From Stage to Screen: Examining the Representation of Marginalized Indian Men in Contemporary Indian Drama and Hindi Cinema

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HOW TO CITE:
Mansi Kapoor, Pallavi Thakur (2026) From Stage to Screen: Examining the Representation of Marginalized Indian Men in Contemporary Indian Drama and Hindi Cinema. International Journal of Special Education, 41(18s), 350-360

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ABSTRACT:

This study explores the portrayal of marginalised Indian men using three works of theatre and cinema – Dance Like a Man by Mahesh Dattani, Ilham by Manav Kaul and Sharmaji Namkeen by Hitesh Bhatia – to analyse how masculinity is presented as a socially constructed, contested and legible entity within dominant cultural frameworks. The paper suggests that these three contexts of artistic non-conformity, spiritual estrangement and ageing domestic reinvention create marginalised masculinity, using a qualitative comparative method. In Dance Like a Man, Jairaj's journey towards dance Bharatanatyam reveals the policing of masculinity through laughter and patriarchy; in Ilham, Bhagwan's inwardness makes him invisible as a productive and emotionally rational middle-class man; and in Sharmaji Namkeen, retirement and widowhood prompt a crisis of selfhood, which is partially reconfigured through cooking, care and emotional vulnerability. The results of this study reveal that there is no correlation between the notion of marginalisation and masculinity, but rather of failing or refusing to conform to the hegemonic notions of authority, breadwinning and emotional restraint. It also illustrates the figuration of exclusion in the visible body and the live performance of the theatre, and the vulnerability of the cinema in close-up realism and domestic atmosphere. The paper as a whole helps to advance the field of masculinity studies by focusing on marginalized male subjectivities in the cultural contexts of today's India.

Keywords: Marginalized masculinity; Indian drama; Hindi cinema; gender performativity; ageing; social exclusion; identity; comparative analysis.

1. Introduction

Recent research on masculinity in India contests the notion of a unified and uniform masculinity, shifting it to multiple and contesting masculinities affected by class, sexuality, labour, age and power (Dasgupta and Gokulsing 12). It is particularly helpful for reading Mahesh Dattani's Dance Like a Man (1989), published in Collected Plays (2000), as well as Hindi Hindi film Sharmaji Namkeen (2022) and Hindi play Ilham (2008), which has been performed in a range of adaptations and theatrical productions (Dattani vii; Kaul 3; Vadhwa). Together these works document three versions of marginalized masculinity that received little critical attention: the male classical dancer, the retired widower-cook, and the middle-class spiritually disaffirming man. In each instance, masculinity is defined in relation to a social norm that prioritizes the exercise of breadwinning authority, bodily normativity, heterosexual domestic control and emotional restraint. These texts therefore shed light on a larger research lacuna: while there are studies of both the study of ageing and the study of masculinity, older men have been largely left out of both fields, as there has been a crisis of identity following the loss of work identity in the midst of retirement in India (Roy and Yalon 4; Dhal 112). However, from stage to screen these works are not only adding "different" men to the archive, they reveal the process of masculinity's manufacture and the need to be socially legible through exclusion, embarrassment, ridicule.

Dance Like a Man does not hesitate to make the policing of masculinity brutally explicit: A male dancer "could not be a man" (Dattani 405), and "normal men don't keep their hair so long" (417). The play's live theatricality renders the male body as the site of suspicion; its shift between "time past and time present" exposes masculinity to be a performative social act, not an essence (Devanesen 58). This is also a more profound cultural irony, since the art of Bharatanatyam, now considered classical, was originally that of the female temple dancers who were not accepted by the public until around 1930, and Jairaj's desire is already caught up in a male dominated history of cultural respectability ("Bharatanatyam"). While Dattani portrays the man who is a non-conforming artist, Ilham brings the non-conforming contemplative or spiritually changed man to the fore. In the play, Bhagwan, a bank employee and a family man, asks,

"Kya duniya tumse aakar kahti hai ki main hun?" (Kaul 47).

The larger theme of the play, which the line encapsulates, is the difficulty of comprehending a man whose voice is no longer tied to the rhythms of his work, family, and normal speech; thus, his inner voice is unreadable and socially dangerous. In both Dattani and Kaul, stage drama thus makes the marginalised masculinity visible by bringing it under the pressure of embodiment, dialogue and spectatorship.

