

Chapter – III

Homosexuality and Child Sexual Abuse

We have a tendency to constantly look for ‘classics’ in literature. Very few literary works emerge as full-blown classics. Theatre, by its very nature, is transient. But while it does not mean that the plays which do not last through generations of play-doers and plays –goers, it also does not mean that plays that do not, perhaps, stand the test of time are irrelevant or ‘bad theatre’. Drama has to confront its own times. It has simultaneously always been a mirror of society, its trends and through-processes, while also forcing society to look at situations and think about issues that it may not want to deal with. One of the most prominent issues prevailing in present Indian society is the identity crisis where only male and only heterosexual male is considered the major element of the social system; while the female, homosexuals etc. are considered as deviant or ‘others’.

Homosexuality in India has been generally considered as a taboo subject by both the Indian civil society and the government. Public discussion of homosexuality in India has been inhibited by the fact that sexuality in any form is rarely discussed openly. Feminist issues are being discussed world wide from the 1960s to the present time; but any talk on homosexual relationships are still a clichéd issue as homosexuals themselves are afraid of coming out from the fixed behavioural norm inflicted on them. Their sexual proclivities are still strongly forbidden by social custom and are greatly offensive to the prevailing moral and social code. In her introduction to the collection of essays *Inside/Out*, Daina Fuss considers that the question of homosexual identity is itself folded inside a structure:

The homo in relation to the hetero, much like the feminine in relation to the masculine, operates as an indispensable interior exclusion- an outside which is inside interiority making the articulation of the latter possible, a transgression of the border which is necessary to constitute the border as such. (Fuss,3)

As Fuss's intricate sentence shows, the opposition inside/outside represents not a choice, or even a distinction, but an epistemology of the border- a spatial notion of identity and difference which can never get outside itself, but only move a boundary line or permeate it, reproducing the interior/exterior law.

The society imposes stereotypical roles on both men and women, acknowledges, and legitimizes only these roles. Male and female-these are the only sexual categories, which have secured social existence and the approval of the society. People who do not fit into these two classes either keep trying to fit into the rut and suffer throughout their lives a burden of living the big lie; or if they choose to live with the truth, they have to bear social ostracism and contempt. This hypocrisy is best illustrated by Duncker :

Sex is supposed to be the moment when we are most honestly, nakedly ourselves. This is a myth. Often we use the mask of intimacy to perpetuate the most destructive physical emotional bullying. We use our bodies to avoid the issue. We exchange loving confidences in fraudulent currency. We fake it-again and again. We do this to hide, to deny our fears, to avoid honesty. We all live ironic lives. (Duncker,10)

The basic element in both secular and religious arguments non-heterosexual activities is that because sex is designed for reproduction and any behaviour detracting from that end is biologically unnatural and therefore verboten. Sex has uses other than procreative, and behaviours that are apparently non-procreative, may

nonetheless contribute to reproductive success. Moreover, the socialization is responsible for stereotyping gender and relationships:

The optics of a gay relationship is always viewed from a heterosexual viewpoint. Regarding marriage there are divided views in the community. Many feel that there is no need to replicate the institution of marriage in which women have borne the brunt of violence for ages. But there are others, who feel that marriage is a must. (Chauhan, 1)

Being conscious of the limitations of blaming all of contemporary Indian social problem on a post-colonial legacy, Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai have argued that a homophobia of virulent proportions came into being in India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and continues to flourish today. In this article “Critically Queer”, published in *glq* Butler emphasizes that: “There is no power, constructed as a subject, that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability.” (Butler, 17)

For Butler, “lesbian”, as an identity, is over determined by heterosexuality. It is actually produced by homophobia, articulates the unarticulable, in its claim to sexuality, is both ‘out of control’ for those reasons, and oppressive in drawing exclusionary borders of specificity.

Part of what constitutes sexuality is precisely that which does not appear and that which, to some degree, can never appear. This is perhaps the most fundamental reason why sexuality is to some degree always closeted, especially to the one who would express it through acts of self-disclosure. (Butler, 25)

However, the terms heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, and the concept of “sexual orientation” itself are all modern sociology constructs. In earlier times too, a

particular behaviour, might have been considered as homosexual, but people were not labelled using such terms. An Australian clinical psychologist reportedly coined the word 'homosexual' to explain same-sex relations in 1887. Cary Grant used the word 'gay' for the first time in a Hollywood film, *Bringing Up baby* (1939), in a role that needed him to cross-dress and move about in a transparent negligee.

The terms are western import and the law that outlaws sex between two members of the same gender came not from religious fanatics of any kind, but surprisingly, with British, who came as traders and stayed to conquer the subcontinent (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), and were scandalized by the sexual customs of the Indians. The educational system, they established however eventually created new Indian elite which enthusiastically absorbed British ideas, including the more prurient attitudes of the Victorians toward sex. These elite, in turn, imposed their new anti sexuality on the Indian middle class. When British took control of India, British sexual law was imported by the colonial administration.

The 1861 legislation, which changed the British penalty for sodomy from hanging to life-imprisonment, became Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) after independence. This law prohibited "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" and continued to prescribe imprisonment up to life as well as whippings and fines. To put it simply, homosexuality per se was not an offence, but being caught in a homosexual act was illegal. Therefore western sexual ideologies have 'invaded' Indian discourses on; sexuality and identity by professionals, lawpersons, "straights" or "gays", and whereby indigenous histories and cultures become invisible. Let us always remember the indisputable truth expressed in the opening articles of the universal declaration of human rights that "All persons are born free and equal in dignity and rights...." Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedom set forth in

this declaration, without distinction of any kind. The criminalization of gay behaviour goes not only against fundamental human rights, as the open letter of International Human Rights points out, but it also works sharply against the enhancement of human freedom in terms of which the progress of human civilization can be judged. Therefore, now the revolutionary change in this Sec. came in 2009 by the Indian government, which legitimizes the relationship of the homosexuals, brings a new hope in the life of homosexuals, but it is again challenged in the Supreme Court of India and decision is yet to come.

A marginal homophobic trend in pre-colonial India thus became a dominant one in modern India. Indian nationalists, including Hindus, internalized Victorian ideals of heterosexual monogamy and disowned indigenous traditions that contravened those ideals. Unfortunately, this provision has become one of the most notorious forms of legal discrimination against homosexuals, who already suffer from severe social stigma in the country. It further casts a shadow of illegality on the personal lives of thousands, making them unable to live openly and with dignity, because even their families and wellwishers point to the existence of the law to justify their prejudice and concerns. Families, health professional and others often cannot accept people's sexual preferences precisely because of the law. Dr. Dayal Nihlani, a psychiatrist asserts:

Homosexuality is a part of human experience. Anthropologists have found that homosexuality existed among primitive tribal cultures. It is not as if modern society has created it. One has to accept it rather than look at it as normal or abnormal Homosexuals are made to suffer because of the prejudice. There is nothing wrong with them. (Chatterji,1)

Indian newspapers, over the last twenty-five years, have reported several same-sex weddings and same-sex joint suicides, mostly by Hindu female couples in small towns, unconnected to any gay movement. Several weddings took place by Hindu rites, with some family support, while the suicides resulted from families forcibly separating the lovers.

In the world of individual dignity, the homosexuals are rarely allowed to define themselves in terms of their role, their socio-political location, and their representation of themselves as a challenge to the patriarchy. The political slogans, which describe the homosexuals in purely institutional, or counter-institutional terms ('lesbianism' is a blow against patriarchy). The symbol of their identification with women as a group, or the emblems of their rejection of the institution of compulsory heterosexuality (inscribed upon their badges and emblazoned on their banners) all are described as mere outward regalia, which conceal the real human being underneath. The very role of 'lesbian' itself, which locates the individual in terms of her group membership, is described as an artificial and dehumanizing category; people are to be seen as individuals with their own separate and distinctive selves, not pigeonholed into labeled boxes. The real identity of the lesbian is represented not in her overtly and explicitly political activities, or herself as lesbian, but in the private sanctum of her inner self, her unique human identity, which transcends this one limited aspect of her total being.

Indian history, geography, and demography all exhibit a rich diversity of traits, generalizing hazardous. Indian subcontinent is a spectacular mosaic of cultures, ethnicities, religions, languages, and traditions. Sexual attitudes and practices also show considerable variation, ranging from the classic sex affirming *The Kamasutra* and the world-famous erotic sculptures of ancient temples to the extreme prudishness

of ascetics, who condemned all forms of seminal emission and modern educated elite, which still derives its inspiration from Victorian England. Both unearth and affirm that homosexuals have always existed since time immemorial in this land. Most modern Indians are ignorant of this rich history, and believe the popular myth that homosexuality was imported into India either from medieval West Asia or from modern Euro-America. It is symptomatic of the ignorance that the democratic and secular Indian government has retained the British law, which criminalizes sodomy.

To begin with, India's colourful history is rife with examples of homosexuality in different forms. Homosexuality, in fact, has a long history in the subcontinent; same-sex relationships are described in ancient Indian texts like the fourth century love guide, *The KamaSutra*, *The Ramayana*, and medieval Persian and Urdu poetry. Vatsyayana, wrote *TheKamaSutra* in the fifth century B.C, the world's oldest sex manual, devotes an entire chapter to homosexuality. *The KamaSutra* is revolutionary because it gives an objective description of all forms of sexual behaviour; it deals without ambiguity or hypocrisy in all aspects of sexual life – including marriage, adultery, prostitution, group sex, sadomasochism, male and female homosexuality, and transvestism. The text paints a fascinating portrait of an India, whose openness to sexuality gives rise to a highly developed expression of the erotic. It categorizes men, who desire the other man as a 'third nature', further subdivides term into masculine and feminine types, and describe their lives and occupations (such as flower sellers, masseurs and hairdressers), *Kama Sutra* states that homosexual sex "is to be engaged in and enjoyed for its own sake as one of the arts." "Homophobia, and not homosexuality, is new to Indian culture," says Vinay Chandran of Bangalore-based charitable trust, Swabhava, which works with gender and sexual minorities in the country. His argument has a sound basis considering the

fact that homosexual acts have been recorded in ancient Indian writing, including *the Kama Sutra*, for hundreds of years. (Manjunath, greatreporter.com)

Some historical evidence suggests considerable social acceptance of sexual diversity in ancient South Asia: In parts of the subcontinent, for example, centuries-old erotic sculptures depict men and women engaged in a variety of homosexual as well as heterosexual activities; some classical Hindu myths recognize, even affirm, the fluidity of gender as well as sexual identities.

Probably the best known are the erotic sculptures adorning the celebrated temple architecture of Khajuraho, where one can find couples of the same sex entwined in ecstatic postures alongside the regular couplings of members of the opposite sex. Construction of Hindu temples of stone began around the sixth century A.D. and reached its culmination between the twelfth and the fourteenth century, when the grand pagodas of eastern and southern India, such as Puri and Tanjore, came into being. On the walls and gateways of these magnificent structures, we find a variety of images: amongst scene from epics and legends, one invariably finds erotic images including those that modern law deems unnatural and society considers obscene.

Other erotic manuals suggested that sodomy was common in Kalinga (southern Orissa state) and Panchalalin in Punjab. In general, sex for pleasure was explicitly validated (at least for males and often, as with Vatsyayana for females as well) and not necessarily linked to procreative function. According to ancient treatises on architecture, a religious structure is incomplete unless its walls depicts something erotic, for sensual pleasures (*kama*) are as much an expression of life as are righteous conduct (*dharma*), economic endeavors (*artha*) and spiritual pursuits (*moksha*).

