CHAPTER-3

A Critical Study of Tendulkar’s and Dattani’s Screen Plays

This chapter deals in detail with Vijay Tendulkar’s and Mahesh Dattani’s screen plays. It discusses thematic pre-occupation such as feudal autocracy, women exploitation, suppressed voice against inhumanity, power politics, homosexual relations, existential crisis etc. Let us discuss in detail the contribution of both playwrights to Indian Cinema.

3.1 Vijay Tendulkar’s Contribution to Indian Cinema:

A Screenplay is a work written for a film or television programme. These screenplays can be original works or adaptations from existing pieces of writing. In them, the movement, actions, expression and dialogues of the characters are also narrated. Screenwriting is also called script-writing. It is the art and craft of writing scripts for mass media such as feature films. It is a freelance profession. Screenwriters are responsible for researching the story, developing the narrative, writing the screenplays and delivering it in the required format, to development executives. Screenwriters therefore have great influence over the creative direction and emotional impact of the screenplay and arguably, of the finished film. They either pitch original ideas to producers in the hope that they will be sold, or screen-writers are commissioned by a producer to create a screenplay from a concept, true story, existing screen work or literary work such as a novel, poem, play, comic book or short story. Fundamentally, the screenplay is a unique literary form. It is like a musical score, in that it is intended to be interpreted on the basis of others’ performance.

Vijay Tendulkar’s script writing is quite distinctive. He is regarded as one of the best screen play writers in Indian writing in English. He is among the handful of playwrights along with Girish Karnad, Habib Tanvir and Badal Sircar who gives a new content and form to Indian Theatre, writing about contemporary issues and themes in a novel way. He is a giant among these modern Indian playwrights, both in terms of the volume and quality of his dramatic creations – a subtle observer of Indian social reality, a humanist, an innovative playwright who continuously experimented with form and structures. He is known for his insightful objectification in the development of multi-layered characters whose existential angst was held up against the social crises of the
society. In an interview, Tendulkar once said, “I have not written about hypothetical pain or created an imaginary world of sorrow. I am from a middle class family and I have seen the brutal ways of life by keeping my eyes open. My work has come from within me, as an outcome of my observation of the world in which I live. If they want to entertain and make merry, fine go ahead, but I can’t do it, I have to speak the truth.”

Tendulkar has written scripts for as many as seventeen films. In fact, his screenplays formed a part of India’s new wave Cinema Movement of the 1970s. Govind Nihalani, whose Aakrosh (1980) and Ardh Satya (1984), he scripted, said: “His vision and his engagement with the reality of the period gave a direction not just in terms of content but also form.”

Tendulkar’s screenplays have timeless quality. His directions in his screenplays are crisp and vivid. He preferred short, pithy sentences and he listened to the way ordinary people spoke, catching the rhythms of their language perfectly. In 1977, Tendulkar was awarded the National Film Award for the Best Screenplay for Shyam Benegal’s film, Manthan (1976). His other well-known screenplays are Nishant (1974), Aakrosh (1980) and Ardh Satya (1984). The present chapter critiques three screenplays which established him as an important chronicler of contemporary violence. They are:

1. **Nishant** (Night’s End, 1974)
2. **Aakrosh** (The Cry, 1980)
3. **Ardh Satya** (The Half-Truth, 1984)

Nishant is a powerful screenplay of Tendulkar. The movie is set during the immediate pre-independence period. It is about whether a woman leading a somewhat precarious existence as a ‘housewife,’ would choose instead the life of a (comfortably) kept woman under the right (or wrong) circumstances, is a question. Let us study the screenplay in detail:

3.2 **NISHANT:**

Nishant is a 1975 Hindi social drama film directed by Shaym Benegal and scripted by Vijay Tendulkar. The film’s star–cast are well-known playwrights and contemporaries of Tendulkar. They are Girish Karnad, Shabana Azmi, Naseeruddin Shah, Amrish Puri and
Smita Patil. This film focuses on the power of the rural elite and the sexual exploitation of women. The film won the 1977 National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Hindi. The movie was also nominated for the Palme d’Or at the 1976 Cannes Film Festival, and was invited to the London Film Festival 1976; the Melbourne International Film Festival 1977 and the Chicago International Film Festival 1977, where it was awarded a Golden Plaque.

The movie is about a man, a new schoolmaster (Girish Karnad) in a village, whose wife, Sushila (Shabana Azmi) is abducted by the rulers. In India, in 1945, at the time of independence, there were many isolated semi-autonomous states, which had their own laws. The movie deals with such autonomous laws used by some rulers for their own sake. In the movie, Vishwam (Naseeruddin Shah) is the youngest brother of the powerful and influential village Zaminadar (Amrish Puri). The Zamindar will not hesitate to do anything for the welfare and protection of his family, which also includes bending the law to his own advantage. The shy and quiet Vishwam is married to Rukmani (Smita Patil) and, unlike his brothers, does not indulge in alcohol or women, nor does he have any bad habits. But when Vishwam sees Sushila for the first time, he is unable to take his eyes off her. Sushila, however, does not reciprocate his attentions. But Vishwam is unable to control his feelings for her and makes his brothers understand the real cause for his disturbance. So, one night the two elder brothers of Vishwam grab Sushila and take her forcibly. Several people are present, but no one dares to raise neither a hand nor even a voice to stop this abduction. The schoolmaster seeks to have the men prosecuted for their crime, but no one will help him. Meanwhile, the wife, abused and berated by her abductors, cannot bring herself to face her husband and finally submits to one of her captors.

The distraught schoolteacher, who is denied justice by everyone from the local police officer to the district collector, is helped by the old priest of the village temple, (Satyadev Dubey) and finally they succeed in mobilizing the villagers. In the end the frenzied villagers kill the oppressors, including innocent Rukmani as well as Sushila. In the words of Shyam Benegal:

“In 50yrs, India has not seen another playwright like him (Tendulkar).......My association with Tendulkar strengthened when he wrote the
screenplay of Nishant…..And you can see what great he has done in this film about the power of the rural elite and the sexual exploitation of women.”

In Tendulkar’s plays, woman is almost at the center of each problem. Tendulkar has given a new look to his women characters by providing them an open platform to put forward their own choice. All the women in Tendulkar’s plays rise in life, acknowledge their existence and assert their roles. They march from ignorance to knowledge. Tendulkar’s unorthodox frame of mind and distrust of formulary attitude and institutions as far as the status of women was concerned, both in the society as well as in the sanctuary of home, needs to be studied and re-evaluated today. The portrayal of Sushila in the movie Nishant is rather unconventional at the end. Sushila surrendered herself to one of her abductors instead of going with her husband which is very shocking as well as surprising. The movie does not have a typical end as generally expected in Indian Cinema. It raised so many questions about the chastity of a woman. In Indian society where religious values dominated woman’s position, Sushila’s bold step, at the end, creates many controversies. In the movie, Nishant, Sushila emerges as a New Woman. By running away with her abductor, she challenges her husband’s manhood, and in this way she challenges the whole patriarchy that treats woman as an “object.”

However, Tendulkar can’t be called a feminist in the traditional sense because he had no definite propaganda of feminism to communicate through his plays. However, one can see Tendulkar’s acute observation of women in real life. Tendulkar presents the image of a woman, stretching from silent and submissive to aggressive and violent, struggling to register her protest against oppression and injustice. While projecting the social reality, Tendulkar unveils two major tendencies of the Indian society: male dominance and feminine frailty. Women are projected as a suffering lot at the hands of their male-counterparts. They do not have equal status with men and, sometimes, they are forced to part with their individual dignity, too. They are exploited both socially and economically. Although men are largely responsible for the exploitative and oppressive nature of society, women remain contributory to it. Tendulkar believes that,
“…Women themselves ought to be determined to liberate themselves….The difference that one is a man and the other is a woman is superfluous. I think that man and woman are just two elements.”

It is true, and perhaps this might be the reason why Tendulkar has projected the polarized picture of a woman in his plays – one is submissive and the other is bold. Tendulkar’s unconventional art of projection of women is clearly seen in his stage plays which is impressive as well as interesting. The contrast which he creates in his women portrayals is challenging and at the same time convincing. For example, Kamala and Sarita in the play, Kamala. Ms. Leela Binare and Mrs. Kashikar in Silence! The Court is in Session, Laxmi and Champa in Sakkaram Binder, Rama and Manik in The Vultures, Lalita Gauri and Gulabi in Ghashiram Kotwal, Sumitra and Nama are in His Friend’s story and Jyoti and Seva in Kanyadan. It seems that the playwright wants to give the ultimate choice into the hands of a woman. It depends on her how she would like to be treated. In the movie Sushila and Rukmani are two different portrayals of a woman. If Sushila is Tendulkar’s New Woman, bold enough to register her independent identity, Rukmani gives a traditional image of a woman, extremely docile and naïve. Sushila’s arrival in the house makes Rukmani insecure but she could not take any step against this injustice. Moreover, Sushila enjoys all the facilities in the house, including her independent kitchen. She is also allowed to visit the village temple. In Nishant Tendulkar shows how a woman in a comparatively more comfortable situation (as a schoolmaster’s wife) could choose a life as a kept woman in a landlord's household.

As the movie opens, the schoolteacher, with wife and son, are shown arriving in the village. Even as the tonga fare is still being haggled over, Sushila has already made known, with biting sarcasm, her disappointment with their new lodgings. As they settle in, her dissatisfaction with the material circumstances that he is able to provide is repeatedly expressed. She desires a full-length mirror, (for example, an indication of her vanity). She twice reminds her husband of the front door that needs fixing. This door is both literal and figurative - for it is the very door through which she is kidnapped by the landlord's men at the behest of his youngest brother Vishwam. But symbolically, it is also the gaping
vulnerability in her marriage - her unhappiness with her socio-economic status - that has gone unaddressed. After the abduction-rape of Sushila, Rukmani asks Vishwam directly,

“Why did you have to do this? Was I not good enough?”

The camera has by this time dwelt on Smita Patil (Rukmani) at great length, so at least for the male viewer, the question is hardly rhetorical. But there is also in her question a certain resigned acceptance of the nature of men in general, and the nature of this group of men in particular. That the act is morally repugnant in the extreme is not even in the subtext of the question - it is framed only in the form of – ‘was I not good enough?’

One might even observe that the portrayal of Vishwam is basically as a good man, whose circumstances are wicked. Further, his friends and associates are also the bad guys. As the film unfolds, Tendulkar seems to want the viewers' sympathies to remain with Vishwam, a simpleton oaf who nevertheless becomes obsessed with another man's wife.

