APPENDIX - I

Email sent by Dattani along with the typescript of the play Night Queen
A tiny room with two doors. The side door leads directly to the street. The other door leads to the rest of the house. It is the sort of room which would be built for a paying guest who may need to come and go without disturbing the rest of the household.

We can see that the room is occupied by a single male. A bachelor's room with a huge poster of a muscle man on the cupboard. Some workout equipment can also be seen. A pair of jeans tossed on a chair.

We also see a window. However we can't see outside on the street because there is a night queen (raat ki raani) shrub acting as a mask. It could do with some pruning. The shrub is shaking as a result of a strong wind.

We open on an empty stage. We hear an old woman calling out, "raghu! Ay, raghu"

The strong wind blows some flowers into the room.

Raghu enters the room through the side door and quickly shuts the windows.

Raghu is a young man around mid twenties. He wears trendy jeans that are a little too tight. His muscles are heavy and fairly well developed but they add a certain grace, rather than power, to his movements.

RAGHU. (Calling out)Come in!

Ash walks in. He looks around still at the doorway. Ash is a little older than Raghu. He is good looking. A little self conscious, which perhaps adds to his charm. Raghu picks up some of the flowers that had swept in.

RAGHU. I like them on the branches.

ASH. Huh?

RAGHU. The blooms. I don't like them on my floor.

ASH. Oh. (preoccupied. Looking around the room) Why not?

RAGHU. (taken aback at the question)Why not? I don't know. I just like them better when they are still up there. Besides, they lose their fragrance once they fall off. No point in sticking them in vases.

ASH. Pretty strong smelling.

RAGHU. Do you need to go to the bathroom now?

ASH. Er - ya.

RAGHU. (pointing to the other door)You have to go through that door. It's the first door across the living room. You might bump into my folks but don't mind. They are quite used to it.

ASH. Never mind. I'll go later.
RAGHU. Sit down.

_Ash continues to stand. Raghu is unsure now._

ASH. Why don't you shut the door?

_Raghu looks at him for a while. He goes to the window instead and opens them. The wind blows in more flowers and dried leaves, before subsiding._

_Raghu stares at him._

ASH. What’s your name?

RAGHU. Babu.

_Old woman's voice (off) Raghu! Raghu?_

ASH. Who is Raghu?

RAGHU. (throwing up his hands) _AMght._ I am Raghu. I am so used to giving a false name. But you seem to be okay.

ASH. You didn't think so a while ago.

RAGHU. Just out of habit I guess, (fishing out his car^) Here's my card. I work for Micro land. Assistant Sales Manager. Here, take it.

_Ash accepts the card and puts it in his wallet without looking at it._

RAGHU. I might as well have yours.

ASH. Huh?

RAGHU. Your card. Can I have your card?

ASH. (putting his wallet back in his hip pocket) No. I have run out of cards.

RAGHU. Then I think I should have my card back.

ASH. Why are you nervous?

RAGHU. What's your name?

ASH. Relax.

RAGHU. What is your name?

ASH. I told you. Ash.

RAGHU. Ash. I have used that one before!

ASH. That is my name.

RAGHU. Is it short for Ashok or Ashish or Ashley?

ASH. Ash will do for you. Now that you know my name, you can shut the door.

_Raghu moves slowly to the door and shuts it._

ASH. Leave the window open.

RAGHU. Someone may peep in.

ASH. (moving to the window) For now. I will shut it after a while.

_Pause._
ASH. My grandmother wouldn't allow us to grow Night Queen. She said it attracted snakes. We grew up in a village named - a village.

RAGHU. There's no danger of that here. Snakes, I mean.

ASH. I planted one anyway. Such strong fragrance!

RAGHU. And did it attract snakes?

ASH. In my dreams.

_Pause,

ASH. I would go to sleep with the blooms on my body. And I would dream. The snake would slither into my bed, curl up over my belly, attracted by the scent. And I would imagine that it was attracted to my body. The warmth of my body. And I was aroused by the presence of the snake. The snake then turned into a man. A man who made love to me.

_Old woman's voice (off) Gayatri! Gayatri, are you asleep?

ASH. (startled) Who is that?

RAGHU. My mother. She is senile. And an insomniac. Just ignore her.

