CHAPTER-III

HOMOSEXUALITY: OUT OF THE CLOSET—

A STUDY OF NIGHT QUEEN AND ONA MUGGY NIGHT IN MUMBAI

The previous chapter presented a comprehensive study of queer theory highlighting its origin and development. This chapter examines how Dattani has presented the taboo subject of homosexuality in Night Queen and On a Muggy Night in Mumbai.

Night Queen

Dattani’s first play which addresses the issue of homosexuality is Night Queen. This is the first play in the Indian theatre to openly handle gay theme raising serious closet issues that remain generally invisible. This short play was first staged in 1996 and was published in The Telegraph Autumn Collection the same year. Since the published version of this play was not available, the playwright himself sent the researcher a typescript of the play at his request. This is a play about two homosexual characters who meet for a “one night stand” of sorts and how this impacts their destiny. In the middle of the play, it is revealed that their lives intersect at a volatile and unexpected point.

Dattani presents the story of two gays named Ashwin Kothari and Raghu. Ashwin is the fiance of Gayatri Rao, Raghu’s sister. Raghu brings Ashwin to his house from a park where gays meet regularly. For the elite class in India, the beach or the park functions as a pick-up site and the gays prefer to carry out their sexual activities in the privacy of their cars or elsewhere. The
economically less privileged males resort to encounters on the beach or in the dark corners of the park or in public toilets and other available locales. The majority of the gays practise depersonalized sex solely for their own gratification. It is only after a period of solid friendship that gays evolve towards a monogamous sexual relationship. This bonding is based on similar interests, emotional dependency and a desire for mutual trust and understanding. Married men who have homosexual tendencies prefer impersonal sexual encounters with consenting strangers.

In this play, one such meeting creates confusion in the lives of two gays who come to know each other. Ashwin is totally unaware that Raghu is Gayatri’s brother. But he becomes aware of this fact later and Ashwin and Raghu reach a mutual agreement to continue their relationship keeping Ashwin’s marriage with Gayatri as a mask.

Unlike “visible” characteristics such as the skin color and tone, sexual orientation can be easily hidden. Many societies do not even have a name for same-sex behaviours or relationships. Yet they stigmatize those who are not heterosexual. In these societies, homosexuals have the daunting task of finding their partners.

Butler argues that heterosexuality itself is an impossible imitation—a compulsory performance that is destined to failure. As a consequence of this failure, Butler argues that categories of sexuality and gender are merely the products of straight men and women “panicked” over the uncertainty of their heterosexuality. She writes in “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”: 
Heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself and failing. Precisely because it is bound to fail, and yet endeavors to succeed, the project of heterosexual identity is propelled into an endless repetition of itself. Indeed, in its efforts to naturalize itself as the original, heterosexuality must be understood as a compulsive and compulsory representation that can only produce the effects of its own originality; in other words, compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasms of ‘man’ and ‘woman,’ are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real. (21)

The action in Night Queen unfolds in the tiny room of Raghu. There is a huge poster of a muscle man on the cupboard. There is a window but we cannot see anything outside because a Night Queen shrub is blocking the outside view. Night Queen is a variety of jasmine which is known as Raat Ki Rani in North India. It is a quick growing shrub often planted in tropical gardens. Numerous strongly scented flowers blossom at night almost all the year round.

The play starts with a conversation between Ashwin/Ash and Raghu about the Night Queen shrub. Ash says that his grandmother would not allow them to grow Night Queen because its scent attracts snakes. He adds that he planted one but the snakes came only in his dreams. The snakes would slither into his bed and curl up over his belly attracted by the scent of Night Queen
flowers. But Ash would imagine that it was attracted by the warmth of his body. He was aroused by the presence of the snake. The snake then turned into a man—a man who made love to him.

While Ash was narrating this, Raghu’s grandmother calls out: “Gayatri, Gayatri, are you asleep?” Ash is startled at hearing that and asks Raghu who Gayatri is. Raghu replies that it is his sister and walks towards the door. In the meantime Ash quickly takes out Raghu’s visiting card and realises that Raghu is his brother-in-law-to-be.

Raghu comes back and talks about the fantasy that Ash had about snakes turning into sexy men. Raghu confronts Ash and tells him that he is a gay and not a straight guy pretending to be gay who picks up someone, bashes him and take away all his money. Raghu asserts that only a gay will fantasize about snakes turning into sexy men, for the snake is a classic phallic symbol.

Raghu then closes the window and goes to Ash and starts caressing his cheek. Ash stands frozen for a while. Raghu’s hand moves to Ash’s breast. Ash suddenly grabs Raghu’s neck and starts pushing him against the wall and punches him and he cries in pain. At that time the old woman calls out to Raghu and asks who is there with him. Ash challenges Raghu to tell her the truth. Ash beats him again and grabbing his hands shouts “Ashwin Kothari”. Ash is stunned at this disclosure and backs out slowly. Raghu moves slowly to him. Ash tries to unlock the door and leave but Raghu manages to grab him by the waist and drags him back into the room and beats him up. Ash resists but does not fight back. He then threatens him that he is going to tell everyone that
this is Ashwin Kothari, son of Keshavlal Kothari and Kantaben Kothari, and the fiance of Gayatri Rao.

Raghu then turns off the light and asks Ash to lie on the bed and he too lies down. He plucks some flowers and places them on Ash’s abdomen. He then asks him to talk about his dream. Ash talks about the snake turning into a man and remarks that the man was his brother who made love with him.

Ash had slept with his brother for real. The next day his brother took him to the gay park and told him how unhappy and miserable the gays were, waiting for a sexual partner, a complete stranger. He promised his brother that he would change. Ash confesses that he does not want to be “ugly” anymore so that he can marry Gayatri. Hearing that, Raghu slaps him and tells him that if he does that he will become uglier.