The other theme Tendulkar develops at length in the movie is the raw power in the hands of the landlord played by Amrish Puri. He and his men have access to, it would seem, anything they want, and any woman they want in the village – either by raw force or coercive persuasion. It is this unbridled power that Vishwam witnesses at close range, and begins to see the possibility of using these 'fraternal' ties (even while he is not fully accepted into the 'fraternity' because he refuses to drink or gamble to excess) to set his own obsession: by persuading the landlord's men (half-brothers or cousins to him) to kidnap Sushila. There is some dilemma about Vishwam, whether he is a good man who develops an obsession for a woman, but unlike most men, he's in a position to do something about it – i.e., have her kidnapped and brought to him! What would you do in a similar situation, if you had the same power to act with impunity, is the question Tendulkar leaves you with. Or more pertinently, what would a woman facing such absolute power do?

As the plot proceeds, the seemingly improbable happens, Vishwam's wife, Rukmani, acting on her own volition, becomes the intermediary 'soft-power' who persuades Sushila to accept her situation, and thus also becomes Vishwam's enabler. This boggles the viewer's imagination, especially if he has bought the idea that female sexual jealousy should assert itself. Tendulkar here seems to suggest that under a sufficiently dominant
patriarchy, even female sexual jealousy, strong though it can be, is overridden by the sororal instinct - which enables a comfortable, symbiotic sororal polygamy to develop between two women attached to the same man. Indeed, the two women in this movie become good friends, and Sushila slowly begins to assert and improve her relative status vis-a-vis Rukmani. The full-length mirror comes in almost immediately. Then she requisitions the family car for an unchaperoned temple visit, where incredibly, she meets her husband, mourning and pining away for her. This is one of the most powerful scenes of the movie, where it is made clear that she could escape with her husband if she chooses, but she instead chides him cruelly for his lack of manhood, and drives him back to the manor, signaling that she has fully accepted her position as a kept woman. In fact, she is now also asserting her privileges. Even her maternal instinct is shown thus to have become subordinated to the status-and-comfort she has successfully obtained elsewhere. She also appears only too willing to believe the subterfuge-alibi her housemaid has spun – that her young son has completely forgotten her – seemingly ready to put her entire life behind for the comfort and privilege that have now become available to her. Eventually, even though Sushila remains the 'kept woman' in the household, she manages to elevate herself to become Vishwam's mistress-concubine, ranking higher than the 'married' wife. When the housemaid does not show up one day, it is Rukmani who has to get out of bed to make tea for everyone. What is remarkable here is that the entire household, including all the brothers - have instinctively realized who is No. 1! Nobody even thinks of asking Sushila to make them tea! Tendulkar thus shows that easy generalizations about how issues at the intersection of power, sex, gender, and desire play out, are likely to be wrong; and that individual conditions and characteristics (and character) determine the choices one makes in different situations. Nishant illustrates widely differing possibilities in a New Woman’s theory.

Sushila enjoys all the rights of womanhood in the house and perhaps that might be the reason for her to be aggressive towards her husband as well as the society by running away with her abductor at the end instead of going with her husband, who remained passive during her abduction. Here, Tendulkar satirizes that true awareness in society does not come by movements like feminism, humanism and socialism; but it comes by self-realization. Women should self-acknowledge their roles in the society and start respecting
their sex. They must assert their importance in a man’s life. They themselves should make
their male-partners realize that they are their better-halves – not slaves, not inferiors. Man
must realize that woman is equally responsible for his existence. However, women
themselves have to take the initiative to honour their sex, to respect their fellow women.
The end of the movie is untraditional and unconvincing when Sushila elopes with one of
her abductors but it gives a hint of Tendulkar’s concept of a New Woman.

In the rest of Nishant, Tendulkar goes on to sketch even more distressing dilemmas
and painful paradoxes as in the character of the landlord (Amrish Puri). He is also shown
as someone who chooses not to use the deadly force at his disposal, even when he can do
so with impunity, and even when it would be in his legitimate interest to do so. He is
certainly not a benevolent person, but he is also not the cruelest man you could imagine.
Worse, from the point of view of constructing a Manichean good-evil disjuncture, he
appears merciful when you least expect it. The landlord is unmarried, and Tendulkar drops
subtle hints that he might be gay – several times in the movie, for example, masseurs are
shown attending to him. In one scene, he's getting a massage as dawn is breaking and he's
just waking up. More to the point, he's never shown participating in any of the heterosexual
adventures that his henchmen participate in.

The movie vividly shows the homicidal chaos that ensues when the villagers, finally
roused from their apathetic stupor by the schoolmaster and the village priest, storm the
landlord's manor, killing everyone they can find - even Rukmani, Vishwam's wife, whom
Tendulkar has developed as the only morally pure person in the plot. Vishwam escapes but
with Sushila, not Rukmani. The crowd pursues them, and in the final scene, Vishwam and
Sushila, having truly emotionally bonded, realize that there's no escaping the crowd. They
sit transfixed, as if waiting for the crowd to descend on them (as they have climbed a rocky
formation in trying to escape the crowd). The scene slowly fades out, giving the viewer
time to reflect on whether such a violent upheaval would indeed result in a better social
order than the repressive one the landlord had held up.

The messages in Nishant are complex and subtle. The cast consists of established
screen names. But somehow Girish Karnad was miscast in the movie. Notwithstanding his
other achievements, it seems that he did not do justice to the role of a schoolmaster; the
raw passion, one would expect to see in a man whose wife has just been abducted is completely missing in his interpretation of the scene.

*Nishant* is a powerful film, disturbing at a more elemental level. There are graphic scenes of physical and strong suggestions of sexual violence. The overall thematic content is profoundly unsettling. The Censors at the time (1975-76) thought it fit to grant it an 'A' rating. But it still won many awards and award nominations, including the 1977 *Indian National Film Award*. From this point, Tendulkar became more established in his reputation as a maker of quality ('art') screenplay. *Nishant* is a movie that really makes viewers to think some more. The title is also suggestive, *'End of Darkness' (Nisha = darkness, ant = end)* is intended to mean in this context. It is a movie certainly well worth watching, and then watching again.

Tendulkar’s next screenplay is *Aakrosh*. It is a movie of a peasant who becomes a victim on account of excessive oppression and violation of his humanity so much so, that he does not utter a single word in the entire film and only bears a stunned look. The movie was the blockbuster in 1980. Let us study how Tendulkar has presented in *Aakrosh* the deepest anguish of the marginalized people who have been suppressed again and again by autocrats:

3.3 **AAKROSH:**

*Aakrosh (Cry of the Wounded)* is a 1980s Hindi art house film, directed by Govind Nihalani. The movie got *the National Film Award* for The Best Feature Film in Hindi and several *Filmfare Awards*. It won *the Golden Peacock* for the Best Film at the *International Film Festival* of India. Tendulkar has always been at ease in the medium of films. Fieldwork and travel gave him a deep understanding of the way violence expresses itself in society and the working of the power structure in the rural and urban India. Out of this experience was born his outstanding screenplay *Aakrosh*. The movie won awards for direction and for Tendulkar who emerged as an eminent screenplay writer. Vijay Tendulkar has been known as the angriest voice in India during the 1970s and the 80s. His anger was elemental because it was inward, turned against an intimate enemy, the male order in a web
of power relations – be it feudal or bourgeois. *Nishant, Manthan, Aakrosh, Ardha Satya*, these are not only names, they are milestones on the road to social discovery.

Tendulkar is one of those screenplay writers who continue stroking artistic creativity without bothering about returns. He likes to hit his viewers hard, overwhelming them with strong themes. In fact, Tendulkar’s preoccupation is with violence in contemporary society. Quite like Bernard Shaw, Tendulkar would perhaps not have moved his little finger to the ink bottle to write simple entertainers. He is more of an iconoclast using, like Shaw, his plays as platforms from where to deliver his manifestoes and each play, though not overtly didactic, does address the audience, compelling each member to listen attentively. Throughout his career as a dramatist, Tendulkar has used his plays as eye-openers, revealing unspoken truths, exposing what many have been too inhibited to touch and hitting hard as and when required. And with *Aakrosh*, he has given to Indian Cinema a new meaning and a definite mission.

*Aakrosh* forms a part of the series of works, based around explorations in violence, written by Vijay Tendulkar who had earlier written *Nishant* and went on to write next the surprise breakaway hit, *Ardh Satya* (1983).

The movie is a frustrating saga of a young lawyer who is desperately trying to win his first independent case which involves a silent illiterate tribal. On December 25, 1978, the body of an Adivasi tribeswoman named Lahanya Nagi (Smita Patil), was found at the bottom of a dry, abandoned well near the village of Kondachiwadi, as the image of the somber faces of a group of resigned villagers, having quietly assembled at a clearing on a dark, still night, are illuminated by the intermittent glow of a nearby fire. A stoic and inscrutable man, Lahanya Bhiku (Om Puri), wearing a crude restraining device fashioned from rope tied across his torso, then advances with a lit torch towards what is revealed to be the funeral pyre for his late wife, Nagi, before being led away by the authorities to prison. The following day, the impassive Bhiku is brought to court for his arraignment on the charge of murder of his wife, Nagi, before being led away by the authorities to prison. The following day, the impassive Bhiku is brought to court for his arraignment on the charge of murder of his wife, but refuses to respond, much to the irritation of the presiding judge who is eager to conduct a swift trial, and to the bewilderment of Lahanya's public defender, an energetic and idealistic young lawyer, Bhaskar Kulkarni (Naseerudin
Shah) who finds himself pitted in his first, independent case against his mentor and family friend, a seasoned prosecutor named Dusane (Amrish Puri). Frustrated by his own client's enigmatic silence and unwillingness to provide a motive or proclaim his innocence, nor cooperate in the formulation of his own defense strategy, Bhaskar embarks on an independent investigation into the facts surrounding the seemingly clear-cut case, leading him to a wary and evasive editor of the weekly periodical National Welfare who had recently published a case involving the mysterious death of another Adivasi tribal woman at a hotel.

The film begins where most Hindi films would have ended or used as a tool within their narrative fulcrum to seek revenge, vengeance or simply ponder about mindless actions. Bhiku Lahanya has been convicted for the murder of his wife seen in the film in fragments, and beautiful as ever, and Advocate Bhaskar Kulkarni is defending him on behalf of the state, that provides lawyers to people who cannot afford the fees. Prosecutor Dushane who, though from the social backward caste has risen to prominence as a Senior–Respected–Public Prosecutor, and he is standing right against Bhaskar Kulkarani who is defending a case for the first time, and who also happened to be the son of a prominent lawyer under whom Dushane had worked and learned the nuances of the craft.

Tendulkar’s works expose the vices of the society such as hypocrisy, vulgarity, barbarism, corruption, narrow-mindedness etc. In his attack on the society, the playwright’s mutiny against the feudal values and his demand for the new code of conduct and morality are clearly perceptible. The feelings of anger and cruelty of the postwar young generation is clearly reflected in the post independent Indian theatre.

