Chapter - II

Alternate Sexuality

This chapter investigates the representation of sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular in the plays of Mahesh Dattani. The plays of Dattani deal with the theme of homosexuality and different attitudes towards it.

Mahesh Dattani, a contemporary Indian English playwright, is cognisant of the problems of his society. His microscopic eyes always find out the invisible but crucial issues of the post modern society. His plays deal with the marginal sections of Indian society such as women, hijras, and homosexuals. Homosexuality is a recurring theme in his plays. His plays dealing with the alternate sexuality are: *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Do the Needful*, *Seven Steps around the Fire* and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. In all these plays Mahesh Dattani presents homosexuals and heterosexual society’s attitude toward them. Due to homophobia and heterosexism most of the homosexuals in Dattani’s plays lead a double life hiding their homosexuality (Nitin in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Bunny Singh in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*). Some homosexuals, influenced by the gay movement, boldly confess their homosexuality (Sharad and Kamlesh in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*). Dattani presents their struggle for identity and human rights, their social and psychological problems in his plays. Dattani, indirectly, appeals the society to be tolerant and accept homosexuals as human beings. His plays are the plea for the same-sex marriage.

*Bravely Fought the Queen*, written in 1991 and performed at the Sophia Bhabha Hall, Mumbai on 2nd August 1991, is set in Bangalore of the 1990s dramatizing the emotional, financial, and sexual workings in the lives of an urban Indian family of two brothers. The two brothers—Jiten and Nitin Trivedi — are the
co-owners of an advertising agency and married to two sisters –Dolly and Alka respectively who remain mostly at home looking after Baa, the old and bed-ridden mother-in-law. The play underscores “theemptiness and sham in the lives of its cloistered women and self-indulgent, unscrupulous men, blurring the lines between fantasy and reality, standing on the brink of terrible secrets, deception and hypocrisies” (Asha Kuthari Chaudhari 32).

Mahesh Dattani introduces the theme of homosexuality for the first time in his play Bravely Fought the Queen. Commenting on the theme of the play, Beena Agarwal states, “The play aims at tearing the veil of the filthy realities and gruesome truths those lie behind the presence of conservative Indian morality. Besides the issues of gender and sexual identity, Dattani also exhibits his concern for sexual abuse, alcoholism, adultery and homosexuality.” (26-27) The theme of homosexuality has been presented through the character of Nitin. There are two other homosexual persons mentioned in the play but they have no role to play on the stage. They are Praful and the auto rickshaw driver—the homosexual partners of Nitin. Nitin is, perhaps, the first homosexual character in the Indian English drama that is treated with empathy. He conceals his homosexuality behind the sham of his marriage with Alka, the sister of his homosexual partner, Praful. Being ignorant about her husband’s homosexual identity, she blames her mother-in-law, Baa, for her childlessness. She thinks that Baa does not allow Nitin to fructify their marriage as she was against his marriage with her. The following conversation between Alka and Baa makes it clear.

ALKA. You know why I can’t have children. You won’t let me. That’s why.

BAA. What are you saying?
ALKA. You won’t let us!

BAA. You are mad, mad, mad!

ALKA. You won’t let us! You want him to hate me!

BAA. Go away! Away!

ALKA. He needs your permission to have children and by God, you won’t give it to him! (CP 284)

The above conversation clearly indicates that Alka is ignorant about her husband’s homosexuality. That’s why she blames Baa for her being childless instead of blaming her fate or her husband.

There are many stray references to the homosexuality of Nitin in the play. Narrating the recklessness of Jiten while driving the car, Nitin describes the auto rickshaw driver very sensually. He describes the driver: “He was really …violent looking … He …he was a powerful man. I still remember that strong black arm.” (CP 281) Nitin’s description of the driver shows his fascination for the rickshaw driver. Sridhar, Nitin’s employee in the ad agency, puzzled by the description, asks Nitin:

SRIDHAR. Was it really fascination?

NITIN. Fascinating?

SIDHAR. That’s what you said.

NITIN. Did I? No. Why would I think it fascinating? (Pause)

SRIDHAR. Last night I passed by this way. We were going to the pub with a few friends.
NITIN. Oh. and…?

SRIDHAR. There was an auto rickshaw parked outside.

NITIN. So?

SRIDHAR. The driver was inside the office compound.

NITIN. (tense) Well. He didn’t come up.

SRIDHAR. The office lights were on.

NITIN. Yes. I was here. I- I was going through the accounts. What else did you see?

SRIDHAR. He must have recognized the car. Hmm? I was just passing through. I didn’t think it was important then.

NITIN. Well. It is unimportant. He didn’t come up. (281-82)

The conversation between Nitin and Sridhar clearly implies the homosexual relationship between Nitin and the rickshaw driver. At the end of the play Lalitha, the wife of Sridhar, also sees the rickshaw parked outside the house of Nitin and the driver climbing the compound wall of Nitin’s house. When she is confirmed that Kanhaiya does not exist, she says, “…If Kanhaiya doesn’t exist, who did the auto driver come to . . .” (CP 314). It confirms the relationship between Nitin and the auto rickshaw driver.

At the outset Alka blames her mother-in-law for her childlessness; but later she realises the impotency of her husband. She blames her drinking on Praful who has deceived her. When Dolly defends Praful, Alka remarks: “…Our brother is a cheat! …He lied to me by not telling me…” (CP 256). Here Alka perhaps wants to say that
her brother Praful lied to her by not telling her about Nitin’s homosexuality. Again she sarcastically tells Dolly: “For you, he is the descendant of a saint! A saint! (Laughs hard.) Like my husband. Such close friends! Friends from college” (CP 257). In her drunkenness Alka makes a comment on the incompetent nature of her husband. She says, “I know I haven’t been an ideal wife. And you haven’t been a …well, a competent husband. But who is complaining? Nobody’s perfect! Nobody’s perfect! …Thank God you understand me.” (CP 300) Thus, though Alka does not speak openly about Nitin’s homosexuality, she does refer to it indirectly.

At the end of the play Nitin exposes his homosexuality to the audience which is implied throughout the play. As Jiten holds Baa responsible for his behaviour towards Dolly, Nitin holds Praful responsible for his being deceitful towards his wife Alka. The play ends with his monologue addressed to Alka who is in her sound sleep:

He (Praful) tricked you too, didn’t he? How can you still love your brother after what he did to you…? That’s right. Don’t answer. Just sleep. (Laughs.) You always were a heavy sleeper. Thank God. Those times when I used to spend the night at your place, I used to sleep on his cot. And he would sleep on a mattress on the floor, beside me …When all the lights were out, I would lie on the cot. Waiting. For at least an hour…I would get up and quietly walk to your room …Yours, your sister’s and your mother’s. To make sure…That’s right. Don’t wake up. Just sleep. And I would go back to Praful’s room and kneel …At times he would wake up immediately. At other times I would lean forward to look at him. Close enough for my breath to fall gently on his face. And he would open his eyes …I loved him too. He is …was attractive. 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… He told me to get married …How could I? and to whom? … He told me that you knew. That he had told you…about me. And that it didn’t matter to you. You only wanted the security of a marriage. He …he told me everything would workout fine… But you didn’t know! He tricked you! I –I am sorry. It wasn’t my fault. (Moves to her and slowly covers her face with the blanket.) But now, you will have to sleep. You mustn’t keep him waiting … (He moves towards the kitchen.) The office is not a good idea…too many people passing by …but here—the outhouse. Perfect. Yes. Don’t wake up. Stay drunk. You mustn’t watch…those powerful arms… (Exits to the kitchen.) (CP 314-15)

Nitin confesses his homosexual relations with both Praful and the rickshaw driver. He enjoys the company of rickshaw driver either in his office after office hours or in his out-house. He does not prevent Alka from drinking because she has sound sleeps after getting drunk, giving him enough time and space to enjoy the company of the rickshaw driver. In fact, Nitin could not be blamed for his marriage with Alka. If we want to blame anyone it is either Praful or the heterosexist society. Nitin wins our sympathy by confessing his homosexuality. He is a traditional homosexual who is afraid to ‘come out’ openly due to the fear of social exclusion. In a traditional heteronormative Indian society ‘coming out’ means social exclusion and deprivation of civil rights. Most of the homosexual persons pretend to be heterosexual because “heterosexuality carries with it the assurance of normality” (Jane Pilcher 69). That’s why many homosexuals conform to the heterosexual marriages continuing their
homosexual relations with their same sex partners. Nitin, too, marries to avoid the public shame and lives a double life or life of lies.

