Chapter-III

Alternate Sexuality

"On one level or another we are all Others to some group"

Sander L. Gilman

The opening line of Gilman from his well known work *Jewish Self-hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* is a commentary on Jewish self identity. He further observes that the model can be extended to sexuality, gender, class and age. In every society there are few individuals who do not fit into the culturally dominant categories of sex/gender. Such individuals are either born intersexed or exhibit behaviour or desires deemed appropriate for the opposite sex/gender. Most of the time such people outwardly conform to the normative gender roles while for a few the conflict is so severe that they cannot deal with social normativity, resulting in a disarray of their lives. Contemporary academic research on sexuality and gender has targeted issues such as gender oppression, objectification, and commodification. However the creation and recognition of alternative, non normative sexuality and gender identification has been largely overlooked by the academic community. To put it in the words of Mark Wigley, an architectural theorist, “If all space is closeted for queer people, then perhaps academics is among the most closeted of all” (388). In the Introduction of Sally Munt’s *New Lesbian Criticism*, Louise Johnson has gone to the extent of saying that this ignorance is a result of a great risk to one’s own identity while teaching or doing research:

The pressure of being out and teaching lesbian material includes dealing with students and staff to whom you always seem to be
representing sexual difference in its entirety; who collapse personal identity with theoretical integrity in a totalising motion which can only work against you, whether you are patronised, idealised or stigmatised (Munt xiv).

This present chapter is positioned at a point of intersection of queer, urban theories, as well as sexuality studies. Urban studies have long reflected a gender bias in both the construction of theory and the avoidance of research. Urban sociologists and historians have traditionally viewed cities as confluence of strangers, treating anonymity as a defining attribute of urbanity. Urban anonymity has played a role in the renaissance among lesbian and gay scholars and artists who have focused on its heightened relevance to people whose group affiliations render them strange in non urban settings.

Social Invisibility and Desire for Legitimation

According to Erwin J. Haeberle, anonymity appears as a largely defensive strategy, that is historically used by gays and lesbians who felt they had to hide their group identity (7). Interestingly this urban strategy may actually be a carryover from an experience in rural or other “non-metropolitan areas where gays and lesbians are forced to rely much more on invisibility and anonymity” to hide prohibited behaviour and association (Kramer 201). In big cities queer populations particularly engage in community formation strategies that are both self conscious and highly attentive because space occupied and employed is an indicator of the extent to which the quest for anonymity has been replaced by the desire for legitimation and acceptance of group identity.
Urbanisation is linked to migration, a subject on which, Bonnie Menes Kahn states that people “have chosen city life to escape the curse of tradition and the clutches of small town acquaintances. They have sought the relief of anonymity. Society escape makes men free” (Kahn 15). This also works for the queer population as they also want to get away with the “hetero-normative” setup of society. At the same time Kahn also makes the less conventional but equally convincing claim that cities, “consist of social strangers whose object is the relief of anonymity—or new attachments” (Kahn 13). This duality of the city provides relief in anonymity and relief from it by making new acquaintances of the similar outlook.

Academia has shied away from examining such situations deeply. Gay historian John D’Emilio sounds pessimistic about the future of queer studies when she writes: “To contemplate the subject at hand, to think—really to think—about gay history and gay historians in relation to the profession is to tap an interior wall of pessimism, discouragement, despair, and exhaustion that shocks as well as frightens me” (Bell 22). Similarly Louise Johnson’s comment on feminist geography’s future and the space shared by university people towards sexual outsiders sounds discouraging, “I have agonised for years about the consequence — professional and otherwise — of coming out in print, declaring my own sexuality and building a feminist geography upon my lesbianism. And basically I’ve seen the risks as too great, the stakes as too high in a homophobic culture and discipline” (Bell 22).

In all major Indian cities except for a few English speaking elites most of the people with same sex orientation neither identify themselves not admit their sexual preference, even to themselves. This does not mean that there are hardly any homosexuals in India but the fear of being outcast results in non acknowledgement of such orientation by both male and female members of society.
While sex is an act of enjoyment and procreation within marriage; sex between men, is not regarded as sex but irresponsible masti. Almost all men who have sex with other men will get married even if many continue to have sex with men after marriage. The sexuality or rather the masculinity of a man is not challenged by society as long as he is not exclusively homosexual and who has declared a preference for a male sexual partner. In all the cases society accepts the man’s personal orientation if he continues to follow hetero-normative practices.

A well known gay activist Ashok Row Kavi narrated an incident of his life when even after he acknowledged that he liked to cohabit with men, his aunt snapped at him “I don’t care whether you fuck crocodiles or elephants, Why can’t you marry?” (Kakar 101). A recent study (2007) on gays seems up their predicament in these words, “Even effeminate men who have a strong desire for receiving penetrative sex are likely to consider their role as husbands and fathers to be more important in their self-identification than their homosexual behaviour” (Kakar 101).

This chapter examines the space given to queer population in the city as they are parallelly marginalised by both society and cultural discourse. This double marginalisation results in a peripheral positioning of the queer space. Even the educated policy makers are in a fluid state of mind. One may recall that the decision of the Delhi High Court on July 2, 2009 was a milestone for the queer population when in the case Naz Foundation vs. Government of NCT, the Delhi High Court decriminalized homosexual intercourse between consenting adults, throughout India, where Section 377 of Indian Penal Code was adjudged to violate the fundamental right to life and liberty and the right to equality by the constitution of India. Yet, on December 12, 2013 the Supreme Court of India overturned the decision of Delhi High
Court. This decision clearly indicates a retrograde step in the history of queer freedom in India.

Before the 2009 decision LGBT supporters and activists’ organised a pride parade in Chennai. Many people swarmed to the street of the city demanding a reconsideration of Section 377 as a matter of human rights. What was significant during this parade was that the protesters were wearing masks. All the masks were beautifully hand carved and hand painted with bright pink feathers. Both the colour pink and the feather are traditionally associated with femininity. Paradoxically the mask became their new identity and a mark of unwillingness to come out in public. This mask seemed antithetical to the name of the queer activism ‘Pride Parade’.

Public perception towards queer action has still not changed. The so called ‘Indian sensibilities’ make the subject more difficult to reclaim the rights of the queer people. This duality or paradoxical politics on queer India makes the works of Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan worth considering while discussing the conscious use of city space.

Alternate Sexuality Across Ages

While alternate sexuality has not been explicitly mentioned in the religious texts central to Hinduism, the largest religion in India, Hinduism has taken various positions, ranging from positive to neutral to antagonistic. Rigveda, a sacred text of Hinduism says Vikruti Evam Prakriti (what seems un-natural is natural), which some scholars believe recognises the constancy of homosexual/transsexual dimensions of human life, like all forms of universal diversities. Further the carvings in the famous temples of Khajuraho, Konark, Puri suggest the acceptance of homosexuality. This concept has been a part of our culture since the inception of social organisation, still it
is treated with shame, looked down upon and considered as an alien concept. The
*Markandeya Purana* also carries the story of “Avikshita”, the song of a king who
refused to marry because he believed he was a woman (Pattanaik 165).

