Chapter – V

Voicing the Unvoiced and Marginalized in Indian Society:
Do the Needful and Other Plays

Dattani has dealt with the marginalized in the contemporary Indian society in multiple ways. The chapters attempts to look at his treatment of the marginality and taboo subjects like eunuchs, gay/lesbian relations, inter-caste marriages and, gender discriminations, alternate sexuality, confrontational sex issues, fatal disease like AIDS, etc. Marginalization is a symbol that refers to processes by which individuals or groups are kept at or pushed beyond the edges of society. The term social exclusion is also used as its synonym.

The term, 'marginalization' has different connotations. In cultural anthropology marginalization is a major subject of study in which ethnic groups and their social situations are studied. It may have various forms like class, caste, gender, community and so on at one level and at the other level groups who are subjected to economic and social hardships. These groups may still be marginalized at multiple levels in a country like India which has witnessed tremendous socio-political changes in both pre-independence and post-independence period. Of course, the forms of marginalization may vary. It is generally linked to "the level of development of society; culturally, and as (if not more) importantly, with relation to economics. For example, it would generally be true, that there would exist more marginalized groups in the Third World", and developing nations than in the developed/first-World nations. Indeed, there can be a distinction made on the basis of the choice that one has within this context those in the Third World who live under impoverished conditions, through no choice of their own (being far removed from the protectionism that exists for people in the First World) are often left to die due to hunger, disease, and war. Within the First World, low-income drug addicts stand out as being the most marginalized. This deliberate or chosen marginalization of people carries with it aspects of a so-called "Social Darwinism". (Anupkumar 3)
Indian society witnessed a multilayered marginality during colonial period and in the postcolonial scenario in the 20th century. When India emerged as a nation-state; the western concept of marginality began to melt slowly, yet a profound question -whether the subaltern can speak- kept the nation haunting. Gayatri Spivak Chakraborty rightly elaborated on the issue through her epoch making post-colonial discourse, 'Can the Subaltern Speak? ’ and she meant that the subalterns are still at the periphery and Dattani in his dramatic discourse attempts to give voice to the voiceless while letting them a push from the margin toward the centre.

Dattani’s concern of marginality was in the backdrop of Indian social construct beginning at the 80s onward when Indian society already stood the test of democracy, yet reeling under several vexing issues, one of them being the problem of social inequality of which marginality forms part. Thus, gay/lesbian, homosexuals, transgenders, and human beings suffering from fatal disease like AIDS were looked down upon by the society which had been following the straight jacketed division of male and female. Dattani shows his concern for the people belonging to these marginalized groups by focusing on the homophobic condition of Indian homosexuals, their dehumanizing and split personality due to social norms and laws of the land, their aspirations, the existential dilemma and the author’s plea for a tolerant view on them rather than banishment from the society.

Gay/ Lesbian relationships are branched off as two separate identities of homosexual behaviour and the issues relating to it have been a matter of intense debate in India and abroad. They are labeled as queer which has become their identity. But now they are being treated as the part of larger humanity deserving attention.

Homosexuality has been common across cultures in the world though the term was first coined by a German Doctor in 1869. In an era of gay and lesbian marginalization, the homosexual immigrants of Indian subcontinent demanded in Britain and America. Sherry Joseph through his study made an attempt to understand the Indian Gay and Lesbian movement through the wider perspectives of identity politics:
An agenda within a racist climate different from the agenda imposed by white gays and lesbians. The impact of colonial history and concepts of orientalism upon world-views and perceptions has played a central role in how non-white people have been defined ... Silenced in both South Asian patriarchal societies and the white gay communities in America and Europe, the South Asian gays and lesbians have had to invent themes, often with new terms of identification. (2228)

The identification of one's sexual behaviour is again the product of the western ideology as the entire West rests on Christian values for their prime ideological moorings. In post-colonial era scholars of the empire began to deliberate on a new terminology that can be conveniently used to identify people not preferring to be heterosexual. Thus came the term alternate sexualities mainly as "an attempt to decolonize the general notion and establish the existence of various expressions of sexualities surrounding scriptures, arts, life histories etc." (Joseph 2229).

The predicament of gays and lesbians, unlike Western countries, is pathetic to intent that their identification in society leads them to social ostracization and victimhood of homophobia. Dattani is vociferous in his works regarding the treatment meted out to the homosexuals and the subsequent degradation in the social strata. He attempts to undo, if not legally approve, mainly homophobia, a term that refers to unreasonable fear of the gays or lesbians. A subjectivity of human beings is again centered with an appeal to all that they may in every way be treated as human being the way the third wave of feminism vouch for treating women not as a gendered identity, instead they should be looked at thought of as human beings first. A change of attitude is the central focus.

People with same sex behaviour are not only a minority, but also practice of such is a taboo, inasmuch as the Judaeo–Christian values and beliefs held that non-procreative sexual acts were a sin against nature and consequently frowned upon in the culture. This value system shaped the legal binding on sodomy as a criminal offence even in the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The entire world is still in a suspended state as to its stand on validating gay marriages on moral grounds and value system. The values also have undergone change
over the years especially, after the postmodern scenario of anti-essentialism and antifoundationalism. Gay and lesbian movements all over the world have caught the attention of people in general into thinking on the issue seriously. President and Founder of the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry, Matt Slick feels his concern to write on the subject as: Homosexuals want others in society to accept them as normal people with normal sexual behavior patterns. They are working hard to change moral, social, and political opinion to be more in line with what they want. They are not content to be by themselves. They want others to accept them as a philosophically, morally, and ideologically valid. They want to change the opinions of people. In short, they want to change society. Therefore, it is necessary to write about something that can so drastically affect the moral fabric of this country.” (Bhadury and Kumar 42)

Dattani has also felt the same concern for Indian homosexuals. Scriptural truth is a permanent reality, yet values keep changing over time with the multifarious development in an ever evolving world. Indian gay and lesbian movement gained ground during 1980's onward and they have common goals of opting for same sex marital relationship or like a living-together like any other heterosexuals. Both of the communities might be disapproved by the general Indian mass, yet they differ in terms of the power relation they occupy or the space they could create for themselves. Certainly, gays have greater dominance since they belong to masculine gender and India has always been a male dominated society. Indian lesbians in the 1980's were part of the feminist movement but later on the tie is snapped off for the same reason of societal disapproval and homophobia. The active lesbian group like ‘Sakhi’ in Bombay was initially a part of the feminist movement group, but later on it stopped receiving any communication or cooperation from the later. So, rightly lesbianism deserved its legitimate place in Indian society given the age old injustice to Indian women. The present status of Indian gay and lesbian groups are rooted to the emergence of South Asian gay and lesbian group publications in Europe and America in 1980's of which Trikone, Samakami, and Dost were prominent. Whereas, at
present only three groups in three metro cities like Mumbai, Chennai and Delhi are functional with least number of lesbians or women activists in them. Naturally, the lesbian women stand doubly marginalized, first by being women and then by being lesbians. Some of them may still be viewed as the marginalized of the marginalized that have been forced to be isolated turned lesbians for being subjected to marital torture, dowry related oppression, sexual violence and so on. Thus, their sexual identification as lesbians is the result of their series of marginalization and a shift of political consciousness.

