Chapter 5

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Mahesh Dattani is a playwright with purpose. His plays bring on stage the sordid reality of pinching but socially relevant issues. Although he does not openly propagate his personal views in most of his plays, *Ek Alag Mausm* and *Thirty Days in September* seem two exceptions. *Ek Alag Mausam* discusses the plight of individuals infected with HIV. It endeavours to reveal to the world the scars of individuals, most of whom are, doomed to suffer for no personal fault. It brings to the fore the trauma and discrimination faced by people infected by Aids. Dattani looks at the issue very sympathetically and suggests possibility of rekindling one’s life with rays of hope to brighten the patches of darkness. He strongly propagates the possibility of cherishing life in the moment. Even the serious issue of Aids, in the play, has been coupled with the possibility of romance and passion for living. Similarly, *Thirty Days in September* has for its theme a socially relevant but
tabooed theme of child abuse and incest. Like most of his plays, Dattani sets both these plays within the Indian family structure.

_Thirty Days in September_ is said to be the cruelest play scripted by Dattani. He was approached, to write this play, by RAHI (Recovery and Healing from Incest), an NGO that helps survivors of child sexual abuse. Before venturing to write the play Dattani met survivors of child sexual abuse and spent time with them, listening to their horrifying experiences. After listening to anecdotes of child abuse by the very people who are supposed to shield and care for children, he was so disturbed that he could not prepare himself to develop these incidents into drama for a very long time. He revisited this material after the lapse of a considerable time. He confesses:

> I was completely exhausted at the end of it all. Felt very drained. In fact I did not go back to the material for a long time. I couldn’t bring myself to.

The success of the play can be gauged from the fact that it has evoked strong emotional responses in audience and readers across the globe. Lillete Dubey, sharing her experience as the director and actor of the play, says:

_Thirty Days in September_ has touched hearts and consciences everywhere. Sensitive and powerful without ever offending sensibilities, it manages to bring home the horror and the pain within the framework of
a very identifiable mother-daughter relationship. 

The play centres around two victims of child sexual abuse. The fact that they are mother and daughter molested by the same family member aggravates the agony and magnifies the helplessness of the victims. Both experience the wounds of incest and suffer in isolation, endeavouring to find solace and refuge in self indulgent escapism. Shanta tries to evade reality. She escapes in religious indulgence through prayer and worship of lord Krishna. The constant recitation of bhajan echoes her helplessness. She sings: *Mere to Girdhar Gopal, Doosrs na koi* . . . (TDS:9). She deliberately confines herself within the house trying to fill the void in ritualistic chores. Mala, on the other hand, flees home in order to avoid her mother. She feels that her mother is responsible for her suffering. The rift between mother and daughter widens owing to lack of meaningful communication between them. Mala accuses her mother:

The only person who can, who could have prevented all this is my mother. Sometimes I wish she would just tell me to stop. She could have prevented a lot from happening . . .

Dattani portrays the psychological trauma and the anxiety experienced by them and its effect on their relationship. Mala develops an abhorrence for her own body. It is also the story of Mala’s recovery and survival and the sense of betrayal she feels towards her mother. The play successfully brings out the psychological trauma experienced by people who are abused at a tender age. It also portrays a
range of emotions like betrayal, anger, guilt, depression, and anxiety that impel hatred towards one's own body and self. The story is visualised in retrospect.

Unlike most other plays by Dattani, where he uses multiple levels on stage to depict and define individual space, *Thirty Days in September* focuses more on the mental and psychological terrain and the thought process of the characters. It endeavours to explore the issue of child sexual abuse, within the family, which is often hushed behind the veil of silence. After listening to the horrified tales of child sexual abuse Dattani was convinced that the tabooed issues pervaded even the middle class homes in India. He deliberately selected the upper middle class setting for the play. He confesses:

I would see the setting of *Thirty Days* as upper middle class. I choose this setting because I did not want them to dismiss sexual abuse as something that does not happen to people like them.  

The play revolves around Mala, a victim of child sexual abuse. She is raped by her own maternal uncle, at the tender age of seven. The mother remains a mute witness to the subsequent history of abuse that continues over a long period of time. Mahesh Dattani says:

It’s the silence and the betrayal in the family that affects me the most. Like in this case, the mother knew that her daughter was being sexually abused by her uncle, but still
chose to keep quit. It's this silence that makes the abused feel betrayed. 