The *Arthasastra*, an ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, mentions a wide
variety of non vaginal sexual practices which whether performed with a man or
woman, were sought to be punished with the lowest grade of fine. While homosexual
intercourse was not sanctioned, it was treated as a minor offence, and several kinds of
heterosexual intercourse were punished more severely. The *Manusmriti*, which lists
the oldest codes of conduct, does include mention of homosexual practices, but only
as something to be regulated. The text contains an approximation of a code penalizing
same sex desire which gives authority to punish a person for homosexual activity.
However Manu’s mandate was more patriarchal than homophobic. Queer activist
Akshay Khanna comments on this phenomenon:

> My sense is that ‘homophobia’ doesn’t begin to describe the
> experience of being queer in India. For a collective attitude to be called
> ‘homophobia’ there needs to be a collective recognition of the
> ‘homosexual’— a person who could be categorized as a type, othered
> and hated/fearred. My understanding is that the ‘homosexual’ is not a
category that may be considered to be collectively recognized, outside
of certain middle- to upper-middle-class urban context (Khanna 163).

Similarly the reference of alternate sexuality is also there in the *Mahabharata*.
As a result of a curse Arjun was compelled to take a “Vow of eunuchism,” and to live
as the third sex for a year. “O lord of the earth, I will declare myself as one of the
“neuter” sex. O Monarch, it is indeed difficult to hide the marks of the bowstring on
my arms. I will, however, cover both my cicatrized arms with bangles. Wearing brilliant rings on my ears and conch-bangles on my wrists and causing a braid to hang down from my head, I shall, O king, appear as one of the third sex, Brihannala by name" (Bolich 293).

Another important character, Shikhandi, is born female, but raised as a boy. Shikhandi’s father, King Drupada had begged the God Mahadeva to give him a son, to which Mahadeva replied that he will have a child who will be a female and male. When Shikhandi comes of age and marries, Shikhandi’s wife soon came to know that he was a woman like herself and spurns him. Fleeing from the unnamed wife’s enraged father, Shikhandi encounters a male Yaksha (nature spirit) in the forest, and they agree to swap each other’s sex identity. Now in a male body, Shikandi proves to his father-in-law that he is truly male, after the latter sends a number of young women of great beauty to Shikhandi to test him. They report back that he is a powerful person of the masculine sex and Shikhandi becomes a skilled and famous warrior, playing a pivotal role in the war.

India is also the place of the Vātsyāyana’s *Kama Sutra*, which is known as the iconic text about intimate acts, which includes a complete chapter referring to homosexuality. This classic Indian text deals without ambiguity or hypocrisy with 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 gave rise to a highly developed expression of eroticism. Lesbian activity is described at the beginning of the chapter in harems where women live together in the absence of men.
Historians of homoerotics, Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai have rightly pointed out that same sex desire was not valorised or celebrated in pre-colonial India. However, the ancient Indian Text Kama Sutra acknowledged a third sex or people who by nature combined male and female attributes, “People of the third sex were described as homosexual, transgender and intersexed people, they were such by birth and consequently were allowed to live their lives according to their own nature...Even gay marriage...was acknowledged in the Kama Sutra many thousands of years ago” (Wilhelm, xxi).

In some versions of the Krittivasa Ramayana, the most popular Bengali text on the legends of Lord Ramachandra, there is an interesting narrative of two queens that conceived a child together. When the famous king of the Sun Dynasty, Maharaja Dilipa, died, the Demigods became concerned that he did not have a son to continue his line. Lord Shiva therefore appeared before the king’s two widowed queens and commanded them, “you two make love together and by my blessings you will bear a beautiful son.” The two wives, with great affection for each other, executed Shiva’s order until one of them conceived a child. Unfortunately, however, the child was born boneless, but by the blessings of the sage Astavakra, the child was restored to full health and continued the dynasty. Astavakra accordingly named the child “Bhagiratha” – he who was born from two vulvas. Bhagiratha later became a king and is credited with bringing the Ganges river down to earth through his austerities (Hazarika web).

Mythologist Devdutt Pattnaik summarises the place of alternate sexuality in Hindu literature as follows: “Though not part of the mainstream, its existence was acknowledged but not approved.” Other Indologists assert that homosexuality was not approved for Brahmans or the twice-born but accepted among other castes. In India
the acceptance to any such kind of orientation takes place in the framework of rebirth theory. When two policewomen in the state of Madhya Pradesh got married in the year 1987 it was a cause celebre in the Indian media, the explanation often heard was that one of them must have been a man in a previous birth and the couple were prematurely separated by a cruel fate. Lesbianism is invariably taken as an outcome of lack of sexual satisfaction in unmarried women, widows or women in unhappy sexless marriages. Even in Deepa Mehta’s film Fire, two women turn to each other for fulfilling their sexual desires as both of them were disenchanted with their marital partners.

Certain intellectuals like Vikram Seth and Amartya Sen have come forward to support Indian homosexuals. Vikram Seth has gone to the extent of saying that it is the most cruel act out of all the cruelties that man inflict on a fellow being. He says:

You shall love or make love with the person you love, not because of excessive youth or because of unwillingness, but because he she comes from a different religion, a different caste, the same village, the same gender. You may say love each other, that you are happy with each other, that you give each other solace and courage and delight, but your love disgusts me. It runs counter to custom, it is an offence in law, it is against the order of nature, it brings dishonour to our family blood, it will dilute our blood, it will bring about kali-yuga, will corrupt everyone around you, it is an abomination in the sight of the Lord. It must be forbidden (Seth India Today).

Amartya Sen in a separate letter of support had described the Section 377 as a violation of fundamental human rights and termed it as “monstrosity”. Many
intellectuals have asked for the repeal of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code according to which homosexual relationship is a punishable crime. It is true that Indian cities have not completely accepted the practice of alternate sexuality. Movements like ‘Rainbow’ where homosexuals were given chance to articulate the truth about their existence and their problems are limited only to metropolis only.

A report by SMS GupShup; a company that claims to be India’s biggest mobile social network shows a change in mindset of the Indian urban dwellers after the decriminalisation of homosexuality on July 2, 2009. By its SMS poll ‘Voice of India Poll, they claimed that almost one third of Indians living in Mumbai and Bangalore supported same sex partnerships. The figure of one third supporters would be almost unbelievable in rural India where honour killings because of heterosexual love in the same caste and sometimes even outside caste are still not acceptable.

All metropolises like Bombay, Bangalore and Delhi have vibrant gay communities of India. Multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, the centres of technology industry and trade, the location of the huge film industry, wealth, tolerance and freedom make these conclaves a hospitable environment for this self-assured community. Bombay in particular draws gays and lesbians from all over the country. Though alternate sexuality has begun to be accepted somewhat in all urban spaces, it is unobtrusively acceptable in Bombay.

In the 1990’s the themes of queer identity and relationships which opposed heterosexual patterns, met strong denunciation. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code sets the law which says: “Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature, with any man, woman or animal shall be punishable with imprisonment for life or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten
years and shall also be liable to fine” (IPC Section 377). This is not the only subjugation from which queer community is made to suffer. Ashwani Sukthankar has argued in *Facing the Mirror* that Sec 377 is applicable only to male homosexuality as it considers only penetrable sex as an offence so lesbianism does not come under its purview. Although this according to her is a “silencing technique” because in a way it is non-acceptance of the fact that something like lesbianism exists, on the other hand it makes gay men extremely susceptible to police atrocities and gay bashing.

In 2005, Prince Manvendra Singh Gohil, who hails from Rajpipla in Gujarat, publicly came out as gay. He was quickly anointed by the Indian and the world media as the first openly gay royal. He was disinherited as an immediate reaction from the royal family, though later, a reconciliation was made. He appeared on BBC Three’s *Undercover Princes* and the American talk show *The Oprah Winfrey Show* on October 24, 2007 where he claimed, “I thought after marriage I will be all right because I never knew and nobody told me that I was gay and [that] this is normal. Homosexuality is not a disease. I tremendously regret ruining her life. I feel guilty” (Oprah). On 29 June 2008, five Indian cities (Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata, Indore and Pondicherry) celebrated gay pride parades.