The gross marginalization of the gay and lesbian community occurs due to the dichotomy of homo sexuality and heterosexuality. The policy of domination by the majority to minority, or by the powerful to the powerless has been as old as subjecting Eve to eat the forbidden fruit by Adam and thereby bring the hubris upon the earth. Such prominent dichotomies are Black and White races in America, immigrants and natives in Europe and the US, male/female and so on. Even among women, there are black and white women in the US, upper and lower caste women in India, and other common distinctions are based on class, race and community all over the world.

Five plays of Dattani—Do the Needful, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Bravely Fought the Queen, EK Alag Mausam and Mango Soufflé—take up the invisible and taboo issues like alternate sexuality, confrontational sex issues, gay, lesbian, homosexual, and fatal disease like AIDS in various forms and they are discussed in the chapter one by one.

Dattani chooses the issues of gay and lesbian relationship, their marriage, pleasures and pains and the societal confrontation they face within his first radio play Do the Needful, broadcasted on August 14, 1997 by BBC Radio 4. It ushered in a hope for the aspirations of Indian gay community by opening a debate and a deliberation for the society to have a considerate view upon them. Sally Avens in 'A Note on the Play' writes: "And whilst the play may be set in India within the conventions of arranged marriages, its wider themes are universal." (CP 115)
This particular drama swings to the concern of women's freedom while arranging a gay relationship of convenience. The third wave of feminism has some common causality with the gay-lesbian movement. Women are looked as stereotypical image as wife or as a shadow to a man. Singlehood is not accepted as normal in India. Such situation forces women to go for a marriage of convenience as the case happens in the Do the Needful where Lata and Alpesh accept marriage to maintain the status quo and later on they use the liberty to pursue their own choices.

In reality, more often than not, the gay people are subjected to familial, social and political injustices. The cases of Lata and Alpesh are shown in this light with two distinct levels of the action of the drama: one is the responsibility and burden of the parents to arrange marriages for their wards and the other is the freedom of choices of an individual in the society. In Indian scenario, in a majority of cases parents’ choice prevails over the marriage of a boy or a girl. Though in recent times there is slight shift on the side of a boy or a girl. In most of the cases this is due to their economic independence.

Both Alpesh and Lata are seen as deviants by their parents and are coerced into a marriage of convenience to salvage their reputation in the society. Chandrakanta Patel, through letter correspondence with Dr. Gowda, fixes marriages of their wards Alpesh and Lata. From the conversations of both the parents and would-be-bride-groom, it is made clear that Alpesh, a divorcee with thirty plus age, is not much educated.

Whereas Alpesh is a deviant because of his sexual orientation towards same-sex guy, Trilok, Lata twenty four and notorious, though well read is deviant because of her emotional attachments with a Muslim Kashmiri terrorist, Salim. Lata is so enamored with Salim that she would prefer to be his fourth wife. She was running away to a guilt trip. Here, the ideology from the Bangalore Catholic school what she inherited is in conflict with her passion that sends her "on a guilt trip now." (CP 127)
When the marriage is fixed, Alpesh felt the repulsion to be married, rather preferred to be alone to continue his relationship with Trilok. His mother fails to understand the nuances of his words as made clear from the dialogue:

Alpesh. Is it … is it very important for me to get married?
Kusumben Patel. Hmm.
Alpesh (thought). Trilok, you can't say I didn't try.
Kusumben Patel. Why do you ask me that?
Alpesh. What if ... I don't want to get married.
Kusumben Patel. Why don't you want to get married?
Alpesh. Because I am happy being alone. (CP 125)

Alpesh is vacillating between his own homo-sexual orientation and the normative heterosexual orientation put by the society. He knows that a heterosexual marriage would jeopardize a girl's life and he even attempts to explain it to her mother. He is beset in the absurd world alone wishing to escape to the backyard into the darkness and beyond. At other moment, he allies his anguished temperament of being in a state of ennui with the drum beat of angry Mariappa: "Mariappa beats that drum when he is angry with the whole world. Which is quite often." (CP 142). The character of Mariappa is brought to bring a resonance to Alpesh. The drum is beaten in a drunken state whenever the angst of his run-away daughter crosses his limit of toleration. She ran away to Bombay to be an actress but "Will end up in a brothel. I am sure." (CP 143). A drum beat goes on in Alpesh for being a gay and by extension to Lata also for demolishing her self-expression. She expresses her wish to her mother and in turn mother's unhappiness is clear in their dialogue:

Lata. Please, Amma! Please don't insist I agree to this! You are ruining my life.
Prema Gowda. You should have thought of our lives before sleeping with that terrorist!
Devraj Gowda. Lata, go to your room.
Prema Gowda. You have ruined our lives! (CP 122)
In Gowda family, in the backyard scene, both Alpesh and Lata promise to each other not to divulge their secrets to anybody. They barter their secrets so that normalcy of family, their image in society and family's status remains untarnished, "Teri bhi chup, meri bhi chup.... It means your silence and mine as well." (CP 142). This is the turning point for the secret gay relationship for Alpesh. And the same silence would be used as the most powerful tool for their convenience against all societal taboo. This silence element of silence prevailed over both the parents as well as they were in a difficulty to arrange the marriages of their wards as both of them are involved with some social stigma: one is a gay and the other is involved in illicit sex-relationship. So, both of the parents were seeking an alliance outside the community.

An element of absence is put deliberately to make the presence conspicuous, not as an opposition to it. Silence for both Alpesh and Lata about their smoking before the solemnization of their marriage beacons a stimulus of what's going to be eloquent in them as their lives unfold in the sequence of events. The warring forces are a mindset of these two persons or the likes of their generation of going against the social norms manipulatively. A norm, they feel, needs change with evolving time, but it is very difficult to bring in overnight. Hence, a silence can be the panacea for all such taboo. Again, Chandrakant Patel's word of negotiation with Gowda that states: "But you can still consider a proposal from us for your daughter. I understand there will be reasons for not seeking a groom in your own community. We are also in a ... similar situation." (CP 147). does not expressly speak of such hidden warring forces as both the parents are in difficulty in arranging marriage in their own community and they meet also as belonging to different community for the same reason of the compulsion of warring forces.

The warring force Alpesh is fighting for is his hiding his originality, celebrating a life of his own with social approval. During their talks, an important dramatic technique used here is pause. The audience is again taken to the unspoken words that constitute their
individuality and the crisis of life they are brought to. Through pause, Lata could go back to
her memory of meeting Salim, running away from home or accepting the lout for making
everyone happy. Alpesh too could visualize his life with Trilok and at other times he groans
the solitude of his life matching the agony of Mariappa's drumbeat.

Amid a loud drumbeat outside and cowbell at the yard Lata could hear the groaning
sound. She thought that somebody as in pain or might be her Salim is in danger in Kashmir.
In a height of mental agitation she opens the door of Alpesh, put on the flash light to discover
the secret of groaning: "They were ... doing it! You are a homo!" (CP 153). Alpesh was
engaged with the Mali in his carnal pleasure and with the presence of Lata he does not feel
the shame, instead, he just asks her to put off the flashlight. Mali, the poor gardener was not
aware of his gay nature; it was Alpesh, the experienced and divorced man who found a right
partner here only to put as a foil against his marriage with Lata.