It weakens the natural bond between mother and daughter. Their relationship converts into a relation based on betrayal instead of trust. The scars of abuse send Mala drifting from one relationship to another. None of her relationships last beyond thirty days. Her misplaced sense of guilt leaves her with a very low sense of self esteem. But her self-destructive flight comes to an end when Deepak, her latest lover, refuses to end their relationship after thirty days. He forces Mala to seek the help of a counsellor. He comforts Mala and helps her to confront her past and eradicate her sense of guilt. Even the mother is persuaded to shed her 'mute' role and finally voice her own helpless story of abuse and guilt, which had driven her to seek solace in silence.

_Thirty Days in September_ is a very powerful play. Most of its power is derived from the written word and its inherent design:

Given the seriousness of the problem that it addresses, a malaise that can at no level be taken lightly, Dattani tackles it with raw emotions, and the stark realities are dramatized vividly.

There is a lot of poignant movement in the play, in terms of time and space shifts. The recorded monologues of Mala document her healing process. Snatches from her counselling sessions, with her psychiatrist, take the reader back and forth in time showing the scars of child abuse and the healing process. It carries the entire play forward adding a sense of completeness to it. The dialogue is terse. Dattani
successfully employs an abundance of broken sentences pregnant with raw emotions. Dattani makes extensive use of monologues to intensify the empathy of the audience/reader with Mala whose slow recovery from her tortured and abused past carries the play forward. The tension builds-up considerably before the audience/reader is made to confront the molester, Mala’s uncle. The action of the play is presented with equal seriousness as the dramatist allows Mala to narrate her own story, as nakedly as possible. Dattani has created some highly charged and poignant moments in the script. The most enduring images created include the scene when Vinay simultaneously transcends into the psychological space of Mala and Shanta. The fusion of the scene when Mala cannot forget instructions by her uncle, when he molested her, and Deepak’s endeavours to console her. Dattani draws a parallel between these two incidents to emphasise Mala’s inability to differentiate love from lust. The trauma of abuse that her body and mind have experienced, at a very tender age, leave her incapable of recognising affection and sympathy. Her situation can be compared to that of her mother, Shanta, who too cannot reciprocate genuine love of her husband. He leaves her for another woman saying “I married a frozen woman”(TDS:36). Shanta and Mala represent two different responses to abuse, during childhood. Shanta, being the mother, represents the older generation and bares the distress and disgust mutely. She cannot reveal her agony to anyone as she has been physically abused by her own brother. The only solace she seems to find is in prayer. The portrait of Sri Krishna helps her to evade the reality:

**SHANTA:** *(defeated).* Yes. Yes! I only remained silent. I am to blame. That is why
God is punishing me today. I remained silent not because I wanted to, but I didn’t know how to speak. I—I cannot speak. I cannot say anything. My tongue was cut off . . . . My tongue was cut off years ago. . . . I was six, Mala. I was six. And he was thirteen . . . and it wasn’t only summer holidays. For ten years! For ten years!! (Pointing to the picture of God.) I looked to Him. I didn’t feel anything. I didn’t feel pain, I didn’t feel pleasure. I lost myself in Him. He helped me. He helped me. By taking away all feeling. No pain no pleasure, only silence. Silence means Shanti. Shanti. But my tongue is cut off. No. No. It just fell off somewhere. I didn’t use it, no. I cannot shout for help, I cannot say words of comfort, I cannot even speak about it. No I can’t. I am dumb (TDS:54-55).

Mala, who represents the new generation does not recourse to religion. In fact she develops a sense of hatred for her mother and the portrait of God, lord Krishna. She complains:
You were never there for me. You were too busy *(Pointing to the portrait, saying the word with contempt.)* praying! (TDS: 24).

She feels guilty and accepts her situation with a sense of self hatred:

My father left us for another woman . . . I feel if I were more loveable he would have at least visited us . . . (TDS:33).

She inflict both physical and psychological pain on herself. She literally hunts for new lovers every thirty days and marks the progression of her affairs with them on a calendar. It clearly suggests her agony and the unforgiving vengeance she inflict on her own body and other men, her temporary lovers. She feels guilty and unwanted because Vinay, her uncle who abuses her, made her feel disgraced and sinful after every physical exploitation:

**MAN:** See, I love you even though you are so ugly. Keep singing . . . Nobody will tell you how ugly you are. But you are good only for this . . . Only for this . . .