**On a Muggy Night in Mumbai: Issue of Invisibility**

Mahesh Dattani’s *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* attempts to deal with this important social issue of alternative sexuality which is seen as a major social change in the urban scenario. It is not that such issues never existed earlier but a kind of openness towards these issues is definitely an urban phenomenon. In this dramatic framework Dattani puts forth the socio psychological identity saboteurs even in the
urban setup of anonymity where gays are not only marginalised but seen as sabotaging civilized life.

There are ways in which one's identity can upset the conventional norms of the society. Mahesh Dattani in his play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* articulates this issue. In the Introduction of this play John McRae says, "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 expectation society creates" (*Collected Plays 45*).

These faults are not just in the characters – but in all who condone sexual hypocrisy, rather than allowing self-expression to individuals in a free society.

The play was first performed at Tata Theatre in Mumbai on 23rd November 1998 and was later adapted as a film *Mango Soufflé*. The script portrays the conflicts, anguish, insecurities, frustration, fear, dilemmas and mental agony of the homosexual people. John McRae writes in a note on the play:

> 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. (*Collected Plays 45*)

Mahesh Dattani tries to expose the constant struggle against the forces that are hostile to the survival of an individual. The social forces that contest the hidden terrain of human consciousness constitute intense conflict. Compulsive heterosexuality is an important tool of patriarchy in maintaining the hegemonic authority of the pseudo civilized society. The suppression of alternate sexuality and the suppression of homosexuals is a product of the same system whose rules oppress
women. Society gives to such inclination the negative connotations of pervert, abnormal, barbarous. Intolerance often creates such a void in the life of homosexuals that all ties of family and friendship disappear. The repressive state apparatus and ideological state apparatus view them as passive subjects who are non living entities. Mahesh Dattani delineates the pressure that is exerted upon the people with alternate sexuality who have to function under the acceptable norms of society. The play deals with the complexities of same sex relationship. At the release of the film, Mango Soufflé Dattani propounds:

Same-sex sexuality is an unspoken part of our life. So far the imagery has been detailed in literature or cinema. So a big deal is made out of films exploring it. I was disappointed when there was no adverse political reaction. I was hoping the fundamentalists would give us some free publicity. (Rathi web)

On a Muggy Night in Mumbai is about Kamlesh and his unsuccessful relationship with Ed. The relationship flounders due to societal pressures of heterosexuality which make Ed believe that he is wrong and should switch to the normal, heterosexual lifestyle. Kamlesh finds it nearly impossible to come to terms with the broken relationship. He comes in contact with Sharad who is a very lively, intelligent and confident person. Both Kamlesh and Sharad live together for some time. But, unable to forget Ed, Kamlesh dumps Sharad. Meanwhile, Ed starts seeing Kamlesh’s sister Kiran unaware of the fact that Kiran is Kamlesh’s sister. Their marriage is fixed and they plan to visit Kamlesh before the wedding. Kamlesh is, however, still unable to get over his relationship with Ed. He seeks the opinion of his queer friends who advise him to tell Kiran about his past affair with Ed. In one of the speeches of Kamlesh he presents the mental agony of being a gay:
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 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 years ago, Prakash left me because he was ashamed of our relationship. It would have worked between us, but he was ashamed of our relationship. It would have worked between us, but he was ashamed. I was very angry. I left my parents and my sister to come here...for the first time in my life, I wish I wasn’t a gay. (Collected Plays 68-69)

The themes of On a Muggy Night in Mumbai should touch the heart and soul of society. It is not simply the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal; it is also about how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to societal expectations.

Alternate Sexuality is not a new or urban phenomenon yet the anonymity of city life makes it expressive, in rural areas. The play On a Muggy Night in Mumbai revolves around the anti-hero Kamlesh. Dattani simply brings to the fore the question of sexual choices and how these choices are culturally constructed. As he says: “It is to do with my perceptions. I don’t mean to say that this is a definite view of life. But several of images that we carry around in our minds are politically generated images and we accept them to be true. However, I don’t think so and my characters are simply personifications of my perceptions”(Nair web).

Dattani tries to find out why the queer people seem to be hypocrites, escapists and introverts. Foucault propounded that the dominant discourse restricts the free development of queer subjectivity and makes such persons a minority, always
protecting and defending themselves against the incriminating discourse of the heterosexual majority.

**Poverty and Social Unacceptability**

The play takes Mumbai as its background. The city chosen by the playwright has its own importance as it suggests the kind of freedom with anonymity of people being the hallmark of such big cities. Such cities attract the queer population as the *social restrictions are quite limited in city space. Cities provide the kind of acceptance* and assistance to these people that they never found among their family, religious community, friends, or classmates. Dattani's main reason of bringing this issue out of closet is to create empathy towards this issue. Through this play Dattani presents the queer aspect of city dwellers ranging from those who are born with this tendency to those who try to hide it from the society and even to the ones who just pretend for the sake of earning some extra money.

The play deals largely with the issues of gay and lesbian rights through Sharad and Deepali. The main plot revolves around Edwin Prakash who was initially in love with Kamlesh as Prakash but due to societal fear leaves him and pretends to be a heterosexual. Now he is about to marry his beloved Kiran as Ed; who unfortunately happens to be Kamlesh's sister. Kamlesh tries to makeup with Sharad and sometimes even tries intimacy with a guard to satisfy his physical urge but he cannot get over his past affair with Prakash. Kiran is shown to have all compassion for the gay people and wishes they could marry for happiness as she knew that her brother is a homosexual. The irony of the story is that the young woman does not know that the man to whom she was getting married was a homosexual and ex-lover of her brother. The revelation
in the end comes as a shock to her. The story throws light on the growing publicity of homosexuality and its non-acceptance by Indian society.

The stage directions in the opening scene of the play aptly acquaint the viewers and the readers about the major theme of this play:

_There are two men in the bedroom...Kamlesh is in his dressing gown, smoking a cigarette, watching the other man dress in a khaki uniform. It is apparent that this man is a security guard. After he is fully dressed, he turns and looks at Kamlesh who is still blowing cigarette smoke and watching with great enjoyment. Kamlesh gets up, walks to where his trousers are on the floor, takes out his wallet and offers a few hundred rupees to the guard. The guard pockets the money, makes a salaam to Kamlesh and steps out of the bedroom into the living room._ (Collected Plays 49)

The stage directions clearly suggest that the two men had sex in the bedroom. But in the following sentence the level of acceptability is more clearly demonstrated by the playwright:

KAMLESH. Tum, Kya... yeh sab...paise ke liye karte ho?

GUARD. (Shakes his head) (Realizes the implication of what he said. Hastily.) Hahn! Hahn, main paise ke liye hi to karta hoon sab kuch!

GUARD. (a little nervously). Ab main jaon?

KAMLESH. But we will have to pretend you do it only for the money!
GUARD Duty chalu hai saab. Secretary daantega mujhe.

KAMLESH. Go do your duty. You are just like him. He is no different from you...No. He was worse! (Collected Plays 51)

While Kamlesh has accepted his sexual orientation openly as a matter of choice the guard is not telling the truth as he does not accept the truth that he is not “straight”. It’s not a matter of chance or money that he is involved with Kamlesh. The truth is that it is because of his choice. Picking out guard as a partner for his physical satisfaction is because in such relationships the constant Other on the basis of gender is altered and becomes the same. This idea is discussed in Whistling in the Dark, “What is same/similar in non-transgressive sexuality is different here, for example, age and class. On the other hand, what is different in non-transgressive sexuality is same here, for example, gender” (Rao xvi).