The movie silently depicts the various levels of social undercurrents and inadequacies prevailing in the society without pointing out actual fingers but at the same time depicting the rape of the social infrastructure at the hands of an influential few. The remarkable characteristic of Tendulkar’s works is that they present perplexing, distressing, and complex situations in all seriousness. They carry no message, in overt or covert terms. He minces no words in moralizing or philosophizing. He presents the existing reality of human predicament, as he perceives it with his own naked eyes. With the treatment of the
details of actual life, his works become more and more realistic. Besides, the ideas put forward in the plays are thought-provoking and revolutionary. Tendulkar opines:

“I think a lot before I write. My creativity has been shaped more by experience than by imagination.”

Moreover, Govind Nihalani also does a perfect job at directing a movie which has so many unspoken complexities. The confrontation between Bhaskar and Bhiku could have become a farce had any of the thespians tried to outdo the other, however the director manages to create a perfect surrounding for the confrontation. He also effectively portrays the rape scene without making it look crass or vulgar and it is to his credit that one can feel the anguish of the woman even when her face is not visible throughout the rape.

*Aakrosh* centers around the internal and external struggles of two people, Bhaskar and Lahanya. Bhaskar has to struggle with the corrupt people on the one hand and on the other he has to struggle to seek the truth from the non-consenting tribe. Lahanya has lost his wife, he knows it is nearly impossible to get justice, but he has to take care of a young sister too. How does he manage a solution? The conflicts are shown very subtly without much dramatisation. Needless to say, Naseer and Om who have respectively performed the roles of Bhaskar and Bhiku are brilliant in their performance.

However, Amrish Puri stands out with his portrayal of a man refusing to acknowledge his past and now working in tandem with the people who are exploiting their own kith and kin. The last scene where he refuses to even acknowledge disparities in the social structure is exceptional. As the senior public prosecutor, Amrish Puri, against Lahanya has done an efficient job. He is the current mentor for Bhaskar too. The scenes of conflict inside the court between the mentor and the mentee, and the camaraderie outside, are portrayed quite sensitively too. Smita, as a Nagi, has barely anything to do in the movie but leaves an unforgettable effect through her absence. She is wasted in a cameo role but she portrays her little role with excellent intensity. It is to the credit of the director that although the actress does not have a lot to do still her presence looms large over the entire movie. Of others, Mohan Agashe and Nana Palsikar play their roles in perfect consonance with their character. Mohan performs the bribery scene in a commendable manner.
Based on a real incident, the movie was a scathing satire on the corruption in the judicial system, and victimization of the underprivileged. It is a trend setter movie that hits out at the Indian judicial system and mocks at people for not doing anything to change it. This screenplay is not a one to be easily forgotten. It’s unbelievable that Aakrosh which was made so many years before still has that intensity intact, it still hits people hard, it still forces people to think, and it still leaves people in a state of total helplessness. It is doubtful whether anybody made a movie on tribals till that time. A lawyer goes against his own class and the network of power operating in the town to investigate the rape and murder of a tribal woman for which her husband is framed. The single frame of Bhiku tied and waiting before the court room; everybody passing by without caring, his father and sister standing with a baby is enough to show the helpless state of the tribals. That shot brings the message to the audience that Law and justice are something distant to those peoples. The movie further increases our anger with the indifference shown by the judicial system towards the victim with its requirement of evidence.

Aakrosh, apart from telling the powerful story successfully also captures the innerself of the characters like, Bhasker, Dushane and Bhiku. They fight with both the outside and inside world. The fight of Bhiku visually is a long scene in the jail. It is also used to let the audience know how tormented he is by his wife’s murder. Om Puri as a Lahanya Bhiku, as a tribal, is an extraordinary man framed for the murder of his wife. He is like a volcano. He is extremely effective showing anger through his eyes, agony through his face, haunting love for his wife and as a viewer, people know that he is going to explode and when he does explode in the last five minutes, people are shocked, surprised and disturbed. Om Puri delivers a mind-blowing performance as the tribal Bhiku who is unable to take care of his family and who very well knows the repercussions of trying to obtain justice from a moth-infested infrastructure completely in cahoots with the criminals.

The cynicism he depicts is outstanding in face of the idealism portrayed by his lawyer so also is his silence more powerful than the speech of the lawyer. His wounded cry at the end of the film is excellent and the director deserves full marks for keeping the pressure boiling throughout the movie. The performance by Naseeruddin Shah (Bhaskar), as the idealist lawyer is simply outstanding and mind-blowing. He is, in fact, the main focus.
of the movie. Viewers see the whole crime investigation through his eyes and he is outstanding as a sometimes confused, sometimes angry, sometimes fearful lawyer. His frustration and feeling of impotency stands out in a regal manner. The fear psychosis due to threats received from the influential few is well depicted and one can feel the psychological stress he is going through to uphold the rule of the state.

The characters in Tendulkar’s plays are the victims of hostile situations or harsh circumstances. The characters, either tender-hearted or aggressive, are the victims of chance, fate or circumstances. They have to follow the law of life. The playwright’s mute sympathy goes with these victims. In the treatment of his theme and delineation of characters, Tendulkar is outrightly a humanitarian, but, for that, one has to read his plays between the lines. Even “Silence” in the places with “Pauses” is eloquent.

Tendulkar holds the banner of man not as formidable and venerable but as appallingly hideous. His intelligence may rightly be categorized as radically oriented, supplemented with neither reflection nor sentiment. He discouraged, assailed and condemned an exaggerated self-righteousness and distorted historical perspective. He challenges the upholstered morality. So, there is no spiritual revelation, in any of his characters. However, he has been often attacked for his flair for crude sensationalism, but as a committed artist, he attempts to delve deep into characters and to know how life functions at different levels, providing a deep insight into the great jigsaw puzzle of human existence, and enrich people’s understanding of life around them. Tendulkar, with his real life experience, depicts sensitive issues in the contemporary society with a touch of imaginative realism.

*Aakrosh* is a crime thriller-courtroom drama-cum-social commentary. The movie is on surface level mainly a crime thriller with an undercurrent of social drama. As a thriller, it is one of the finest captivating thrillers people might ever see. It keeps viewers on their edge from the very first scene to the very last scene. The screenplay successfully draws viewers into what’s happening, even though viewers might be able to figure out what was the crime, who is the real culprit, why they did it, how they did it, their major concern is whether Bhaskar will able to save Bhiku or not. As a social study, the screenplay indirectly
points out many social issues like tribal exploitation, feudal’s autocracy and injustice to lower caste people.

Although the major part of the movie is fascinating, some of the scenes will remain etched in the memory of the people forever. For e.g., Bhaskar’s ineffective pleas to Bhiku and his family to speak up, the cyclist constantly following Bhaskar; Bhaskar’s cross examination of the witnesses especially Dr. Patil and jungle contractor’s illiterate manager; the head of city council (Mohan Aghase) trying to bribe Bhaskar and of course Smita Patil’s rape scene. But, the most important is the climax. Most of viewers will be surprised by the climax. Aakrosh is a crime thriller all the way up to the last five minutes. The last five minutes of the movie elevates its reputation from a finely made crime thriller to one of the finest films made in India on the social-problematic of tribal exploitation.

Tendulkar has always been aware of the need for novelty on the stage and as a result he has come up with constant experimentation with the ‘theme’ and ‘form’ in his works. And that is also the reason why perhaps there have been controversies about several of his film scripts. Owing to his eagerness to expose the socio-cultural phenomena eating into the vitals of the society, the plots of his plays sometimes appear to be unconvincing or exaggerated, though a close analysis proves the point otherwise.

Tendulkar is deeply concerned with the presentation of the existing reality of the human condition, as he perceives it with his own naked eyes. He has always shown interest in depicting the agonies and suffocations, tensions and turmoil of the common man. His central concern has been to reveal the confrontation of the individual with the hostile society and exposing the hypocrisy inherent in the accepted social norms and values. With the use of irony, satire and pathos, Tendulkar brings out the hollowness of the middle class morality. He believes that theatre is a serious medium and not like a sitcom,

“If nothing is happening through theatre, then there is something wrong with the medium itself. The lure of television cannot be faulted for the decline of theatre. I do not think that the ill effects of one medium can be thrust on another medium.”  

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Being an experimental writer, Tendulkar always deals with unconventional themes. Thus, his screenplays are revolutionary in the sense that they bring about a transformation in the audience’s mindset. They depict the doomed or lost generation of post-independent India, where people are victims of willful monstrosity. Majority of his themes are based on real-life events and incidents that Tendulkar himself has witnessed. Tendulkar’s early struggle for survival and living in Mumbai’s chawls provided him a first-hand experience about the life of the urban lower middle class and thus writing material of the genre which was earlier either mostly absent or presented in romanticized or sketchy forms in Marathi theatre. Whatever he wrote throughout his lifetime had a social message. Aakrosh made a mark and it went on to win several National and International awards.

Among the all aspects of the screenplay, the most required ingredient for a well-made movie is its script. This screenplay is a prime example why Vijay Tendulkar was one of the finest yesteryear script writers with hard hitting dramas like Shyam Benegal’s Manthan and Nishant, Govind Nihalani’s Aakrosh and Ardh Satya, and Ketan Mehta’s Sardar. One of the most fascinating things about the script is that a major section of Aakrosh is shown through Bhasker’s point of view. Here and there viewers get some more insight about crime incidents by showing club card parties and Bhiku’s flashbacks, but 80% of movie is concentrated on Bhaskar’s point of view and how he unfolds the mystery behind the crime with scenes like failed interrogations, smelling something beyond simple murder mystery; threats from unknown hoodlums; visiting local newspaper editor’s office or tribal community or doctor’s office for postmortem details; and trying to gather evidence. Even though there are many films that tackle themes like cop or lawyer delve into crime incidents, Aakrosh is much different because of the realistic treatment – real life characters, real life situations, real life dialogues and conversations, real location and cinematography.

The screenplay has captivating thrilling crime drama and equally well told social messages. Screenplays like this should be preserved forever and it is really unfortunate that movies like this are tagged with offbeat or art house cinema. Aakrosh has everything what commercial movies offer with captivating treatment.

Vijay Tendulkar, who is known as the angry young man of Indian theatre created a havoc by introducing highly realistic theme in this screenplay. Thematically his works have
ranged from the alienation of the modern individual to contemporary politics, from socio-individual tensions to the complexities of human life, from the exploration of man-woman relationships to reinterpretations of historical episodes. The unenviable status of woman in the male dominated urban middle class society; the hypocrisy; lust and violence latent in the Indian psyche; the unmistakable ambivalence inherent in the words and deeds of both the promoters and beneficiaries of the Dalit upliftment programmers, the Machiavellian manipulation and absurd hero worship that characterizes Indian politics and cut-throat competition and resultant foulness that permeates sensational journalism – all come under the arena of Tendulkar's works.