Hindu texts have been discussing variations in gender and sexuality for over two millennia. Like the erotic sculptures on ancient Hindu temples at Khajuraho and Konarak, sacred texts in Sanskrit constitute irrefutable evidence that, the whole range of sexual behaviour was known to ancient Indians. The Vedas do mention human beings can be classified into three different categories: male (*pums-prakriti*), female (*stri-prakriti*) and a third sex (*tritiya-prakriti*). *Tritiya prakriti* or “third sex” is the group most homosexuals identify themselves with and nowhere does it contain a straight forward condemnation of homosexuality. The Sutras seem to support the contention that homosexuality was somewhat acceptable in ancient times. Homosexuals argue today that third-gender citizens were neither persecuted nor denied of basic rights in the past. They were allowed to keep their own societies or town quarters, lived together within marriage and were engaged in all means of livelihood. Either Gay man could blend into society as ordinary males or they could dress and behave as females, living as transvestites.

Shiva, the Hindu god, has been, from the most ancient of times, worshipped primarily in the form of a *lingam* or erect phallus; in the most common ritual is pouring of the milk over the tip of the lingam and that flows down on all sides. Males as well as females worship the lingam; it suggests the existence of a sublimated homoerotic element. The Sakibhave cult, which worships Krishna (an incarnation of Vishnu), holds that only Krishna is truly male and that all other creatures are female in relation to him. Male followers of the cult dresses like women. The male poets like Kabir and Jiyasi often envisaged themselves as women in love of God. As observed by journalist Mrinal Pandey, “The cultural scene during the time allowed Kabir and other poets to openly integrate their femaleness into their poetry”. (Chatterji, 1)

In Hinduism, love is regarded as an eternal force. It is seen as devotion between two people, whether romantic or platonic. Hindus believe that love and devotion both are important in attaining Moksha or Liberation from the cycle of rebirths. *The Mahabharata*, *The Panchatantra*, *The Kamasutra*, *The Shiva Purana*, *The Krittivasa Ramayana*, and *The Skanda Purana* have examples of it.

The medieval texts too engage homosexual themes: Emperor Babur's autobiographical *Tuzuki-i-Babri* contains a sentimental recollection of his erotic love for a teenage boy; Dargah Quli Khan's personal diary *Muraqqa-e-Delhi: The Moghal Capital in Muhammad Shaw's time* briefly documents his foray into the pedasty circles of Islamic Delhi. These stories allow women to have sex with women and men to have sex with men on heterosexual terms. One may interpret these tales as repressed homosexual fantasies of a culture. Hindu medical texts dating from the first century A.D. provide taxonomies of gender and sexual variations, including same sex desire.

However, homosexuality does not need the sanction of *The KamaSutra* or any ancient text for that matter. It needs the understanding of human beings towards fellow human beings and the respect for an individual's personal choice, which harms no one else. The more one searches the Scriptures, the more convinced one is that homosexuality is not a sin. Nor has God relegated us to a life of celibacy! So this begs the question: if it is so obvious that one's sexual orientation is not in and of itself a 'sin' why do so many in the religious places condemn homosexuality? Two important factors come into play: fear and prejudice. When you fear something, you wish to get away from it. It can challenge the patriarchal notion of heterosexual society of a binary differentiation of male/female where the first one dominates the 'Other'. To most people, this means pretend, it doesn't exist, subdue it, change it, or destroy it.

Denying a person the right to choose their partner is morally wrong. However much we cloak our traditions of marriage in garbs of sanctity, the truth is, marriage as an institution was established for procreation and that alone, in every culture. According to Freud, homosexuals are simply those who have either failed to renounce identification with mother in favour of father (gay men) or those who have failed to retain their ties of identification to mother (lesbians). However, Freud postulated that homosexuality was the failure of the child to adequately identify with the same-sex parent, and was therefore a problem of gender identity, development, he did not believe in either the criminal persecution or psychiatric treatment of homosexuals. In fact, when a woman, whose son was homosexual, contacted Freud he patiently explained why he did not think her son needed to be ‘cured’.

Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation; it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function....Many highly respectable individuals of ancient and modern times have been homosexuals, several of the greatest men among them.... It is a great injustice to persecute homosexuality as a crime- and a cruelty too....What analysis can do for your son runs in a different line? If he is unhappy, neurotic, torn by conflicts, inhibited in his social life, analysis may bring him harmony, peace of mind, full efficiency, whether he remains homosexual or gets changed. (Freud, 419-20)

There is even greater reticence on homosexuality in contemporary Indian literature – a reticence that perhaps reflects the generally conservative sexual mores of the people and there is hardly an imaginative text that sympathetically explores the theme of male homosexuality. Ismat Chughatai’s “*Lihaf*” (“*The Quilt*”), written in Urdu, was first published in 1942, unfolds the account of mid – 20th century Muslim

Nawab family where the Nawab sought his pleasures from young boys. Narrated from the point of view of a ten-year-old girl, the story focuses on the sexual relationship between an aristocratic Indian woman and her female servant. Shortly after its publication, the author appeared in court to defend herself against charges of obscenity. Kamala Das, a well-known poet in South Asia, published *My story* in 1976, created a minor scandal. The candid autobiography not only revealed her extramarital heterosexual affairs but also her adolescent crush on a female teacher and a brief lesbian encounter with an older student. More controversial is Shobha De's *Starry Nights* and *Strange Obsession* (1993), a rambunctious novel about lesbian love published by the prestigious Penguin Books of India. Her commercial success certainly indicates wide spread interest among Indian readers in works that explicitly deal with non traditional sexualities; however, the interest, to some extent, may simply be prurient curiosity. When Deepa Mehta's 1998 movie *Fire* portrayed two unhappily married women start an affair with each other. It caused nationwide controversy and caused the topic of homosexuality to be hotly debated within public forums, an area where it had been for the most of time silent. "*Fire*", was eventually banned in India. It shows quite clearly that it is extremely dangerous to try to overturn the country's traditional values.

Although self-identified gay and lesbian artists are yet to break into the South Asian literary scene, a few writers of the South Asian Diaspora have begun to explore gay, lesbian, and bisexual themes with some candor. They live in either the United States or Britain – countries that have well-established gay and lesbian communities with a tradition of organized resistance – and therefore have greater sexual and artistic freedom and wider publishing opportunities. Further, their physical separation from family and community probably gives them relative privacy and greater freedom from

culturally imposed constraints. Some of them are: Prafulla Mohanti's autobiography *Through Brown Eyes* (1985); Agha Shahid Ali's poems – such as “*Leaving your City*,” “*Beyond the Ash Rains*”, and “*A Rehearsal of Loss*”; Vikram Seth's novel in verse *The Golden Gate* (1986); Andrew Harvey's novels, *Hidden Journey* (1991) *One Last Mirror* (1985) *Burning Houses* (1986), *The Web* (1987); Hanif Kureishi's screenplays *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1986); *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990); Suniti Namjoshi's poetry *Feminist Febles* (1981) and novels *The Conversations of Cow* (1985), *Flesh and Paper* (1986), *The Mothers of Maya Dilip* (1989), etc.

In recent years, however, attitudes towards homosexuality have shifted slightly. Gay activism in India is growing and has begun to challenge laws which criminalize homosexuality and which were inherited from the British Raj. It remains to be seen whether these emerging identities will reflect (or perhaps imitate) western constructions and whether those who adopt these identities will attempt to love these within Indian cultures, or whether differing identities will be constructed.

In September 2006, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen and acclaimed writer Vikram Seth came together with scores of other prominent Indians in public life to demand this change in the legal regime. The open letter demands that ‘In the name of humanity and of our Constitution, this cruel and discriminatory law should be struck down.’

On June 29th, 2008, Delhi held its first ever gay pride march, along with similar gatherings in Bangalore and Calcutta. On June 30, 2008, Indian labour minister Oscar Fernandes backed calls for decriminalization of consensual gay sex, and the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called for greater tolerance towards homosexuals. On July 4, 2008, gay activists fighting for decriminalization of consensual homosexuality at the Delhi High Court got a shot in the arm when the

court opined that there is nothing unusual in holding a gay rally, something that is common outside India.

The Naz foundation (India), a New Delhi based NGO is at the forefront of the campaign to decriminalize homosexuality. In December 2002, Naz India filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) to challenge IPC section 377 in the Delhi High Court. Gay Indian residing outside the country has formed support groups that cater to issues specific to the lesbian, gay men bisexual and transgender community of South Asian descent. In the United States of America, SALGA(*The South Asian Lesbian & Gay Association*) in New York City, and *Trikone* in San Francisco are two such organizations. New York City is also host to a unique, monthly Bollywood-themed gay party and mixer called Sholay.

Now it becomes important for us to analyze these aspects through the different theories, which have been formulated by various critics. Lesbian and gay literary theory in the literary field has emerged prominently as a distinct field only in the 1990s. The ‘liberation movement’, however in the large part is because of the assimilation of the viewpoints and analytic methods of Derrida, Foucault, and other poststructuralists. The earlier assumptions about a unitary and stable gay or lesbian identity were frequently put to question, and historical and critical analysis became increasingly subtle and complex. It attacked the “essentialism”, fixed gender identities subscribed by society and introduce the notion of choice and allegiance into matters of sex and gender, so that sexuality is not seen as something merely ‘natural’ and unchanging, but rather as a construction and as subject of change. This theory appears at the post-structuralism time or post-modernist times and therefore, in spite of adhering to fixed gender identities like feminism, it rather works on shattering those ‘essentialism’. One of the main points of post-structuralism was to ‘deconstruct’

binary opposition (like that between speech and writing, for instance). It shows firstly that the distinction between paired opposites is not absolute, since each term in the pairing can only be understood and defined in terms of the other, and secondly that it is possible to reverse the hierarchy within such pairs, and so 'privilege' the second term rather than the first. Hence, in lesbian/gay studies the pair heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy is deconstructed in this way. With radical implications and since all such distinctions are constructed in the others too. Drawing upon a post-structuralist reading of Saussure, we find that such apparently elemental categories as heterosexual and homosexual do not designate fixed essences at all—they are merely part of a structure of difference without fixed terms, like Saussurean signifiers. We construct, instead an anti-essentialist, postmodernist concept of identity as a series of everything, which is provisional, contingent and improvisatory. Therefore, identity is necessarily a complex mixture of chosen allegiances, social position and professional roles, rather than due to a fixed inner urge of the particular individual.

Further, what is called into question here is that distinction between the naturally-given, normative 'self' of heterosexuality and the rejected 'other' of homosexuality. The 'Other', in these formulations, is as much something within us as beyond us, and 'self' and 'other' are always implicated in each other, in the root sense of this word, which means to be intertwined or folded into each other. As basic psychology shows, what is identified as the external 'Other' is usually part of the self, which is rejected and hence projected outwards. 'In general, lesbian critical reading proposes the blurring of boundaries between self and other, subject and object, lover and beloved as the lesbian moment in any text.' [Zimmerman, 'Lesbians like this and

that’] Thus lesbianism is theoretically linked with notions of ‘liminal’ consciousness when existing categories are in process of deconstruction.

A number of queer theorists, for example, adopted the deconstructive mode of dismantling the key binary oppositions of Western culture, such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and natural/unnatural. The spectrum of diverse things is forced into only two categories, and in which the first category is assigned privilege, power and centrality, while the second is derogated, subordinated and marginalized. In an important essay of 1980, “*Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*,” Adrienne Rich posited what she called the ‘lesbian continuum’ as a way of stressing how far-ranging and diverse is the spectrum of love and bonding among women, including female friendship, the family relationship between mother and daughter and women’s partnership and social groups, as well as overtly physical same-sex relations. Later theorists such as Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler inverted the standard hierarchal opposition by which homosexuality is marginalized and made unnatural, by stressing the extent to which the ostensible normativity of heterosexuality is based on the suppression and denial of same-sex desires and relationship.

Another prominent theoretical procedure which undone the earlier assumption that heterosexual and homosexual are essential, universal and trans-historical types of human subjects, or identities, by historicizing these categories- that is by proposing that they are social and discursive “constructs” that emerged under special ideological conditions in a particular culture at a particular time. A central text is the first volume of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1976), which claims that there had long been a social category of sodomy as a transgressive human act, the ‘homosexual’, as a

social type of human subject or identity, was a construction of the medical and legal discourse of the latter nineteenth century.