This crisis is shifted from the exposed body of the theatre to the realistic camera of Sharmaji Namkeen. The search for identity after the loss of work-related selfhood (Dhal 115), as embodied in Brij Gopal Sharma, a 58-year-old widower forced into retirement, is the subject of this book. But the movie does not equate old manhood with an inevitable deterioration. On the contrary, Sharmaji's role as a cook reimagines manhood through care, taste and domesticity, which Roy and Yalon define as the key elements of "caring masculinities" that is not about hegemonic dominance, but about relationality and interdependence (Roy and Yalon 7). Meanwhile, the film demonstrates that such care is still "stigmatised" and "classed" as Tanul Thakur puts it:

Sharmaji is embarrassed by the act of cooking for others, as if it were "lesser skilled" work, the one that is marked by class and caste (Thakur). In Sharmaji's statement

"Main jaisa hoon… waisa hoon… Mujhe kisi ki permission lene ki zarurat nahi hai" (Sharmaji Namkeen),

This reflects his resistance against the pressures of society on the basis of his age and masculinity. This statement of identity is even enhanced by the film's formal division of the protagonist between the lightness of Rishi Kapoor and the darkness of Paresh Rawal. This is an aging masculinity screen grammar that is doubled, unstable and very vulnerable. Significantly, Sharmaji's younger son, who is also "happy in his dance group", echoes Jairaj across media and generations (Gupta). Together, these texts evoke the idea that marginalized Indian men are not a part of the margins of the field of Indian masculinity studies; they are produced by the exclusions of masculinity, and as such are central rather than peripheral to the field of Indian masculinity studies today.

2.Literature Review

2.1Representation of Marginalized Male Identity in Dance Like a Man and Ilham

An examination of marginalised male identity is possible in the context of the existing literature on masculinity, gender roles and performativity in the works of Mahesh Dattani's Dance Like a Man and Manav Kaul's Ilham. One of the most recurring themes that can be drawn from the various studies reviewed is that masculinity is an unstable construct and gender identity is socially constructed. In the modern context, the very notion of identity cannot be seen through one holistic lens anymore because gender roles are now becoming blurred (Bharti, 2019). Bharti draws on Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity, which suggests that gender is created in a multitude of social actions instead of by an objective biological certainty. This view is very pertinent in Dance Like a Man, where the pursuit of Bharatanatyam by Jairaj questions the stereotypical notions of authority, control and physical hardness as markers of masculinity. His marginalisation comes because his art is not in line with the behaviour norms of men.

The other theme is the regulation of the male identity through patriarchy. Marigold (2017) examines Dance Like a Man in the context of the patriarchal social structure of the 1970s when gender roles are distinctly defined and strictly enforced. Thus the conflict between Amritlal Parekh and Jairaj is a good example that reflects the family as a space of control and discipline of the masculinity. Jairaj's dancing profession is seen as a weakness or deviance, as is the case with the patriarchal norms that demean women, but also men who do not act the socially expected part of a boy or man. The intergenerational structure of the play also illustrates changing attitudes to gender throughout the centuries, but social judgment is still a formidable influence.

Another field of literature is the emotional impact of patriarchy. Lukman and Ahmad (2025) suggest in their research on Rintih Chicago, that psychological demands are imposed on men through patriarchal systems that require them to be emotionally restrained, socially responsible, and conform to the pervasive notions of masculinity. Their argument expands the concept of patriarchy in that it suggests that men can be victims of patriarchy as well as beneficiaries. This concept will help you to read both Dance Like a Man and Ilham. In Ilham, Bhagwan's inner probing and spiritual aloofness intrude upon the conventional stereotype of the calm, rational and socially functional middle-class male. His exclusion is not only by profession, but rather by his will to refuse to be part of the "normal" family, job, or society.

Chakrabarty (2025) also explores Dattani's work from a queer perspective and a queer studies angle in the theme of fluid identity and non-normative masculinity. Chakrabarty asserts that Dance Like a Man reveals how gender roles were created and made up of by society, and questions whether masculinity and femininity are fixed biological categories. Jairaj's body, profession, and his desire to be free of constraints in his art are all sources of social anxiety as they challenge heteronormative expectations. Lastly, Yusoff's (2021) work on Malaysian cinema brings in the discourse of temporality, memory, tradition and cultural displacement in relation to masculinity. His claim that marginalised masculinities may serve as counter-narratives is helpful to the analysis of how male characters in both Dance Like a Man and Ilham negotiate dominant conceptions of masculinity.The usefulness of his claim that marginalised masculinities can serve as counter-narratives is that it will enable a consideration of male characters in both Dance Like a Man and Ilham who resist dominant conceptions of masculinity. In general, the literature reviewed indicates that the marginalized male identity is generated in the process of social exclusion, emotional repression, policing of gender and lack of adherence to the norms of masculinity.