The tragedy for any gay people is the disclosure of their behavior. Life long they remain
prisoner of their own soul for the stigma attached to gay behaviour. Mali also is ashamed of
him and tries to justify crying to Lata that he is normal and everything was by force:

Mali.  I didn't want to do it. He made me do it…Please don't tell appa. He forced
       me to do it.

Alpesh. Stop crying....

Lata.  You filthy beast! How could you force him to do that?

Alpesh. Wait a minute! He was enjoying every minute of it! (CP 153)

Lata later understands the psyche of Mali and his double-faced behavior. Mali is
besotted by societal perceptions of taboo and homophobia and thus, he wants the best of both
the worlds in disguise of his pretence of innocence. He is completely beset with a paranoia
that, "Mariappa won't give his daughter to me now. Who will marry me? I will kill myself."
(CP 154). Thus, the real problem is that the taboo subject reduces all such gay people into a
state of paranoia, or their suffering, in turn, makes them as victimizers. The character like
Mali is brought here as technical brilliance of dramaturgy to serve two purposes: one as a catalyst through whose interaction and induction to the stage the main characters like Alpesh and Lata find enough space to lay bare their private thought and their individuality, and the next as a lens through which the hidden recesses of the characters' deep psyche can be gauzed which the explicit fails to make it up.

The same element of surprise, common in all Dattani plays, comes here also in the silent understanding of marriage to give in to the patriarchal dominance and at the same time to assert individual choices by making a confluence of the tradition and modernity of evolving culture in Indian perspectives. Now, both of them are free to maintain their individuality as it is apparent from their last dialogue of planning a reunion after their business is over with silent thought in pleasure of their individual partners. But the textual analysis of their settlement and utterances leaves enough space for the play of warring forces with a serious question, how far this could bring harmony to their lives and what still could lie in wait for them in the ensuing events in their lives?

*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* shows the intensity of gay love and this play was first performed at the Tata Theatre, Mumbai, on November 23, 1998. The depth of experience is communicated through the stage setting in which the combination of the silhouette and the indoor present an outline of the condition of Indian gay people as a whole to the audience. One of the prominent techniques of Dattani is to create the dramatic tension which highlights the depth and breadth of not only a character but also engages the readers and audience into their own attitudinal turmoil to the reality of human experience. Individual talent and dramatic techniques help spinning a mindset of people toward more acceptances through a slow process of evolution. It is slow because the impact reverberates into the minds of an audience and the same helps consolidate their rational approach to the vexed issue to be translated into acceptance. Recalling the early reception of the play Dattani observes:
On a Muggy Night in Mumbai was received with dismissal mostly. On opening night, I could hear comments like 'It's a sick play'. An elderly couple were talking about how in the West 'this sort of thing if very common'. Most people chose to ignore it completely, as if they had never watched it. This was even more hurtful than a strong negative response. I first attributed all this to our society's conservative views on homosexuality…. They hated it, and they hated me. Their accusation was that I showed gay men to be stereotypical. Even to this date, they refuse to acknowledge it as the first Indian play with gay love as its central theme…. I continue to stand by my play on those grounds. (MMP 36)

Dattani's themes are traditional Indian society and its design is to impact upon the gay, lesbian and on anyone who is opposed to heterosexism as defined by society. The play is a realistic picture of society as it affects an individual behaviour when one is denied any self-expression and hypocrisy is upheld for the sake of tradition. This leads to the victimization of the character against social expectations and the same question Sharad in On a Muggy Night in Mumbai is haunted by as the national anthem, not as the celebrated 'Jana Gana, Mana', but as 'what Makes A Man A Man' (CP 55). This question stems from his quest for existentiality and as important as the national anthem. Kamlesh is engaged with a love of convenience or sham-love for Kamlesh who only makes an attempt of love, but his heart is engaged somewhere else what evokes Sharad's laments: "I wasted a year of my life being a house wife for you and all I get is a kick in the ass! You beast! (CP 56). Sharad discovered that Kamlesh was in love with Prakash, but he too was a wounded lover, for Prakash was more afraid of being banished by the society and hence, distanced himself.

Sharad loved Kamlesh truly as he put on 'sindur' (vermilion) like traditional women and wore bangles what he broke at a height of emotion, for what he found is now lost because of Prakash. Sharad helped him forget his lost-love with Prakash but hardly could he do that as Prakash kept cropping up to his mind painfully. Sharad could not conceal his frustration of unrequited love with Kamlesh to Deepali's catalytic remarks that they must be back to terms of their love-relations: "If I had a lover, would I be such a bitch?" Immediately, Deepali gets
back to her natural sense of empathy for the female species saying that: "You can call yourself a dog, call yourself a pig, but never, never insult a female." (CP 59)

Sharad, while suggesting the guard to be shameless, accepts that the gay people are all shameless, but this comes as his deep protest against such societal taboo upon them. Deepali is more of a flat character as she does not undergo any complex changes of life and performs more like filler, yet she is dynamic in her response to a conflicting situation which is expressive of her internal dialogues, put forward as external dialogues and reactions at various points in the dramatic events. That's the reason that she retorts to the example of a bitch. She too becomes more revelatory in her plea for an acceptance for gay people. She, along with Sharad stands between the two categories of round and flat characters in its literary sense; or rather she is an admixture of these two and may be labeled as catalytic character that helps manifest the main or dynamic characters like Kamlesh or Ed/ Prakash. She pleads for the gay men's cause more than her own category of lesbians: "I am for gay men's cause. Men deserve only men!" (CP 160)

Dattani through his play explicates how the dominant discourses of the society shape gender construction and fix heterosexual orientation as the standard. He sets a discourse through everyday language and out-on the-street characters through distinct mode of sexism. For example, Deepali and Kamlesh never feel any love for each other in a sense of lovemaking. It's made clear when Deepali expresses that if Kamlesh were a woman, they could be in a love and the same is reciprocated in opposite terms and finally Deepali asserts: "If we were heterosexuals, we would be married." (CP 65). Deepali feels proud of being a woman: "Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am a woman. (CP 66). The same words are suggested in a different way by Sharad to register his contempt for all those who deny any space for gay or lesbians: "Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am not pregnant" (CP 66). Kamlesh in the gathering of his gay and lesbian friends is obsessed with his lost love and separation with Prakash and in turn he makes Sharad's life miserable. In other words, the
victim turns into victimizer. Prakash, at the initial stage of the drama is a victim of social pressure which is made clear in the words of Kamlesh himself: "He left me because he was ashamed of our relationship." (CP 69)

The irony is that even the medical practitioners have an aversion to gay relationships. Kamlesh is shocked when his visit to a psychiatrist for self-help aggravates his mental condition because the psychiatrist plunged him into more depression instead of counseling positively. Out of his own abomination of gay people, he had aversion therapy as the only solution which brought further depression to Kamlesh as he recalls, "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." (CP 69). Ranjit termed the doctor's eccentric and homophobic view as a primitive idea. In fact, the society is the great barrier what Dattani's dramatic technique and making of the characters unravel as an anti-venom against a venom of hatred for all these people who are struggling to be accepted as human beings and, human dignity in the society. Bunny, the TV actor, too has experienced the same treatment of homophobia and non-acceptance as gay.