In a further development of constructionist theory Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), described the categories of gender and of sexuality as performative. In this sense that the features which a cultural discourse institutes as masculine or feminine, heterosexual or homosexual, it also makes happen, by establishing an identity that the socialized individual assimilates and the patterns of behaviour that he or she enacts. Homosexuality, by this view, is not a particular identity that affects a pattern of action, but a socially pre-established pattern of action that produces the effect of originating in a particular identity. In *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler has consistently interrogated the notion of identity. Adapting Freud, feminism, Lacan and post structuralism, Butler's work has focused on the modes of representation of gay/lesbian identity and the idea of difference. Butler questions the fixed identities of heterosexuals, homosexuals and lesbians. Further, the so-called derivative nature of homosexuality, where same sex sexuality is seen as a bad copy of the original, can itself be reworked. One can demonstrate how heterosexuality that sees itself as the original is itself composed of the otherness of homosexuality. All our identities come from differentiations from other identities. Paradoxically, identities are repetitions based on performances. It is in this sense that heterosexuality which takes itself as the only authentic form of sexuality is a 'string of performances.'

Queer theorists now say that like gender, sexuality is a social construct. Heterosexuality sees itself as the authentic form of sexuality by relegating lesbianism and homosexuality to the background and discarding them as inauthentic. Thus, the whole equation of original/heterosexual and copy/homosexual can be displaced. This

is the main argument of Butler. Identity is a switching of roles. Identity is not closed, stable or unitary thing, which is separate from an 'Other'. The 'Self' and the 'Other' are not mutually distinct species. Butler suggests that the 'Self' emerges only with a separation. To deal with this loss, the Self retains the 'Other' through a 'melancholic incorporation'. The 'Other' thus contains the 'Other' within it. Without the disruption of the 'Other' inside there would be no self. This argument suggests that the insertion the 'Other' into the 'Self' is extended to the gay/lesbian identity. The term 'queer' which may be produced due to homophobia, may itself be cited as the discursive basis of opposition. The citation/repetition of the queer identity may be used to destabilize the very discourse of heterosexuality. Identities thus escape the terms. The repetition of the terms 'we' and 'I' cannot be either summarily rejected nor can they be followed scrupulously. Butler is here suggesting an aporetic condition where one needs to both reaffirm and reject the identity 'queer', as both acceptance of a certain subject position and as the site of prospective resistance. The use of post-structuralism by queer theorists like Butler, Edelman and Fuss enables gay/lesbian theory to problematize issues of identity, marginality, authenticity and epistemology. There is an emphasis on the social context of identity.

Identity is constituted through a series of attempts to embody normative gender and sexual identities. The 'injunction to be a given gender', the repetitions and parodies of the identity (male/female) in the form of drag thus reveal the 'imitative structure of gender itself- as well as its contingency.' There is no original or primary gender, which is imitated. Gender itself is a kind of imitation for which there is no original. Here imitation creates the effect of the original. Homosexuality is always present within the construction of heterosexuality itself, and unless the notion of the homosexual is spelt out there can be no 'heterosexual' at all. Heterosexuality can no

more see itself, or be seen, as either pure or original, because the term/identity is construction out of homosexuality. Butler's deconstructive argument thus reverses the hierarchy of priority and derivativeness. Heterosexuality is always the process of imitating its own idealization, and failing its imitation. Heterosexuality needs repetition, and repeated repetitions, to naturalize it as original. Heterosexuality needs to elaborate itself because it fears being 'undone'. Heterosexuality is always afraid of its dependence upon homosexuality to construct itself. Thus, these social expectations will affect even the self-conception of the homosexual individual too.

Diana Fuss deconstructs the inside/outside opposition, where the inside stands for the heterosexual norm and the outsized is the realm of the homosexual (who is outside the norm, is a paradoxically closeted-inside-and need to come out). The outside, suggests Fuss, is formulated as a consequence of the internal lack of the heterosexual. To protect against the recognition of the lack within itself, the self erects boundaries against an 'Other' which is made to represent this lack. The homosexual is thus the ghost that haunts the heterosexual.

The gay/lesbian studies have influenced literary and cultural studies to a great extent. The retrieval of gay texts, anthologizing and publication of the gay texts, and tracing the history of gay themes have been an important development in the area. In new Historicism and Cultural Materialism, the work of Jonathan Goldberg, Alan Sinfield, among others, have focused on homosexuality in Renaissance texts (as the title of Goldberg's book suggests: *Queering the Renaissance*, 1994), the repression of the theme and a gay resistance (especially in the life and work of Oscar Wilde and Andre Gide).

Theatre is not a mute observation, but a mechanical representation of the social dynamics, which consciously or unconsciously affect the existing dynamics of

human sensibility. Dattani brings the Indian drama closer to the real life experiences and tries to articulate the voice of the oppressed sections of society whose identity have been dragged in darkness, doomed to survive in perpetual silence and occupy no space in social order. This process of Dattani within the framework of dramatic structure is referred by Erin Mee as “a way of decolonizing of theatre”, without any preconceived ideal of “a politically driven search for an indigenous aesthetic and dramaturgy.” (Mee, 14)

To break the taboos, to expose the misery of sexuality marginalized sections and to reflect man’s consistent struggle with his inner self, confronting with socio-ethical restrictions constitute a specific strain in Dattani’s dramatic art. In the homosexuals has not yet been recognized and they are left to lead a secluded life in their claustrophobic spaces. He admits: “I have found out that sexuality can’t be strait jacketed or compartmentalized. They are varying degrees of love and bonding one feels for another person irrespective of gender. (Rao, 3)

These neglected people come in the group of ‘Subaltern’, a term that is applied to those of ‘Inferior rank’. According to Spivak, subalterns are forced to maintain silence against oppression and injustice and the entire terrain of post-colonial literary appreciation became an unpleasant Babel of subaltern voices. Leela Gandhi attributes:

Subaltern studies defined itself as an attempt to allow the ‘people’ finally to speak within the jealous pages of elitist historiography and in so doing, to speak for, or to sound the muted voice of truly oppressed. (Gandhi,2)

Dattani’s works aim to enhance the life experience of gay men and lesbians, help homosexuals through the difficult development tasks, which lead to greater adjustment, satisfaction, acceptance and happiness, improve the quality of their interpersonal relationships and maximize the growth potential of the individuals are

being studied. What Dattani says is that it is homosexuality, which causes to social exclusion and he portrays them sympathetically in his plays hoping for their inclusion into our society. A common belief among the most conservative faction is that homosexuality is *a behaviour – something that one does*. It is a chosen *lifestyle*, which is abnormal, unnatural and changeable. It is hated by God. It is a mental disorder and/or an addiction. For Dattani, *homosexuality is a sexual orientation – something that one is*. It is an unchosen orientation, which is normal and natural for a minority of adults. It is always or almost always fixed. It is accepted by God. It is neither a mental disorder nor an addiction. He tends to favour equal rights and protections for persons of all sexual orientations, including the right to marry, with special rights for none. The core of this argument is that there are no ‘homosexual’ or ‘lesbian’ people only homosexual or lesbian acts that anyone can enjoy:

Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. The sooner we learn this concerning human sexual behaviour, the sooner we shall reach a sounder understanding of the realities of sex. (Kinsey, 639)

Through a focus on sexual expression as the meaning of homosexuality (i.e. homosexuality as an act rather than the homosexual as a type of person), differences between the homosexual and the heterosexual are dissolved. Same-sex sexuality is not a distinctive, unitary, frozen state; sexuality is innately plastic, and every human being has the physiological capacity to respond both heterosexuality and homosexuality. The theme central to Dattani’s plays on homosexuality is the notion that lesbians and gay men pose no threat to either heterosexuals or the social system, but they can be integrated into society and contribute to its rich variety. He favours same-sex

marriage too and discards the view that procreation is the only motive in any marriage, in an interview to Bijay Kumar Das:

You can be nurturer and provide in a same-sex marriage just as you can in an opposite sex marriage. Procreation is a choice which some married couples do not exercise. In same sex marriage procreation is not a choice you have. (Das, 178)

This belief is in sharp contrast to the arguments of the ‘pathologists’ who present lesbianism as a threat to the nuclear family and society as we know it. Same-sex love is, in this analysis, a normal, a natural and healthy aspect of the self. Dattani asserts to Erin B.Mee that it is the most burning issue of the present times as it has been always present in our society from the ancient times and that he is not talking in the air:

.....If we look at the statistics of a gay population in any given society, even if you look at it as a conservative five percent (people put it at ten, but even if you take five percent), with a population of 850million, we’re talking about almost 50million people, and I think it’s a real invisible issue. Almost all gay people are married in the conventional sense, so I think there are invisible issues which need to be brought out and addressed. In this case, it wasn’t such a conscious attempt to say “look, here is an invisible issue, let’s talk about it”, I think it’s there, and since it is very much a part of our society, very much a part of my society, it happen to be there. (Mee, 157)

Dattani’s liberal approach of dissolving any specific differences between lesbian and heterosexual women and gay and normal men shows a strong tendency to deny as well as minimize the differences between lesbians or gay men and heterosexuals. He brings out homosexuals and lesbians as invisible people, hidden in

dark closets, inhabiting a shady twilight world, shrouded in cloaks of prejudice, clouds of ignorance and fogs of taboo and mists of obscurity. We are ‘invisible women’ – ‘the invisible minority’ or ‘almost invisible’, If not invisible at least concealed: ‘the hidden segment’, the hidden minority’, the ‘hidden population’, into the obscurity. Dattani brings the light of reason or dispels the darkness; light is continuously being shed, candles lit, dark cupboards opened and blankets of cloaks of ignorance removed. He reveals homosexuals as they really are and the characters themselves began to question their identity and their position in society. As Dattani asserts: “A growing number of people, gay included, are beginning to question societal pressures on people to be in single partner relationships.” (Chauhan, 1)

Therefore, we are offered a ‘new light on homosexuality’ and ‘illuminated by a few candles of factual knowledge, ‘although homosexuality is ‘shamefacedly clouded, and ‘shrouded in mystery and taboo’ dattani dispels the ‘clouds of ignorance’ and ‘rips’ away the distorting cloaks of stereotype’. Dattani describes the murky depths behind the cloaks and in the cupboards, and varies with theoretical perspective.

Mahesh Dattani is neither afraid nor hesitates to present the bold and powerful issues such as homosexuality to the most conventional society without any care; he is indifferent to its acceptance by the society. His motive behind the task is to force the society to think about issues that it may not want to deal with. Dattani here can be compared to Oscar Wilde, who also presented the stark reality of homosexuality to the Victorians in his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that reveals homoerotic bonds between two men, the well-known artist Basil Hallward and Dorian Gray. Unlike him, Dattani’s plays like *Muggy Night in Mumbai* and *Bravely Fought the Queen deals* with the issue of gays and lesbians, their inner turmoil and struggle for acceptance in a

conservation society of India. In one of his interviews, he asserts, “You can talk about feminism, because in a way that is accepted. But you can’t talk about gay issues because that’s not Indian, it doesn’t happen here.” (Mee, 163)

His plays raise questions about the social, moral psychological, cultural and biological dimensions of the gender and the construction (and sometimes confusion) of individual identity, most poignantly illustrated. Gender concepts and models are not static and, as the plays illustrate concepts and constructions of gender must be understood in reference to their particular cultural, political, social, religious and historical contexts. As a dramatist, who is aware of the complexities of the culture baggage attached to such terms, Dattani, in these plays, examples how gender identities and relations are invented, constructed, replicated, stereotyped, manipulated and sometimes reversed through language, politics, narrative and ritual. Religious conservatives generally regard homosexual behavior by any two persons as profoundly immoral regardless of the nature of their relationship. Homosexuality is widely discussed in terms of religion, and more recently, politics. The various analysis shows us how these ideologies are reflected or played out, as well as shaped refracted, reinforced, subverted or negotiated by the particular text of context. The plays depict a conservative India, bound by familial traditions and circumscribed by fear of change. Homosexuality and lesbianism are seen with a considerable degree of suspicion and hostility on the basis of common ‘stereotypes’, ‘myths’ and ‘prejudices’. D.J. West comments:

In order to come to a balanced judgment of the matter of the correct attitude to homosexuals, one has to try to cast personal feeling to one side, and to discount the particular prejudices of our society, which has so long

unthinkingly stigmatized all such persons as ‘perverse’, ‘heretical’ or ‘criminal’. The task calls for a high degree of intellectual honesty. (West, 257)

As indicated above, the Indian social context is one in which repressive attitudes and social latitude towards same-sex sexuality appears to be particularly intertwined. In this climate ‘gay relationships’, according to the commentator, have little or no place, since they disrupt conservative mores and family values. This indicates something of an ambivalent moral position; private tolerance coupled with public reprobation an attitude arguably typical of wider contemporary social values regarding same-sex sexuality in India. Against this backdrop, this chapter aims to explore ambivalent attitude and ambiguous moral censure towards male-to-male sexuality in contemporary India.