*(now more moralistic than before, the furtiveness gone).*

You like it! You enjoy it. After four years, you have become a whore! At thirteen you are a whore! (TDS:44).

Shanta’s compulsions of silence are more severe when compared to Mala’s situation. She loses her self-respect, the ability to oppose and retaliate and
even worse to reciprocate the love of her husband and daughter. She is doomed to remain a silent witness of her daughter’s molestation. Even other men, for instance, the newspaper vendor, take undue advantage of her position as a solitary woman. The absence of male member in the house makes it more vulnerable. She is genuinely worried about her daughter’s future and wants Mala to marry Deepak but she cannot exert any authority on her daughter. She can only plead with her. Her pathetic situation can also be analysed by the fact that she is economically dependent on her brother, Vinay, who is responsible for ruining her life, as well as her daughter’s. She is forced to rely on Vinay’s assistance and advice even to seek the matrimonial alliance of her daughter with Deepak. This dependent position of Indian women, unless they are economically independent, makes them more vulnerable. The strong bonds in the mother-daughter relationship can help women face the challenges of sexual abuse within the family. But the lack of trust and belief in each other’s ability leaves a sense of doubt and hesitation that forces them to face the torments in isolated muteness. The moment they are able to voice their anguish and share their compulsions, overcoming the inherent guilt, the demon of atrocity begins to diminish. The bonding between Shanta and Mala, in the play, was lacking initially. Mala blamed her mother for her woes. But as soon as she learns about her mother’s plight she regrets and immediately allies with her mother to kill the demon of incest, both physically and psychologically. The play ends on a positive note. Both women can finally voice their anguish. Shanta’s revelations pierce the silence of decades, maybe ages. Mala realises her mother’s silent suffering and admits:
While I accused you of not recognizing my pain, you never felt any anger at me for not recognizing yours. We were both struggling to survive but—I never acknowledged your struggle. Ma, no matter where I am, I always think of you. I want you to know that I am listening (TDS:58).

*Ek Alag Mausam* is another play that truthfully depicts the silent sufferings and inarticulate emotions of individuals suffering from HIV. It was scripted by Dattani as a screen play for Actionaid India. It was produced and directed by K.P. Sasi in 1999. The film was released in India on 4th February 2005. Nandita Das, Ranjit Kapur and Anupam Kher played the lead roles in the film. The chief concern here is not the cinematography but the theme and its treatment by Mahesh Dattani as *Ek Alag Mausam* has been included as a part of the *Collected Plays Volume Two*, published by Penguin India in 2005. It is a very significant play because Mahesh Dattani analyses the real situation of the Aids infected people and the social apathy towards them, largely owing to the ignorance or misconceptions of people in India and world over. The people infected with Aids, who yearn for social sympathy and support from their family, mostly experience marginalization and isolation.

Both the protagonists in the play, Aparna and George, are HIV positive. Aparna gets the infection from her husband, Suresh, while George gets it through a blood transfusion. Though they are not responsible for being infected, as they are the passive recipients of the virus, still they suffer the humiliation and hatred of
people around them. The disclosure that they are infected with the virus changes their life for ever. Both of them volunteer to help other infected victims. Dattani very effectively brings out two different attitudes towards life through the reactions of George and Aparna. George conceals his suffering by becoming an extrovert and motivating other HIV infected patients to fight the disease bravely. Aparna becomes very submissive and introvert. She cannot bring herself up to fight the disease. She wants to help other people, suffering from Aids, but she cannot help herself. Aparna is portrayed as an innocent house-wife. Her main source of happiness can be imagined to spring from the fact that she is pregnant and expecting her first child. Her husband Suresh is a salesman and remains away from home for long durations. When the play opens, Aparna receives a call from her doctor, asking her to visit the hospital with her husband. Suresh bluntly refuses to accompany her to the hospital. On her visit to the hospital, Aparna is thunderstruck to learn that she is HIV positive. Dr. Sanyal refuses to admit her to his nursing home and insists that she should abort the foetus at once, at some other clinic. He reveals the bitter truth to her without mincing words.

... No proper nursing home is going to touch you. And either your baby or you will die soon.7

The medical report, like a bolt from the blue, in one stroke makes her bereaved of her expectant child, her motherhood, her husband and her trust in life. In an instant the entire world and human relationships become alien and meaningless to her. When Rosalynd Cooper, the volunteer nurse asks her:
COOPER: Aparna... Have you heard of HIV?