Seeking Sustenance through Group Identity

The curtain rises with the get together of gay men who were called together by Kamlesh at his apartment which is similar to the concept of Louis Wirth’s ‘Ghetto’ a place of social exclusion where minorities live. This is a usual tendency of people with alternate sexuality that most of them prefer to meet in seclusion while discussing class differences and language barriers. Nihar, a gay, in an interview with Parmesh Sahani says, “People criticize Gay Bombay for being a segregated group of upper middle class people – the bourgeoisie ...but class does set in—you can’t avoid that. Birds of a feather flock together and that’s where they are comfortable... the kind of people that are members of Gay Bombay...they are English speaking upper middle class” (Sahani 252).
Kamlesh has invited some of his friends to his place. These friends include Sharad and Deepali who are portrayed as extremely comfortable with their sexual orientation. There is Bunny Singh, a famous TV actor who is an archetype of macho, heterosexual man, while he is happily married he clandestinely enjoys his gay relationships. There is Ranjit who thinks India as an unfit place for queer people, so he lives abroad. All these friends have suffered societal pressure and are comforted in each others' company. The play foregrounds the subjectivity of alternate sexuality in terms a metropolitan city. Alternate sexuality is relatively unacknowledged but it is very much a fact as is evident from the law.

Further, we find that the participants are engrossed in discussions on homosexuality and support each other. Most of the homosexual people feel companionable towards each other as they understand the social hostility. As mentioned in one of the websites on same sex attraction:

The personal conflict over same-sex attraction feelings creates a difficult internal struggle. After years of trying to find answers and little success at trying to change their feelings, some people become convinced that their same-sex attractions are inborn and unchangeable and they accept a gay identity which finally ends the internal struggle that has caused them so much frustration and pain. Accepting a gay identity has far-reaching implications because being “gay” includes not only personal feelings, but also describes a social and political identity. As they associate with other gay people, they find a great deal of acceptance and feel—perhaps for the first time in their life—that they fit in. Since they often feel that the world has let them down or they
feel rejected by the world, they turn to each other for support. There
they feel safe, comfortable, and at home. (Gay Identity web)

Kamlesh has invited his friends to share his grief of not forgetting Prakash.
Sharad arrives first. He loves Kamlesh but Kamlesh is unable to reciprocate his love
in the same way.

SHARAD. I knew it within a month of moving in with you...

KAMLESH. I wanted to love you, I tried for a whole year. (Collected
Plays 56)

Though Kamlesh has tried his best to adjust with Sharad and get himself
emotionally attached with him but was not able to love him as he uses to love
Prakash. Sharad knows this and cries out in pain “Oh! Spare me the lies! You could
never love anyone because you are still in love with Prakash! I wasted a year of my
life being a housewife for you and all I get is a kick in the ass! You beast!” (Collected
Plays 56).

Kamlesh accepts this before his friends by admitting the wrong he has
committed towards Sharad. He inflicts a pain that he himself experienced without
Prakash. Sharad believes that Kamlesh is not sincere about forgetting Prakash, that is
why he is unable to come out of the past. Kamlesh still has a photograph featuring
him and Prakash hidden behind a mirror. Sharad says: “I don’t think you will ever
succeed. He will crop up painfully in your life like Herpes” (Collected Plays 59).

In a way Sharad was right as Kamlesh’s love for Prakash is more like a
chronic disease that will surface paradoxically. Deepali who is a very good friend of
Kamlesh represents yet another form of alternate sexuality that is lesbianism. Deepali
s involved with Tina who never appears on stage. Deepali is shown as a contented person with confidence in her love relationship; that is why she disapproves to the relationship of Kamlesh with the guard.

Similarly another friend of Kamlesh, Ranjit Singh is also a gay and lives in England. He believes that in India people cannot commit themselves to the long term relationship when it comes to alternate sexuality as people are afraid to face the reality around them. The living example of this notion is Bunny Singh another close friend of Kamlesh who is a T V actor and epitomises the saying alternate sexuality results in alternate identity. His image as a social reformer due to his television career helps him wear a garb of an ideal Indian man but he is a coward.

Bunny Singh advises Kamlesh to “blend with the surroundings” so that no one recognises his real identity. Though identity is important for everybody but with alternate sexuality it becomes extremely important to position the self in society. Jeffrey Weeks describes identities as necessary fiction people need to create, especially in the gay world (Weeks 98).

The scene shifts from here to the airport lounge where Kiran, Kamlesh’s sister is waiting for her fiancé Ed. Her manners suggest that she is nervous. Ed comes and tries to comfort her by telling her to relax. Ed’s former name is Prakash. He had been Kamlesh partner but he was a reluctant gay and that’s why left Kamlesh and tries to be straight and even consults a psychiatrist for this. Due to this Kamlesh shifts from Bangalore to Mumbai and tries to forget Prakash. Kiran knows nothing about Ed’s past. Ed too, at this point of time looks committed to her. Basically the play revolves round the identity crises of Edwin Prakash Matthew alias Ed but crises is not only restricted to Ed. All the gays in the play face the same problem but each has a
different way of handling the situation. While Kamlesh is ready to admit his reality to
the world Bunny Singh tries to “camouflage” it. Ed too tries to ‘camouflage’ his real
identity in the same manner. He is under immense psychological pressure and is on
the verge of a nervous breakdown. On one hand he is in conflict with Kamlesh whom
he leaves because he was ashamed of his relationship with him and did not want to be
branded as a gay in the society. On the other hand he is in conflict with Kiran from
whom he hides his true identity but tries to use her to remain in touch with Kamlesh.
Sharad is the antithesis of Ed who is vocal about his gay identity. “Let the world
know that you exist. Honey if you flaunt it, you’ve got it “(Collected Plays 70). He
himself admits that “I am not bisexual. I am gay as a goose” (Collected Plays 100).
He teases Ed with his speech on ‘Macho Man Syndrome’ that Ed tries to feign

You see, being a heterosexual man—a real man as Ed put it—I get
everything. I get to be accepted-accepted by whom?......Well that
marriage lot down there for instance. I can have a wife, I can have
children who will all adore me simply because I am a hetero.......I beg
your pardon—a real man. Now why would I want to give it all up? So
what if I have to change a little? If I can be a real man I can be king.
Look at all the kings around you, look at all the male power they enjoy,
thrusting themselves on to the world, all that penis power! Power with
sex, power with muscle, power with size. Firing rockets, exploding
nuclear bombs, if you can do it five times I can do it six times and all
that stuff. (Thrusting his pelvis in an obscene macho fashion.) Power,
man! Power! (Collected Plays 101).

The plot moves further as Kamlesh tells them the reason for the get together.
Though nobody present there had ever seen Prakash, all of them were aware of the
fact that Kamlesh left Bangalore because he wanted to forget Prakash. Kamlesh tried his best first by getting involved with Sharad and later by consulting a psychiatrist, who advised Kamlesh to change himself.

KAMLESH. I knew I needed medication. I chose the psychiatrist out of the yellow pages. He pretended to understand. Until he began to tell me about aversion therapy. For a while, I believed him. Because the medication helped me cope with my depression better. 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 (*Collected Plays* 69).