The title of the screenplay is very relevant and significant. Bhiku screams at the end after a chilling silence throughout the film. That scream, a literal translation of the title, “Cry of the Wounded,” is a blood-curling expression of repressed rage and helplessness that follows after he axes his sister to save her from the foreman’s uncontrolled lust and a fate that drove his wife to suicide. The filmmaker, who shot the scene in Alibag without any fancy camera angles or even background music, explains:

“This was Bhiku’s way of raising his voice against the crime. Any other ending would have appeared unconvincing and patronizing.”

There was a silence, interspersed with live natural sounds. Following the Hindu funeral ritual, Bhiku walks around the pyres of his father with the pot leaking water, catches the foreman meaningfully eyeing his young sister and desperate to stop another crime, he snatches an axe and as the pot drops and shatters, kills his sister in one stroke. Then, trying vainly to break free of the clutching arms, looks up at the skies and screams. The film director, Govind Nihalani, recalling the moment, points out that,

“…as he and his writer, playwright Vijay Tendulkar, concluded this was the only way to end a story of grave injustice and human rights violation perpetrated against a victim not educated or empowered to challenge the culprit.”

Tendulkar has always been ahead of his times, existing in a zone, which is neither real nor pure imagination. He has been placed at the helm of a revolting generation that
overthrew the established norms of script writing and created a legacy of experimentation. And that might be one of the reasons that such a non-conformist is often met with no response or non-acceptance by critics.

The fierce controversy of many of his censored works is perhaps an obvious indication of the actual currency of incidents used in the plays, and their strong rootedness to their socio-political context in which they were written. At the same time, the magnetic quality reflected in the frequency with which these works continue to be popular in different parts of India and abroad, suggests a certain universal quality, which jolts audiences out of their complacency every time the plays are enacted.

_Aakrosh_, in many ways, is a more radical film. It did not run so well because it took people to the heart of terror and exploitation in this country, showing the rural poor as the victims. In the movie, only stray middle class individuals dare to look at the real face of exploitation, because as the young lawyer and the political activist realize, even acknowledging the existence of exploitation involves grave risks to one’s life.

Lahania, in the movie, is shown as someone who has bottled up his rage against his exploiters. It is highly significant that none of the women tribals are shown similarly suppressing their rage. The reason is the ability to feel indignant just as the anger of the title is shown to spring from thwarted manhood. And manhood is thwarted because Lahania is unable to protect the women of his family from sexual exploitation by forest contractors and their henchmen. After his arrest, Lahania can only writhe in torment because he is now surrounded by those who have power over him. At home he could vent his rage on his wife by abusing and beating her. In fact, he finds himself impotent to overpower them with violence, which he certainly wants to do. Therefore, he vindicates himself by murdering his sister. (supposedly out of concern for her). This killing is shown in so sympathetic a light that it appears as a vindication of suppressed humanity, here identified with manhood.

The film ends with the lawyer declaring that he is going to defend Lahania in court. It should be pointed out that in Tendulkar’s original script, Lahania was not shown murdering his sister. Instead, the whole crusade to save him was shown petering out and coming to nothing, as often happens in real life. This is where one can see Tendulkar’s vision differs from Nihalani’s. While Tendulkar’s plays almost always leave the audience
deeply disturbed and self-questioning, Nihalani’s film presents a self-righteous vindication of the hero.

Tendulkar’s third screenplay, Ardh Satya is a realistic film; its authenticity is more present than anything else in it. It is a true depiction of the life of an Indian cop and it does not submit to stereotypes, which could have been the easiest way to go. The screenplay is about the man suppressed beneath the Khaki uniform by an oppressive system. Violence within a person has always been the core theme of Tendulkar’s play. Let us discuss the screenplay which is labeled as a cop film, but it is about a man oppressed by a corrupt system:

3.4 **ARDH SATYA:**

Ardh Satya is a 1983 film directed by Govind Nihalani, Tendulkar’s second offering after the angst-ridden movie Aakrosh (1980). Ardh Satya won many awards and went on to become a landmark film in Indian film history. It is still considered to be one of the best cop films made in India. In this acclaimed cop-drama, the protagonist is a policeman struggling with the evils around him and with his own frailties.

The film opens at a party where the protagonist, Anant Welanker (Om Puri), a police officer, meets Jyotsna (Smita Patil), a lecturer at a local college. Anant is a sub-inspector with Bombay police. They seem to hit it off despite some initial skirmishing about ideology, and the friendship blossoms into a relationship.

Anant brings dilligence, enthusiasm and a definite idealism to his job. But the job is harsh. There is a deep nexus between the local mafia, the cops and the corrupt politicians. Honest himself, Anant falls among the lower rungs of the police hierarchy and has very limited scope of authority on the state of affairs in his area. When Anant arrests three common thugs, he is asked to meet their boss, Rama Shetty, a don in the local mafia. Anant refuses all of Rama Shetty’s attempts to get his men out or to entice Anant to join him. Shetty decides to watch over Anant. After sometime, a meek fellow from a local slum lodges a complaint about some ruffians who harass his wife. Anant finds them, locks them up, and administers a severe beating. As a fallout, the local MLA asks for Anant to be suspended.
Anant’s boss, inspector Haider Ali, explains to a mystified Anant that the ruffians were the MLA’s henchman who provide muscle during elections and political rallies. Anant is defiant with a clear conscience (he did nothing wrong) and is ready to face a tribunal. Haider Ali explains that it will hardly get that far. Tribunals are either delayed indefinitely or rigged (by corrupt politicians), and suspension during that time is a permanent black mark on one’s record.

Anant is initially baffled but goes along with Haider’s plan to bring in Desai, a mediator or middle man with connections in New Delhi, the “centre” or national seat of power. Desai invokes higher powers to quietly cover up the matter. Anant’s morals are shaken by this incident. He had to use means barely legal to uphold his righteous actions upon criminals. Anant reflects upon his childhood. His father retired as a Faujdar in the village police force. His father was a hard and violent man, quick to slap or beat his wife on the slightest pretext. Anant recalls looking on and being powerless to intervene (to come, to lie). When Anant graduates, he expresses his desire to pursue higher education but is forced into joining the police force. Thus, from the beginning Anant finds himself as a helpless being before various forces.

Things get interesting when Anant finds one of Rama Shetty’s goons, badly beaten, burnt and left to die. Anant brings the man into the hospital and takes his statement where he names Rama Shetty and others who inflicted this assault. Anant rushes into Rama Shetty’s room to arrest him. But Shetty is unfazed. He makes a simple phone call to a high ranking cop who immediately asks Anant to back off. Anant cites the context and the overwhelming evidence but is still ordered to step away. A consternated, resentful and hapless Anant leaves, feeling intensely humiliated. Haider Ali informs Anant about Rama Shetty that he plans for the upcoming municipal elections and simply cannot afford to let a petty matter distract his ambitions. Anant is horrified and enraged, and takes to drinking. His relationship with Jyotsna suffers. He is distraught when he is sent to provide security cover for Rama Shetty’s campaign rallies.

However, he suffers another career setback when he leads an assault team to capture a dangerous daku in the hills outside Mumbai, and the credit for the arrest is ultimately handed to another officer. His relationship with Jyotsna greatly suffers as he starts to drink
heavily. Jyotsna tries to be supportive and suggests to him to consider another career. She is deeply affected by recent news stories about police brutality and has decided that she will not marry a police officer. He has always tried to do the right, but his well-intentioned actions always seem to be thwarted by the tentacles of corruption in the police force or the political strata.

Things go completely out of control one night soon after as a small-time thief, accused of stealing a small radio, is brought into custody. Anant is very drunk, angry and frustrated. He delivers a shocking and brutal beating to the thief, accusing him of stealing the legitimate rights of others. In the alcoholic state, a prisoner is killed by Anant in the jail when he uses ‘third degree’ and now Anant is not only likely to be arrested and jailed, but also has to lose his entire career. Anant is suspended and faces charges of excessive force. He tries to invoke Desai again, but Haider Ali backs off, saying the situation had become too hot for anyone to handle. Haider Ali suggests somewhat reluctantly, that perhaps the newly elected Rama Shetty can help. After several days of deliberation, Anant decides to visit Rama Shetty in his betting den. Rama Shetty receives Anant cordially, possibly aware that this righteous cop is finally on his knees before him. He agrees to help him only if Anant, in return, joins forces with him. Now, in the clutches of Rama Shetty, Anant has to obey his every order and humiliation. The dirty conditions put by Rama Shetty angers Anant and he breaks out of his ‘impotent’ torpor and, infuriated, in a stunning and violent move, strangles Rama Shetty there and then and surrenders himself voluntarily to the police for any punishment.

The movie derives its name from a poem that Jyotsna gives Anant to read from a book that she is carrying, Ardh Satya. Anant begins to read the poem aloud; as the meaning sinks in, his smile vanishes; he continues reading in a more subdued and somber tone. This is one of the finest moments, world cinema has shown portraying the effect of art upon man in modern cinema. Later in the film, a cathartic moment occurs symbolizing the poem, where Anant breaks down crying; Jyotsna reaches out a hand to comfort him but then withdraws it without touching him, in one of the most poignant moments of cinema; it is as if she realized that he is within this chakravyuh, or circle of deceit alone and needs to find his inner strength to break out.
Govind Nihalani, in an interview on Indian TV after winning the National Award said that,

“…the moment had actually occurred just before filming, during the rehearsal, where actor Om Puri broke down and started weeping openly while reciting this poem. Nihalani reached out a hand to comfort him and then withdrew it feeling that his anguish was too monumental for a mere touch to provide any solace.”

Nihalani subsequently instructed Smita Patil to play the scene like this, giving her his futile gesture. When faced with a moral or existential choice of such magnitude, man is essentially alone and another cannot partake of his anguish or lessen his burden. The movie suggests that Anant refuses to break out of his situation, choosing to stand and face his nothingness –to continue being an ‘impotent’ police officer, rather than give up his uniform and regain his manliness and self-efficacy.

*Ardh Satya* is a powerful movie. It is a disturbing and a landmark movie. This movie, unlike most of Indian movies lacks song and dance, yet was shown to packed houses all over India because the generation of the tumultuous 1980s identified themselves with Anant Velankar.

Tendulkar’s works depict the exploitation of men and women within and outside their houses for centuries. They give us a sad awareness of the fact that our love of feudal values is responsible for the oppressive and exploitative nature of our society. That is why, in his works, he tries to bring about change in the mind-set of people by shocking their sensibility and challenging the conventional norms and values. It is in this sense that his works are not just unconventional or original but new too. Tendulkar had the ability to create dramatic situations without making it sound contrived or melodramatic. He wrote dialogues with precision. Apart from being a playwright of great stature and a fine journalist, he was also a social commentator.