Aparna looks at her with disbelief. She laughs a little.

APARNA: Are you saying that my child... ?

But that's impossible!

The child can only get it from its m...

Aparna stops midsentence as the shock of what she is saying hits her.

COOPER: (moving to Aparna). It's you, Aparna.

APARNA: It's not possible. How could I be HIV positive?

SANYAL: We are certain.

APARNA: It just can't be! ... I haven't had a sexual relation with anyone but my husband, I haven't had any blood transfusions, I always make sure the doctor uses a disposable syringe... No, It can't be. Isn't there a different kind of test? That's more accurate?

COOPER: We have done the Western Blot. Aparna, I am a trained counsellor. I suggest we talk...
APARNA: But . . . How?

SANYAL: It is very clear to me that you got it from your husband.

Aparna thinks about it for a while. Tears well up in her eyes.

APARNA: And . . . how did he . . . ?

Silence (EAM: 478-79).

Aparna feels deceived; her helplessness and misery are intensified when her husband Suresh, instead of consoling her walks out of her life for good. She experiences the trauma of being deceived by her husband and the stigma of being HIV positive. Suresh has no answers for her when she implores him for help, pleadingly:

APARNA: They want me to lose our baby. Suresh, you are responsible for ruining my life! Help me now.

SURESH: (edging his way to the main door). How can I help you? I am dying too.

Aparna realises that he is just as helpless as she is.

APARNA: Suresh, don’t leave me now.

SURESH: I—I have some important work. I am leaving the city . . .

APARNA: Suresh, stay for a while! Just talk to me for a while!
SURESH: No. I can't.... I am sorry,

Aparna.

_Suresh leaves in a hurry. Aparna rushes to the door. She is about to call him back. She decides to slam the door instead. She bolts the door from inside and leans on it_ (EAM:482).

Mahesh Dattani very beautifully brings out the difference between the perception of two infected individuals—Apama and George. Apama is so conscious of her disease that she cannot bring herself to positive thoughts. She is haunted by the eerie thoughts of death. She dreams about playing cards with the infected old man whom she had seen dying that morning. In her dream, the dying old man holds three aces in front of her and laughs away his victory. The dream may be interpreted as the old man’s victory over suffering and his achievement of ‘Moksha’ through death. Her loss suggests that she has yet to suffer and repent. This act of playing cards clearly compares life as bait for gambling. Apama’s situation can be compared with the Mariner’s in _The Rime of the Ancient Mariner_ by Coleridge. Just as the Mariner is laden with inner guilt and cannot narrate his story to anyone, similarly Apama too cannot narrate her inner state to anyone. She fears social disgrace and feels branded and guilty for no real fault of hers.

This theme of social conviction and suffering without personal involvement and fault encompasses other characters in the play as well. Dr. Machado runs a rehabilitation centre, Jivan Jyoti, for individuals infected with the virus. Jivan Jyoti provides shelter to many helpless individuals, of all age groups, suffering from...
Aids. George, a volunteer, helps them fight the disease. He assists Dr. Machado with his preparations and even in managing daily chores. He is a truck driver. He often drives his truck into the premises of Jivan Jyoti and plays with the infected children. The loud music from his truck breaks the sordid monotony of life for the inmates. Children love him and eagerly await his arrival. The fact that he himself is suffering from HIV is not revealed to anyone except Dr. Machado. Geoge is full of optimism. He constantly motivates the elders and the children to fight Aids. He knows that the disease has no remedy except the inner will and desire to live.

Aparna finds solace and security at Jivan Jyoti. She volunteers to help other infected people. But her inner guilt and knowledge, that she is infected with Aids, does not allow her to interact with other infected children and elders at equal terms. She is very conscious not to reveal her sickness. She wants to help other infected victims but only as an outsider. She seems scared to accept the reality and does not wish to reveal her real state even to the sympathetic and suffering people. When she meets Dr. Machado at Jivan Jyoti, she says: “... I would like to volunteer” (EAM:490). But when Dr. Machado asks her “why?” She conceals the real reason and says:

I--I am now separated from my husband and
I--don't have any children. So . . .

(EAM:490).