Ash is now in confusion. He starts pulling at the shrub and becomes weaker as he pulls at more flowers and branches. Finally he just hits at the plant blindly. He gives up after a while totally exhausted. He falls to his knees crying out, “God! Why don’t you help me?” Raghu replies, “God Won’t.” Ash looks at him and tells him, “But you will”. Now Raghu is also confused and replies, “I don’t know, I am just scared as you are. I too am looking for help from you. Help me”. They embrace and hold each other tightly. The old woman calls out and asks Raghu what he is doing. Both of them giggle. Raghu shouts back, “I am playing mother”. They move clumsily to the bed. Raghu says, “We should give each other the chance to bloom—at least at night”. They sit cross-legged on the bed facing one another. They just look at each other, too excited to do anything. The scene slowly fades out and the Night Queen shrub fades out last.
The discourse on homosexuality emanated from the Foucauldian premise that sex and gender are socially constructed and caught up in a nexus of knowledge and power. Homosexuals usually fall into a heterosexual matrix where they are unable to take a decision on whether to continue with their homosexual relationship or change their sexual preferences. The heterosexual matrix is “hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality” (Gender Trouble 151). Butler uses the term “heterosexual matrix” “to designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalized” (151).

In this play, Ash and Raghu are trapped in a heterosexual matrix where they have to act according to the naturalised pattern set forth by the society in which they live. They are forced to keep their desires a secret. They are afraid to “come out” because they fear that the society will not accept them if they do so. And this fear of rejection by the society leads Ash to agree for a heterosexual marriage with Gayatri. He also wants to change his sexual orientation to heterosexuality. He wants to become a heterosexual on seeing the miserable and unhappy condition of the homosexuals in the park.

The temporality of orientation reminds us that orientations are effects of what we tend toward, where the “toward” marks a space and time that is almost, but not quite, available in the present. In the case of sexual orientation, to become straight means that the person has to turn toward the objects given to him by the heterosexual culture and at the same time turn away from those objects that take him off this line. Queer theory acknowledges sexuality as a social issue rather than a personal one. Steven Seidman writes in Queer
theory/Sociology, “Queer perspectives approach coming out less as a process of revealing one’s true nature than a process of constructing or preformatively enacting a sexual identity” (21).

At the end of the play Ash and Raghu decide to continue their relationship, keeping Ash’s married life with Gayatri as a mask for their double lives. Michael Warner in The Trouble with Normal - Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life writes:

Sooner or later, happily or unhappily, almost everyone fails to control his or her sex life. Perhaps as compensation, almost everyone sooner or later also succumbs to the temptation to control someone else’s sex life. Most people cannot quite rid themselves of the sense that controlling the sex of others, far from being unethical, is where morality begins. (1)

Warner argues that sexuality is not a preference but an orientation. “Preference” is the selection of someone or something over another, meaning that someone can prefer, for example, classical music to rock music, whereas “orientation” is to discover his/her position in relation to his/her surroundings, i.e., to make sense of himself/herself in relation to the surroundings.

When Ash and Raghu chose to continue their homosexual relationship keeping Ash’s marriage with Gayatri as their public face, they are again keeping their orientation closetted. Butler is of the opinion that people who take the stance of bisexuality cannot have the commitment to both the relationships and consequently both the relationships become failures. Butler writes in Bodies that Matter:
Heterosexuality does not have a monopoly on exclusionary logics. Indeed, they can characterize and sustain gay and lesbian identity positions which constitute themselves through the production and repudiation of a heterosexual Other; this logic is reiterated in the failure to recognize bisexuality as well as in the normativizing interpretation of bisexuality as a kind of failure of loyalty or lack of commitment—two cruel strategies of erasure. (112)

Heterosexuality in a way becomes a space that gives ground to heterosexual action through the renunciation of what it is not, and also by the production of what it is. As Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* showed so powerfully “there is an incitement to discourse” where objects are spoken and made real through the very demand to give them a form, rather than through prohibition (31). Both demands and prohibitions are generative; they create objects and worlds.

According to Butler, gender identity or identities are “performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence”. She adds that “gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed” (*Gender Trouble*, 33). This is true when it comes to identities and in some sense even to lifestyles. A lifestyle becomes a way of creating an identity through a precomposed style, which can be related to others that ‘share’ the same lifestyle. Identity performativity is “a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (*Gender Trouble* 33).
Butler further observes that identity or gender is not merely “a set of repeated acts”. Therefore, it is important that to acknowledge that performativity is not a question of choice or role; rather the “repetition marks the failure of subjectivation: what repeats in the subject is precisely that which is not yet mastered” (Gender Trouble 27). Thus, for the subject these identitities are part of “reality”. Therefore, there can be no queer lifestyle in the Indian society until there is a visible queer identity in reality. Dattani presents same-sex relationships as a reality and makes queer identity visible through Ash and Raghu in Night Queen.

The space where the action takes place in Night Queen represents the clearest materialization of queer space. Ira Tattelman, in “Presenting a Queer (bath) House,” defines queer space as something that:

involves the construction of a parallel world, one filled with possibility and pleasure, while functioning simultaneously as an intervention in the world of the dominant culture, . . . queer space provides an alternative means of worldly inhabitation, makes visible the already-in place hierarchies, and embraces the reciprocity of space and sexual identity. In its space of opportunity, we are free to construct ourselves in flexible, unspecified, and unpredictable ways. (223)

Dattani describes the space where the action in Night Queen takes place in:

*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. (1)

The room in this play is built in such a way that it does not disturb the rest of the household. This room represents “queer space” which is tucked away from the visibility of the society. Queer communities prefer to create a space for themselves where the focus is on their presence. They want to create a secure space for themselves away from the visibility of the society for they do not want to blend with the society. When it comes to homosexuality there is a need for a secret, secure space because heteronormativity has created and maintains, what Sedgwick refers to, as “the closet”.

The homo-hetero duality and homophobia, like “the closet”, are the creations of heteronormativity. Being in the closet is not simply a choice one makes, since heteronormativity continually pushes the gays toward the closet. In this context, it should be seen as using the queer space in order to keep the closet tightly concealed. Foucault writes in the first volume of The History of Sexuality, “to ensure that one did not speak of sex, merely through the
interplay of prohibitions that referred back to one another: instances of Muteness which, by dint of saying nothing, imposed silence” (1: 17).