It is clear from Nitin’s monologue that both Nitin and Alka have been deceived by Praful who coerced them to marry to gratify his own sexual hunger. Both are the victims of the heteronormative patriarchal society. Alka is pressurized to marry Nitin by her brother Praful knowing Nitin’s sexual orientation. Having no say in this matter, she accepts Nitin as her husband and leads a wretched life suppressing her sexual hunger and drowning in wine. On the other hand Nitin is blackmailed by Praful to marry his sister Alka so that he can continue his same sex relations with him. Nitin realises his mistake in marrying Alka and destroying her life but it is too late.

Thus, *Bravely Fought the Queen* is the first Indian English play to present a homosexual character on the stage, making him confess his homosexuality. Mahesh Dattani gives a human treatment to his homosexual character namely Nitin and expects the same from the society.

In *Do the Needful* Mahesh Dattani concurrently presents the twin issues of gender and alternate sexuality. Besides the theme of the Indian system of arranged marriages, the play also deals with the theme of homosexuality in Indian culture. While commenting on the theme of *Do the Needful*, Sally Avens remarks:

And whilst the play may be set in India within the conventions of ‘arranged marriages’, its wider themes are universal. A British audience found it easy to empathize with a gay man being forced to live his life within the norms of a heterosexual society or a young woman eager to prove her independence and break free from her parents. (CP 115)
In India arranged marriages never take place between ethnically, linguistically or racially divergent groups. But in the play *Do the Needful* the Patel family and the Gowda family—linguistically and ethnically divergent families—come together for the arranged marriage of their progeny. The Patels travel all the way from Mumbai to meet the Gowdas of Bangalore to tie a match between Alpesh Patel and Lata Gowda.

The play is about the Indian system of arranged marriages in which individuals are coerced to marry against their wills. As Asha Kuthari Chaudhari says, Dattani points at the shared spaces between women and gay men, both under the tremendous hegemony of mainstream patriarchal society that forces them to conform and live lives that are alien to their nature (61). Alpesh Patel is the only son of Chandrakant Patel and Kusumben Patel, a Gujarati family living in Mumbai. He is “thirty-plus and divorced” (CP 121). His parents insist him for the second marriage to have an heir to the family. Being a gay, Alpesh does not like to ruin the life of any woman by marrying her. He knows very well that he cannot satisfy any woman sexually. He tries to avoid his heterosexual marriage as he has no interest in it. But his parents force him to marry any girl to have an heir to run the race. He asks his mother “Is it …is it very important for me to get married?” (CP 125) But when his mother asks him the real reason behind his unwillingness, he does not tell her that he is homosexual and loves Trilok, a boy who works in Slim Gym. Now the question arises in our mind why Alpesh does not tell his parents about his homosexuality. Of course, the answer is society’s approach to homosexuality. Ours is a conservative heterosexual patriarchal society which does not tolerate and accept homosexuality. Even today homosexual act is a crime. The section 377 of Indian Penal Code has criminalized homosexuality. Thus homosexuality in India is not only a social stigma but also legal crime. Due to social stigma and legal prosecution, most of the
homosexuals lead double life. Hiding their homosexuality, they conform to heterosexual marriage to enjoy their civil rights which would be denied to them if they come out openly as homosexuals.

Devraj Gowda and Prema Gowda live in Bangalore with their daughter Lata who is “twenty-four and notorious” (CP 121). The Gowda family belongs to Marasu Vokkaliga Gowdas who have been landowners since the Vijaynagar Empire, but they are very desperate about the marriage of their daughter Lata who loves Salim, a Muslim terrorist. Being conservative parents, Gowdas does not approve of her love for a Muslim terrorist and force her to marry any Hindu boy. Being a modern girl, she does not conform to the traditional arranged marriage. That’s why she requests her mother not to insist her for the arranged marriage. The following conversation between the mother and the daughter throws light on the forced arranged marriage:

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! (CP 122).

No Gowda boy is ready to marry Lata as her affair with the Muslim boy Salim is known to every one. That’s why Devraj and Prema Gowda are ready to marry Lata with Alpesh who is divorced and much older than Lata.

Mahesh Dattani has very dexterously made use of “thought” to lay bare the inner psyche of the main characters—Alpesh and Lata. Like soliloquy and aside, the device of “thought” helps the dramatist to take his audience directly to the pre-speech level of Alpesh and Lata. While going to Bangalore with his parents to see Lata, he
lays bare his mind by using the device of ‘thought’. He thinks: “I must admit I was uneasy about the whole thing. I had no reason to be. It was just another mad window shopping spree. They couldn’t all be agreeable to the …venture. Somebody would say no, so it did not have to be me. Yet . . .” (CP 127)

This thought-over clearly states that he accompanies his parents to Bangalore unwillingly, hoping to be rejected. But Lata’s parents in spite of his being divorced and older than Lata accept him as a suitable boy for their only daughter Lata who has no say in this matter.

While commenting on the arranged marriage of Lata and Alpesh, Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri remarks:

The negotiations between the two parties begin with games of one-upmanship, and the gulf between the two sides reveals itself in more ways than just those of languages and ethnicity. Categories of class, literacy, wealth, power, and politics make their obvious statements of difference. Food habits, non-vegetarianism and other little nuances occupy as much space in the conversation as do the bigger issues of land-ownership, business or heritage. In spite of the laying bare of the separateness of their existence, the families move inexorably towards the pre-ordained destiny: the marriage of their subversive children. This is obviously preferable to the anarchic damage that will annihilate the identities of both families should the young have their way. (96)

While the parents are busy negotiating the wedding, Alpesh and Lata are busy thwarting the plans of their parents. Both Lata and Alpesh do not want to marry each other as they have their own interests. Lata wants to be rejected by Alpesh and vice
versa. In order to be rejected by Alpesh, Lata Gowda smokes in front of Alpesh. Her act of smoking in front of a prospective husband is an indecent act which is never done by any girl who wants to be accepted. The thoughts of Lata and Alpesh make their intentions clear to the audience regarding their unwillingness to marry each other:

LATA. (thought). I had the chance! I couldn’t lose it. I had to tell him about you, then or never.

ALPESH. (thought.) What could I say, Trilok? How would I tell her to reject me? (CP 149)

Thus they express their inner desires to be rejected by each other. Both Lata and Alpesh expect each other to take the lead to ‘do the needful’ to avoid their marriage. But at last Lata takes the initiative and tells Alpesh: “Look, I don’t want to marry you, I am in love with someone else” (CP 149). Alpesh, too, gathers his nerves and tells Lata, “Good. I am glad you don’t want to marry me. Because I don’t want to marry you either” (CP149). Thus they make their intentions clear to each other but it is not enough for them. One of them must tell their parents that they don’t want to marry. As Lata’s parents already know about her affair with the Muslim boy, she can not tell her parents. But Alpesh can not tell his parents the real reason of his unwillingness to marriage. Lata expects Alpesh to say no to the marriage but it seems impossible for him. Lata even threatens him that “if we do get married, I will give you hell! That’s a promise! (CP 151).

In Do the Needful Dattani suggests that homosexuals are not different from heterosexuals. They are capable of doing any work a heterosexual can do if proper education is given. Alpesh, in spite of his being gay, is a sole supporter of the Patel
family. After having done a diploma in printing, he runs a press successfully. He provides print materials to Hewlett Packard with whom he had a big contract. As a human being he is very lovable. He does not like lying. Even he does not like his father boasting about his business. He opens his mind before the audience through his ‘thought’:

What could I say to them? Daddy had his colleague approve the loan. We paid enough bribes to get the damn thing off. We hired the underworld to have Grandpa’s tenants evicted…I hate lying and liars. I have to do it so often. I feel everything I speak, I am lying. (Pause) In case you think I am rich…I am just the caretaker. It’s all his. I can’t walk out on him without leaving it all. I wish it didn’t matter. I wish . .

(CP 136)

Alpesh’s above words in the form of ‘thought’ clearly indicates what kind of man he is. Compared with Devraj Gowda and Chandrakant Patel, he is far better as a human being than them. He wins the sympathy of the audience by expressing his real thoughts to them. Both Devraj Gowda and Chandrakant Patel hide facts about their offspring from each other, but Alpesh reveals everything—his homosexual relationship with Trilok—to the audience and proves that he is far better than the hypocrite heterosexual people.