ASH. Who is Gayatri?

RAGHU. My sister.

_Old woman's voice (off) Gayatri!

RAGHU. (going to the door) Excuse me.

_Ash surreptitiously takes out his wallet again and looks at Raghu's card.

RAGHU. (yelling through doorway) Gayatri, see what she wants. I have a visitor!

_Raghu comes back in.

_Ash quickly puts the card and wallet back in his pocket

RAGHU. Wow! I have heard some wild gay fantasies, but this one is something special. Snakes turning into sexy men. Though it should be obvious. I mean the snake being such a classic phallic symbol.

_Ash looks at him displeased.

RAGHU. Anyway, I am happy that you mentioned it. Only a gay man could have such a fantasy. So I am sure of you now.

ASH. What do you mean?

RAGHU. For a minute I thought that you may be, you know, one of those.

ASH. One of those?

RAGHU. Straight guys pretending to be gay so they can pick up someone, bash them up and take all their money.

ASH. Has it happened to you?

RAGHU. Sure. Twice. Hasn't it happened to you?

_Ash shakes his head._
RAGHU. I can't believe it. You are probably the only one. Maybe you just know how to stay away from the wrong ones. Some people can tell a hetero guy a mile away. I think it's the way they walk.

ASH. Oh. And what about you. Can't you tell?

RAGHU. Sometimes. But I am never too sure.

ASH. What do you feel about me?

RAGHU. When you sat beside me on the park bench, I was pretty sure. But after a while I wasn't too sure.

ASH. Why?

RAGHU. You didn't put your hand on my crotch.

ASH. And yet you invited me to your home.

RAGHU. Well. I put my hand on your crotch. That's when I was sure. At least then I was.

ASH. And now you feel that I may be one of those.

RAGHU. It doesn't matter even if you are. I am trained for combat. I bash up gay bashers.

ASH. You feel that would be necessary with me?

RAGHU. You never know.

ASH. Do I look like a gay basher to you.

RAGHU. Not now. Not after you told me your fantasy.

ASH. That was a lie.

RAGHU. You mean it was a fantasy. There's a difference between a lie and a fantasy. What you just said was your fantasy.

ASH. The fantasy was a lie. I don't fantasize about snakes turning into men and giving me a blow job.

RAGHU. So you made it up.

ASH. Yes.

RAGHU. But that's what a fantasy is! It's not real, it's made up! So it can't be a lie if you made it up!

ASH. I lied about making it up! I don't fantasize. I don't fantasize!

RAGHU. No. You don't understand. If you could invent such a story, then it is a part of your fantasy. Whether you really dreamed about it then, or it came to you now is immaterial. It is a part of you.

ASH. No! It can't be. I -1 didn’t invent the story. It was told to me. By someone in the park. And I passed it off as my own now.

RAGHU. Why? What was the necessity? To impress me? I am impressed already.

(suggestive) Shall we close the windows now? The smell of the Night Queen is overpowering somehow.
Raghu doesn't wait for an answer. He moves to the windows and shuts them, gently slipping the bolt in.

Raghu goes to Ash and slowly begins to caress his cheek. Ash stands frozen for a while.

Raghu’s hand moves slowly to Ash’s breast. Ash suddenly grabs Raghu’s neck and starts to push him up against a wall.

ASH. You know what I did to the guy who told me that story? I bashed him up. I beat him till he was pulp. I could have slit his throat and thrown him in the gutter! That’s what he deserved. That’s what you deserve!

RAGHU. Get your hands off me you swine!

ASH. Why? What will you do? Shout for help? Call the police? What can you do? Call your parents? Call your neighbours to help you? You don't deserve to be helped. You should be locked up in an institution.

RAGHU. Who are you to decide that? Fuck you!

ASH. I know you would like to do that. I won’t let you do that!

Ash begins to punch him. Raghu lets out a cry of pain as he doubles up.

Old woman's voice (off) Raghu! Ae Raghu!

ASH. Go on! Tell her! Tell her. "Mother! The man I picked up in the park to have sex with is beating me up!"

Old woman's voice (off) Raghu! Who is that with you?

ASH. Tell her who I am?

Old woman's voice (off) Raghu! Answer me!

ASH. (beating him up) Answer her! Tell her who I am.