The unannounced entry of the Kiran, Kamlesh’s sister upsets everyone. She herself feels as an intruder. Kiran is also planning to settle in Bombay after her marriage with Ed. She is astonished to see Bunny Singh in the company of her brother and asks him whether he too is gay, to which Bunny answers, “Oh no! I am not! I am not... like him. They are such intelligent people and good company. I am a very liberal minded person.” (*Collected Plays* 76)

Act II starts with a flashback when Ed and Prakash found each other in the park searching for a partner with similar inclination. The mutual understanding set the right cord for the further relationship:

*Ed is sitting on a park bench looking around. He spots someone walking by. His eyes follow him. The person walking by, whom we don’t see, turns around and walks past Ed again. Ed smiles at him, again following him with his eyes as he walks by. Now the person*
walks by again and this time Ed gestures to him to sit next to him. The person sits down next to Ed (Collected Plays 80).

From this the scene shifts to the present in Kamlesh's flat where all the friends persuade Kamlesh to reveal the reality of Ed / Prakash to Kiran, who has recovered from her sorrow only because of Ed’s Love. Kiran finds him a considerate husband and this truth about him would break her completely. Kamlesh is in a fix as Ed now says that he is a heterosexual. He further proves his point by saying:

KAMLESH. He goes to church every week now. They put him on to a psychiatrist. He believes his love for me was the work of the devil. Now the devil has left him.

SHARAD. Now the devil has put him on to your sister. I'll tell you what. Show her the photograph. Let her know who the devil is.

(Collected Plays 85)

Though as a brother Kamlesh is doing the right thing but at the same time he is not able to forget that the Ed/ Prakash is gay. To avoid this fixity Sharad asks Kamlesh to disclose the truth to Kiran. This results in a bitter fight between them and Kamlesh asks Sharad to leave his house. As the atmosphere becomes tense Sharad leaves and Kiran goes after him.

In Act III Ed is introduced to everyone. Kamlesh and Ed consciously try to avoid each other to such an extent that Kiran asks them: “Why are you two behaving as if you have never met before?” (Collected Plays 98). Sharad and Deepali want to tell the truth about Ed/Prakash to Kiran. For this they devise a game. Deepali asks Sharad:
DEEPALI. The reason why you broke up with Kamlesh is because you want to be straight, isn’t it? (*Collected Plays* 99)

They argue with the possibility of Sharad’s transformation. Kiran firmly believes that this transformation is not possible. Sharad brings up the point about living heterosexual life at the same time continue homosexuality secretly. Listening to this Kamlesh speaks:

KAMLESH. Sharad, you are wonderful. I don’t know why I didn’t see it before. I love you.

Kiran grabs this opportunity

KIRAN. 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. (*Collected Plays* 102)

These lines turn out to be the psychological victory of Kamlesh as he gets disillusioned. Prakash’s memory will not torment him now:

KAMLESH. It took me just this moment to realise it. (Looks at Ed) I know now that I have been chasing an illusion. Perhaps the man I loved does not exist. (To Sharad) But you do. And I love you.

(*Collected Plays* 102)

**Countering the Double Consciousness**

Bunny Singh is next in line to get disillusioned as he confesses to the predicament and experience of all homosexuals:
I know. Just as the man whom my wife loves does not exist, I have denied a lot of things. The only people who know me- the real me- are present here in this room. And you all hate me for being such a hypocrite. The people who know me are the people who hate me. That is not such a nice feeling. I have tried to survive. In both worlds. And it seems I do not exist in either. I am sorry Kiran I lied to you as I have lied to the rest of the world. I said to you that I am a liberal minded person. I am not them but I accept them. Actually, it is they who are liberal minded. They have accepted me in spite of my letting them down so badly, I deny them in public, but I want their love in private. I have never told anyone in so many words what I am telling you now-I am a gay man. Everyone believes me to be the model middle class Indian man. I was chosen for the part in the serial because I fit into common perceptions of what a family man ought to look like. I believed in it myself. I lied-to myself first. And I continue to lie to millions of people every week on Thursday nights. (Collected Plays 103)

This confession is one of the major transformations recorded in the play and gives a lot of meaning and weight to the efforts of Dattani who presented the issue and the evolution of a person. Dattani is a past master in using the stage in terms of space that stands for interior/ exterior locations, public/ private, secret/open and physical and mental space by dividing it into different acting areas and different levels. Dattani establishes three different acting areas in the very beginning: the private open world, the private secret world and inner world of thoughts. In this Act the action is performed at two levels viz. drawing room and bedroom. While
the bedroom space is occupied by Ed and Kamlesh where Ed/Prakash’s reality is shown as a hypocrite, who has a selfish motive behind his marriage with Kiran and that is to hide his true identity because he has no courage to face the world.

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. (Collected Plays 104)

Ed sees no future in the open gay relationship. He does not want himself to be branded as a gay. He keeps on pretending as a ‘straight’ in the party. In one of his previous remarks while talking to Ranjit, he says:

ED. Look around you. Look outside...There are real men and women out there. You have to see them to know what I mean. But you don’t want to. You don’t want to look at the world outside this- this den of yours. All of you want to live in your own little bubble. (Collected Plays 99)

In the drawing room Kiran’s comment brings out the dramatic irony as she feels like a “complete woman” as later, the guard comes with the photograph of Kamlesh and Ed, Kiran is seen as frozen. In the bedroom Kamlesh grabs Ed by the throat. In the drawing room Kiran moves towards the window, when Ed comes out of room Kiran puts the photograph on the table and sits down, looking away, as Ed picks the photo Kamlesh holds his sister.

Ed is shown as a real loser as he loses both his loves. To forget all this he drinks large rum and rushes and climbs on the window to commit suicide. But he does
not have the courage to jump off. He hesitates momentarily. Everybody runs and grab
him, while he cries “I only wanted to live” before leaving all of them he says, “Where
do I begin? How do I begin to live?” (Collected Plays 111).

The play ends on a note of emancipation as Asha Kuthari Chowdhuri
observes, “Dattani obviously seems to have a point to make to his audience. But
rather than directly preach, the playwright dramatises and peoples the performance
stage with characters 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’ “ (51).

The playwright focuses on issues that would lead to questions like these:
Whether homosexuality is an unnatural phenomenon? Or whether people are
homosexual by choice? Or can a homosexual convert into heterosexual, Or whether
compulsory heterosexuality is an important tool of patriarchy in maintaining the
hegemonic authority of the pseudo civilized society. The suppression of alternate
sexuality and the suppression of homosexuals is a product of the same system whose
rules oppress women. Society’s attitude towards such inclination is expressed through
the negative connotations as pervert, abnormal, barbarous. Intolerance often creates
such a void in the life of homosexuals that all ties of family and friendship become a
source of corrosion for them. The repressive state apparatus and Ideological state
apparatus view them as passive subjects who are treated as sub-human entities.