All these screenplays carry a hidden social message. Tendulkar did not accept the traditional set up and aspired to find and project something challenging and new. Basically
what sets him apart and takes him beyond his illustrious contemporaries has been his deep concern for the contemporary issues and his experimental techniques that have made all his works unique.

After studying Nishant, Aakrosh and Ardh Satya, the researcher has arrived at the following conclusions:

1. By depicting feudal autocracy, Tendulkar has given a real picture of his period of the 70s.
2. His works depict the exploitation of men and women for centuries. Say for instance, Sushila in Nishant and Anant in Ardh Satya.
3. Tendulkar’s preoccupation is with violence in contemporary society. Say for example, in Aakrosh and Ardh Satya, he shows his anger which is inward that turned against the male order in a web of power relations, be it feudal or bourgeois.
4. After observing the screen plays in detail, one can conclude that Tendulkar does not follow any ‘ism’. If Nishant is the movie of a woman’s exploitation, Aakrosh and Ardh Satya are the screen plays in which he reveals man’s exploitation. Say for instance, both Bhiku and Anant become impotent against power politics.
5. The remarkable characteristic of Tendulkar’s screen plays is that they present perplexing, distressing and complex situations in all seriousness.
6. The study of the screen plays shows that it is voiced against the indifference shown by the judicial system towards the oppressed people who become the victims.
7. The works carry no message, in overt or covert terms. They present the existing reality of human predicament, as the playwright perceives it in his period.

Mahesh Dattani, just like Vijay Tendulkar, presents the most relevant issues of society in his screen plays. He has been making conscientious efforts to showcase the issues and problems of contemporary Indian society by making them an integral part of his
dramatic credo. Let us discuss in detail Dattani’s most eminent screenplays with his art and craft.

3.5 **Mahesh Dattani’s Contribution to Indian Cinema:**

Mahesh Dattani is the most powerful and potent dramatic voice in the present Indian English dramatic world. As a dramatist, he carries on simultaneously a three pronged career namely as a stage play writer, as a radio play writer, and as a screen play writer in a remarkable way. His screenplays bear the unmistakable imprint of his innovative theatrical art in terms of theme and technique. The present chapter covers up Dattani’s three screen plays for full length critical exploration and elucidation. They are:


Film adaptation of a play is a very huge and challenging enterprise. A film is a technologically enhanced and updated manifestation of a theatrical performance or narrative art. The screenplay writing has evolved as an independent and separate genre from that of stage-play writing. It is inter-related with two art forms, the drama and the film. In other words, screenplay may be called a textual version or a manuscript for a film.

For Dattani, script writing is a collaborative process. It must serve many masters and accomplish many purposes. It is the script that provides the imaginative magic that brings together a group of people. In other words, a script is a different document for every person reading it. To the producer it is a story that can appeal to the audience. To the director it is a task of cinematography. To the designer it is a list of locations and sets; to the wardrobe people it is a list of costumes; to the actor, a list of lines to learn; to the assistant director a schedule; to the transportation captain, a list of cars, trucks, maps and times. The writer writes for all these people.

“……it is very difficult to translate a play into cinematic terms. It is like restructuring an old building. Isn’t it much easier to just knock it down and build afresh?”

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Mahesh Dattani’s theatrical art depicts the real experiences of life and human conscience. He is very innovative and quite daring in the presentation of human experiences on the stage. He doesn’t allow his presentation of theatrical art rationed by any norms or conditions of dramaturgy. He believes:

Unless you reflect the ethos of the people, it is going to be an enlist theatre; or it is going to be a museum piece intended to satisfy curiosity. On the other hand, if you widen your audience, the only thing you can do is to write more about them.\textsuperscript{13}

*Mango Soufflé* is a 2002 Indian film written and directed by Mahesh Dattani. It was promoted as the first gay film from India and was adapted from Dattani’s own successful English play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. Let us study the screenplay in the marginalized communal context:

3.5.1 **MANGO SOUFFLE:**

The film *Mango Souffle* is the screen version of Dattani’s play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. It is the first celebrated Indian film to address homosexuality, addressing gay issues within the territorially distinct identity of its subject. It was promoted as the first gay male film from India. The film was released in India in February 2002. It won the best motion picture award at the Barcelona Film Festival in the same year. The film was directed by the author himself. Since, the film is a cinematic reproduction of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, there is no change in character and themes etc. Mahesh Dattani showed courage in introducing the homosexual theme openly through this screen play.

*Mango Souffle* is a metrosexual love story which hit the screens nearly a decade ago as a 95-minute English film. The cast includes Atul Kulkarni, Rinke Khanna, Ankur Vikal, Neeba Shah and Faredoon Dodo Bhujwala. The storyline is quite interesting. Kamlesh, a young, successful fashion designer, invites his friends over to brunch at his farmhouse, the Mango Grove. There is Sharad, a witty, intelligent man who is in a relationship with Kamlesh; Deepali, a woman of the world and TV star Bunny whose public-personal impression is that of an ideal husband and father, but whose real (sexual)
interest is quite different. Kamlesh’s sister, Kiran and Ed (Edwin Prakash Methew), who once had a relationship with one of the men in the group also come to the party.

Mahesh Dattani is one such great writer of Indian English literature who showed courage in introducing homosexual themes openly in at least two of his dramas, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* and in *Bravely Fought the Queen*. His directorial debut in a film deserves high commendation because he knew he would have to fight so many taboos and digest so much of unfriendly criticism.

The title of the film, *Mango Souffle* has its symbolic meaning. Mango symbolizes human passion. The mango fruit incites desires, passion etc. It incites the desires of love and friendship in the film. Most of the events take place at the family farm house in the vicinity of the mango orchard. The hot atmosphere outside and the strong passion inside are suggested through the title *Mango Souffle*.

Since, *Mango Souffle* is a cinematic reproduction of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, there are no specific changes, except the locale of the living room of Kamlesh in Mumbai is replaced by the farm house of Kamlesh (in Bangalore) in the film. Kamlesh, the protagonist of the play, has shared an unsuccessful relationship with Ed. The relationship flounders due to societal pressures of heterosexuality which make Ed believe that he is somehow wrong and should switch to the normal, heterosexual mode. Kamlesh is unable 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 on the advice of his psychiatrist. 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.

The movie opens with the arrival of Kamlesh’s friends at the farm house. Sharad is quite familiar with Kamlesh’s house as he has been living with him for sometime. After Sharad, Deepali arrives at the farm house. She is curious to know the cause for Kamlesh’s invitation. Deepali is a lesbian character in the play. It is necessary to mention here that the dramatist has discarded certain elaborations or events in the cinematic version of the play.
For example, in the stage play, the guard is paid for sex by Kamlesh but it isn’t clear in the screen play. In the screen play, Sharad notices a bruise on the watchman’s neck and thinks that Kamlesh is having a sexual relationship with the guard. The strong urge for same sex love is depicted skilfully in the play. Ed wants to marry Kiran while retaining at the same time his relationship with Kamlesh. He is gay or rather a bisexual like Bunny Singh. Despite being gay, Ed asserts that he is not a gay. So when Ed Betrays Kamlesh, Kamlesh feels anguished and depressed. Dattani assures that gay/lesbians have their concept of sexual relationship but they can’t escape the need of sexual differences determined by nature.

Ranjit and Bunny join the party later on. The guard returns with refreshment material. In the party, it is revealed that Ed and Prakash are the same person. All of them are left aghast as they all know about the relationship between Kamlesh-Prakash. Kamlesh requests everyone not to reveal the secret before Kiran for the sake of her happiness.

Sharad wants to help Kamlesh by destroying all the photographs and letters related to the memory of Prakash. However, he snatches one of the photograph and enjoys the sexual warmth in the relationship of Kamlesh and Prakash. The entry of Kiran in all her enthusiasm for the companionship of Prakash, makes Kamlesh restless. Meanwhile, a photograph of Kamlesh-Prakash blows due to the sudden gust of wind. It remains on the French window for a moment and then blows away through the window and lies among people. Of course, Ed and Kiran can’t see it. Everybody rushes out under one or another pretext barring Kiran and Ed. It is quite an amusing scene as all of them chase the moving photograph. Deepali and Ranjit advise Kamlesh to reveal the truth to Kiran. However, Bunny does not agree with them:

Bunny: Don’t tell her. It will ruin their lives. If both of them want it then what is the problem? I think it went that way! (CP II 209)

Both Ed and Kiran feel that something strange is going on. Kiran insists upon Sharad to reveal the truth. Now Sharad is compelled to expose the thing.
Sharad: Well, Kamlesh hasn’t been entirely honest with you. (CP II 210)

Kiran wants to know the true reason behind the failure of relationship between Kamlesh and Sharad. Kamlesh informs her that it just did not work out. The rest of the friends also supported Kamlesh by saying that “Sharad wants to be straight.” (CP II 216) Kiran doesn’t agree with this reason. Moreover, a frank person like Deepali inquires with Ed whether he knows anyone who successfully became straight. Ed responds that he doesn’t know anyone. The reaction of Deepali evinces that homosexuality is a passion beyond the natural scheme of things. In Kamlesh’s life, it is an all absorbing passion. Kamlesh confesses his love for Sharad:

No. It’s true. It took me this moment to realize it.
(looking at Ed) I know now that I have been chasing an illusion. Perhaps the man I loved does not exist…..And I love you. (CP II 218)

However, this confession comes as a blow to Ed. Ed’s hidden passion for Kamlesh is aroused. Kamlesh is struggling against something beyond his control. In his efforts of suppression, he terribly suffers. On the contrary, Bunny is a gay in disguise. He is married and well set. He thinks that Kamlesh is unnecessarily bothered. Therefore, he advises Kamlesh to get married to a woman and continue with his gay affair. However, Ranjit escapes the country to continue his gay relationship. He puts his argument in the following way:

Ranjit: ……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! (CP 71)

Deepali, being a lesbian, is faithful and content with her lesbian relationship. Thus, everybody suggests his/her opinion to make Kamlesh free from depression. Dattani dramatizes the conflict and emotional crisis in the lives of his characters. Kamlesh and Prakash struggle due to the social canons that disapprove their nature in a respectful manner. Kiran is greatly humiliated and betrayed as the photograph is found by the
watchman; has been seen by children; their fathers and the other men-women gathered there. When Ed tries to convince his love to Kiran, Kiran puts him to test by assigning the task of facing the world outside.

Kiran:…….I want you to go outside, meet those people at the wedding. They know you……. (CP II 24)

Ed is aware of this public humiliation. But, yet he jumps on the bike and drives towards the gate at breakneck speed. Maqsood, the watchman, tries to stop him but Ed kicks him. He falls from the bike and crawls out. People are laughing at him. Ed hurts himself and feels pain. Helped by Maqsood, he hobbles in through the gateway. The crowd stares at him. At last he turns to Kiran and asserts, “I love you.” (CP II 226) The film ends here with Kamlesh throwing the torn bits of the photograph into the pool and Sharad applauding it.

