

# LGBT Community: The Position of the Marginalized People in Mahesh Dattani's Play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*

Vandana Bhartiya

University of Allahabad  
E-mail: snehvini@gmail.com

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**Abstract**—The term LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and Transgender. India is a country where tradition, culture and civilization value the most. In such scenario, homosexuality in India is regarded as a social stigma. Though, on 24 April 2015, the Rajya Sabha has passed the bill of guaranteeing right and reservations in education and jobs, legal aids, pensions and so on. Still, LGBT community is facing discrimination and marginalization in the society. They are struggling to find universal acceptance.

Mahesh Dattani is a dramatist who talks about the marginalized and discriminated condition of the LGBT community in his plays. The voice of LGBT community finds a special place in his plays. His play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is a play which reveals the insignificant position of lesbian, gay and bisexual. It talks about the marginalization and discrimination of these people who often being neglected from family, friends, and relatives, move towards the cities where they can feel comfortable. The play presents eight characters in which seven are homosexual. The play is set in Mumbai, which shows that in Mumbai a large part of gay community exit without noticing anyone. Dattani has presented before us a group of people who have the different notion about being homosexual. Through this play, Dattani puts a very simple question before us that if two men really want to love one another than what is the harm? The present paper discusses the position of homosexuals in the society. It reveals the fact that how they are victimized, marginalized and discriminated in the society.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is a play by Mahesh Dattani, which reveals the alienation, discrimination, homophobia, and marginalization of homosexuals in India. Mahesh Dattani was born in Bangalore on August 7, 1958. He is regarded as the first Indian English playwright to win the *Sahitya Akademi* Award for his play *Final Solutions and other plays* in 1998. His plays deal with the current issues and real-life problems. Homosexuality, gender discrimination, communalism, and child sexual abuse are the remarkable issues of his plays. He focuses on the marginalized, rejected, neglected, the downtrodden and subaltern section of our society like LGBT, HIV positive, transgender, minorities etc. Dattani sees drama

as a tool of social awareness. His plays, as Anju Bala Agrawal in "The Drama of Mahesh Dattani: A study in Technique" points out: "have moral undertones, but he does not take on the stance of the moralist" [2].

*On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is the play which presents eight characters before us, in which seven are homosexuals. John McRae in "A Note on the Play" explores that it is "the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal" [45-46]. The central character of the play is Kamlesh, a rich fashion designer who lives in Mumbai. He has invited all his homosexual friends—Sharad, Ranjit, Bunny, and Deepali for some purpose.

When all his friends arrive at his flat, in their conversation it is revealed that Kamlesh is in love with Prakash/Ed (both are the same person) who is also a gay. Prakash, who is not happy with his homosexuality, has moved on from Kamlesh's life in order to live according to norms of society. When Prakash leaves him, Kamlesh gets the company of Sharad to get over the trauma. Sharad lives with Kamlesh in his flat until he comes to know that Kamlesh does not love him. Kamlesh was only using him to get over his memory of Prakash. When he discovers the truth, he leaves Kamlesh. Kamlesh is all alone with his pain, therefore, he invites his friends to help him in forgetting his former love Prakash. He makes them promise that they will never mention his love affair with Prakash to anyone especially to his sister Kiran who is going to marry Ed. The first marriage of Kiran was unsuccessful. Her husband was a very cruel man and was often inflicting her with physical abuse. She has undergone the trauma of divorce. Now, she is about to marry Ed. The relationship of Kamlesh and Prakash, and Kiran and Ed provoke the curiosity of the audience through the first act. Till by the end of the act it discovers that Prakash and Ed are the same person.

Kiran is the only character in the play who respects the feelings and emotions of the gay community. She says: "I really wish they would allow gay people to marry" [CP 98].

Her first marriage fails and she gets divorced. Now she is in love with Ed. After getting to know that Ed and Prakash are the same person and is loved by her brother, she is heartbroken and cries. She feels cheated that her brother has not revealed the truth. She cares a lot for her brother Kamlesh. She is aware of the fact that her brother is suffering because society does not allow or accept the marriage of a gay couple.

The play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* presents seven homosexual characters before us and each character of the play has a different notion about their homosexuality. The play shows the conflict of characters of their homosexuals feeling and desire. It is their fear from the society that they are in conflict. As John McRae comments: "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" [45-46]. They are suffering from the various types of social injustice-marginalization and discriminated, sense of alienation, the homophobia of acceptance or rejection and so much more.