According to Judith Butler gender is performative, in other words, gender
identity is not fixed and permanent. When we talk about alternate sexuality, it is
generally considered a taboo subject by both Indian civil society and the government.
Public discussion on alternate sexuality in India has been inhibited by the fact that
sexuality in any form is rarely discussed openly. In recent years, however, attitudes towards alternate sexuality have seen a slight change. There have been more depictions and discussions of homosexuality in public and media. The urge to conform, however, is strong and makes people with different sexual preferences look for ways to be accepted in society. Ed also tries to become manly by consulting the psychiatrist. He says, “I am not happy with being who I am. And I want to try to be like the rest” (*Collected Plays 92*). He adopts certain mannerisms which make him look more aggressive and manly. Sharad makes fun of such mannerisms that people adopt to look masculine:

> All it needs is a bit of practice. I have begun my lessons. Don’t sit with your legs crossed. Keep them wide apart. And make sure you occupy lots of room. It’s all about occupying space, baby. The Walk: walk as if you have a cricket bat between your legs. And thrust your hand forward when you meet people...And the speech. Watch the speech. No fluttery vowels. Not ‘It’s so-o-o hot in here!’ - but it’s HOT! It’s fucking HOT!’ (*Collected Plays 101*)

Such behaviour and body language help people to gain acceptance, power and authority. Ed also plans to put up this front in society so that he appears as a normal straight heterosexual man. This is what happens when Kiran remarks, “he is so...male. So protective, so caring and yet so assertive” (104) The play posits a lot of questions like whether whatever Ed was doing to himself was correct? Dattani’s addresses such issues that are rarely considered worth talking while affirming also if any definite answers are possible.
Alternate Utopia

The play brings to the fore the subjectivity of queer people in contemporary urban space. The play begins with the description of Kamlesh's flat which is “too perfect to be real” which is intentionally built by the playwright to create a world where he belongs. The play closes with Kamlesh rediscovering his love for Sharad and a humiliated Ed/ Prakash trying to commit suicide. The social expectation seems to be so overwhelming that he just cannot think of living. Society does not accept queer people. This results in self alienation in persons who have ‘Other’ sexual preferences.

The heterosexual world keeps on encroaching the homosexual space sometimes in the form of a wedding taking place in the compound, disturbing the peace of the flat with noise, sometimes as children, chasing Bunny for an autograph and finally like neighbours finding the incriminating photograph of Kamlesh and Ed and sometimes the love making of couples, seen through the window in the flat of the diamond merchant. As Sharad comments in the play, “Oh my Gawd! Those heterosexuals are at it again!” Through this tone of condemnation Sharad hints at the way the homosexual world talks about the heterosexual. His comments are almost like an expression of revenge: “Of course he is her husband! He is too fat and bald to be her lover. . . . She is gritting her teeth. She might throw up any moment” (Collected Plays 53).

Dattani’s Craftsmanship : Allowing the Text to Speak for Itself

Critics have attributed, “Dattani is intrinsically a theatre person, rather than a writer, is evident in the way he is able to structure the stage mechanism effectively and how at times allows the texts to speak for themselves and to look at their own
workings and methodology. He employs a language that is often pungent, clear and sharp, pushing the spoken word to its limits and interfering them with pregnant silence and that only someone with an intimate inwardness with theatre can” (Chaudhuri 105).

Dattani’s forte is not only writing but he is a perfect stage setter. In all his plays we see an immaculate craftsmanship of stage management. In this play also Dattani makes use of multiple stage settings to depict the different spaces, mental conditions of the character and different contexts and realities in which they live. While the dark and expansive area signifies the mental anguish and dilemma of the characters, open space represents the action in the context of external thoughts. There is another very important aspect of dark expansive area, which is that even if a person of high status or elite section has such sexual orientation he is not accepted by society. In the play the stage is divided into three spaces- the living room, the bed room and the non realistic expansive state. The flat is situated in the upmarket area of Marine Drive which indicates the luxurious life of Mumbai: “The entire flat is almost too perfect to be real” (Collected Plays 49). The first space that is living room is done up in ethnic chic style. A huge poster of Meena Kumari in “Pakeezah” offers a pleasant relief on the stark white walls. The second area is a non realistic space in black, where the characters immediately suspend into ‘shoonya’ and their innermost feelings come out. The third space is Kamlesh’s bedroom that is shown as realistic, but hidden behind a gauze wall that gives it some mystery and secrecy.

Dattani also uses a paradoxical situation where there is a gathering outside the flat due to someone’s wedding signifying the sanctity of heterosexual relationship that the world acknowledges with all celebration. In contrast there is gathering of gays inside the house who feel the burden of this ‘sanctity’ on them as they do not abide by
the rules of society. Each one of them has his own idea regarding the position of gays and also as to what can be done to change perception of society about them. As Kiran, Kamlesh’s sister says, “I really wish they would allow gay people to marry.” And she gets a reply from Ranjit who says, “They do. Only not to the same sex.” (Collected Plays 98)

Sharad pinpoints the crisis in Ed’s mind through the gay anthem that he sings in the beginning and the end of the play which is the English version of Charles Aznavour’s ‘Comme ils disent’ ‘What Makes a Man a Man’

So many times we have to pay
For having fun and being gay...
I ask myself what I have got
And what I am and what I’m not... (Collected Plays 56)

Kiran is the only heterosexual in the play. She is an attractive girl in her thirties with ‘exquisite bone structure’ and having the right complexion. The ‘scars’ of the troubled marriage have not left her. She divorced her husband because she wanted “To escape from those fights at night...The humiliation of expressing to friends and neighbours...that the black eye was from banging my head against the door. Or the broken rib was from the fall...It was the cigarette burns on my arms I couldn’t explain” (Collected Plays 77). She feels the humiliation of being branded a ‘divorcee’ as she says: “Being divorced doesn’t help. Everyone seems to know all the details. Or think they do. At that party, I felt their stares, as if they were saying ‘That’s Kiran. The one whose husband dumped her.’” Kamlesh, take my advice. Don’t let people know about you. You will spend your whole life defending yourself. If I had the choice, I would stay invisible” (Collected Plays 91). Kamlesh had introduced her to
Ed whom she now loves dearly but assumes that he is not a gay. She is planning to shift to Mumbai after marriage with Ed. She comes to know about Ed’s identity at the party. She says, “If there are stereotypes 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?” (Collected Plays 107).

The title of the play is in harmony with the theme and the situations of the characters. On a Muggy Night in Mumbai not only tells us about the story of one of the biggest metropolitan cities of India it also talks about the hot warm humid weather that makes all of us uncomfortable. This muggy weather is symbolic of the suffocating and uncomfortable situation in which all the characters are shown. As a matter of fact all the characters are sick of the situations they are in.

The vocabulary used by Dattani is generally unacceptable to the conservative Indian society to accept publically. One doesn’t have to look for gay connotations between the lines. Words like: bulge in the pants, coconut friend, buggery, dickhead, love bites, pelvis to pelvis, nerds, fucking hot, faggot, pansy, gandu etc. have been used without any restriction. These words have been taken from the gay vocabulary to make the dialogues crisp and functional. Dattani makes the characters speak loud and in detail of their sexual desires and experiences in the play. There are quick exchanges between the characters and sometimes long monologues wherever necessary. Overall this play can be considered as a manifestation of human rights of homosexuals.

The title is also suggestive of the concealed sexual life of people with alternate preferences as the word muggy also has a sexual connotation while night is suggestive of the darkness, the hidden and the secretive desires.
Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Morning Glory in the East of Kailash*

Manjula Padmanabhan has also touched upon these issues in her works. Though the major work dealing with the theme *The Sextet* remains unpublished but her story dealing with the theme of alternate sexuality has been included for analysis. Throwing light on her decision of not publishing a set of six short skits called *The Sextet* and *The Artist’s Model* Manjula Padmanabhan talks about the present scenario of English Drama in India she observed:

...neither has been performed or read. I had understood, by the time I wrote them, the unlikelihood of seeing them onstage. The inflexible logic of the marketplace makes it suicidal for a theatre group to finance plays which are not guaranteed a return on the money spent on them. The choice for directors lies in using scripts which have been a smash hit elsewhere. The choice for playwrights lies in writing for television or cinema. Which is sad, because theatre is such an eclectic, immediate experience. Unlike films or television, there is never a ‘final cut’ for a play. It reinvents itself with each new interpretation, each new cast, each night of performance. A charge develops between the actors onstage and the audience in the hall, each one needing the other, like a pair of hands that wants to clap. (Padmanabhan web)

Still we can have a glimpse of Manjula Padmanabhan’s ideology and projection of alternate sexuality as observed in *Morning Glory in the East of Kailash* a short story included in the anthology *Kleptomania*. Though a short story *Morning Glory in the East of Kailash* is highly relevant not only because of its theme but also because of the dialogic technique used by Padmanabhan. Unlike in Bombay, gay
relationships are not openly acceptable in Delhi. The story is autobiographical and narrates a month’s experience of twenty eight year old young Padmanabhan in a Delhi barsaati in the East of Kailash due to her new job while she shared an apartment with two gay men. The story projects various view points of alternate sexuality by varied characters as, apart from these two gay men, the inmates have an adopted son, a transvestite cook, two spaniels and a Chihuahua named Carmen. The story fascinates the readers with the life experience and expectations of all inmates and how the author is treated by them when she expected a comfortable, protective stay. She is dismayed as she begins to realise that as a woman she represents a social target for gay men.