2.2Cinematic Representation of Aging and Domestic Marginalization in Sharmaji Namkeen

The literature available on Sharmaji Namkeen is useful to provide a thematic analysis of how Hindi cinema depicts the experience of ageing, domestic labour, food habits and marginalised manhood. One of the striking ideas that I picked up from the studies reviewed, is the link between food, identity and social significance in Hindi films. According to ACLALS (2026), food in Hindi cinema is more than just a means of nourishment—it is a cultural and ideological marker through which relationships, power structures, memory, belonging and social identity are negotiated. Bawarchi, Lagaan, Swades, Ramji Londonwaley and Cheeni Kum are examples of films that show how food can serve as a symbolic environment in which family, community, class, and gender are expressed. In this larger film genre, Sharmaji Namkeen is noteworthy in portraying a senior male widow as the central figure in the kitchen, thus disrupting the patriarchal notion that cooking is the domain of the feminine household.

One of the other major concepts is the rethinking of the role of man in domestic work. Cooking and childcare are perceived as a feminine responsibility in the mainstream patriarchal culture, while earning

is considered a masculine task and authority a masculine identity. But Sharmaji Namkeen is a departure from the binary, introducing cooking as a means of self-expression, self-worth and social reintegration for Brij Gopal Sharma. According to ACLALS (2026), cooking in the film is used to evoke and explore the male protagonist's individuality and rebuild his social life after retirement. In this way the kitchen is not a space which is closed to him, it becomes a space in which he can be remade in the form of care, creativity, taste and emotional engagement, a form of aging manhood.

This interpretation is further supported by Samanta (2022)'s study which examines Sharmaji Namkeen in the context of ageing masculinities, gendered domestic labour and food practices.

According to Samanta, the film does not depict post retirement life as one of deprecation, dependence and being irrelevant. Rather than portraying the aging as one of oppressed passivity and dissatisfaction, it depicts it as a time of newfound agency and delight, creativity and self-discovery. Sharmaji's interaction with cooking blurs the boundaries of foodwork/foodplay as traditionally perceived with women and men. More than anything, the film is a blurring of the distinction between work and play, between man and woman, between the public and the private, providing another fantasy of older Indian manhood. This food activity gives him a way to break free from a loss of identity in his job and find social and emotional relevance in a new and different way.

Marginalisation is also related to caste, class and representational politics. In his analysis of Indian cinema in 2022 (Bunkar 2023), he challenges the mainstream films for their frequent neglect of or failure to adequately portray caste realities and marginalized subjectivities. In his broader analysis of Sharmaji Namkeen in mainstream cinema, Sharma also argues for the need to think of 'representation' beyond the individual and consider it from a caste, class and social perspective. This viewpoint is helpful because Sharmaji's discomfort at preparing food for others is a result of the classed and gendered stigma of household and service work. The literature that is reviewed in the study indicates that Sharmaji Namkeen is a significant reworking of the concept of aging masculinity in the movies. It is the story of an old man who is out of place because of retirement, age, family duties and social perceptions, but rebuilds himself through the power of food, friendship, emotional vulnerability and affirmation. The film thus contributes to the broader debate about masculinity, that it is possible to be caring, creative, relational, and domestic and still be a man in dignity.

3.Objectives of the Study

- To examine the representation of marginalized Indian men in selected contemporary Indian drama and Hindi cinema.
- To analyse the portrayal of masculinity, identity, and social exclusion in Dance Like a Man, Ilham, and Sharmaji Namkeen.
- To compare the depiction of marginalized male experiences across theatrical and cinematic narratives.

4.Research Methodology

4.1Research Design

The study is a qualitative research in terms of design which looks at the representation of the marginalized Indian males in selected contemporary Indian drama and Hindi cinema. A qualitative approach is the right one to use because the study aims to look at meaning, identity, social experiences and cultural representations as opposed to numerical variables. The study uses comparative study of text and theme of Dance Like a Man, Ilham by Manav Kaul, Sharmaji Namkeen by Hitesh Bhatia and Mahesh Dattani. This design allows the research to explore the portrayal of marginalization, identity struggles and social exclusion of males through various modes of narration. The comparative approach allows for a comparison with similarities and differences between theatrical and cinematographic portrayals of masculinity. Specific focus will be on themes of gender non-conformity, aging, emotional vulnerability, domestic marginalisation and the quest for selfhood. Analysis of literary and film texts allows for an all-round view of the way in which the culturally dominant ideas of what a man is and how they are represented in contemporary texts are challenged and modified by alternative modes of presentation.