The film aroused a lot of debate and agitation as it is based on homosexual relationship. However, Dattani presents the theme of homosexuality in such a way that it couldn’t paralyze the popularity of the film. The film is the dramatist’s subtle point to present reality which is invisible due to darkness. The movie presents the suffering of the deprived sections of our society.

Dattani, being an enterprising dramatist, presents the issue of homosexuality on the screen in a very daring way. In fact, Dattani had an intense desire to direct such a film. He projects through the play the problems faced by the Indian urban queer community. He deals with a variety of strange sensibilities, including men and women, showing how they react to societal pressures.

Mango Souffle gets its great cinematic success due to certain omissions and commissions done by the dramatist while converting a stage play into a film. In the place of muggy night, the dramatist presents a hot summer day. Sanjeev Shah, the film producer mentions:

Mahesh and I had several discussions on the script as he agonized to make the play more cinematic. The
clinches was changing the setting of a muggy night in a Mumbai apartment into a summer day in Bangalore at a sprawling farmhouse. This opened up many cinematic possibilities and suited our budget.¹⁴

The film, *Mango Souffle*, makes the characters more communicative and expressive about their problem and constraints. Since it is an English movie, the target audience is not middle class people or regular film goers. They are the urban people. In fact, the issue of homosexuality deals with urban life. It is attributed:

The movie is targeted at urban audiences since it is all about urban life and urban relationships.¹⁵

The play also raises serious questions as to whether homosexuality is an unnatural aberration. Are people homosexuals by choice? In other words, can one choose one’s gender and sexuality? And can homosexuals convert to heterosexuality? It is difficult to answer these questions with certainty. The play attempts to pose several questions while affirming that no definite answers are possible. Dattani’s play thus raises a host of rarely addressed issues and places them in the forefront.

Dattani’s next screenplay is *Morning Raga*. It is about the meeting of worlds. It is a story that brings the modern and traditional together, unites the past with present, Carnatic music with Western music as never before in the history of humanity and fate and coincidence with individual choices. It is a story of our times where our worlds are interacting with each other. Let us study the screenplay in detail:

3.5.2 **MORNING RAGA:**

As a playwright, Mahesh Dattani will never be stereotypical. At forty-five, he is at the peak of his creative powers, continuously experimenting with new forms and manners of expression. The varied content of his plays seldom have his characters mouthing quotable lines, nor does his thematic material rise to extraordinary heights. But what makes him one of India’s finest playwrights is perhaps his manner of speaking to the audience with complete honesty.
Dattani’s next film, *Morning Raga* was an original screenplay based on the life of a classical music singer. The script of *Morning Raga* has been archived by the *Academy of Motion Pictures*, USA, 2011 and he won the award for best artistic contribution. It had its international premier at the *Cairo Film Festival* in December. It is one of his best Screen plays. The film was released in India on 29th October, 2004. Shabana Azmi, a multi-talented actress played the lead role of Swarnalatha and the film was directed by Mahesh Dattani. The film is unusual for its understated acting and extensive use of English.

*Morning Raga* is set in the Andhra Pradesh countryside. It is a story that brings together the modern with the traditional, unites the past with the present, Carnatic music with Western music, fate and co-incidence with individual choices. Swarnalatha is a classically trained Carnatic singer who has lost her son and best friend, Vaishnavi in a bus accident. At the very outset of the play, the flashback technique shows that some villagers are boarding a bus with their luggage. This is a twenty-year old incident. Swarnalatha with her friend, Vaishnavi, is leaving her home village for the city to cherish and realize her dreams. Both are carrying their sons of about four years. But Swarnalatha loses her son and best friend in a bus accident. Simultaneously, the flashback also shows Mr. Kapoor, in a city home, getting into his car, and Mrs. Kapoor, along with her daughter are seen at the front door of the house. Mr. Kapoor drives out his car and puts on the stereo. The fast moving car and the bus in which Swarnalatha is travelling with her friend, appear from the two opposite directions and collide. Mr. Kapoor’s car overturns on the bridge throwing him in a pool of blood. The music however, from the car continues to play on. Swarnalatha survives but her son is dead. Her friend Vaishnavi also dies whereas her son Abhinay survives. This is the flashback of the past.

Swarnalatha holds herself responsible for Vaishnavi’s death because she encouraged a reluctant Vaishnavi into making a trip to a city on that fateful bus journey. After twenty years the story reopens, when Vaishnavi’s son, Abhinay plans to leave his business of composing music to commemorate the 20th death anniversary of his mother. Abhinay, with these plans returns to his home village.

Abhinay’s father is greatly annoyed with Abhinay’s interest in music. He wants him to look after the ancestral lands in the village. He asks him not to waste his time in
music. Abhinay had left his home village for the cause of music three years back as his father was against his desire. When Abhinay expresses his desire for starting a music group before his father, his father retorts,

“You have also gone mad! Like your mother! She is controlling you from the other world!” (CP II 344)

Thus, the two different attitudes of the father and the son generate the conflict between them. Abhinay tries to get his mother’s violin as it is the sign of his late mother. But his father hates Abhinay’s madness for music. Abhinay finds a hostile atmosphere within his own home in the form of his father. It is aptly observed:

The impatience of Abhinay, the contempt of father and the mystery of violin are three strong situations for the exposition of the plot. It sustains mystery and suspense........

Mahesh Dattani is carefull enough to keep the violin as a centre of attention to heighten the conflict of the past, suggesting rather than explaining what is on Swarnalatha’s mind. That she holds herself responsible for the death of Abhinay’s mother and suspects he might have returned to blame her for it. But he doesn’t. He is too preoccupied with starting his music group.

Abhinay’s passion for music leads him closer to Swarnalatha. He invites Swarnalatha to sing for his music group. However, the invitation takes her completely by surprise. She is haunted by her loss, and keeps herself shut in her grand house for twenty years, too depressed to meet people or even sing. But Swarnalatha’s husband asks Abhinay to compel her to sing but she again and again refuses. Meanwhile, Abhinay’s father expresses his dislike for his son’s musical career in front of Swarnalatha, and asks her to back off from his son because her music will take him no where. Swarnalatha is enraged at this insult to music and at the same time she agrees to sing for Abhinay in the city.

Another interesting character is Pinkie (Priyanka). Like Abhinay, she is also a very sensitive girl of twenty and wants to perpetuate the memory of her deceased father by preserving the tradition of Western music, as her father was a passionate lover of Western
music. His passion for Western music and Vaishnavi’s urge for Carnatic music are the two dimensions of one tradition of music.

Pinkie feels that her mother shows no sign of feeling and sympathy for her defunct father. But her mother shows indifference to it. Her disbelief in her mother is clearly revealed in the following words:

Pinkie: You didn’t love him, did you? All you care about is yourself.

Mrs. Kapoor: (slamming the stuff in the sink) Pinkie that’s unfair to me. You are being very very unfair.

(CP II 365-66)

Pinkie charges her mother for being unfair with her and her father. But this is not true. Mrs. Kapoor removes Pinkie’s illusory notions regarding her father by presenting the truth. Mr. Kapoor was sick and used to beat her. Pinkie is deeply grieved to know the ill treatment meted out to her mother. She also came to know the truth that her father was responsible for the accident as he was drunk. Pinkie’s consciousness rocks again as the accident has taken away so many villagers’ lives, including Abhinay’s mother and Swarnalatha’s son and her father too. Being a sensitive girl, she suffers from the past accident.

After acknowledging the facts about the accident, Pinkie experiences a sense of self-guilt. She wants to help Abhinay, Swarnalatha and the villagers as well. She carries the weight of the responsibility of her father for the accident. So she comes to the village where the accident had taken place. She arrives in the village with a view to paying homage to her deceased father. So, for Pinkie, her passion for music is her sentimental quest.

In this way, Swarnalatha, Abhinay and Pinkie share the unhappy common past. All the three have lost their dear ones in the bus-car accident and now all the three are keen to nurture the tradition of music. Abhinay plans to commemorate the 20th death anniversary of his mother by setting up a musical group; Pinkie tries to keep the memory of her dead father by preserving the tradition of music and for Swarnalatha, music is her identity which she had lost in the accident, and wants to get it back. It is observed:
Swarnalatha, Pinkie and Abhinay have a common quest to preserve the tradition of art and music. Their passion is rooted in their begotten past but they have a yearning to seek its outlet in the present life conditions. The dramatic structure of *Morning Raga* moves in the direction of breaking the duality of past and present and the distinction of personal and impersonal.\(^\text{17}\)

In *Morning Raga* Dattani delicately presents the emotional crises of an artist in whose life, music is a passion, a creative art and a question of his identity. The attempt to crush it under the pressure of social conventions generates uncompromising guilt. In the play, the idea of self-guilt has been projected through the anguish of Swarnalatha. She, as an artist passes through intense conflict born out of her passion for music and the restrictions imposed on her by her family members. Even at a mental level, Swarnalatha suffers with double conflict – her passion for music and her sense of loss at the death of her friend and her son. Swarnalatha can overcome her conflict only through transmitting her art of Carnatic music to Abhinay.

Swarnalatha has been avoiding music for twenty years. Abhinay wants to rediscover her voice by revitalizing Swarnalatha’s passion of music. Vaishnavi’s violin remains useless because Swarnalatha has suspended her passion for music. Abhinay wants to break the long observed silence of Swarnalatha. Actually, Swarnalatha is a true worshipper of music. She wants to carry on the practice of music and to keep the voice of Vaishnavi alive as well. However, her will is controlled by the society which doesn’t appreciate her interest in music. There is a conflict in her mind resulting from her undying urge for music and discouraging familial environment. Critically, the clash or tension is born out of conflict between individual ‘choices’ and ‘social commitment.’

Dattani’s balanced script ensures *Morning Raga’s* message is unraveled at a steady pace, and in doing so keeps the audience’s interest locked. Swarnalatha did not dare to cross the bridge where her son had died. In contrast, Abhinay and Priyanka, who had lost their mother and father respectively, can not wait to break for the city to pursue their dream.
of forming a band. Fusing Carnatic (South Indian) music with contemporary western sounds, the talented trio help each other cope with the emotional loss of their loved ones.

Marginalization is one of the favourite themes of Mahesh Dattani’s plays. Woman who has been regarded as a subaltern both in pre and post independent India, is clearly displayed in the portrayal of Swarnalatha. Her passion for music has been restricted by the society. Dattani’s plays become a strong witness to the double standards existing in our society. The women find themselves constricted by traditional role expectations. They are ignored and neglected by society, and so frequently deprived of their rights and privileges. Dattani’s plays demonstrates the plight of the women sympathetically and much has been written about them pondering over the question why they are treated as subordinates when society benefits by their respective contributions in one way or the other. Moreover, they are also creations of the same super power.