Hindu philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986), who set up a center in Ojai, California, says that homosexuality, like heterosexuality, has been a fact for thousands of years and becomes a problem only because humans over-focus on sex. When asked about homosexuality, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (born 1956), founder of the international movement, Art of Living, said, “Every individual has both male and female in them. Sometimes one dominates, sometimes other, it is all fluid.” (Vanita, 5)

Mahesh Dattani, being an iconoclast, deals with many issues prevalent in the society, which the society is either hesitant to discuss or tries to camouflage. Thus the volatile subject of homosexuality, currently raging many hot debates and discussions in numerous social circles, media, both electronic and print, becomes the theme of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* and *Bravely Fought the Queen*. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, like all other plays dealt in the previous chapter; here also we find the concept of the divided or fragmented self. The characters wear masks, which project

them not as they really are but as they want to show their persona to the world. Dattani uses it externally when two characters, one gay Ed and the other, homosexual Prakash, turns out to be one and the same person. The dramatist enhances the dual personality of the character by giving two names, Prakash and Ed. The later is used to highlight the Western concept of homosexuality in contrast with the Indian presented by the first name. This is true of all the characters in the play who try to hide their homosexuality. In the views of Dattani:

Modern Indian society is just as narrow-minded and un-accepting of differences as traditional Christian as Islamic societies. People talk about the Kamasutra and its celebration of sexuality but how celebratory of sexual expression mainstream Hindu cultures were in the past is anybody's guess. It would be simplistic to put this denial of sexual expression down to Victorian mores. I have a feeling we, as a culture, have become too boring! (Ayyar,2)

As the term, homosexuality is itself the deconstruction of male/female binary oppositions and will be free from all unorthodox. The play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* begins with a shocking scene of a couple lying in bed. The man, however, blocks the view of his partner. But as he lifts himself from the bed, the audience realizes that his partner is not what it might expect-and the viewer comes face-to-face with a middle aged, overweight, balding male who is servant of the man, Kamlesh, the main protagonist of the play. It soon becomes apparent that this Indian man-an affluent member of Bombay's haute couture-is paying a lowly security guard for sex. Therefore, the opening reveals a sexual reality not generally accepted by the heterosexual people as they consider it an 'abnormality', which is a bold concept for the India theatre. The play is a tragicomedy that renders contemporary gay life in India and finds its main characters grappling both privately and publicly with issues

of love, sexual identity, family honour, and societal obligations. Dattani has a strong message to convey, but instead of falling into the trap of having someone in the play preach the message, the playwright creates a believable set of character going through real life problems and hopes that his plea for acceptance and understanding of India's 'queer culture' is made clear with the stories of these characters/Dattani states:

I'm not looking for something sensational, which audiences have never seen before. Some subjects which are under-explored deserve their space. It's no use brushing them under the carpet. We have to understand the marginalized, including the gays. Each of us has a sense of isolation within given context. That's what makes us individual. (De, 1)

Therefore, referred as 'a metro-sexual love story', the play brings this taboo issue like homosexual relationships, out of its conventional closet by giving the gay characters freedom of sexual choice. Dattani enacts the play only in metros not just because it is an urban tale, but because he feels the city people will best understand the hidden spaces of sexual expression. He asserts:

Actually, it is about people in the metro who are exploring relationships. Sex is implicit. The motivations of the characters in the film are to live their lives honestly. They are the third generation urbanities. They create their own environment. They are alienated from society, seeking emotional fulfillment. (Bajeli, 3)

On a Muggy Night in Mumbai deals with homosexuality in all its colours. Humans are, by nature, emotionally androgynous beings, with the characteristics of one gender overshadowing the other. By this, we mean that most women have male responses that are not induced by the society and culture, while men have a tendency to constantly suppress their feminine urges. Now that it is fashionable for men to be

‘sensitive’, the lines between gender specifics are becoming more blurred. Dattani designates a group of characters from elite classes to prove that same-sex sexuality is as normal and prevalent as heterosexuality, irrespective of class and caste. Alternate sexuality in India is a rare occurrence; it is treated with a sensitivity and restraint that is even rarer in our theatre.

On Muggy Night in Mumbai confronts the politics of sexuality. The play addresses itself to the question of self-worth and integrity and plunges us straight into the lives of people who practice alternate sexualities. Penetrating into the sexual conundrum, gradually the play unfolds the inner turmoil and conflicts and an acceptance of the ‘closet’ position for themselves in order to live with the forced harmony of the society to be acceptable. As John McRae puts it:

It is not simply the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal. It is a play about how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates. (CP-I,45)

The story unfolds primarily in one place: the living room of Kamlesh, a well-heeled fashion designer living in Mumbai, where he invites his friends in order to confide a heart breaking secret that he is still in love with Prakash, one of his old flames. Prakash, however, has denounced their relationship as the work of the devil and moved on to become a straight man leaving Kamlesh lonely, distraught and confused. Kamlesh tried to forget him by finding love in Sharad but could not succeed. He still endures the mental scars of his three years terminated relationship and asks his friends for help:

Please! I am afraid! I need your help! I need you all. I am afraid. Frightened.

(Pause) After Sharad went away-I decided that I didn’t really need anyone to

live with me. I had my work. That should have been enough. It wasn't I felt this void. The same feeling when three year ago, Prakash left me. I would have understood if he had left me for another man, but he left me because he was ashamed of our relationships. It won't have worked between us, but he was ashamed. I was very angry. I left my parents and my sister to come here, all because of him. I know I shouldn't blame him entirely for that....

.....

For the first time in my life, I wished I wasn't gay. (CP-I,68-69)

Hence, the reason behind calling his friends, seeking help to erase the memory of his ex-lover Prakash, or he will go and settle in Canada. But the play does not have tragic undertones as the characters are fighters who fight with society to have their individual identities, though they also could not free themselves from the forced harmony imposed by the society. As Dattani says, "...they are not tragic characters. They are survivors who celebrate the life. Of course, there is tragic undercurrent. (Baleji, 3)

As the party progresses, new surprises turn up for all the friends of Kamlesh, who represents the many facets of homosexual culture: his ex-lover witty and sharp-tongued Sharad, who does not worry about how the world views him and is still in love with Kamlesh; a television actor Bunny, who is happily married and very conscious of his public image and so he does not want to come out of the closet; pompous and over confident Ranjit, who has left India to settle in the west with his true homosexual identity; and Deepali, an aggressive lesbian, who is quite comfortable with her sexuality and considers herself more sensible than others as being a woman, but on the other hand she is also worried about her friend Kamlesh's restlessness. In this diversity of characters one can notice while Deepali and Sharad

are very comfortable with their sexuality, Bunny behaves like a traditional Indian gay man for the acceptance of heterosexual marriage. With this fine delineation of characters, Dattani brings out the psychological pressures and fears, whether real or imaginary, gays have to live with. All these characters have different position in society, different mentalities and different constitution but they have deep bonds with each other and equally feel defiant of the institution called heterosexual marriage, ridiculing the wedding music in the final Act. M.K. Naik says that *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is the record of the “changing mutual relationship, their revelations, their self discussion and self discoveries, though they are all sailing in the same boat; each has his/her own oar to put in his/her own flag to hoist.”(Naik, 2.)

Thereupon, the issue becomes more complex and helps Dattani to present an exciting and vibrant Indian gay community to the audience. Sharad tries to help Kamlesh by concocting a ceremony in which Kamlesh has to perform a ritual step as suggested by Sharad. In this sacrament, Kamlesh has to tear his photograph with Prakash, hugging each other; and he feels unable to do it. But this symbolic ceremony could not be completed as when they were preparing, Kamlesh’s sister Kiran arrives, unfamiliar with the happenings and the troubles of Kamlesh. Kiran is rather happy at her impending marriage to Ed. Kiran is the only heterosexual in the play and is exposed to having great compassion for the gay people and wishes they could marry for happiness; she knew that her brother is a homosexual. The affiliation between Kiran and Kamlesh is much like the siblings Tara and Chandan in Dattani’s other play *Tara*-very friendly and intimate. It is a celebration of gay life, but it also deals with the middle class virtues of family values and friendship among its characters; and so like the earlier play *Tara*, this is also a play, looks into sibling relationships and bonding that is at the core of the play. It creates ambiguous spaces that Kamlesh and

Kiran must negotiate to arrive at the revelations that will redefine the given structures. Kiran has been unfortunate in her arranged marriage, which sends her into the spiral of depression and damages self worth. Kiran tells to the friends of Kamlesh about her past life and her new fiancé Ed; this gives rise to be feminist leanings and a feminist issue occurs, when she begins to describe the tortures inflicted by her previous husband and also by her conservative family, who, in spite of all the pain suffered by her, want her to adjust in her married life:

Kiran ...the first one. I had to get away from him. To escape from those fights at night. And the nightmare wouldn't end. The humiliation of explaining to friends or neighbours... that the black eye was from banging my head against the door. Or the broken rib was from a fall.... It was the cigarette burns on my arms I couldn't explain, that finally made my brother call the police.... They arrested him.Oh no, justice doesn't last for very long. He was free the next day. His parents bailed him out. And my parents wanted me to... adjust! My brother helped me with the divorce proceedings. Oh, thank God for him! And thank God that I met Ed! (CP-I, 77)

But they are all in for a surprise when Kiran reveals the truth that Ed is no one else but Prakash, One of the friends of Kamlesh. This shocking revelation makes, Dattani's characters face even more vague situations. The irony of the whole story is that the poor girl does not know that the man to whom she is going to get married is a homosexual and an ex-lover of her brother. And all the friends of Kamlesh ponder whether to tell Kiran about Prakash's sexuality, something that could end Kiran's short lived happiness. But Kamlesh holds them to their promise of not revealing anything about his relationship to anyone.

Consequently, in Act I of the play, Dattani adds many new shades into the relationship of homosexual characters by presenting an intricate web of identities not only in terms of sexuality but as complex and multi-dimensional cultural, racial, social and sexual polyphony. Kamlesh is in a fix and begins to doubt his own reality, and visits to a homophobic psychiatrist to rid himself of depression. It seems to help, until “he said I would never be happy as a gay man. It is impossible to change society he said, but it may be possible for you to reorient yourself....” (CP-I, 69)

Bunny, in the play, constructs an acceptable identity as a cover for the true self to live with the ‘forced harmony’ of the society in a typical Indian manner of living as he advocates:

What’s wrong with that? Huh ? Do you think I will be accepted by the millions if I screamed from the rooftops that I am gay....

.....