While all the gay friends assembled at Kamlesh's residence to sympathize with him, shehnai music was pouring in. They show their antipathy by turning on the CD player, for they are anguished as no such celebrations are solemnized for them so such rituals or music is, 'filthy hot air' (CP 73) for them. Here, one contrast is shown: one marriage is going on with social gaiety amid colours and music down stairs and upstairs apartment is witnessing a break up of a gay marriage with the chanting of parallel mantra: "...This city and God are witness to my vow, I break all ties with Prakash." (CP 73). Love for each other for these two friends is so strong that Kamlesh could not tear up the joint photograph with Prakash symbolizing their conjugal relationship.

All the three Acts are three in one. Psychic turmoil of all the characters, their pleasure and pain, frustration and revolt against the society are balanced placing them in the silhouette
and the front show of the stage setting. This juxtaposition of interior and the exterior or the front and the back stage against each other is to create a deep impression on the audience's mind as to the conflict that goes in their consciousness, yet how they struggle to reconcile with the stem reality of society a reality divorced from free expression and fair play.

The central character of the play Kamlesh is brought in Act II with brilliant dramatic technique in which he walks by Ed at the lonely park at around 8.30 PM, yet not visible to the audience. He has throttled a few pegs to get rid of his depression and he divulges the fact of his coming to the park as to let someone know his story before he ends his life by committing suicide. Someone exactly listens to his story (history?) who, in turn, is the exact cause of such wretched condition of life. Social paranoia is what troubled Ed as he was a little more reactive to people's suspicion about his gay relationship with Prakash that turned him into hyper vigilant against any social threat from any quarter. Kamlesh struggles for visibility of such relationship against the blind sensibility of average people: "They can't see us at all, although we can see them. They must be blind." (CP 81)

Then, Kamlesh asks Ed to close his eyes, stand behind him and kiss gently to discover, "Can you see how beautiful we are?" (CP 82). Through long pause and silence after this warmth of feeling of the two old lovers, fading light, slow music and then Kamlesh's appearance on front show of the stage to join the gathering of his friends of Act I while the light reappears to create a sense of change in time and space, is a brilliant technique of creating two distinct mental spaces into the minds of the audience: to recreate the subtlety of feelings of these two men off the glare of the everyday world in their minds and the dreary intercourse of the same world under the visibility of everyone in which hardly they could feel proud of and contented with what they are all about. Surreptitious orchestration of pause and silence, music, light are done to heighten their speed of the stream of consciousness natural to all human beings.
Social pressure is so enormous that Ed's psychiatrist could convince him that his love is the work of a devil and through regular church going alone could absolve him of such devil. Kamlesh also believes it and so he wants to avoid showing the photograph of their love making to his own sister, Kiran, who is now going to be married with Ed. On the other hand Ranjit, a European immigrant, is contrasted with his Indian counterparts of gay community. In Europe, he has greater freedom of being honest to his sexual behaviour but in India he might not expect the same degree of freedom: "There is such a thing as honesty. Or may be it is the company you keep. Or maybe the company I am in" (CP 88). Further Ranjit is perturbed seeing 'closet homosexuals' in India and he regrets being an Indian on grounds of his vantage point of Western immigration. His statement to Bunny echoes the shifting subject of subalternity in Indian society: "I can't seem to be both Indian and gay. But you are simply ashamed. All this sham is to cover up your shame." (CP 88). The hypocrisy of Indian society is again substantiated through Bunny's character. He belongs to Sikh community, yet he avoids wearing a turban as he would be subjected to stereotypical role of being a Sardar (a member of Sikh community).

The characters are designed skillfully representing every type and category of Indian gay and lesbian people on stage in an effort to produce a gay ambiance within an hour or two to show what India is passing through presently. The real plight of this marginalized community is made clear in exact terms through Deepali's words that it is more fear of being ostracized or a subject of homophobia than any stigma of shame attached to them. Basic human dignity is at stake for all these people in general. Being woman and lesbian is more pathetic in India as Deepali makes it pretty loud and clear: "It's not shame, is it? With us? ... It's fear. .. Of the corners we will be pushed into where we don't want to be" (CP 89). Dattani's effort has been to widen this corner of Indian society to make it at least as large as to accommodate these innocent bonafide citizens of a sovereign country, known for its age old tolerance and universal acceptance. Of course, India as a nation could be described in no
better terms than the first address at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago on September 11, 1893 by Swami Vivekananda: "...We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth...." (Laderman and León 1386)

Equally fluctuating is the condition of Sharad's mind after being broken from Kamlesh. He too wants to force his way to be straight, to be a real man only to be accepted by the society, even though he knows deep down within himself that he is 'as gay as a goose' and seeks the advice of a psychiatrist only to invite a fresh misery in his life. Kiran still thinks wishfully of a happy bond between her brother and Sharad as she recalls her own life of solitude after divorce. She also warns about the gravity of misery a woman undergoes in this country just because of male dominance. Sharad's decision to act like a straight might shatter a woman's life: "And think of the poor woman. You may end up marrying just as a cover up for your shame". (CP 102). Bunny accepts that he is a gay man and keeps deceiving people through his constant denial and in the process; all such gay people vacillate between the world of reality and the world of sham, finding no permanent anchor to embrace with fullness of heart.

The last scene of Act III lays bare the absurdity of life of all the gay people on stage who are representative of entire gay community. Ed is the most pathetic character not only for Deepali, but also for every viewer or reader the way he has shattered the lives of Kamlesh and Kiran. He also could not remain immune to this wretched condition of life as a closer look and a psychological delving into his character reveals that he is more sinned against than sinning. His very purpose of marrying Kiran was a matter of convenience so that he could continue his love for Kamlesh without any suspicion from anyone. Certainly, in the process he could save one life at the cost of the other and the other is a woman. Kiran, while looking at the photograph of Ed and Kamlesh kissing each other, cries out through the open window leading to the vacuous blue sky of Bombay. She must have felt the void of the sky more than anyone else who has not passed through the tormenting labyrinth of life like hers.
She is that subaltern woman, conditioned to tolerate torture and untold suffering. She remembers her past life as to how she used to be beaten up by her husband and still she continued to accept and digest all these as she believed and felt that he loved her: "I felt he loved me enough to want to hurt me." (CP 107). She questions Ed's motive of marrying her and the answer comes out as her dramatic monologue that all such gay people behave in a stereotypical manner as "we just don't know what else to be!" (CP 107). The imagery of the photograph with Ed as the best couple on the floor that appears in her mind matches with the vacuous blue sky to condense the absurdity of her life. The explosion of fireworks, coloured lights and loud screams of delight from the ground floor heightens the inner turmoil of a saddest thought, perhaps churning an existential dilemma in her mind. Ed in utter shame and disgust for life is completely broken down: "Where do I begin? How do I begin to live?" (CP 111)

All the characters on stage are suddenly plunged into existential dilemma in the world of uncertainty and absurdity of life. The height of the dilemma in the last scene is accentuated by more firecrackers and lusty yells from the wedding below. Lights are slowly fading to beckon the void while the pictures of Ed and Kamlesh and Kiran and Kamlesh are slowly evanescing from the minds of the audience before it is completely engulfed into darkness.