Swarnalatha, like a traditional woman, suffers all alone within by suppressing the burden of guilt on her heart. A sense of guilt consciousness for the tragic demise of her friend Vaishnavi and secondly her mind undergoes intense conflict for her passion for music. It is only after the arrivals of Abhinay and Pinkie that she rediscovers her passion for music. Dattani’s women characters in spite of being marginalized possess a will of their own to resist the forces hazardous to their survival. Swarnalatha’s resistance comes out when Abhinay’s father blames her. It is well illustrated in the following words:

Abhinay’s Father: I hear my son is learning music from you.

Swarnalatha: May be.

Abhinay’s Father: Please leave him alone. Music will take him nowhere. (CP II 381)

This allegation falls like a brick on her head. She is already in pain inwardly. Abhinay’s father has increased her pain by this negative remark. Moreover, her decision of singing is not welcomed and appreciated by other people of the village. Finally, she makes up her mind and gives her approval to participate in Abhinay’s music group.
There is a spiritual bondage between Swarnalatha and Abhinay. Abhinay can’t sing without Swarnalatha. Despite being different persons, there is a spiritual bondage between them. Music is their common quest.

Swarnalatha’s suspended passion for music is revived fully by Abhinay and Pinkie, and Swarnalatha decides to teach them music. By the dual efforts of Pinkie and Abhinay, Swarnalatha slowly revives her interest in music. Pinkie has made up her mind to disclose the reality, so she takes Swarnalatha and Abhinay into her car, and drives towards the bridge. The car speeds towards the bridge and the truck passes by at high-speed. The car crosses the bridge. Pinkie consoles Swarnalatha:

“You see. Nothing happened. It is not a curse on you! I knew that nothing would happen, because you are not to blame…….” (CP II 410)

Swarnalatha is filled with practical wisdom and moral guts. Abhinay is also filled with strength and understanding. As stated earlier, Abhinay has decided to organize a concert in the city and he sends an invitation card to Swarnalatha. Mr. Shastri opens the card which has an image of a mother and a child. He reads for Swarnalatha:

Mr. Shastri: (reading) You are wrong. There are forces that can bring back your son and my mother to us. I hope one day I can help you understand how proud your son would be if you sang for him. I don’t know how to make you see that, but I will keep trying. (CP II 411-412)

Swarnalatha is moved by this note and decides to join Abhinay at the concert. Swarnalatha and her husband reach the auditorium. Abhinay’s father also arrives with the villagers. Abhinay, who was nervous earlier, beams when he sees Swarnalatha and rushes to her to touch her feet. Pinkie also appears. They are going to play Morning Raga taught by Swarnalatha. Pinkie encourages Swarnalatha by saying that her dream of singing in the city is going to come true. Swarnalatha is motivated by these words and takes a decision to
sing Morning Raga which was the dream she has seen twenty years ago. After getting a very warm welcome by the audience, she in her ecstasy says,

“Thank you. It has been a difficult raga for me to learn. Twenty years is a long time. Music is a never ending journey……It has been my dream to sing for an audience such as you………….. I will sing this song for my son who, like my music, has returned after a very long journey. (Looking at Abhinay) Abhinay, I sing this raga for you – my son” (CP II 416)

Abhinay too is moved by Swarnalatha’s words. If Swarnalatha has got back her music and son, Abhinay has got back his mother after twenty years. It happens just because of music. It is only by music that the trio – Swarnalatha, Abhinay and Pinkie come together. The song ends with a thunderous applause. Thus, music triumphs over the forces that control human life. The inspiration for this film came from one of Dattani’s experiences.

Dattani’s third screenplay is *Ek Alag Mausam*. It is Dattani’s celebrated screen play which deals with the pain and suffering of HIV positives of our society. The play seems to be a thematic innovation in the field of Indian drama in English. Dattani in *Ek Alag Mausam* takes the pen against the forces that suppress the call of humanity. The play looks like an attempt to respond to the call of humanity. To live, to survive and to belong are the basic thrusts of human existence. The protagonists in *Ek Alag Mausam* are HIV positives and in spite of being aware of it, they are equally sensitive towards the warmth of human relationship. There are legal restrictions of matrimonial alliances for HIV positives. Yet Dattani takes his pen against this socially and legally challenged issue with a motif that human life takes its own course beyond the domain of legislature and its pace can be felt and estimated only in the court of humanity. Let us discuss the play in detail:

### 3.5.3 EK ALAG MAUSAM:

Mahesh Dattani is an avant-garde who made experiments with new themes, and unconventional mode of stage practices. The close coordination of the crisis of real life and
the conditions of theatre, constitute the essence of Dattani’s drama. In modern times, life is unorganized and fragmented. Man is constantly suffering between the conflicting pulls of social commitments and personal choices. During the course of one single day, one is forced to play ten different parts and sometimes more than that. What remains constant is one’s sense of being. It is a fact that people undergo their emotional crisis in silence or speak of them inarticulately.

*Ek Alag Mausam* is a screenplay in which Dattani emphatically articulates the inarticulate to express the ‘silence’ of those who are the victims of social apathy, indifference of fate and ignominy born out of human attitude. He registers his protest about the irrational control of social conventions that do not permit a man to respond to the call of humanity. The play *Ek Alag Mausam* was first written as a screen play by Dattani. It is the story of the emotional sensibility of two HIV positives, both who cannot crush the urge of life. Society can not leave an individual to die in shame and isolation for reasons that are beyond the conscious control of man.

The protagonists, Aparna (Nandita Das) and George (Rajit Kapur), in *Ek Alag Mausam* are HIV positives and in spite of being aware of this fact, they are equally sensitive to the warmth of human relationship. There are legal restrictions on matrimonial alliances for HIV positives. Still Dattani took his pen against this socially and legally prohibited issue with the vision that human life takes its own course beyond the domain of legislature and its pace can be felt and estimated only in the court of humanity,

“It is a human rights issue and the courts have no right to interfere in the decisions that individuals make – if they are aware that the person they are going to marry is HIV positive”

Like many other naturalistic plays, *Ek Alag Mausam* depicts incidents of past and present in the lives of Aparna and George. The action moves with the flashback memories of the protagonist, Aparna. When the play begins, Aparna decides to put Paro in Panchgini boarding school. Paro’s mother had died due to the virus infection. She was brought up like a daughter by Aparna. Paro loves Aparna like a mother but for her it was difficult to support Paro for a long time. The present includes Aparna’s affinity with George and her
maternal care for the child Paro. The past consists of the bitter experiences of Aparna’s first exposure to the reality; the horror of existence for HIV positives, her unwilling abortion and her final separation from her husband. They are driving in the car. Paro accuses Aparna for leaving her as well as leaving George. After this accusation, Aparna’s conscience shifts to the past. The whole past emerges from the flashback memories of Aparna. The horror of the past appears one after another before her eyes. The past memory of George, driving a truck, and the phone call of Rosalynd Cooper who was a volunteer nurse at the central Hospital is very fresh.

Aparna is expecting a baby. She informs her husband about Cooper’s call and requests him to accompany her to the hospital. She says,

“It’s something about our baby. I am scared Suresh. I want you with me.” (CP II 476)

She is greatly hurt as her husband is not keen to accompany her. So, she is compelled to go to the hospital alone. At the hospital, Cooper advises her to give up her baby. Aparna strongly objects to this idea by asking, “Why? What’s wrong with my baby?” (CP II 478) She doesn’t understand what doctor and nurses mean to say. Cooper then says;

“I think it is better for you to come with your husband sometimes when he is free……Have you heard of HIV?” (CP II 478)

Aparna is unconvinced and laughs a little at this question. In her shock, she said,

“It’s not possible, how I could be HIV positive?” (CP II 478)

Dr. Sanyal even confirms that she had got the virus from her husband. Her conscience is torn between the conflicting pull of ideas. Her anguish is born out of fear of losing an unborn baby. She is also worried about her husband. She was left helpless with the warning, “there is no need to come to this hospital any more.” (CP II 480) She argued with the doctor but the doctor, indifferent to her sentiments, said, “Don’t be a fool…..No proper nursing home is going to touch you.” (CP II 480) Aparna is left dumbfounded. There
are two spaces of her sufferings. She is physically in pain because of the virus infection and in addition, she is greatly worried about the pain that results from social stigma.

Besides the existential crisis, the play also presents a woman’s maternal crisis. Aparna is a woman and to be the mother of a child is a blessing in every woman’s life. But her privilege of being a mother is destroyed. Moreover, she was forced to lead the life of a marginalized and to endure pity and disgust. The conversation with Suresh further puts Aparna in an uncertain condition,

Aparna: All those business trips! Those late nights.
How many women have you infected so far?

Suresh: I don’t know!

Aparna: You are too drunk to know.

Suresh: What are you going to do now? (CP II 482)

It is not a question of an individual but the question of the entire community of HIV positives. Aparna seeks Suresh’s help but he too is sailing in the same boat which is going to sink very soon. He is unable to help her. He confesses with a sense of guilt, “How can I help you? I am dying too.” (CP II 482) He tries to escape from the blame and leaves the city with a guilt ridden soul.

Aparna being disgusted leaves her family and takes shelter at Jeevan Jyoti Hospital. Gradually, she feels that Jeevan Jyoti is her new and true home. It is observed:

It was a new dawn in her life with message of the shadows of death, can’t be overpowered, can at least be lingered with the positive thrust of life. If HIV is the preface to death and social shame, Jeevan Jyoti is certainly the light of life.  

Dr. Machado (Anupam Kher), the organizer of the hospital, is a very impressive and optimistic character. He inspires the inmates through his energetic words.
Dr. Machado: …… We will all die one day….. Then why this fear of dying….? What is important is that we are alive today. We are alive right now! Aren’t we all dying? Isn’t everyone in this world dying? I am not HIV positive but I am also dying. But do I think about my death all the bloody time? No. I think of each moment that I have. Each day. Each month. Each season that I have. So why don’t you. You all have these moments, months, seasons…….” (CP II 486)

The patients are encouraged and cheered by the doctor’s attempt. Aparna is moved by Dr. Machado’s slogan “Keep fighting. Seize the moment” (CP II 487). He invites the patients to share their positive experiences. Encouraged by Dr. Machado’s words, Manoj, one of the boys, shares his experiences with two different dentists. Manoj needed gum surgery to save his teeth and went to a dentist and told the truth of his being HIV positive. So, the doctor didn’t attend to him. After this incident, he went to another dentist to whom he did not tell the truth of a virus infection. The dentist did the surgery. His gums are perfect now. Later, he sent him a letter informing that he was HIV positive. This provides a sort of amusement to the people. It indicates that social myth is more powerful than an individual’s rationalism. This incident is full of humour and satire. Dattani ridicules the society where even a doctor, a man of science, is carried away with the tides of social myths and irrational notions and thus increases the suffering and pain of the people instead.