Camouflage! Even animals do it. Blend with the surroundings. They can’t find you. You politically correct gays deny yourself the basic animal instinct of camouflage. (CP-I, 70)

A dissimilarity and disparity is clear in the views of Sharad, who is the most upfront and outspoken about his identity. He challenges Bunny:

Give me maquillage! Lots of rouge and glitters! Let the world know that you exist. Honey, if you flaunt it, you’ve got it. (CP-I, 70)

He emphasizes again, “If any one of us can be straight, I am Madhubala” (CP-I, 85). Sharad is the mouthpiece of Dattani himself and acts as a mirror to show the real face to everyone in the play without any defense and apology. Dattani himself comments on Sharad:

There are shared spaces and I think Sharad is aware of these spaces. His camp humor reflects his self-awareness and intelligence. (Ayyar, 2)

Sharad, in his usual critical vein, reprimands Ranjit and calls him a ‘cocount’ because of his hypercritical and escapist behaviour as Sharad as put it, “You are brown on the outside and white on the inside.” (CP-I, 71)

Ranjit, very candidly reveals his comfortable relationship with another man in a foreign land to Sharad, but there he did face another kind of problem: of racial discrimination. Deepali is yet again of a different construct. On the one side, she is comfortable with his identity as a lesbian; on the other she is biased as a woman in the gender war of the society. For a moment sexuality is kept apart, when Deepali defends herself as a woman:

I’m all for the gay man’s cause. Men deserve only men. (CP-I, 60)

....

I thank God. Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am a woman. (CP-I, 66)

Or when Sharad takes on Deepali:

SHARAD: if I had a lover, would I be such a bitch?

DEEPALI: Don’t –don’t use that word, (Clenches her fist at him). You can call yourself a dog, call yourself a pig, but never never insult a female. (CP-I, 59)

M.K. Naik’s comprehensive assessment of the play is helpful for a better understanding:

The play presents a group of well-to-do homosexuals in Bombay, their changing mutual relationships, their revelations, their self-delusions and self – discoveries. Though they are all sailing in the same boat, each has his/her own oar to put in, his/her own flag to hoist. Kamlesh is weak and sensitive: Sharad is his exact opposite, with his jaunty non-chalance. Ed assumes a double identity,

with Prakash as his second avatar. Bunny is true to the 'kindred point' of home and the Homo Den; he is a good husband at home and a very competent one in his bedroom, while he enjoys himself as a gay soul in the company of the initiated. Ranjit solves his problem by going abroad where he feels he will be more readily accepted; and Deepali is a militant lesbian, who declares, 'Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am a woman.' Totally free of guilt, she is strong and bold enough to strike Ed when he becomes violent. The wedding music heard constantly in the background in the final Act is an ironic commentary on the lives of these homosexuals for whom 'marriage' can only be a doubly dirty twice-four letter word. (Naik, 6)

But, inspite of all these differences, these people have deep bonds and do care for each other. The play's primary preoccupation is with fond attachment between people, and not with passionate sexual attachment between them. Sexual alignment is only a secondary derivative of a primary love bond and that too only selectively. For example, the affinity between Deepali and Kamlesh cannot be overlooked:

DEEPALI. If you were a woman, we would be in love.

KAMLESH. If you were a man, we would be in love.

DEEPALI. If we were heterosexual, we would be married. (CP-I, 65)

Therefore, Dattani's weaving of complex structures of the identities of these gay characters within the diverse frameworks proves an intimate bond and affinity beyond the sexual relations alone, and as he asserts:

I have found out sexuality can't be straight jacketed or compartmentalized. There are varying degrees of love and bonding one feels for another person irrespective of the gender. (Rao, 2003)

Act II begins with the hallucinations of Ed, sitting on a bench in a park talking to someone, not visible to the audience. He is dispirited and disheartened as at not being acceptable with his real identity as a gay in the society; in order to escape from his utter isolation; he even thinks of committing suicide. The second person is none other than Kamlesh who gets visible to the audience after sometime. He consoles Prakash by his love for him and makes him realize how nice they look together as attractive as a heterosexual couple. It makes Ed confess “You saved my life!” (CP-I,82)

This scene, which is depicted in the dark area to represent the past life of Kamlesh and Prakash when they met first and fell in love with each other, is really a contrast to what Prakash feels now and breaks all relationship with Kamlesh. This is the irony of the play that Kamlesh, who wipes away the fear of loneliness of Prakash, gets the reward of loneliness from the same person. The reason of the escape is made clear by these words of Deepali, which she affirms later on:

It's not shame, is it ? With us ? ... it's fear Of the corners we will be pushed into where we don't want to be. (Pause) I too was once afraid of being a woman. (CP-I, 89)

The scene shifts again into the flat of Kamlesh, where everybody insists upon Kamlesh to tell Kiran the truth about Prakash and himself, or it may ruin the lives of all the three. The already confusing situation becomes even more complex when Kamlesh is unable to reveal the truth to Kiran and end her temporary happiness. He tells his friends that he is not concerned about Prakash, who left him because of the crap that Prakash should love a woman and be a real man, but is worrying about his sister Kiran, who has suffered so much in all her life.

KAMLESH. I want her to be... content. Like Bunny's wife. (Pause) I have met her. She has a considerate husband in Bunny. He does care for her. And I have seen how contented she is. Kiran has had a troubled first marriage. I helped her fight for a divorce. Those scars haven't left her.

.....

Very slowly she began to find herself again. And I would pray that she would not fall apart. I was thankful also for Prakash for making her happy again. I don't think it ever occurred to her wildest dreams that we were lovers. She never even asked me whether Prakash was gay. She just assumed he wasn't.

(CP-I, 85-86)

In this small act, we get only a forward movement of Act I and a preparation for Act III. No significant action is taking place and the audience get only a glimpse of the past life of Kamlesh when Prakash suddenly turncoats, leaves him and changes into Ed, wearing the garb of a handsome man and declares his love for Kiran, who unfortunately happens to be Kamlesh's sister. This sense of shame is very well expressed by Eve Sedgwick:

For certain ('queer') people shame is simply the first, and remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity: one that has its own, powerfully productive and powerfully social metamorphic possibilities. (Sedgwick, 14)

Kamlesh resigns to the changed situation without complaining for the sake of his sister and not his lover. In the play, the gay person is conceptualized as moving from an initial stage of 'identity confusion', marked by uncertainty about his or her sexual identity; through a second stage of 'identity comparison', marked by a sense of alienation from heterosexual society; to a third stage of 'identity tolerance', in which the person admits to his or her own homosexuality and seeks out the gay community.

With the support and validation of other homosexuals, the person progresses to the fourth stage of 'identity acceptance' and from there to 'identity pride', the fifth stage, marked by gay activism and 'purposeful confrontation with the establishment.' But the sixth and final development stage for homosexuals is 'identity synthesis', in which the 'them and us' distinction is removed and with the help of supportive heterosexuals, there lingers no clear dichotomy between the heterosexual and homosexual worlds; it is not attainable in the Indian society and this leads to the 'identity crisis', which confuses homosexuals and makes them to follow the wrong path of 'identity denunciation'. As JohnMc Rae puts it:

... The themes of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* deserve to touch the whole of society and to be touched by it. It is not simply the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal. It is a play about how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates. (CP-I, 60)

These circumstances throw light on the growing trend of homosexuality and its non-acceptance in the Indian society. Central to this argument is the assumption that our 'inner selves' – the way we think and feel about and how we define ourselves- are connected in an active and reciprocal way with the larger social and political structures and processes in the context of which they are constructed. It is for this reason that as many radical and revolutionary movements of oppressed peoples have argued, "the personal is political". (Halmos,1)

In this, analysis, neither heterosexuality nor lesbianism are 'natural': both are political constructions; the former a 'compulsory institution' (Rich, 631-57) into which women are coerced, and which is no more natural than high-rise flats or the neutron bomb', the latter a political challenge to patriarchy. Adrienne Rich (1978)

describes lesbian's 'disloyal to civilization' and adds that 'a militant and pluralistic lesbian/feminist movement is potentially the greater force in the world for a complete transformation of society. (Rich, 29-38). 'Lesbianism says Brown 'is the greatest threat that exists to male supremacy'. (Brown, 109)

The life of homosexuals is not a life chosen, but a destiny beyond choice. Oppressed people are often convinced of the necessity for separation, as a means of resisting assimilation into the dominant order, organizing politically, reclaiming our heritage and valuing our cultural differences.

Instead of union, cooperation, solace, stimulations, emotional enrichment, and a maximum opportunity for creative interpersonal maturation and realistic fulfillment, there are multiple underlying factors which constantly threaten any ongoing homosexual relationships, destruction, mutual defeat, exploitation of the partner and the self, oral-sadistic incorporation, aggressive onslaughts and attempts to alleviate anxiety-all comprising a pseudo-solution to the aggressive and libidinal conflicts that dominate and torment the individuals involved. (Socarides, 18)

Act III begins with the entrance of Ed into the flat of Kamlesh. All the characters are now brought together in such a way so as to escape the conflicts and repression, secrets and scandals. Everyone gets a chance to hide his or her truth then seek redemption as a last resort. Tensions and moral choices collide and all the characters begin to be ripped apart. Commenting on such a situation, John McRae says:

...the audience must go through the classic cathartic emotions of terror and pity as the character's masks fall, their emotions unravel, and their lives disintegrate. For the fault is not just the characters' – it is everyone's, in the

society which not only condones but encourages hypocrisy, which demands deceit and negation, rather than allowing self-expression, responsibility and dignity. (CP-I, 61)

Bunny made up a story to give some relief to Kiran in the previous act that Kamlesh is stressed, because Sharad has broken up with Kamlesh. When Ed enters on the scene in the present act, Deepali gets a trick to forward this story and mould that in a way so that Ed himself asserts his true sexuality in front of Kiran. Deepali informs Kiran that the reason of break up is that Sharad wants to become normal to which Kiran replies 'that's absurd' (CP-1, 99). Sharad shakes his head in disbelief and then goes with the story in a hilarious travesty of 'penis power' and heterosexual privilege and dissertation on what it takes to be a real man. Commenting on Sharad's bold statements, Raj Ayyar's reaction is interesting:

I love Sharad's gay liberation speech, where he lashes out against 'penis power' and the pathetic 'wanna be a macho man' self-delusions of many straight males. In fact, though he's such a politically incorrect queen, Sharad unwittingly reveals some of the shared spaces between feminism and gay liberation in both locate a common oppressiveness in the straight male and his desperate patriarchal clinging to phallogocentric superiority, 'normalcy' and privilege. (Ayyar, 6)

Ed begins to be afraid of being caught in a trap and tries to leave the place with Kiran as soon as possible, to escape the cynical eyes of the others who knew about his relationship with Kamlesh. By the last scene, with multiple truths having spilled out all over the screen, Bunny and Ed both realize their follies. The crisis is reached at climax when Kiran gets the knowledge that her fiancé was her brother's lover, she expels the fumes of rage, anger and other negative conflicts on him while

Ed tries to commit suicide by jumping through the window. Ed confesses to Kiran at last, "I am... Sorry. I didn't mean to harm you. I only wanted to live." (CP-I, 110)

The friends of Kamlesh, as a result, are successful in revealing the true self of Prakash in front of Kiran by constructing a difficult situation for him. On being asked by Lakshmi Subramanyam whether it is his trick to entrap characters in unusual circumstances in order to reveal social and cultural prejudices in a dominant patriarchal society, Dattani replied:

I like the extraordinary in the day to day. I feel that it takes unusual circumstances to really bring out true character. It's only in times of crisis or when one is off centre that one's true nature is likely to be revealed. So I guess I use unusual circumstances more for dramatic reasons. (Subramanyam, 129)