Homosexuality is much talked about issue all over especially when people express their grievances against them and the active media, both print and electronic, pour in so many such incidents every day. Sometimes, people and religions brand them as sinners; sometime they are killed and sometimes they are forced to kill themselves. They have to lead a secret life of camouflage or have to leave a dual life of homosexuals, lesbians as well as heterosexuals to protect their lives in a society. This chapter aims to study the psyche of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender in the light of Mahesh Dattani's plays and to delve deep into his feelings and views regarding different issues pertaining to the condition of so called queer people and his understanding and opinions regarding their rights. Mahesh
Dattani's plays portray the discrimination against people in Indian society on the basis of religion, class, gender and sexuality with his own experience of urban people struggling to be part of the mainstream and be visible. The theme of marginalization of the gay people demands a change of attitude in the society. And the themes of *On a Muggy Night* deserve to touch the whole of society and to be touched by it. John Mc. Rae in the introduction to the play writes:

> It is not simply the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal. It is a play about how society creates patterns of behavior and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates. *(CP 45)*

Drama functions as an intellectual sap to the society mirroring the actual happenings on stage and this particular play has shown the exact picture of the functioning of all gay people in India. It has helped creating more tolerance and space for them than it was before. Now it's common that the gays and lesbians come together from across the country to show their solidarity and a sense of belongingness as a community by lending all possible support for one another. Currently, India is on a path of new social and economic reformation of which class consciousness is replacing caste. Similarly, dominant social groups and structures based on tradition is giving way to differentiations which is again supported by its own discourse in a postmodern setting that goes against any fundamental essentialism. So, for the author, and for the readers, it might be a matter to see an evolution in India in course of time.

A multi-faceted personality, Dattani tried his skill at writing and directing a movie like *Mango Soufflé* on the forbidden theme, *i.e.*, homosexuality. This film was released in India on February 2002 and it won the best motion picture award at the Barcelona Film Festival the same year. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri has stated that it is “the first Indian feature film to explicitly address homosexuality, addressing gay issues with the territorially distinct identity of its subject.” *(95)*. *Mango Soufflé* symbolically implies the dish of mango which stands for human passion that has been placed before the readers for consumption.
Dattani has taken a realistic stand on the theme of homosexuality wherein he tries to project before the readers that stigmatizing a particular aspect of a segment of society is not the solution. The solution lies in the acceptance of it. We need to bring it out of the confinements of debates and ostracization and tabooing so that homosexuals can breathe freely without pressure and fear. Dattani has presented the concept without any spicing it up and false pretence. Dattani has added a few new shades to the human relationship and rightly stated that he has found out that sexuality can’t be strait jacketed or compartmentalized. There are varying degrees of love and bonding one feels for another person irrespective of the gender.

The film \textit{Mango Soufflé} was accorded a warm reception in the prestigious London International Film Festival for its exploration of the theme of homosexuality and that too, with capturing the emotional and psychological nuances with a deep subtlety. At the Barcelona film festival the film was awarded the Mostra Lambda Award for the presentation of, says festival Director J.G.I. Llopart, “homosexuality as a normal phenomenon”, and its “enormous valour” for projecting it before the mass which is antagonistic to it as in a country like India. It was an effort of valour on Dattani’s part to direct such a bold film where homosexuality hasn’t acquired a legal status even.

With a certain aim, Dattani has cast his characters into molds of type characters as we had seen in the Sentimental Comedies and the Restoration plays like Sheridan’s \textit{The Rivals} and \textit{The School for Scandal}. Like Arthur Miller’s plays, \textit{Mango Soufflé} is highly suggestive in stage decoration and symbolic representation. The title of the play clearly suggests that the atmosphere is unpleasantly warm, damp and clammy in a muggy weather and naturally it will make us feel tired or uncomfortable. Dattani through his symbolism depicts the psychological canvas of his characters, their mental turbulences, frustration, isolation, introspection and despair.
Fireworks form the major symbolic trope as was in Shakespearean tragedies. The image of ‘fireworks’ occurs frequently and it symbolizes ‘explosion of one’s self’. The real self of the characters come up that had been suppressed beneath the societal constraints. Firecrackers accompanied by coloured lights, yells and screams clearly symbolise the commotion arising in the hearts of different characters who talk to their pious selves and realise their blunders. The play unravels the various shreds of human thought layer after layer—a whole gamut of emotions is visible which in a way reveal their path to self-expression.

Following the lineage of Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar and Badal Sircar, Dattani tries to expose the hypocrisy and cruelty of society under the garb of the social constructs norms and conventions that push the have-nots like homosexuals, and trans-genders to the margins. As a part of his humanitarian project and drama as its instrument, Dattani focuses on the issues that have been rendered invisible to the society. The society has muted the voices that it finds different from the dominant tone. It is his goal to bring to the forefront the invisible and the muted issues of the society which are swept under the rug and are presumed to be non-existent by the dominant voices. His plays are deeply rooted in reality its milieu holding and are reality-centred, as he himself comments in his essay “My favourite book” published in Outlook (October 2, 2000) “a mirror up to society” (XV). Commenting upon his focus on pressing contemporary issues, Dattani shared his views with Aditi De:

I write for my milieu, for my time and place ..........middle class and urban Indian.......My dramatic tensions arise from people who aspire to freedom from society.......some subjects which are under explored, deserve their space. It is no use brushing them under the carpet. We have to understand the marginalised, including the gays. (The Hindu, March 9, 2003)

Bravely Fought the Queen centers on a multiple themes arising out of the complexity in perceptions towards sexuality and further complications arising out of such discriminations. The marginalization of gay people and their tragic predicament forms the locus of this play. They are always to camouflage like the character of Bunny, in On a Muggy
Night in Mumbai who is a famous TV actor and behaves like a hetero sexual in the eye of the society, but observes gay relations privately. Dattani portrays a similar case with this drama with a difference. Here, the younger of Trivedi brothers, Nitin, is a gay, but he is convinced into a marriage alliance as heterosexual. Ultimately, it proves just a complete ruin.

One of the important techniques of a typical Dattani Drama is to shock and surprise the audience at the end. Here also we come to see at the end when Alka, the younger wife of Trivedi brothers is fighting a brave battle against her husband's life long torture by questioning his cowardly act, and she is about to be chocked by the tyrannical husband, the flash comes that Nitin was a gay and his marriage was only a camouflage with the connivance of Praful the elder brother of Alka herself.