Mahesh Dattani casts light on the heterosexual attitude toward homosexuality. Lata is a representative of the heterosexual society. She hates homosexuality and homosexuals. When she accidentally finds Alpesh and Mali doing homosexual act in the cowshed, she is surprised and shocked. Her immediate reaction is “You are a homo!” (CP 153). Thinking that Mali was forced to do it, she calls Alpesh “a filthy
beast” (CP 153). Lata’s words to Alpesh clearly indicate her aversion and attitude to homosexuality. Like other heterosexuals, she too considers homosexuality abominable act and threatens Alpesh to “Get out of my way or I’ll beat you up” (CP 154).

Mali feels guilty about his homosexual act and requests Lata not to tell his father about it. The fear of social stigma and exclusion makes him to react: “If the villagers come to know, I will not be able to go to the market. If Appa doesn’t kill me, I will kill myself...Muniappa won’t give his daughter to me now. Who will marry me? I will kill myself!” (CP 153-54)

Mali’s reaction reveals the homophobia prevalent in the Indian society. He does not feel guilty while doing the act with Alpesh. As Alpesh says, “He was enjoying every minute of it” (CP 153). He succumbs to the force of Alpesh only because he enjoys it and gets pleasure out of it. He feels guilty and shameful only when he was caught while doing the homosexual act. In India the homosexuality per se is not shameful but being homosexual is shameful. Mali thinks that his father will kill him for being homosexual. He also says that if his father doesn’t kill him, he will kill himself. Probably he would like to suggest that in homophobic society, it is always better for a homosexual to be dead than to bear the social disgrace, oppression and harassment.

Dattani’s Do the Needful brings out the wretched condition of the homosexuals in Indian society. Their condition is worst than the slaves. As soon as Lata assures Mali that she will not tell his father, Mali immediately falls at her feet and says: “Akka! You are a goddess! ...I will serve you for the rest of my life! (CP 154) To avoid the social disgrace and the subsequent harassment, Mali is ready to
become a slave to Lata. Lata, too, takes undue advantage of his homosexuality and takes him with her as a dowry to gratify the physical need of her homosexual husband.

Mali is a traditional homosexual who, instead of coming out of the closet, lives a life of lies. He is different from Alpesh. Alpesh does not want to marry any girl since he can not satisfy his wife. But Mali wants to marry the daughter of Muniappa to prove that he is a not different from other heterosexuals. He is a representative of those homosexuals who want to marry as per the norms of the heterosexual society.

Mali believes in an age-old tradition and moral values. When he comes to know Lata’s intention to run away from the house to avoid her marriage with Alpesh, Mali reminds her family name and fame. He tells Lata, “No! Your appa and amma will die of shame!” (CP 154). He also threatens her that he will commit suicide if she runs away. He also reminds her that “A daughter of Gowda can not do this!” (CP 154). Thinking that Lata’s happiness lies at the feet of Alpesh, he requests her to marry Alpesh.

Mahesh Dattani ridicules the existing social customs regarding the arranged marriages which are in favour of custodians of heteronormative society rather than the individuals. It is very ridiculous that Lata’s marriage with Alpesh, a homosexual man, does not mar the family image but her running away with a Muslim boy brings shame to the family. Dattani perhaps wants to say that arranged marriages are not for the happiness of the bride and the groom but to maintain the social status and dignity of the parents.
Though Mali’s suggestion seems ridiculous to Alpesh, it appears useful and practical for Lata. She thinks over it and comes to the conclusion that it is worth trying. She tells Alpesh what Mali says:

LATA. He is begging me to marry you.

ALPESH. What for?

LATA. He feels that my happiness lies at your feet.

ALPESH. How ridiculous! I can never make you happy. (Pause)

LATA. Yes but, you won’t make me unhappy.

ALPESH. Huh?

LATA. You …wouldn’t want to sleep with me, would you?

ALPESH. Well…

LATA. My Salim lives in Bombay.

ALPESH. Oh, great! So you are going to run away! Thank you. Mali and I will help you get on a bus…

LATA. Why should I run away? Mali has made me see sense.

ALPESH. You believe what he said? What did he say anyway?

LATA. What was that Hindi expression you’d used? Something about your silence and mine as well… (Pause)

ALPESH. (Weakly.) No.

LATA. Think about it …If we do the needful… (Pause)
ALPESH. No. I mean, no, I can’t marry you.

LATA. Are you going to say no to your parents then?

ALPESH. No. (Pause) Will you bring Mali as your dowry? (CP 155-56)

Lata is clever enough to convince Alpesh that after marriage “both will be able to give each other ample space and do their own thing, also keeping the families and society happy—doing the needful” (Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri 61). Lata and Alpesh come to the mutual agreement following the principle of “Teri bhi chup, mery bhi chup” (CP 142). “The compromise that Lata and Alpesh make in marrying is, however, a clever and conscious choice, almost tailored to suit both the characters as well as the larger milieu, indeed a ‘forced harmony’ as Dattani would put it. The crux of the solution also suggests that the spaces between two marginalized groups are now truly shared. The forced harmony has actually brought is a sense of liberation, not guilt.” (Asha Kuthari Chaudhari 61)

Once the marriage between Lata and Alpesh takes place, “…the Patels and Gowdas heave huge sigh of relief at having averted cultural disaster and ruin in their own context” (Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri 97). The following words of Chandrakant Patel show how relieved he feels after his son’s marriage: “Alpesh is very happy with his choice. After all, he is independent, he has his own business. He can make his own decisions. Now that he is settled in life, I am going to devote my time to God’s work.” (CP 156)
Sally Avens, a producer and director in BBC Radio Drama, in his note on the play says: “Like all the best love stories, the hero and heroine end up getting married, but the road to marital bliss is full of the most unexpected twists and turns” (CP 115).

Dattani’s *Do the Needful* is a warning to the heteronormative patriarchal society that if the individuals are forced into arranged marriages having no choice to them to decide with whom to marry, such kind of dummy marriages will take place to protect their own interests. The marriage between Alpesh and Lata is “a gilt-edged camouflage, hoodwinking their respective parents to pursue their respective choices—Alpesh his gay relationship with Trilok and Lata her infatuation for Salim. In fact here both the homosexual and the feminine share the same platform, finding space and identity vis-à-vis an uncompromising social set up and hegemonic patriarchy respectively, through different agendas.” (Chakrabarti Santosh 45) Thus, in *Do the Needful* Dattani manages to entangle the dominant issues of homosexuality and gender arriving at an ingenious solution to the forced arranged marriage imposed on Lata and Alpesh. Having no other alternative before them to protect their own interests and the family disgrace, Lata and Alpesh act as husband and wife at home and in public spaces but they carry on their own affairs in their private lives.

Dattani’s *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, first broadcast as *Seven Circles Around the Fire* by BBC 4 on 9th January 1999, was first performed at the Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi on 10th July 2004. It is another play of Dattani that deals with the theme of homosexuality. It is about a tragic love marriage between Kamla, a hijra, and Subbu, a homosexual. In this play, Dattani voices his protest against the injustice meted out to the marginalized sections of our society namely hijra community and homosexuals. The play criticizes an age-old social institution of
marriage that is based on the heterosexual relationship. Dattani pleads on behalf of the hijras and homosexuals to whom the privilege of marriage is denied.

The plot of the play rotates around the murder of Kamla, a hijra, married secretly to Subbu, the son of the minister Mr. Sharma. Uma Rao, the daughter of the vice chancellor of Bangalore University, the daughter-in-law of the Deputy Commissioner of police and the wife of the Superintendent of Police, is a research scholar in Sociology. While working on her research paper “Gender-related Violence”, Uma Rao comes across the murder case of Kamla and decides to give justice to her by bringing the murderer to light. In the course of investigation she meets Anarkali, an accused hijra in the murder case of Kamla, and Champa, the head hijra. From Champa, Uma learns about Salim, the bodyguard of a minister, who used to take Kamla out every day. Thinking Salim as a murderer, she visits the house of Mr. Sharma, the minister, along with Munswamy. On being asked by Munswamy, while going to the house of the minister, how she relates the case of hijras to the house of the minister, Uma Rao tells him about Salim, the minister’s bodyguard, who used to come for Kamla and perhaps wanted to marry her. But Munswamy cannot imagine the marriage between a man and a hijra. As an agent of the patriarchal culture, he believes only in heterosexual sex and condemns the homosexuality. He suddenly reacts: “Marry? Who would want to marry …? Tchee! What kind of people are there in this world? (CP-II 263).