When Dr. Machado reveals to her that Dr. Sanyal has told him about her disease she pretends of having a severe headache and wants to leave. Dr. Machado consoles Aparna:
DR. MACHADO: Well—I respect your need for confidentiality. You have my word. No one will know about it from me. But Why have you come here?

APARNA: I told you. I want to be of some use to people with . . . people who have the disease.

Dr. MACHADO: And yet you don’t want others to be of use to you (EAM:490).

It is actually the stigma and social apathy that inhibits an individual from revealing one’s suffering to the world.

George, on the other hand, reveals a positive attitude. He accepts life as it is and does not surrender his desires and yearning for life just because he is infected with Aids. He wants to help other victims fight their fear of death. He does not show undue sympathy towards the victims. He prepares them to be strong and defeat death with vigour and the inner will to live. When Suraj, a young child suffering from Aids succumbs to exhaustion, loses breath and falls down, Aparna panics and insists George to quickly take Suraj to Dr. Machado, George does not show any urgency. Instead he brings a wooden toy-soldier for Suraj and asks him to fight like a soldier:

You wanted to be a soldier? This is you.

Now show me how you can fight

(EAM:503).
Even when Dr. Machado prepares medicine for Suraj, in order to lift his spirits, George says:

**GEORGE:** Arre forget about all this medicine. He will go when he has to go. But he won’t go without putting up a Fight . . . .

**SURAJ:** *(holding the toy soldier up).*

Attention! The soldier will kill all enemies of the country.

**GEORGE:** Live like a soldier, die like a soldier *(EAM: 504, 506).*

He along with Dr. Machado succeeds in motivating victims at Jivan Jyoti to put up a brave face and fight death fearlessly. Dr. Machado talks to the inmates and asks them to share their positive experiences, one by one. He makes them chant “I am alive, this moment, this day!” *(EAM: 486).* Ramnath, an old man, suffering from Aids is nearing death but Dr. Machado does not show any overt sympathy towards him. He asks Aparna to go and entertain him. He tells her: “I don’t care what you do. Make his journey a little easier” *(EAM: 491).*

Dattani looks at the issue and its impact on the suffering individual from the social, economic and psychological perspective. Even after more than two decades the stigma and discrimination against HIV infected people continues unabated. The amount of awareness regarding the virus, its transmission etc. has increased many fold yet very few people can tolerate the company of an infected person. Even people belonging to the medical fraternity show little inclination to understand and treat the infected individual. Aparna was refused admission to the
hospital even for an abortion. Doctors and nurses maintained distance from her when she underwent an abortion in another clinic. The helplessness of Aparna is very aptly brought out by Dattani in the scene without dialogue where Aparna does not scream. Her suffering in silence can only be described visually, without words, not even sound:

_Aparna is lying on the table, clutching her abdomen. The sheets are bloodied. We don’t hear her scream. The doctor and nurse stay far away. Not wanting to touch her. The nurse throws an extra sheet to her_ (EAM: 484).

This sort of unmerited and unsympathetic indifference is meted to all the infected people. In fact the victims are not provided even proper funerals after death. George very appropriately expresses the public discrimination towards Aids infected people when he tells Aparna:

**GEORGE:** 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

(EAM: 497).

The psychological impact of this feeling of social rejection forces infected individuals to conceal their disease. The dangers of disclosing one’s true condition
accompanies possible alienation and lack of positive support from the society. Manoj's narration of dental surgery reveals the imminent dangers of rejecting the infected people:

**MANOJ:** I went to the dentist the other day. . . . He said I needed gum surgery to save my teeth. I thought I should tell him the truth. So I told him that I am HIV positive, so that he will be more careful during the surgery. The dentist looked at me strangely . . . He ordered me to wait outside. I waited for an hour before his assistant came out to say the doctor was not free to do the surgery and I should go somewhere else. She did not even take money for the consultation. Okay. I said. I went to another dentist across the street. I didn’t tell him anything. I just let him do the surgery. *(Showing off his teeth.)*

And now I have perfect gums (EAM: 487).

But ultimately Aids cannot be fought by covering up its effect on individuals. George, Manoj and other inmates of Jivan Jyoti endeavour to create awareness amongst the vulnerable population. They advise people to use precautions. The message is very appropriately targeted at truck-drivers and sex-workers. Dattani suggests a way to fight the virus through creating social
awareness. But looking at the impact of the disease it is inapt to rely solely on the government machinery:

George, Manoj and Shyamu have converted the truck into a makeshift stage. George has a megaphone. Prostitutes have gathered around the truck.

