

NEGOTIATING THE QUEER:  
THE PLAYS OF MAHESH DATTANI

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### **Abbreviations**

*CP*: Dattani, Mahesh. *Collected Plays*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000. Print.

*NQ*: Dattani, Mahesh. "Night Queen." *Yaarana: Gay Writing from India*. Ed. Hoshang

Merchant. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1999. 57-71. Print.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction (Literature Survey)

The Queer “mark[s] a flexible space for the expression of all aspects of non- (anti-, contra-) straight cultural production and reception ... [and] describe[s] a wide range of impulses and cultural expressions, including space for describing and expressing bisexual, transsexual, and straight queerness” (Doty 2). Queer “may be used to describe an open-ended constituency, whose shared characteristic is not identity itself but an anti-normative positioning with regard to sexuality” (Jagose 98). Or, as Hanson puts it, the term “Queer” demarcates a “domain virtually synonymous with homosexuality and yet wonderfully suggestive of a whole range of sexual possibilities ... that challenge the familiar distinction between normal and pathological, straight and gay, masculine men and feminine women” (138). In Mahesh Dattani, the Queer is integrally linked with his presentation of the invisibilised sexualities, his attempt to making the invisible visible, voicing the devoiced. The Indian society at large loves to avoid talking about things which do not conform with the hegemony enjoyed by the straight or heteronormative sexualities. There has always been a politics in society behind this closeting of something, especially if the thing is tabooed or one deviating from norms. This politics renders any sexual deviance invisible by merely denying its existence with a projection of the discourse of heterosexual and normal behaviour or heteronormativity. This politics is also interlinked with the formation of the identity called “Indian”. The identity of the Indian society, as is traditionally defined by Hinduism, is that of peace, harmony, tolerance and inclusion, “Unity in diversity,” as it is presumed to give shelter to multifarious deviances of sexuality even in spite of a monolithic heteronormativity. But this picture of Indianness is a politically convenient construction which suits the

needs of a particular political ideology at a particular juncture in history. As such, the issues which can subvert the very essence of “Indianness” are tactfully hidden in the closet to construct a harmonious social picture. The contemporary India keeps issues of deviant sexualities like those of the gays, lesbians and hijras deftly closeted in its cupboard, denying them any existence.

In general, the politics of closeting the Queer sexualities has its origin in economics, since the Queer sexualities have nothing to do with reproduction and propagation of the human species. These sexualities do not lead to creation as such, since they are presumed to be meant for mere recreation. Therefore any sexual deviance is crushed or silenced or made invisible under the veneer of the fruitfulness and harmony of heterosexual behaviour. The Indian society at large has seen homosexuality as a Western behaviour and posed as a self-sufficient milieu immune to such Western influences. Writers have been compulsorily part of this politics of invisibilization by positing a “straight” and harmonious world. Hoshang Merchant observes how even writers “do not wish to be identified as gay in a gay anthology” (xvii). Taking cue from Anupama Mohan, it may be said that any form of deviant or alternate sexuality “threatens veritably to cut off the roots of the patriarchal tree” by setting up an alternative which can “seriously undermine, and even inhibit, the growth and proliferation of the patriarchal species” (123). Therefore the only way the patriarchal society can curb any such exercise of self-autonomy is to render all such deviant desires invisible.

This politics of closeting the Queer is made visible in the dramatic writings of Mahesh Dattani, one of the leading contemporary Indian English dramatists and the foremost among modern Indian dramatists to treat a so called tabooed issue with veracity and sensibility. He iconoclastically he subverts the traditional image of India

as a heteronormative society by exposing the skeleton in the cupboard. In his interview with Erin B. Mee Dattani elaborates on how the Indian society is built on “right” (25) values. Dattani’s words focus on two aspects of this process of closeting the Queer: the building of what is called “India”, and the invisibilization of the so called tabooed issues of Queer sexualities by keeping them in the closet and building a veneer of normality and right values. In the interview, Dattani explains that that the “right” values are “*not* anything that is confrontational” (25):

... you cannot talk about gay issues because that’s not Indian, it doesn’t happen here. You can’t talk about a middle-class housewife fantasizing about having sex with the cook or actually having a sex life, that isn’t Indian either—that’s confrontational even if it is Indian.  
(25)

Dattani emphasizes that it is a forced harmony in which the Indian society lives and in which the deviant elements are consciously closeted to give a normative façade.

Dattani complains in his interview how most of the audiences reacted to his presentation of the invisible and closeted homosexuality as “very embarrassing to talk about” (20) in a family and how letters from his audiences deliberately avoided mentioning the word “homosexuality” and how even people who have reviewed his plays for sponsoring in England reacted with this summary rejection, “we don’t feel it’s Indian enough” (24).

But not only Dattani’s audience, some of his critics or reviewers, too, see Dattani’s exposure of the Queer issues as “Western”, as Laxmi Chandrasekhar puts it (qtd. in Bari and Khalilullah 56), “Sensational”, as Sangeeta Das puts it (*Sensational* 111), “Contemporary” as Rozario Ignasius thinks it (104) and “Scintillating” as

Sangeeta Das puts it again (*Identity* 52). Rachel Bari and M. Ibrahim Khalilullah support Dattani:

Now the question would be, do these in any way figure in the country's past; in other words, are they in any way a part of our culture?

Relationships and Gender ... yes, but homosexuality ah, ah, ahem ...

Ask Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai and we get a different answer, yet as Indians we are not very comfortable with tackling these issues.

When sexuality itself is under wraps, discussing contentious issues like lesbianism and homosexuality would certainly merit us queer glances!

We know what *FIRE* went through though there is not much talk about *My Brother Nikhil* (a movie on homosexuality and AIDS). Surprisingly

Indians are yet to look these problems openly, discuss it as part of its culture, something that has never been strange to the Indian psyche or panorama. This is a part of all of us and are we acknowledging it? (57-

58)

Certainly, a part of the audience would see the issues as sensational whereas mostly others would find them as tabooed and not fit to watch along with children. Even the academics' finding the issues to be "Scintillating", "Contemporary", "Western" and "Sensational" involves one kind of denying the truth. The Indian academicians could not welcome Queer Studies or studies on sexuality with that much warmth with which they had welcomed Marxism, Feminism or Deconstruction. But the issue of alternate sexuality is not at all contemporary: the Queer sexualities existed and do exist.

Neither of them is Western, since they have been part of the Indian culture since ages. These viewpoints of the academicians are part of the discriminating tactics undertaken by the Indian society at large in which gays, lesbians and hijras are victims of

negative myths which are accepted as truths. These include the myth that the homosexuals are sick, evil, or both and that it is therefore in their nature to be insatiable sexual predators, to molest children and to corrupt youth.

The Queer sexualities had not been invisible if one looks back to the Indian past as represented by numerous texts. The historical narratives on India have largely been the narratives of exclusion, with most of the issues on Queer sexualities and same-sex relationships treated with a heterosexual reading. It is a well-established myth that the Queer sexualities are foreign imports: they travelled into India with the Muslim invaders, the European conquerors and the American capitalists. But Devdutt Pattanaik speaks of the “omnierotic and pangendered nature of life and divinity” (*The Man Who* 6) in India’s ancient and pre-colonial past. In the pre-nineteenth century India, love between men or that between women was not a punishable offence, and was rather encouraged, celebrated romantically and accepted as something encouraging creative impulses. This love was not always sexual, and most of the times, was purely romantic and spiritual. Thus, literary and non-literary texts in several languages like Sanskrit, Pali, vernacular languages, Urdu and Persian, from the ancient Vedic ages through the medieval ages and the Muslim rule before the British colonial era, reveal an Indian society which liberally accepted the people of Queer sexualities including the now-marginalized hijras, and celebrated same-sex love and also cross-dressing. The *Rig Veda* celebrated same-sex pairs rather than heterosexual couples. It tells of a “queer” myth of Creation resulting from the union of twin feminine deities (*Vanita Ancient* 19-20). The friendship between Krishna and Arjuna often has homoerotic suggestions in *The Mahabharata*. Krishna’s *leela* with many women are less celebrated in the epic and the *Puranas* than his friendship with Arjuna. In Dattani’s plays, same-sex lovers live in harmony with a heterocentric

society by making a negotiation or a conscious compromise, whereas in ancient times such a love as theirs was visibly celebrated. Ana García-Arroyo's book on the celebration of alternate sexualities in the Indian past says:

... it is a fact that in many societies and cultures, same-sex attachments have enjoyed equal priorities as marriage and procreation.

Furthermore, the latter can perfectly coexist with the former, which implies that a wife or a husband can also have a "friend" of their own sex who represents his/her primary, faithful, emotional bond and support. In India, this attitude still prevails in many parts today. These present and past relationships may not necessarily be tinged with sexual explicitness, however, the metaphoric force of language and the poetic tone function as distinctive features to convey love. (17)

Thus, in the *Gita* Krishna can declare that he and Arjuna are not two but one.

According to Vanita, "The metaphor of chariot rider and driver as inseparably paired ... is made literal in the image of Krishna driving Arjuna's chariot. Ultimate and temporal reality are figured in this same-gender pair" (*Ancient* 9).

In her Queer reading of the friendship-stories in *Panchatantra*, a compilation of stories in Sankrit built on friendship, Ruth Vanita notes a queer suggestiveness. These friendships are not between men and men, or men and women, or women and women; they are between animals of different species, so that the flesh-eater befriends a grass-eater. The animals allegorize human beings. The oddness of this friendship also allegorizes the "oddness" connected with same-sex human relationships. Vanita says,

The oddness of life-defining friendship between creatures of different species could stand in for the oddness of life-defining friendship

between persons of the same sex. Both appear unconventional, even ‘unnatural,’ in that they appear to defy biology, social custom, and inherent traits. (*Panchatantra* 48)

Even in the Buddhist *Jataka* tales, homoerotic feelings were sometimes eulogized, as was the case with Buddha’s relationship with his devotee Ananda. Together, Buddha and Ananda were compared to two deer always in a happy caressing.

An ancient text like Vatsayan’s *Kamasutra*, in addition to giving treatises on heterosexual relationship, also deals with man-man and woman-woman sexual relationship. Separating erotic pleasure from the bondages of procreation, it advocates a non-procreative consensual carnal pleasure instead of sex for procreation only. In *Kamasutra*, Desire (*kama*) is the road to *moksha* or salvation. Hence, it is not surprising that the book is not built on a hetero-homo binary, though its heterosexist reading by the western scholars deftly made it a heteronormative treatise on desire. The *Kamasutra* “can be viewed as an account of a ‘psychological war’ of independence that took place in India some two thousand years ago. The first aim of this struggle, the rescue of erotic pleasure from the crude purposefulness of sexual desire, from its biological function of reproduction alone, has been shared by many societies at different periods of history. Today, the social forces and the moral orders that would keep sexuality tied to reproduction and fertility are no longer of such fateful import, at least not in what is known as the ‘modern West’ (and it enslaves in the more traditional societies around the world), although this was not the case even a hundred years ago” (Kakar 72). Kakar thus blames the West for giving this eclectic sexual treatise a heteronormative turn. In a word, the ancient India, in matters of sexual choice and gender roles, was open to possibilities. In fact, the *Kamasutra*, if read in its original essence, de-constructs many myths regarding sexual practices and

alternate sexualities which are generally believed to have been introduced much later in the pre-colonial era of India and the colonial era. It is a myth that eunuchs and same-sex relationship for the first time arrived with the Islam. But actually in the periods before that, mentions are found in the *Kamasutra* of men and boy prostitutes serving upon rich masters in courts.

The Indian literature of the past is also replete with transgendered, transsexual and cross-dressed characters. When in *The Mahabharata*, Arjuna's son Aravan was to be sacrificed to ensure victory for the Pandavas in the battle of Kurukshetra against the Kauravas, he expressed his last wish to be married to a woman; Vishnu assumed the shape of Mohini and married Aravan, with the marriage lasting for one night. Such cross-dressing acts, transgendered gods and miraculous births show an openness to different sexual possibilities in ancient India. Transgendered characters are also found in *The Ramayana*. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire* Dattani uses *The Ramayana* to delve into the origin of hijras:

A brief note on the popular myths on the origin of the hijras will be in order, before looking at the class-gender-based power implications. ... Another legend traces their ancestry to the Ramayana. The legend has it that god Rama was going to cross the river and go into exile in the forest. All the people of the city wanted to follow him. He said, "Men and women, turn back." Some of his male followers did not know what to do. They could not disobey him. So they sacrificed their masculinity, to become neither men nor women, and followed him to the forest. Rama was pleased with their devotion and blessed them.

(CP 10)

Devdutt Pattanaik, in his *The Pregnant King*, recounts the story of King Yuvanashva of *The Mahabharata*, in which Yuvanashva, a childless king, accidentally drinks a magic potion meant to make his queen pregnant, and himself turns a woman, and gives birth to a son. Sikhandini, who changes into a man Sikhandin, is the most exemplary. The *Kamasutra* mentions two types of *tritiya prakriti* or “third nature”: those who adopt feminine dress codes and feminine behaviour and those who appeared manly by growing moustache and beards. The Sutra 6 of the *Kamasutra* says that those who take the form of men hide the fact that they desire men and earn their living as hairdressers and masseurs.

The Urdu and Persian literature of the medieval India, too, deal with same-sex love. These literatures, which flourished after the invasion of Islam, principally deal with erotic and romantic relationships between men of different classes and creeds. As Hodgson writes,

Despite strong Sharia disapproval, the sexual relations of a mature man with a subordinate youth were so readily accepted in upper-class circles that there was often little or no effort to conceal their existence. Sometimes it seems to have been socially more acceptable to speak of a man’s attachment to a youth than to speak of his women, who were supposed to be invisible in the inner courts. The fashion entered into poetry, especially in the Persian. ... the person to whom lyric love verse is addressed by male poets was conventionally, and almost without exception, made explicitly male. (146)

Muslim mystic poets like Madho Lal Hussayn, Ras Khan and Sarmad loved and celebrated boys. The Quran and the Sharia held homosexuality as a crime and advocated severe punishment for the offenders. But homosexually inclined men were

visible in every rung of society. There appeared a large body of mystical poetry in Arabic and Persian, dealing with men-men love. Even the ruler's relationship with his male lover was considered part of politics. In Barani's *Qabus Namah*, a man's falling in love with another is held to be practical and natural, but it is also advised here that men should be politically discrete in choosing a mate and displaying of passion, lest it should be politically disastrous.

Same-sex love was discouraged on economical and moral grounds during the reign of Akbar. But with the enlightenment provided by the advent of Sufism in the medieval India, same-sex love received a fresh impetus. The Sufis often described the relationship between the Divine and human in homoerotic metaphors. To them it was a transcendental love. The Urdu poet Wali "Dakkani" (1668-1744) celebrated a male lover in his poems. The writers of *ghazals*, during the early years of the genre's coming to India, did not confine love poetry to a mere heterosexual affair, but opened it up to include male-male love. Often the *ghazals* involved a male poet assuming a female voice worshipping a male lover. Two Urdu poets, Mir Taqi Mir and Abru, very frankly described the passions and pangs of homoerotic love. Their poetry was an eulogisation of young and beautiful men just as the conventional love poetry eulogized the beauty of the female beloved. The classical Urdu *ghazal* or *rekhta*, entailed a voice which is masculine addressing a female beloved, and the feminine version of *rekhta*, i.e., *rekhti*, was a kind of Urdu poetry written by male poets assuming a female voice and depicting a female lover. In other words, *rekhti* was a Queer version of *rekhta*, as it explicitly dealt with a woman's passionately physical and spiritual attachment with another woman. *Rekhti* poetry explicitly used terms such as *dogana* and *zanakhi* to refer to female lover and *chapti* to refer to lesbian physical activity (García-Arroyo 45).

However, the West is generally blamed for importing homosexuality into India, whereas it was actually homophobia which the West imported to India. At that point in history when India opened its literature up to include male-male love and was celebrating same-sex love in Sufi poetry, homosexually inclined men and women were being burnt to death, pilloried, ostracized and pelted with rubbish in many parts of Europe. Simultaneously with the British Antisodomy Law of 1860, a similar law was passed as the Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, making same-sex sexual love a crime. The law said that whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall be liable to fine. Gradually, the medieval Indian romanticism attached with same-sex love gradually began to be closeted under a West-imposed law. In literature, the *ghazal* underwent a sort of cleansing and became a heterosexual affair. *Rekhti* poetry was abolished as obscene. Homophobia gradually began to possess the Indian society. The West began to hold the permissive Indian society as licentious, and thus the Indian society was programmed to view its medieval and ancient past as degenerating and began to accept the British, or, to be precise, Victorian morality. The Victorian morality began to be strictly followed as a model to form an ideal Indian society built on heterosexual patriarchy. Every kind of polygamous and deviant sexual relationship other than a heterosexual marriage came to be denounced. In addition to the heteronormative ideology prescribed by the British colonialism, the rise of nationalism and the zeal to build the nation called India on the basis of patriarchal Hindu codes took the toll on the long tradition of homoerotic literary and social culture. Alternate sexualities and same-sex desire were excluded from the scene where building the nation was concerned. Thus, Giti Thadani writes:

The nineteenth century colonial and nationalist discourses both provided for a construction of “Hindu” identity on the basis of a glorious “Aryan heritage” which privileged the patriarchal Vedic, brahminic and *kshatriya* traditions. Women were made into the regulatory site of tradition and the management of their sexuality was essential to both ideologies. The choice of the Aryan concept provided the “Hindu” civilization with racial superiority and a return to a “heroic warrior manhood.” It also provided for a form of cultural nationalism that affirmed the masculine identity of the “Hindu man.”

(68)

Even today, a same-sex asexual relationship is encouraged to the extent that it never becomes a consuming sexual passion destroying marriage and family. As a result, homosexually inclined men and women put on the mask of heterosexuality and lead a double life. The Indian academicians, who have embraced other Western theories, maintained a studied silence over the issue of homosexuality in India and kept a distance from it as not suitable in the Indian context until recently. Indian politics, too, have maintained a distance from the issue. The Indian Press only obliquely reported the homosexuality of Westerners like Martina Navratilova. Although stray incidents of gay or lesbian marriages did come to the news, those were referred to as imitation of the West. People posing as counsellors in newspapers and magazines asked homoerotically inclined people to seek psychiatric counselling and mix with people of opposite sex. As an adverse result of the movement for the amendment of Section 377 and the consequent “coming out” of the gay and lesbian population through gay and lesbian carnivals, hatred about the gay and lesbians have increased and incidents of gay-bashing, too, have increased in number.

Here comes Dattani's *avant garde* endeavour of giving the Queer a voice in his plays. If, according to M. K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan, Indian English drama was the "sad Cinderella of Indian English literature ... waiting for her prince," (201) it was Dattani who liberated her from the conventional depiction of the mythological and the historical to include closeted issues like same-sex love, the hijras and child sexual abuse.

For an Indian dramatist writing in English about marginal issues is in itself a marginal affair, as Indian English is virtually off-centre in the theatre milieu of India in which regional languages hold the centre. However, for Dattani, Indian English is his medium because it is the medium which helps him bring together characters from several parts of the nation to urban centres which form the setting of his plays. Arpa Ghosh writes,

In all these plays the use of English, cutting across community and family barriers, with its underlying associations of a liberal, globalized culture, elicits subversive disclosures about the hypocrisy and double standards of the Indian family. (189)

Dattani uses theatrical devices like the split-level stage, flashback, cinematic narratives, symbols, music and dialogues which are witty to the core and suggestive and connotative to the utmost, and in this way undertakes the task of making things visible. Michael Walling puts it in his introduction to Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen* : "His plays fuse the physical and spatial awareness of the Indian theatre with the textual vigour of western models like Ibsen and Tennessee Williams" (CP 229). In the manner of Tennessee Williams, Dattani uses *mise en scène* or the same stage setting divided into multiple levels, so that actions and dialogues from different levels

and from different locations, physical as well as psychological, from past as well as present, can overlap in a single time frame.

There is a dearth of criticism on Dattani as regards his negotiations with the Queer in his plays. This is due to the very heteronormatively charged judgements of the critics themselves. There has been an attempt to brush away his plays as plays dealing with “tabooed,” “sensational” and “vulgar” issues. Further, most of these critiques are in the form of articles. Except in some numbered cases, very few of these writings on Dattani undertake to analyze and evaluate the heteronormative discourse formation and the process of negotiation with this discourse undertaken by the marginalized people belonging to Queer alternate sexualities. Jagdish Batra in his essay holds the female protagonist of *Dance Like a Man* as built on a Shavian model in her struggle for existence in the competitive world of art with her practical brain. But Batra fails to expose Dattani’s Shavian act of exposing the social construct of gender performances. Dance, in this play, is a gendered performance, and is to be performed by women, whereas men should act as men. Batra calls Jairaj’s dance performance in women’s clothes a “farcical” (223) one, thus completely ignoring Jairaj’s acknowledgement of his feminine self and his becoming a star dancer in the performance. In other words, Batra’s terming the cross-dressed Jairaj’s dance as farcical places the critic at par with the patriarchal and heterosexist Amritlal in the same play who is on a mission to “cure” the androgynous Jairaj’s subversive bodily act of dancing like a woman and to make a man of him.