Munswamy’s reaction, without doubt, indicates his nausea for such a relationship. He reacts in such a way that shows that hijras and homosexuals have no right to marry at all. He does not know, as Uma says, about the strange world in which people live without knowing one another.
When Uma Rao reaches the house of the minister, they drive to the servants’ quarters where Salim lives. Uma’s interrogation of Salim forces him to confess the crime. He says: “I-I will confess, Madam. I killed her” (CP-II 265). But when asked why he burned her on the day he was getting married to her, Salim breaks down and begs pardon of her with these words: “Madam, I beg of you! Do not bring so much shame to me and my family. I have two sisters to marry, and- and my parents …I-I cannot!”(CP-II 265).

Salim feels embarrassed in front of the people assembled. He knows very well what reactions would be of the people when they come to know that he was going to marry Kamla, a hijra. His sisters will not be married and he will not be in the position to show his face to the others as homosexuality is condemned in the male dominated society. His words clearly show that people do not imagine and accept a marriage with a hijra. It is disgrace on the part of that man who marries a hijra. No one boasts of his relationship with a hijra as homosexuality is considered abnormal behaviour.

In her conversation with Mr. Sharma, the minister, Uma Rao tells him that she is doing the investigation for her thesis and she suspects that Salim was having an affair with Kamla and he killed her. She also tells him that Salim has confessed it but Mr. Sharma suddenly asks her “Did he say why he did it?”(CP-II 267). He would like to confirm whether Salim has mentioned his name regarding the murder. He also calls him “pervert” and his deed “very disgusting” (CP-II 267). To divert Uma’s attention from him and his family, he also opines that “one of the hijras must have paid him to do it” (267). Subbu, the son of Mr. Sharma, comes to know the matter and appears before Uma and asks her if they are going to arrest Salim. He requests Uma not to arrest him. He says: “Please don’t arrest him. He is a good man.” (CP-II 267) When
Uma congratulates him for his wedding, Subbu bursts out: “I hate weddings. I don’t want all this! I don’t wish to ahead with this.” (CP-II 267)

Though Subbu does not want to marry, yet his father Mr. Sharma forces him to marry a girl chosen by him. For Mr. Sharma, his son’s marriage is a matter of social pride and social respect. If he does not marry, his reputation will be maligned. Therefore he requests Uma Rao to keep her investigation pending till the wedding of Subbu. When Uma asks him about Subbu’s remarks about Salim, Mr. Sharma only comments “He is very fond of the man” (CP-II 268). No doubt, his son is fond of men as he is homosexual; but his father does not understand him. He wants his son to marry not for his son’s pleasure or happiness but for his social status. He forgets that his son is a homosexual. By marrying his son with a girl of his choice, he is destroying not only the life of his son but also the life of a bride of his son. Mr. Sharma, along with other men characters in the play, characterizes the patriarchal social code of behaviour and does not allow his son to have relation with a hijra.

As a patriarch, Mr. Sharma does not approve of his son’s marriage with Kamla, a hijra. He murders Kamla for being an obstacle in the marriage of his son to a girl of his choice. Subbu does not like the wedding arranged by his father for him but he has no choice at all. He marries but when the hijras dance and sing to bless the newly married couple, Subbu sees the vision of Kamla dancing and opening her arms wide to welcome him. Immediately he snatches the gun from Suresh Rao and says: “I—I am leaving you all! You can’t keep me from Kamla” (CP-II 279). Every one requests Subbu to give the gun back and not to do what he wants to do with the gun. Mr. Sharma accepts his mistake and asks his son to pardon him. He says: “It was a mistake. I am sorry, son” (CP-II 279). But Subbu does not forgive his father who is responsible for the murder of his beloved Kamla. He calls Salim a traitor and accepts
the gift given by Anarkali. The gift is, of course, the photo of Subbu and Kamla after marriage. Subbu looks at the photograph and addresses Kamla:

SUBBU. They killed you, Kamlas!

KAMLA. (echoing) They killed me!

SUBBU. Why?

KAMLA. Because you loved me!

SUBBU. I still love you Kamlas!

KAMAL. I love you Subbu. (CP-II 279-280)

The conversation between Subbu and Kamla throws light on their love relationship. Mr. Sharma who stands for patriarchal power decides what is good and bad for his son. He tells him, “Subbu, your Kamlas is gone. It’s all over. You have a whole life ahead of you” (280). It seems that Mr. Sharma is a selfish and self-centered father who does not care for the children of others. He mercilessly gets Kamlas burned to death, who was also a human being like his son. In order to have an heir to his family, he spoils the life of a girl by marrying her to his homosexual son who hates weddings. He spoils the lives of Kamlas and his daughter-in-law who are the voiceless in Indian society. He is bothered only about his son’s future and the future of his progeny but not about the future of Kamlas or the girl who marries his son. In order to prevent his son from committing suicide he even falls at the feet of Champa and requests her to help him in saving the life of his son. He says to Champa, “Help me! Talk to my son! Tell him to forget Kamlas. He will listen to you!” (CP-II 280).
But Mr. Sharma’s son Subbu becomes angry and is about to shoot at his father but suddenly changes his mind and commits suicide. Hoshang Merchant rightly remarks in his “Introduction” to *Yarana: Gay Writing from India*: “... Most homosexuals get married due to social pressures. Some commit suicide. Most adjust to a double life, so do their wives” (xvi). By committing suicide, Subbu joins his beloved Kamla and proves that his love for Kamla was genuine. By depicting the tragic love story of Kamla and Subbu—a hijra and a homosexual—Mahesh Dattani probably would like to warn the dictatorial fathers of the pernicious repercussions of compulsory heterosexuality. He also suggests to the heterosexual world that the hijras and homosexuals too have rights to live, to love, to marry, and to lead a life as they wish.

The play ends with pathos as Uma reflects on the suicide of Subbu: “They knew. Anarkali, Champa and all the hijra people knew who was behind the murder of Kamla. They have no voice. The case was hushed up and was not even reported in the newspapers. Champa was right. The police made no arrests. The photograph was destroyed. So were the lives of two young people” (CP-II 282).

Mahesh Dattani presents the case study of the murder of Kamla to show the position of hijras and homosexuals in society. Both the lovers, Kamla and Subbu, belong to the marginalized sections of our society namely hijra and homosexual communities respectively and their marriage is not approved by the agents of patriarchal society as their marriage is against the norms of the patriarchal concept of marriage. In order to avoid the suicides and murders of the innocent people like Subbu and Kamla, the society should give its sanction to the marriage of homosexuals and hijras. In this regard Bijay Kumar Das rightly observes: “What Mahesh Dattani highlights in the play is homosexual relationship and seems to ask why can’t it be
natural like heterosexual relationship and why can’t there be marriage between homosexuals?”(95). As a human being, they should have privileges like marriage, birth, love and family for which they yearn.

Dattani’s *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, first performed at the Tata Theatre, Mumbai, on 23 November 1998, is the first play in Indian English Drama which deals openly with homosexuality. Dealing with issues of homosexuality, it brings to light the difficulties of living a lifestyle outside the norm. It aims to encourage and cajole gay people to come out of the closet. Commenting on the theme of the play, John Mac Rae, in his A Note on the Play, remarks: “And the themes of “On a Muggy Night” deserve to touch the whole of society and to be touched by it. It is not simply the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal. It is a play about how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individual to fall victim to the expectations society creates.” (CP 46)

The action of the play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* takes place in a small flat of Kamlesh located in the upmarket area of Marine Drive, Mumbai. At his flat he tries to create his world, the world of a homosexual that is separated from the outside world. When the play opens, Kamlesh and Guard enter from the bed into the living room suggesting homosexual relations between them. Kamlesh’s kneeling before Guard, placing his foot on his thigh and his act of tying his laces clearly indicates that they are gays who have just completed the act of homosexuality in bedroom. Kamlesh is not ashamed of his being a gay. He does not like people who hide their sexual orientation.