The consequences of societal pressure on gay relationships take toll on Alka who becomes a victim because of his own brother Praful's connivance with her husband Nitin. Praful's complicity makes Nitin bitter to his own wife as he finds his tortures to Alka as a justification in disguise. Every time, before close meeting, they use to take enough precautions and verify that all are sleeping and the lights are put off as he himself says:

And I would go back to Praful's room ... and kneel ... At times he would wake up immediately. At other times 1 would lean forward to look at him. Close enough for my breath to fall gently on his face ... And he responded. Oh! But how ashamed he made me feel after! He made me cry each time! That was a game he played. And I–I was caught in it. (CP 314)

The marriage of convenience and the sequence of events in the drama show that Indian society is on the path of transformation with an admixture of both tradition and modernity and sometimes the values set in are not in conformity with rationale, even though the society is largely responsible for this. The corporate culture of a middle class society is shown for comparative analysis of traditional society and modern society. A distinct shift of consumerism, of gossip, rum, gin, ghosts, Pepsi and so on has crept in even among the women. Dolly and Alka represent the modern Indian middle class society; both fall victim
and fight their husbands for marriages of convenience. In the last scene when Alka comes staggering on the landing with a blanket wrapped around her as she is shivering in fever due to rain and storm, we come to know that a fight has begun a fight of ‘do or die’. Rain and storm represent the storm she has been facing all through her life since marriage and probably rain is her last chance of shedding the tears before she is put to sleep for ever by Nitin:

But, now you will have to sleep, you mustn't wake up, while I... while I... mustn't keep him waiting ... Don't wake up. Stay drunk. You mustn't watch ... those powerful arms ... (CP 315)

Both Jiten and Nitin turn apathetic to their wives as the former is a demoniac character and the latter is a gay. Their insensitivity and cruelty to their wives leave them dry; they keep on quarreling on petty issues. Added to their woe is the constantly obtrusive mother in law, Baa. In their upsetting mood, she would add further fuel to fire their ennui and boredom by her constant, shrill screams or by buzzing the calling bell that would bring Dolly to such an extent that she wishes God might fix her arms so that she cannot ring that wretched bell.

The plight of the women in the drama is twofold: the evolving Indian society, its conflicting values in a business family, sharp class divides and the problem of an untouchability attitude for the gay people. The gay in turn stand as stumbling block to the dynamics of any society. The Trivedi brothers need investment for their advertising company. They find their brother in law, Praful as the emotional fool to provide them money without any interest, yet they treat him rashly; his helping hand is taken as his inferiority; he is treated as a crap and he is addressed as bastard. They are struggling for Re Va Tee branded women under-garments. The advertisement they have made earned so many negative responses from the clients and the director Mr. Menon. The advertisement is designed in a way that it "will appeal latent subconscious desires and not overt, superficial, culturally-bound responses." (CP 275). The survey conducted by Sridhar on the advertisement is negative. The review comments show that women are shown or are reduced to a level of commodity with westernized treatment. It's opposed to any Indian notion of sobriety that a woman exists only to please a man.
Praful as well as Nitin give up under the societal taboos and in an attempt to appropriate their sexual orientations in disguise, they ruin the lives of the people around them. Dolly and Alka bear the brunt of societal pressures and its effect on their husbands. Their dreams of love and affection by their husbands just process to be castles in the air. Dolly has to pay the price also as she has to pay for the young group of Kanhaia. Lalitha is right as a bonsai category of woman, always restrained and progressive. She warns Dolly out of her values of the class she belongs to, not knowing the hell Jiten and Nitin has weaved to her destiny. But Praful and other male and female characters in the play remain absent on stage only to make a sense of an invisible power of male domination in the society. A deconstructive reading of the play shows that meaning lies not in real presence, but in the differential structures of speech. Both logocentrism and phonocentrism are to be taken into consideration for the proper understanding of the nuances of the play.

_Bravely Fought the Queen_ was first performed at the Sophia Bhava Hall, Mumbai on August 2, 1991. The play was subsequently performed by Border Crossings, UK, in 1996, directed by Michael Walling and Mahesh Dattani. In “A Note on the Play” Michael Walling describes: "This is a play about performance; and uses the theatre to demonstrate how, in a world of hypocrisy, acting becomes a way of life…. By exploiting layer upon layer of performance, of unreality, Mahesh allowed his actress a route to emotion in its rawest form: the pain, the anguish in the blood-knot of the family which is his constant theme." (CP 230). In this play Dattani uses on stage absence not in opposition to presence, but as an inevitable pointer to it. The absence of characters from onstage action provides stimulus for the events that occur. The non-perceivable causes represented by the absent characters produce the effects seen by the audience. Significantly, the absence of men from the first act and the absence of women from the second act integrated through the split level stage blends the implicit and the explicit levels of discourses. The telephonic conversations foreground the viability of heard speech over physical presence onstage.
Praful's non-presence on stage shows his complicity of the guilt with Nitin in ruining both Dolly and Alka's lives. Throughout the play the tragedy of women speaks of Praful's deferred presence. Here, the contrast of these two gay people is made by nuanced presence and absence to heighten the sense of tragedy as the reader/audience would be automatically persuaded to create the text of his presence in their grasp of the drama. Both the gay people inflict injuries, both physically and mentally, to the trio of women Dolly, Alka and Lalitha. Lalitha is a link between these two sisters only to elicit the facts of their private life as a catalyst. At the same time, she represents a character of struggling lower middle class women of evolving society who cannot indulge in many an activity that moneyed people can go for.

Thus, continued the tale of sorrow for both sisters. Baa could mitigate her mistakes of behaving so irrationally against Dolly by making the will of her property to Daksha whose tale cannot stop the tears even from the eyes of a stone hearted person. It begins with Dolly's mother who was not aware that her husband was already married and had other kids. Mother's misery doubled on Dolly sisters and Dolly's suffering trebled upon Daksha. When Daksha was in the womb, Dolly was beaten black and blue once just because of her father's guilt of unlawful marriage. Baa cautioned Jiten not to hit on abdomen, but the frenzied Jiten proved his meanest cowardice by hitting indiscriminately. She was hospitalized in a critical condition citing the reason that she had fallen from the stares. Amid the complete darkness on stage Dolly's monologue evokes pity and fear against monsters' galore in the society: "Daksha was born two months premature. With the cord around her neck ... She demonstrates a spastic's uncoordinated arm and neck movement with her eyes dilated." (CP 312). Patriarchal intolerance carries forward in series for Daksha to bear the brunt of living a life of trauma. She undergoes physiotherapy, but the term pains mother's heart. She calls it a dance to camouflage her mental grief and to avoid societal criticism.

The queer characters representing both the gays and lesbians of urban middle class India undergo a tortuous journey of victimization due to homophobia and social boycott of
such people. Dattani has been true to his calling as a dramatist by showing their painful odyssey in modern India, yet how the issue escapes the thinking mass to be considered for an acceptance and a right place in the society. It's rightly an odyssey as the victims at times turn into victimizers; thereby bringing upon them a series of miseries, little knowing what exactly ails them. The dramatist has won the heart of many by bringing this cause of ailment, the whole truth of it, on stage with all sincerity of purpose.

Dattani's plays abound in thematic variations, plot dynamics and after all engrossed entertainment reflecting not only the issues of marginalized sections like eunuchs, women, gay, minority community but also certain issues that apart from drawing our sympathies, it takes us to the presence of the protagonists like a myth of life. The situations of the protagonists, their struggle for space, joys and sorrows and their account of life gives others of their likes the strength to make life more meaningful. Two of the plays fall into special category: *Tara* (1991) reflecting the condition of disability of Tara, crippled by birth and *Ek Alag Mausam* (2005) that shows the plight of Aparna, another married woman, fighting her double marginalization due to being a woman and a patient of the fatal disease of HIV-AIDS. Both the plays deal with female protagonists of the contemporary society pushed to extreme margins, yet how they are fighting the blights like Alka in the *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Of course, a distinct difference of these two plays with the other is that here, the excruciating mental trauma is caused by the forces beyond the control of human beings or are caused by sheer ignorance as Tara's very birth, being a Siamese twin, is a curse what she fights even after her death living behind her other half in the form of Dan and Aparna is inconsolably crushed to despair when she learns during her delivery of a baby in the hospital that she has got the gift of HIV positive from her husband and she cannot give birth to the baby.