The heteronormatively programmed critics judge *Do the Needful* (a play dealing with a gay’s negotiation with the marriage-oriented heteronormative milieu) as a family play, *Dance Like a Man* (a play on an androgyne’s fight for keeping his masculine and feminine selves closely united in himself) as a play on dance and

music, and *Tara* (again a play about the self, about the man and the woman in the self) as a play on disease and the disabled (Das 163). Bijay Kumar Das, critiquing Dattani's plays from a traditional humanistic approach, shows how the plays "dive deep into human heart and create characters true to life-situations" (9). Putting emphasis on Dattani's power of words, his stagecraft and his place in the Indian theatre, Das has shied clear of Dattani's exposition of the trials and tribulations of the non-straight characters in the heteropatriarchal world. Further, when the critic, in his interview with the playwright, asks the latter whether homosexuality is "natural or abnormal" (178), it exposes the natural/unnatural divide regarding sexualities in the critic's psyche itself. Dattani in his interview with Lakshmi Subramanyam reminds the reader that *Tara* is a "play about the male self and the female self. The male being preferred. ... The play is about the separation of the self and the resultant angst" (129). Contrary to Dattani's view, Subhas Chandra reads *Tara* "through the issue of simple man-woman relationship ... or ... in terms of the disabled children's struggle against a variety of odds, which have been put in their way by nature, or chance, or accident of their birth" (60). The same kind of reading of the plays from a heterosexist ideology is seen when Amar Nath Prasad claims that Dattani's plays deal with "homosexual vulgarity among the youths in a materialistic world" (161). With a bleak straightforwardness, he compares Dattani's plays with the Restoration Comedies of Manners in which the ethos and practices, mostly vulgar, of the British upper class of the period were shown, and claims how the "enigma of the photograph containing vulgar portrait draws the readers into the vortex of suspense" (161) in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. To him, the gays' secret coterie in the play is a place of "wild and savage entertainment" (163), just as the Victorian moralists termed the Molly Houses as places of vulgar entertainments. To Arpo Ghosh, the hypocrisy and

hollowness of the Indian joint family system, “where money-power and brute-power go hand in hand, is depicted in [Dattani’s] plays as a stagnant slough of despond with no possibility of change for the better” (201). Ghosh, however, touches on the issues of homosexuality, but does not venture into a detailed analysis of Dattani’s dialogues and stagecraft. Ghosh also sees Dattani as “an artist who calls for a healthier synchronization of global and Indian values, rather than one who strikes the high moral note” (190). L. Saraswathi delves into, though not at length, the gender construct, gender performances and compulsory heterosexuality touched upon by Dattani when she opines, “Pretence has become a way of life and keeping up face is an essential survival strategy. Dattani, in his plays, forces us to confront [invisible] issues. He tries to shake us out of our complacency...” (2). She glosses over both *Tara* and *Dance Like a Man* on the basis of the concept of “Ardhanarisvar,” and shows how in the latter play the dissociation of the male and female from within the androgyne leads to Jairaj’s “professional death” (5). More recently, Beena Agarwal in her commentary on the plays of Dattani does bring out the playwright’s preoccupation with the gendered subalterns and alternate sexuality. But her study of the plays is more thematic than analytical: she excludes from her study the playwright’s handling of dialogues, which are often witty, provocative and grim, and his use of stagecraft. The chapter, “Taboo Relationship and Alternate Sexuality: *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* and *Do the Needful*” (in her book *Mahesh Dattani’s Plays: A New Horizon in Indian Theater*) deals with the theme of taboo relationships and homosexuality. Agarwal discusses this theme rather from socio-psychological point of view. She investigates “how the human aspirations are insignificant in contrast of social faiths” (46) and “the fact that the invisible clutches of social forces can never permit an individual to carve his own designs beyond the patterns recommended and

accepted by society” (46). The chapter provides insights into different dimensions of thought—biological, social, moral and psychological—that the concept of homosexuality involves, but it does not proceed to analyze how heterosexuality is established as the norm. It seems that the critic has ignored Dattani’s deep and abiding concern in understanding and dramatizing the reality of alternate sexualities amidst all conflicts with heteronormativity. In “The Voice of Subalterns in *Seven Steps Around the Fire*,” Agrawal discusses how “Dattani ventures to explore the misery of other marginalized sections of society struggling against the irresistible forces of social apathy” (36). She probes deep into the suffering of eunuchs like Anarkali and Kamala from the perspective of their subalternity in heterosexual society. Her assertions suggest that “Dattani has the potential to extract the innermost recesses of human psyche that compels an individual to make perpetual struggle against the forces that makes oddities of life difficult to bear” (44). But this study does not go deep into how society in general has created patterns of behaviours and how the hijras have been relegated to such a marginalized status unlike they were in the past. Again, Agrawal sees *Tara* as a play on gender-bias. Her’s is an investigation into the cause-and-effect pattern in the relationship between Tara and Chandan. In this context, she emphasizes the “realization of the identity of distinctive selves working in union in the comprehensive scheme of things” (91). It would have been better to analyze this aspect from the point of view of androgyny, which Dattani distinctly emphasizes when he says that the play is about the man and woman in the same self. Similarly, Santwana Halder in “Gender Discrimination in Mahesh Dattani’s *Tara*: A Study of Prejudice in Patriarchal Society” brings out attitudes of discrimination against the girl child in a male-dominated society. She focuses particularly on the anguish of Tara caused not only by the social prejudices that have rendered her handicapped.

According to her, “Tara is not to be treated as a girl who is physically handicapped by the very fact that she has been born with the gender she has” (107). She appears to be very much right when she highlights potentials, energies and intelligence of Tara greater than those of her brother, Chandan. But, Chandan’s predicament, his sensitivity, honest introspection and rebellion against the established patriarchal code do not get the appreciation they deserve from the critic. Nor does the critic delve into Chandan’s “forgetting” of his feminine self and his androgynous status, and how he consequently fails as an artist.

In her dissertation submitted for award of Doctor of Philosophy in English to the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Lakshmi Devi Menon raises the issue of how the female characters in Dattani’s plays subvert the patriarchal codes in family. Discussing Dattani’s *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Santosh Kumar Sonker says that the play “delves deep into multidimensional Indian tradition to unravel the ‘hidden India’ throwing light on the pathetic life of the discriminated and marginalized eunuchs who have to bear the tyranny of social stigma and to struggle against the indomitable forces of social apathy if they dare to cross their marginal limit in order to share the basic human instinct” (89). Sonker does make a powerful hint at the centre/margin dichotomy in the play, but he does not probe into the creation of the discourse of power/knowledge with a view to creating the good/bad, normal/abnormal, beneficial/odious binaries, thereby subjugating the alternate sexualities like the hijras.

Pranav Joshipura’s book *A Critical Study of Mahesh Dattani’s Plays* is one of the very few full-length studies done on Dattani’s works so far. Almost all the important plays of Dattani come up for analysis in his attempt at giving an overall view of their general as well as unique features. According to him, Dattani’s plays:

... principally deal with humanism in general and injustice to marginalized section of society such as homosexuals, hijras and women, in particular. In all of them, he provokes our thinking, compels us to think afresh about the problems... and to change our conventional attitudes and assumptions about what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil. (1)

Joshiyura thinks that Dattani “is not a preacher” (1) and has “no new doctrine to propound” (1). The overall impression drawn from Joshiyura’s book is that the critic, instead of focusing on Dattani in an objective and critical manner, makes a very subjective reading of his plays reflecting his personal inclinations and points of view. In his own words, his effort is aimed at collecting “what lies scattered in [Dattani’s] plays, and [to] construct from the material Dattani, the man and Dattani, the artist” (4).

By far, two critics who have been able to rightly pinpoint the issue of alternate sexualities in Dattani’s plays are Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri and Angelie Multani. Chaudhuri notes how in Dattani’s plays the traditional Indian middle class family is “constructed and deconstructed” (25) and how the issues in the plays which “make his audiences sit up and listen” (134) are “veiled or masked, ... behind façades that need to be penetrated” (25). She takes up nearly all of Dattani’s plays written till 2005 and judges them in terms of their settings, their forms and the typical Dattani stylistics involving stagecraft and dialogues; her’s is also the first comprehensive hint at the “invisible” issues regarding alternate sexualities in Dattani’s plays. Though she does not meticulously discuss the creation of heteropatriarchal discourse as dealt with in Dattani’s plays, her hints provoke a comprehensive study of the plays regarding the playwright’s preoccupations with the marginalized and their negotiations with the

norm. Anthologizing critical writings on Dattani from such diverse fields as dramaturgy, gender theory, feminist theory, postcolonial theory, and space and nationhood, Multani's *Mahesh Dattani's Plays: Critical Perspectives* critiques the dramatist from several angles. The essay by Michael Walling, who has produced on stage some works of the dramatist, finds in Dattani's work that characters resort to gender performance as a mode of being. Or, in other words, Walling touches upon how characters sacrifice their sexual identity to live a negotiated existence within a heterosexual milieu. In this regard, he elaborates on the use of the symbol of the mask in Dattani's plays, particularly in *Bravely Fought the Queen*. The mask here is a façade of complacency and heterosexuality hiding the essential sexual identity, or often, desires (*Everyone* 67-75). Gouri Mehta's essay traces the political context of Dattani's writing, drawing upon theories of postcolonialism and placing Dattani in the second phase of postcolonial writings. G. J. V. Prasad, in Multani's book, evokes the ideas of nation and partition and traces how these two concepts have their influence on the partition of the twins. He takes the dysfunctional Patel family as the microcosm of the modern Indian urban society, with the attitudes of patriarchy, chauvinism, class and normality and other hegemonic values which wreak havoc on the future of society, state and the self. In the dissertation submitted to the University of Burdwan, the principal investigator of this project discussed at length the "invisible" issues in the plays of Dattani, while touching on the use of Queer Theory in interpreting Dattani's exposition of issues hidden like skeleton in the cupboard.

Most of the critiques of Dattani have been thus limited to the petty judgement of the plays from traditional perspectives like the feminist perspective, from the perspective of Dattani's exposition of the skeleton from within the cupboard, the decay of moral values in the Indian joint family system, and also from the crudely

heterosexist perspective of the presentation of the “vulgarity” of homosexuality. The heteronormatively-charged Indian academia has so far mostly shied away from the reading of Dattani’s plays from the perspective of the creation of the discourse of silencing and the discourse of the hegemonic power of heteronormativity. A critical endeavour, therefore, can be made in unraveling Dattani’s politics of making the invisible visible and his undertaking of a politics of inclusion, as opposed to the social politics of exclusion which deliberately covers up certain issues to keep up a harmonious façade. Making the invisible visible is both his precept and practice. Created for and about the urban Indian people, his plays hold up a mirror to them through a language that is specifically urban and through theatrical elements comprehensible to the urban English speaking Indians. He is an iconoclast writing, to borrow the Shavian term, “Unpleasant Plays.” In his plays the margin forms the centre and the background figures are foregrounded. Even, his texts have ample suggestions of invisibilization. The plays which the project is going to discuss—*Seven Steps Around the Fire*, *Tara*, *Dance Like a Man*, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Do the Needful* and *Night Queen*—in general create a marriage-centred heterocentric milieu based on the male/female, good/bad, normal/abnormal, hetero/homo binaries. As such, there are distinct divisions in the plays between two sorts of milieu: the heterosexual and the homosexual. There are distinct divisions between two sorts of characters: those belonging to the hegemonic order responsible for the creation of the discourse of closeting and those gendered subalterns who are closeted and who need to undertake different sorts of negotiations not only with the hegemonic power structure but also with one’s own choice of sexuality or gender.

The hegemonic power in plays like *Tara* and *Dance Like a Man* has the sanctified mission of dissociating the male and the female from within the psyche, so

that one's gender becomes a given, a sort of imposition, under the spell of which one is compelled to "do" or "perform" a gender role which society determines for the subject. In the former, Mr. Patel and Dr. Thakkar, and in the latter it is Amritlal round whom this axis of power revolves. On the other hand, it is Chandan in the former and Jairaj in the latter who are gradually "taught" to behave like men. In both these plays, the spirit of androgyny is made to dissociate into the male and the female selves and is thus invisibilized.

*Seven Steps Around the Fire*, a radio play, has been generally critiqued in terms of a feminist approach. Uma, the female lead, has been foregrounded and has been shown as putting resistance against the oppressive forces of patriarchy represented by not only Subbu's father, the evil politician, but also her husband. The critiques on the play have delved far into the discourse of female suppression and the commoditization of the female body. Less importance has been attached with the hijras' negotiations with the dominant discourse of normativity. Referring to the ancient times in the history of India and the ancient myths connected with the hijras, Dattani positions the hijras in the play in the present time and shows their liminal existence in the borderlines of society from where they can occasionally sneak into the normative mainstream to "do" the performances or patterns of behaviour society has set for them. Dattani shows how their very inclusion into the mainstream entails a form of exclusion. Allowed entry into the auspices of a marriage ceremony to perform and bless the bride and the groom, the hijras themselves are disallowed marriage. The body of a hijra in this play becomes the Foucauldian body on which tortures are applied by the hegemonic normative society to make them suffer from a crisis of identity, as a result of which they are compelled to negotiate with the normative mainstream. Unprecedented in the history of Indian English drama, Dattani makes

visible the hijras' invisible close-knit social structure based on not only regimentation but also love and respect, which suggests not only the alternate nature of the hijras' sexuality, but also the alternate nature of their own society. By judging the play against the sourcebooks on the life and social structure of the hijras of India, the endeavour of this project would be not only to analyze Dattani's effort of showing the negotiation of the hijras with the normative mainstream, but also to bring out and validate the invisible social structure of the hijras of India.

The project would take up three plays, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Do the Needful* and *Night Queen*—all dealing with gay characters—and would endeavour to analyze the gay characters' negotiatory strategy with the heteronormative society. In all the three plays, heterosexual marriage serves as a befitting backdrop of a hegemonic discourse, and gay men are shown to perform as masculine, macho and hetero to come to terms with a society built on marriage and procreation. In addition to the dearth of analytical critiques on the visibilization of gay men in these plays, no analysis has ever been done on the politically balanced use of their gay identity and the heterosexual marriage as a form of negotiation with the heteronormative society. In two plays in particular, i.e., *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* and *Night Queen*, the playwright not only shows the negotiations undertaken by gay men with the heteronormative society, but also creates a counter-hegemonic queer discourse in which the heteronorm, the center, is sometimes pushed to the margin, so the homosexuality becomes the norm to some gay men. But more than that, these two plays and *Do the Needful* project Dattani's own critique of gay men, who, in the name of negotiation, deliberately lead a double existence and move cosily between the heteronormative and the homoerotic spheres, enjoying all forms of heteronormative domesticity and consumerist lifestyle and practising their gay identity in private.

Ed/Sharad, Bunny, Alpesh and Aswin are those gay men who, according to Dattani, add more negative layers to the already existing negative construct of gay men as sexually hyperactive and believers in multiple sex-partners.

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Framework

The vast difference between the attitude towards the Queer in the pre-colonial era and that in the post-colonial can be interpreted in terms of Michel Foucault's constructionist view of sexuality and codification of sexual behaviour through religion, politics, economics and science. Foucault views the nineteenth century as the origin of the modern concept of sexual behaviour, about what is "normal" and what is "abnormal". He sees how in the nineteenth century any form of deviant behaviour was coerced into normality and how Victorianism entailed policing, too. He sees how even medical science attempted to fix the "right" sexual identity in treating the case of one Herculine Barbin, a nineteenth century hermaphrodite, "a sad disinherited creature" (93). Eve Sedgwick gives the idea of homosociality, which, she thinks, developed from the nineteenth century emphasis on asexual bonds which negated any kind of homosexual bond for economic and social reasons. In her view, the binary opposites, homosociality and homosexuality, coalesce into each other in practice. This fact is evidenced by Dattani's plays in which homosexual characters negotiate an existence by mixing themselves and adopting heterosexual existence. In Queer Studies, one finds the expansion of Foucault and Sedgwick's constructionist view of sexuality to include the role of social construction in any kind of sexual identity formation which challenges and subverts heteronormativity. It deals with the idea of non-straightness which virulently challenges heterosexuality as a natural and universal norm. These post-modern preoccupations with the marginal and the liminal "Other" which has been traditionally overlooked are employed by Dattani in his plays. His plays strongly promote the ideas of the cultural constructs of gender, straightness and gender-deviance. His characters

perform gendered roles which negotiate their social and sexual relations, their homosociality and homosexuality.

Dattani claims in his interview with Mee that there are “invisible issues which need to be brought out and addressed” (20). And to Dattani, the term “invisible” refers to the closeting of the homosexual men, women, the hijras and the androgynous men who have been termed as abnormal and forced to a marginal and liminal existence. Dattani uses the term as a sort of umbrella term to include not only gay and lesbians but also other liminal forms of sexualities like the hijras, the Third Gender, it would be feasible to search for a theoretical framework best suited to study so many types of sexual identities other than the heterosexual male and female. Queer theory provides a valid platform for analyzing the non-heterosexual identity formation, closeting, silencing and invisibilizing these identities and their negotiation with the hegemonic straight world in Dattani’s plays dealing with “invisible” issues.

Sometimes, theorists would not like to equate these Queer sexual identities with another generic term, i.e., alternate sexualities (Bose xii). Yet, it may be convenient to bring the Queer and the “alternate” at a par in dealing with Dattani. These Queer or alternate sexualities had been an integral part of the Indian past before they were marginalized in the colonial and postcolonial contexts. Thus, though some would hegemonically brush off these sexualities as not “Indian,” Dattani’s preoccupation with these sexualities is very much “rooted” in the Indian reality. Dattani wants his audience to look back into the past of India when homoerotic contexts in literature were found in abundance and the celebration of queer sexualities was also not an uncommon practice. A discussion on the search for roots in the postcolonial Indian theatre is pertinent in this regard.

The Indian theatre started its experimental negotiation with Western forms and structures of drama after the Independence and came to be called modern.

Simultaneously, there was also a looking back to tradition and the ethnic, to reach to the very essence of “Indianness.” The Indian theatre not only began utilizing the conventions of the two thousand years old Sanskrit drama, production methods and *Natyashastra*, representing the ethnic referred to not only the representation of the “ethnic India,” it also began assimilating the folk theatre forms existing in several forms and languages all over the nation. According to Nemi Chandra Jain, there was hardly any director or group in the country who had not attempted to produce one or more Sanskrit plays during the decades after the Independence (12). Thus, through returning to roots, the Indian theatre presented a form of resistance to the “servile imitation of the decadent Victorian and semi-realistic moulds of theatre devised for entertainment or superficial social reforms, or a mindless distortion of the Western dramatic and theatrical practices” (Jain ix). In the mid-1960s and mid-1970s, a kind of hybridity was visible when, in the words of Nandi Bhatia, drama was “simultaneously engaged with Western forms, especially Brechtian, in combination with local forms and conventions and returned to the folk in ways which revealed overlaps with the proponents of the “roots” movement. In a bid to critiquing the nation through its theatrical forms, K. N. Pannikar experimented with traditional dance idioms from Kerala, Habib Tanvir brought folk actors from Chhattisgarh, and Karanth (Karnataka) used Yakshagana<sup>3</sup> in his drama” (xxv). At the same time, the disenchantment of the new nation and the dark social realism brought out playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar and Mohan Rakesh, both crudely realistic, and Dharamvir Bharati, who exposed the disenchantment through metaphors. Girish Karnad went back to myths and history and reshaped them according to what he saw in the present, as he did in *Tughlaq* and

*Hayavadana*. The theatres in several Indian languages and especially in Hindi strived towards the building of a “national theatre.” Citing theatre as “essentially a symbol of movement” (451), Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay advocated the need of a national theatre in the times of a major cultural degradation throughout the nation in the 1960s and 1970s: “Our physical degradation is thus matched only by our cultural degradation. Never before has the need for a national theatre been so great as today, on the positive as well as the negative side” (453). Criticizing the hybrid presentation of the folk and mythic elements in drama cast in Western forms, Kamaladevi expressed the need of a dramatist who “will take the challenges of today and give adequate expression to the vivified impulses and emotions, the surging thoughts and actions of a vast human mass slowly stirring like a huge elephant rising to its feet. Then alone will the theatre cease to be a reserved enclosure and become an open creative playground for all, an organic part of national life, expressing the individuality of the people as a whole” (455).

It is here where Dattani’s importance as an Indian dramatist lies. For him, a return to roots does not mean a mere return to the traditions of Sanskrit poetics of drama or folk elements, but also to the anthropological roots of the nation. When he makes visible the invisible alternate sexualities he does not only revert to the past of the nation but also refers obliquely to their age-long struggle against the hegemonic discourse of power which is carried forward to the present context. The ideas of “rootedness” and the “national” identity of Indian theatre are challenged by Dattani and they assume new significations. He liberated Indian theatre from the confines of myths and folk elements and gives impulsive expression to the myriads of people belonging to queer sexualities but also situates them in the midst of that “India” which the dramatists endeavoured to build so far in the search for “roots” and “national

identity.” Going against the “right values” of that “India” as prescribed by the Sangeet Natak Akademi to be projected in Indian theatre, Dattani challenges the veneer of the quintessentially peaceful and harmonized India, the multicultural and tolerant façade of the nation to project the aspirations and struggles of some people who are not categorized as “right” and “Indian.” The history of the hegemonic dominance of heteronormativity has made even artistic representation like theatre ideologically biased towards the dominant heterosexuality which is always the “norm,” the “right” and the “Indian.” That is why people of alternate sexualities, though having formed part and parcel of the Indian society and culture since ages have been left out in this search for roots and the national identity. Dattani’s challenge against these very ideas of rootedness and Indianness is expressed in his interview with Mee:

I would say, first of all, what in your opinion is Indian? I have lived all my life in India, I have learned the English language in India, and I have learnt it from Indians, so the way I speak the English language is Indian. I am Indian: this is my time and this is my place, and I’m reflecting that in my work, and that makes me Indian. I would like to challenge the assumption of what is Indian. Does that mean traditional theatre forms? Yes, they’re wonderful, they’re very sophisticated, they’re impressive, but are they really Indian? That’s something I would like to question and challenge. Are they really reflecting life as it is now, that is the question I would like to ask. (23)

Dattani emphasizes that looking back to the ancient poetics of drama and indigenous and folk forms of theatre does not solely comprise a return to roots and constructing the nation; one should also be very rooted in his own “time” as well as the very “place,” and that would entail representing those, too, who have been left out

monologically from building the nation and those who have been politically left out of the history books, have been invisibilized, suppressed, stigmatized, demonized and silenced, and are still being done so. These people, to Dattani, are the gendered subalterns, the people who do not fall within the hegemonic male/female binary.

Dattani also looks back towards the poetics of ancient Indian drama, particularly the *Bibhatsa Rasa* of the *Natyashastra*. Literally “juice” or “flavour” in Sanskrit, *rasa* refers to the experience of the poet/artist out of which emerges the creative process and *rasa* is concretized in the expression of the *bhava* or emotive state in the dramatic text ((Lal 389-90). The *rasas* recognized in Sanskrit poetics are *sringara* (erotic), *hasya* (comic), *karuna* (pathetic), *raudra* (furious), *vira* (heroic), *bhayanaka* (terrible), *bibhatsa* (odious) and *adbhuta* (marvellous). On stage the *bibhatsa rasa* was concretized through facial expressions and distortion of limbs on seeing or hearing something unwholesome or odious, like the monsters, the untouchables, the abject, the inferior and the repugnant. This *rasa* was considered repulsive and unsuitable for production for a long stretch of time before the audience. The *bibhatsa rasa* for Dattani comprises the abject, the invisibilized, the odious, the inferior and the repulsive people belonging to alternate sexualities, people who have chosen not to perform or “do” the gendered patterns of behaviours as society has assigned for them.

The *bibhatsa rasa* can be said to connect the abjects of Dattani with the Queer theory. The abject, the odious, the monstrous and the repulsive have been at the receiving end of the discourses of power which, according to Foucault, have given these terms as “multiple implantation of ‘perversions’,” (37) to those belonging outside the “normal” male/female, hetero/homo binaries, or in other words, those who identify themselves as belonging to alternate sexualities. The central unifying theme of Foucault’s work on sexuality has been to reach an understanding of how in modern

Western societies sexualities were formed and developed, how sex was a historical construct and how individuals came to think of themselves as sexual subjects (Smart 94). The discourses of power, obviously centred round the heterosexual ideology, have maintained a studied silence about these people, have closeted them and have closeted them as non-existent:

The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. ... Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (Foucault 43)

Foucault observes how beginning from the seventeenth century and particularly with the advent of the Victorian regime sexuality began to be regulated, censored and confined within the heterosexual family and heterosexual procreative marriage. Sex began to be attached with the government policy regarding population. And thus the recreational but unproductive forms of sexuality like those of homosexuals and hermaphrodites were prohibited. All discourses, legal, medical, religious, economic and political, aimed at taking population to a stable stage so as to ensure production of labour capacity in a newly emerging capitalist society and preservation of the prevailing social relations. Gradually through this period, medical explanations began defining a homosexual orientation as the outward manifestation of a congenital illness, a product of a disease called neurasthenia. Defined as a disease of the urban male, neurasthenia was often termed to be the leading cause behind a homosexual

leaning. And hence, sexualities which were unproductive began to be labeled with “multiple implantation of ‘perversions’” (Foucault 37):

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, a certain frankness was still common, it would seem. Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; ... But twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple led down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, ... A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: ... And sterile behaviour carried the taint of abnormality. (Foucault 3-4)

Sexualities contrary to heterosexuality thus began to be perceived as not only contrary to nature but, more than that, contrary to law. Thus, a discourse of normality, heterosexuality, physical and psychological naturalness and sexual “purity” as something religious, began to proliferate, as a result of which contrary practices and identities began to be “spoken of less and less, or in any case with a growing moderation” (Foucault 38). But power “[had] been positive and productive rather than negative, and [had] ensured a proliferation of pleasures and a multiplication of sexualities” (Smart 97). As such, whereas repression was continuing to silence and closet the “abnormal” sexualities, more and more individuals found themselves culturally defined as sexual inverts, and this led to increased group identification and resistance to the enforcement of public morality. Popular interest in the homosexuals

as well as homophobia grew through the nineteenth century as sexual inversion became better defined within the legal and medical professions.