Mahesh Dattani’s *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* deals with the psychological problems of homosexuals. Kamlesh has invited all his friends – Sharad, Deepali,
Ranjeet, and Bunny—to his flat to help him out to forget Prakash, his homosexual partner with whom he was quite comfortable but who left him being ashamed of their relationship. In order to forget Prakash, Kamlesh loves Sharad who spends a whole year of his life as a housewife for Kamlesh. Kamlesh tries his best to forget Prakash by loving Sharad but he could not. Still in love with Prakash he forces Sharad to leave his flat by saying “We can be true friends forever if you get out of my flat” (CP 56).

In the presence of all his friends he admits:

Three years ago, I moved to Bombay not to make it big in the fashion world—although I did, that wasn’t my intention. I came here to get over a relationship. A relationship…I suppose it was. … I did a cruel thing by loving Sharad to forget Prakash. I have not succeeded. And I have hurt someone as wonderful as Sharad. I made Sharad go through the same pain and suffering that I was trying to get over. (CP 67-68)

As Hoffman acknowledges, "..... the most serious problem for those who live in the gay world is the great difficulty they have in establishing stable relationships with each other” (166). The lack of institutional support, legal sanctions, religious approval, cultural guidelines, and the absence of children and the sexual nature are some of the hurdles in establishing the stable relationships with each other.

The ghost of Prakash’s memories haunts him day and night making him almost mad. The more he tries to forget Prakash, the more thoughts about him crop up in his mind. He gets depressed and consults a heterosexual psychiatrist who advises him to change his sexual orientation which is impossible for him.

In *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* Mahesh Dattani presents heterosexual society’s attitude towards homosexuality, homosexuals and their problems. In his
helplessness and loneliness, Kamlesh turns to his homosexual friends in stead of his heterosexual parents and relatives who are indifferent to his problem. It seems to him that his friends alone can help him to rid of the memory of Prakash. That’s why he invites them to his flat, tells them his problem and seeks their guidance to forget Prakash. He pleads them:

Please! I am afraid! I need your help! I need you all. I am afraid.

Frightened. (Pause) After Sharad went away—I decided that I didn’t really need anyone to live with me. I had my work. That should have been enough. It wasn’t. I felt this void. The same feeling when three years ago, Prakash left me. I would have understood it if he had left me for another man, but he left me because he was ashamed of our relationship. It would have worked between us, but he was ashamed. I was very angry. I left my parents and my sister to come here, all because of him. I know, I know I shouldn’t blame him entirely for that—Sharad has told me often enough. (Pause) Sharad, this is something I haven’t told you because I know you would disapprove.

For the first time in my life, I wished I wasn’t gay. (CP 68-69)

Although Kamlesh gets angry with Prakash for leaving him being ashamed of their homosexual relationship, he does not blame Prakash entirely for his act. He would like to place the blame on the society that believes in the compulsory heterosexuality. John McRae is right when he says: “For the fault is not just the characters’ –it is everyone’s, in a society which not only condones but encourages hypocrisy, which demands deceit and negation, rather than allowing self-expression, responsibility and dignity” (CP 46).
Homophobia and heterosexism are the impediments in the development of a positive self image in gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons. From 1970s, approach towards gay men, lesbians and bisexuals have been changing positively. Nevertheless, compared with heterosexual people, homosexuals are still among the most stigmatized groups in the nation. They have been humiliated, and discriminated legally, socially, politically and economically. Fearing that they will not be accepted by their friends, family members and society, homosexuals often struggle to come to grips with their personal identities. Dreading the stigma associated with homosexuality, homosexuals often wish to be something different. Kamlesh, too, wishes “I wasn’t gay” (CP 69). Ranjeet tries to console him by saying that “…At some point or another we all wish to be something we are not” (CP 69).

Kamlesh’s feeling to be something he is not was the result of his seeing “a straight homophobic psychiatrist” who pretended to understand his problem. Though his medication helps him cope with his depression, his aversion therapy does not work at all. Kamlesh does not like his advice to reorient himself sexually. He seems to believe in the old saying “To thine own self be true” and decides to be true to his self and his nature.

*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* also casts light on the heterosexist attitude of psychiatrists who regard homosexuality as a mental illness. They think that homosexual orientation can be changed. Their aversion therapy shows their aversion for the homosexuals. Being heterosexual, they consider homosexuality as perverse, deviant and abnormal and advise their homosexual patients to reorient themselves. Both Kamlesh and Prakash undergo their aversion therapy without any positive results. It shows that even in 1990s in India homosexuality was linked with clinical practice.
As soon as the psychiatrist tells Kamlesh that he will never be happy as a gay man, he stops visiting him and taking his pills. His action shows that he does not want to be other than what he is. He is proud to be a gay and never hides his sexual orientation. He confesses:

I am obsessed even more by the memory of Prakash. I—I feel I can not live without him. I am capable of doing anything (Pause) Please help me! Who do we turn to except one another? ... For the past week, I have been picking up strangers—bringing them over –hoping to connect. Strange men who will call me when they feel the same loneliness, when they grow tired of the pretence. Or when they need more money. (CP 70)

Mahesh Dattani presents the different types of homosexuals and their psychology very dexterously in the play. While suggesting solutions to the problem of Kamlesh, his homosexual friends reveal different veneers of homosexuality. Carol Smart’s remark in this regard is important: “[h]eterosexual identity is therefore akin to a white colonial identity. It entails an effortless superiority, a moral rectitude, a defeat of the emotional and the neurotic by the power of the unconscious struggle and, of course, the certain knowledge of masculine superiority.” (Smart Quoted in Jane Pilcher 70) That’s why many homosexuals lead a double life—the private life and the social life. In their private life they practice homosexuality secretly with their same sex partners whereas in their social life they marry conforming to the norms of the heteronormative patriarchal society. Cultural codes and moral values in India still regard homosexuality as deviant and unnatural. In this regard Narrain Arvind says:
By its very existence, section 377 [of Indian Penal Code] crystallizes the deep societal repugnance towards homosexuality, considering it perverted, animal like behaviour. If People in law enforcement, medical practice and the judiciary treat homosexuals as people without rights, the power of the societal mindset comes from the law. Thus, Section 377 functions as a condemnation of Indian’s sexual minorities be it gays, lesbians, kothis or hijras. Section 377 is thus not just a law but a worldview which remains entrenched in legal structures, medical, family, and media discourses and perhaps, most strongly, in the ‘common sense’ understanding of people. (Narrain 257)

This societal view forces homosexuals to lead a closet life hiding their sexual orientation. They are even ashamed of their relationships. In the play On a Muggy Night in Mumbai we have homosexuals like Prakash, Bunny Singh, and Guard who are closet homosexuals leading a life of hypocrisy. At the beginning of the play Kamlesh talks about his relationship with Prakash who left him being ashamed of his homosexual relationship. It is because the conservative heterosexual society does not tolerate and accept homosexuality as one of the types of sexuality. The fear of social exclusion and the fear of being deprived of civil rights make them put up all shams to cover up their shame. The following dialogue between Ranjeet and Deepali makes it clear why some homosexuals hide their sexual identity:

RANJEET. I am sometimes regretful of being an Indian and gay. But you are simply ashamed. All the sham is to cover up your shame.

DEEPALI. It’s not shame, is it? With us …Its fear…of the corners we will be pushed into where we don’t want to be. (CP 88-89)
Bunny Singh, a T. V. actor, is a friend of Kamlesh. He advises Kamlesh to pretend to be straight like him and marry a nice woman to forget Prakash. According to him there is nothing wrong in hiding the homosexual identity. He gives his own example and asks them, “Do you think I will be accepted by the millions if I screamed from the rooftops that I am gay?” (CP 70). He asks Kamlesh to use the basic animal instinct of camouflage. He says: “Camouflage! Even animals do it. Blend with the surroundings. They can’t find you. You politically correct gays deny yourself the basic animal instinct of camouflage.” (CP 70) Bunny Singh succeeds in making people believe that he is “the ideal husband and father” (CP 76). He is a very good actor who acts not only in a T. V. serial “Yeh Hai Hamara Parivaar” but also in actual life. When Kiran suspects him to be a gay because of Sharad’s comment, Bunny reacts: “Oh no! I am not! I am not…like them. They are such intelligent people and good company. I am a very liberal-minded person.” (CP76) Thus Bunny Singh is one of those homosexuals who pretend to be straight and marry as per the norms of heterosexual society to avoid the public disgrace. He is a conservative homosexual who lives in his closet due to heterosexual bias towards homosexuals.