GEORGE: So to conclude . . . Can HIV be spread through touch?

MANOJ AND SHYAMU: (forming a chorus). No!

GEORGE: Can HIV spread through mosquitoes and flies?

MANOJ AND SHYAMU: No!

GEORGE: Can HIV spread through living, eating, sleeping with an infected person?

MANOJ and SHYAMU: No! (EAM:525).

Minute social observation and adequate research enable Dattani to evaluate the problem of HIV infected people from multiple perspectives. Economic compulsions, in developing countries, force the vulnerable population to ignore even life-threatening situations. The truck driver, Sukhiya, does not heed to the good advice for precaution by George and when the sex worker insists him to use condom:
SUKHIYA: (drunk). What's this? There's no fun in that?

WOMAN: (frightened). George had said . . .

SUKHIYA: Even my wife cannot tell me what I should do, who are you? (Taking his money.) If I drive twenty miles, I can go to Champa. She gives me complete pleasure.

WOMAN: (Laughing nervously). Arre, I was just teasing. Come. Come on.

Sukhiya takes off his cap. The woman throws away the condom packet

(EAM:513).

The inability of women to protect themselves despite knowledge of the impending danger suggests their awkward position in relation to man in the patriarchal society. In the lower strata of the society and most of all the women in the brothels are forced to tolerate physical and psychological violence. Their importance depends on their ability to earn money through selling themselves, repeatedly. Human relationships that revolve around economic activity makes a female sex-worker redundant the moment she loses her economic importance. Rita is dragged out of her house and her personal belongings along with her daughter are thrown out as soon as the people living in the brothel learn about her having Aids. Neither men nor women from the neighbourhood sympathise with her. In fact they all want her to leave so that they can continue to survive by selling
themselves. Economic compulsions define human relationships. The very men who have extracted money by pushing Rita into prostitution throw her out:

**MAN A:** Get out! Go die somewhere else.

**MAN B:** Take your filth with you!

_The second man drags a five-year-old girl out of the house. The little girl is bawling due to all the commotion...._

**MAN A:** *(addressing the crowd).* Nobody will be able to do any business over here if Rita stays here. You will all have to leave and beg on the streets for scraps of food! You all tell me what should we do?

_The crowd unanimously feel that she should leave. Some of them say—'Let her go somewhere else', 'Why did she have to tell all those people', 'She should have thought of her girl at least if she didn't care for us', etc. *(EAM:526-27).*

Social compulsions and peer pressures also affect the fabric of family ties. Even the last anchor where an infected person could harbour one's feelings is lost when even parents cannot comprehend and sympathise with the condition of their own children. The psychological and social burden on Aids infected individuals is immense. It creates orphans in society, disowned by their parents and left to fend for themselves. More than economic independence and support, the people infected
with Aids yearn for a non discriminatory attitude from the society. George is a
social activist. He endeavours to spread information about prevention of Aids and
assists Dr. Machado in making the lives of infected people easier in Jivan Jyoti. He
is surprised by the response of his own parents when they learn that he too is
infected by the virus. The villagers ask George to leave the village along with his
parents:

**VILLAGE ELDER 1:** You will have to
leave town George. We cannot tolerate you
living with us!

**GEORGE'S MOTHER:** what nonsense are
you all speaking about my son? Don't you
see he is fine? You are all jealous of him.
Your son is an idiot so you turn the whole
town against my son?

**GEORGE'S FATHER:** Tell them son. Tell
them this is not true.

**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!...

Mother. I will be fine. Don't worry about
me. I can live for another seven eight years,
mother. I will take care of you.
His mother cannot bear it any longer.

She breaks down and cries. She runs inside the house. His father collects himself and speaks.

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! (EAM:536-37).

This attitude of his parents leaves George stunned. He can hardly believe his ears. The effect of Aids on the social fabric and family ties can be gauged by the fact that George's parents don't even bless him for the last time although they know that they will never see their only son again.

