

## Gay Identities in Dattani's On a Muggy Nights in Mumbai

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**Abstract:** Heterosexuality is considered as a norm for men and women in patriarchal set-up of the society. At the same time same-sex-love is discarded by thinking it as not natural and authentic as heterosexual love. It is not the fault of the person who can born as a man or woman but later proved as homosexual. It is also wrong to consider homosexuality is not our culture. It happens rarely but it can become substitute to heterosexual love.

**Key words:** *Homosexuality, eterosexuality, gay, lesbian, same-sex-love etc.*

### Introduction:

The establishment of modern Indian theatre is in the decade of 1950's and 1960's. This theatre was dominated by four well-known playwrights Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar and Girish Karnad for a long time. Mahesh Dattani appeared on the horizons of Indian English drama in 1980's deals with themes related to the contemporary society. In his plays he raised issues related to identity, communal riots, religion, sexuality and gender. He treats them in such a ways that they are not plays of entertainment but brood on these issues.

In Indian culture, gay relationship is

taboo. Very few writers have depicts gay culture as a theme for writing and no one has shown courage to present it on the Indian theatre except Mahesh Dattani. In "On a Muggy Night in Mumbai" he has created a world of gay which is different from the rest of the people and yearns for to consider them as a part of society. Thus, Mahesh Dattani writes on those issues which are invisible and remained on the fringes of the Indian drama. These issues are put forward at least to show their existence. Dattani speaks,

...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,[that] doesn't happen here. You can't talk about a middle-class housewife fantasizing about having sex with a cook or actually having a sex life – that isn't Indian either – that's confrontational even if it is Indian.

[Mee, 1997:24-25]

Indian society is very ancient and it has its stereotypical norms for the behavior of men and women. Among these norms, the marriage between heterosexual man and woman is the only authentic and accepted form of marriage. The same sex marriage is unaccepted and looked down. But Dattani, here, yarns for the marriage between same sex lovers and consider it as natural and normal as heterosexual. It is a different world of gay and lesbians created by Dattani where everyone is looking for the partner of same

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sex. It suggest through the following dialogue.

Deepali: If we were a woman, we would be in love

Kamlesh: If we were a man, we would be in love

Deepali: If we were heterosexual, we would be married. (65)

Dattani observes that those who are indulged in homosexuality often hate themselves and live in shameful feelings secretly. If their passion for same-sex love could not satisfy or difficulty to bear contempt of society, they frustrate and incline towards suicide. They face disgust of their family. They are less important human beings and their pain is ignorant by society, government and social activists. But Mahesh Dattani looks their issues by social-humanistic point of view and realizing their existential issue as contemporary social importance. He looks towards homosexuality as substitute to heterosexuality. He shows that it is the time to give permission to their marriage and right to live life as a normal human beings.

The beginning of the play is shocking and unexpected to the Indian society. The play starts with the stage direction where the dim light becomes bright and the man who dressed up is a security guard and another man who is smoking cigarette watching him with great enjoyment. It is obvious that they have enjoyed sex. So, the theme selected for the play is not conventional and suitable to the traditional minded people whose patriarchal impact teaches that it is not Indian. Thus, the beginning of the play is shocking to all. John McRae in a note on the play says on the theme of the play,

And the themes of *On a Muggy Night* 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 behavior and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates. (45)

Cittaranjan Mishra in his article 'Gay Themes in Dattani's Plays' says,

Unacceptable to the ideas of homogeneous cultural identity, the gays inhabit a world of their own subject to exclusion and isolation. Dattani tracks a group of characters tobring out their conflicts and repressions against the backdrop of the society that denies them their freedom. (53-54 Chittaranjan Mishra )

Along with the theme of homosexuality this play focuses on the values of family life and friendship. Asha K. Chaudhari comments on the sub themes of the play,

Despite its offbeat subject – gay love – the play manages to convincingly show its moorings in family relationships within its choosing milieu. It is a celebration of gay life, but it also deals with the middle class virtues of family values and friendship among its themes. (42 Asha k. Chaudhari)

The setting of the play is three leveled, the first is the interior of Kamlesh's flat, the second one is a non-realistic set comprising to expresses inner thoughts and the third one is the Kamlesh's bedroom which is realistic but hidden behind the gauze wall that creates some mystic and secret background suits to the theme of the play. This play is a gay world of Kamlesh, a well-known fashion designer, living in a flat in Mumbai. He was in love with Prakash when he was in Bangalore. Now he comes to Mumbai to forget him because he is a reluctant gay and sincerely tries to become straight. Another reason is that Kiran, Kamlesh's sister, after the divorce with the first husband is in love with Prakash/Ed. She knows to him as Ed and both have decides to marry. Kamlesh could not like that his sister

can suffer this time though she decides to marry Ed who is homosexual partner to him. He says, "I want her to be... content. Like Bunny's wife." (85) However, Kamlesh is passionately in love with Prakash and it is very difficult to forget him. He tries to forget Prakash by developing relationship with Sharad but he could not become successful in his attempt to forget Prakash. Sharad helps Kamlesh and ready to do anything for him to forget Prakash. But kamlesh fails to forget him. Sharad expresses his predicament and cries in disappointment.