Sharad and Deepali are comfortable with their homosexuality. They are proud to be homosexuals. Sharad likes to flaunt his homosexuality. He considers himself a ‘drama queen’. By his camp behaviour he shows that gender role is performative.

Ranjeet is also an overt homosexual to whom India is not a proper place to live in. He laments the fate of homosexuals in India, a country that compels its homosexuals to take shelter in “…either the United States or Britain—countries that have well established gay and lesbian communities with a tradition of organized resistance—and therefore have greater sexual and artistic freedom . . .” (Claude Summers 664). That’s why he leaves India for England and lives there with his
English lover from the last twelve years. According to him it is very difficult “to find a lover in this wretched country!” (CP 71). In his opinion one has to pay the price for living in India. The gays in India will never succeed because they “end up loving all the wrong blokes” (CP 71). Ranjeet indirectly suggests Kamlesh to follow his own example.

Deepali, a lesbian, is a good friend of Kamlesh. Being concerned about Kamlesh, she comes to the flat of Kamlesh leaving her niece in the hands of Tina, her “the significant other” (CP 58). Being a woman and proud of her lesbianism, she objects to the use of the word ‘bitch’. She says to Sharad, “Don’t – don’t use the word. You can call yourself a dog, call yourself a pig, but never never insult a female” (CP 59). Being antagonistic towards heterosexual men, she says “I am all for the gay men’s cause. Men deserve only men!” (CP 60) When Sharad blames Kamlesh for using Guard as a sex object, Deepali says to Kamlesh, “Treat him like a sex object. Men should get a dose of their own medicine” (CP 63).

Though Deepali hates men, she is very sympathetic towards gays. Her remark “I am all for the gay men’s cause” shows her concern for the gays. She attends Kamlesh’s party, leaving her two-year-old niece in the inexperienced hands of Tina just to be with Kamlesh and his gay friends. Very sympathetically she asks Kamlesh to tell her about his problems. The following conversation between Deepali and Kamlesh throws light on their close relationship:

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

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

DEEPALI. If we were heterosexual, we would be married. (CP 65)
Being homosexuals, Kamlesh and Deepali prefer same-sex love but as they belong to opposite sex they can not love each other as lovers though they love as friends. Marriage for them is a dream which can not be fulfilled due to heterosexual bias. Heterosexual society does not allow homosexuals to marry. That’s why Deepali comments that if they were heterosexual, they would have married. Mahesh Dattani here talks about the problem of same sex marriage. To get married in a heterosexual patriarchal society, it is essential to be heterosexual or to pretend to be heterosexual. Homosexuals are tolerated if they pretend to be heterosexual and marry as per the norms of the patriarchal society. But if they come out honestly and want to marry with their same-sex partners, they are not tolerated and accepted because their marriage is ‘bloody unnatural’ as it is against the norms of the society.

Kamlesh does not like Bunny’s advice to marry a nice woman. Nor does he like Ranjeet’s indirect suggestion to leave India for England. He accepts Sharad’s suggestion to forget Prakash by destroying everything that reminds him of Prakash. As per the instructions of Sharad, Kamlesh stands near the window and takes the vow “As my friends, this city and God are witness to my vow, I break all ties with Prakash”. But Kiran’s unexpected entry into Kamlesh’s flat disturbs the homosexuals and the kind of ritual they were performing to exorcise the spirit of Prakash from Kamlesh’s mind. Due to her arrival, Kamlesh could not tear up the photograph. Instead he throws it out of the window which lies on the ledge of the window. All the efforts of Kamlesh’s friends to help him out became futile. They keep quiet in the presence of Kiran.

Kiran, a heterosexual character in the play, represents the heterosexual world. Her unexpected entry into the flat of Kamlesh symbolizes the encroachment and interference of the heterosexual world into the homosexual world. The homosexuals
are always disturbed by the heterosexuals. The heterosexual world always creates new problems before them. It is suggested by Kiran’s action in the play.

In the course of conversation, Kiran tells Kamlesh and his friends that she is going to marry Ed, who lives in Bangalore and whom Kamlesh had introduced her before four years in Bangalore. On being asked more about Ed by Sharad, Kiran asks Kamlesh to tell them about Prakash which will help him get out of his depression. Sharad, Deepali, and others soon come to know that Ed is no one but Prakash who is responsible for the depression of Kamlesh. This revelation at the end of Act-I shocks Sharad and Deepali who insist Kamlesh to tell Kiran about Prakash’s sexual orientation. But Kamlesh does not want to reveal the homosexual identity of Prakash to Kiran for her happiness.

The threat of the heterosexual world to the homosexual world is indicated by Kiran’s act of loving Prakash. Kiran snatches away the happiness of Kamlesh by loving Prakash whom Kamlesh loves very much. Kamlesh sacrifices his love for the sake of his heterosexual sister.

Dattani also presents the travails of homosexuals in a heterosexual world and their desire to be recognized. In the first scene of Act II, Dattani takes us back in time to show us how Prakash and Kamlesh met each other in a park in Bangalore where gays often come in search of a partner. Edward Prakash Matthew is a closet homosexual who does not come out due to heterosexism. He leads a lonely life in his room consuming rum every day. Being tired of his lonely life, he thinks of committing suicide by jumping off the balcony. But he changes his mind and decides to visit the park to find out the partner. In the park, he meets Kamlesh who listens to his story and loves him. By loving Prakash, Kamlesh saves the life of Prakash.
In a conservative Indian society most of the homosexuals lead an invisible life in their ghettos as hetero-patriarchal society does not tolerate and accept homosexuality. It is the desire of every homosexual to be accepted as a human being. They want to be seen and accepted by the society giving them enough space. They want to be allowed to express their love for another man openly. But the heterosexual society seems to be blind to see the homosexuals—their existence, their problems, their love. The following conversation clearly brings out homosexual’s sense of being neglected:

ED. ... Look at all those people on the road.

KAMLESH. They can’t see us.

ED. No. They can’t.

KAMLESH. They can’t see us at all, although we can see them. They must be blind.

ED. Come closer...closer.

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

ED. Are we?

KAMLESH. What?

ED. Beautiful?

KAMLESH. Yes.

ED. I don’t know. (Points to the people on the road) They wouldn’t think so.
The above dialogue between two homosexuals clearly brings out how their love has been deliberately neglected and despised by the heterosexual society.

Kiran’s declaration of her marriage with Prakash next month seems to be a turning point in the action of the play. Henceforth, the action of the play rotates around how to prevent Kiran’s marriage with Prakash, a homosexual. Deepali and Sharad strongly oppose her marriage with Prakash and request Kamlesh to tell Kiran about Prakash’s sexual identity. But Kamlesh, who is more concerned with the happiness of Kiran than his own happiness is unwilling to expose Prakash.

Deepali, a staunch lesbian feminist, tries her best to save the life of Kiran by preventing her marriage with Prakash, a closet homosexual. In her opinion, Kiran must know the truth that she is marrying a gay. She asks Kamlesh to “show the photograph to Ed and tell him that if he doesn’t tell Kiran, we will show her the photograph” (CP 84). Being herself a homosexual, Deepali knows that a homosexual person cannot love his/her spouse with the same intensity as he/she loves the homosexual partner. When Bunny Singh blames Deepali and Sharad for creating unnecessary trouble, she directly asks Bunny whether he loves his wife with the same intensity as he loves his homosexual partner.

Bunny’s confession that a gay man cannot love his wife as passionately as he loves his homosexual partner exposes the hypocrisy of a male homosexual who pretends to be straight and marries a woman. Such a man deceives himself by denying what he is and his life partner by making her believe what he is not. Deepali exposes gay men like Bunny Singh who marry only to cover up their shame. As Ruth Vanita writes: “It is well known that in India and other supposedly traditional societies, large
numbers of people live as apparently traditional heterosexuals, while secretly engaging in homosexual liaisons or leading lives of quiet desperation” (218-219).

Hiding his homosexuality, Bunny Singh marries as per the norms of the heterosexual society in order to enjoy all the privileges available to a ‘normal’ man. But he never thinks of a woman with whom he marries. Neglecting her sexual desires, he only provides material things. No doubt, he may be more considerate towards her than a heterosexual husband, but what about her sexual desire. Time and again, from the antiquity her sexual desire has been restrained and neglected in a male dominated society.