The room in the play constitutes queer space in different ways. There is a huge poster of a muscle man on the cupboard and this can be interpreted as a sign of queer. There is also the Night Queen shrub which masks the queer space from the outside world. The homosexuals’ repressed sexual desires get threatened in the queer space or the closet. This queer space gives them the space where their sexual needs can be met without any questioning and it also give them a break from the repression imposed by heteronormativity. The gay closet has a remarkable significance in queer space as Sedgwick puts it:

The gay closet is not a feature only of the lives of gay people. But for many gay people it is still the fundamental feature of social life; and there can be few gay people, however courageous and forthright by habit, however fortunate in the support of their immediate communities, in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence. (68)

Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* explores contradictory conceptual models of homosexuality as both a representation of the identity of a minority and at the same time constitutive of heterosexual identity. In a typically deconstructive move, Sedgwick attempted to show the unhelpful side of binary oppositions, the prime example being that when something is ‘out’ it implies something else being ‘closeted’. Sedgwick proposes that the closet is an impossibly contradictory place. You cannot be in the closet since you can
never be certain of the extent to which you have actually succeeded in keeping your homosexuality secret. But you can never be fully out of the closet either since those who come to know refuse to give up the privilege of restricted knowledge and treat your sexuality as a secret to which they have special access. Halperin observes that “coming out is also too soon and too late. It is too soon when affirmation of homosexuality is greeted with dismissal; it is too late because in coming out you have lied” (Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography 35).

Queer theorists interrogate family and intimate relationships. In Night Queen, the intimate relationship between Raghu and Ash becomes a site of confrontation when they are connected to Gayatri. Raghu is concerned about his sister’s life but at the same time is interested in satisfying his own sexual desires. Ash wants to gratify his sexual desires with another gay but at the same time wants to lead a heterosexual family life in order to gain acceptance in the society. Against this backdrop, Dattani depicts homosexuality as a stable form of sexuality just as heterosexuality is. In “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities: An Introduction,” de Lauretis writes:

Homosexuality is no longer to be seen simply as marginal with regard to a dominant, stable form of sexuality (heterosexuality) against which it would be defined . . . it is no longer to be seen as transgressive or deviant vis-a-vis a proper, natural sexuality (i.e. institutionalized reproductive sexuality) according to the older, pathological model, or as just another, optional ‘lifestyle’. • • (iii)
In *Night Queen*, the playwright demonstrates the secretive nature and lifestyle of the homosexuals at the beginning of the play itself. This is evident in the conversation between Ash and Raghu. For instance, Ash asks Raghu to shut the door. In yet another instance when Ash asks Raghu his name he replies that his name is Babu. In turn when Raghu asks Ash his name, he replies that he is Ash. But Raghu remarks that he has used that name before.

Dattani uses the word “gay” several times in the conversations between Ash and Raghu. The word “gay” implies a bold willingness to disregard conventional or respectable sexual traditions. The play also talks about gay bashing which is an expression used to designate verbal confrontation with, defamation of or physical violence against people thought to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT) because of their different sexual orientation or gender identity. Terms like gay and gay bashing are considered negative terms in a predominantly heteronormative society like ours. On the contrary, the playwright uses the word “gay” as a stable form of sexual orientation and reality.

The scene in which Ash and Raghu make love would shock any heteronormative society. The playwright has openly presented their excitement through their actions: “Raghu then closes the window and goes to Ash and slowly caresses his cheek. Raghu’s hand moves slowly to Ash’s breast. They embrace and hold each other tightly. They move clumsily to the bed.” Such description is not common in the Indian literary scenario.
Dattani uses the stage to present an alternative to heterosexual normativity created and perpetuated by cultural hegemony. Hegemony is an ensemble of cultural, social, and economic practices that work to constitute our lived experience of relations of domination and subordination. Hegemony refers to the way in which oppression is not only a structure but a structure that is lived—it is a concept that accounts for how our consent to oppression, including our desires, hopes and wishes, is constructed. In a society which thinks that there is only one type of sexuality, namely heterosexuality, homosexuality becomes a sexual perversion. While a lesbian and gay approach challenges prejudicial attitudes (homophobia) and discriminatory actions (heterosexism) on the grounds that they violate human rights, a queer approach looks at how discursive acts and cultural practices manage to make heterosexuality, and only heterosexuality, seem normal or natural (heteronormativity).

In *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Culler observes:

> Queer theory uses the marginal—what has been set aside as perverse, beyond the pale, radically other—to analyse the cultural construction of the centre: heterosexual normativity. In the work of Eve Sedgwick, Judith Butler, and others, Queer theory has become the site of a productive questioning not just of the cultural construction of sexuality but of culture itself, as based on the denial of homoerotic relations. (131)
Heteronormative societies do not regard homosexuality as a stable form of sexuality but queer theory challenges this stance. A queer approach recognises that sexual identities are not universal but are perceived in different ways in different cultural contexts, and calls for a close look at how identities are produced through day-to-day interactions. In queer analysis, sexual practice is redefined as a subject of disidentification, disintegration and reconsolidation of identity signifiers.

Queer analysis achieved its symbolic force from a radical critique of (hetero) sexual difference. Queer literary interpretation is largely concerned with sexual identity, especially "closeted" sexual identity, gay, lesbian and bisexual issues. De Lauretis suggests that queer theory makes it possible "to recast or reinvent the terms of our sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual" (iv).