RAGHU. (suddenly grabbing his wrist) Ashwin Kothari.

Ash is stunned for a moment at this disclosure. He backs away slowly.

Old woman's voice (off) Who is that in the house? Raghu!

RAGHU. (goes to door, yelling out) Nobody! Just my friend! Go to sleep!

Raghu looks at Ash. He moves slowly to him. Ash suddenly makes a dash to the door. He tries to unlock it, but Raghu manages to grab him by the waist and drag him back into the room. Raghu beats him up. Ash resists but doesn't fight back.

RAGHU. Shall I tell her? Shall I tell her who you are?

ASH. Let me go! (struggling) Let go of me!

RAGHU. You don't deserve to be anywhere near this house!

ASH. (gasping for breath) Don't tell them. Just don't tell them!

RAGHU. Let them know!

ASH. (wheezing loudly) can't breathe! I - I can't breathe! Please!
Ash is on the floor now trying hard to breathe. Raghu goes to the window and opens it. A strong wind blows in more dry leaves and flowers. Ash staggers to the window and lets out loud gasps as if he is fighting asphyxiation.

Old woman's voice (off) Gayatri! Gayatri! See what that Raghu is doing!

RAGHU. Smell that! Get that strong smell.

Ash's spasm seems to be subsiding.

RAGHU. Do you get it? Can you smell anything else?

Ash shakes his head.

RAGHU. Just the Night Queen right?

Ash doesn't respond.

RAGHU. (fierce)Right?

Ash nods.

ASH. (weak) Just let me go back to my room. Let's just pretend it all never happened. I won't say anything about you, if you...

RAGHU. I can't just let you go now. And tomorrow...

ASH. Forget it. Forget we ever met. I won't bring it up again.

RAGHU. And Gayatri?

ASH. What about her?

Pause.

ASH. Surely you wouldn't tell her, would you? Then you will have to tell her about yourself!

RAGHU. She knows. She knows about me. And I am going to tell her about you.

ASH. You mustn't! If you do, I will reject the proposal! I will say she is unsuitable.

RAGHU. And then! Marry someone else? Who doesn't have a brother who knows too much about you.

ASH. That is none of your concern. Let me go.

RAGHU. Get out!

Ash walks slowly to the door.

Old woman's voice (off) Gayatri! Is there enough milk for the kheer? Is he coming alone?

Ash turns around and looks at Raghu.

Old woman's voice (off) Gayatri!

RAGHU. Wait! I am not going to let you get away without doing something first.

ASH. What do you want now?

Pause

RAGHU. If you didn't know who I am...
ASH. I -I just want to stop people from doing it.
RAGHU. Bullshit. If you didn't know who I am...
ASH. I wouldn't have done anything. I am not gay.
RAGHU. Bullshit.
ASH. Look. If you wish I will come tomorrow and we could go ahead as planned. I could meet your parents and - and fix the date. I promise not to tell them about you, if you promise-

Ash stops himself, realizing what he just said.
RAGHU. I promise not to tell your parents, if...
ASH. Don't bring my parents into this!
RAGHU. I promise not to tell your parents, if...
ASH. (hysterical) What do you want from me?

Pause.
RAGHU. I don 't want anything from you, you scum.
ASH. Good bye.
RAGHU. I want to give you something.
ASH. I don't want anything from you.
RAGHU. You are going to get a nice present.
ASH. I don't want it.
RAGHU. A present you will value for the rest of your life.
ASH. Alright! Give it to me and let me get out of this hell.
RAGHU. Come back in.
ASH. What is it? What's the present?
RAGHU. Yourself.
ASH. What?
RAGHU. You get to see yourself.

Old woman's voice (off) Gayatri! What time is he coming?
ASH. Can't we do that tomorrow?
RAGHU. No. This is the only chance you will have.
ASH. What do I have to do?

Old woman's voice (off) Raghu! Ae Raghu!
RAGHU. (goes to door and yells out) I am busy with preparations for tomorrow! Don't disturb me! Gayatri, see what she wants!

Raghu shuts the door and walks slowly towards Ash. A strong wind blows in some flowers again.
RAGHU. Come and stand by the window.
ASH. No I won't.