When Deepali entreats Kamlesh to force Ed to come out to Kiran, Kamlesh says. “Ed will never come out to anyone” (CP 84) because “he says he is heterosexual now” (CP 85). Kamlesh tells them about Ed’s regular visits to church and a psychiatrist who makes him believe that “his love for me (Kamlesh) was the work of the devil” (CP85). As a result, Kamlesh thinks, “I have lost him forever! All because of the crap that has been filled in him that he has to love a woman” (CP 85). Though Kamlesh admits that it is all the crap that he loves his sister, he does not want to expose Ed by showing the photograph to Kiran only because, he says:

It is not him, can’t you see? Kiran can not do without him. I don’t want her to suffer the way I have… I want her to be …content. Like Bunny’s wife… I was thankful also for Prakash for making her happy again. I don’t think it ever occurred to her in her wildest dreams that we were lovers. She never even asked me whether Prakash was gay. She just assumed he wasn’t. (CP 85-86)
These words of Kamlesh show his concern for his sister Kiran. He genuinely loves her and does not want her to suffer as he suffers due to her separation from her lover. His words also make it clear that he is not supporting Ed’s marriage with Kiran for his selfishness. Kamlesh appears to be more humane than any heterosexual man regarding his love for his sister. He sacrifices his love for Prakash to see her sister happy. It is a great sacrifice on the part of a homosexual.

Deepali and Sharad do not like Kamlesh’s argument. Deepali thinks that it is better for Kiran to suffer for a short period of time and get it over with than suffer permanently after her marriage with hypocrite homosexual Prakash. Sharad’s attempt to tell Kiran that Kamlesh hasn’t been entirely honest with her infuriates Kamlesh who asks Sharad to “Get out of my house” (CP 87). After Sharad’s departure from Kamlesh’s flat, Kiran blames herself for and follows Sharad to bring him back.

Dattani opposes categorizing people on the basis of sexuality bringing out the adverse effects of it. Hetero-patriarchal society’s attempt to identify people depending on their sexual orientation and oppressing them if they deviate from the social norms causes homosexuals and bisexuals to hide their sexual identity. Homosexuals expect that they should be allowed to do what they want to do and to love whom they want to. Bunny Singh finds nothing wrong in his marriage; he finds nothing wrong in Ed’s marriage with Kiran. That’s why he asks Sharad and Deepali not to tell about Ed’s homosexuality to Kiran. He says: “Don’t tell her. It will ruin their lives. If both of them want it, then what is the problem?” (CP 82). Regarding the categorizing of people he says: “All I am saying is that we should all forget about categorizing people as gay or straight or bi or whatever and let them do what they want to do!” (CP 88). Bunny does not like to be identified as gay because of heterosexism. But according to Deepali homosexuals don’t like to be categorized because of the fear. She says: “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). It is this fear to be pushed into corner, to be pushed to the periphery which makes some homosexuals to hide their sexual identity and to remain closet homosexuals by marrying heterosexual persons. In fact homosexuals can not be blamed for their hypocrisy. It is not their fault. It is everybody’s fault.

Mahesh Dattani is very innovative in his experiments with the stage. In the last scene of Act II we have three simultaneous conversations between Kamlesh-Kiran, Ed- Kiran and Kamlesh-Ed. Dattani manages these conversations very dexterously. These conversations show Dattani’s mastery over the use of multi-level stage. By using the empty space available to him, Dattani makes his characters reveal themselves. In this scene we are told about Kiran’s meeting with Ed and their involvement with each other, Ed’s willingness to break up his relationship with Kamlesh and Kamlesh’s encouragement to Kiran to face the world and his attempt to keep Ed for himself by showing him their photograph.

Kiran, after her divorce, seldom sets out to face the world because she is afraid that everyone will stare at her saying “That’s Kiran, the one whose husband dumped her” (CP 91). But Kamlesh takes her to a party and introduces her to Prakash who dances with her and wins the first prize for the best couple on the floor. It is ironical that Prakash and Kiran were chosen as the best couple. In reality, they cannot be the best couple. Dattani perhaps wants to tell that there are many couples that cannot be happy but want to show others that they are happy.

Kiran, being frightened of people’s attention, advises Kamlesh to be invisible to avoid people’s stares. But Kamlesh is open about his sexual identity. He is least bothered about the world. He says, “Let them talk! If two men want to love one
another, what’s the harm?” (CP 91). But Kiran, having faced the stares of people, advises Kamlesh “Don’t let people know about you. You will spend your whole life defending yourself. If I had the choice, I would stay invisible too.” (CP 91)

On the other hand, Prakash is bothered about the world. He is not as open as Kamlesh is. In order to hide his homosexual identity, he becomes friendly with Kiran and dances with her deliberately in a party to make others believe that he is heterosexual. He tries his best to show what he is not. He succeeds in his efforts to make Kiran believe that he is heterosexual. To Kiran he does not look gay. She loves Ed supposing him to be heterosexual. Her words “Ed doesn’t seem to care about what people think or say. He is so open!” clearly reveal Ed’s success in creating a heterosexual identity which is, in reality, an illusion. Ed’s remark “Let them talk. If a man and a woman want to dance together what’s their problem?” (CP 91) is deliberately intended to create his identity as a ‘real man’.

Thinking that there is no real future in his relationship with Kamlesh, Ed tells him not to see him anymore. He tells him, “I am not happy with being who I am. And want to try to be like the rest” (CP 92). He calls Kamlesh a cheat when Kamlesh shows him their nude photograph together. Thus, in order to prove himself to be a heterosexual, Ed intentionally breaks up his relationship with Kamlesh and proposes Kiran in marriage to be one with Kamlesh after marriage.

Dattani contrasts the two worlds—the gay world and the heterosexual world. The gay world represented by Kamlesh’s flat is in contrast with the heterosexual world represented by the outside world associated with the wedding ceremony. The gays are forbidden to marry each other being considered it as unnatural due to its non-procreative nature whereas heterosexuals are allowed and compelled to marry as it is
considered natural due to its procreative nature. Though marriage appears to be
natural to the majority of people and to some homosexuals like Bunny and Prakash
who pretend to be straight, it appears “so bloody unnatural” to homosexuals like
Ranjeet who argue that “Animals don’t do it”. That’s why Ranjeet poses a question
“Why do people get married? (CP 95) He hates the homosexuals who pretend to be
straight and marry following the norms of the heterosexual society to show them that
they are not different from them. Ranjeet makes it clear to Ed that he has nothing
against wedding “If that’s what people really want” (CP 98).

Mahesh Dattani raises the question of same sex marriage in On a Muggy Night
in Mumbai. Kiran, knowing that Kamlesh and Sharad have broken up, wants to patch
up their relationship to make her brother happy. She raises the question of gay
people’s marriage. She says, “I really wish they would allow gay people to marry”
(98). No doubt, as Ranjeet says, heteronormative patriarchal society allows gay
people to marry but not to the same sex. If they had allowed the same sex marriage,
Kiran says, “I don’t think my brother would suffer so much if only he were allowed to
marry his partner” (CP 98). When she wants to know the reason why Sharad broke up
with Kamlesh, Deepali tells her that because Sharad wants to be straight which
appears very absurd to her.

Deepali and Sharad play a game to avoid Ed’s marriage with Kiran. They want to
expose Ed’s identity to Kiran and make her believe how absurd the idea
is to marry a homosexual. As a part of this game, Sharad tells Kiran that he wants to
be straight in order to belong to the outside world. But Kiran regards such a desire on
the part of the homosexual to be straight as an absurd and unfair and questions the
possibility of being straight. Deepali, having known Ed’s visits to a psychiatrist in
order to become straight, suggests Kiran that Sharad will find a psychiatrist “who will
help him escape to the more acceptable world” (CP 100). When Ed supports Sharad’s desire to be straight, Ranjeet asks him directly “Can he become heterosexual?” (CP 100).