I wasted a year of my life being a housewife for you and all I get is a kick in the ass! You beast! (56)

Kamlesh also feels regret for his behavior to him. He says,

Look, I am sorry. I know I hurt you. (57)

Sharad replies,

The way Prakash hurt you. (57)

Kamlesh has called his gay company to help him to get rid of from the obsession of Prakash. He is sure that Prakash will not love him because he is trying to become heterosexual. He says to his friends, "I have lost him forever! All because of the crap that has been filled in him that he has to love a woman." (85)

The play is a gathering for the same-sex lovers. Their view of looking towards homosexual relationship is different. John McRae in a note on the play says,

Of the characters, Sharad and Deepali are comfortable with their sexuality, and have different ways of being gay. Sharad is camp, flaunting; Deepali more restrained, perhaps more stable. Kamlesh is anguished, and Ed the most obvious victim of his own securities. Bunny the TV actor, is a rather more traditional Indian gay man- married (he would say happily) while publically denying his own nature, and Ranjit has taken an easy way out by moving to Europe where he can 'be himself' more openly. (45)

Kamlesh is confirmed gay and needs another partner to fill the vacuum created by Prakash. He tries to love Sharad. But Sharad is not capable to take the place of Prakash. Kamlesh uses guard to fulfill him sexually. It is not liked by Deepali and Sharad. She doesn't approve this type of promiscuity for she promotes that sex can have only with the person with whom the person loves.

Dattani compares the condition of gay in England is better than India. Ranjit migrates to England to get rid off from the contempt of Indians towards gay. He finds English lover and lives happily with him since twelve years. He expresses his satisfaction to others, "My English lover and I have been together for twelve years now. You lot will never be able to find a lover in this wretched country!" (71) It shows that gay have difficulty to find partner in India because most of the gays hide their identity from society and from other gay people. Ranjit has no courage to face humiliation of Indian people and difficulty to get partner, he migrates to England.

Bunny Sing is a famous T.V. star meets to his audiences on the T.V. serial on every Thursday at 9 p.m. His image as a loving husband and sincere father among his fan is not a real one. In reality he is a gay but he hides this identity by marrying a woman to prove himself straight. He does not face any problem in projecting public and private image. He thinks that though he is a gay, he satisfies his wife. He says, "You know I would be lying if I could. But I give her so much more. More than any heterosexual man. I do look after her well. She is content." (84) He is an actor, so he manages himself to get satisfaction in public and private life. But in reality, he conceals his identity on both the levels. When Kamlesh finds difficulty to live as homosexual and face loneliness, he advises Kamlesh to find a suitable woman and get married. His advice to him, "You are looking in the wrong places to forget your Prakash.

Get married.” (70) He knows that to be straight is the only safe way to hide a gay identity and humiliation of people. But the truth pervades him and throws mask to reveal his real face.

All the characters in the play are gay except Kiran. She knows her brother’s gay nature and expects a good companion to him. She yawns that the society should give permission to the same sex marriages. She knows that Sharad loves to her brother but her brother is interested in another man Prakash. When Kamlesh declares that he loves to Sharad, she says to him,

He loves you, Sharad. What more do you want? You will never be happier than this. You will end up being lonelier if you tried to be anything else other than who you are. And think of the poor woman you may end up marrying just as a cover- up for your shame. I know how it feels to be unloved. (102)

All the homosexuals love to each other but society never permits them to live together by marring among themselves. But society allows marriages only to heterosexual unions. It is the pain of Kamlesh and his friends that they cannot live together as married couple.

Kasmlesh loves to Prakash very passionately but Prakash is hypocritical in nature. He gives up his relation with Kamlesh to become straight. Now he desires to marry Kiran to hide his true identity. He is malignant in his motive because he intends to continue his relationship with Kamlesh after the marriage with Kiran. The following dialogue shows it,

Ed: My marriage with Kiran is a start.

Kamlesh: What do you mean?

Ed: Once we are married, I could see you more often without causing any... suspicion. (104)

Thus, the gay world which is created by Dattani in ‘On a Muggy Night in Mumbai’ is a world where gays are hiding their identity

in public, but in private they want that love. The society never accepts homosexual relationship because there is a strong impact of only heterosexuality on them. The patriarchal society in which we live permits only heterosexual love. Homosexuals are minor in number but it is not true that their love is not authentic. Homosexual love is as natural as heterosexual love because there is hate, passion and love triangle like heterosexuals. The only fault is that they cannot take part in the procreation process and could not bear themselves children. But their longing for love is same as heterosexuals. They can share their passions and love for each other and can become companion and give support to each other like heterosexuals. Dattani in his plays never gives any message, but yawns to treat their love as natural as heterosexuals and allow them to live together. So, it is the predicament of the gay that they live lonely life. Some are try to become bi-sexual or heterosexual but after it they lose support of gay movements. Such a pathetic world of gay is created by Dattani only to support them as human beings and treat sympathetically.

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