The phobia against homosexuals prevailing in the society makes homosexuals psychological orphans, suffering from a state of incompleteness, which is marked by dependency needs, jealousy and possessiveness, a sense of inferiority and depression, some suicidal thoughts and attempts, and the phenomenon known as emphasis or fear of total extinction. In *Overcoming Homosexuality*, a clinical psychologist presents a similar diagnosis of homosexuality as pathological:

Homosexuality is a symptom of neurosis and of a grievous personality disorder. It is an outgrowth of deeply rooted emotional deprivations and disturbances that had their origins in infancy. It is manifested, all too often, by compulsive and destructive behaviour that is the very antithesis of fulfillment and happiness. Buried under the 'gay' exterior of the homosexual is the hurt and rage that crippled his or her capacity for true maturation, for healthy growth and love. (Kronmeyer, 24)

And the play is summarized rightly in these words, of Sharad, which is a real question everyone asks to oneself all one's lives, being tired of the hypocrisies:

I ask myself what I have got

And what I am and what I'm not (CP-I,111)

Dattani obviously seems to have a point to make to his audience. But rather than directly preach, the playwright dramatizes and puts in characters on the stage and one begins to identify with, facing genuine, real life problems. The play, then, in a sense, is a plea for empathy and sensitivity to India's 'queer culture'. Dattani's motive behind writing the play is recapitulated by John McRae as:

If two men want to love one another, what's the harm"? The harm now is in their oppression, symbolized throughout by the muggy heat and the failing air con. "I really wish they would allow gay people to marry," says the naive Kiran only to get the reply from the cynical Ranjit, "They do. Only not to the same sex." It is one of the wittiest barbs in the play, but, as ever with Mahesh, in the sharp humour lies the truth of a very clever, moving and hugely dramatic tragicomedy. (CP-I, 61-62)

Consequently, beneath the 'queer' surface the characters in the play cope with the crisis of life as 'normal' heterosexual people, and this tragicomedy finds its characters grappling both privately and publicly with issues of love, sexual identity, family honour and societal obligations. Dattani, however, says that he had no political agenda in writing *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*:

I'm strongly affected by social issues, especially when it comes to power-play in class and gender. A lot of my plays deal with them and they remain the leitmotifs of my plays. I am, however, not a social activist. From my long experience in theatre, I know what will work in a play, that is, what

will be empowered writing. My first service is to the story and I believe that the form should serve the content. Usually, there is something like a coming to terms at the end the audience can experience a catharsis-like situation. That's deliberate and is part of my craft! (Banerjee, 166)

A lot of unanswerable questions arise through the play as to who is a real man? The one who lives by a strict code of behaviour? Or the one who moves to his own instinctive rhythm? Should they listen to their heart's dictates and stay with a man for a lifetime and face social opprobrium or should they hide their sexuality and takes a shot at marriage to see if it works? Relationships and expectations between same sex people are as different and diverse as those between heterosexuals. Then why is the society so interested in the lives of people with alternative sexuality? Is it possible for homosexuals to turn heterosexual? Though Dattani does not claim to have all the answers as he has no political agenda in writing the play but to explore relationships, which are under suspicion in the fixed societal norms, as he says, "...In any case, being gay or lesbian is not right or wrong, it is reality and we have to learn to accept alternate relationships and live with them". (Menon, 3)

Gay literature seems to have been beleaguered by unhappy endings. Homosexuals invariable move towards death, isolation or a sham heterosexual marriage of the kind Ed and Kiran are heading towards. But *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* ends on an upbeat, significantly luminous note. In the adaptation of this play into the film, *Mango Souffle*, Dattani broke new ground in his explorations of these complex structures of identity and such related issues. This obviously required adjustments in the narrative as well, but the phenomenal international response to his film requires us to look at how such subjects are handled in terms of audience abroad, gay or otherwise. Raj Ayyar comments on the film:

Till recently, gay literature has been plagued by the ‘victim syndrome’ and the unhappy ending. Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice* is a classic example of this tendency. The gay man or the lesbian fades out of the novel, play or film and out of our lives in death, loneliness, AIDS or, at best, a loveless heterosexual marriage. Hats off to you in that *Souffle* has an almost upbeat moment of truth ending. (Ayyar, 6)

Another play *Bravely Fought the Queen* does not deal with homosexuality or gay relationships at great length. However, one of the main protagonists, Nitin, does have shades and overtones of being homosexual. His marriage to Alka is not a very happy and throughout the play, we find Alka’s suffering, being the wife of a homosexual. However, she is not aware of this fact throughout the play and thus she cannot analyze the reason of her unhappy marriage to a man who is not a caring husband. The audience and the readers of the play also become aware of this aspect of Nitin’s personality only towards the end of the play. The heterosexual practice of marriage and family ensures the longevity of the patriarchal system and therefore social structures with the support of legal and ethical state apparatus come down heavily on such homosexual preferences. This phobia against homosexuals and penalization makes the practitioners of homosexuality feel ashamed and scared of the social stigma and encourage either lie and marry or continue to live the lives of self-denial.

Dattani makes it obvious that both men and women are forced to live according to the social dictates of a dominant heterosexual society and calls for a relaxation in the rigidity of social taboos, beliefs and value systems established centuries ago. In *BFQ*, Dattani takes up the problem of homosexuality of a married man, Nitin, a closet homosexual, who consequently is unable to satiate his wife

Alka's desire, which ultimately mars the unconsummated conjugal life of both. Alka has to suffer the reluctance of her husband who is a big failure in his business, just because he is in the trap of this dangerous sexual disease. Nitin has hidden the secret of having sexual relationship with Praful (Alka's own brother) from everyone and from Alka too and the audiences learn this in the latter half of the play from Nitin's conversation with his mother that Praful tricked him into marrying his sister, Alka. Therefore, both are trapped in the same social norms and Praful plays a significant role to represent the conventional society as both Alka and Nitin are manipulated by him. As Nitin asserts to Baa:

...he is blame. Praful tricked me into marrying her!

...I hate him now! Do what you want with the property but don't let him run my life! He is out to get us! Alka can stay here, or go away, or drink herself to death, I don't care. It doesn't make a difference to me! But get him out of my life! (CP-I, 305)

He has neither any desirability or concern for Alka nor any sympathy for her lonely and abandoned life, which becomes obvious from his commitment that he does not care if Alka stays there or leave or drink herself to death. The prominent reason for this abiding and everlasting misery of Alka is Nitin's homosexuality but another one is that his old mother Baa was not ready to give him the property because of her annoyance on his marrying Alka against her will. Nitin's apathy towards Alka is obfuscated by the sympathetic treatment meted out to him as a homosexual. As a man of weak will, Nitin neither wants to disappoint his brother Jiten by refusing to divorce his wife nor Praful by divorcing his sister. And the audiences' sympathies are for the both as being exploited by the forcing power of the societal norms. Countering Erin Mee's observation about Nitin's character in BFQ is the first homosexual character in

any modern Indian play, Dattani states, "I would say the only time a homosexual character has been treated with sympathy. There have been caricatures." (Mee, 157)

In the 1990's when Dattani wrote this play, the position of homosexuals was ridden with confusion and was seen as a result of an abusive childhood, a violent father or any other kind of domestic strife. This view is also found in closeted Nitin, who at last sympathizes with Alka, confesses his true sexuality, and seeks forgiveness from her, though she does not hear as she faints after an excess drinking:

That was a game he played. And I-I was caught in it

he told me to get married...how could I? and to whom?

...he told me that you knew. That he had told you about me. And that it didn't matter to you. He-he told me everyone would work out fine... but you didn't know! He tricked you! I-I am sorry. It wasn't my fault. (CP-I, 314-315)

Both characters find consolation and expression of their true inner desire in different ways as Alka has to make do with alcohol as concoct a fantasy about Kanhaiya and Nitin finds refuge in the 'strong arms' of the auto-driver clandestinely. And finally, the last dialogue in the play, a kind of soliloquy or confessional monologue is delivered by Nitin where his craving for a free expression of his true sexual self is clear in an address to his sleeping wife Alka, who sleeps in a drunken stupor on the living room sofa. Moreover, all the mystery is ultimately cleaned up as we hear that Nitin is a homosexual, who had fallen in love and had been seduced by Praful, and we watch him go out to the auto-rickshaw driver, who waits for him in the outhouse. Nitin covers Alka's face with blanket and confesses:

But now, you will have to sleep. You mustn't wake up, while I... while I ... mustn't keep him waiting ...(He moves towards the kitchen.) The office is not a good idea... too many people passing by ...but here – the outhouse. Perfect.

Yes. Don't wake up. Stay drunk. You mustn't watch ... those powerful arms... (CP-I, 315)

Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* holds that the hysterization of women's bodies is seen as a strategy to regulate female sexuality and discipline femininity and the 'psychiatrization of perverse pleasure' stresses the need to develop a system for normalizing so-called deviant behaviour. (Foucault , 104-105)

Dattani's play *Bravely Fought the Queen* gives a voice to the tacit homosexuals, who sent thankful letter to Dattani after watching the play as Dattani asserts to Erin B Mee:

Most of the letters were from gay people who were extremely closeted. Some of them said, "I thought I was the only person in the whole world", so it was heartening to see that it evoked such a strong response and people felt they could identify with these characters so strongly. And I got letters from women saying I think my husband is a homosexual. (Mee, 157)

Though the reactions of the heterosexuals was varied, Dattani asserts to Erin B Mee that some people said "...brilliant, I'm glad we're talking about this at last- the liberal section of our society ..." and other responds negatively, "we come to the theatre as part of a family, we come with our children and our spouses, and we don't want issues which are very embarrassing to talk about." (Dattani, 157)

Therefore, the plays somewhat, prove that the traditionalist consider homosexual relationship as something aberrant, disgusting and even blasphemous, the gays think otherwise. They would feel pride and happy to assert their true identities and sanctity on some favorable situations. On the whole, the both plays discussed above, tackle a theme that is bound to catch the conventional Indian audiences by surprise and may raise their eyebrows. Though Mahesh Dattani is not the first to visit

this unexplored piece of land, his approach is certainly different and his honest effort to portray the complexity of relationships with utmost sensitivity without any vulgarity and cheap thrills in the form of entertainment make the plays acceptable even when dealt with taboo issue such as homosexuality. According to Mahesh Dattani, much of ‘mainstream’ society, lives in a state of ‘forced Harmony’, and a stereotype like homosexuals, simply for lack of choice, out of a sense of helplessness, or out of a lack of alternatives and therefore they suffered and marginalized. How true the words of Kiran in *On Muggy Night in Mumbai*, “If there any stereotype around here, they are you and me. Because we don’t know any better, do we? We just don’t know what else to be!” (CP-I, 107)

Dattani *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* to arouse four points:

- A belief in the basic underlying similarity of homosexual and heterosexual people;
- A rejection of the concept of homosexuality as a central organizing principle of the personality;
- An assertion that homosexuality is as natural, normal and healthy as heterosexuality; and
- Denial of the notion that lesbianism or male homosexuality poses any threat to the nuclear family and society as we know it.