4.2Data Collection Methods

The research used the secondary data and textual data. The main texts which are analysed are two texts of Mahesh Dattani, Dance Like a Man and Manav Kaul's Ilham, and the Hindi film Sharmaji Namkeen directed by the director Hitesh Bhatia. The works are the main sources for the study of the

representation of marginalised men. Secondary data are obtained from scholarly books, peer reviewed journal articles, research papers, dissertations, film reviews, and critical studies on masculinity studies, gender theory, theatre studies, and film criticism as well. Theories and concepts appropriate to the context, especially those related to ageing and social exclusion, and masculinity, are included to support the analysis. Data collection consists of a detailed viewing of the film as well as a close reading of the dramatic texts to identify themes, dialogues, character development, and narrative structures that appear throughout the text. This mixture of primary and secondary sources makes for a strong basis for interpreting the representation of marginalised masculinities in various cultural media.

4.3Nature of the Study

The present study is qualitative, descriptive, analytical and comparative. It is qualitative because it concerns with reading meaning, experience and representation in literary and cinematic texts. The descriptive part of the study attempts to identify and document how marginalised male identities are represented in the works selected. The analytical dimension is the area of study that considers and analyzes the ways in which expressions of identity, social exclusion, emotional isolation, aging and masculinity are shaped and transmitted in the characters and storylines. In addition, the study compares the interpretation of marginalised men in the dramatic and the cinematic texts, offering insights into similarities and differences. The study does not attempt at drawing generalizations but hopes to throw light on the cultural and social aspects of marginalization of the male in the present context of India. The interdisciplinary approach of the research also incorporates literary criticism, masculinity studies, gender studies, and film studies, allowing for a thorough understanding of the subject.

4.4Data Analysis Tools and Techniques

The research tools and techniques used in this study are textual analysis, thematic analysis and comparative analysis in data analysis. The selected plays and film are analyzed using textual analysis which is done by examining dialogues, character interaction, structure of story and symbolism. The study, using a close reading and interpretation approach, highlights the marginalised or negotiated masculinity in the study's texts. Recurring themes are identified using thematic analysis, including themes of gender expectations, social exclusion, ageing, emotional vulnerability, domestic identity and self-realisation. Patterns and variations between the texts are explored systematically across all three texts. Theatre and cinema are then compared to ascertain their differences in the depiction of marginalized male experiences. Results of each text are analyzed and compared to gain insight into the differences between artistic mediums in the construction and communication of masculinity. These analytical methods help in understanding the cultural, social, and psychological aspects of male marginalization that are illustrated in the context of the drama and Hindi cinema of present times.

4.5Ethical Considerations

The study is conducted in respect of rules of academic integrity and ethical research practice. The research does not include the involvement of humans, interviews, surveys or the collection of personal data as it is conducted entirely on literary materials published in books and a commercially released film, and secondary sources from different scholarly works. As such, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity are not concerns. However, this study upholds ethical practices such as presenting an accurate and appropriate representation and interpretation of the chosen texts and ideas put forth by scholars. Use of appropriate citation and referencing in line with MLA guidelines ensures that all primary and secondary sources are properly cited and avoiding plagiarism and intellectual misappropriation. Effort is made to make interpretations objective and to avoid twisting meaning from the authors. The study is sensitive to cultural diversity and does not encourage stereotyping based on gender, age, class or identity. The research aims to make a responsible contribution to the debates surrounding masculinity and marginalisation in the current cultural landscape of India without compromising on transparency, scholarly integrity and respect of intellectual property.

5.Result & Analysis

Objective-1: To examine the representation of marginalized Indian men in selected contemporary Indian drama and Hindi cinema.

A recent wave of research on masculinity has productively challenged the notion of "man" as a coherent social class, instead focusing on the multiplicity of masculinities that are defined by class, sexuality, work, age and cultural authority (Connell; Dasgupta). From the lens of these texts, Dance Like a Man, Manav Kaul's Ilhaam and Hitesh Bhatia's Sharmaji Namkeen are three different

expressions of marginalised Indian masculinity: artistic non-conformity, spiritual estrangement and ageing domestic marginalisation. These texts do not make their male characters outside of masculinity, but rather demonstrate how masculinity is shaped by exclusion. In the film Dance Like a Man, Jairaj's aspiration to become a Bharatantyam dancer pits him against a vision of the manly man as one who is disciplined, powerful, and conforms to cultural norms of gender representation. Dattani makes that disciplining language explicit when Jairaj is subjected to "accusations" that he can't be a man (405-06) or a "sneer" that "normal men don't keep their hair so long" (417). The reason why Jairaj is marginalized is not because he is a less ambitious man but because his art which feminizes him is repulsive to bourgeois society. As Jaitra Bharti points out, the play reveals the performativeness and fragility of the "gender identity," particularly when the male body encroaches upon a feminized aesthetic regime (160).