By presenting homosexual characters on the stage and highlighting homosexuality as a stable form of sexuality, Dattani is moving out of the current conceptions of sexuality with a view to dismantling the naturalisation of identity categories. This is a negotiation of sexual boundaries set by heteronormativity by rejecting the idea that sexuality is an essentialist category, something determined by biology or judged by eternal standards of morality and truth. Jagose underscores the strong deconstructionist epistemological premise of the term “queer” and queer theory:

Disillusioned with traditional identity-based forms of political organization and engaged in a radical denaturalization of all
identity categories, queer operates not so much as an alternative nomenclature—which would measure its success by the extent to which it supplanted the former classifications of lesbian and gay—than as means of drawing attention to those fictions of identity that stabilize all identificatory categories. (125)

According to Butler’s performative theory of gender, gender is a norm or ensemble of norms that one follows in one’s daily practices. For gender to exist, it must be constantly reenacted by gendered bodies as “styles of the flesh,” that is to say, it must be repeated through a repertoire of signifying gestures (Butler 139). The materialization of norms is the “action” of both gender and its subversion. However, there is no “doer” behind the deed, a point first developed by Butler in Gender Trouble and elaborated more fully in Bodies That Matter. In Bodies That Matter, Butler argues that there is no unified subject who “stands behind discourse and executes its volition or will through discourse” (225). She elaborates her performative notion of agency to show that the individual is an effect, not origin of its “performances”; it “comes into being through being called, named, interpellated . . . and this discursive constitution takes place prior to the T ” (225).

Dattani’s representation of male bodies, reading of their minds and the presentation of stage as a queer space mark a shift in the pattern followed in Indian theatre. Such shifts in the larger cultural conversation about sexuality are interesting in their own right. But in this play they are important because they offer us the opportunity to refine and modify our perceptions of discourse of sexuality. The representation of homosexual characters and the valorising of
their actions as socially normal behaviour give the queer communities more visibility in the Indian context. These representations serve as the background for more serious queer investigations which were earlier dismissed as sexual perversion or abnormality.

The expressions of love between two men in this play signals a significant phase in the Indian theatre and literary field where homosexuality becomes a strongly contested site of theoretical inquiry. This becomes all the more important in a situation when queer pride marches are being conducted in several cities in India and homosexuals have started coming out and gaining more acceptances in the society. The Indian judicial system is taking a fresh look at the decriminalization of same-sex relations and the latest judgment by the Delhi High Court is a landmark in the history of same-sex relationships in India.

**On a Muggy Night in Mumbai**

*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998) is one of Dattani’s best loved and most performed plays, both at home and abroad. It has been adapted by the playwright for the film version named *Mango Souffle* (2002) that went on to win rave reviews the world over. This is a highly unorthodox and startling play which deals with homosexuals.

In this play, a whole range of homosexual characters are presented and their experiences throw light on various aspects of the homosexual’s struggle in the traditional Indian Society. The play presents well-to-do gays and lesbians, their relationships, their revelation, their self-delusion and self-
discoveries. Despite its offbeat subject, namely, gay love, the play manages to convincingly show its moorings in family relationships within its chosen milieu. It is a celebration of gay life; but it also deals with the middle class virtues of family values and friendship, among its themes. This is a play that looks at how society creates stereotypes and behavioural patterns which oppress these characters.

Dattani begins *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* by presenting gay characters as invisible, but very much a part of the Indian society for years. He presents this play as a true reflection of the contemporary social reality. In his introductory note on the play, John McRae observes:

> And the themes of *On a Muggy Night* deserve to touch the whole of society and to be touched by it. It is not simply the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal. It is a play about how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates. (45)

The narrative of this play is set in the living room of Kamlesh, a fashion designer living in Mumbai. This room represents queer space because this is the place where homosexuals come together and share their happiness and anxieties. Sedgwick notes that the closet became “the defining structure for gay oppression in this century” (48). This room is a closet where the gays open their minds away from the visibility of the heteronormative society.
When the play starts we witness an intimate and tender moment of love making by a couple in bed. When the lights turn bright the invisible is made visible and we realize that both are men. The audience notices a middle aged man—a security guard—being paid for sex. Kamlesh is the one who pays the guard for satisfying his sexual desire. This scene is unconventional and challenges the traditional ideas of heterosexual relationships.

One night, Kamlesh invites his friends over to his house and asks them for help. He confesses to be still in love with Prakash, one of his old flames. Prakash, however, has denounced their relationship as the work of the devil and moved on to become a straight man. Kamlesh's friends, who are all gay, represent the many facets of homosexual culture. There is Sharad, the flamboyant one with no worries about how the world views him; Bunny, the closet homosexual who plays a happily married father on a television sitcom; and Deepali, the level-headed lesbian, who realises that even in the homosexual culture it is the woman who is sensible. Kamlesh and his friends have complex personalities and deep bonds with one another.

In this play, Dattani works out the problematic identity of Kamlesh, a gay, who begins to doubt his own reality. He visits a homophobic psychiatrist for help and remarks, “Until he said I would never be happy as a gay man. It is impossible to change society he said, but it may be possible for you to reorient yourself” (69). Kamlesh highlights the helplessness of gays when he says, “I tried explaining to him that I needed his help to overcome my anxiety and fears, not to be something I am not. Could he help me cope with my loneliness
and fear the same way he would help a heterosexual cope with his” (69). This anxiety and fear Is a stigma attached to any homosexual who is closetted.

Queer seems to set up its own hierarchies, exclusions, and more or less mandatory subject positions, as indicated in the following passage from Michael Warner’s *Fear of a Queer Planet*:

> Every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that his/her stigmatization is connected with gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body. Being queer means fighting about these issues all the time, locally and piecemeal but always with consequences, (xiii)

Sharad is the most upfront person about his identity. He says, “If any one of us can be straight, I am Madhubala” (85). Bunny, the TV star, comments that the Indian society abets hypocrisy instead of encouraging self-expression, responsibility and dignity.

**BUNNY:** Find yourself a nice woman. You can always have sex on the side.

**SHARAD:** And pretend to be straight like you?
BUNNY: What’s wrong with that? Huh? Do you think I will be accepted by the millions if I screamed from the housetops that I am gay.

RAN JIT: Yes, but you do scream from the rooftop that you are straight

BUNNY: Camouflage! Even animals do it. Blend with the surroundings. They can’t find you. You politically correct gays deny yourself the basic animal instinct of camouflage.

(70)

This is the typical Indian manner of constructing an acceptable identity as a cover for the true self. The other way to “be yourself” would quite simply mean to run away or, as Sharad would put it, turn into a “coconut” like Ranjit, who boasts of having a steady relationship with a man abroad, where his sexual identity is not a problem. Many homosexuals in India are forced to marry and lead the life of a heterosexual. But they secretly keep their homosexual relationships alive by staying in proximity to their partners as neighbours or colleagues. This play lifts the mask of secrecy that covers the marginalized sexualities and lifestyles.