The title is apt and carefully chosen by Manjula Padmanabhan, who has taken it from the language of flowers, a common Victorian era way of communication in which the coded message was usually sent through various flowers and floral arrangements, allowing individuals to express their private feelings which otherwise could not be spoken. In the title Morning Glory in East-of-Kailash “Morning Glory” stands for Love in Vain. It is a probing account of the lives of homosexual men, told in a straightforward manner, in an unapologetic voice. Pushing the confines of ‘normalcy’, the story deals with alternate sexuality:

I concluded that there were two speeds of sex: first world and third world. Only wealthy and glamorous individuals had first world sex. The rest of us made do with the third world variety: at best reproductive, at worst perfunctory. The idea that there could be first world sex taking place behind third world bedroom doors amazed and humbled me. (Kleptomania 181)
The title also suggests the fading out glory of an artist whose work has been wasted since the dawn of his life. With the passage of time his ability as an artist is declining. He is an alcoholic and cannot even keep his pen steady. The story begins with Padmanabhan’s experience and compulsion of staying at a secure place in New Delhi due to its “testosterone-enriched atmosphere” so she was given the option to stay with the gay artist Alistair ‘Alice’ Stevens with whom the publishers already had made an agreement by giving a down payment.

Their company not only offered her food and hospitality but also functioned as a masculine shield as they themselves had different sexual orientations ensuring complete safety. Alice and project editor, Nikhil, escorted Padmanabhan to Alice’s house. The first meeting with Alice at the airport resulted in a slight abhorrence on Padmanabhan’s part though the reason of this was not even clear to her. As she says:

It had never occurred to me, for instance, that I might dislike Alice. Yet there he was, handsome in haunted, paint peeling sort of way and—I disliked him. He was missing a front tooth. The gap gave him, when he smiled, a rakish, predatory appearance. I realized too, that to have expected to like him because he was gay was the same thing, in reverse, as disliking him because he was gay. (*Kleptomania* 164)

The proximity between Nikhil and Alice makes Padmanabhan also doubt Nikhil’s orientation “NIKHIL MAY ALSO BE GAY!!! as he was with Alice but the second thought makes her realise her mistake of taking any interest in Nikhil’s sexual orientation. On the other hand she also realises that she already knew about his married status. These two thoughts simply reflect the societal thoughts of associating
sexuality with people out of suspicion sometimes and also by giving a clean chit to those who overtly follow societal norms and keep their sexual orientations hidden.

The first uncomfortable night is spent at the barsati feeling all the more desolate and doomed. The next morning starts with the thump on the door by the cook, Gopi, who is a transvestite from Kerala. Later that morning at the breakfast table she learns more about Gopi’s thoughts of physical transformation from a male to a castrated eunuch. Gopi came to this city looking for fortune, glamour and romance but instead he found a gang of hijras who adopted him as one of their own. Due to this he is contemplating castration.

They discuss the growing impatience of the neighbours to the “all-male ménage.” Everybody talks indirectly about their presence in the neighbourhood. “…India was a country where homosexuality was still a crime punishable by law and thank god for that! Then he had spoken with longing about those noble Islamic nations where unnatural citizens were flogged in public or stoned to death. He even insinuated that the success of such nations in cricket tournaments was linked to the sobriety of their teams’ personal lives.” (Kleptomania 167)

**Dreadful City versus Friendly City**

They further speculate about the city space and the metal setup of the people as Alice claims “…in Delhi, when the alternatives is deviance ordinary promiscuity becomes acceptable” (Kleptomania 167), at which Nikhil further adds his description of the city as “Delhi is a very … very … very backward city, Un-un-unlike Bombay” (Kleptomania 167). This backwardness is the result of general acceptability of the deviance of any kind from the mainstream acceptability. In one of the news report “Is Mumbai emerging as India’s gay capital?” the reporter quotes Nitin Karani the editor
of *Bombay Dost* a magazine brought by the trust of the same name. Karani is a prominent gay activist from Mumbai, “Being a cosmopolitan city, we are more accepting than any other city. The number of parties, conferences, film festivals is more than in other cities.” The correspondent also quotes Girish Kumar of Humsafar Trust who stresses, “Mumbai has a more open outlook that Delhi. Banglore is progressive, but has not yet reached the mark. So Mumbai is the undisputed champion” (NDTV web).

In one of the blogs on homosexuals *Sumlaingik* the blogger has given a very realistic picture of homosexuality in India:

It is not good or easy to be gay in India. Every Indian gay man or woman has to live a double life. Even those who live in big cities and are openly gay have had moments in their lives when they had to tell a white lie. They had to pretend to be something or someone they weren’t. It is definitely not OK to be gay in India... Indian society is still quite backward in accepting social reality and freedom of sexuality. They are still stigmatised by the old thinking of homosexuality as sin. It is still considered to be un-natural and abnormal. There is nothing ok about such thinking. Growing up in a large Indian family I was lucky to find myself growing as confident and mentally strong to cope with these challenges...I hadn’t heard of homosexuality and being gay. I didn’t know a single person or even a television or movie character which resembled who I was. A gay man. It was confusing and very frightening to think that there was something wrong with you. That you were different. Your friends will talk about sex with girls non stop and you will have no interest in such topics
what so ever...though the young generation is more accepting of homosexuality, the people in the society are still dominated by the people who openly oppose and ridicule homosexuality. So in answer to the question I would say – No, it is not good to be Gay in India.

(Sumlaingik web)

Padmanabhan has given various references to the homosexuality of Alistair Stevens by using various names in his context. Firstly the nick name Alice has a close association to the Gertrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. The book hints at the homosexual relationship between Gertrude Stein and Alice B Toklas.

**The Complexity of Otherness: Being Indian, Being Homosexual, Being Passive**

While Mahesh Dattani had portrayed a very sympathetic image of gays, Manjula Padmanabhan highlights that in spite of being gay Alice has a very different perception about women when he refers to Padmanabhan, “See? It’s a good cow after all! It appreciates our efforts to make it happy!” His observation simply suggests the derogatory image of women that dwells in his mind. Anthropologist John Halverson calls it “thoroughly derogatory” (515) as the metaphorical reference to the cow connotes a gender specific image of an animal for milk that is kept incessantly pregnant or lactating, with a swollen belly. Confined to all, denied active role of nurturing and protecting the calf, it is seen as passive and dull. This also depicts the problematic of society where the marginalised turns out to be the oppressor. Kuhu Chanana explains this dichotomy:

Though gay men are themselves a sexual minority yet in the patriarchal society even heterosexual women are subjugated by them.