## 2. LGBT COMMUNITY

A person who attracts emotionally and sexually towards the same gender is called homosexual. There is specific term given to homosexual which is LGBT. LGBT stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender. Homosexuality in India is regarded as the social stigma. Though it exists in India since ancient times but it is not accepted in Indian society. Indian society often escapes talking about on such matter and neglect homosexuals. The play reveals that gay community exist in the large part of our society without noticing anyone. Homosexuals are craving for social acceptance and are fighting for a separate identity from a very long time. The condition of homosexuals is very pathetic because their voices are unheard not only by the society but also by their family.

The marginalization of homosexuals Starts from their family. They often fear to share their homosexual feelings in their families because they suffer from the sense of acceptance or rejection. If they tell the truth, their families often reject them or do not give importance to their homosexual identity or often force them to live their lives like heterosexuals. Due to lack of support of the family members, homosexuals often lead their lives in conflict. Therefore they leave their home and face the problem homelessness.

Most of the people do not give shelter to homosexuals because they consider homosexuals as an abnormal creature. Abuse and harassment start in homosexuals' life the moment they try to live in the society. LGBT community faces a lot of difficulties to grow up in society. They suffer socio-economic and cultural injustice. They are facing violence, discrimination, marginalization, and sexual harassment in all sphere of life. Because of discrimination they are unable to access social protection such as education, health, employment, care, housing and pension. Because of this

discrimination, they are regarded as vulnerable groups who are at the risk of socially exclusion. They struggle to find universal acceptance.

They feel lack of legal protection against discrimination. They are discriminated everywhere in school, market, hospital, and bank. Everywhere they go, they are mistreated and disowned because of their gender orientation. Sometime they face physical attack such as torture and sexual assault. They face marginalization, discrimination, harassment, violence, psychological distress at every level of their lives due to lack of the support of family, friends, and society.

### 2.1 Marginalization and Discrimination

The homosexual characters in the play face marginalization and discrimination by the society. The play is set in a metropolitan city of Mumbai which shows that in Mumbai a large gay community exists but no one notices them. All the characters gathered in Kamlesh's flat which shows that they are forced to celebrate their homosexual identity in a dark cell and escape to face the society. The gathering of homosexual characters at the cool atmosphere of Kamlesh's flat symbolizes the demand of gay community from society to give them acceptance, ease, comfort, in their heterosexual society so that they can enjoy freely. They create their own world in which they are frank and uninhabited.

### 2.2 Sense of Guilt

Kamlesh and Prakash are the characters in the play who are gay and love each other a lot. Both have the different notion of their homosexuality. Kamlesh is depressed of being a homosexual while Prakash feels ashamed. Kamlesh cries: "I wished I wasn't gay. . ." [CP 69]. Kamlesh and Prakash both were in the relationship but due to the fear of society Prakash thinks of committing suicide. Prakash begins to doubt at his own identity. It is Kamlesh who consoles him. Prakash wants to be accepted by the society and knows that it will only happen when he lives like heterosexual people. Therefore, he leaves Kamlesh to live according to the accepted norms of society. Later, Prakash tries to compromise with Kamlesh under the camouflage of institutional matrimonial relationship. Under the disguise of heterosexuality, he hopes to fulfil his homosexual desires.

### 2.3 Force to leave with Double Identity

Homosexuals are forced to live with the double identity to satisfy the society. Bunny is the character in the play who is a bisexual and assumes double identity in order to fit himself in the society. Dattani observes in one of his interviews that for the Indian male, fear of losing his identity could be the prime reason for clinging onto regressive role-playing. Bunny uses marriage as a camouflage and justifies it:

**Bunny:** Camouflage! Even animals do it. Blend with surroundings. They can't find you. You politically correct gays deny yourself the basic animal instinct of camouflage. [CP 70]

Bunny does not want to be denied in society and knows very well that society will never accept him: "Do you think I will be accepted by the millions if I screamed from the rooftops that I am gay" [CP 69]. He is in the fear of being rejected that is why he gets married. He is a TV actor and acts in a serial "*Yeh Hai Hamara Parivar*." He is chosen in the serial because he is "fit into common perceptions of what a family man ought to look like" [CP 69]. He is satisfied with the thought that his wife boast about his work and children are popular and they all love him. He is happy only to show the external world. In the inner of his heart, he is isolated and believes that he exists in neither. When Kiran meets him and asks him if he is also a gay, he says "I am not . . . like them, they are such intelligent people and good company. I am very liberal minded" [CP 76]. For the whole society, he becomes what Kiran calls "the ideal husband and father" [CP 76]. He confesses in front of everyone that he leads a double life.

## 2.4 Sense of Alienation

Each character of the play suffers from the sense of alienation. After being neglected by the society, they put themselves in a dark cell where they can hide. It arouses the sense of isolation and alienation in their life. Kamlesh, Prakash, Sharad, Bunny, Ranjit, and Deepali feel alienated because they know that this is the society where heterosexuality is celebrated while homosexuality is regarded as the social stigma. They feel isolation, frustration, and alienation. Both being homosexual, Kamlesh and Deepali share their feelings with each other.

