities. In *Morning Raga* he shows how art can affect life. Swarnalatha represents the marginalised voice. Her phobia makes her an introvert. She seeks refuge in self created exile due to her guilt and a harsh suspension of ambition:

Shattered by guilt and remorse she goes into

a self-imposed exile never to sing again and

never to cross the bridge to the city.  

The musical band from the city comprising young talents metaphorically represents what is essentially western and progressive. The main theme is not how the Western music is influenced and enriched by the Carnatic or how it 'modernizes' the traditional musical heritage. In stead the dramatist seeks a
hybridisation through crossing-over the bridge that transports the two genres into a new realm of cross-over art and choral polyrhythm. What is native and shown as sterile is released from its xenophobia and endless nightmare of losing its identity. It is then added to the suffering post-colonial western music which finds its own identity and voice for a new generation, beyond its obvious Western-ness. Both the East and the West climb out of their respective comfort zones and intermingle into an immediate present that can only reflect this very generation and its cultural idiosyncrasy.
NOTES

1 Mahesh Dattani, Dance Like a Man in Collected Plays (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2000), p. 406. All subsequent citations from this play are from this edition and henceforth referred to as DLM in parentheses.


4 Mahesh Dattani, Uma and the Fairy Queen in Collected Plays Volume Two (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2005), p.462. All subsequent citations from this play are from this edition and henceforth referred to as UFQ in parentheses.


7 Mahesh Dattani, Morning Raga in Collected Plays Volume Two (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2005), p. 344. All subsequent citations from this play are from this edition and henceforth referred to as MR in parentheses.

8 Beena Agrawal, Mahesh Dattani’s Plays: A New Horizon in Indian Theater (Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2008), p. 130.