RAGHU. Ashwin. Ashwin Kothari. Son of Keshavlal and Kantaben Kothari. Brother of somebody or other Kothari. Fiance of Gayatri Rao. Come and I will show you somebody else, with no son of, brother of, fiance of, after his name.

*Raghu turns off the light. The room is now lit only by the bed lamp and the Night Queen is seen in a silhouette caused by the street light. It looks almost surreal.*

*Ash walks slowly to the window. The wind continues to blow through the Night Queen.*

RAGHU. Smell that?

ASH. How can I not?

RAGHU. (gently) Yes. It is perfect. The perfect night.

ASH. It is very quiet all of a sudden.

RAGHU. So it is.

*Pause*

RAGHU. It is time to go to sleep.

ASH. Huh?

RAGHU. It is time. You said so yourself.

ASH. Did I?

RAGHU. At your grandmother's you said.

ASH. Oh that. That wasn't me. I told you it was someone else.

RAGHU. It is your fantasy. You see, I know about your grandmother. Gayatri tells me everything.

ASH. And... do you tell her everything?

RAGHU. No.

*Pause*

RAGHU. (adding) Only what she ought to know. And if I feel it necessary. And if circumstances force me to it. Which I am sure they won't. Will they?

ASH. *(sighing)* Do what you want.

RAGHU. Good. That's settled. Now what was it you said? Or was it your grandmother? About snakes.

ASH. She said... she said, we mustn't grow Night Queen near our house. Its fragrance attracts snakes.

RAGHU. And you believed her?

ASH. Yes.

RAGHU. And yet you planted one.

ASH. No. I didn't. I imagined I did.
RAGHU. Oh that's even better! Well. You are lucky. This one is real.
ASH. (touching the plant through the window) Yes. There's no doubt about it.
RAGHU. So what do you do now?
ASH. I don't understand.
RAGHU. What you do every night. Not now, but... How old were you then?
ASH. You mean... the first dream?
RAGHU. Yes. The first time.
ASH. Oh. Maybe thirteen, fourteen. No! I was fourteen!
RAGHU. How are you so sure?
ASH. Because that is the day I saw... No! I won't tell you.
RAGHU. So you are fourteen. And this is the day you've seen something you
won't tell me.
ASH. Yes. It is night now.
RAGHU. Good. Go on.
ASH. It is time to go to sleep.
RAGHU. Be my guest. Go on.

Ash looks at him. Ash walks to the bed and lies down on it. The light from the
bed lamp puts the focus on Ash's face.

Raghu begins to pluck some of the blooms. The wind blows again. Raghu goes
to Ash.

RAGHU. (placing the flowers on his abdomen, one by one) The fragrance is
intoxicating. It puts you to sleep.
ASH. Hram,
RAGHU. And...
ASH. (closing his eyes) I don't know now.
RAGHU. And you dream.
ASH. Yes. That I do.
RAGHU. Tell me your dream.
ASH. I can't.
RAGHU. You talked about it earlier.
ASH. That was different.
RAGHU. Why?
ASH. You didn't know me then.
RAGHU. I don't know you. I don't know who you are. So tell me.
ASH. (with some difficulty) I dream that I am sleeping under the shrub. The night
is warm, although it has rained. The shrub is of course in full bloom. I look up and
I can see the bunches of tiny white flowers. Hundreds of them. And I see the snake. Amidst the flowers. Drinking in the fragrance, like I do. I smile at the snake. He comes down and moves up my legs. He curls up on my abdomen. I am aroused. Like I was aroused that morning when I saw my brother lying on his bed, stroking himself. I watched... I watch. The snake turns into a human being. A man. A beautiful man. My brother. My brother makes love to me. And I cry. I am filled with pleasure that I cannot contain... I burst with joy. A fountain erupts. Tears and semen flow. My brother vanishes. The snake moves away. The shrub grows. The flowers fade away leaving nothing.

Ash opens his eyes and looks up at Raghu. Raghu moves closer to Ash.

RAGHU. So. You see who you are. Don't you?

ASH. (turning away from him) That is not all!

RAGHU. There are more dreams?

ASH. Nightmares! Living ones. Real, not fantasy! Don't you want to hear them too?

RAGHU. No. All I wanted you to do was admit you are gay. You may go now.