Foucault's theory of sexuality as a construct led to a re-reading of canonical texts and the formation of the gay and lesbian studies and further the Queer theory which evolved from the gay and lesbian movements, with added philosophical and critical emphasis on the questions of sexuality and identity. The deviant identities like the "homosexual," "gay," "lesbian," and "queer" successively trace a historical shift in the conceptualization of same-sex sex and alternate sexualities. Eve Sedgwick claimed that male-male desire is legitimized only when it is "homosocial." Homosociality among men thrives on misogyny and homophobia, thus retaining the heteropatriarchal power structure intact. Sedgwick claims that in "any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power" (25). Similarly, Adrienne Rich claimed that compulsory heterosexuality is "both forcibly and subliminally imposed" (653) on women to ensure her continued subordination by privileging a man's need. Compulsory heterosexuality forces the women to turn to men instead of turning to other women, and thus she accepts a heteropatriarchal ideology. Gayle Rubin's *Thinking Sex* also deals with the social construction of sexual hierarchies and the consequent demonizing of non-normative sexualities. Judith Butler's poststructuralist analysis of gender as performative construct also gave an impetus to the theorization of the Queer. Gender, according to Butler, is a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory framework that congeals over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being. Agreeing with Foucault's discursive view of sexuality, Butler argues that gender is discursively constructed within a cultural discourse of heterosexuality in

which the act of performing a gender constructs the performer's gender. Heterosexual discourses create patterns of behaviour strictly based on the prohibitions of homosexuality. Using Freud, Butler proposes the concept of heterosexual melancholy in which the loss of the same-sex object of desire creates the melancholic heterosexual identity:

Clearly, a homosexual for whom heterosexual desire is unthinkable may well maintain that heterosexuality through a melancholic structure of incorporation, ... the heterosexual refusal to acknowledge the primary homosexual attachment is culturally enforced by a prohibition on homosexuality .... In other words, heterosexual melancholy is culturally instituted and maintained ... (95)

In recent times there has been a multiplication in sexual identities in India. Borrowing Foucault, it can be said that, in the Indian context, "the discourse on sex has been multiplied rather than rarefied; and if it has carried with it taboos and prohibitions, it has also, in a more fundamental way, ensured the solidification and implantation of an entire sexual mosaic" (53). Accordingly, queer subcultures coexist in India as clear challenges to heteronormativity. The hijras have been an ubiquitously present queer subculture in India, existing in direct contestation with heteronormativity. Within this hijra subculture, there are many small identity groups, such as the *akwa* hijra (a cross-dressing male who is preparing for the ritual castration), the *nirwan* hijra (ritually castrated men), and *jogta* hijra or a Hindu hijra working as temple-prostitute (Kavi 392). Recent works on HIV/AIDS issues have uncovered another identity called the *kothi*, a feminized male identity, who, though biologically male, adopts feminized ways of dressing, speech and behaviour and looks for a male partner who has masculine modes of behaviour, speech and dress (Narrain

2-3). The male partner of a *kothi* is called *panthi*, who can be identified by a *kothi* and none else. Identities like *kothi* and *panthi* are not rigid, but fluid. However, Kavi also identifies some sexual subgroups who are vulnerable to their occupation or profession (392-93). Compelled into “survival sex,” they include male film extras, gym boys, room boys and truck-cleaner boys. There are *maalish-wallahs* or masseurs who offer sex to male frequenters of gyms for a little more than the cost of a regular message. Migration and movement of men across states and national borders have created the unnamed subculture of behaviourally bisexual men consisting of migrant labours, jail inmates, police personnel in male quarters, hostels and orphanages etc. These, along with *Kothis* and *panthis*, are together called MSM or Men who have Sex with Men. It is noteworthy that Dattani addresses these subgroups when he deals with hijras in *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, with the guard as migrant labour in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, and with the masseur in *Do the Needful*. The Queer here overlaps with the issue of class in the context of the Indian subcontinent. The Western concept of lesbianism is also predated in India by a variety of words like *chapti* (or, clinging together of two women in a lesbian act). There has been the androgyne, a coexistence of the masculine and the feminine within the soul. Androgyny has remained since time immemorial a challenge to the heteronormative male/female binary and thus the androgyne is itself an identity, though not in that sense in which a gay, a lesbian or a hijra is a queer identity, because the latter form a subculture whereas the androgyne does not form a subculture. The abundance of these several terms denoting these diverse sexualities in ancient and modern India suggests that these sexualities have been there in parallel with heterosexuality and that they were once recognized as parts of the culture before the West monologically termed them as deviant species challenging the institution of heterosexuality.

The above queer subcultures can be referred to as “indigenous” varieties. In addition, there are “modern” (as well as considered imported from the West) and newly emerging queer communities which include the gay, the lesbian and the self-identified bisexual man. Yet, owing to the social, legal, political, medical and media discourses in general, queer people and queer subcultures have been compelled into a conformity, self-annihilation, self-chosen invisibility and silence and thus have been discarded from the process of making the nation. It is a common myth that much of the contemporary hostility towards queer people and queer cultures in India is a direct result of Western colonialism (specifically the Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code passed in the colonial India), Judeo-Christian-Islamic homophobia and that no indigenous movement—unaffected by the homophobic West—has ever led to the proliferation of homophobia. But, actually, the homophobia imported from the West and the Hindu nationalism jointly worked in giving a heterosexist twist to the identity of India as a nation incorporating disparate sexualities along with the dominant heterosexuality.

Colonialism taught the Indian ethics to hate the homosexual man/woman in general. The 1837 Draft Code attached a provision against “unnatural lust,” and the Criminal Tribes Act dealt with communities which could not be dealt with by the ordinary criminal law. The hijras came under the purview of this Act and the modern Indian society still carries on with this colonial legacy. The 1837 Draft Code came to be finalized as the Indian Penal Code of 1860 and came to include the infamous Article 377 which summarily categorized all sexualities other than heterosexuality as “Unnatural Offences”:

Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment

for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.

Explanation: Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section.

Lesbian acts were exempted from the jurisdiction of this code as the Victorian colonial ideology privileged masculinity as the “repository of colonial authority [and] it simultaneously insisted upon the contrasting ‘effeminacy’ of colonized Indian men as an alibi for conquest and domination” (Gandhi 92). Not only so, this anti-sodomy law was aimed also at constructing an Indian martial race built on the ideal of Hindu masculinity based on Kshatriya (warrior caste) manhood. It also aimed at terminating the licentiousness which the British considered as the legacy of medieval India and also to prevent the British soldiers and officials (staying away from the nearness of their wives and families for a long time) from surrendering to this licentiousness themselves. Paola Bacchetta says:

Colonial administrative policy towards queer sexuality was an exemplary Foucauldian operation involving surveillance, deterrence, repression, and punishment of men’s queer conduct, albeit in a reworked order. Women, considered passionless and sexually passive in the Victorian grid of intelligibility without sexual subjectivity, were not encompassed in these operations. The first targets of what we might call today *queer cleansing* were the British themselves, beginning with the Imperial Army. ... British administrators officially organized an Indian female prostitution apparatus to prevent same-sex acts between male British soldiers. They preferred that their men

engage in inter-racial extra-marital hetero sex instead of intra-racial hom(m)o sex. (126)

It is ironical that the British themselves scarpd this law in 1967, while India carries on with the colonial leftover.

Regarding the role of nationalism in Queer identity formation, Narrain calls colonialism and nationalism “Siamese twins” (45) in the sense that both projected a heterosexual family and nation at the cost of the queer past. In the colonial period, the nationalistic zeal to construct a virile Indian who could challenge the Western culture did a damage to the queer past of the nation. Thus, nationalism stressed on heteronormativity at the cost of the “perverse” and “deviant” which were challenges to the nationalist purity and perfection. How this concept of virile nation affects the androgyne even after the country achieves Independence is best exemplified in Dattani’s *Tara* and *Dance Like a Man* where the androgynous male is termed a sissy or a effeminate. Patel and Amritlal respectively in the two plays carry on with the nationalistic zeal to make their sons virile. In the post-colonial context of India this nation-building is maintained by the right-wing Hindu nationalism, often infamous for its extremist anti-Other misogynist and queerphobic ideology. Bacchetta mentions how Hindu nationalism operates on the basis of “xenophobic queerphobia” and “queerphobic xenophobia” (122). Xenophobic queerphobia implies that the Indian queer has its origin outside the nation, i.e., in the West. Queerphobic xenophobia assigns the origin of queer sexualities to the “Other” in the Hindu context, i.e., the Muslim men.

In a worldwide propaganda in the late 1980s and the early 1990s a “connection” between being a gay and being infected with HIV/AIDS was politically established which further reduced the gay subject to the straits of invisibility. The

gays were politicized as practising non-procreative polygamous homosexual relationships through their acts of sodomy and unprotected sex. In this situation, the only option which the gay citizens could adopt was to come to a form of negotiation with the heteropatriarchal ideology by marrying, procreating, leading an apparently “homosocial” life with other men though in private identifying themselves as gay, and thus leading a double life. R. Raj Rao opines,

In a scenario where homosexuality is criminalized by law, where heterosexism thrives, and where society insists on marriage and procreation, gay love is but likely to rely on chance and casual encounters that do not blossom into permanent relationships on account of the odds. The heterosexual mainstream accuses homosexuals of not being committed to the idea of love ... (xxix)

This is what Dattani’s *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* and *Do the Needful* and *Night Queen* deal with.

Keeping Queer Theory as its theoretical framework, this project would thus examine how Dattani uses his stage devices to explore the particular heteropatriarchal queerphobic discourse, the identity formation among the queer characters and their negotiation with this queerphobic discourse.

### Chapter 3

#### **Hegemony of Marriage: *Seven Steps Around the Fire***

The very term “hijra,” usually implying a castrated male, relegates the hijra community to a laughable as also an intimidating group of cross-dressed male gate-crashing and threatening the families in which male children have taken birth to extort money from them and also extorting money from wayfarers in public places, and, if denied, exposing their distorted genitals to the shame of everyone. “Hijra” is an umbrella term, a construct, a formula to include eunuchs or men who have emasculated themselves, men and women with genital malfunction, hermaphrodites, persons with indeterminate sex organs, cross-dressed impotent men, gays and even effeminate men, who cannot be assimilated into the mainstream heteronormative masculinity. Hijras are omnipresent in the mythology and history of India. In fact, the hijras do also represent an institution, a community based on strict religious and societal practices. Claiming themselves as incarnations of the *Ardhanarisvara*, the half-man half-woman form of Lord Siva, the hijras have been the proof of the multiple sexual possibilities in the Indian context and enjoyed literary and political patronage since ancient times to the Mughal era till in the colonial period they were ostracized as criminal caste and dangerous outlaws and laws were passed to keep them under surveillance and to regulate and proscribe their labour. As a direct hangover of this colonial criminalization, the hijras’ struggles and negotiations with the mainstream heteronormative society and the institutional nature of their community based on kinship feelings, religious regimentation and class consciousness has been closeted, and what remain is a construct of a set of low-living peripheral cross-dressed people occasionally making forage into the mainstream society for extortion of money. Dattani’s *Seven Steps Around the Fire* exposes the unjust politics

with which society excludes the hijras, the “invisible minority” (CP 21). Dattani includes the ostracized, criminalized and closeted subculture of hijras as very part of the Indian society and as forming an organized institution in itself.

In the colonial and post-colonial eras of nation-building a deliberate amnesia corrupted the age-old inclusiveness of the Indian society which encouraged the cohabitation of diverse creeds based on religion, culture, ethnicity and language, and particularly, of the sexual minorities with the majority. With the building of nation-state, emerged the concept of India as Mother. Nation, thus, became a gendered construct, promoting the heterosexual custom of family-making, which entailed a heterosexual marriage as an ideology. In this politics of heteronormativity, the sexual minorities, especially the hijras, the Indian Third Gender, though forming a considerable part in the Indian culture since ages, became victims of the politics of exclusion due to the very subversive nature of their sexuality. Marriage, the ideological heterosexual one, thus formed the centre of all sexual recognitions as it forms the centre in *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, and in the margin reside the sexual non-conformist hijras, who, though taking part in the marriage ceremony in the way of blessing the bride and the groom, are themselves denied marital bliss. Dattani’s play exposes this politics of exclusion inherent in their very inclusion. He shows how, as the result of the politics of amnesia, the hijra society, in spite of its ubiquitous existence in India’s rich cultural past and its regimented and institutional nature, has been relegated to the status of a feared, hated, ghettoized and marginalized community considered as the *os bairros perigosos* or the dangerous neighbourhood. The relegation of them to an inferior status of the “Other” by society at large is the result not only of the complexity of their nature, biological and social, but also of this fact that they have a very tangential contact with society and their affairs of day-to-

day life are bound in secrecy. Whether to term them feminine or masculine, sexually unproductive beings or homosexuals, transvestites or transgender, or biological hermaphrodites or castrated men has long been a matter of contention. Their asexuality is rarely recognized by the State, as they are usually considered as resorting to sodomy and “unnatural” sex and are thus frequently booked under Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The society at large is confused regarding the role and identity of the hijras. As a result it resorts to stigmatizing the hijras and forms a construct conferring on them an inferior status and somehow establishing their dangerous nature.

Theorists and ethnographers trace this criminalising of hijras to the Anglo-European or colonial repression of the alternate sexualities as threat to the gender binaries, whereas at the same time they certify the “implicit accommodation of gender fluidity” (Reddy 31) by the Indian culture since ancient times. Serena Nanda identifies the hijras as “culturally significant ritual performers” (ix) and certifies that “third gender roles and gender transformations are important mythological themes and real-life possibilities” (x). Nanda further certifies that the hijra role in India is one of the very few alternative gender roles existing currently in any society and that whereas the other third gender roles in non-Western countries, like the *Xanith* of Oman and the *berdache* or two-spirit of Native North America have gradually given up to colonialism, modernization and Westernization, the hijras have retained themselves as not only important subjects of study but also as significant community in the study of gender categories. Like all human beings, says Nanda, “hijras engage in the essentially and characteristically human activity of interpreting and constructing culture, so that their lives are not merely lived, but are given meaning, even as they exist on the fringes of society” (xxi). With the view to ensuring civil rights to the

hijras as his subjects the medieval Indian ruler often affirmed their right to collect alms and granted them lands to be succeeded from guru to chela. In the vein of Foucault, Gilbert Herdt in his *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* points out how Western social and medical practices introduced the gender binaries. The hijras were reduced to the status of a criminal caste in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century India in which the colonial power tried to sort out the so called “immoral” (in the Victorian sense of the term) sexual practices and revoked all the rights meted out to the hijras as state bounties. Vinay Lal cites how in the late eighteenth century, James Forbes, a British merchant, found an opportunity, alongside the surgeon-major, to medically examine the hermaphrodites employed as cooks in the Maratha army, and forthwith declared the objects disgusting; and similarly other colonial officials never disguised their profound distaste for members of a community whose practices they unequivocally declared to be revolting (121).

In the heteronormatively programmed society, “he” and “she” are the only valid identities, with all the other sexually deviant subjects relegated to an identity-less status. That is why the play introduces the “it-she” dialectic in the beginning to run throughout the play. Uma wants to address the hijra(s) as “she,” but Munswamy and other male characters in the play, as part of the “class-gender based power implications” (CP 10), deny any such status to the hijras and continuously address them as “it.” Uma feels how consorting with hijras is held a tabooed affair, as Munswamy repeatedly warns her of bringing shame to her family respect by meeting the hijras. He tries to divert her attention to “other cases” or cases involving “Man killing man, wife killing man’s lover, brother killing brother” (CP 7), implying a social prejudice against the hijras who are not given the status of a “man,” “wife,”

“lover” and “brother” and are denied any social or familial role. Anarkali, a hijra, is also termed as “this thing” (*CP* 16), again relegating the hijra to a non-entity.

The posits a male world. The rude male force is introduced in the form of male inmates of the lock-up beating Anarkali and screaming with pleasure. In a cinematographic jump-cut, the scene shifts to the bedroom of Suresh and Uma where a Hindi movie fight scene, symbolic of the rude male force again, blares from a TV set, and immediately afterwards one hears Suresh ordering Uma to wear a purple nightie symbolizing a sexual commoditization of the female body by the patriarchal society. Munswamy repeatedly addresses Uma as “Sir,” and it obviously adds a comic touch to the play, but one cannot also deny how Munswamy, belonging to a lower rung of the patriarchal society, has been programmed to pay respect to the power that be, that, of course, is masculine.

In the play Uma acts as Dattani’s spokesperson with her sympathetic and analytical approach towards the hijras. Her voice-over in the play takes note of how “Perceived as the lowest of the low, the hijras yearn for family and love. The two events in mainstream Hindu culture where their presence is acceptable—marriage and birth—ironically are the very same privileges denied to them by man and nature. Not for them the seven rounds witnessed by the fire god, eternally binding man and woman in matrimony, or the blessings of “May you be the mother of a hundred sons”” (*CP* 11). In fact, the phrase “invisible minority” (*CP* 21), too, is literally “heard” in the play as Uma’s thought. Voice-overs and thoughts are typical Dattani elements in his plays, but the reason why Uma’s sympathy is “heard” only in voice-overs and thoughts is that perhaps Dattani wants to suggest the muted nature of this sympathy and also that this sympathy is recorded only in her thesis paper while the common people or those connected with her are unable to feel with her. In others words, her

sympathy also is “closeted.” Anarkali resorts to self-mockery when she says, “People give us money otherwise I will put a curse on them. As if God is on our side” (*CP* 12), and later with real grief at heart she tells Uma, “One hijra less in this world does not matter to your husband” (*CP* 35).

Dattani not only shows how society criminalizes the hijras, but also presents their human and organized social structure based on simple interpersonal relations. To Suresh, the hijras are a construct: they are “as strong as horses” (*CP* 9), are “all liars” (*CP* 9) and are “all just castrated degenerate men” (*CP* 10) fighting among themselves like dogs. They are believed to curse people if their demand is not met when they come to bless the bride and the groom and later the new-born baby. In fact, the original purpose of the improvised hijra-songs performed at the time of wedding remains invisible behind this façade of criminality. Nanda terms these songs as “ritual of reversal” (5), in which the groom and his family, traditionally higher in status than that of the bride, are made fun of and brought down and humbled. The hijra performances thus reduce the tension between the two families. Vinay Lal interprets the hijra performances in terms of a “lack”:

The presence of hijras is auspicious, and yet terrifying; and while themselves incapable of carrying or seeding children, they appear to have some inexorable power over the reproductive process. It is paradigmatic that, unable to partake experientially in what are conventionally viewed as the two most fecund and poignant moments in a person's life, namely marriage and childbirth, the hijras nonetheless leave the stamp of their own unconventionality on these life cycles: their very “lack” makes them the most desirable witnesses to truths that they can only know vicariously. (123-124)

The veneer of criminality also hides the ritual significance of their blessing the newborn male. As ritual performers, hijras combine the regenerative power of the Hindu Mother Goddess and the creative power of the ascetic, particularly that of Siva, and confer this power on the new-born male baby by blessing him, opine both Nanda and Reddy. The special powers which they achieve through their ritual emasculation or *nirvana* form the core of the hijra's self-image. Even the Arabic meaning of *hijra* (from *hijr*, the recluse) carries the sense of the ascetic, who has renounced the desires of the earthly body. Behind the claims of being ascetic there runs the hijras' own comparison of themselves with two important figures from mythology: Siva and Arjuna. Doniger tells the story of how among the numerous Hindu creation myths, there is one in which Siva is asked by Brahma and Vishnu to create the world (*Asceticism* 130-135). Thereupon Siva retreats into the water: but as he remains plunged in it for a thousand years, Brahma is induced by Vishnu to create all the gods and other beings. When Siva finally emerges from the water, and is prepared to commence with the creation, it dawns on him that the universe no longer has any vacuum. Consequently, Siva breaks off his phallus and tosses it aside with the remark that he has not much further use for his generative organ; yet as the phallus falls and breaks into pieces, it extends fertility over the entire earth. Thus, even as Siva himself becomes a sexual renunciate and loses the power to procreate, his phallus becomes emblematic of universal fertility, and it is to this circumstance that one can trace the cult of *lingam* (phallus) worship. The hijras, in their own life, provide a mirror image of this scenario: while themselves impotent, they confer the blessings of fertility on others. No less significant, even while some hijras engage in sexual relations with men and have recourse to prostitution, they insist on being considered akin to sexual ascetics or religious mendicants. Whatever the credibility of that claim, it is pertinent

that Siva is represented in the Hindu tradition chiefly as a yogi, venerated for the power yielded by his practices of asceticism. Alf Hildebeitel's retelling of Arjuna's incognito stay at the palace of king Virata has an important clue to the hijras' own comparison of their auspicious role with that of Arjuna playing Brihannala (154-157). When Virata offers Arjuna his daughter Uttara in marriage, Arjuna refuses with the reason that as Brihannala he/she has played the role of a father to Uttara and thus cannot marry her. But as Arjuna is the primordial eunuch, who has shared an asexual and parental intimacy with Uttara, he/she must preside (as do hijras) over a marriage and the birth of a male child. This is accomplished when Arjuna arranges for the marriage of his son Abhimanyu to Uttara, and prepares her, in a manner of speaking, for the birth of her son, Pariksit, on whom alone will fall the burden of continuing the dynasty of the Pandavas. The auspiciousness which is attached with the presence of the hijras during weddings and birth is perhaps the only concept that has been carried forward by the Indian nation-state from the past, while shedding off the other contributions of the hijras in making the rich past of the nation.

Dattani also indicates how an imposed criminality has often been used to cover up many unpleasant truths. Uma was an adopted child to her parents, and the inability of her parents to have child of their own was rumoured out to be a result of the hijras' curse. Uma thinks, "Is it true? Could it be true what my mother used to say about them? Did they really put a curse on her because they did not allow them to sing and dance at their wedding? Or was that their explanation for not being able to have children of their own? Or ... a reason to give to people for wanting to adopt me?" (CP 17). Taught at home to hate the hijras and decreed by society at large to avoid them, Uma suffers from vacillation regarding whether to treat them sympathetically or to hold them criminals. She thinks, "Then is it true? That they are

criminals? Am I making a fool of myself? Even so, I've got to find out for myself ... Who knows? Some of those there might be ... they just might be ..." (CP 17). When Anarkali scars Kamla's face with a butcher's knife society interprets it as a product of the uneducated and rowdy nature of the hijras, but little does it realize that behind this apparently criminal act there is Anarkali's message to Kamla to remain a hijra and not to join the common rung of people by marrying and having a family: "When she told me about Subbu, madam, I tried to stop her. I fought with her. I scratched her face, hoping she will become ugly and Subbu will forget her. He wanted to marry her ..." (CP 41). So Anarkali tries to force Kamla to "conform," to remain an "Other" since she and Champa both feel that Kamla "will not be happy in the outside world" (CP 28), i.e., the heteronormative world.