Kiran, a heterosexual, believes that it is impossible for a homosexual to be straight. Whatever Sharad says appears absurd to her. When Kamlesh expresses his love for Sharad, she requests Sharad to reconsider his whim of becoming a heterosexual and says:

He loves you, Sharad. What more do you want? You will never be happy than this. You will end up being lonely if you tried to be anything else other than who you are. And think of the poor who you may end up marrying just as cover-up for your shame. I know how it feels to be unloved. God knows I have suffered enough in my marriage. The scars are never going to leave me. But I am thankful now that I have Ed. And I wish the same happiness for my brother and you. (CP 102)

But it is the irony that ‘the poor woman’ Kiran talks about is no one but she herself and the man with whom she is going to marry is a homosexual who is marrying her to cover-up his shame. She is ignorant of the fact that Sharad is only acting the part Ed is playing with her. Sharad’s reply to Kiran’s question “why he wants to be straight” is:

…you see, being a heterosexual man—a real man, as Ed put it—I get everything. I get to be accepted—accepted by whom? —well, that marriage let down there for instance. I can have a wife, I can have children who will all adore me simply because I am a hetero—I beg
your pardon—a real man. Now why would I want to give it all up? So what if I have to change a little? If I can be a real man, I can be King. Look at all the Kings around you, look at all the male power they enjoy, thrusting themselves on to the world, all that penis power! Power with sex, power with muscle, power with size. Firing rockets, exploding nuclear bombs, if you can do it five times, I can do it six times and all that stuff…power, man! Power! (CP 101)

The flaunting of exaggerated 'feminine' characteristics has been a favourite pastime of the homosexual subculture. The important defining feature of a gay subculture is that it exhibits ‘characteristic counter-norms’ (Plant 122). The manifestation of the counter norms is an attempt to cope with the dominant culture primarily by ridiculing it. In the gay subculture, this ridicule has traditionally taken the form of camp. Camp is a mockery by exaggeration of gender appropriate behaviour by people whom the dominant culture derides as inappropriate gender role models. According to Sontag, camp is essentially a way of looking at things rather than an idea in its own right (1967). The camp behaviour helps homosexuals to an understanding of what the world is like and helps them to cope with that world. On the one hand it involves “a perception of the world which is coloured, shaped, directed and defined by the fact of one's gayness” (Babuscio 18). Conversely, it criticizes “through mockery the hypocrisy, pretension, self-deceit and prudery that gay people have come to know exist in the wider world” (Blackford 195).

Sharad’s camp behaviour which was intended to expose Ed’s sexual orientation impresses Kamlesh very much and makes him express his love for Sharad. While appreciating Sharad’s acting he says, “You are funny! Sharad, you are wonderful. I don’t know why I didn’t see it before. I love you” (CP 101). He realizes
his mistake in rejecting the love of Sharad for the love of Prakash which was an illusion. Looking at Ed he says, “I know now that I have been chasing an illusion. Perhaps the man I loved does not exist” (CP101). All the friends of Kamlesh agree with him that the man he loved does not exist. Being ignorant about Kamlesh’s relationship with Prakash, Kiran does not understand who Kamlesh is talking about. She asks him about the man he is talking about. But neither Kamlesh nor his friends tell her about the man.

The intention of Sharad behind his camp behaviour was to expose Ed or to force him to come out to Kiran. But instead, Bunny comes out of his closet and very boldly asserts his homosexual identity. He says:

I know. Just as the man whom my wife loves does not exist, I have denied a lot of things. The only people who know me—the real me—are present here in this room. And you all hate me for being such a hypocrite. The people who know me are the people who hate me. That is not such a nice feeling. I have tried to survive. In both worlds. And it seems I do not exist either. I am sorry, Kiran, I lied to you as I have lied to the rest of the world. ... I deny them in public, but I want their love in private. I have never told anyone in so many words what I am telling you now—I am a gay man. ... I lied—to myself first. And I continue to lie to millions of people every week on Thursday nights. There’s no such person . . . (CP 102-103)

The act of coming out is central to the gay experience. As Simon and Gagnon points out, coming out is simply “that point in time when there is self-recognition by the individual of his identity as a homosexual” (181). According to Evelyn hooker
‘coming out’ takes place “when he identifies himself publicly for the first time as a homosexual in the presence of other homosexuals by his appearance in a bar” (31).

Kamlesh appreciates Bunny’s coming out of the closet. In fact, as Kamlesh says, coming out of the closet requires a lot of courage on the part of the homosexuals who live in their ghettos due to the fear of social exclusion. But it is the need of the time to come out of the closet and fight for the civil rights. If every homosexual proudly says that he is a gay man and fights for his/her fundamental and civil rights, they can live their lives like the heterosexuals enjoying all kinds of rights.

Sharad’s camp behaviour also changes Kamlesh. He, too, is cured of his depression. He is no longer haunted by the ghost of Prakash’s memories. He realizes his mistake in chasing an illusion. He declares his love for Sharad and is ready to live with him as he has courage to accept their relationship openly. But his declaration upsets Ed. Calling Kamlesh into the bedroom Ed asks him whether he really loves Sharad. The following conversation between Ed and Kamlesh throws light on Ed’s intention behind proposing Kiran in marriage:

ED. Never mind the Imol. Tell me, is it true?

KMLESH. What?

ED. That you love Sharad…What are you thinking about? Answer me.

KAMLESH. Yes, I do love him. . . .

ED. You fool. Can’t you see? My marriage with Kiran is a start.

KAMLESH. What do you mean?
ED. Once we are married, I could see you more often without causing any… suspicion…you don’t really love Sharad. You love me.

The above conversation between Ed and Kamlesh brings out the contrast between their natures. Kamlesh is open-minded whereas Ed is reserved. Kamlesh has courage to live his life openly as a gay man whereas Ed tries his best to hide his homosexual identity and wants to marry Kiran only to cover-up his shame. Kamlesh is sympathetic towards women in general and Kiran in particular. When he realizes Ed’s intention behind marrying Kiran, Kamlesh requests Kiran not to marry him telling her that she deserves better. Conversely, Ed does not hesitate to deceive Kiran to gratify his sexual hunger.

Kiran loves Ed sincerely and honestly. She never suspects Ed’s homosexuality and his relations with Kamlesh. She is very happy with him. In her opinion, Ed is “so…male, so protective, so caring and yet so assertive” (CP 104). But when Sharad shows her the photograph of Ed and Kamlesh, she is almost frozen. She begins crying because she has been betrayed by both Ed and Kamlesh whom she loves most. She is in a quandary state. She only says “I—I have lost the two people whom I love …” (CP 106).

Kiran blames Kamlesh for hiding Ed’s sexual identity and his relationship with him. Kamlesh can not be blamed for it as he is sincere in his love for her. As a brother he wants her to be happy. Thinking that she was happy with Ed, he sacrifices his love for him. When Kiran wants to know why he did not tell her about Ed’s identity, he only says: “I just couldn’t. You were so happy with him; I just could not take that away from you” (CP106-107). As Deepali says, it is Kamlesh’s love for Kiran which makes him blind to the hypocrisy of Ed. Deepali, Sharad, Ranjeet and
Bunny—all request Kiran to forgive Kamlesh as both of them need each other in a quandary situation. They ask her to hate Ed and not Kamlesh. Bunny, too, consoles her saying: “Yes. It is him [Ed] you should hate. At least it is not too late for you, Kiran. But for my wife…I do hope she will forgive me when I tell her . . .” (CP 107).

Ed’s approach towards women seems to be that of heterosexual man who expects his would be wife to ignore the vices of her man. But when Ed blames her for behaving like a typical woman, she retorts him: “That’s why you want to marry me. And that’s what I tried to be all the time. …Typical, you said. You are right. If there (are) any stereotypes around here, they are you and me. Because we don’t know any better, do we? We just don’t know what else to be!” (CP 107)

Like her first husband, Ed takes Kiran granted and never thinks about her sexual desire. He, too, wants to use her as a means to fulfil his sexual need, neglecting hers.

Having been exposed completely, Ed reminds Kamlesh the night they first met, and tries to commit suicide. But Kamlesh and his friends prevent him from doing so. The play ends thwarting Prakash’s intention to marry Kiran to continue his homosexual relations with Kamlesh. Thus, the play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, as M.K. Naik has said, “presents a group of well-to-do homosexuals in Bombay, their changing mutual relationships, their revelations, their self-delusions and self-discoveries” (Cinderella 51). In order to avoid such kind of marriages between homosexual men and heterosexual women Dattani seems to appeal the heteronormative society to allow same-sex marriages.

Thus, Mahesh Dattani chronicles homosexuals’ struggle for identity, social space and human rights. His plays question “the social norms that advocate the
inequality of the sexes” (Miruna George 145) and appeal the heterosexual society to treat homosexuals as human beings, providing them equal status and civil rights.