ASH. Don't! You hate me, don't you? Go on, say it!

RAGHU. I pity you.

ASH. Who are you to feel superior? You think you have it easy? Just because you have this- (gesturing to the room and bed) this arrangement, this set up. Just because you are smart enough and strong enough to defend yourself, you have a sister who understands you, you have a secure job and all that, it doesn't make you any... (stopping) Yes. It does make you superior somehow. You can tell the world to fuck off.

RAGHU. (sincerely) I am sorry.

ASH. He beat me up.

Pause

RAGHU. You don't have to talk about it, I understand.

ASH. My brother beat me up. I slept with him the next day. I wanted it. For real. I should have been happy just dreaming about it... He hit me hard. The next evening, he took me out. To the park. He showed me those guys, looking around, waiting for a sexual partner. A stranger. He told me how unhappy and miserable they were. They looked unhappy and miserable to me. And ugly. And I didn't want to be a part of that. I didn't want to be so ugly and repulsive! In my brother's eyes they were worse than lepers. And I was my brother's favourite. In his eyes, I didn't want to be so ugly. Walking alone at night in a park eyeing strange men. Waiting at corners for someone to stop and stare. Following a man into the bushes. Unloading my burden as quickly as possible. Pulling up my pants and walking away before I could feel shame. Going home as if nothing happened. Till the next evening.

(tearful) I saw! You asked me to see myself? I saw myself in my brother's eyes and I wanted to die. I promised my brother I would change. I told him to help me. I wanted him to help me get out of the hell, (looking at him) I hate myself.
RAGHU. You shouldn't have asked your brother for help.
ASH. I should have asked you. Where were you when I needed you?
RAGHU. I was right there. But you didn't look for me. You looked for your brother.
ASH. It is too late now.
RAGHU. Bullshit.
ASH. I will marry Gayatri.
RAGHU. Why?
ASH. I don't want to be ugly anymore.
RAGHU goes up to him and slaps him.
RAGHU. Look at me.
ASH. I don't want to! You are ugly too.
RAGHU. (shouting) Look at me! I am your brother. I am the one you dreamed of. And you look ugly in my eyes! Oh yes! You are ugly. And you will be uglier. Pretending to love her-
ASH. I do.
RAGHU. (ignoring him) Pretending that she turns you on. That you are in love with her. That everything will be alright after marriage. Such pretense! And when you sleep with her, you will be groaning extra loud with pleasure, shutting your eyes, thinking of your snake god or whatever, and penetrating her with those images in your mind. Pretending, pretending all the fucking way! That's really shitty ugly! And in case you can't make those wonderful fountains erupt, she will look at you, questioning you. And you will be ugly enough to lead her to believe that she isn't good enough. That she doesn't satisfy you. You will watch her being filled with self doubt. And you will give your ugly sympathy to her. You will say to her its alright, you still love her. And she will be grateful to you! That's ugly! See that! See all that and tell me if that isn't ugly.
ASH. No! That won't happen! I know it won't!
RAGHU. (drowning him) That is not ugly, that is simply repulsive. Hideous! To think it won't happen. You stink!
ASH. (running to the door) I don't believe you! I refuse to believe you!
RAGHU. (stopping him from opening the door) Why didn't you say that to your brother? You should have refused to believe him!
ASH. How could I? He is my brother!
RAGHU. You don't exist for your brother! You are ugly to him! He doesn't want an ugly brother.
ASH. (gasping loudly) No! Nooooo!
RAGHU. (not letting him off) But he is ugly too. Why don't you think of him as ugly. In your eyes he should be ugly.
ASH. (hoarse with crying) But I love him! I love him!
RAGHU. *shaking him* But you never asked him to change. Why didn't you beat him when you saw him masturbating? Why didn't you beat him up when you saw him with his girlfriend? Why didn't you tell him that unless he slept with a man, he is as ugly as a leper? Why didn't he go down on his knees and plead with you to help him? WHY?

ASH. I need some air! Why isn't there any air in this room?

*Ash goes to the window and start to pull at the shrub."

ASH. Get rid of this plant! The smell is stifling me!

*Ash starts tearing down the shrub. Raghu watches him."

ASH. Get rid of this! I will be able to breathe again! Help me! Why won't anyone help me!