The instability gets intensified, as we remember, when modern Bharatanatyam was reshaped by respectability projects that excluded hereditary female practitioners and recorded it for legitimacy by the upper-caste, middle-class body (Soneji). Theatre magnifies the struggle as the male body is directly looked upon; Jairaj's marginalization becomes thus a spectacle, a rehearsal, and a shame.

Though Dattani's work foregrounds the artistically-marginalised man, Kaul's Ilhaam takes this concept of the marginalised masculinity one step further to the spiritually distant middle-class subject. Bhagwan, though, is not the sort of guy who's a social outcast economically: a bank clerk, husband, and father, or, in fact, the sort of guy that ought to fit snugly into the middle-class scripts of productivity and domestic order. But Ilhaam takes that seemingly stable state to its extreme end by illustrating that a man can grow inward, thoughtfully, and resistant to the pragmatic work and family 'grammar'. Bhagwan's question

"Kya duniya tumse aakar kahti hai main hun?"

marks an ontological disturbance that disrupts the usual oscillation between masculine and feminine that structures the social recognition of the masculine (Kaul 47). Whereas Jairaj's estrangement is made manifest through his physical difference, it is made opaque in the case of the former.Unlike Jairaj's case, the estrangement in the latter case is not expressed by difference in the body, but by opacity; that is, he becomes illegible as a productive, disciplined and emotionally intelligent male subject. In this sense, Ilhaam demonstrates that marginalisation is not just about flagrant gender nonconformity, but also what happens when someone refuses or cannot be made readable under the regimes of salaried work, family duties, and social common sense. Here, it is relevant to hear what Dasgupta has to say regarding the cultural legibility of queerness and non-normative visibility in India, and how masculinity is held together through its cultural legibility and sanctioned modes of public selfhood—Bhagwan's inwardness poses a threat to exactly that legibility (Dasgupta). Dialogue, pause, the stillness of the body, are Kaul's method of theatre, making male interiority palpable before the spectators. The body of the performer is not filmic or montage, as it is in the filmic voice-over, but rather exposed, present, and cannot be easily psychologized away from the stage. Therefore, the spiritual estrangement is the masculine marginalization that is generated by middle class respectability itself. Hence, the spiritual estrangement is the marginalization of masculinity that is created by the middle class respectability itself.

This is not only because Sharmaji Namkeen takes this crisis from a theatrical setting to a cinematic one but it is also because of its one of the most poignant portrayals of old age masculinity in recent Hindi cinema. Brij Gopal Sharma's marginalisation is revealed in his retirement, in his widowhood and in an entangled sense of loss of work-based identity, which Samir Dhal locates as a crucial crisis of selfhood for many middle-class retirees in India (112). The film does a great job of elucidating that retirement is a symbolic demotion; Sharmaji no longer has a job, but he no longer has social utility, nor a central role in the household, nor masculine authority. But the film isn't just about the old manhood that's going downhill. Rather, cooking serves as Sharmaji's means of rebuilding selfhood, pleasure and relation. This is particularly applicable to Tannistha Samanta's research on 'new aging masculinities' in Bollywood, as she suggests that foodwork can redefine the concept of masculinity rather than simply a dichotomy between the leisure and the domestic sphere of the male citizen. Cooking is a labor and a care, it is a self-expression and a survival in Sharmaji Namkeen (Samanta). Meanwhile, the movie is also on the ball with class. Sharmaji's embarrassment over catering work says a lot about the feminisation of domestic skill once it becomes economy-worker service labour, a lack of respectability and its classing. Cooking for money is feminised, classed, and less respectable for a retired middle class man. Since there is no published

screenplay available, the film is cited by timestamp of the streaming version used for this study. Sharmaji's declaration,

'Main jaisa hoon… waisa hoon… Mujhe kisi ki permission lene ki zarurat nahin hai'

is a late statement of selfhood achieved at the cost of just such a shame (Sharmaji Namkeen). Unlike theatre, cinema here is capable of capturing small humiliations, hesitations, tender solidarities - all of which gradually remodels the concept of masculinity in the home.