Everyone has the right to live life as they see fit and make their own choices. There should be no discrimination based on sexual preferences. As E. Goffman says:

The individual is advised to see himself [sic] as a fully human being like anyone else, one who at worst happens to be excluded from what

is, in the last analysis, merely one area of social life. He is not a type or category, but a human being. (Goffman, 29)

Dattani slips the rug out from under or from within the ‘thing’, resting its identity claim as contingent upon volition, on the one hand and material circumstances, on the other. His aim is to retain the project of identifying in order to challenge directly the social-symbolic institution of heterosexuality. Within the critical environment, performing homosexuals would be taking what de Lauretis calls “the essentialist risk” to perform the identity of homosexual against that of heterosexual. For that, such kind of performance provides a “challenge (to) the construction of heterosexual/homosexual binary, adulterating the first term and foregrounding the production of the second term.” (Hart, 128)

These plays of Dattani remind us those of the lesbian and gay theatre movements emerge out of a history of a political struggle. Enabled by the post-Stonewall liberation politics of identity that galvanized lesbians and gay men to come out and demonstrate to the world that “we are everywhere”, lesbians and gay men established community-based theatres where lesbian and gay playwrights, actors, technicians, and others involved in the production of performance could both develop and refine their work without fear of reproach. Moreover, lesbians and gay men interested in theatre that spoke explicitly about lesbian and gay issues now had a theatre within the public sphere where sub-cultural codes, vernaculars, and customs could be articulated and shared, negotiated and contested. In New York City, for example, this process begins as early as 1958 emergence in the 1960s and 1970s of other Off-Off Broadway theatre such as La Mama, the Judson Poets Theatre, the Glines House, and the Playhouse of the Ridiculous. In these Off-Off Broadway houses, lesbians and gay men were able to begin offering alternative representations

to the standard fare of mainstream representation, what Don Shewey identifies as “frivolous fairies, psychotic bulldykes, and suicidal queer.” (Shewey, xi)

The founding of a new generation of lesbian and/or gay theatre in the early 1980s- such as San Francisco’s Theatre rhinoceros, New York City’s WOW Café and Seattle’s Alice B.Theatre- extended the cultural work of their predecessors and were essential in developing both lesbian and gay artists and audience locally, regionally and nationally. Together these people forged energies to stimulate and enact a sense of queer art and queer history and queer community. At once a place for queer art and queer gathering, lesbian and gay theatre remained primarily theatre of, by and for lesbians and gay men.

Though the theatre of Dattani is not only for homosexuals but of, by and for heterosexuals too for presenting them that they have same emotional lives and conflicts as they have and so there is no difference between them at all. The audiences enter into the space of performance, because we know that magic and transformation sometimes happen here and our curiosity gets the better of us. Dattani makes audience remember that performance puts into motion any number of emotions that circulate within the space of performance and that, occasionally, this dynamic transference of energy invigorates our lives, persuades us to return again and again to the theatre. And it is the result of the efforts of people like Dattani that the Government is now becoming aware towards these social issues and the change in the sec.377 of the law in 2009 is the proof of this which legalizes the relationships of the homosexuals.

No matter how different Dattani’s people are from the standard definition of normal but they never appear strange or distanced from reality. This is a play about creating spaces within restricted areas of self-expression. To that extent, *On a Muggy Night* needs to be looked at as a radical step forward for Indian theatre. As Dattani

says in an interview: “It’s not that I have done something new, but I’ve done something unpredictable, and I have shattered a lot of images.” (Mee, 157)

As Mahesh Dattani, through his plays focuses on many contemporary social issues, he has recurrently used subjects that touch upon the zones of experience that the ‘normal’ middle class society would rather sweep under the carpet and happily imagine did not exist. The preoccupation with ‘fringe’ issues forms an important element in Dattani’s work-issues that remain latent, suppressed and rather ‘invisible’, or are pushed to the periphery, come to occupy centre stage-to create at least an acknowledgement of their existence. This is exactly how Dattani would penetrate below the surface, subvert the complacent beliefs that everyday reality is constructed with, and makes visible the invisible issues that haunt so many of his plays. It also points towards the postcolonial design and concept that a responsible for dichotomy evident in its continuous erosion of moral and spiritual values and discipline. This uphill and bold task requires grit and forbearance which Dattani has proved that he has. In an interview given to Aditi De, he says:

I write for my milieu, for my time and place-middle-class and urban Indian...my dramatic tensions arise from people who aspire to freedom from society....I am not looking for something sensational, which audiences have never seen before... some subjects, which are under-explored, deserve their space. It’s no use brushing them under the carper. We have to understand the marginalized, including the gays. Each of us has a sense of isolation within given contexts. That’s what makes us individual. (De, 2003)

The positive and hopeful point is that such a play has done exceedingly well in urban India, which implies an audience that is rapidly coming to terms with its own multiple, many hued self. The message is loud and clear: gay is beautiful and if you’re

drawn to same-sex love, come out for your own sake and to avoid hurting others. Judith Butler too has stressed upon the necessity of conceiving lives that are lived beyond (hetero-normative) symbolic order (or social law), she argues that such 'unorthodox' lives should not just be seen as the shadowy outer margins that represent the foreclosure of hetero-normative kin and cultural boundaries, but as lives lived within the norm. Male-to-male sexuality in India can be understood in these terms, as a sexual possibility intrinsically bound up with hetero-normative contexts, rather than as necessarily separated out as an individual and social sense of self, identity or sexuality.

Child Sexual Abuse

The play *Thirty Days in September* by Dattani illustrates a brutally honest portrayal of the sensitive, volatile and generally taboo issue of child sexual abuse through the medium of theatre. In almost all developed countries, law decides the acts of physical, sexual or emotional abuse, or neglect of children. But the laws are ambiguous and most of the children suffer in silence for their whole lives; this is due to the emphasis placed in our society on preserving family reputation at all costs. Says Dr. Kaur:

Disbelief, denial and cover-up to preserve family reputation made child sexual abuse an invisible crime in India. It seems there is an official denial of the existence of the problem. In fact, child abuse in India is as old as the joint family system and patriarchy. Though the problem is highly pervasive, there is pretence that it only inflicts the West. This also explains why there is no legislative framework in India to prevent such abuse and there has not been much data collection and research. (Kaur, 5)

The play *Thirty days in September* is commissioned by RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest). Dattani attacks the common notion that abuse does not happen to urban, educated class of children. According to RAHI's survey, which involves middle and upper middle class women in four metros of the country find's that 70 percent of them have been sexually abused as children. More than 40 percent of these are survivors of incest- the victims, whose sufferings last much longer, often extending for their whole lives and the healing is both slow and painful. Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) happens across the society, among the rich and poor, irrespective of class, caste or community. The family itself leads to child sexual abuse, because it polarizes adult and child, rural and urban, male and female. Therefore, it is clear the Pedophilia and incest are not new entrants to the world of sexual variants, but they have certainly acquired newer, graver dimensions that demand urgent social response.

Suicide tendencies, low self worth, addictions, panic attacks, eating disorders, dysfunctional relationships, promiscuity and so on, all the abnormalities happen to the victim of CSA. This is exactly what is endured by Mala, the protagonist of the play *Thirty Days in September*, who is disturbed, discontented, complaining, unreasonably demanding, aggressive and shows it directly or indirectly. She is first time raped by her maternal uncle, when she was only seven. She suffers from continual sexual abuse by him, which affects her mind and life even after fifteen years of that incident. Mala's life of the 'silent scream' is not only her own story, but it can be based on real lives of victims of sexual abuse. Every now and then a crime occurs against the female community; a girl is kidnapped, sold, re-sold and raped. Her individuality is lost and she is forced to bear the torture and agony. The scene, when Deepak, her boy friend, solaces her by his agreements of love to her, Mala cannot response as she is entrapped all of a sudden in her childhood and goes back to the time when her uncle

had raped her for the first time and seduced her soul completely with his shameful act. This scene is presented in the play by flashbacks where we can clearly get, how step by step in these lines, the man goes on to destroy her inner and outer self and also silence her:

MAN. Touch me here.

.....

You said you loved me in front of your mummy and daddy. Come on!

Show it!

.....

There! You feel that? It means I love you. Your uncle loves you.

Mala begins to cry.

.....

Shhh! Don't cry. You want to come here in your holidays, no? Then don't cry. This is your seventh birthday, no? you are seven now. Ready for a real birthday present. Lie down, Come on, quickly.

.....

If they hear you they will say you are a bad girl. This is our secret.

(Like an order but in a whisper) Don't cry!

.....

Help me and I will love you more than your mummy or daddy.

.....

Think of your school. Be still and put your arms up, come on. Yes!

What did you learn in school today? Hmmmmm? What? Tell me.

.....

Good, Good, Keep singing.... Again, don't stop until I stop. See, I love you even though you are so ugly. Keep singing... Nobody will tell you how ugly you are. But you are good only for this ...Only for this. See how much I love you. See....Now go away. Quickly. (CP-II, 42-44)

The adult finishes the act with great satisfaction while the child is in pain and agony. Sexual abuse of children has existed within close family members in homes and especially with girl, since our culture does not allow its exposure and the girls are not allowed to report the incidents due to cultural taboos and upbringing; thus the secret is nursed till death. The child, who is victim of sexual abuse or exploitation, is under great stress and trauma. The child's problem enhances as, she is repeatedly exposed to the exploiter for the sake of identification during trials at police station and courts. It is grossly unfair for the child, because just the sight of the man is enough to trigger the mind back to the trauma, she has passed through and it destabilizes her.

Mala, the protagonist of the play, is unable to forget her abuse at the hands of her uncle and reduced to an incorrigible sex-hungry seductress, Mala tolerates because of her love for her uncle in her subconscious and does not feel to be a victim. She shields him from social backlash and fails to concentrate on her anger at her uncle. Her sexual intercourse with him is an approval of his love for her, which gives her the affirmation that she exists. Mala says, with heartrending simplicity, "I see this man everywhere, I can never be free of him" (CP-II, 54). Even the worse thing is that she could not find solace in the lap of her mother, who continuously negates her sufferings by forbidding her to make imaginative stories like this, even if she knows inwardly that she is true.

SHANTA. Mala, my daughter. What all have you been thinking all these years? You have always been so bold and frank. But sometimes, you tell stories.

MALA. That is not a story. I made up and you know it. (CP-II, 26)

The reason why the mother apparently negates the abuse and the subsequent trauma is analyzed by Dr. Kaur:

Stigma, secrecy and shame make the problem appear as an exception rather than a rule. Society can cope with stranger forms of danger but not with intra-familial threat as it challenges the very foundation of trust, faith and familial bonds. It is danger ever looming in some corner of our so-called secure homes. (Kaur, 5)

Therefore, here again in this play, like Tara in the play discussed earlier, the protagonist Mala feels a keen sense of betrayal by her mother as she always remains silent and avoids any conversation with Mala; she also advises Mala to do the same to preserve the conventional traditional societal beliefs and family norms. Dattani throws light on such situations in real life in an interview given to Utpal K. Banerjee:

This was commissioned by a Delhi-based NGO, RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest), who deals with survivors of childhood sexual abuse. After asking me whether I would be interested, they initiated me to Delhi to meet some of the victims under counseling. Seven women (covering both young and middle aged) agreed to speak to me. What struck me was the scar of the abuse and the trauma that stays with you even into your adult life. Some women had benefited from counseling and found healthy relations in life, including marriage. I also met a man whose girl friend was the survivor of such and abuse. To deal with the issue, it needed a lot of sensitivity in the way of adult-to-adult relationship. In some cases, there was a sense

of betrayal if it involved the father and there was a transferred resentment against the mother who perhaps could have intervened, but didn't. Often it was a helpless mother who had just no power in society, to speak against the father as the perpetrator. (Banerjee, 164-165)

If a little girl is rejected by her mother, she immediately suffers a vital loss of security necessary for her development. In order to do so successfully, what the little girl needs primarily is the unquestioned devotion and love of her mother, to which Mala is denied in the whole play. The mother remains a mute witness to the subsequent history of abuse that continues over the years and voices no protest. Mala confesses:

The only person who can, who could have prevented all this is my mother. Sometimes I wish she would just tell me to stop. She could have prevented a lot from happening.... Here are all the names of people whom I have been with. And the outline... well I just wanted a line that would put them all altogether. But if you ask me, whose face I think it is – it must be my mother's. (CP-II, 18)

As a result of CSA, there is a brittle relationship between the mother and daughter, a relationship which is based on betrayal instead of trust. Child sexual abuse causes a range of problems, but it is the complexity of the family through silence and a lack of protest that is the ultimate betrayal for the abused. In the words of Dattani:

Though sexual abuse is at the core of the play, the mother-daughter relationship is equally important. The main protagonist, who has suffered at the hands of her uncle, feels a deep sense of betrayal that her mother did not stop the abuse and failed in her role as protector. We see the journey of the protagonist from her mid-20's to her early 30's, the betrayal, as she sees it, is as painful as

the abuse. Though the play draws from real life, the focus is on the inner world.