*Ash grows weaker as he pulls at more flowers and branches. Finally he is just hitting at the plant blindly. He gives up after a while, totally exhausted. Ash falls to his knees, spent."

ASH. God! Why won't you help me? God!

RAGHU. God won't.

*Ash looks up at him."

Pause

ASH. *(rising)* But you will.

RAGHU. I don't know. I am just as scared as you are. I too am looking for help - from you. Help me.

*They move towards one another. They embrace. Holding on to each other tightly."

ASH. Help me, Raghu.

RAGHU. Help me, Ashwin.

*They begin to kiss."

Old woman's voice *(off)* Raghu! Ae Raghu! What are you doing?

Raghu giggles. Ash giggles.

Old woman's voice *(off)* Raghu!

Raghu begins to laugh. His laughter grows. Ash joins him in the laughter.

Old woman's voice *(off)* Raghu!

RAGHU. *shouting* I am playing mother!

*They move clumsily to the bed, still laughing. They grow silent for a while, looking at each other."

RAGHU. We should give each other the chance to bloom - at least at night.

*They sit cross legged on the bed, facing one another, just looking at each other, too excited now to do anything."

Slow fade out. Fade out last on the night queen.
1. Can you tell something about your choice of subject matter for your plays?

Choice of subject matter is a very subjective thing and it is hard to say this is a rational decision for me. The subject appears in one's thoughts or observation and then it grows on you till you feel you have to write it down.

2. Do you do any research before writing on a subject? Can you explain the creative process that you go about in writing a play?

Yes, with some subjects like my latest play required a fair amount of research on cancer and cancer hospices. The research is very much a part of the creative process. You are making choices subliminally as you go along your research.
3. While writing a play, do you keep in mind any specific dramatic tradition or theories?

No I do not. Theories come later and by others more qualified to form them.

4. Are you familiar with Queer theory and its application?

No, not really.

5. Among the various socially relevant themes that you have tackled in your plays, which is your favorite theme?

If I didn't fancy the theme, I wouldn't develop it into a play. So my response to that question has been that they are all my favourites.

6. What was the response of your audiences/readers to the atypical subjects that you portray in your plays?

Audiences are varied in their responses. Some are appreciative and encouraging. Whereas others prefer more conventional themes.

7. Having presented a gamut of invisible issues in your plays, do you feel a need to address any other invisible issues?

That would depend entirely on my gaze. If I feel strongly about something, I will address that.

8. You have written several plays which address homosexuality. Do you consider homosexuality as a normal sexual orientation?

Yes, of course it is. The whole world knows that.
9. **Do you support same-sex marriage as the characters in some of your plays desire?**

I do not believe in the institution of marriage whether normative or alternative.

10. **What is your opinion about the gay rights movement, queer pride parades and campaign for decriminalization of homosexuality in India?**

I always feel proud and happy to see human rights struggles being met with success. Human rights are for everyone. No one really deserves any rights unless everyone has them.

11. **Do you think that the sexual orientation of the playwright has a vital role in writing a play about homosexuals?**

No. Gender, class, age, sexual orientation of the writer is irrelevant. If it was, you won't have men writing about women, young people writing about older people etc.

12. **What importance do you give to the feedback/critical response that you receive for your plays?**

Depends on the kind of criticism or feedback. The most honest feedback, from my experiences, is from regular audience members. It matters a great deal to me what they think of my play.

13. **Instead of dealing with legends, myths, history or folk tales what made you interested in addressing contemporary social issues?**

I know this is considered to be a deviation from the norm in traditional Indian theatre, but in contemporary theatre there are no prescribed rules on subject matter. This is a personal choice and depends entirely on the writer.
14. Why do you prefer writing in English to any other Indian languages?

I don't. I would love to write in Hindi. Once I am more comfortable in Hindi, I might switch to Hindi.

15. Which genre, in your perception, is the best medium for articulating ideas; drama, movie or novel?

They are all excellent formats for telling a story. However, if you want to articulate ideas, essays are the best way to do it.

16. What is the scope for Indian English Theatre in the coming years?

Very good. Considering the growing number of Indians speaking English.

17. What is your latest project?

A play called Brief Candle written by me, directed by Lillete Dubey.

18. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Not really. Thank you.