**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]

Their conversation reflects the constant fear in the mind of the homosexuals about their general social acceptance or rejection. They always try to cover their identity under false impressions. In the matter of gay literature, Asha Kuthari Chaudhari explores that it "seems to have been beleaguered by unhappy endings. Homosexuals invariably move towards death, isolation, or a sham. . . [50-51].

## 2.5 Moves to Other Country

Homosexuals often being neglected by the society moves to another country where they homosexuality is accepted. Ranjit, another character in the play, represents that community of gays who move to another country where they can be easily accepted and lived their lives freely. He says: "I am sometimes regretful of being an Indian gay. But you are simply ashamed. All the sham is to cover up your shame" [CP 70]. He knows the truth that how difficult it is to survive in India with the homosexual identity. In few foreign countries, homosexuality is easily accepted. There is no stigma attached to being in the same-sex relationship. Therefore, he shifts to Europe where he can live freely.

## 2.6 Psychological Distress

Indian society only approves two opposite sex to live together. Homosexuality is regarded as a disease in India. Kamlesh is depressed of being gay and starts to visit a "straight homophobic psychiatrists" [CP 69] to get rid of this problem. Prakash leaves Kamlesh with the notion that he would never be happy as a gay man. Kamlesh tells his friends what the Psychiatrist had suggested to him: "It is impossible to change the society, he said, but it may be possible for you to reorient" [CP 69]

## 2.7 Attempt Suicide

Homosexuals often commit suicide due to depression and frustration. In the play, Prakash attempts to commit suicide in a state of depression. He suffers from an acute identity crisis. His frustration can be seen when he says: "Where do I begin? How do I begin to live? . . . Will You help me? What makes a man a man?" [CP 111]. He is afraid of facing the society. He is totally heartbroken when he came to know that society has seen his real face. The conflict begins in his mind when he says "Where do I begin? How do I begin to live? . . ." [CP 111]. In such a state of depression, he tries to end his life.

## 2.8 Homophobia of Acceptance or Rejection

Homosexuals suffer from the sense of acceptance or rejection. They live in constant fear that how their families and society will react. In the play, the homosexual characters try to hide their identity. They know the reality that the society will never accept homosexuality. Each character suffers from the indentity crisis. The marriage which is taking place outside Kamlesh's flat, remind them again and again that this is the society where only heterosexuality is celebrated. As Ed says: "Look around you. Look outside.... Look at that wedding crowd! There are real men and women out there! You have to see them to know what I mean. But you don't want to look at the world outside this... this den of yours. All of you want to live in your own little bubble" [CP 99].

## 3. CONCLUSION

Thus, each character discovers his/her identity and dilemma about what they have achieved or not by the end of the play. Kamlesh is depressed of being homosexual. Prakash feels ashamed while Bunny, who is bisexual, leads a double life and believes that he does not exist in either. Ranjit escapes to another country where his sexual identity does not matter and he can live a peaceful life with his partner. Sharad calls him "coconut" and comments "you brown on the outside and white on the inside" [CP 71]. There are only two characters who do not feel regret of being homosexual- Sharad and Deepali. At the end of the play, Sharad words reveal the feeling of each character: "I ask myself what I have got/And what I am and what I'm not" [CP 111]. The marriage taking place near Kamlesh's flat reveals the true face of Indian society where heterosexuality is celebrated. People enjoy freely. Like Ed

says: “Look around you. Look outside. . . . Look at that wedding crowd! There are real men and women out there! [CP 99]. The flat of Kamlesh reveals the community of gay who have retreated here after being neglected by the society. This is a place where they can reveal their identity and celebrate life. Amar Nath Jha in “The Plays of Mahesh Dattani: A Fine Fusion of Feeling and Form” compares heterosexual characters to Shakespeare’s tragic heroes who “arouses a sense of pity and catharsis in the hearts of the readers or audience” [163]. In the same way, Dattani’s homosexual characters “talk to their pious soul and realize their blunders” [Jha 69].

Dattani has presented before us a group of homosexuals who have the different notion of being gay. John McRae comments: “Of the characters, Sharad and Deepali are comfortable with their sexuality, and they have different habits of being gay” [45]. Through this play, Dattani wants to ask a very simple question to the audience that “If two men want to love one another, what’s the harm” [CP 91]. The play is about “how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectation society creates” [McRae 45-46]. They often want to live with the community in which they can feel comfortable and everyone accepts them. Often being neglected from family, friends, relatives, or classmates, they move towards the cities where they can find large gay community. The play shows that homosexuals too want to live a normal life like others. They also want a social acceptance.

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