Dattani’s audience, themselves perhaps strangers to Article 377 of the IPC outlawing same-sex relationships, may find themselves increasingly preoccupied with patterns of camouflage and survival. When Sharad points out to Kamlesh that he can never forget Prakash because he will keep cropping up like herpes (58), the audience has already entered a discourse on normative sexual behaviour.
Death as an option is a little more uncomfortable to deal with in a world that offers hotlines for help. It is not the first time that Ed has contemplated killing himself only because he is not sure if there is anybody who wants to hear his story. And every time someone listened to his story and held his hand, and looked at the trees, and told him they were beautiful together, even if the larger world could not see him, he deferred death.

The homophobic psychiatrist in the play diagnoses homosexuality as an illness and prescribes reorientation as the remedy. Kamlesh confesses that he had traced feelings of shame directly to his psychiatrist: “I wished I wasn't gay” (69). Later he gets rid of both his psychiatrist and his fear. Bunny believes that one must follow “basic animal instincts” and camouflage in order to “blend with the surroundings”. Sharad asserts, “Honey, if you flaunt it, you've got it”. Kamlesh wants to make peace with himself: “I don't want to flaunt or hide anything” (70).

Eventually, the argument falls back upon the reader/audience. Kiran clarifies the position: “If there are any stereotypes around here, they are you and me. Because we don't know any better, do we? We just don't know what else to be” (107). In her recognition that she is what she is by default, Kiran is as much a victim as anybody else in the play. But what turns out to be her saving grace is her willingness to acknowledge realities that lie beyond borders and probably beyond her grasp too.

In this play, Dattani targets not just a single mind but three individual psyches which divulge their inner selves to the audience/reader. They are:
Kamlesh, a homosexual who is ready to assert his sexual identity but is tormented by his partner who is not willing to accept this openly; Kiran who is troubled by her gender identity; and Ed/Prakash, a closet homosexual who is not willing to come out into the open with his identity. All these characters are caught up in the social and psychological web. Dattani questions the assumption of being a heterosexual without fear, man-woman definition of marriage, and the meaningfulness of such a marriage for a queer individual.

Sex is viewed as fundamentally social. The categories of sex—especially heterosexuality and homosexuality—are understood as social and historical facts. With respect to homosexuality, the chief theme was that homosexuality or same-sex experiences were not a uniform and identical phenomenon but that their meaning and social role varied historically. Constructionists in particular argued that the homosexual cannot be assumed to be a transhistorical identity. Instead, the category of homosexuality operates as marking a distinct psychological and physical human type or identity only in modern Western societies. The preoccupation with sexuality as a cornerstone of personality and a prerequisite for fulfillment is a recent phenomenon. Our current ideas about sexual identity rest on deep and fundamental changes in the social organization of sexuality that date back to the late nineteenth century. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault writes:

> As defined by ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, a life
form. . . . Nothing that went into the total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions . . . because it was a secret that always gave itself away. (1: 43)

Although Foucault challenged essentialist or universalistic understandings of homosexuality, the discourse concerning homosexuality was often tied to a politics of making the homosexual a minority. Instead of asserting the homosexual as a natural fact made into a political minority by social prejudice, constructionists talked about social factors that produced a homosexual subject or identity, which functioned as the foundation for the building of a minority, ethnic-like community and politics.

Dattani is known for the way he sets his principal characters on a process of self-disclosure cutting through the web of circumstances, relationships and entrenched hypocrisies. McRae makes a significant observation in the following words:

Of the characters, Sharad and Deepali are comfortable with their sexuality, and have different ways of being gay. Sharad is camp, flaunting; Deepali more restrained, perhaps more stable. Kamlesh is anguished, and Ed the most obvious victim of his own insecurities. Bunny, the TV actor, is a rather more traditional Indian gay man—married (he would say happily) while publicly denying his own nature, and Ranjit has taken an easy way out by moving to Europe where he can ‘be himself’ more openly. (45)
Traditional family patterns have remained unchanged in the Indian society and the expression of homosexuality has remained undocumented. India's erstwhile colonial laws outlawing homosexuality are out of touch with a changing society. Current attitudes towards homosexuality go back in part to the British law of 1860 when India was under the British rule. It was then that the infamous Section 377 was introduced into the Indian Penal Code. Section 377 discriminates persons on the basis of their sexual orientation and asserts that the offence is "sodomy". This Section was enforced in all the British colonies including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan but has since been repealed in England, the rule’s country of origin, in 1967.

Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code states: “Whoever has carnal intercourse against the code of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life.” This provision has become one of the most notorious forms of legal discrimination against homosexuals. The threat of legal action—combined with social ostracism—is enough to deter all but the least vulnerable from coming out. The threat is real for the gays who, like their counterparts around the world, are forced to meet in parks, public toilets and similar places for want of better places. But here they are open to persecution by the police.

In urban life, homosexuals are just beginning to emerge though only a handful would define themselves as “gay” or “lesbians”, and they usually belong to an English-speaking elite group. The Indian gay community is made up of privileged middle and upper class men who keep in contact through a private network. For most people, the obligatory arranged marriage is
inevitable with their homosexual desires being gratified in terms of sexual contact outside the home.

Homosexuals exist in all strata of Indian society. But there is limited access to information as to the exact number of homosexuals in the country. Homosexuality is not considered an appropriate subject for culture or art and homosexual characters do not generally appear in films and plays and other genres. But Dattani’s plays boldly present homosexual characters as a reality that has been closetted for years.

The gays in Kamlesh’s party symbolize the varied faces of the homosexual community. Sharad, the flamboyant gay, cares little about how the world views him; Bunny, his antithesis, is the clandestine homosexual who plays the role of a happily married father on a television sitcom as well as in real life; and Deepali is a sensible lesbian whose portrayal subtly implies that it is the woman who is sensible even in gay culture. In this play, we find a set of complex people who care deeply for one another. We could also see the expression of their insecurities that arise from being closetted and their longing to live without fear of losing their dignity.