All these works show that the depiction of marginalized Indian men in current drama and Hindi cinema is contingent upon the presentation of how gender is mediated by respectability, work, and social legibility. The male artist whose manliness is challenged by the culture, is represented by Dattani; the middle-class man whose inner self is unreadable by the culture, by Kaul; and the old man whose journey from salaried work has relegated him to feminised domestic space, by Bhatia. These figures are shaped in the stage and screen, but both media reveal the fragility of hegemonic manhood. The live body becomes exclusion on stage, surveillance of performance on screen; the politics of intimacy becomes visible as camera turns aging, care and domestic shame (Connell; Dasgupta and Gokulsing).

Objective-2: To analyse the portrayal of masculinity, identity, and social exclusion in Dance Like a Man, Ilham, and Sharmaji Namkeen.

In order to analyse the portrayal of masculinity, identity and social exclusion, one should shift away from the concept of "man" as a monolithic construct and view masculinity as a space of competing and hierarchical identities in the works of Dance Like a Man by Mahesh Dattani, Ilhaam by Manav Kaul and Sharmaji Namkeen by Hitesh Bhatia. As Connell and Messerschmidt argue, hegemonic masculinity is reinforced by the subordination of other bodies, emotions and forms of labour, and as Dasgupta and Gokulsing demonstrate, class, sexuality, caste-coded respectability and generational power all influence Indian masculinities. The three texts chosen together present three types of 'marginalized masculinity' – that of the classical dancer, the middle class householder alienated by his or her spiritual state, and the retired widower whose love of cooking challenges the accepted male identity. In both, masculinity is not a core quality but is instead a socially inscribed act, and exclusion is manifested through men who do not perform their role as breadwinners, keep their bodies normal, manage their homes, and regulate their emotions according to socially established norms.

In Dance Like a Man, Dattani offers a glimpse into male policing in the family, language and the performing body. Jairaj's aim to become a Bharatanatyam dancer is seen as a lack of manhood; one instance of this is when he is told that "a dancer boy could not be a man" (405) and another is when it is said that "normal men don't keep their hair so long" (417). These statements expose the modes of the regulation of masculinity through ridicule and social judgment. This is where the gender performative reading of Bharti is helpful as it is Jairaj's marginalisation due to the time and time again enforcement of what men should look like, do, and want to (Bharti). Dattani also imbues Jairaj's efforts with the cultural context of Bharatanatyam. The modern classical status of Bharatanatyam was achieved by reformist recoding of a dance associated with devadasi, and Jairaj's aspiration is a component of a politics of respectability that is gendered (Srinivasan). On the stage this battle is accentuated through the visibility of Jairaj's body, his gestures, his costume, and his hair, which become a sign of social suspicion. His crisis is not just personal but historical, too, because he cannot practise his art without judgment, and that judgment is based on the expectations of patriarchal society (Mukherjee).

Kaul's Ilhaam provides another manifestation of marginalisation that considers the crisis not to be just the physically policed body but the loss of self. Bhagwan is a bank employee and a husband/married man who is socially unsettling because he is questioning his spiritual and existential life and he is losing his connection with the logic of work, family and pragmatic speech. In his questioning "Kya duniya tumse aakar kahti hai main hun?" he poses the question of uncertainty of life without social acceptance (Kaul 47). Unlike Jairaj, Bhagwan isn't the marginalized type because he seems feminized but because he is rendered unreadable in the middle-class norms of rational, productive and responsible masculinity. Isolation, nostalgia, rootlessness, existential unease are aspects of Kaul's theatre, and in the case of Kaul this is a place of suspicion (Kaul; Dasgupta and Gokulsing). Silence, pauses, and broken communication are dramatic devices which allow the audience to feel his alienation. As a result, Ilhaam does more than just focus on nonconformity of the male gender; it illustrates how the spiritually transformed man can

also be socially unacceptable.

These are shifted to the arena of ageing, retirement and domestic work by Sharmaji Namkeen. Brij Gopal Sharma's marginalisation starts when he is forced to retire and becomes a widower, losing his identity as a working man, the norm for middle class men to be stabilized by. The concept of dependence, gender norms, and shifting social valuations can be seen in Lamb's research on ageing in Northern India (Lamb). But the movie doesn't let aging be seen as a process of deterioration. Sharmaji's shift to cooking embodies a new form of masculinity that is characterized by caring, taste, service, and relationality, all of which resonate with Elliott's concept of "caring masculinities" (Elliott). Concurrently, this change is not romanticized as cooking for others is feminized and service-class work, leading to shame before self-acceptance. He has said "Main jaisa hoon, waisa hoon, Mujhe kisi ki permission lene ki zarurat nahi hai" which is his rejection of the validation of patriarchal norms (Sharmaji Namkeen). Close-ups, domestic interiors, everyday life and double acting by Rishi Kapoor and Paresh Rawal demonstrates the aging man as unstable, broken and weak. In all three pieces, the theme of masculinity is linked with the themes of identity and social exclusion, framed as interrelated structures in which masculinity is failure, identity is existential unreadability, and social exclusion is late-life domestic invisibility.