The veneer of criminality also hides the familial and organizational structure of the hijra community. "What's that you said? Sister? There is no such thing for them. More lies..." protests Suresh (CP 10) when Uma mentions the sisterly relation between Anarkali and the dead Kamla. While comments like this relegate the hijras to an unsocial clan of fallen creatures, Anarkali's very statement, "We make our relations with our eyes. With our love. I look at him, he looks at me, and he is my brother. I look at you, you look at me, and we are mother and daughter" (CP 11), brings out the human basis of the relationship among hijras. Champa exults with joy when she finds out that Uma sees them "also as society, too" (CP 21). This is Dattani's politics of "visibilization," and the word "also" not only signifies a parallel social institution but also Dattani's politics of including the "Other" as part of society. In fact, when Uma repeatedly visits Champa's "dera" or locality, she gradually comes to know of the institutionalized and organized social structure of the hijras built on some codes of conduct and replicating many of the beliefs, roles and behaviours of

the larger society. The “dera” is very much like a family, with the Guru as the head or at the top of the hierarchy and the “chelas” (disciples) as sons (the drum-beating hijras) and daughters (the dancing hijras) occupying various positions according to experience and talent. A. Revathi, herself a hijra, records a distinct hierarchy of a hijra family in her autobiography:

Badudaadi—great-grandmother’s guru  
 Daadaguru—grandmother’s guru (great-grandmother)  
 Nanaguru—guru’s guru (grandmother)  
 Guru—mother  
 Kaalaguru—guru’s sister  
 .....  
 Chela—daughter  
 Naathi-chela—granddaughter ... (64)

The Guru’s authority is enormous and any chela challenging it is held a non-conformist and is seriously punished. Though lacking in any spatial dimension, the hijra household functions as “both a residential and an economic unit” (Nanda 39).

Islam has a major influence on the hijra social organization and structure, owing to the hijras’ looking back at the glorious era of Muslim patronage. This is the reason why they generally assume Muslim names. “The egalitarian ideal of Islam, as compared with the hierarchical nature of the Hindu caste system, [is] also frequently and favourably mentioned ... as an explanation of hijra inclinations towards Islam” (Nanda 42). Their borrowing of a patriarchal hierarchy of power also suggests their inclination to imbibe the structural principles of their immediate surroundings. However, the guru-chela or mother-daughter relationship acts as a substitute for the familial ties which the hijras renounce. The “idealization of the emotional, social, and

material dimensions of the guru-chela relationship replicate, and are drawn from, the ideology of the [patriarchal] Hindu extended joint family” (Nanda 46). Marrying and having a husband is also an important source of hijra self-esteem, as normally having a husband is the main source of prestige to a traditional Indian woman. That is why a hijra often chooses a man, or vice versa, as husband, and both of them vow to live in conjugal happiness like a heterosexual couple.

Dattani does not evoke the guru-chela relationship in detail, but he obviously refers to this role relationship when Champa wields her authority, “I am the head hijra, and I will decide who the guru will be after me. Anarkali will never be the guru” (CP 23). Uma suspects that Champa might have got Kamla killed for disobeying her as she was leaving the hijra house to lead a normal life. Dattani shows that not only is this organization based on love, fellow feeling and strict codes of conduct, it is also not certainly “criminal,” as termed by society. The socially imposed label of criminality drops off when Champa, instead of snatching the amount of fifty thousand rupees from Uma’s hands in her own “dera,” warns her, “Are you mad? Hold the bag tightly. You should not bring so much money in to such places” (CP 24), as the place is frequented by rowdies like Salim.

Dattani uses myth to denote how the hijras had the identity of devoted friends enjoying homosocial bonds with great heroes like Rama. Uma’s voice-over reads:

Case 7. A brief note on the popular myths on the origin of the hijras will be in order, before looking at the class-gender-based power implications . . . Another legend traces their ancestry to the Ramayana. The legend has it that god Rama was going to cross the river and go into exile in the forest. All the people of the city wanted to follow him. He said, ‘Men and women, turn back.’ Some of his male followers did

not know what to do. They could not disobey him. So they sacrificed their masculinity, to become neither men nor women, and followed him to the forest. Rama was pleased with their devotion and blessed them. (*CP* 10)

“Whereas Westerners feel uncomfortable with the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in such in-between categories as transvestism, homosexuality, hermaphroditism, and transgenderism, and make strenuous attempts to resolve them, Hinduism not only accommodates such ambiguities, but also views them as meaningful and powerful,” feels Nanda (20). Indian mythology thus abounds with numerous impersonators of opposite sex and individuals who undergo sex-change. Ancient Hinduism held that there was a third sex, which itself divided into four categories: the male eunuch (the male without male physical properties), the castrated male, the hermaphrodite, and the female eunuch (the woman without womanly physiognomy). Those who were more feminine among these categories, imitated the voice, gestures, dress and timidity of women (Bullough 268). Doniger mentions an ancient reference to a prostitute named Sukumarika in a Sanskrit play who fell within the category of the female eunuch (*Women, Androgynes* 299). In the Tantric school of Hinduism, hermaphroditism is the ideal.

But society at large likes the hijras perform, as docile performing bodies, only some stock roles as dancing and singing during wedding and after childbirth and blessing the persons concerned. A very casual remark of Anarkali, when Uma meets her in the lock-up, serves as Dattani’s mockery of the society-assigned performance of the hijras which ignores giving human identities to them:

UMA: I teach sociology.

ANARKALI (*smokes*): Very good.

UMA: I am doing my paper on class- and gender-related violence.

ANARKALI: What do you want me to do? Shall I come to sing and dance when you pass exam? (*CP* 12)

*Seven Steps Around the Fire* thus endeavours to include the hijras into society, makes visible the politics of “othering” them. But the play does not make the hijras “come out” of their closet, nor does it offer any solution to their predicament. The play offers evidences of hijras accepting and living with the power equation of society. Even knowing fully well that the mastermind behind the killing of Kamla is none but Mr. Sharma, hijras led by Champa and Anarkali come to sing and dance at the wedding of Subbu and perform their society-assigned role of blessing. Although “the drumbeats and the dancing bells are unrealistically overpowering” (*CP* 39), rarely do they symbolically function as the sound of protest. Champa returns to her usual job of blessing the childless women: Anarkali hands Uma the locket with “special mantra” (*CP* 41) to bless her with children. She forbids Uma coming to her “dera” again lest the latter’s family life becomes unhappy. The latter accepts that hijras “have no voice” (*CP* 42). The play ends with a placidity with patriarchal hetero-normative politics reigning supreme. The photograph of Kamla and Subbu, with “Kamla as a beautiful bride smiling at Subbu with the wedding garland around him” (*CP* 41), symbolized a hijra’s coming out of the closet in search for identity and happiness. But, at the end, it is destroyed, thus symbolizing the politics of devoicing the people with a deviant sexuality. The nexus between politicians, bureaucrats and media works ruthlessly to hush up the mystery behind Kamla’s killing, with no arrests made. A characteristic comic touch towards the end of the play suggests the eternal working of the hegemony enjoyed by the people in power: Uma exposes the murder-

mystery to Suresh, and the latter takes all the credit for unraveling the mystery when he reports it to his higher authority:

SURESH: Sir, that is the truth. I have my resources to verify all this. Of course, they are all sworn to secrecy so . . . And Mr. Sharma's gratitude will be expressed in ways that will be, I am sure, more than adequate . . . (CP 42)

The play thus restores the normative order of society at the end. The men are shown to take the driving seat, with the ideological domination of men like Mr. Sharma and Suresh, so that the hijras have to come to a compromise with the dominant power and the voices of their sympathizers like Uma are hushed up. Dattani does not give the hijras a triumph to celebrate, but visibilizes them and their negotiations with the heteronormative ideology to such an extent that it does the job of sensitizing the audience about the "invisible minority" (CP 21).

## Chapter 4

### **The Politics of Heteronormative Gendering: *Tara and Dance Like a Man***

Coleridge said, “The truth is, a great mind must be androgynous” (587).

Virginia Woolf interpreted Coleridge as meaning “that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent, and undivided” (114). Androgyny as the ultimate and archetypal creative force is testified in mythology. It is the undiscovered and ignored consciousness lurking deep within the human psyche; a collective sense of oneness of the masculine and the feminine leading to the Creation itself. Way apart from hermaphroditism and bisexuality, androgyny is dealt with in this chapter as a spiritual state, which resides in a unification of the masculine and feminine aspects in the self. It is also different from the condition of the effete male, with whom the androgyne is often confused. Androgynous men never tend to the extremely virile (a quality conventionally held to be masculine), and androgynous women never tend to be extremely dependent (a quality conventionally expected in the feminine gender). Traditionally, the polarization of the male and the female arose out of a social necessity, thus encouraging the development of so-called masculine and feminine characteristics in male and female respectively. An androgynous mind transcends these polarities by virtue of its being an all-pervasive comprehensive force, an inner potency, a liberal consciousness of belonging to the vast cosmic order. Taoism says:

He who knows the male, yet cleaves to what is female

Becomes like a ravine, receiving all things under heaven... (Waley

178)

June Singer, in her seminal *Androgyny: The Opposites Within*, says in support of the psychological state of androgyny:

The androgyne will not be discovered by turning outward into the world, but by turning inward into ourselves. It is a subtle body, that is to say “non-material,” buried in the deep unconscious realm that all humans collectively share. The collective unconscious yields up its treasures slowly. The androgyne rests in its murky depths and will not easily be imagined, let alone comprehended. It rarely enters awareness, or if it does, it is usually repressed, and for two important reasons. First, androgyny is a state of consciousness that is far from ordinary, and therefore it threatens many people’s state of equilibrium. Second, androgyny threatens many presuppositions about individual’s identity as men or as women, and hence threatens the security of those people, including most of us, who have vested interests in the conventional attitudes toward sex (maleness and femaleness) and gender (masculinity and femininity). (8-9)

Carl Jung for the first time saw the male and female natures as abstracts. Jung’s theory was based less on the male and female sexual behaviour than on an individual’s internal psychological state. He felt that human beings could achieve fullest potential only on the recognition of the contrasexual aspect within the self and on the establishment of a harmonious relation between the two contradictory aspects, maleness and femaleness, within the consciousness. These two aspects live in a conflicting yet co-operative co-existence in the psyche and result in a release of creative energy. Jung’s concept of the *anima* and *animus* as contrasexual opposites forming the integrated consciousness of a complete being comprises this basic view that *anima* (Latin for ‘soul’) as the feminine element lies unconsciously deep within a man’s psyche, and *animus*, the masculine element, resides unconsciously deep within

the psyche of a woman. In order to become a total personality a woman has to become conscious of and then has to integrate this *animus*. *Animus* manifests itself in a kind of manly independence, assertiveness and intellectually outgoing nature which traditionally do not form parts of a woman's character. Thus, in order to appear 'feminine', a woman suppresses her *animus*, whereas to appear 'masculine' a man suppresses his *anima*. Thus, "straightness" is achieved at the expense of the ideal of androgyny. At the root of this suppression there lies homophobia, or a fear of being termed a homosexual or an effete, a frigid, impotent personality, since androgyny is more often than not confused with homosexuality, camp behaviour, hermaphroditism and bisexuality. Androgyny, as opposed to hermaphroditism, is based on gender role assimilation rather than the display of dual sexual characteristics.

In fact, the unification of the masculine and feminine in the psyche at the expense of gender stereotypes has often been seen as conducive to the development of a creative mind. What Coleridge hailed as the androgynous "great mind" (587) or what Woolf hailed as the "naturally creative, incandescent, and undivided" mind (114) is nothing but the characteristic of the self which has harboured both the masculine and the feminine selves into one boundary. The androgynous mind is thus queer, as it challenges gendering of the self and assignment of performances exclusive to gender. The androgyne therefore is deviant, the abject and should therefore be disintegrated, so that each of the male and female selves within the psyche can be gendered. As has already been discussed in the chapter on the theoretical framework of this thesis, the building of the heteropatriarchal nation in the colonial and post-colonial eras led to the stigmatization and silencing of the queer culture of India. On the one hand, the colonial endeavour to erase the Indian queer past and to sublimate the "effeminacy" of India, and on the other the nationalist project of building the

virile nation to fight the colonial power jointly worked towards the building of a heterosexual nation shorn of all references to the queer identities residing within it. The nationalist project of building the virile nation ran on also into the post-colonial phase. The Indian home and the family in this regard became the site where this colonialist as well as nationalist projects began and continued themselves. This chapter would look into *Tara* and *Dance Like a Man* to analyze the building of the virile and the masculine in the heteropatriarchal centre called the family at the cost of the androgynous mind. But, more than that, this chapter will look into the politics of dissociating the androgyne and the consequent onset of personal and creative aporia and stasis in the mind of the two androgynes, Chandan in *Tara* and Jairaj in *Dance Like a Man*.

The reading of *Tara* and *Dance Like a Man* on the basis of the heterosexual gendering of the androgynous soul can be made, taking cue from Dattani's own opinion of *Tara*. In the interview with Erin Mee Dattani puts, "I think [*Tara* is ] a play about the self, about the man and the woman in self, but a lot of people think of it as a play about the girl child," and that it is rather "about the male denying the female, and how the cultural construct of gender favour the male" (21). The play is about how the patriarchal society sustains its domination through sexual politics, how the male is programmed to deny his androgynous status, how female creativity is suppressed and how, in spite of all these, Tara tries to "twinkle." The story itself, the dialogues and other theatrical elements bring to the fore these "invisible issues" (19). Though the title emphasizes Tara, the play may in fact be seen from Chandan's point of view. It is less about Tara than Chandan or the struggle of the male and the female selves to seek a union within one self. It is a "coming to terms with one's own self in terms of the feminine in the self" (21). Or, as Mee himself points out in "A Note on the Play,"

Tara and Chandan “are two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities and that Dan, in trying to write the story of his own childhood, has to write Tara’s story. Dan writes Tara’s story to rediscover the neglected half of himself, as a means of becoming whole” (*CP* 320). The play is also about how the dissociated female self colludes with patriarchy, and how the female acts as the chromosome of patriarchy within the family, herself carrying its effect and contributing in its sustenance.

Dattani’s multi-level stage setting in the play suggests a working of different incidents taking place in the conscious and the subconscious or in the present and the past simultaneously. The subconscious of Chandan involving the residues of his memory is presented in the lowest stage level. The present or the conscious state of Chandan, now Dan, is acted in the next level, which, according to Dattani, is “the only realistic level” (*CP* 323): a small writing table with a typewriter and a sheaf of papers, indicating his present preoccupation as a writer. There is nothing refreshing in his room, as he still has not been able to shed away his faded memories of his other half, Tara. That Dan, too, is conscious of the symbolic proportions of his surroundings is indicated in his observation:

DAN. ...Yes. I have my memories. Locking myself in a bedsitter in a seedy suburb of London, thousands of miles from home hasn’t put enough distance between us. (*CP* 323)

But what is the most striking in the initial stagecraft is the higher level stage where there is the abiding presence of Dr. Thakkar. With his “sheer God-like presence” (*CP* 323), Dr. Thakkar is the prime-mover in the play, combining all the dissociative forces. He is the puppeteer controlling the movements of the puppets, here Chandan and Tara, invisibly from his level. The play begins in this realistic level, showing Dan gradually indulging in memorising Tara, his forgotten female-self which lies “deep

inside, out of reach” (CP 324), and immediately in a theatrical stroke the spotlight changes to the lower level, where Chandan and Tara appear together. The symbolic meaning of the entry of Patel and Bharati, the intrusion of the dissociative family ideology, is suggested immediately by Tara’s words:

TARA. And me. Maybe we still are. Like we’ve always been.

Inseparable. The way we started in life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out ...

*Patel and Bharati are seen.*

And separated. (CP 325)

The play takes place in Chandan’s memory and starts with a feeling of void within the writer who feels, “My progress, so far ... has been zero” (CP 324). Sitting at his writing table in London Chandan busily tries to write a play *Twinkle Tara*, and finds that he has so far been able to produce nothing: “I keep staring at my typewriter every day, wondering how best to return my anguish into drama. All I find every day, without fail, is one typewritten sheet with the title of the play, my name and address and the date. Nothing changes—except the date” (CP 324). Salvation lies, he feels, in his return to his roots, primarily his nation which he left long ago:

DAN. ... Tonight I drop everything I’ve desperately wanted to be in my years in England. (*Mimes removing a mask and throwing it away.*) The handicapped intellectual’s mask. (*Mimes removing another mask.*) The desperate immigrant. (*Mimes removing yet another.*) The mysterious brown with the phoney accent. (CP 324)

He thinks that removing these masks will salvage him from the aporia he is now facing as a writer and that distancing himself away from his past lived in his own nation cannot bring him any achievement as a dramatist: “But in drama! ... Try

distancing yourself from that experience and writing about it! A mere description will be hopelessly inadequate” (CP 323). Dattani presents metatheatrical aspects as Chandan talks of distancing oneself from the experience and writing about it. He *forgets* to remove his mask of the gendered male self which so far has compelled him to forget his female self, his sister, Tara. Chandan criticizes the literary world for having overt interest in issues like “sati, dowry deaths or child marriages—all subjects guaranteed to raise the interest of the average Western intellectual” (CP 324), or the issues which *are* visible. And similarly, as a litterateur, Chandan believes in shedding his visible immigrant identity, scarcely making a journey inside where Tara, his female self, “was lying deep inside, out of reach” (CP 324). The play ends with the same sense of artistic stasis and void, except for the fact that Chandan, by delving into his inside where his female self lay neglected, finds, “Yes. The material is there. But the craft is yet to come” (CP 379). Some progression can be hoped for, as the failed artist, having become aware of his neglected female self, now has developed a greater sensibility. The dissociation of sensibility which had set in as a result of conforming with the sexual politics of suppressing, or invisibilizing, the female self, is gradually overcome by Chandan, leading to the development of a greater consciousness as an artist at the end. The play, in fact, is Chandan’s *künstlerroman*, tracing Chandan’s failure as an artist when he dissociates within himself his female self, or invisibilizes his “psychological androgyny” (Bem), and in the way obstructs his own development of a wider view of things, or of an eclectic attitude as an artist. To say with Marilyn R. Farwell, “Androgyny in a writer is defined, then, by the width of perception rather than by a single, universal mode of knowing” (435). The separated twins, Chandan and Tara, remain at their intellectual best when, even after separation, they feel like one conjoined being. Their “psychological androgyny,” or feeling of the oneness of

their male and female identities, gives them an edge over the other characters in the play who act as they have been “gendered” to act, like Roopa. Even though living in a milieu which invisibilizes the existence of the opposite sex within one sex, Chandan and Tara still live in a harmony, making fun of the so called “gendered” character like Roopa who does not have a broader view of things as them. Living with an androgynous consciousness, Tara and Chandan are not defiled by any “gendered” feeling, and, in fact, make strong protest when society tries to “gender” their actions. But it is only when Chandan and Tara gradually begin to give in to the politics of “gendering” that a dissociation takes place, separating each from the other’s consciousness: Chandan learns to act like a man, and Tara as a woman. Chandan’s intellectual failure starts from this phase of his life. He becomes morose and Tara wastes to death after their psychological separation takes place, or the androgyne disintegrates into a gendered male and female.

*Tara* records how family, media and the medical science form an unholy nexus to, in the words of Agamben, “capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, [and] control” (14) the behaviour of the androgyne after the separation of the male from the female. Chandan’s failure is a product of his living in a “forced harmony” (*CP* 379) with these *dispositifs*:

DAN. An object like other objects in a cosmos, whose orbits are determined by those around. Moving in a forced harmony. Those who survive are those who do not defy the gravity of others. And those who desire even a moment of freedom, find themselves hurled into space, doomed to crash with some unknown force.  
(*CP* 379)

The “those around” in Chandan’s observations refer to the family, media and medical science in collusion with each other and Chandan is compelled to negotiate with them at the cost of his creativity.

The politics of dissociation undertaken by the *dispositifs* in the play finds a metaphorical parallel in Greek philosophy, in which the Androgyne is mentioned for the first time in Plato’s *Symposium*. In the work, Aristophanes tells of the existence of three genders, the Man, the Woman, and the Androgyne. The last was a distinct kind, with a bodily shape and a name of its own, constituted by the union of the male and the female: but by Aristophanes’ time the name “Androgyne” became a term of reproach. All these three were round, with the back and sides forming a circle, had four hands and the same number of feet, one head with two faces, looking opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike; also four ears, two privy members, and the remainder to correspond. They aimed high to scale the Heaven, and Zeus, as a punitive measure, cut each of them into halves. Apollo was also bidden to heal their wounds and compose their forms. After the division the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and throwing their arms about one another, entwined in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one (Singer 81-83). Dr. Thakkar, the family and the whole world are like Zeus and Apollo in the play, operating upon the androgyne and separating the male from the female. The “sheer God-like presence” (CP 323) of Dr. Thakkar as hinted in the very beginning of the play thus stands justified. He resembles Plato’s Zeus cutting the Androgyne into two halves as his action becomes highly symbolic:

DR THAKKAR. It took us a further ten days just for planning. We couldn’t afford to make any miscalculations. There would be separate teams for each twin. Two operation tables were to be

joined together. When the separation was done, the tables would be pushed apart and each twin was to receive individual attention.

(CP 358)

So, when Dr. Thakkar speaks of post-operative care to be given to the separated twins, ironically it refers to the process of gendering, of making the separated twins gradually give in to their masculine and feminine identities and behaviours. Secondly, giving the girl another identity in the name of a better life, while overtly denoting a better physical existence, actually hints towards the process of her being conditioned as a female. Dr. Thakkar's medical science takes androgyny as a pathological defect, one akin to a state of hermaphroditism, a defective physiological condition, thus ruling out the idea of "psychological androgyny." Dr. Thakkar, guided by this patriarchal vantage point of medical science and his own personal interests, thus undertakes the job of the separation, deftly concealing them within the veneer of humanitarian zeal. In a Foucauldian observation, G. J. V. Prasad here notes, "Advances in Science and technology are of no import because they are tainted by their human associations—our own prejudices and desires will dictate how we use our scientific progress and how we use our technological advances" (135). Dattani is realistic enough to delve into the role of media in this politics of separation. In the play Chandan assumes the voice of the media which upholds the medical marvel and creates much hype, thus invisibilizing not only the politics of the separation of the male from the female but also the dissociative role of the medical science. Chandan interviews Dr. Thakkar in a studio:

DAN (*mock-cheerful*). Good morning, viewers, and welcome to another edition of *Marvels in the World of Medicine*. We have with us this evening at our studio Dr. Umakant Thakkar who has been in

the news lately for his outstanding work at the Queen Victoria Hospital in Bombay. Dr. Thakkar ... was surgeon-in-chief to a most unique and complex surgery, the first of its kind in India. ...

(CP 331)

The closeting of “psychological androgyny” (Bem) in the heteropatriarchal context of the play comprises the gendered conditioning of the male and the female, Chandan and Tara respectively. Plato’s *Symposium* says how so ancient and natural is the desire of one another—the male and the female—after Zeus’ separation of the Primordial Androgyne, that seeking to make one of two, the Androgyne keeps on appearing in the collective unconscious as an archetype, or in the words of Singer, “as a dark intimation of a potentiality” (83). That is why the Foucauldian *dispositifs*, under the auspices of patriarchy, endeavour to keep the male and the female halves of the mind in mutually exclusive environments. Thus, once Tara and Chandan are physically separated, the *dispositif* of family resorts to the politics of their gendering. During this process of gendering, the androgynous nature of Chandan and Tara appear time and again as a protest against the hegemonic nature of this process. So, when Patel proposes that it would be better for Chandan to come to office with him, Chandan remains well aware of his sister, whom he considers still another half of his existence: “You can take Tara. She’ll make a great business woman” (CP 328). Chandan, thus, by suggesting that doing business is not a male prerogative, protests against this societal or political imposition of gender-related codes. Immediately afterwards he says, “We’ll both come with you” (CP 328), thus forcefully asserting himself as an androgyne. The twins show how each of them is acutely aware of the fact that masculinity and femininity are not mutually exclusive states of existence, but rather can exist in a complementary relationship within the same person. The

following witty exchange between the twins records this. It also suggests their dig at the gendered distribution of labour undertaken by the *dispositifs*:

TARA. Not at all. The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave.