Thus the position of victim and victimizer interchanges here as despite
being homosexual in hostile heteronormative society gay men are capable of ostracising straight women and hence in these cases sexuality triumphs over gender and makes the notion of unified gay subjugation problematic. (163)

Another important aspect of homosexuality is reflected by Padmanabhan when Nikhil says, "He can't control Alice! He can't say anything to Alice! Alice treats him like a—a—well, a wife! Alice doesn't listen to him. He doesn't listen to anyone!" (Kleptomania 172) It is a fact that even in same sex relationship binaries exist with mutual consent. But there is no such domestic violence law for them as we have for heterosexual couples. This makes them twice abused. Praveen was not just twice abused but was in a fix about his decision as at the time of sharing his life story with the author he unconsciously utters what is deep within his thoughts, "On the worst day of my life—then corrected himself, or rather, I should say, the most beautiful day, the first day of new life—" he was sodomized by the old drill instructor on an outing from school when his knowledge was almost cipher on sexuality or sexual practices. Intellectually both Alice and Praveen are poles apart as Praveen always excludes him from his professional life. Through Praveen, the author also illustrates one of the important aspects of financial independence, that is being ignored in homosexual relationships. In this regards she writes:

...being gay in India represented a material sacrifice. In that sense, a stable homosexual relationship was more truly unworldly than the typical heterosexual one. But in another sense, rejecting his own background had made Praveen utterly dependent on Alice. Only in Alice's company could he hope to spend a morning matching the colour of a plastic mug to a plastic bucket or be openly depressed by
the sight of a dead puppy. In his own society, such behaviour would be stigmatized as effeminate. If he left Alice, he would have nowhere to go, no one to turn to who would understand him or care for his emotional needs. *(Kleptomania 187)*

This incident echoes the later life of Gertrude Stein and Alice B Toklas. When in 1946 Stein died of cancer, Toklas was at her side till her last breath. But after that Stein’s family completely cut Toklas out of estate leaving her in utter poverty as they had no legal standing to the epic works of art that they both had collected over the years (Paynter). Not only this, Toklas acted as Stein’s confidante, lover, cook, editor, critic and muse which is almost similar to Parveen’s responsibility towards Alice in the story.

**Pets as Emotional Anchors in City Space**

The story also throws light on the general tendency of close affinity of all same sex couples to have pets, as these pets become family for them and sometimes substitute their craving for children. At the same time these pets also help them to get unconditional love for which they crave all their life; whether accepted in this way by their family or not. The kind of acceptability they get from their pets gives queer people a sense of self reliance and self confidence. The pets also help them to reduce the sense of loneliness that is so common with people of deviant orientation:

The human-animal bond allows for a sense of social relatedness and belonging. One may turn to pets to fill a range of roles from companion to child substitute. The relatedness encompassed within human-animal companionship may in turn be an ability to connect with others in more appropriate ways by increasing self-cohesion and esteem. Pet
companionship may also work as a source of emotional sustenance for those who have no or limited connection (both physical and emotional) with people. (Brown 329-343)

Another important aspect of keeping pets as companion is the similar response the pets give to people without taking note of the situation of the day. The pet’s greeting always has the same gestures and the same enthusiasms. The pet makes no demands and has no ill feelings. A pet’s welcome is restorative that everything is as it was when you left. On the other hand human family members almost always reflect the troubles of their day and have their expectations of a person returning home. Anticipation, blame, sorrows and tiredness spoils the human greetings.

The story is also an outburst of Padmanabhan’s quest for understanding a person beyond his/her gender. Padmanabhan insisted on breaking the gender stereotypes by pointing out her identity as an Illustrator rather than as a woman. “It’s oppressive to be stuck inside a sexual identity, even if it’s one of the ordinary ones—” (Kleptomania 173). Nikhil and others learn to accept this perspective.

Padmanabhan in this story hints at various deviances in the heterosexual world. People are just not what they pretend to be all their lives. In this regard she shares her lesbian encounter in the story:

On that one occasion, with that other woman, the most striking sensation has been one of touching someone who felt exactly like myself. With my eyes shut it was difficult to tell that I was not alone. Like journeying to a foreign country only to find it utterly familiar. I could wonder whether I had journeyed at all. There was no adventure; no mystery of otherness, such as there was in the presence of a man’s
body, similar yet also so magically different to my own. (*Kleptomania* 175)

Secondly she discusses her boyfriend and questions the idea of being normal, "Was he normal? He’d told me that he masturbated three times a day. He had been in love with an older woman for years before he built up a courage to declare his passion.” After which the old lady just ignored him refusing to take his calls. When Padmanabhan met him he was determined to live the rest of his life in technical celibacy. The story also refers to Praveen’s younger brother Om falling in love with his cousin. They had never met. It was barely the romantic glance at each other during a wedding in the family. Though the girl was married off to someone else in Pakistan, Arun, still imagines his future with her.

The story also highlights the contrast between contemporary Delhi and Delhi of the past. Padmanabhan feels that today we are all free to do whatever we want to do. The life in the modern times is so different that people feel free to acknowledge their sexual orientation or their action. The architecture of the city that is so different from the other cities. The residents belonging to different economic classes reside in the same localities. From the *barsati* style to the open terrace to the rooftop terraces to the gloved compartments all come together to make a holistic vision of the modern Delhi architecture. But this is not all as the city has a dual nature. In the rural part of the city you can still find young couple hacked to death for love marriages.

The story ends with a reference to Okhla, an industrial area near Delhi that is referred to as a “place of future” (*Kleptomania* 188). The place is all barren and without much life or inhabitants. Similarly, life for Arun see his future with just vague hopes and faint belief that one day he will meet his beloved who is already married to
someone else in Pakistan and is a mother now. These relationships in this society can be as deviant as the relationship of Alice and Praveen. So Okhla metaphorically suggests the present situation of queer people in the city space but by adding this adjective to a city of the future Arun adds some hope and optimism to the queer geography in the city space.

The story also highlights the division of space in an urban sprawl that makes the survival of everyone one feasible. The mushrooming of high quality residential space in the city attempts to accommodate all classes in the same space. This results in creation of heterotopias (Foucault 1967) that lend city a plural and heterogeneous character. To be queer is an experience that has been defined so succinctly in a pamphlet circulated in New York, *Circa 1990, I Hate Straights*:

“Being queer means leading a different sort of life. It’s not about the mainstream, profit margins, patriotism, patriarchy or being assimilated. It’s not about being executive directors, privilege and elitism. It’s about being on the margins, defining ourselves; it’s about gender fucha and secrets, what’s beneath the belt and deep inside the heart; it’s about the night” (Bell 18).

To conclude, we can say that *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* and *Morning Glory at the East of Kailash* raise many questions regarding gay identity and acceptability in the city space where even today the issue is seen as a taboo. Both the authors have given an open choice to the audience and readers to evaluate the situation according to their perception. Instead of being didactic the issue is dealt with utmost sensibility and seriousness. A closet subject is thrown open for public viewing and reading. The works reflect sudden change in the urban materiality
through the new suburban spaces that are gradually amalgamating with the older ones to produce “barren future spaces.” This idea also has connotations of merging of alternate sexuality with the mainstream culture.

Though bleak and barren, our cities have an intrinsic Indian tendency of not losing optimism. Whether it is nature’s fury seen in torrential rains or manmade danger of terrorist attacks, its citizens have always coped up with the toughest situation and moved on. Our cities have seen and survived many attacks. One can only hope to see the day when society would begin to accept homosexuals or travestities as their own.