Kiran, Kamlesh’s sister, comes to visit Kamlesh and there is a revelation: she is about to marry Prakash, Kamlesh’s former lover. Initially Kamlesh and Prakash were ardent lovers but Prakash suddenly turncoats and changes into Ed, wearing the garb of a handsome guy head over heels in love with Kiran, who unfortunately happens to be Kamlesh’s sister. Kamlesh, playing the role of a humble lover, resigns himself to the changed situation. Nevertheless, his sexual needs are fulfilled by Sharad, his partner.
Homosexual love could be as demanding as heterosexual love relationship. It also arouses jealousy. This is evident in the following conversation between Kamlesh and Sharad:

SHARAD (after a while). You know I still love you.

KAMLESH (in a matter-of-fact manner). Then why did you walk out on me?

SHARAD. You were relieved when I did.

KAMLESH. I am sorry ...

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

KAMLESH. I tried, Sharad, I . . .

SHARAD. You tried to love me, but . . .

KAMLESH. I do love you.

SHARAD. Oh! Spare me the lies! You could never love anyone because you are still in love with Prakash! (56)

While Kamlesh and Sharad argue, Deepali enters. She knows about their relationship and makes a sarcastic comment: “I am all for the gay men’s cause. Men deserve only men!” (65). She is a lesbian who cares for the gays. The affinity between Deepali and Kamlesh works well, often loaded with irony:

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

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

DEEPALI. If we were heterosexual, we would be married. (65)
Kamlesh reveals his secrets and regrets being a gay before his friends and seeks their help to get over his difficulties. Ranjit tells him not to be emotional but he calls out for help:

Please! I am afraid! I need your help! I need you all. I am afraid. Frightened. (Pause.) After Sharad went away—I decided that I didn’t really need anyone to live with me. I had my work. That should have been enough. It wasn’t. I felt this void. The same feeling when three years ago, Prakash left me. I would have understood it if he had left me for another man, but he left me because he was ashamed of our relationship. It would have worked between us, but he was ashamed ... For the first time in my life, I wished I wasn’t gay. (68-69)

In Act II, the scene changes and Prakash/Ed enters the stage. He meets Kamlesh in a lonely place in the park. They feel closer to each other and there is a nostalgic harking back to the past.

ED. Come Closer... Closer.

KAMLESH. If only they could see how beautiful we are together. (81)

Kamlesh is depressed and sick about his relationship with Prakash and on top of that it is his sister Kiran who wants to marry Prakash without knowing about their relationship. He is unable to reveal the truth to Kiran and put an end to her happiness. All the friends—Kamlesh, Sharad, Bunny, Deepali and Ranjith—know the secrets of one another’s affairs. Now that Ed is
going to marry Kiran, Deepali threatens to show the photograph of Kamlesh and Ed in a compromising position to Kiran, This is because Deepali wants her to know the truth. Kamlesh feels that Ed has now become a heterosexual. He says:

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

SHARAD. Now the devil has put him on to your sister. I’ll tell you that. Show her the photograph. Let her know who the devil is. (85)

As Kamlesh’s friends were planning to tell him the truth about Kamlesh-Ed relationship, Kiran entered the living room. They were puzzled to see her there. Ed also appears in the room suddenly to meet Kamlesh’s sister, and bumping into Kamlesh is revived of his earlier crush on him. Nonetheless, Prakash/Ed is ashamed of being a homosexual and tries to leave the place with Kiran, to escape the cynical looks of those who know about his relationship with Kamlesh.

Kiran is shown to have compassion for the gays and wishes they could marry so that her brother who, she knows is a homosexual, is happy. At one stage, Kiran innocently remarks, “I really wish they would allow gay people to marry” to which Ranjit cynically replies, “Oh, they do. Only not to the same sex” (98). The irony of the whole play is that she did not know that the man to whom she was to get married was a gay and an ex-lover of her own brother. The revelation at the end comes as a shock to her.
The only heterosexual in the play is Kiran who is initially presented as a naive, victimized and weak character but turns out to be perhaps one of the strongest, basing all her ideas of the self on openness and truth. Through Kiran, Dattani tries to explore various other aspects of sexuality. He also wants the audience to move beyond the conventional understanding of sexuality.

Just as Kiran begins to understand her brother's world, she sees a photograph of her brother and his lover in the nude. She recognizes his lover as her fiance Ed, whom her brother had always affectionately called Prakash. She is devastated. Ed works himself into a fury and tries to jump off the ledge but his friends save him: “You will survive, Ed. Come back in!” (109). He hits out at Kamlesh crying with anger: “Faggot! Pansy! Gandu! Gandu!” (110). Weeping, he turns to Kiran: “I am sorry. ... I didn't mean to harm you. I only wanted to live” (110).

_On a Muggy Night_ throws up two worlds with two separate geographies. One of the two worlds carries a large space because it has assumed the power to exclude. The other space is occupied by the circle of friends who have come together at Kamlesh's apartment; The larger world lies outside celebrating the ritual of marriage. The mood inside is hardly festive—in fact everybody feels betrayed at some level.

Being gay in India is a taboo and a curse. For most men it can mean a lifetime of ridicule and persecution for showing even a slight interest in the members of the same sex. With homosexuality classed as illegal under an outdated law that prohibits "unnatural" sexual acts, resulting in a punishable
offence, it has become virtually impossible for most gays in India to be completely open about their sexuality. In this play, the initial scene in which two men are shown making love would shock the traditional audience, but an audience familiar with the queer culture would have a different pattern of reaction to the scene, taking gayness in its stride without shock or sensationalism.