CHANDAN. I haven't decided yet. (*Looks at Patel.*) I might stay back in the cave and do my jigsaw puzzle.

TARA. Or carve another story on the walls. (*To Roopa.*) he's a writer, you know. (*CP 328*)

Going on hunting and looking after the cave are culturally constructed behaviours of the masculine and the feminine respectively. Later in the play Chandan is found unweaving a knitting with his mother, clearly stating his "non-gendered" state and living with a deep consciousness of his feminine self within. Patel disturbs this state with his politics: "Let Tara do it" (*CP 351*). He protests this turning of Chandan into a "sissy" (*CP 351*), orders him to join office with him, and Chandan protests, "Not without Tara" (*CP 351*). The image of the androgyne as "Two tiny smaller-than-life babies, hugging each other" (*CP 355*) at the time of birth recurs forcefully as "*They stand with their arms interlocked while the spot slowly fades out*" (*CP 362*) and as they hug each other at the end of the play, thus sustaining their voice of protest against the sexual apparatuses. The identity of the opposite-sex twins, through its unique complexity, seems to be highly problematic for Heilbrun. She notes, "Throughout opposite-sex twin lore, the two are always seen as an original unit which has split, a unit destined to be reunited by sexual love, the ultimate symbol of human conjoining" (34), thus vindicating the reflection of the Platonic theory of Androgyny in literature.

Dattani shows how in *Tara Chandan* and Tara Chandan and Tara live a life of harmony together, are in constant communion with each other's opposite self, and are at the peak of their intellectual functions till they learn to negotiate with the *dispositifs* which take every step to make androgyny invisible. Though they are being crushed under a convention which does not allow their intellectual faculty to be mutually shared, they shine up. Rightly does Chandan, when he begins remembering his lost female self, i.e., Tara, name his play "Twinkle Tara," because Tara, in fact, keeps on twinkling as long as she and Chandan enjoy their "psychological androgyny." Marilyn Farwell's view of androgyny provides an explanation of Tara's twinkle:

The mind, thus, is not forced into a rigid stereotype but is allowed to roam the spectrum of experience and perception. The female side of the soul which has intercourse with the male side will not be boxed in by conventions which force it to respond in only one way; rather, by experiencing that which is opposite but complementary, the female side of the soul will be qualified by its complement. (447)

This robust energy of the duo is celebrated in the play by Dattani's ubiquitous stage-device of music. Music, as any other play of Dattani, serves as a metaphor in *Tara*. Chandan and Tara's bursting with life has been presented through Brahms' First Concerto, which, according to Tara, has Brahms' "quality of high tragedy and romance—of youth bursting forth in the world with all its claims. A spring-like freshness ..." (*CP* 333). The same music welcomes back Tara after her kidney transplant, acting as a musical prelude to Tara's play-acting in which she imitates the Oscar winner. Dinu Lipatti's version of Chopin's Prelude No. 2 in A minor is used by Dattani to convey the vulnerability of Tara and Chandan, who remain energetic in spite of being haunted by a sense of failure of their surgery, just like Dinu Lipatti

himself who created most of his notable compositions including Chopin's Prelude No. 2 at a time when he was haunted by a sense of imminent death. Chandan explains its metaphorical significance when he says, "People who know they are dying have such a deep understanding of life. And a sense of attachment to it" (CP 362-63).

But gradually polarization wreaks havoc on Chandan and Tara, wringing one out of the other's consciousness. If Mary Daly suggests "a breakdown of walls within the male psyche as well as within the female" to achieve the "adequate 'cosmosis'" (172), the *dispositif* of family, in particular, erects the wall which dissociates the twins from each other physically as well as psychologically. Dattani traces this process of dissociation through Chandan and Tara's discovery of maleness and femaleness respectively. The gendered male and female identities keep on appearing throughout the play, interspersed among dialogues and actions which generally suggest the physically separated twin's psychologically separated states. The first such exposition comes from Tara when she says, "We women mature fast" (CP 333). In fact, it is Tara who rapidly gives in to this gender polarization. Chandan keeps on refusing to join either college or office without Tara, and in contrast, Tara exhorts him to accept the male roles defined by conventions:

TARA. Oh, you can't hide behind your jokes all the time! Face it.

You're a coward.

CHANDAN (*angrily*). Well, I'm sorry. Not everyone has your strength!

TARA. You are afraid. Afraid of meeting new people. People who don't know you. Who won't know how clever you are. You are afraid they won't see beyond your ... (CP 361)

Tara's gendered conditioning and the interior colonization of patriarchy within her can be clearly seen in her viewing the body of another woman with the male gaze which looks for perfection in a woman's body: when Roopa calls her a freak and her mother crazy, Tara retaliates by saying: "I'd sooner be one-eyed, one-armed and one-legged than an imbecile like you. An imbecile with uneven tits" (CP 369). She gradually learns to view the masculine as the cruel "Other": "And we are more sensitive, more intelligent, more compassionate human beings than creeps like [Chandan] and ... and ..." (CP 371). On the other hand, Chandan discovers his maleness when he gradually becomes conscious of the female body: "*He cannot ignore [Roopa] now. He slowly puts his hand on her shoulder. She freezes. He very awkwardly moves his hand till it is almost on her breast*" (CP 366). Separation begins spreading its gloomy shadow on the androgyne. As the stage direction reads: "*Tara stands alone in a spot, in a daze. Chandan moves to her and gestures to her to hold his hand. Tara turns away from him. Chandan is crushed*" (CP 378).

It is from now on that Chandan begins prioritizing himself over his beloved sister. He changes into a mere Dan, dissociated from the female within himself as well as from the nation. Having forgotten Tara, he reiterates to himself, "*my trauma, my anguish, and ... my tragedy*" (CP 379; italics mine). Tara's being cocooned within the family as the stereotyped Indian woman and her gradual wasting away may be compared to Virginia Woolf's portrayal of the imaginary sister of Shakespeare:

Meanwhile [Shakespeare's] extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remains at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. ... any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly

have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely  
cottage... (55-57)

Tara's subjugation is beautifully expressed by Dattani through the parallels of the Lady of Shallot and the custom of drowning female babies in milk. Lady of Shallot is imprisoned, "[l]ocked up. Not being able to see the world ... Just sitting and weaving a tapestry or something" (CP 346). Tara, too, is jailed in her handicapped state and the constraints of tradition. Just as the Lady of Shallot foresees her impending doom in the mirror, Tara too senses her end in the mirror, which is represented by the expressions of her closest relatives. Both Tara and the Lady of Shallot find a release from their predicament only in death. Roopa narrates how the Patels were traditionally notorious for killing their baby girls by drowning them in milk and later veneering the act by spreading stories about how the girls died by getting choked with milk:

ROOPA. Since you insist, I will tell you. It may not be true. But this is what I have heard. The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies—you know dowry and things like that—so they used to drown them in milk.

*Pause.*

TARA. In milk?

ROOPA. So when people asked about how the baby died, they could say that she choked while drinking her milk. (CP 349)

Ironically, Tara, a Patel girl herself, gets the same treatment when all her intellectual abilities are ignored.

Chandan is relegated to only a half of his self, devoid of the communion with his objectified other self, Tara. The writer Chandan, who could relish carving stories

upon the wall and loved writing about Tara, now fails and suffers a precarious existentialist situation. His robust zeal for life gives way to despair: “Well, I’m in the middle of writing something, but that’s not it. It’s just that I don’t think I can face life there anymore ...” (CP 372). An artistic stasis grips him firmly, engendering nothing:

“My progress so far—I must admit—has been zero ... But I persist with the comforting thought that things can’t get any worse. All I find every day is one typewritten sheet ... with the tide of the play, my name and address, and the date. Nothing changes ... except the date...” (CP 379)

However, having learnt to remember Tara, Chandan now finds that the “material is here” (CP 379) for his play. Looking back, and in the course of the fictitious interview with Dr. Thakkar, he also remembers the subjugation of Tara, his own gendering and the invisibilization of his androgynous consciousness by “some unknown force” (CP 379). The play ends on an optimistic note, with Chandan and Tara again asserting their androgynous existence: “*Tara embraces Dan as the music starts. The explosive opening of Brahms’ First Concerto. They hug each other tightly*” (CP 380).

*Tara* thus exemplifies what Maithreyi Krishnaraj calls the “development of a transcendental consciousness”:

The psychic unity that androgyny promises is advocated for the development of a transcendental consciousness, an overcoming of fragmentation that gender polarities induce. We are half our true selves. To become complete we must reintegrate, on a higher level, the conscious and the unconscious, the active and the passive. (WS12)

*Dance Like a Man*, too, can be read as a “play about the self, about the man and the woman in self” (Mee 21), about the creativity associated with an androgynous self and the dissociation and invisibilization of the androgyne leading to a masculine gendering and the negation of the feminine self, ultimately leading to an artistic failure—an aesthetic aporia at that. It can be read as a failure of Jairaj as an artist when the *dispositif* of patriarchal family, at the helm of which remains his father Amritlal, dissociates the male and the female within Jairaj, with the aim of bringing the man out of him and in the process killing the creative artist within him. Whereas in *Tara* the conjoined twins together symbolize the androgynous ideal, in *Dance Like a Man* Jairaj and Ratna, the dancer husband and wife, may be taken together to symbolize the Androgyne, or the Ardhanarisvara. The phrase “the magic to dance like God” (CP 447) provokes such a reading, since the play is about the perfection and beauty Jairaj reaches once he assimilates femininity within himself and the artistically lean phase he reaches once he learns to “dance like a man.” The play is thus about invisibilizing one’s androgynous self in order to imbibe the perfect masculine gender performativities under the *dispositifs* of a patriarchal heteronormative family which rests upon the binary of the masculine/feminine.

According to “A Note on the Play” by Mithran Devanesen, the play provokes an examination of “our own individual and collective unconscious” (CP 383). Elaborated with support from Jung in the beginning of this chapter, the “individual and collective unconscious” can be taken to refer to the androgynous mind. When associated with creativity, androgyny takes the creative artist to a transcendental level of success. *Dance Like a Man* is built on the ideal of the artist, an androgynous artist at that, weaving a magical performance. Just as in *Tara*, Tara is the metaphor for Chandan’s feminine self, in *Dance Like a Man*, too, Ratna can be taken as the

metaphor for Jairaj's feminine self. Dancing together, Jairaj and Ratna are a "magic" (CP 389), and when performing separately, he is a failure. This portion of this chapter will delve into how Jairaj is "taught" to dissociate himself from his feminine self and to perform as a man, and in the way fails both as an artist and a person.

Gender identities are created, asserted and maintained by the discourse of power by assigning performances to each gender identity in the male/female heteropatriarchal ideology. As such, the gender performance becomes so naturalized that the performer can be identified in the very performance. Dance as an art form cannot be assigned exclusively to the gender performance of one gender, i.e., the feminine. As an art form it is gender-neutral, that goes beyond the binary division of male/female, and has not ever been gender specific. The figure of Nataraja, the dancing Siva, as the Absolute, the extra-temporal entity looking over the Creation of the Universe from the ashes of the old order which he has destroyed himself, is a testimony to the gender-neutrality of dance. As Nataraja, Siva is an androgyne, the male in the dancing posture of a female, and in this, the image of Nataraja recalls the image of Siva as Ardhanarisvara. Yet, the general image of Siva as a masculine god with the anger of destruction, which is called the *Rudratandava*, can be assigned to a heterosexual image-building of Siva. On the other hand, Ardhanarisvara or the androgynous figure is a queer image, a deviant one, one which can be safely assigned to what is *Klivatwa* or sexual effeminacy. This heterosexual interpretation of a queer divinity is a part of many such readings which have their roots not only in the colonial drive for masculinity but also in the nationalist project of the building the virile nation. As such, while in the post-colonial era a search for "rootedness" and a drive for exposing the nation and its treasures were announced as State agendas and as a result of which dance forms like Bharatanatyam began to be revived, there was an

opposite current, which continued to assign the dance form to the feminine only.

Thus, it was a time when two opposite currents prevailed: the zealous drive to revive the dance form on the one hand, and on the other, the heteropatriarchal drive to inscribe the art as a performance of the feminine gender and a marker of feminine identity formation. The play, *Dance Like a Man*, is thus initially set in this conflicting crosscurrent of the late 1940s, after the Independence.

A transcendental androgynous spirit is conducive to the development of an artistic spirit. As such, the androgynous ideal is created in the play, and also maintained throughout. In the beginning, there is the reference made by Lata to the dance of Jairaj, who, in the accompaniment of Ratna, spells “magic” (CP 389). Later, Jairaj is referred to as performing in the guise of a female dancer, wearing Ratna’s costume, “a wig and ... whatever else was necessary to make [him] look like a woman” (CP 435), and the performance becomes all the more significant when the army, before whom it takes place, loves it more because a man is dancing in the guise of a woman. Jairaj’s performance becomes transcendental as he keeps in abeyance his masculine self, or “unlearns” his masculinity to “learn” performing as feminine. This is not only transcendental, but also challenges and problematizes the construct of a man in the mind of his erstwhile freedom-fighter father, Amritlal, who bears the responsibility of building the virile nation and chooses his own family as the centre of this project. As the patriarch, thus, he builds up the discourse of masculinity and resorts to the politics of repression so that Jairaj’s identification with his feminine side, or his “learning” of femininity can be subjugated and his androgynous self can be invisibilized to gender him as “man.” In the post-colonial phase of the nation the West was beginning to make its inroads into the microcosmic level of the home and

family, traditional identities, too, were at the same time imperative to be maintained as part of the nationalist project. Partha Chatterjee thus notes,

... the home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility for protecting and nurturing this quality. No matter what the changes in the external condition of life for women, they must not lose the essentially spiritual (feminine) virtues ... they must not, in other words, become essentially westernized. (118)

Cooking food and bearing the child were still considered to be the essentially feminine duties assigned on women. Thus, when Viswas—Jairaj’s would-be son-in-law and the fiancé of his daughter Lata—hears that Lata does not want to have children after marriage, he reacts: “My father almost died when I told him I’m marrying outside the caste. Wait till he hears this!” (*CP* 389). A little later he says, “Me marrying a Southie my father will tolerate, but accepting a daughter-in-law who doesn’t make tea is asking too much of him” (*CP* 391). Heteropatriarchy thus creates its own set of knowledge or discourse to assign particular performances upon a particular gender. “Man,” too, is shown in the play to be constructed in many ways. For Amritlal manhood does not reside in performing as a dancer or putting on long hair, dressing up as a woman or walking in a particular feminine style typical of a dancer: “I thought it was just a fancy of yours. I would have made a cricket pitch for you on our lawn if you were interested in cricket. Well, most boys are interested in cricket, my son is interested in dance, I thought” (*CP* 414-15). For Amritlal, happiness of a man lies in “being a man” (*CP* 426). In Amritlal’s discourse of manhood, “A woman in a man’s world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman’s world is pathetic.” And not only so, it is “sick” (*CP* 427). In his

mock postcolonial angst to present only the good side of the nation, Amritlal relegates the dance form of Bharatnatyam to the lowest level of art form as it was once practised by the temple-prostitutes or devdasis. His discouragement of Jairaj's dance does not only stem from dance's being a feminine performance, but also its being performed by the lowest form of the feminine sex, i.e., the temple-prostitutes:

AMRITLAL. You are mistaken. Gaining independence was part of our goal. And someone has to be in charge. It's what we do now that counts. As you know, our priority is to eradicate certain unwanted and ugly practices which are a shame to our society.

JAIRAJ. Like dowry and untouchability.

AMRITLAL. That too. And ... you know perfectly well what I mean.

JAIRAJ. You have no knowledge of the subject. You are ignorant.

AMRITLAL. We are building ashrams for these unfortunate women!

Educating them, reforming them ...

JAIRAJ. Reform! Don't talk about reform. If you really wanted any kind of reform in our society, you would let them practice their art.

AMRITLAL. Encourage open prostitution?

JAIRAJ. Send them back to their temples! Give them awards for preserving their art.

AMRITLAL. My son, you are the ignorant one. Most of them have given up their 'art' as you call it and have taken to selling their bodies.

JAIRAJ. I hold you responsible for that.

AMRITLAL. You have gone mad. ... I will not have our temples turned into brothels! (CP 416)

Amritlal's argument against Jairaj's choosing to dance rests on Jairaj's "selling" the body just as prostitutes do. Amritlal thus creates his own discourse of the knowledge of dance as a lower rank of art form to weave his own concept of family honour and the honour of the nation. That the patriarchal ideology makes the dance form exclusive to women is evident in Dattani's suggestion of the male gaze associated with dance. The dancer is less a performer than a body to be gazed upon, to be subject to the possession of man. The press adulation of Lata's skill as a dancer comprises chiefly a voyeuristic gaze upon her body: "Blessed with a supple figure and expressive face, Lata Parekh executed the adavus neatly and with precision" (*CP* 431); "Her sculpturesque poses and flourishes were truly delightful to view" (*CP* 433); and "Lata's tearful expression and heaving bosom conveyed all that was humanly possible" (*CP* 433). Dance thus suggests a womanly performance before the male gaze, and hence Amritlal's objection against Jairaj's dancing.

With this ideology Amritlal undertakes the task of turning Jairaj into a man. The ideologue finds that it is his marriage with Ratna which has made him "learn" the feminine performance of dance by "unlearning" his masculinity:

AMRITLAL. I would like to see what kind of independence you gain  
with your antics.

JAIRAJ. The independence to do what I want.

AMRITLAL. I have always allowed you to do what you have wanted  
to do. But there comes a time when you have to do what is  
expected of you. Why must you dance? It doesn't give you any  
income. Is it because of your wife? Is she forcing you to dance?

JAIRAJ. Nobody's forcing me.

AMRITLAL. She may be by influencing you. Maybe it's her, not you.

That's one thing I regret. Consenting to your marriage. (*CP* 415)

Amritlal suspects that under Ratna's influence Jairaj is associating himself with his feminine side, and thus the growth of his androgynous spirit should be curbed, his masculine and feminine halves dissociated, and Jairaj should be turned into a "man." Ratna makes Jairaj "learn" and nurture his feminine half, and thus she herself becomes the metaphor for Jairaj's feminine half. Dattani suggests this metaphor himself when at the end of the play the younger Jairaj and Ratna in unison re-act the image of Ardhanarisvara: "We dance perfectly. In unison. Not missing a step or a beat" (*CP* 447). The male and female halves merged into one, Jairaj dances a magic, as he does in his cross-dressed performance to the awe and admiration of the army personnel. So, keeping in mind Ratna's influence on him, Amritlal's operation of normalizing Jairaj begins with Ratna, and the central point in this normalizing lies in his discourse that happiness lies in being "normal":

AMRITLAL. Do you know where a man's happiness lies?

RATNA. No.

AMRITLAL. In being a man.

RATNA. That sounds profound. What does it mean?

AMRITLAL. Does Jairaj know where his happiness lies?

RATNA. He does. But I don't think it fits in with your idea of where it should be.

AMRITLAL. Yes. I am aware of that. And I am disappointed with that.

RATNA. Well, I'm sorry that you are disappointed. There is nothing much I can do about it.

*Pause.*

AMRITLAL. You can do a lot.

RATNA. I don't think I know what you mean.

AMRITLAL. I have seen the world. And I recognize a clever woman  
when I see one.

RATNA. Thank you, I think.

AMRITLAL. How do you feel? How do you feel dancing with your  
husband? What do you think of him when you see him all dressed  
and ... made up? (*CP 425-26*)

Thus, in *Dance Like a Man* Amritlal himself becomes the standard-bearer of this normalizing operation and gradually takes Ratna in his side. "Help me make him an adult. Help me to help him grow up," he exhorts to Ratna (*CP 427*) whom he persuades to believe that unless a man becomes manly enough to be "worthy" (*CP 428*) of a woman, he is of no avail.

Ratna's unholy cooperation with Amritlal stems from her own ambition: once Amritlal succeeds in normalizing Jairaj with her help, he will never object to her dancing and that there will be a steady flow of financial help from him as dancing alone will not suffice to keep her financially stable. So the first step she undertakes is to stop accompanying Jairaj in his performances and forcing him to dance alone so that the "magic" is lost. The first picture of dissociation is suggested when Ratna is seen in her dance costumes and Jairaj in his ordinary kurta-pyjama suit:

*Flute music takes over. Jairaj exits to the kitchen. The living room changes to the garden, bathed in moonlight. After a while the younger Ratna and Jairaj enter from the garden. Ratna is wearing*

*a splendid Bharatanatyam costume which she has covered with a shawl. Jairaj is in an ordinary kurta-pyjama. He is evidently drunk.*

JAIRAJ. Walk in! The doors of hell are wide open.

RATNA. Shh!

JAIRAJ. Come in, Ratna Devi. Into the house of Sri Amritlal Parekh.

RATNA. Quiet. You'll wake [the baby].

JAIRAJ. The seth of the house is not in! He's away receiving awards for serving the nation—while his Lakshmi-of-the-house has been away receiving (*claps*) acclaim for her ... talents. (*CP 440*)

Forced by Ratna to dance alone, Jairaj is seized by disappointment, and a form of aporia sets in to kill the dancer. Reduced to a non-entity, he is keenly aware of the politics that Ratna and Amritlal together play with him:

JAIRAJ. For one full year. For one full year I refused to dance—turning down offers because I didn't want to dance alone.

RATNA. I didn't ask for such a sacrifice. Tell me what you want in return. I'll do anything except sacrifice a year of my life in return.

JAIRAJ. I want you to give me back my self-esteem.

RATNA. When did I ever take it?

JAIRAJ. Bit by bit. You took it when you insisted on top billing in all our programmes. You took it when you made me dance my weakest items. You took it when you arranged the lighting so that I was literally dancing in your shadow. And when you called me names in front of other people. Names I feel ashamed to repeat in private. And you call me disgusting. (*CP 443*)

Once turned into a “man,” Jairaj achieves the masculine gaze upon the female body. Admiring Ratna’s costumes he says, “What a beauty you are! Is that why you like to dance? To have men admire your assets?” (CP 442) Jairaj’s case here becomes similar with that of Chandan, who, too, “learns” to desire the female body once his male and female halves are separated and he becomes a “man.” The stage direction in *Tara* reads:

*... Roopa slowly comes to [Chandan] and lies down or sits beside him. She slyly looks at him. He feels her presence. He looks at her. She pretends to be with the music. He cannot ignore her now. He slowly puts his hand on her shoulder. She freezes. He very awkwardly moves his hand till it is almost on her breast. The music ends. (CP 366)*

*Tara* and *Dance Like a Man* thus deal with how the androgyne cannot negotiate with the hegemonic politics of gendering and how this failure manifests in a personal as well as creative loss for the androgynous soul. The plays also finally suggest that to be a “man” does not always mean to be masculine or a normal person performing the masculine. A “man,” as Dattani suggests, also comes to mean a complete human being, an identity beyond the gender binary of male/female, and a composite spirit who has assimilated the eternal androgynous spirit.