The screen play *Ek Alag Mausam* was released in India on February 4, 2005. The play was directed by K. P. Sasi. Based on the love story of two HIV positives, Aparna and George, this play is an outstanding thematic innovation in the arena of Indian English Drama. The play intends to articulate the suppressed voices of people facing discrimination due to lack of
awareness of the prejudiced society against HIV AIDS. Through a very well fabricated plot of the play, Dattani tries to delineate the emotional, psychological, medical and social trauma of HIV positive patients. The plot of the play revolves around Aparna, the main protagonist of the play, whose sudden meeting with the fact, that she is HIV positive and her bearing a baby is fatal for the baby's and her own life, leaving her all shattered and under absolute crisis. This particular play deals with the harrowing tale of Aparna–her marginalization due to patriarchal domination for incurring HIV positive for no fault of hers, social apathy and loss of her baby. The root of her tragedy surrounds her symptoms of HIV positive. Human Immunodeficiency Virus or the positive causes of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) which was first recognized in North America in the early 1980s, the infection has become a worldwide epidemic. The cause of the disease is now well known as India, once unknown to this virus, has now been worst affected.

Dattani highlights the socio-psychological implications, traumas and tribulations of HIV patients for living in a conventional Indian society beset with customs, myths and misconceptions about HIV-AIDS. The playwright sensitively takes up the issues that heighten the anxieties and pains of patients awaiting imminent death. Dattani also tries to point at the marginalization of people suffering from deadly diseases like AIDS and their dual marginalization if the sufferers are women like Aparna and Rita in Ek Alag Mausam.

Mahesh Dattani is undoubtedly a past master in depicting human experiences and emotions on the stage. He, in a most innovative fashion, depicts the real life experiences to reflect the ethos and apathy of a hostile society towards people suffering from an incurable and infamous disease leading to their death. The HIV patients are forced to lead under existential crisis a life full of self-pity and disgust. Dattani's play centres on the fundamental emotional need of a human being for a dignified existence amidst all negativities.

Dattani pinpoints with exact precision the human urge for survival and existence. He wants to convey that however inevitable death may be but it cannot destroy human thrust
for living life in a glorious manner. It is the Sun who guides the entire world and our lives. Dattani's use of the image of the Sun in the Hands of God is symbolically used in the play to signify:

And the Sun is his ball. When he kicks the ball, it is Sunrise. The ball goes high in the air. That is noon. When it lands in the goal, it is sunset. God always scores the goal. (CP II 556)

The play opens with the scene of Aparna driving her car towards Panchgini Boarding School where she is going to put Paro, the daughter of Rita, a sex worker who lost her life succumbing to AIDS. Since Rita's death, Aparna had been undertaking the responsibility of looking after Paro as her own child. Now she feels that she cannot exist long to look after her all her life, so she takes such a hard decision of sending her to boarding school. Aparna has developed a parental affection and motherly attachment towards Paro who herself is disappointed at Aparna's decision and entreats, "Why? Why are you sending me away?" (CP II 473)

Dattani has effectively used the flashback technique in many of his plays to bring about a union between the past and present and the device of 'interior' and 'exterior' to show the movement of the action in his plays. Here also, he employs these dramatic devices to relate past actions and events through the ruminations of Aparna to connect them logically to the current rush of actions taking place. While Aparna is driving her car on her way to the boarding school, the memory of her past flashes in front of her eyes and keeps evoking feelings and emotions in her mind. Sometimes it is the memory of George driving the truck; sometimes it is Suresh and sometimes her own foregone experiences that keep distracting her while driving. She narrowly escapes a head-on collision with a truck. Her imagination keeps oscillating between past and present. Aparna is elated at the thought of her being pregnant and wants to share her pleasure with her husband, "Suresh! It is confirmed. I'm pregnant!" (CP II 475). Suresh is drunk and her words fall on deaf ears.
Rosalynd Cooper, the volunteer nurse at Central Hospital, calls on Aparna and advises her to visit the hospital with her husband. They have something to discuss concerning her baby. Aparna tells Suresh about the call and implores him to accompany her to the hospital but he shows his reluctance to accompany her. Hence, Aparna goes all by herself to see the doctor declare that she cannot give birth to her child because she is HIV positive. This shocks her as her long cherished dream of mothering a baby of her own is shattered to pieces.

Aparna's plight is more pitiable when she learns that AIDS has been transmitted to her by her soul-mate Suresh, and this traumatic knowledge of the truth leaves her shattered. The dual fear of losing her husband and her unborn baby at once grips her mind and she forgets for a moment that she is also at the threat of imminent death. Aparna is given a clue to the social implication of her disease by Dr. Sanyal inadvertently:

Sanyal. (clearing his /her throat) I am sorry, but I have not much time ... Aparna looks at him/her, totally vulnerable. Cooper puts a hand on her shoulder. I will get to the point. We have not yet formally admitted you into my nursing home, so far as we are concerned, we are refusing to admit you on the ground that it will upset our nurses and other patients ... (CP II 479)

Aparna leaves the hospital in a very helpless and wretched condition wondering under the impression that her life is ruined. Outside, she feels ill at ease realizing that some people are looking at her with mixed feelings of pity and disgust. The pain and suffering due to her ordeal is afflicted by the realization of social stigma underlining the notorious disease. Aparna is defeated and shattered both inwardly and outwardly. The virus is killing her physically and the fear of social stigma is slaying her self-esteem and will to survive.

Aparna returns to her home completely broken. She wants to let her mother know about her miserable tragedy but she falters as she is gripped with sorrow. Suresh enters the living room where Aparna has just hanged up the phone; he expresses his regret for not accompanying her to the hospital. She accuses him of destroying her life as he was aware of
the fact about his being HIV positive. Her resentment and grievance against her husband for cheating her and ruining her life for no fault of hers is obvious in the following conversation:

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. (CP II 482)

Aparna's authoritative enquiries and complaints receive a heavy jerk when Suresh questions her, "What are you going to do now?" (CP II 482). Dattani seems to highlight from Aparna's crisis that a woman in a patriarchal society has no authority even over her man and she always has to succumb to the power of men. It is obvious as Suresh desserts her all alone fighting with death and no effort of hers can hold him back.