Dattani very effectively highlights the sordid reality that the biological function of parenting does not transcend into social responsibility and many children are left orphans. Rita is lucky that George brings her and her daughter Paro to Jivan Jyoti. She escapes the harsh reality of prostitution and the hatred of others in the brothel. At Jivan Jyoti she is relieved to know that social workers and organisations are working for the betterment of the lesser privileged people like her. She is hopeful that her daughter will not have to sell herself in order to support herself and other ungrateful people connected with the physical trade. In such a
situation Aids becomes a boon rather than a curse for her. The plight of the suffering humanity can be understood when Rita says: Oh! Thank God I have Aids (EAM:528). And later “Thank God for places like this” (EAM:531).

But the psychological impact on children may create a sense of hatred towards elders. Little Paro raises a very pertinent issue when she shows a painting to Aparna:

Aunty, this is my mother. And these are all uncles who come to see my mother. One of them is my father, but I don’t know which one (EAM:538).

Even at another instance the curious and ignorant mind of the young child raises questions of social importance:

PARO: Who thought of my name I wonder.

APARNA: Your mother of course.

PARO: It could have been my father.

APARNA: I don’t think so . . . Your mother didn’t know who your father is.

PARO: Do you think he is still alive?

APARNA: Who knows? Probably not, if he gave the virus to your mother.

PARO: I get so angry. Thinking about this nameless faceless man who killed my mother (EAM:524).
Many women are denied motherhood due to Aids. Aparna lives in a constant conflict between desire and denial. She loves children but cannot accept her own inner yearning, when Rita tells her:

**RITA:** You want children very badly. I can see it in your face.

**APARNA:** No! I don't. Not any more. I don't want anyone. I don't want to end up like you! Begging others to take care of your loved ones! (EAM:529).

George too expresses similar views when he tells Aparna:

**GEORGE:** I have seen you with the children. You want to be close to them; but any demands of affection and you are suddenly as distant as the stars. I can see the fears in your eyes and also the desperation to love something without the fear of causing it harm (EAM:533).

Thus the real problem of the people infected with Aids arises from their own self denial. They arrest their inner feelings and suffocate their inner urge to live. *Ek Alag Mausam* very appropriately brings out the multiple issues that surround Aids and its impact on individuals and the web of relationships that define life. The solution Dattani seems to give is to accept life as it is. People infected with Aids can enjoy whatever life they have instead of grieving and waiting for death. This solution is very appropriately expressed:
DR. MACHADO: *(Moving around).* You are not alone in this world. There are hundreds of thousands of people like you suffering in silence. Why? Because they all think that they are going to die. Of course they will die. Of course you will die. We will all die one day. Who is to say when? Then why this fear of dying? What is important is that we are alive today. We are alive right now! Am I right or am I wrong?

*There are a few mumbles of approval.*

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? . . No. I think of each moment that I have. Each day. Each month. Each season that I have. So why don’t you. You all have these moments, months, seasons. . . *(EAM:486).*

Even George says the same thing to Aparna but in other words, when he tells Aparna:

GEORGE: Forget for a moment that we are HIV. Forget that we have five, seven, ten, twelve years to live. Forget that and then

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think of our lives together. . . . You have branded yourself Aids, Aids, Aids! You have put a big red stamp on yourself. I thought only an uncaring, unfeeling society would do that to us. But no. We don’t have to worry about society. We are doing it to ourselves! I refuse to brand myself. All I know is that I love you and I want to marry you (EAM:533).

Thus *Ek Alag Mausam* discusses very serious social issues. Dattani endeavours to provide practical solutions to the problems discussed in this play, through unconventional treatment of the theme and its symbolic ending. George and Aparna are in each others arms, on a hill, away from the society; Paro is with them, blowing away bubbles. The three of them make a complete family. George and Aparna are infected with Aids while Paro has been orphaned due to Aids. Their lives are inextricably linked together by the HIV virus. They decide to live with each other. They represent a family outside the social institution of marriage. This ending also raises an issue of human rights because people infected with Aids are not allowed to marry according to the Indian law.
NOTES

1 Anitha Santhanam, “It’s the Silence that Affects Me Most” 2001


3 Mahesh Dattani, Thirty Days in September in Collected Plays Volume Two (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2005), p. 18. All subsequent citations from this play are from this edition and henceforth referred to as TDS in parentheses.


5 Anitha Santhanam, “It’s the Silence that Affects Me Most” 2001


7 Mahesh Dattani Ek Alag Mausam in Collected Plays Volume Two (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2005), p. 480. All subsequent citations from this play are from this edition and henceforth referred to as EAM in parentheses.