## Chapter 5

### **Embracing Homonormativity: *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Do the Needful and Night Queen***

Lisa Duggan propounds her theory of homonormativity according to which gay men resort to “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency, and a gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (50). According to her, gay men worldwide, instead of putting up a resistance against the hegemonic capitalist powers, would secretly come into a bargain with the same by embracing a consumerist lifestyle and shutting off their eyes against the violence committed by the capitalist powers against all sorts of social and sexual others. A homonormative gay sacrifices his gay identity to consume all markers of capitalist happiness (the same capitalism which “produced” the identity called the homosexual, according to the Marxist Queer theorists) and consolidates a certain norm, a certain way to be gay, be married to another man, have two kids, one dog, one cat and two cars etc. Thus, instead of putting up a resistance against capitalism, the homonormative gay sacrifices his anti-capitalist, counter-culture credentials. Homonormativity thus says of a politics of negotiation with the capitalist powers undertaken by urban gay men to enjoy all creams provided by capitalist consumerism, in the same manner a heteronormative person is intimately related with capitalism and consumerism.

R. Raj Rao and Dibyajyoti Sarma, two Indian Queer writers, also opine the same. In the Introduction to their anthology, *Whistling in the Dark: Twenty-one Queer Interviews*, Rao says:

Heterosexism is the fallacious belief that the prerequisite for sexual attraction is that the partners invariably be of opposite sexes, that is, male and female. However, heterosexism serves the interests of homoerotically inclined men in most Eastern cultures, including India, by allowing them to establish an alibi: it guarantees that a homosexual liaison arouses no suspicion in the minds of one's immediate kith and kin, and indeed, society at large, by making the association seem like friendship, or, to use a more resonant word, *yaari*.<sup>1</sup> Two people of the same gender can never be lovers—they can only be friends. (xix)

Rao also thinks that “gay love is but likely to rely on chance and casual encounters that do not blossom into permanent relationships on account of the odds” (xxix). In this scenario, both Rao and Sarma apprehend that the invisible gay men would politically remain invisible by not coming out and by acting out as straight men and utilizing the familial and social relationships with their gay lovers as veneers of a formal friendship. The gay men have straight marriages, are loving “straight” husbands, and are “straight” fathers and family-men. While on the one hand they are pressurized to put on the hegemonic heterosexual body-images to compensate for their social perception as effeminate gay men, on the other hand they negotiate with this pressure by putting on heterosexual roles to hide their homosexual identity. The straight-acting gay men conform outwardly with the cultural norm of strong, tough, outdoor-type working class men. Thus, whereas gay activism aims at the building up of an alternative culture of resistance by coming out or by employing the politics of self-visibility, the very opposite of it also happens. Instead of coming out, the gay men negotiate to live with their intimate enemy, heteronormativity. While society at large is silent about the homosexuals, the homosexuals themselves choose to be silent

about their sexuality. While Foucault says that silencing is a political act on the part of powers that be in the production of discourse and history, this very silencing also becomes a political strategy on the part of gay men who silence themselves in order to act straight while making their association with other gay men “seem like friendship, or, to use a more resonant word, *yaari*,” as notes Rao (xix). In the words of Ashok Row Kavi, it is a “contract of silence” (2).

Ruth Vanita notes that the hyper-visible same-sex relationships in ancient India were perfectly compatible with marriage and procreation, so that Arjuna and Krishna tales speak explicitly of their idealized same-sex intimacy while at the same time leaving ample room for their heterosexual roles in society at large. “It is only relatively recently in human history that the heterosexual monogamous relationship has come to be viewed as necessarily a married person’s chief emotional outlet” (xxiii-xxiv). In the same vein, Arvind Narrain, writer on queer activism, notes about the co-existence of the homosexual and heterosexual roles in medieval India: “Further, the existing social institution of marriage was not really disturbed, as queer desire in the form of close emotional and sexual relationships with those of the same sex could go hand in hand with being married” (39). Modern discourses of heteronormativity thus keep homosexual and heterosexual relationships in hermetically sealed compartments, making the two identities mutually exclusive: where heteronormative marriage exists, the homoerotic relationship cannot be there. But same-sex friendship or the so-called *yaari* is still idealized in the Indian context. Herein lies the politics of self-silencing undertaken by the gay men who, under the public performance of *yaari* and straight marriage, mask their gay identities so that their same-sex liaisons may thrive in silence.

Gay men of India thus choose a mixed-orientation marriage (a marriage between partners of differing sexual orientations: one person is heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual while the other is of a different orientation.), in which they act as straight husbands, while practising their homosexual encounters with other gay men in the garb of *yaari*. Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar call it “homosexual denial” (102). They say, “The statement that there are hardly any homosexuals in India and yet there is considerable same-sex involvement seems contradictory but simple to reconcile” (101), and gay men have been successful in this political reconciliation. According to them again:

The cultural ideology that strongly links sexual identity with the ability to marry and procreate does indeed lessen the conflict around homosexual behaviour. Yet for many it also serves the function of masking their sexual orientation. It also denies them the possibility of an essential aspect of self-knowledge. (101)

For gay men heterosexuality thus becomes a strategic tool in hiding their sexual orientation. It is a form of “sexual Bunburyism.” In Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* Algernon leads a double life. He uses an imaginary invalid friend, Bunbury, to get out of boring engagements and to provide excitement in the otherwise dull life of Victorian England. A double life or Bunburyism was also a facet of Oscar Wilde’s life who publicly led a heterosexual identity by marrying and having children, while having been secretly engaged in homosexual trysts particularly with Lord Alfred Douglas.

While the politics of making the invisible visible is Dattani’s forte, his stage play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, the radio play *Do the Needful* and the short play *Night Queen* make use of invisibility as a strategic tool on the part of some of the gay

characters in the play. While primarily these plays visibilize and give some sort of voice and space to the silenced and closeted gay, some of the gay characters, instead of coming out, make a hide out in the enemy den, i.e., heterosexuality. Thus the plays do not only “show” the closeted and silenced gay, they also make suggestion of a self-silencing on the part of the gay characters. While retaining their gay identity and homosexual liaisons as a closeted affair, they join the common rung of heteronormative life. The plays thus talk of—to borrow Foucault again—“many silences” (*History 1 27*).

These three plays bring out the contemporary status of the metropolitan gay men in India, a status of hanging midway between liberalism and unacceptability. These plays were produced on stage in the last years of the 1990s, a time when the cable TV led to a mass revolution in TV entertainment throughout the country by bringing in foreign TV channels to the common Indian viewers. While on the one hand the West, with its ethos and culture, was gradually being exposed to common men, on the other the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the consequent identification of high risk groups such as gay men with this pandemic was opening up new kinds of resistance towards the West. As a result, while the common Indian viewers were gradually getting aware of the homosexual, the latter’s identification with HIV/AIDS was building up his social unacceptability. The one-act play *Night Queen* was published in 1999 in Hoshang Merchant’s anthology of gay writings from India, *Yaarana*, and in this regard Merchant’s views are supportive:

In India the MTV culture has done the country’s homoerotic culture a disservice. ... it has projected the West’s gay sub-culture in its worst light by highlighting its lunatic fringe as if it were the mainstream. Your baker, butcher, banker, bus conductor, neighbour or brother

could all be very ordinary and also very gay. It has also caused a backlash. While encouraging homosexuals to come out of the closet and increasing tolerance and acceptance it has also caused an increase in the display of physical or verbal abuse against homosexuals and put closet homosexuals on the defensive. It has also put many young men out of the gay circuit, forcing them prematurely into the arms of women. (xiv)

Merchant also makes another pertinent point regarding why the gay men choose heterosexual performance. He notes “the distance and sometimes outright hostility between gays and women” (xiv) as a dark side of homosexual liberation in India in that decade. Though women and the homosexuals have the same common enemy in masculinity and patriarchy, macho male is what the women prefer and thus they take to mocking the gay for their effeminacy. Social mockery as a whole thus puts the gay off to the edge, compelling them into a tryst with heteronormativity. Dattani in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* has very deftly put why gay men choose heteronormativity, touching on the areas of performativity, heteronormative hegemony and the politics of assimilation of heteronormativity by the gay:

SHARAD. We-ell let me see how I can put it. You see, being a heterosexual man—a real man, as Ed put it—I get everything. I get to be accepted—accepted by whom?—well, that marriage lot down there for instance. I can have a wife, I can have children who will all adore me simply because I am a hetero—I beg your pardon—a real man. Now why would I want to give it all up? So what if I have to change a little? If I can be a real man, I can be king. Look at all the kings around you, look at all the male power they enjoy,

thrusting themselves on to the world, all that penis power! Power with sex, power with muscle, power with size. Firing rockets, exploding nuclear bombs, if you can do it five times, I can do it six times and all that stuff. (*Thrusts his pelvis in an obscene macho fashion.*) Power, man! Power! ... All it needs is a bit of practice. I have begun my lessons. (*Demonstrates.*) Don't sit with your legs crossed. Keep them wide apart. And make sure you occupy lots of room. It's all about occupying space, baby. The walk. Walk as if you have a cricket bat between your legs. And thrust your hand forward when you meet people. (*Speaks in a base voice, an imitation of Ed.*) Hi! Sharad! (*Squeezes an imaginary hand.*) And the speech. Watch the speech. No fluttery vowels. Not 'It's so-o-o hot in here!'—but 'It's HOT! It's fucking HOT!' (CP 101)

Revolving around a host of gay men trapped in the anxiety of performance, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998) is not simply the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal, but is also, as John McRae notes in "A Note on the Play," "a play about how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates" (CP 45). The play presents a set of gay men who are seen in different stages in the negotiation of their gay identity and the society-assigned masculine performances. While Sharad is an out and out gay character comfortable with his gay identity, for Ranjit *coming out* entails *going out* of the country as he finds India unsympathetic towards homosexuality; Kamlesh is an insecure gay man suffering the tortures not only of the heteronormative society but also of the break up with his gay partner Ed/Prakash who has recently decided to adopt heterosexual behaviour (though

not denying his gay identity either) by falling in love with none other than Kamlesh's own sister Kiran; and finally Bunny who is out and out a straight-acting gay denies his gay identity in public and lives in compromise with heteronormativity by marrying and having a family, while at the same time mixing freely with the other gay men in the play.

The beginning of the play, as most other plays of Dattani, indicates the hetero-homo binary. Kamlesh's bedroom serves as the melting pot of his friends, gay and lesbian. It is a ghetto where the peripherals meet. Or it may be said that the peripherals are ghettoized in this little apartment by the impressive heteronormative milieu outside. The stage direction says of Kamlesh's "attempt at creating a world where he can belong" (*CP* 49). But the muggy heat inside Kamlesh's flat created due to the failure of the air-conditioning machine and the heteronormative milieu symbolized in the impinging Mumbai skyline, as also the sounds of a faint shehnai in the marriage ceremony going on downstairs, make Kamlesh's surroundings as uncomfortable as possible. The failure of the air-conditioning machine is attributed by Ranjit to the marriage party downstairs: "The air-con. Oh no! Those ... those wedding people must have tampered with the junction box to get more power for their lights! Those bastards!" (*CP* 95), indicating the symbolic disturbance created by heteronormative ideology in Kamlesh's gay ghetto and disruption of the gay relationships. Bunny says that marriage "is natural to the majority of the people" (*CP* 95), indicating how heteronormative hegemony constructs the concept of heterosexuality and procreative marriage as something biologically determined. The "natural," in this regard, is heterosexual; the "natural" is hegemonic. In the stage directions, the Mumbai skyline is shown as "engulfing the created world of Kamlesh" and "the secret private space of the bedroom" (*CP* 49). The wedding of a neighbour in

the compound of the apartment, with “*the raucous tunes and lusty cries of the baraat*” (CP 49), impinges upon the privacy of Kamlesh’s ghetto. Deepali calls it “Very intrusive” (CP 58) and “really sticky” (CP 64), and Ranjit calls it “all that muck outside” (CP 66). Kamlesh speaks of “the house rules around here” (CP 56), which reduces this area of a posh metropolis into a veritable Panopticon in which Kamlesh’s apartment is under surveillance by the heteronormative society. Noteworthy it is, the photograph is an important element in the play symbolizing not only the gay relationship between Kamlesh and Ed, but also gay relationships in general. Kamlesh’s hiding the photograph from Kiran indicates the invisibilization of the relationship before a representative from the heteronormative world, i.e., Kiran, as it is supposed to destabilize her heterosexual relationship with Ed/Prakash. To the heterosexual world, this photograph is a kind of an unnatural ludicrous thing, as the Guard says:

GUARD. Aap log apna kam sari duniya ko batana chahte hain kya? ...  
 Aapka woh photo! Baraat wale ke compound me gira! ... Sab  
 bache dekh rahe the! Sab hans rahe the. ... Aur phir badon ne bhi  
 dekh liya. Sab ne dekh liya! ... Mujhe pooch rahe the, yahaan kaun  
 kaun aate hain. ... Society waalo ko sab complaint karne wale  
 hain! (CP 105)

Among the gay only Sharad flexes his gay identity boldly. For him, existence for a gay character is possible only if he exerts his gay identity: “Let the world know that you exist. Honey, if you flaunt it, you’ve got it” (CP 70). Sharad justifies Jeremy Seabrook’s take on the gradual emergence and the individual acceptance of a gay identity in the 1990s in India:

Becoming gay or, rather, becoming aware of being gay is an organic process. More men in India are seeing themselves and their lives reflected in this idea and the individual testimonies often give a hint of the evolution within people's lives of that consciousness. (qtd. in Shahani 219)

His camp act of "becoming" a Meena Kumari parodies the agony of Kamlesh jilted by his homosexual lover, Ed/Prakash. As Butler says, parodies often serve to reinforce the existing heterosexual power structures (*Gender* 200). Meena Kumari was an acclaimed film actress of the 1950s and 1960s. Known as the "Tragedy Queen," her roles eternalized the grief-stricken and distressed "Bharatiya Naari." And like her roles in the films, in real life, too, she became addicted to alcohol after her divorce with her husband, Kamal Amrohi. Thus when Sharad performs a Meena Kumari act, or rather parodies it, his performance not only adds comedy to the play but it also reinforces the hegemonic patriarchal power structure in which the "Bharatiya Naari" is the oppressed Other:

SHARAD. ... (*imitates Meena Kumari*) Aao. (*Gasps*). Aao. Tum bhi meri tarah dukhi ho na? (*Gasps*) Aao, mere saath. Hum palkiwale se kahenge hume kisi kabristan le chale. (*CP* 55)

His Meena Kumari act takes the woman and the gay, Meena Kumari the woman and Kamlesh the gay, at a par, as both are victims of the heterosexual patriarchal hegemony and the sublimation of the Other. Later on, he is seen to don the Meena Kumari performance again:

SHARAD. (*with a drunken slur à la Meena Kumari*). Prakash! (*Rubs off her 'sindoor.'*) Prakaash! (*Breaks her 'bangles' on the wall.*) Prakaash! (*Slides down the wall, sobbing uncontrollably.*)

(CP 57)

Hence, just as Sharad is quite easy with his gay identity and sympathizes with another gay like Kamlesh, he also has an intrinsic sympathy for women, as he feels the peripheral nature of all sexualities except the male in the patriarchal power structure. This is brought out in his relationship with Deepali. Sharad assigns the sexual exploitation and commoditization of the peripheral Other to the power structure in a heterosexual patriarchal society, and hence when he finds out Kamlesh's secret and paid sexual escapades with the guard he virulently protests against it and accuses Kamlesh of sexually exploiting the guard:

SHARAD. (*throws the money at him.*) And how dare you exploit that poor man?

KAMLESH. I did not exploit him.

SHARAD. You used him as a sex object. (CP 63)

In fact, Deepali supports Sharad's tirades against Kamlesh by suggesting that the heterosexual patriarchal society should be paid back on their own coin when she says that "Men should get a dose of their own medicine!" (CP 63). A witty and light verbal exchange between Sharad and Deepali, in which Sharad also dons a camp behaviour, puts a form of resistance against the creation of the binary of procreative, hegemonic heterosexual sex on the one hand and the so-called recreational homosexual sex on the other. While Deepali flaunts her pride of being a woman by saying, "Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am a woman," Sharad attacks heterosexuality for its politics of procreative sex: "Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am not pregnant" (CP 66). Not only so, his political distance from the heteronormative world is seen in his use of a pair of binoculars to follow from a distance the affairs of the heteronormative world and parody them. His voyeuristic gaze with the pair of binoculars onto a heterosexual

couple engaged in a sex-act is not meant to erotically please him but to provide food for his parody and banter of the heterosexual performances. He banter the mismatch and the forced harmony existing in a heterosexual union:

SHARAD. Oh, my Gawd! Those heterosexuals are at it again!

KAMLESH. If you can see them, they can see us. Shut the window.

SHARAD. Are you crazy? Just look at them! Yeeuch! That guy is just bad news.

KAMLESH. A diamond merchant in Zaveri Bazaar. If it is her husband with her, that is.

SHARAD. Of course he is her husband! He is too fat and bald to be her lover. (CP 53)

Sharad ridicules heterosexual lovemaking as a form of “Govinda’s dance routine” (CP 65) and the heterosexual world for him is a world “run by rituals” (CP 72). He thinks that “Blue films are so boring” (CP 54), as perhaps he finds in pornographic films the very establishment of the phallic power or the masculine power. Denying imbibing the masculine performances in pornography and sympathizing with the suffering women as in his Meena Kumari act and in his verbal support of lesbians like Deepali, Sharad puts up resistance against the masculine order. Sharad’s denial of pornography is his denial of the institutionalization of penis power. Pornography institutionalizes the male sexual supremacy, fusing the eroticization of domination and submission with the social construction of male and female. Pornography attracts a man when he can identify himself with the male pornstar exerting his phallic power on the female star, and no such identification is achieved by Sharad in pornography. Pornography locks the sexes in “a vicious all-encompassing system” (Bristow 154) conferring upon them codes of masculine or feminine behaviour. Thus Sharad avoids

being taken in by the patriarchal ideology and retains his resistance against the masculine order by avoiding pornography. Sharad keeps a bold front before heteronormativity and calls for a united stand among the sexually marginalized against its hegemony: “They can’t do us harm any more than the harm we do each other” (*CP* 105).

Ranjit is one character who has not compromised his gay identity, but, knowing well that India is not the proper milieu conducive to the nurture of a gay identity, he has decided to leave his country. The first reference to him in the play comes in the form of “coconut friend” (*CP* 59), as termed by Sharad. Sharad later explains the term “coconut” as “brown on the outside and white on the inside” (*CP* 71). Ranjit accepts such a taunting accolade by defending his immigration as a gay: “My English lover and I have been together for twelve years now. You lot will never be able to find a lover in this wretched country” (*CP* 71). “Yes, I am sometimes regretful of being an Indian, because I can’t seem to be both Indian and gay,” says he (*CP* 88). Kamlesh’s suffering as a gay is interpreted by Ranjit as “the price one pays for living in India” (*CP* 70). Ranjit’s case can be interpreted as exemplifying Queer Diaspora, an emerging field of theory in which the queer and the diasporic coalesce. Queer theory asserts, on the one hand, that the nation, through structural arrangements of citizenship, marriage law, and immigration regulation, always and unconditionally privileges heterosexuality. On the other, queerness challenges not just the nation’s familial metaphor of belonging, but disrupts national coherence itself. To this extent, being a queer is already being an extra-national. Queerness constitutes a mobile resistance to the boundaries and limits imposed by gender, and that resistance is the same as the migrant’s movement through national and cultural borders, puts Wesling (31). Migration enables an Asian or black queer to escape the claustrophobia and

homophobia reigning in their original home or nation. Ranjit is a “sexile,” who is “a gay cosmopolitan subject who, once exiled from national space, is therefore outside of the duties, identifications, and demands of nationalism, and is paradoxically liberated into free transnational mobility” (Wesling 31). A diasporic queer like Ranjit is twice removed from the nation. The term “coconut” thus metaphorically suggests Ranjit’s real identity as both geographically and ideologically unlocatable and ambivalent.

But the play actually hinges on the trials and tribulations of Kamlesh for his breaking up with his long time gay partner Ed/Prakash, his discovery that Ed/Prakash has fallen in love with his sister Kiran whom Ed wants to marry soon, Kamlesh’s not very stable relationship with Sharad, his visit to a psychiatrist who wanted to “reorient” him (*CP* 69) and his anxiety regarding whether he should disclose Ed/Prakash’s real identity to Kiran. Of all the gay characters portrayed in the play he is the most obvious victim of his insecurities. When Sharad advises him to get Ed out of his mind, he says, “I can’t! I tried! I can’t!” (*CP* 55). Unable to tolerate Ed’s betrayal he decides to tear all his photographs taken with Ed/Prakash, except one which shows him and Ed/Prakash in a very intimate embrace and which, as Sharad says, is “an interesting picture. Cheek to cheek, pelvis to pelvis. Naked” (*CP* 71-72). The photograph, hidden behind a mirror, haunts him, as does his memory, so that his present relationship with Sharad is affected. Desperate at being unable to bear his separation he draws solace from casual and paid sex with other gay men. In fact, the play opens with such a scene in which Kamlesh has just had sex with the apartment security guard:

There are two men in the bedroom. ... Kamlesh is in his dressing gown, smoking a cigarette, watching the other man dress in a khaki uniform ... takes out his wallet and offers a few hundred rupees to the

guard. The guard pockets the money, makes a salaam to Kamlesh and steps out of the bedroom into the living room. (CP 49)

To Deepali, this is a “terrible thing” (CP 63) he is doing to himself by paying the guard for sex, and to Sharad, Kamlesh is imbibing the heterosexual men’s culture of exploiting someone else for sex: “Only men who are fat, bald and forty pay for sex” (CP 63).

Kamlesh’s paid sex with the guard raises the issue of sexual exploitation of socially inferior classes by the upper. Though such a kind of sexual exploitation is usually a heteronormative phenomenon, Dattani’s use of such exploitation in the homosexual circle raises the issue of a capitalist class consciousness among male homosexuals. However, it can be said in counter-argument that this is a paid sex, and so the issue of sexual exploitation does not arise here. This counter-argument leads to the sexual classification of other male queer sexualities in India, a classification which certainly is invisible to the rest of the world. As such a classification has already been dealt with in the introduction of this thesis, it can only be said in brief that the guard’s case alludes to what Ashok Row Kavi classifies as MSM Subgroups, or Men having Sex with Men (392). These are the invisible male queer subpopulations which, according to Kavi, are vulnerable to their occupations or professions. These include film extras, gym boys, room boys, truck-cleaner boys, “maalish-wallahs” or male masseurs (as is Trilok in *Do the Needful*), who are into what Kavi calls “survival sex,” as their “work is intermittent and irregular and they may have to offer sex in exchange for work” (392). The guard can also be positioned in the category of “behaviourally bisexual men” (393) belonging to the same category as those of migrant labours and jail inmates, those arising out of inter-state or international migrations, such as Bihari/UP migrant labours and Nepali men in Mumbai.