Aparna is left with her lot to face the terrors of a slow death by AIDS and to face the social humility associated with the disease when Jeevan Jyoti, a Hospital for her likes, emerges as a new ray of hope. She believes that it is her true and trustworthy refuge. At the hospital she comes across the address of Dr. Machado for the inmates of the hospital at a group therapy session:

Dr. Machado. (moving around) Aren't we all dying? Isn't everyone in this world dying? (Pausing for effect) I am not HIV positive. But I am also dying. But do I think about my death all the bloody time ... (CP II 486)

Dr. Machado's speech works like a stimulant to Aparna who is thrilled and inspired by his invocation "Keep fighting. Seize the moment." (CP II 487). From the expenses of Manoj, an inmate of the hospital, Dattani reflects the marginalization of HIV Positives. The myth associated with the disease is so all pervading that medical practitioners like the dentist who refused to treat Manoj as he was HIV Positive are not free from prejudice. "Death is not news over here, life is." (CP II 504). Ramnath's episode of being forced to play cards till his final breath are some of the scenes that make Aparna believe that life has to be lived in the face of horrors of death and social prejudices, myths and social bigotry. The sign
at the entrance of JeevanJyoti Hospital reads 'Leave your prejudice outside' which is symbolical of Dattani's attitude that all prejudice should be get rid of if the HIV patients are to be given peace, love and justice. The exclusion, repulsion and refusal meted out to the Aids victims continue even if they are dead:

Aparna. Never mind. What are you doing here with your truck. Are you really a truck driver or do you just clean them?

George. Your first day here and you are asking so many questions! Who 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 right here. So be careful. If you come here often enough people will think you have Aids also. (*CP II 497*)

Another conversation between Aparna and Manoj is symbolical of social ignorance and lack of awareness about the disease and thus the hospital has no volunteer except George:

Aparna. Aren't there enough volunteers?

Manoj. Are you joking? Only George has remained here. Others are so scared that people will think that they have Aids ... You seem to be very educated, so you are quite broadminded.

Aparna. May be. (*CP II 504*)

Sukhiya another truck driver like George is an epitome of ignorance. He wears his cap so that the virus floating in the air may not enter his ears but quite ironically he refuses to wear condom when making intimate contact with a prostitute. Lack of awareness is so intense that Dr. Machado of JeevanJyoti is forced to do the work of a carpenter as no laborer wants to work with them because they are treating the AIDS patients.

Aparna comes across George, a truck driver, at JeevanJyoti Hospital. It is the place where the love saga of two AIDS victims begins as well as grows as Apama and George come close and develops passionate feelings for one another. The bathing scene of George, the scene where Aparna hammers George's finger and starts sucking his bleeding finger to relieve him from pain and hugs George and latter reciprocates when they succeed to save
Suraj are all incidents that culminate in developing a feeling of love between them. But when George expresses his feelings for Aparna, she breaks away because she is HIV positive. George's confession once again shatters Aparna because being an HIV positive, he plunges into relationship with Aparna and like Suresh, he also cheats her. Heartbroken, Aparna runs away without talking to George anymore.

At an awareness session in front of a brothel, George is interrupted by a commotion nearby. Rita, a prostitute, is being dragged out with her daughter by a few men out of the brothel. They want to drive her away from the place because she is infected with the deadly virus. George rescues her and takes her to JeevanJyoti where both Rita and her daughter will be looked after, given shelter and fed. Rita is relieved: "Oh! Thank God I have Aids." (CP II 528).

Dattani most craftily puts two women Rita, a prostitute and Aparna, a married woman, against each other in the play. Both Rita and Aparna are doubly marginalized as they are women on one hand and AIDS victims on the other. Rita represents the darker side of the disease which she got from an illicit sex trade and so is excluded from brothel which provided her shelter, food and money whereas Aparna got the disease from her husband who cheated and exploited her by infecting her with HIV without her knowledge. She represents the fairer side of humanity which prompts men to think of others' pain and suffering forgetting one's own. Dattani here highlights the double marginalization of woman who is seen as a commodity of luxury by men on one hand and on the other she is excluded or left to die alone because she has become useless as well as fatal for them due to the virus. Rita has a daughter as a byproduct of her sex trade but her motherly feeling for her is intact and comparable to any mother. Her insistent entreat for allowing her daughter to stay with her for only a night is very pathetic and shows her motherhood. Aparna too has the same feeling of motherhood for her baby which she had to give up due to the disease. Beena Agarwal puts it in the following words:
Aparna and Rita are from two distinctive social status, but both of them possess equal quest for motherhood. It signifies that human sentiments, human sympathy and human sensibility is associated with the universal human experiences, irrespective of externally imposed restrictions. (147)

George is an Indian male suffering from AIDS. He, unlike Aparna, lives a cheerful life seeking love and care. JeevanJyoti is a place where he is showered with lots of love and care from everyone including children and Dr. Machado. It is also a place which gives him a sense of pride because he is executing a task of charity by carrying in his truck the corpses of the AIDS victims, whom even the municipality sweepers, would not touch for a decent cremation. With the characterization of George, Mahesh Dattani tries to assert that the feeling of imminent death cannot snatch man's urge for mirth and zest in life. Happiness and enjoyment are the rights of everyone whether diseased or not and George seems to vehemently assert that by dint of his courage of conviction. The following conversation testifies to that:

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. (CP II 533)

George, like other AIDS victims too faces Social Ostracization when his father as well as village folk learns about his disease from Sukhiya. They drive him out of the village for the fear of contamination. This is their prejudice and myth against the AIDS. Dattani even tries to educate people about AIDS through the mouth of George, "So what if I have Aids? You can't get it by talking to me or by touching me! You can eat my leftovers and you still won't get it you understand!"(CP II 536). The social opposition and stigma is so severe that even the people associated with the AIDS patients have to suffer humiliation and discrimination. It is clear in the plea of George's father:

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? (With great effort.) Don't come back. Leave. Go George! (Making a gesture as if to a beggar.) Go! (CP II 537)
George is a character who loves to live a life with honesty and courage. He doesn't conceal his disease; rather he dares to tell the truth. The weight of myth and lack of education is so heavy that in spite of all his attempts of defending him from the opposition and resentment of the society, George has to leave the village and his parents for good. His father's harsh words are a setback to his courage yet he recollects himself and says to his father with a smile: "Won't you even say 'God bless you' to your son whom you shall never see again?" (CP II 537). George's smile is a symbol of George's zest at the lack of awareness and refusal to accept any scientific reason on the part of a biased society.

_Ek Alag Mausam_ ends with a happy note with illusions turning into disillusions, hatred and resentment changing into love and affection and bland outlook to life modifying to pleasurable views. But, Dattani's screenplay leaves a question behind whether the people should be marginalized, subjugated and isolated on the ground of an incurable disease and denied human rights of love and justice? By the dramatization of the emotional, psychological and social crisis of people ensuing from the prejudice and myth against AIDS, Dattani aims to delineate the reality underlying the issue of the marginalization of AIDS victims and seems to preach in the words of Dr. Machado:

Today's enemy is not other human beings from other country or people of another religion or race. The real enemy today is a tiny invisible creature a virus. The AIDS virus knows no barriers of caste, creed, religion, age, gender and race. It is not prejudice, fear or ignorance that will win the battle against the AIDS. (CP II 556)

The analysis of these plays makes me assert again that Dattani has the courage of conviction to deal with the invisible issues lying on the margins of the contemporary Indian society. He has made a bold attempt to expose the hypocrisies of social life which permit stereotypical heterosexual relationship and impart normativity to them. The invisible and forbidden issues are made visible through the dramatic personae struggling for their due space and place in the contemporary social set-up.