Dattani has illustrated same-sex love with a frankness and boldness not usually visible in other playwrights or even writers of other genres in Indian English literature. He also critiques the Indian society which rejects same-sex love. This is how the playwright puts it through Ranjit who admits that he is a gay:

§

RANJIT. Call me what you will. My English lover and I have been together for twelve years now. You lot will never be able to find a lover in this wretched country! (71)

Ranjit is not a closeted homosexual; he has come out. “Coming out” or “coming out of the closet” is the voluntary public announcement of one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity, usually a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender orientation. The process of “coming out” is important for the individual lesbian or gay since it is concerned with the discursive recognition and renegotiation of her/his identity. In 1869, the German Homosexual Rights advocate Ulrichs introduced the idea of coming out as a means of emancipation. Claiming that invisibility was a major obstacle towards changing the public opinion, he urged homosexuals themselves to come out.
Some do not want to take up the subject position of “gay” or “lesbian”, choosing not to reveal their sexuality. Leading a double life can have a negative impact on the individual in terms of his/her self-worth and esteem. Indian culture does not accept people who come out. Eventually, they lose their family and friends. There is some change in the metros in India. But homophobia is still present and will not change very easily.

Sexuality, according to Butler, is a socially constructed model. Sexual identity is performative because coming out means taking up a subject position. It is performative because the declaration is a performative act (‘Gender Trouble’ 33). The concept of performativity emphasises that much of language consists of performative utterances in contrast to constatives where discourse becomes a social practice. In other words, talk becomes action. It is in the repetitive nature of this action that the practice becomes performative. Butler states, “Identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (‘Gender Trouble’ 23).

On a Muggy Night in Mumbai deals with fear, disgust and helplessness, closing in on confrontation—the moment of coming out.

BUNNY. All I am saying is that we should all forget about categorizing people as gay or straight or bi or whatever, and let them do what they want to do!

RANJIT. Well, I am sorry. There is such a thing as honesty. Or maybe it is the company you keep. Or maybe it is the country I am in.
BUNNY, Why don't you go back to England or wherever if you are ashamed to be here?

RANJIT. Buggery do! I will be where I want to be, thank you.

BUNNY. You can leave the country, but you can never run away from being brown. You are ashamed of being Indian.

RANJIT. That's really rich coming from a closet homosexual like you! Yes, I am sometimes regretful of being an Indian, because I can't seem to be both Indian and gay. But you are simply ashamed. All this sham is to cover up your shame.

BUNNY *(really hurt).* That's not true. You cannot make me an outcaste both inside and out.

DEEPALI. Bunny, you are a Sardarji. Why did you cut your hair?

BUNNY. What has that got to do with it ... ? Okay. Not because I am ashamed of being a Sardar. I am proud of it. I believe in my faith. My children learn from the Guru Granth Sahib . . . But because if I had a turban, I will end up playing a stereotypical Sird in all those movies. And that would hurt even more.

DEEPALI. Thank you, Bunny. I rest my case, Ranjit.

RANJIT. What do you mean?

DEEPALI . It's not shame, is it? With us? It's fear. Of the comers we will be pushed into where we don't want to be. (89)
Misconceptions and prejudices abound about any behaviour that is out of the ordinary. Homosexuality is condemned as deviant and sinful. But over the past half-century, rapid advances in the fields of science and technology, new economic patterns, the growing influence of the media and the diminishing influence of religion have brought about vast changes in people's beliefs and life-styles. A once-rigid code of conduct is being subjected to critical scrutiny. A candid, often radical, reappraisal of the traditional value system and behaviour patterns is going on at least in certain circles in India. The discussion of homosexuality should be placed in this milieu of change.

Homosexuality is not about sex alone; it is more about relationships. People with a homosexual orientation can have intense, complete and committed long-term relationships only with those who share their orientation, and these relationships, like any other, include both emotional and sexual intimacy. The homosexuals are a minority group in India and have to face the social consequences of their choice such as marginalization, the experience of humiliation, the social pressure to go in for straight marriages, the deception associated with their search for partners and the near impossibility of going public with their relationships even if they are lucky enough to find long-term partners.

There are very few spaces where homosexuals can meet. Added to this, they have to face a lot of opposition from the public that is largely heterosexual. In a country where people raise their eyebrows if married couples hold hands in public, the day-to-day life of the homosexuals is terrible. As a result, many force themselves into straight marriages that they cannot
sustain, thereby causing pain to their spouse as well. Some of them continue to have secret relationships with other homosexuals but keep their heterosexual married life going for the sake of the society. And those who are unable to do this end up leading lonely, frustrated and single lives or become commercial sex workers. There are however the lucky few who manage to come to terms with their homosexuality.

Ranjit asks a significant question at the beginning of Act III: “Why do people get married?” (95). The answer is given by Bunny: “It is natural to the majority of the people” (95). It is natural because the social construction of sexuality is based on heterosexuality leading to procreation and family life. But Dattani presents homosexuality as yet another normal human sexual orientation like heterosexuality. In an interview with Bijay Kumar Das he comments, “[Homosexuality] goes beyond the animal instinct of sex for procreation” (Form and Meaning in Mahesh Dattani’s Plays 177). But the majority of the people believe in heterosexual relations and this is highlighted by Ed who tells Ranjit:

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

Ed tries to commit suicide and this catapults the play to its climax. The mask he wears is ripped apart and he has to make his choices. Homosexuals
move towards isolation and death or a heterosexual marriage of the kind Ed and Kiran are heading towards. This play lifts the veil of secrecy that surrounds the marginalized cultures, sexualities and life styles. The various shades of gay—the overt, the escapist, the comfortable and the hypocrites who would have both this and that—are catalogued dexterously.

Some of the gays in this play are bi-sexuals and some of them want to change their sexual orientation and become heterosexuals for gaining acceptance in the society. Sharad wants to be heterosexual because he understands the power of sex. He explains the reasons why he wants to be a heterosexual:

SHARAD. We-ell, let me see how I can put it. You see, being a heterosexual man—a real man, as Ed put it—I get everything. I get to be accepted—accepted by whom?—well, that marriage lot down there for instance. I can have a wife, I can have children who will all adore me simply because I am a hetero—I beg your pardon—a real man. Now why would I want to give it all up? So what if I have to change a little? If I can be a real man, I can be king. Look at all the kings around you, look at all the male power they enjoy, thrusting themselves on to the world, all that penis power! Power with sex, power with muscle, power with size. Firing rockets, exploding nuclear bombs, if you can do it five times, I can do it six times and all that
Power is the basis of Foucault's analysis of society. Power relations are formed where differences exist. Foucault analyses knowledge related to sex in terms of power. He writes in the *History of Sexuality*:

Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies . . .

Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (1: 93-94)

All the characters in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* are honest to themselves and bold enough to confess their sexual orientations and preferences as well. They try to grapple with their problems and come out with
astounding disclosures. Bunny, for instance, makes a confession of his sexual life in the following words:

I know. Just as the man whom my wife loves does not exist. I have denied a lot of things. The only people who know me—the real me—are present here in this room. And you all hate me for being such a hypocrite. The people who know me are the people who hate me. That is not such a nice feeling. I have tried to survive. In both worlds. And it seems I do not exist in either. I am sorry, Kiran, I lied to you as I have lied to the rest of the world. I said to you that I am a liberal minded person. I am not them but I accept them. Actually it is they who are liberal-minded. They have accepted me in spite of my letting them down so badly. I deny them in public, but I want their love in private. I have never told anyone in so many words what I am telling you now—I am a gay man. Everyone believes me to be the model middle-class Indian man. I was chosen for the part in the serial because I fit into common perceptions of what a family man ought to look like. I believed in it myself. I lied—to myself first. And I continue to lie to millions of people every week on Thursday nights. There’s no such person ... (102-03)

Bunny represents the queer community which is trapped between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Their sexual preferences change the whole pattern of their life making them happy or sad. In order to fit into the heteronormative perceptions of the society, many homosexuals lead double
life. They deny the homosexuals in public and act like perfect examples of heterosexuality but in private yearn for the love of a homosexual. But very often they end up dissatisfied in either world, as Bunny articulates in this play.

The Indian society, has always tried to silence the queer and cover up instances of same-sex relationships. This silencing of the queer is not a national phenomenon alone but a universal one and Sedgwick challenges the silencing of the queer in the “question posed with the arrogant intent of maintaining ignorance” (*Epistemology of the Closet* 51). She asks:

Has there ever been a gay Socrates?

Has there ever been a gay Shakespeare?

Has there ever been a gay Proust?

Does the Pope wear a dress? . . . A short answer, though a very incomplete one, might be that not only have there been a gay Socrates, Shakespeare, and Proust but that their names are Socrates, Shakespeare, Proust; and, beyond that, legion-dozens or hundreds of the most centrally canonic figures in what the monoculturalists are pleased to consider ‘our’ culture ... (52)

*Epistemology of the Closet* is perhaps most often cited as a canonical text even though the term queer theory does not appear there. It seeks to analyze how various ways of construing sexual marginality shape the self-understanding of a culture as a whole. For example, Sedgwick argues that the very notion of the "closet" as well as the metaphor of "coming out of the closet" reflect the influence of the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy on
broader perceptions of public and private or secrecy and disclosure (72). Countless men and women lead double lives denying themselves the most precious of intimacies and self-knowledge. Towards the end of the play the confusion of the gays about their sexual orientation and the question of identity are evident when Sharad sings,

What Makes A Man A Man? ...

I ask myself what have I got

And what I am and what I’m not ...(111)

*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* looks at how society creates heterotyped behavioural patterns that demolish any aberrations. Dattani talks about this stereotyping through Kiran when she tells Ed:

When my husband beat me up, I truly believed and felt that he loved me enough to want to hurt me. Kamlesh helped me to get out of that. But I continued being the same . . . woman. I wanted to feel loved by a man. In whichever way he wanted to love me. And I met you. And you did show me love. And you continue being the same . . . man . . . Typical, you said. You are right. If there any stereotypes around here, they are you and me. (107)

Dattani takes a different stance by pulling apart the hegemonically constructed roles of human beings and offers a critique of the society that does not provide space to those who are unconventional. In this play, Kamlesh and Prakash break up because Prakash knows that Kamlesh still loves Sharad, who plans to marry Kiran, Kamlesh's sister, in the hope that the marriage will
provide him the cover to return to his relationship with Kamlesh. Dattani is of the opinion that it is not only the third gender that is stereotyped but even the male and female genders are also stereotyped. In the introductory note to the play McRae writes:

As the characters’ masks fall, their emotions unravel, and their lives disintegrate. For the fault is not just the characters’—it is everyone’s, in a society which not only condones but encourages hypocrisy, which demands deceit and negation, rather than allowing self-expression, responsibility and dignity. (46)

Through this play, Dattani has tried to soften the attitude of our society towards the gay and has subtly stirred up compassion for this group. The play depicts the lives of the homosexuals and their efforts to come to terms with their own sexuality, their loves, desires, relationships and betrayals. In this play, Dattani looks at the psychology of persons who are by nature gays, lesbians or bi-sexual and the desire on the part of some of them to become heterosexual. Contrary to the general notion that homosexuality is just about sexuality, the playwright has brought to light the emotional and psychological strains that homosexuals undergo. Some of them even opt for heterosexual lives because of the fear that they will be excluded from the mainstream society.

The figure whose influence looms large in queer discourse is Foucault. His *The History of Sexuality* details the construction of sexuality through institutional discourses, which come to constitute “regimes of truth”. As the
result of the Victorian era’s “discursive explosion,” Foucault argues that sexuality became a mainstay of identity and heterosexual monogamy came to function as a norm, and sexual deviants began to see themselves as distinct persons possessing particular “natures”.

Modern sexuality is a product of modern discourses of sexuality. Knowledge about sexuality can scarcely be a transparent window onto a separate realm of sexuality; rather, it constitutes that sexuality itself. It has been argued that Foucault’s intellectual influence and certainly the fact that he himself was a gay may largely be responsible for the recent emergence of queer theory out of the ghetto. On a Muggy Night in Mumbai shows that India is slowly catching up with the gay culture that is gradually coming out of the closet.

This chapter has presented a detailed, queer interpretation of Dattani’s two plays—Night Queen and On a Muggy Night in Mumbai which openly discuss homosexuality. The following chapter analyses three plays Do the Needful, Bravely Fought the Queen and Seven Steps Around the Fire. While two of them present homosexuality in the urban Indian family context the third discusses the plight of transgenders.