(Subramanyam, 133)

Dattani takes head on the problem of portraying the twin process of victimization: Mala, who uses sex for acceptance within her social circle and her mother, who is branded as a 'frozen women'. Mala's verbal duel with her mother is an optimistic benchmark of her independent attitude. Her relationship with her mother is like a roller-coaster ride. The characterization of Mala has a fall and rise. In the very beginning of the play, she hates her mother for not saving her from the victimization of child abuse:

MALA. It is true. It did happen, but you never believed me.

SHANTA. (turning away). I don't know what you are talking about. I will prepare alu paratha for you tomorrow; you always like that for breakfast

MALA. This is how you always pacified me and that is how I know you believed me deep down. Oh yes, you would remember that I always like alu paratha because that's what I got whenever I come to you, hurt and crying. Instead of listening to what I had to say, you stuffed me with food. I couldn't speak because I was being fed all the time, and you know what? I began to like them. I thought that was the cure for my pain. That if I ate till I was stuffed, the pain would go away. Every time I came to you mummy, you were ready with something to feed me. You knew. Otherwise you wouldn't have been so prepared. You knew all along what was happening to me, and I won't ever let you forget that! (CP-II, 24)

The trauma of the childhood abuse dominates her adult relationships, and it makes Mala go from one relationship to another, first seeking attention and then hating it and no relationship lasts, beyond thirty days. Her sordid past and misplaced sense of guilt leaves her with a very-low or total lack of self worth. Mala struggles

with her twisted desire for attention and her dependency on men to give her a sense of worth, “ If he had looked me, I would have felt-that I truly live”(CP-II,31) As Mahesh Dattani puts it:

People who are abused when young go through a range of emotions starting from betrayal, anger to guilt to feeling that their body is not their own and that's it's a tool to attract attention. The story is told in retrospect through the eyes of the survivor. (Santhanam, maheshdattani.com)

The play merges the past and the present seamlessly, depicts scenes of abuse and she recalls from her childhood and then focusing on the present with a determined boyfriend, Deepak who refuses to accept that their relationship is over. Deepak continually proposes to Mala to marry him, and after getting an instance that Mala is suffering some psychological problem, tries to give her a counselor to make sense out of that. He loves Mala, but she refuses to marry Deepak as she is unable to understand his true love, because of her demands are only physical needs. Thus, she is constantly lying about her past and her short-lived affairs sets Dattani on the path of unraveling a fascinatingly complex but painful story of psychological manipulations, forced cover-ups and multiple falsehoods born out of one's need for subsistence, security and one's own worth.

MALA. I cannot stop them! I attract them.

DEEPAK. This is all in your mind.

MALA. You don't understand! I am doing something that attracts them to me.

DEEPAK. No. No you don't.

MALA. It is true. If I were to let that man in to my house. I will allow him to do anything.

.....

MALA. You don't understand. You just don't understand.

.....

DEEPAK. Hold my hand. Forget everything and just touch me.

MALA. I-I can't. I don't want to. I can't! (CP-II, 41-42)

The conversation clearly states Deepak's concern for Mala and Mala's continuous rejection of any relationship with him more than physical. Deepak's love and care for Mala and a strong will to remove all psychological problems is clear in these lines:

DEEPAK'S VOICE. I really wish she would tell me what is on her mind. She doesn't trust me, and I find that very tiring. I am exhausted. I am ready to throw in the towel. If I tell her it's off she would simply look at me. She may not say a word but her eyes would tell me what she is thinking 'See. I told you it won't work. You are wasting your time with me. Go away and leave me alone.' But she doesn't want to be left alone. She seeks company. Desperately enough to offer sex in return. Does she really feel anything? I think she wants something else. I don't know what, she doesn't know what...it doesn't take our relationship anywhere thoughI don't even exist for her. I-I am tired.... (CP- II, 45)

He tries to sort out things and by revealing the secrets about Mala's psychological problems by playing a trick and calling Mala, her uncle and her mother to a restaurant and getting their reactions meanwhile different kinds of conversations, specially her Uncle's as Deepak is doubting on him for the Mala's tragic plight.

But Mala could not get over of her problems in spite of the unconditional love of Deepak, just because she is more hurt by her mother's silence, who simply refuses to acknowledge the fact that her daughter has been abused; even Shanta blames Mala

of enjoying illicit sex and goes on to describe the specific details that must have given her pleasure. This is really strange of a mother accusing her daughter like this, when Mala surrenders after a lots of efforts of realizing her mother about her pain and says ‘I just have to learn to live with the pain’, Shanta says:

I remember, much as I was trying to forget, what I saw. Not when you were seven but when you were thirteen (Gently). Please don’t misunderstand me, Mala. I remember, seeing you with my brother during the summer holidays. You were pushing yourself on him in the bedroom.

.....

You were forcing him to say things to you.

.....

To do things to you.

.....

I prayed for you Mala... To our god, so He could send his Sudarshan Chakra to defend you, to defend us from the demon inside you, not outside you. But you would’t let me. You don’t let me.

.....

Why should you stop him? You were enjoying it.

.....

You were an average child but you had my brother and your cousin dancing around you. That is what you wanted. (CP-II, 27 – 28)

As the mother never understands, Mala’s complains never ends:

Where were you during those fifteen minutes when he was destroying my soul? ... that’s how long or how little it took for you to send me to hell for the rest of my life!

.....

You were never for me; because you were just too busy praying.

(CP-II, 53)

And the mother's continual addressing her to be fed and shut up and forget everything. She says, "I forget, I forget every thing be like me", (CP-II, 29).

Although one wonders, at times, whether a mother values the orthodox conventional values more for the honour of the family than for her own daughter and teaches the same to her to follow as she has followed is really very strange. In bringing out the entire range of issues involved, Dattani does it without being sensational or cross. The play reaches to its high point when the truth behind this indifferent behaviour of Shanta towards her daughter is revealed that she too has been a victim of incest for over ten years in her childhood, and by the same man. Whereas, Mala at least knows how to protest, Shanta was so traumatized that she even did not know to complain. She tries to forget the reality of her life through praying and submitting herself to Lord Krishna. She even could not continue a healthy relationship with her husband because of her haunting childhood conditioning, which in turn influences her adult relationships like that of her daughter. Though, she outwardly gets angry with Mala or rather most of the times remains silent inwardly, she gets frustrated by the very thought of the destructive condition of her own child. In the end, in sheer disgust, she jabs a piece of glass into her mouth trying to cut her tongue. With this shocking scene, the tragedy of the two generations is complete. Indifference, withdrawal of attention or rejection can also seriously jeopardize a child's emotional development, and can lead to physical, educational or emotional neglect. Dr. Germaine Greer analyses it and says:

The silence that surrounds issues of anger, pain, guilt, shame and even love and joy can become an ‘everyday silence’ that inevitably leads to disempowerment, disillusionment and distress. – Sally Berry, Clinical Director, Women’s Therapy Centre. (Greer, 171)

If Shanta had not remained silent, Mala and she herself could have overcome their tragic lives. As Dattani asserts:

It is the silence and the betrayal of the family that affects me the most. Like in this case, the mother knew that her daughter was being sexually abused by her uncle, but still chose to keep quiet. It’s this silence that makes the abused feel betrayed. (Santhanam, maheshdattani.com)

The gravity of Mala’s fear of speaking and low self-worth in manmade world is clear by her first confession to the counselor in September 2001, when she thought herself fully responsible for her tragedy.

MALA. I-I don’t know how to begin...today is the 30th of September...2001, and my name isI don’t think I want to say my nameI am sorry. I hope that is okay with you.... I am unsure about this... And a lot of other things. But this...this is the first time you see that I ...(After a long pause, where we do hear her breathing) I know it is all my fault really... it must be. I must have asked for it... somehow I just seem to be made for it. Maybe I was born that way, maybe... this is what I am meant for. It’s not anybody’s fault, except my own. Sometimes I wish that my brother... (it gets to be difficult for her.) I am sorry but... I can only tell you more if you turn this thing off. (CP-II, 9)

Is this because in India, women lead a gender-circumscribed, marriage-existence or do we have an absence of support systems such as counselors, legal activists, sex education or public campaigns for awareness? When the opportunities

within the family will ends exploiting the ignorance and trust of children? Will social intervention occur before more children of both genders are sacrificed at the altar of family honour? All these questions arise in the mind of the reader while reading all these plays of Dattani; but they always remain unanswered even after lots of efforts by social activist and reformers in the society. The world is changing and developing at different levels but the blind adherence to tradition is shocking even in the educated class. This is what Dan tells in the play *Tara*:

Nothing changes ...except the date. (CP1, 324)

The end of the play *Thirty Days in September* enlightens all characters through the revelations of hidden truths and realization of inner selves. The death of the abuser man liberates Mala and Shanta from their oppressor and gives new lives to their cut off tongues. It takes the victim Mala years of anguish to digest the fact that the trust bonds with her abuser have long been crushed. The object of men's desire: this is the fate that marks Mala's lives even before she become aware of the world. As Emilce Dio Bleichmar points out:

A girl enters into the Oedipus devalued for her gender, and step by step, through the maternal and paternal phantoms, she will receive the conflicting mandates concerning her sexuality and her possible fates as a woman. She must be formed and delivered as an object of desire and must, for her achievement, develop with greater or less sophistication the arts of grace and seduction. The body, the beauty, the perfection of what is offered to the eye cannot be avoided and will thus be incorporated into the present forms which awaken admiration and desire for a man. (Bleichmar, 109)

But she at last fights against being considered just as a 'body-to-have-sex-with' and vindicates herself human being, instead of being considered merely as a

people who is valuable because of her body. She rebelles against what is imposed on women as the body way of being: to assume only the role of being desired, but never that of desiring. This point is precisely the form of protest that is expressed in being capable of assuming ourselves 'as [subjects] of desire and placing in [our] phantom a man as the object which causes it'. (Bleichmar, 110)

As the realization dawns, she admits to her sickness and is willing to be treated for it. For the first time in life, she manages to focus her anger where it belongs – on her uncle who conveniently forced her and her mother's life into darkness. Mala's confession to the counselor at February 2004, after two and half year of her first confession at September 2001, is wrapped in an indescribable, fragile strength. Whereas, in 2001, she thought herself responsible for the misdeeds happened to her, she is now in 2004, she makes a clean breast that it is not her own fault at all with full confidence:

MALA. Mala Khatri. February 2004...(Listening to the counselor) Why not?I donot hesitate to use my real name now. Let people know. There's nothing to hide. Not for me. After all, it is he who must hide. He should change his name, not me. It is he who must avoid being recognized. In people's homes, at parties, hopefully even on the streets. He should look the other way when someone spots him anywhere on this planet. And I can make that happen. I have the power to do that now. If I use my real name...(Sighing, thinking about it almost as if it were a pleasant memory.) I wish he were here now, so I could see his face when I tell him I have nothing to hide. Because I know it was not my fault....Now. I know now. (CP-II, 8)

Therefore, her self-destructive flight comes to an end when her latest lover Deepak, who refuses to end their relationship after 30 days. He forces Mala to seek

help and confront her past in the form of her uncle and she succeeds in deconstructing her tragic past, not only of her alone, but of her mother's too. Even Shanta is forced to shed her 'mute' role and finally vocalize her own story of self-abuse and guilt, which has driven her to seek solace in silence. As Dattani put it herself in an interview to Lakshmi Subramanyam:

In this play wishes to show that the impact of child sexual abuse is long term but not permanent. This is a play about healing and is positive in its ending. (Subramanyam, 193)

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