However, Kamlesh's paid sex with the guard is a result of his desperation as he himself expresses before his friends:

KAMLESH. I-I am not sure how to put it. Perhaps I shouldn't really trouble you with my ... situation. But you are the only friends I have ... 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. In Bangalore. We have all been through the pain of separation ... As gay men and women, we have all been through that, I suppose ... some of us several times. I did a cruel thing ... Sharad, I hope you will find it in you to forgive me ... I did a cruel thing by loving Sharad to forget Prakash. I have not succeeded. (*CP* 67-68)

Kamlesh suffers not because Ed/Prakash “had left [him] for another man, but he left [him] because he was ashamed of [their] relationship” (*CP* 68-69). The “muggy night” of the title thus serves as the metaphor for Kamlesh himself, a betrayed, suffocated self living like a recluse, “A recluse in the heart of Bombay” (*CP* 64), as Deepika would say. Having failed to come out to the bigger society, Kamlesh embraces invisibility as a kind of solace to his soul on the advice of his sister, Kiran: “Kamlesh, take my advice. 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). As Kiran says, “it is easy for you to be ... invisible” (*CP* 91). Self-imposed invisibility is a kind of strategy for a gay like Kamlesh who feels helpless in his liminal and peripheral existence. His casual sex with the guard in the very opening of the play might have been disturbing for an Indian audience, but Dattani shows this act as a relief from desperation. Kamlesh begins suffering from an existentialist situation,

wishing he was not gay and visits a psychiatrist, “a straight homophobic psychiatrist” (CP 69), who prescribes for him aversion therapy and the need for sexual reorientation:

KAMLESH. I knew I needed medication. I chose the psychiatrist out of the Yellow pages. He pretended to understand. Until he began to tell me about aversion therapy. For a while I believed him. Because the medication helped me cope with my depression better. Until he said I would never be happy as a gay man. It is impossible to change society, he said, but it may be possible for you to reorient yourself. (CP 69)

Dattani’s evocation of the grim pictures of how a homosexual is *tried* to be treated back to the “normal” sexual behaviour is not imaginary. In fact his delineation of Kamlesh’s ordeals can be given a practical support in R. Raj Rao and Dibyajyoti Sarma’s delineation of the normalizing treatment of a homosexual in their interview with one Sushil Patil:

PATIL. Yes. It happened in Kolhapur, another town in southern Maharashtra. I went to see a doctor, a general practitioner. I told him that I was attracted to men. The doctor tried to scare me. He gave me some pill and tablets and told me that my problem was psychological. He said that logically, all men were heterosexual. ... Then I went to Belgaum in Karnataka to see a psychiatrist. ... He said, he understood my “problem” and gave me hopes that I would soon be okay. ... I took the tablets hoping I would be cured and become normal. (22)

It may be added that in addition to law generally condemning a homosexual as a criminal and religion condemning him/her as a sinner, medical science also acts as an apparatus or as one of the Foucauldian *dispositifs* of power and sexuality and views homosexuality in terms of pathology and terms a homosexual as a mentally ill person in need of treatment. Medical science in this regard takes on a normalizing and moralizing role to play in society. Right from the days of the Viennese psychiatrist Richard Kraft-Ebbing in his *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1894), diverse so called fields of medicine such as sexology and psychiatry have thought in terms of the binary of normal heterosexuality on the one hand and the perverse sexualities on the other. As Joseph Bristow notes, Kraft-Ebbing's theory worked towards establishing the fact that "the highest form of heterosexual love is menaced on all sides by an epidemic of perverse sexual behaviours" (30). Male homosexuality was understood as a result of a pathogenic family with a domineering mother and a detached or an absent father (Beiber). As such, the number of medicinal procedures to cure this perversity or abnormality were many, ranging from the surgical technique of transplanting testosterone tissues from a heterosexual man, surgical removal of the hypothalamus, hormone supplementation therapy, aversion therapy through counselling and even shock therapy, in which the male homosexual subject was given electric shock after having been shown nude male pictures. But whereas the Stonewall riots of 1969 coaxed the Western medicine to look the other way round and to discard the pathological and behavioural construct of homosexuality, modern Indian medicine, which by far was a colonial import, has not undergone such radical change and is much in the same state as Western medicine was before the Stonewall riots. Modern Indian medicine still is a testament to the discourse of power and considers homosexuality as a ego-dystonic psychic disorder in which the subject's gender

identity or sexual preference is not in doubt but he/she wishes it were different and the subject thus undergoes behavioural therapy.

Thus, when Ranjit comments that the treatment Kamlesh undergoes is a “primitive” (*CP* 69) one, one must add that it is neither primitive nor old fashioned: the so-called “treatment” of the homosexual in India has been very modern and is a continuation of the process began by Kraft-Ebbing. Kamlesh tries “explaining to [the psychiatrist] that [he] needed his help to overcome [his] anxiety and fears, not to be something [he is] not” (*CP* 69), but all that the psychiatrist understands is that Kamlesh’s homosexuality is an ego-dystonic psychological disorder. Deepali’s words reveal how such a psychiatrist tries to cure one of homosexuality:

DEEPALI. ... The whole point is to find someone who will help him escape to the more ... acceptable world. He will go to this psychiatrist and say, ‘Doctor, I want to be heterosexual.’ The doctor will say, ‘Okay, this is a case of ego-dystonic homosexuality. If that’s what you really want. It’s a bit like you going to a cosmetic surgeon and telling him you want to look like Madhuri Dixit. If that’s what you really want ... Then the doctor will add very casually, ‘We will put you on to our behavioural modification program. Er—by the way, it will cost you twenty-five thousand. I hope that is not a problem?’ (*CP* 100)

Anxiety and fear, just as a heterosexual lover deserted by his/her beloved would feel, are thus the feelings possessing Kamlesh. In Kamlesh, Dattani thus shows the same kind of despair and agony upsetting both a homosexual and a heterosexual in love. Sufferings and ordeals thus characterize not only the heterosexual lover but also the homosexual.

The heterosexual and homosexual are two different forms of sexuality which become one not only in the intensity of love but also in the intensity of suffering. But whereas search for an escape route from despair through casual sex does neither derogate nor idealize the heterosexual, such a search adds a negative layer to the construct of the homosexual as a perverse, promiscuous and highly sexed creature believing in multiple partners. In *Kamlesh*, Dattani tries to give an answer back to this construct. In fact, such a construct is/was politically used by the hegemonic heterosexual milieu to formulate the theory that the promiscuous gay men lead to the proliferation of the AIDS epidemic. *Kamlesh*, having been deserted, seeks succour and solace in casual sex with strangers. Dattani shows that *Kamlesh*'s search for succour is not a product of his sexual promiscuity but his loneliness and feeling of insecurity:

KAMLESH: 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 pretense. Or when they need more money. (*CP 70*)

*Kamlesh*, the gay, thus seeks out sexual partners to “connect,” and not for pleasure or perversity.

While *Sharad* is a gay and *Kamlesh* wishes he *were* not a gay, *Bunny* and *Ed/Prakash*'s are typical cases of *Bunburyism*. If *Ed/Prakash* has been secretive regarding his double life till his mask falls apart at the end, *Bunny* is quite candid with his *Bunburyism*. In fact, *Bunny*'s name puns with “*Bunbury*,” the imaginary character in *The Importance of Being Earnest* who symbolizes double life. *Bunny* exemplifies the ambitious and political use of straightness by a gay. In *Kamlesh*'s ghetto, *Bunny* is a gay, but outside he is a heteronormative straight, a TV actor, idolizing masculine

behaviour. Bunny's entry in the play is thus tinged with significance and carries the hetero-homo binary in the play to an intensity. When Sharad and Deepali are busy in their tirade against the procreative heteronormative ideology inside Kamlesh's ghetto, Bunny's voice is heard offstage where he talks to a group of children who are his fans:

BUNNY (*off*). Mard ke puttar bano! Be brave! Be like your father! ...

(CP 66)

He is thus a fitting representative of India's gay who has sacrificed his gay identity and has assimilated the heteronormative performance involving marriage and procreation. A masculine hero, and a star performer at that, he is a crowd-puller in the marriage party revelling below Kamlesh's flat, and he is thus a perfect go-between between Kamlesh's ghetto and the heteronormative milieu outside:

BUNNY (*eating a pakora*). Maybe we can all join the baraat. They

were insisting that I join them. I am sure they won't mind if I bring

my friends. Anyone who wants to join them can come with me.

Sharad, if you want to join me, no problem. But behave yourself.

No camp talk and flirting if you are going as my friend. ... (CP 66)

In exhorting Sharad to behave as a heterosexual male and to shed off his camp act, Bunny thus exposes his collusion with the heteronormative ideology. Kamlesh's ghetto is thus Bunny's "back stage" and the marriage party below and the TV serials in which he performs are his "front stage" (Goffman 229). His visibility as a straight is thus a negotiatory strategy, as evidenced in his advice to Kamlesh:

BUNNY. Since you want us to help you—let me give you some

advice. You are looking in the wrong places to forget your Prakash.

Get married.

RANJIT. Hah!

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

SHARAD. And pretend to be straight like you!

BUNNY. What's wrong with that? Huh? Do you think I will be accepted by the millions if I screamed from the rooftops that I am gay.

RANJIT. Yes, but you do scream from the rooftops that you are straight.

BUNNY. Camouflage! Even animals do it. Blend with the surroundings. They can't find you. You politically correct gays deny yourself the basic animal instinct of camouflage. (CP 70)

Bunny's "millions" thus of course refer to his millions of TV viewers of his serials in which he performs, in both the sense of an actor and as a straight-acting gay. He "does" the masculine straight to cater to public taste and also to cater to his basic survival in a heteronormative milieu.

Excepting the very little recent queer spaces allowed to some extent, TV serials in India have been generally projecting the happy Indian joint family living in a utopian harmony, overseen by a patriarch or a matriarch with an uncountable number of family members. These shows revolve round stereotyped gender performativities in which straight men of outgoing nature like Bunny are given the central roles:

KIRAN. Hello. Oh! You are the Bunny Singh! I can't believe it.

BUNNY (*switching to star mode*). Banda haazir hai.

KIRAN. I don't watch much TV but I have seen some episodes of *Yeh Hai Hamara Parivaar*. You are wonderful.

BUNNY. It is a good team.

KIRAN. You are the ideal husband and father! I can't imagine anyone else in that part. (CP 76)

Sharad's dig, "Oh, he is a very good actor for sure" (CP 76), cannot be ignored in this context, as it aptly expresses Bunny's double standards. In fact, the iconic presence of Bunny Singh as an ideal husband and an ideal father in a heteronormative middle class Indian family becomes a discourse of power as when Deepali admits, though sarcastically, "We need more men like Bunny to make this a better world" (CP 76). Deepali's sarcasm is aimed at the parodic nature of Bunny's role which establishes hegemony of that which it parodies. Bunny's macho role in TV serials and the preoccupation of the serials with heterosexual family rightly suggest what Dattani, in his interview with Erin B. Mee, termed as the compulsory projection of "right values" and "right people" in the field of Indian performing arts (25). For Dattani, thus, performing arts in India have long been impervious to the presentation of gay issues because "that's not Indian, it doesn't happen here" (Mee 25). Bunny's gay identity is thus a non-issue, a non-Indian affair which cannot be presented on screen. Bunny, an ambitious actor, thus politically uses this "right" (Mee 25) value on screen.

Not only does Bunny sustain the heteronormative ideology on screen, in his advices to other characters in the play, too, he shows himself to be in favour of a status quo regarding the hegemony of heteronormativity. He is not in favour of Kamlesh's demystification of his relationship with Ed/Prakash, and supports Kiran marry Ed/Prakash without Kiran ever knowing that Ed/Prakash is the same person who was in homosexual relationship with Kamlesh. "Don't tell her. It will ruin their

lives. If both of them want [to marry], then what is the problem?" says he (CP 82).

Bunny's vehement support for such mixed-orientation marriage stems from the heterosexual world's ideology of retaining the heteronormative continuum. "Why are you creating trouble where there is no trouble?" says he again (CP 84). His, too, is a masquerade of the masculine, as is Ed/Prakash's:

DEEPALI. Do you love your wife, Bunny?

BUNNY. Yes! I do.

DEEPALI. Can you love your wife?

BUNNY. Of course I can!

DEEPALI. With the same intensity with which you can love a man?

BUNNY. You know I would be lying if I said I could. But I give her so much. More than any heterosexual man. I do look after her well.

She is content.

RANJIT. Content!

BUNNY. She boasts about my work to all her neighbours. Our children are popular in school. And they all love me. At least I am not depressed as Kamlesh!

(*Silence.*) Sorry, Kamlesh.

DEEPALI. We were talking about your wife, not you. We are talking about Kiran, not Kamlesh.

BUNNY. What about me? I exist too, you know! Why doesn't anyone ask me whether I am happy or not?

RANJIT. Because we all know you couldn't possibly be happy.

BUNNY. Well, you are wrong. I am very happy. (CP 84)

But, though Bunny at the first sight seems to the audience a hypocrite having assimilated the heteronormative ideology to act straight both on-screen and off-screen and at the same time practising his homosexual liaisons in closet, his real identity as gay and his pride of being such is not revealed till towards the end of the play where the final twist compels the characters to make an honest choice of their individual sexualities. He admits that his real existence is not in the form of a straight, but as a gay:

BUNNY. 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. This is not such a nice feeling. I have tried to survive. In both worlds. And it seems I do not exist in either. I am sorry, Kiran, I lied to you as I have lied to the rest of the world. I said to you that I am a liberal-minded person. I am not them but I accept them. It is actually they who are liberal-minded. They have accepted me in spite of my letting them down so badly. I deny them in public, but I want their love in private. I have never told anyone in so many words what I am telling you now—I am a gay man. Everyone believes me to be the model middle-class Indian man. I was chosen for the part in the serial because I fit into common perceptions of what a family man ought to look like. I believed in it myself. I lied—to myself first. And I continue to lie to millions of people every week on Thursday nights. There's no such person ... . (CP 102-103)

Bunny thus comes out to the only heterosexual character in the play, i.e., Kiran, expresses his dilemma of being a gay, points out the truth that “the model middle-class Indian man” or the “family man” (*CP* 103) may also be very gay but may look like a straight, how he tried to keep a balance between his two identities, and expresses his gratefulness towards the frequenters of Kamlesh’s ghetto for accepting his dual identities or his so called hypocrisy. Dattani has a sort of sympathy for characters like Bunny who are honest about their gay identity though outwardly they may be straight-acting. Bunny is a gay who, though he wishes, cannot come out because of his professional liabilities as a family man in a TV soap. In fact, in the Indian context, a celebrity or a television star or a film-star coming out as homosexual is still beyond possible imaginations. By default, Indian celebrities should be essentially heterosexual. Bunny hates this kind of essentializing or stereotyping, though he has been stereotyped as a macho man. “But because if I had a turban, I will end up playing a stereotypical Sird in all those movies. And that would hurt [me] even more” (*CP* 89), he says about his fear of being stereotyped as a Sird, and the same fear of being stereotyped as a macho man may apply to his identity. Kamlesh praises Bunny by saying, “That must have taken some courage to say all that. Not everyone has your strength” (*CP* 103). Honestly gay, straightness is Bunny’s source of livelihood. His dual identity is not a serious fraud, though it entails some lie about it. He leaves the play with his decision, “Maybe I should come out in the nine hundredth episode ...” (*CP* 111), suggesting his possible role in the gay movement in his country where gayness does not make a national identity, where a macho masculine hero can never even in imagination be a gay and where being a middle-class family man produces the identity of the Indian man.

But Dattani does not invest Ed/Prakash with any such role in the gay movement of his country. A gay, his straight-acting is only a strategy to reap the profits of what Bunny says “both worlds” (*CP* 103). Ed/Prakash’s double names suggest his double life: a straight-acting gay who wishes to reap the fruit of his heterosexual marriage with Kiran while at the same time maintaining his gay relationship with Kamlesh in secrecy and under the veneer of a family relationship. Ed/Prakash’s relationship with Kamlesh is the crisis point in the play. The relationship falls apart when heteronormative performances become demanding upon them, and Ed/Prakash gives in to the pressure of the apparatuses surrounding him. The play opens *in medias res*, at a time when Kamlesh and Ed/Prakash has already split, with the contrasting scenes of a Kamlesh who tries to stick to his gay identity and an Ed/Prakash who acts straight. On the one hand Kamlesh tries to be as loving as possible as a gay lover when he carefully ties the shoelace of the guard with whom he has just had sex, and on the other hand one finds Ed/Prakash trying to be as careful as the lover of Kiran. Ed/Prakash’s “manner and style are quick and assertive which is sometimes misread as aggressive,” notes the stage direction (*CP* 52). This juxtaposition of homosexual and heterosexual relationships evoke certain common parts and parcels that characterize love in general: care, emotion, dotage and a pampering patronization of the beloved’s wishes. On the one hand, there is Kamlesh careful towards the guard:

KAMLESH. Jaldi aana.

*The guard makes to leave.*

Ek minute.

*The guard stops. Kamlesh goes to him.*

Aapki shoelace ...

*Kamlesh kneels before him. He is about to tie the guard's shoelace. The guard moves away quickly.*

GUARD (*aghast*). Yeh aap kya kar rahen hain, saab? Ji, main kar loonga.

*The guard moves away and is about to put his foot on a stool, but decides against it. He looks around, foot in the air, and decides to attempt tying his shoelace as he is.*

KAMLESH (*rushing to him*). Let me do that for you please ...

*Kamlesh kneels beside him, grabs his foot and tries to put it on his thigh. (CP 50)*

On the other hand, the same love and care are shown by Ed/Prakash:

ED (*begins to give her the baggage tag but changes his mind*). Let me put it for you. (*He puts the tag on her case*). I got a window seat for you.

KIRAN. That was very thoughtful of you. (*Laughs nervously*). But actually—I prefer an aisle seat.

ED (*disappointed*). Oh.

KIRAN. It-it's my fault really.

ED (*looking at the boarding passes*). How is it your fault?

KIRAN. I should have told you I am scared of heights.

ED (*referring to the seats*). A and B. That's not an aisle seat.

KIRAN. It doesn't matter.

ED. Of course it matters. You are scared of heights.

KIRAN. But you didn't know that so ...

ED. But I know now.

KIRAN. Look, I'll seat in B, then everything will be fine.

ED. You said you preferred an aisle seat.

KIRAN. I don't want to be fussy, Ed.

ED. Baby, please be fussy. I like you when you are fussy.

.....

.....

*(Off. Shouting)*. Don't you understand English? I want an aisle seat for my fiancé and I don't care if it is a full flight. Dammit, get someone to give up their seat! What bloody service is this?

*Kiran recoils initially at this outburst, but is comforted by the thought that he is doing it for her. She sighs. (CP 52-53)*

But Dattani's purpose here is not only to show how common emotions of love characterize both the heterosexual and homosexual loves, but, more than that, he intends to point out how, in the midst of all trials and tribulations of separation from his gay lover, Kamlesh has still retained his gay identity intact, whereas as a result of the same ordeals Ed/Prakash has imbibed the performativities expected from the male partner in a heterosexual relationship. His performativities reach the form of a masquerade of the masculine, an exaggerated show of masculine characteristics to hide his gay identity. Insecurity as a gay has led him into a negotiation with heteronormativity and towards a mixed-orientation marriage with Kiran, whereas the same insecurity cannot force Kamlesh into such a negotiation though it has taken a heavy toll on his mind. As Kiran says, she met Ed/Prakash at a time when her torture from her first marriage was in its climax, and a marriage with Ed/Prakash is going to mark an end to those agonies and miseries from her first marriage. Ed/Prakash, on the other hand, sees in the marriage the beginning of an end to his insecurities as a gay.

So, when Kamlesh tries his best to closet his relationship with Ed/Prakash by saying to his company that his relationship with Ed “doesn’t exist,” at the same time Kiran is seen placing Ed’s photograph on the side table in the bedroom (*CP* 79). In a superb dramatic stroke Dattani here suggests the closeting of a gay relationship and the establishment of the hegemony of heterosexual relationship and marriage.

The play does produce ample evidence of Ed’s dilemma. In the second stage level, an empty area where characters “are forced to confront their inner thoughts” (*CP* 49) and which also carries the audience back to the past, Ed/Prakash is seen meeting Kamlesh in a park and confessing his guilt of being a gay:

ED. ... Are you scared? ... I don’t know. I just felt like doing it. I could easily go into my bedroom with my glass of rum, step over the balcony and jump. Nobody would suspect anything. ... Nobody would know. Unless they were intelligent like you. But you don’t know me. You wouldn’t even have known I existed. (*CP* 80).

Kamlesh and Kiran, too, move to this empty area and confront Ed/Prakash, so that the three characters are engaged in a triangular exchange in which Kamlesh is shown talking to Ed, Kiran to Ed and Ed to both Kamlesh and Kiran. The dilemmas in the three—namely Kamlesh’s dilemma regarding his gay relationship with Ed, Kiran’s dilemma regarding how her new-found love for Ed would be accepted by people after her divorce from her first husband and Ed’s dilemma and his consequent politics of turning from a being gay towards being a straight—are delineated through juxtaposition of a budding heterosexual relationship and a decaying homosexual relationship:

KAMLESH. How long shall we continue to hide?

ED (*stops dancing*). Let them talk. If a man and a woman want to dance together, what's their problem? We will stop after this number. Let them see. (*Begins dancing again.*)

KAMLESH. Let them talk! If two men want to love one another, what's the harm? (*CP 91*)

At one time Kiran tells Kamlesh, "And [Ed] told me you thought he was gay! Whatever gave you that idea?" (*CP 90*), suggesting the strategy taken by Ed/Prakash to invisibilize his gay identity to Kiran and also his strategy of presenting himself as a straight mistakenly identified by Kamlesh as a gay. Ed/Prakash tells Kamlesh, "I am not happy with being who I am. And I want to try to be like the rest" (*CP 92*). He is "horrified" (*CP 93*) on seeing the photograph of Kamlesh and him in an intimate embrace. Ed breaks his rank by joining the "rest" (*CP 92*), the heteronormative world and by showing off his straight performativities as an affectionate, sensible and homophobic lover of Kiran engaged in a ball dance with her and gradually showing off his disgust towards a gay identity. The second stage level witnesses Ed's turning a straight from a gay:

ED (*mimes looking at photographs.*) What? When did you take these?

KAMLESH. He first needs to understand how beautiful we look together.

KIRAN. What? What did you just say?

ED (*horrified.*) No! You are a cheat. So that's why you got me drunk! I don't want to look at this filth!

KIRAN (*laughs nervously.*) Best couple?

ED. This is ugly.

KAMLESH. If only he wasn't so concerned about the whole damn world!

KIRAN. Is this a joke? Did you hear that, Ed? They gave us a prize for the best couple on the floor!

ED (*mimes tearing up the photographs*). Filth! Rubbish!

KAMLESH. But he loves me, I am certain of it.

KIRAN. The best couple on the floor!

ED. Go away! I don't ever want to see you again. (*Exits.*) (CP 93)

Ed/Prakash's tearing up the photographs of his intimate moments with Kamlesh signifies his breaking up the homosexual relationship, whereas when Kiran and he are announced as the best couple on the dance floor it signifies not only Ed's joining the straight ranks, but also the acknowledgement of a heterosexual relationship by the hegemonic heteronormative order. On the realistic stage level, Ed/Prakash is reported by Kamlesh as having assimilated the heteronormative ideology of blaming the devil for making him a gay: "He goes to church every week now. They put him on to a psychiatrist. He believes his love for me was the work of the devil ..." (CP 85). Kamlesh blames the heteronormative world for pushing Ed/Prakash to his limits from where he could never turn back and remain a gay: "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). Kamlesh decides that he would keep his relationship with Ed/Prakash as a closely guarded secret for the sake of Kiran's happiness, even though it involves letting her live in a forced harmony:

KAMLESH. I want her to be ... content. Like Bunny's wife. (*Pause.*) I have met [Bunny's wife]. She has a considerate husband in Bunny. He does care for her. And I have seen how contented she is. Kiran

has had a troubled first marriage. I helped her fight for a divorce.