Objective-3: To compare the depiction of marginalized male experiences across theatrical and cinematic narratives.

In comparison, Dance Like a Man, Manav Kaul's Ilhaam or Ilham and Hitesh Bhatia's Sharmaji Namkeen reveal the marginalized male Indian is not the one who lives at the margins of masculinity but the one who is born within some of the most normative institutions of masculinity – the family, profession, body, and home. This comparison directly fulfills the third objective and selected corpus of the study. As Indian masculinity studies define it, masculinity must be seen as a space of multiple and fluid configurations; as a space of competition, not as one social form (Dasgupta and Gokulsing). Dattani's Jairaj is only made comprehensible in terms of disciplinary derisiveness: why "a male dancer" couldn't be a man, and why "normal men don't keep their hair so long" (405–06, 417). In contrast, Kaul's Bhagwan is not feminised but rather made socially opaque, and his question, "Kya duniya tumse aakar kahti hai ki main hun?" interiority sounds as if it were an impossibility for the middle class, socially useful, male radical. A 'gay' or 'transgender' identity is not the cause of Sharmaji's marginalisation, but an age and a domesticity that goes against the grain of the ideal of the productive, emotionally self-contained, patriarch, as he moves towards a new role in Sharmaji Namkeen: cooking and caring rather than art-making. The three works share a particular theme: a crisis of legibility, a man who cannot occupy the script of hegemonic masculinity of authority, productivity, emotional hardness, respectively. This failure is compounded by the fraught history of Bharatanatyam itself, a form that was modernised and, in effect, genders its body and classicism, and so Jairaj faces the double weight of the patriarchy and the cultural feminisation of the dance (Knight; Das). Theatre is really important here. In the wake of Butler's insight into the iterative nature of gender, the stage also displays the vulnerability of the male body, as it is displayed in real time at the very moment of the spectacle (Butler); in the wake of Fischer-Lichte, it also makes the pressure of the performance visible, since it is the body of the spectator that watches the body of the performer in real time, and this is the case without the protection of the framing of a photograph or cinema (Fischer-Lichte). Therefore, in Dance Like a Man, and in Ilhaam, there is no marginalization as an internal state but rather as an exposure to others.

This logic of exposure is not thrown out the window by the medium shift to cinema. "stage to screen" is not only a metaphor in this corpus (Dattani; Das), as Dattani's dramaturgy is already based on temporal layering, but Dance Like a Man also developed a screen afterlife. However, Sharmaji Namkeen is a film that proves something different with the marginalisation of the male. Theatre foregrounds co-presence, dialogue, the pause and the actor's live body, while cinema registers vulnerability at the level of gesture and atmosphere through close-up, editing, domestic mise-en-scène and rhythms of everyday realism. Here, it is helpful to recall the argument made by Yusoff that in filmic temporality it is possible to produce 'counter-narratives of anxious masculinity' because in Bhatia's film, Sharmaji is no longer in sync with the clock of his livelihood and yet he has not been given a meaningful alternative script of male worth (Yusoff; Dhal).

The kitchen, the kitty party, and the cramped home in Delhi turn into filmsets as class, age, and gender are renegotiated. Cooking is not simply a pastime, but a socially marginalized activity since it seems to be just a step away from the feminine sphere of the

household and domestic service, which is precisely why Sharmaji's enjoyment of cooking is radical. The form of the film further fuels that uncertainty with the dual casting of Rishi Kapoor and Paresh Rawal. The doubling of the body is not just a production contingency, but a distinct late-life masculine grammar of affect, of in-completion, of 'replaceability'. There's also an intermedial echo to Dattani, as the film's younger son dances, providing a quiet reintroduction of the stigmatized male performer back into a narrative otherwise focused on ageing and care (Sharmaji Namkeen). Kaul's Ilhaam is in the middle of the two poles. It is like Dattani: relies on theatrical embodiment and spectatorship, but less on the visibility of gender deviance, than on the unreadability of inwardness; a male marginality that, like Dattani, is not rather than about. Combined, these three texts contribute to a growing body of work on masculinity in India that demonstrates that marginalisation of the male subject is not limited to being a victim or a dominated subject. It is also a quality of artistic non-conformity, spiritual estrangement, retirement, domestic labour, and unreadability in society. Theatre translates them as the physicality of a public tension while cinema translates them as an intimate, affective, and distributed experience. But in both media it is the marginal men who are key to comprehending the construction, regulation and sometimes re-envisioning of masculinity in modern-day India.