At Jeevan Jyoti, Aparna comes in contact with George, one of the truck drivers who transports dead bodies. George’s entry in Aparna’s life is very significant. Their relationship inculcates a sense of belongingness and lifts her from depression. Aparna is a very kind lady. She candidly confesses that she is not doing any philanthropic task. When Dr. Machado gives her an opportunity to watch Ramnath, an old patient of HIV positive, to make him smile before he dies, Aparna could not do this job. It was really an acid test for Aparna. She goes to the room to find the man. She is quite horrified and bewildered to see him. Some people are playing a game of cards around him.
Man A: Yes you can. Come on. Try to beat us.

Manoj: You can’t beat death. But you can beat us. Try! (CP II 492)

The man looks at Aparna. His breathing gets more and more desperate. He deals with the cards and wins the game. And suddenly his breathing stops. He loses life. Aparna, in her shock, informs the doctor, “I think I have failed, doctor.” (CP II 492) She reveals her desire that she would like to work with the children at the earliest. Thus, Aparna tries to give meaning to her meaningless life by working with children.

George is a very energetic volunteer. Aparna gets involved in an emotional relationship. She starts taking interest in the lives of children and George. Aparna is curious to know about George’s truck driving business about which George explains,

“……..What do you think, takes the bodies for cremation? The municipality van won’t even enter the compound. Before me they had to bury or burn them all here. So be careful. If you come here often enough, people think you have AIDS also.” (CP II 497)

Aparna and George are quite ignorant of each other’s being HIV positive. George comes to know about Aparna’s being HIV positive through Dr. Machado. Here, Dattani’s sensibility for a purposeful human relationship to sustain the warmth of love is revealed through George and Aparna’s relationship. Dattani tends to say that social apathy doubles the pain and suffering of the diseased people. Human love and warmth can help in forgetting the pain if not in curing it. Aparna has been suffering acutely. She starts forgetting her suffering and pain in the emotional company of George and the children. Dattani, like a scientist, throws light on the cause and the effect of the issue of HIV positives. He observes that the virus infected people have two kinds of suffering, one physical and second mental. The diseased people are more scared of social stigma than death which is imminent. The sign at Jeevan Jyoti hospital ‘Leave Your Prejudice Outside’ is very suggestive and significant. Dattani believes that social myths, convention, prejudice,
apathy etc. have made the lives of many people worse than hell. If society shakes off apathy and deep rooted prejudices, life will become an easy journey. George tries to make Aparna happy and cheerful enabling her to know the reality of life. He finds himself involved. Dattani manipulates two incidents in the play to decode the power of human sentiments. George is in the lake washing himself. As soon as he steps out of lake, Aparna is transfixed as he slowly emerges from water. She feels the sensation of his wet body shining golden yellow in morning sunlight. George also becomes conscious of his body and its sensational effect. He shakes off the water from his hair and Aparna is flustered. Another example is George and Aparna, along with Suraj, who go to George’s home to collect a wooden soldier. Aparna is relieved to find a wooden soldier as it is more important for Suraj at that time. In her excitement, she hugs George. The same is reciprocated by George with more feeling. As Aparna feels stiffened, George breaks away. Soon after this, George goes to her and kisses her tenderly. He confesses, “Aparna, I love you.” (CP II 519) But Aparna makes a desperate attempt to resist herself on the plea, “I am HIV positive.” (CP II 519) George knows well that she is refusing on the ground that she is HIV positive. He exhorts saying that each individual has a right to assert his own passion and has a right to seek happiness. Aparna regrets such a change in her attitude but it seems to be spontaneous and inevitable. Further, she is greatly shocked to know about his being HIV positive that reminds her of husband who had infected her. However, she is ignorant about the real cause of George’s infection. Therefore, she feels that George is more shameless than her husband who had hidden the truth of being HIV positive.

The play celebrates the joy of life rather than mourning of death. It encourages one how to fight against suffering. The message of love for life is clearly conveyed in George’s words: “Death is not news over here. Life is.” (CP II 504) Therefore, Ramnath was encouraged to play cards even before a few seconds of his long breath.

However, it is daring on the part of Dattani to give an elaborate description of the Red- Light Area, the center of unlicensed sex. It is responsible for the spread of AIDS Virus. The sex workers are looked down upon for corrupt sex practices but Dattani encourages social awareness against the undesirable social practices that are responsible for the indignation and humiliation of humanity. He reflects on the causes that are
responsible for a hazardous sexual relationship. The inset story of Rita is a very bold dramatic attempt by Dattani.

At the exterior level in the present, Aparna and Paro are moving in the car singing a Hindi film song. Suddenly Paro asks Aparna how she first met her mother, Rita. With this, the scene shifts again to the past, and George, Manoj and Shyam are seen creating awareness against AIDS. So many sex workers have assembled around the stage. George is addressing them in a question answer method, as it is concluded that HIV doesn’t spread through human touch, living, eating and sleeping with an infected person. It can spread through unprotected sex, infected blood, contaminated injection needles and from infected mother to a newborn. Suddenly, they see a woman being beaten and dragged out of her house along with her five-year old daughter. Actually, she was employed at the brothel as a sex worker by some people. It is revealed that she has got a virus infection on account of her involvement in illegal sex business. They want to drive her out from the house as they are losing customers due to virus infection. Her name is Rita, Paro’s mother. Rita is marginalized as an AIDS infected person and her existence is doomed. She expresses her anger against the stark reality, “They have finished making money out of me so they want to throw me out.” (CP II 527) When George tried to help her, she challenged, “If you want to be so helpful, will you look after my daughter? Will you feed her? Educate her? No? If you can’t do all that then don’t pretend to help.” (CP II 527) Rita is not worried about her personal pain but is very anxious about the future of her daughter who would be a victim of social discrimination. As soon as George ensures a safe future for her daughter at Jeevan Jyoti, she pathetically admits, “Oh! Thank God. I have Aids.” (CP II 528) Here, Dattani articulates the voice of those who are marginalized and destined to lead a life full of shame and guilt.

George’s heroism, to be happy like everyone comes through a realization that though death is certain, happiness should be the aim of survival. However, Aparna is not confident. She is a little suspicious about being happy.

“To watch each other die? I see my mother observing my every move. My every cough, my every sneeze is painful to her. I can see the terror in her eyes when
she is thinking this is the beginning of the end. I can’t do this to anyone else. And what makes you think that just because we are both HIV positive, we will be happy together?” (CP II 533)

Aparna is unable to forget that they are HIV positives. She stands for the pain of survival. However, George stands for the assertion of life. He wants her to forget that they are HIV positives. He encourages others to live like a soldier. According to him one can survive in his pain if he is possessed with strong will power. He accuses Aparna:

You have branded yourself, AIDS! AIDS! AIDS!
You have put a big red stamp on yourself. I thought only an uncaring, unfeeling society would do that to us. But no. We don’t have to worry about society. We are doing it to ourselves! I refuse to brand myself. All I know is that I love you and I want to marry you.

(CP II 533)

Aparna is less confident than George. She loves George but she does not want to undergo the pain that is involved in it. Aparna fails to realize the reality of George’s life. She suspects George for his illicit relations. She can not marry the person who has also infected many other women. The revelation of George’s life is to tear the veil of illusion related to HIV infection. He became HIV positive because he gave blood to Joseph, Dr. Machado’s son. In fact, George is the most innocent character. His condition is more pathetic and tragic than Aparna. The worst realization of social apathy in the life of George comes in the form of his encounter with his family members. He seeks refuge in his parental home only to support his old parents. His parents find it difficult to tolerate the reality of George’s life. His mother breaks down and cries in despair. George’s parents take it as a curse to the whole family and accuse him, “You may live for another seven years. But you have killed us before we have entered our graves. What face do we have left in this village?.....Leave. Go George!........Go.” (CP II 537)
It is ironical that although Aparna herself is infected with the virus, she is yet unable to appreciate the situation of George. However, her illusion is removed when she visits Mr. Machado’s house.

Dr. Machado: My child, you have been very foolish.
So foolish. He didn’t get it through a prostitute. (CP II 598)

Dr. Machado shocks her saying that George got the virus from his son, Joseph who died seven years ago because of AIDS. Dr. Machado narrated the whole story to Aparna. Joseph who was involved with some anti-social elements in Bombay, became a drug addict. “It was George who dragged him back. They were coming back in George’s truck. The truck fell into a ditch. George was seriously injured. Joseph escaped unhurt. George needed blood. Joseph gave him his blood, and unknowingly…….” (CP II 549)

The doctor’s revelation about George puts Aparna into great shock. Soon after this, Aparna and Paro arrive at Panchgini school. Surprisingly, Dr. Machado comes there bringing George with him. Aparna is already regretting for being selfish and rude to George. However, Dr. Machado encourages Aparna to reciprocate her feelings for George without further delay. Encouraged by Dr. Machado, Aparna releases her feelings for George and the play ends with Aparna and George in each other’s arms and Paro blowing bubbles on them. The message of the play is a realization and not a representation.

Dattani, like Tendulkar, wants to highlight the subaltern issues of the contemporary society. He writes about issues which are very relevant in nature like gender issues, homosexuality, lesbianism, communalism and religious issues. His plays depict marginalized groups of society, people who are considered misfits in a society where stereotyped attitudes and notions reign supreme. The study of Mango Souffle, Morning Raga and Ek Alag Mausam shows Dattani’s serious concern with human life.

In the study of Dattani’s screen plays the following conclusions have been arrived at:
1. The playwright deals with invisible issues which are very much a part of the educated urban society.

2. Dattani is seriously concerned with the marginalized themes such as women’s subjugation and the virgin land spaces, that is, of homosexuals, eunuchs etc. For example, the screen play, *Morning Raga* revolves around Swarnalatha and her feminine question of identity. *Ek Alag Mausam* is also about a woman who is HIV positive and the traumatic experiences she undergoes.

3. Gay relations – homosexuality – is one of the issues that figures prominently in some of his plays. Say for example, through the play like *Mango Souffle*, the playwright has tried to soften the society towards the gay and subtly tried to stir up compassion for this class.

4. Through these plays, Dattani registers his protest about the irrational control of social conventions that do not permit a man to make an innate response to the call of humanity. Say for example, in *Ek Alag Mausam*, he expresses the ‘silence’ of those who are the victims of the apathy of society.

5. The study of the above plays reveals that Dattani, within the framework of dramatic structure, tries to investigate the identities of those who occupy no space in social order.
CHAPTER-3

References

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