6.Discussion

This study's discussion reveals that the marginalised Indian men are not only to be depicted as socially alienated but as those influenced by the dominant expectations of masculinity, family, profession, age and social acceptability. In each of these three texts, Dance Like a Man, Ilham and Sharmaji Namkeen, male marginalisation is manifest in subtle ways but is related to each other: in the form of non-conformity within the field of art; in the form of spiritual estrangement; and in the form of the domestic invisibility of ageing. The study points out that masculinity is not one-dimensional or predetermined but is socially defined by a reoccurring demand for authority, productivity, emotional restraint and gender conformity. This is in line with the aim of the study to explore the marginalised male experiences in modern Indian drama and Hindi films.

Jairaj's marginalisation arises from his wish to become a Bharatanatyam dancer, which is a defiance of the identities of men that are associated with the patriarchy. The artist's body, profession and artistic goals are evaluated by social suspicion, revealing the exclusionary nature of social norms about men who don't do things the "normal" way. Ilham is a more internal and philosophical example of Bhagwan's marginalisation. He seems to be part of an average family and of an average occupation, but his spiritually probing nature renders him incomprehensible within normal social systems. He is excluded because he fails to stay within the boundaries of worker, husband and rational male subject. On the other hand, Sharmaji Namkeen raises the issue of marginalization in the form of ageing, retirement, widowhood and domestic work. By tapping into the field of cooking, Sharmaji has subverted the gendered notion of breadwinning and homemaking, giving the film a chance to reinvent a man's voice of age, one that is cared for and inventive, and self-accepting.

This comparative analysis also reveals that the two media of theatre and cinema are two forms of marginalisation of men in different ways. The plays emphasize the real male body, conversation, voicelessness, and viewing, making marginalization overt as being made public. Cinema, in its turn, on the contrary, represents vulnerability in close-ups, inside the house, in the everyday moves, in the emotional realism. The works chosen together show that marginalised men play a crucial role in the study of Indian masculinity in its contemporary form, as their marginalisation makes its precarious nature visible. The study thus maintains that Indian dramas and Hindi cinema are not only about a man's suffering but also about the questioning of the social system that creates accepted, ridiculed, and invisible men.

7.Conclusion

The present study analyzed about portrayal of marginalized Indian men in some of the contemporary Indian drama and Hindi film scene, namely Dance Like a Man by Mahesh Dattani, Ilham by Manav Kaul and Sharmaji Namkeen by Hitesh Bhatia. The results reveal that masculine in the current Indian cultural discourses is not static nor uniform, but influenced by the social expectation, cultural norms, professional identity, age, and gendered assumptions. This is evidenced in the selected works that men who don't fit into the accepted definitions of masculinity are subject to exclusion, ridicule, invisibility, and identity conflict. Thus, marginalisation does not result from the lack of masculinity but from the failure or unwillingness to embody the socially sanctioned ideals of masculinity.

The study revealed that the image of artistic marginalisation in Dance Like a Man was that of Bharatanatyam dancer Jairaj who challenges the notion of 'masculinity' as dominated by the male. Likewise, Ilham is depicted as a marginalized spiritual and existential being, as Bhagwan immerses himself in his introspection and challenges and traditional social frameworks, he becomes more and more removed from expected norms of middle-class male identity. However, Sharmaji Namkeen looks at the experiences of older men as a space of marginalization and how it is within the home that they gain new spaces for selfhood through care, creativity and emotion.

The comparative analysis also allows for the identification of the different representations of marginalised masculinities in theatre and cinema. Theatrical stories highlight the visible body, dialogue, and live performance and the act of exclusion and social judgment is made both present and public. In the cinematic narrative, however, intense realism, close-ups, and emotional ambiguity are used to show vulnerability and change. Despite these formal distinctions, both media reveal the fragility of hegemonic masculinity and counter mainstream norms of male authority, productivity, emotional repression and social legitimacy.

In conclusion, the study brings to light the importance of the marginalised perspective of the male to the study of the complexities of gender and identity in India and thus to the current field of masculinity studies. The selected texts explore the notion of artistic non-conformity, spiritual alienation, ageing, and domestic reinvention, moving the discourse on masculinity beyond dominance and power. They expose the existence of other masculinities in Indian society and give them more critical attention. The study hence concludes that the modern day Indian drama as well as the Hindi film industry has an important role in recreating the concept of men, and also gives visibility to the men's lives that are not featured in the dominant streams.

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