Those scars haven't left her.

*Kiran comes out of the bedroom in a loose dress. She proceeds to wipe her wet hair and comb it while Kamlesh talks.*

Very slowly she began to find herself again. And I would pray that she would not fall apart again. 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 asked me whether Prakash was gay. She just assumed he wasn't. (CP 85-86)

Kamlesh's confession thus exposes his self-sacrifice for the sake of his sister's happiness, whereas Ed's sacrifice of his gay relationship with Kamlesh comes out of pure hypocrisy, out of a politics to join the "rest" (CP 92), to become "a real man" (CP 99), and "to belong to that world" (CP 99).

Ed's subterfuge is brought out in the play by means of a play-acting, a kind of "The Mousetrap" as in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Act III, sc. 2 of the play, in which the murder of Hamlet's father by his uncle is exposed:

DEEPALI. Sharad wants to be straight!

*Sharad almost spills the nimbupani. Deepali goes to Sharad.*

It's all right dear. You might as well come out with it. (*Looks at him directly.*) The reason why you broke up with Kamlesh is because you want to be straight, isn't that so?

SHARAD. Let me think about it. (*To Kiran.*) Your nimbupani, dear.

KIRAN. Thank you. But that's absurd.

DEEPALI (*spelling it out.*) Precisely. That's the whole point. That you don't see how absurd the idea is.

SHARAD (*catching on.*) Oh, right. Yes, I want to be as straight as a stick.

(*Immediately starts speaking more aggressively.*) I want to be straight.

Like a rod. (*CP 99*)

Ed/Prakash, unaware of the trap, encourages Sharad to become so: “Of course he can. It’s been done before” (*CP 100*). Caught in the verbal jugglery of Deepali, Sharad and Ranjit who are out to expose his hypocrisy, Ed/Prakash goes to Kamlesh’s bedroom with the alibi of a headache and meets Kamlesh. It is only there, through Ed/Prakash’s own words, that his use of heteronormativity as a strategy is revealed. The juxtaposition of two scenes—in one scene Ed/Prakash confronts Kamlesh and exposes his politics of remaining invisible as a gay and using his mixed-orientation marriage as veneer, and in the other scene Kiran praises Ed/Prakash as a macho lover, totally in dark about Ed’s subterfuge—brings out Ed/Prakash’s negotiation with heteronormativity:

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.

KIRAN. No, I have no regrets. I feel like a complete woman with him.

(*laughs.*) I know this may sound a little old-fashioned to you, but he is so ... male. So protective, so caring and yet so assertive.

DEEPALI. Yes, so ... male.

ED. You don’t really love Sharad. You love me.

KAMLESH. That’s not true! (*CP 104*)

For Ed, marrying Kiran is a “marriage of convenience” (*CP* 105). He exhorts Kamlesh: “We both hide ourselves,” “You are my brother-in-law. I can meet you any time,” “Nobody would know. Nobody would care,” “I’ll take care of Kiran. And you take care of me” (*CP* 105). Ed’s heterosexual mask falls off and he is proved not only to delude the others concerned with him but also to have deluded himself the most. His assimilated sissyphobia comes to the fore when he begins abusing Kamlesh in pure words from the heterosexual world which are used to refer to effeminate men: “Faggot! Pansy! Gandu! Gandu!” (*CP* 110). Kamlesh exhorts the undoubting Kiran not to marry Ed, and amid the noise of the marriage band fading away in the background the possibility of her marriage with Ed/Prakash ends. Ed/Prakash is warned by Kiran of the future anguish of a hypocritical straight-acting gay and suggests that such an anguish would not have come to his life had he stuck to his own sexual orientation. Ed/Prakash is to pay for his politics of hypocrisy:

KIRAN. ... Just think. Somewhere, sometime, you will meet someone at a party who might say—‘You look familiar.’ And every time you hear that, your heart will beat a little faster, your feet will grow cold. Has this person seen that picture? Does this person know who I really am? Does he see a side of me I don’t want him to see?  
(*CP* 108)

Ed/Prakash can find remedy only in remaining a gay, as Kiran advises him to replace the photograph of him and her together with the photograph of Kamlesh and him in an intimate embrace. In Ed/Prakash’s character Dattani thus puts his critique of a gay’s assimilation of the heteronormative ideology, his adoption of the performativities of the masculine and his use of the veneer of heteronormativity to invisibilize his gay

identity. As Ed reveals, this kind of denying the self leads to identity crisis and self-delusion:

KIRAN. ... What more do you want? You will never be happier than this. You will end up being lonelier if you tried to be anything else other than who you are. And think of the poor woman you may end up marrying just as a cover-up for your shame. (*CP* 102)

Silent negotiation with heteronormativity also forms the theme of *Do the Needful*. “Teri bhi chup, meri bhi chup” (“Your silence and mine as well.”) (*CP* 142) forms the essence of the play. The BBC radio play first broadcast in 1997 uses the backdrop of the big fat Indian wedding and the formal rituals connected with it and pits the homosexual desire of Alpesh for Trilok and Mali (the gardener) against it, only to come to the point of Alpesh’s negotiations with the heteronormative ideology connected with the wedding. Having been a radio play it is easier in this play for Dattani to move from space to space with the help of cinematic jump cuts, whereas in his stage plays the split level stage forms the platform where many actions, the interior and the exterior of the characters, take place simultaneously. Dattani’s smooth shifting from scene to scene, from the exterior to the interior, from the surface level of the interior to the deeper level of the interior and his juxtaposition of scenes which are antithetical to the core and suggestive to the ultimate, carry the play to a twisted finish. In the construction of various spaces evoked by the addition of background sounds, Dattani moves with astonishing finesse from Bombay to Bangalore, from Bangalore to the neighbouring countryside, from the street level to the inside of the gym, from the roadside to the interior of a cowshed, and from the bedroom where sleepers snore to the farmhouse where the water-pump grinds. Similarly, the scenes

move from the gross level of reality, where the characters act and perform, to the abstract level of thought where the characters reveal themselves.

The hetero-homo dialectic is created at the very outset. The busy Bombay street, with Alpesh's car driving through it, serves as the heterocentric milieu in which the Slim Gym acts as the closet in which Alpesh can get homoerotically close to the masseur Trilok. Alpesh's homoerotically inclined taboo relationship with Trilok is given the closeted space of the massage room, and it is immediately juxtaposed to another taboo relationship—though a heterosexual one between Lata and Salim (a terrorist)—which is assigned the “Interior” mental space of Lata. Not only are both relationships closeted, but Dattani all along the play also sustains his suggestion (instead of any overt or covert reference to the Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code) of how a homoerotic taboo relationship and a tabooed love-affair with a terrorist are brought at par: homosexuality and one's association with a terrorist are both crimes of the same level as both a homosexual and a terrorist are enemies of the State.

An Indianism no longer current in British and American English, the phrase “doing the needful” means doing whatever is necessary, with the respectful implication that the other party is trusted to understand what is needed to be done without being given detailed instruction. The phrase “went out of style decades ago, about the time the British left. Using it today indicates you are a dinosaur, a dinosaur with bad grammar. You may use the phrase humorously, to poke fun at such archaic speech, or other dinosaurs” (D'Mello). The phrase indicates the role of hackneyed conventions which one needs to assimilate in doing something. Dattani's title, too, suggests the “dinosaur” of D'Mello, with the playwright's dig at the hackneyed gender performances on the one hand and familial and social performances on the other which are “needful” in effecting a heterosexual marriage. What “needful”

Alpesh as a prospective groom has to do is hinted in the Liftman's words: "Tell Alpesh bhaiya to just say yes. Arre, he should be having two children by now!" (CP 123) The title thus carries the sense of not only the usual formalities connected with the Indian arranged marriage, but also the economic consideration of heterosexual marriage as the means to further the human race through procreation. The title thus is heterocentric to the core and suggests the establishment of the heterocentric hegemony. "Doing the needful" is necessary as it is meant for the "happiness" of the heterosexual couple, as the Liftman says, "I also want to see Alpesh bhaiya's happiness!" (CP 124) Happiness here is thus inevitably connected with straightness. To be happy in life one has to be straight. Further, the Liftman's happy melody, "Le jayenge, le jayenge, dilwale dulhaniyan le jayenge!" (CP 124) also indicates that heterosexual marriage is a prerogative of the "dilwale" or people with heart, as is indicated in the popular Bollywood song here and the Bollywood movies in general. The dialogues, scenes and songs from popular Bollywood films have been in Dattani the very discourse of a hegemonic heterocentric culture. Dattani thus from the very beginning forms a heterosexual marriage-centred milieu in which straightness is connected with happiness and having a heart. This "doing the needful" is also religiously sanctified, as amidst the temple bhajan and cymbals and drums, Alpesh's father prays for his son's happiness before he does the "needful" for Alpesh:

CHANDRAKANT PATEL (*barely audible in spite of shouting*).

Poojariji! Over here ... Put fifty-one, no, hundred and one rupees for a special prayer for my son ... (*Louder.*) A special prayer! For my son! Alpesh Patel! Al-pesh! One hundred and one! I will come back later for the prasad! (*Claps to regain his attention.*) Receipt! I want a receipt now! (CP 124)

Alpesh's mother, Kusumben, on the other hand, seeks the Swamiji's blessings:

"Without Swamiji's blessing, nothing can happen ..." (CP 124).

The play pits in a contrasting parallel the traditional arrangements connected with the arranged marriage of Alpesh and Lata, which is an event itself, and the homoerotic desires of Alpesh, which are limited to Alpesh's thoughts only. Thoughts in this play, as in *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, suggest closetedness. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Uma's sympathy for the hijras is presented as thoughts only, suggesting the very closeted nature of the sympathy itself. In the present play, Alpesh thinks about Trilok, "Will you understand me? How much do you really care for me? How much do I really care for you? Do I understand? Is it any easier for you?" (CP 120) and immediately there is the overpowering rattle of the typewriter which writes Alpesh's father Chandrakant Patel's letter to Lata's father, Devraj Gowda, signifying a monologic closure to Alpesh's thoughts:

CHANDRAKANT PATEL. Dear Dr. Devraj Gowda. Thank you so much for your response to my letter. Thank you also for giving me so much information about yourself, your good wife and your daughter, Lata, who is a very talented and educated girl, thanks to your gracious nature. You have asked for more details about myself, my family and of course my son, Alpesh, for whom, as I mentioned in my first letter, I am seeking a matrimonial alliance ... Please do let us know if 21st and 22nd September are suitable to you to receive us. It is better that we meet personally for all parties concerned, to do the needful. ... (CP 120)

Another striking juxtaposition of thoughts and real words brings not only the closeted nature of Alpesh's homosexuality as opposed to the milieu of heterosexual marriage,

but also the paralleling of the homosexual and the criminal. Kusumben thinks of Alpesh's marriage with Lata, Alpesh thinks of Trilok, and Lata thinks of the terrorist Salim:

KUSUMBEN PATEL. We will see what this Gowda girl is like.

ALPESH. Yes.

KUSUMBEN PATEL. If they have something to hide, then ...

*(Pause.)* If not, we will find some poor Patel girl—who will be grateful to enter our household ... Who will not expect too much from you.

ALPESH. Yes, baa. *(Thought.)* Oh, Tilok, Trilok, Trilok!

*Fade out Alpesh's thoughts. Bring in Lata's thoughts.*

LATA *(thought.)* Salim, I know you are allowed four wives—what's the point in thinking of all that now? I will have to be content keeping you as a lover. How are we going to work this out? What if you have to go back to Kashmir? ... *(CP 126)*

The big fat heterosexual marriage becomes Dattani's target not through any character protesting loudly against it, but through short, crispy and comic utterances and humorous actions on the part of some characters in the manner of Shavian "Pleasant Plays" in which the dramatist literally takes the audience into his grasp through witty dialogues and humorous actions only to drive his iconoclasm into the audience. In the initial stage of the marriage negotiation Lata's parents ponder over the prospective match of Lata and Alpesh as wife and husband:

PREMA GOWDA. He is thirty-plus and divorced.

DEVRAJ GOWDA. She is twenty-four and notorious. *(CP 121)*

Alpesh thinks of the match in terms of “just another mad window shopping spree” (CP 127). Dattani shows that the traditional Indian arranged marriages are showy spectacles in which not only the bride and the groom’s credentials and prospects are on sale but also the “nice house,” “rose garden,” floors with “marble finish,” “Teak wood” furniture (CP 128), the “original Thanjavur” painting “insured for sixty thousand” (CP 129), and the “Bombay property” “worth three crores” (CP 133), along with the bride’s “narrow hips” or “wide hips” (CP 132), are on show.

Traditional arranged marriage thus encourages commoditization of the person and capitalist luxury-seeking. And this is what “doing the needful” ironically consists of. What is more ironical is that all these talks of commoditization take place with the Meera Bhajan by M.S. Subbalakshmi in the background: whereas the bhajan does idealize Radha’s love for her Kanhaiya and create a romantic backdrop for the talks of negotiations, little heed is given to whether Lata pines for Alpesh. Lata, in fact, is shown to pine for her own Kanhaiya, i.e., Salim, just now:

LATA. You bring these things. I will serve the tea. Here.

*(Thought.)* Salim, I really wanted to cry, whine, do anything to stop it all from happening. Mummy was quicker.

*Fade in M.S. Subbalakshmi singing a Meera bhajan as Lata approaches the living room.*

LATA *(thought)*. This was the bit I hated. The last buffalo complained about my narrow hips. Honestly, I would have screamed if this one had done that. You don’t need wide hips to bear children, for God’s sake! (CP 132)

Arranged marriage, again, is negotiated with a battery of lies resorted to by both the parties to build their own credentials. Whereas on the one hand Lata is certified by her

mother as a good cook (while, in reality, she serves burnt cutlets to her would-be in-laws), on the other hand Alpesh is urged by his father to announce that he procured a huge loan of seventy-five lakhs to run a contract of print requirements with Hewlett Packard. Alpesh's thought reveals the truth:

ALPESH (*thought*). What could I say to them? Daddy had his colleague approve the loan. We paid enough bribe 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 every time 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*)

However, the catch-line of the play, "Teri bhi chup, meri bhi chup" ("Your silence and mine as well."), is uttered for the first time in the play when Alpesh expresses his reservations regarding Lata's smoking habits. Both of them, with this catch-line, enter a pact of reservation, a negotiation regarding an abomination, i.e., their smoking habit, which both their families hate and are also unaware of:

LATA. I didn't know you smoke.

ALPESH. Oh!

LATA. I didn't mean to startle you. It's okay, go ahead.

ALPESH. Thanks.

*More puffing.*

LATA. I can see the back yard from my window. I looked out and saw you.

ALPESH. Please don't tell my dad ... about my smoking.

LATA. It's okay, I understand.

ALEPSH. Why did you come out? Is there anything you want to talk to me about?

LATA. No.

ALPESH. Oh.

LATA. I just came down here to join you for a smoke.

ALPESH. Oh.

LATA. May I have one?

ALPESH. Oh, sure.

*Alpesh fishes out a cigarette and lights it for her. Lata exhales loud and slow.*

ALPESH. Teri bhi chup, meri bhi chup.

LATA. I beg your pardon.

ALPESH. Nothing at all. Just an expression in Hindi.

LATA. I think I've heard it before.

ALPESH. In the movies I am sure. It means 'Your silence and mine as well.'

LATA. Oh. And why did you think of that?

ALEPSH. Well, you don't tell about me smoking and I won't tell about you smoking.

LATA. Yes.

*They both smoke. (CP 141-142)*

Soon, however, the negotiation regarding the abomination (i.e., smoking) assumes a metaphorical significance when Lata proposes that she and Alpesh better not marry. Though they still do not reveal their abominations, i.e., Lata her love for the terrorist Salim and Alpesh his love for the man Trilok, both of them are eager to finalize upon

the subject of marriage. In the play, thus, two kinds of negotiations run parallel, i.e., the negotiation of a heterosexual marriage and the negotiation regarding abominations. And Dattani here keeps the abominations still in the level of thoughts till the final negotiations take place: on the one hand Lata and Alpesh begin their talks on negotiation regarding their abominations and their mothers on the other finalize the marriage negotiation:

LATA. Come one, let's go.

*We move with Alpesh and Lata.*

DEVRAJ GOWDA (*fading out*). Let us push our chairs back a little.

*Chairs dragged in distance. Alpesh and Lata walk in silence.*

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?

LATA. Look. I don't want to marry you. I am in love with someone else.

ALPESH (*thought*). That was good of her.

*(Pause. Speech.)* Can we sit down somewhere?

LATA. Keep walking. Might as well see Gauri's bloody calf.

ALPESH (*thought*). She was waiting for me to say something. Maybe I should have told her about you. After all, she was decent enough to bring up her Salman or Salim or whatever. At that very moment, I imagine, our parents were sort of clinching the deal.

*Interrupting.*

KUSUMBEN PATEL. I like Lata very much.

PREMA GOWDA. Oh! You don't know how happy that makes me feel!

Alpesh is such a wonderful boy.

*Interrupting.*

CHANDRAKANT PATEL. My wife and I discussed it just before lunch. We like your daughter very much.

DEVRAJ GOWDA. Excellent!

CHANDRAKANT PATEL. Lata is so intelligent, she will be right for our Alpesh. I only hope she will adjust to being vegetarian.

*Interrupting.*

PREMA GOWDA. I like Alpesh. He is so modest and unassuming. Very few people are ... and he seems so sensitive.

*Continuing.*

LATA. You haven't said anything. I demand to know what your thoughts are on this subject.

ALPESH. Good. I am glad you don't want to marry me. Because I don't want to marry you either.

LATA. Are you saying that because you feel hurt that I am rejecting you?

ALPESH. Bullshit. I am glad you brought it up. If you hadn't, I would have.

LATA. Okay, so bring it up. (CP 148-150)

A little later Prema Gowda, with heart fully saturated with pride and affection, certifies, "Ultimately it is the children who matter. We are doing it all for them," to which Kusumben replies, "It is our duty to see that they are happy" (CP 151). And,

inside the house, the two patriarchs, Devraj and Chandrakant, sleep, with their snoring creating a perfect background. This sense of content among them and their sleep, along with the satisfaction visible in their wives, actually do the job—as it is usual with Dattani—of suggesting the invisible fissures under the rug, the skeleton in the cupboard, characterizing Indian society in general, a society which loves living in a forced harmony, which is a virtual waste land covered in “forgetful snow,” to borrow the phrase from T. S. Eliot (122). The sleep is actually symbolic of amnesia, of a contented oblivion, which creates a false sense of harmony and of peacefulness. The patriarchs of the family who set up rules and “do the needful,” are satisfied with their performance in sustaining the hegemony of heterosexuality by arranging Lata and Alpesh’s marriage, while they remain politically oblivious of Alpesh’s choice of a sexuality and Lata’s choice of marrying the man she likes.

In *Do the Needful* women are not shown supporting the gay cause, and a gay’s coming out before a woman has its own perils in the play. Traditional feminism and Queer theory differ in the matter that whereas the former in its resistance against the patriarchal hegemony does not oppose the hegemony of heterosexuality, Queer theory challenges not only patriarchy but also heterosexuality. Alpesh’s first wife got a divorce from him because he came out to her. Alpesh thinks, “I wasn’t going to say it. She wanted me to” (CP 126). The result was that the marriage could not last long. Lata, in her resistance against patriarchy, as shown in her protest against the conventions of the arranged marriage and her selection of the groom she wanted, does not support at all Alpesh’s homosexual inclinations. She showers her words of hatred on Alpesh which expose her comfortable wanderings in the realm of heterosexuality.

Dattani has, though only once in the play, raised the issue of the binary of useful sexuality and useless sexuality. Useful sexuality, the heteronormative, is

something which is productive and procreational, as it has better utilitarian value. Sexual identity is a choice, though one compulsorily has to be either male or female. Performativity, though, cannot be a choice, and it is socially and economically constructed on the basis of which performances lead to the best utilitarian value or the best production. A man's performances should be masculine, since only then can his credentials as productive can be established. A woman's performances should be feminine, since only then can her credentials as productive can be established. A feminine man and a masculine woman are thus identities which challenge heteronormativity. A heteronormative sexual identity has a utilitarian function, as it can lead to the greatest good of the race, whereas sexualities which challenge heteronormativity are anathemas which are useless. Sexuality, thus, is a socially, economically, and politically, utilitarian identity. The issue has been raised in a very subtle way when in the play the Mali talks of Lata's cow having given birth to a male calf: "Oh, oh, oh. Poor Gauri. Having a male calf. If he were a female, he will be worshipped, like his mother. But now, he is useless" (*CP* 146). A male calf is useless as he cannot yield milk and thus cannot yield high profits. A male calf's sexuality is judged on the basis of its utilitarian values and is found to be "useless," whereas, on the other hand, a female calf is "useful" as she can grow up to be a cow, yielding milk, and yielding profits. Now, if sexuality of an animal can be deemed useless or useful in terms of its social and economic values, human sexuality, too, can be judged on the same yardstick. A manly man is "useful," a womanly woman is "useful," as the union of both can lead to the evolutionary betterment of the human race, can lead to the production of offspring who can fight a war for the country, who can protect their parents, their home and their clan, and can adhere to the general biological rule of "safety in numbers." A womanly man and a manly woman are "useless" as they

cannot produce offspring who can perform socially, economically or evolutionarily utilitarian functions. Whatever is “biological” and “natural” thus becomes the utilitarian, the hegemonic, the ideological and the heterosexual. Men like Alpesh are “useless,” as, though born a male, they do not show the masculine performativity of loving a female. Alpesh loves men, wants to have “unnatural” sex with them, and is thus not procreative, not “productive” as man. He can be recreational with men in sex, but not with his wife, and so he is abhorred by her as “useless” and is driven by her to seek divorce. Lata, too, abhors him for being a gay, and even her having been nurtured on the binary of useful and useless sexualities is clearly discernible, as she says that she will have to be “content” keeping Salim as a lover though he is allowed four wives (*CP* 126). A heterosexual lover who can keep four wives gives “content” to Lata, though, on the other hand, a homosexual husband who loves men is to her a “filthy beast” (*CP* 152). Salim, a virile heterosexual, is a matter of content and is useful, whereas Alpesh, an abomination, is “useless,” like Gauri’s male calf which cannot yield milk (*CP* 146). Lata thinks of Alpesh, “That night I really thought and thought about it. Would it make sense to get married to that lout and make everyone happy? And satisfy that thing in bed? What about me? I had to run away” (*CP* 151). Alpesh is thus “that lout,” “that thing” to Lata. Salim’s polygamy is not immoral, but Alpesh’s homosexuality is, and hence he is a “lout.” Being a homosexual, Alpesh loses his identity as a “being,” and he thus is a “thing.” Lata thus cannot rise beyond the construct of the homosexual as an immoral creature engaged with multiple sex-partners of the same sex, making a great contribution in the AIDS epidemic with his unsafe and unnatural sodomy. Alpesh’s first wife and Lata judge him in terms of norms set up by the patriarchal heteronormative ideology. Lata also decides to remain content with Salim’s polygamy, thus not only giving in to patriarchy on the one hand,

but also to heteronormativity on the other. To her, even a polygamous terrorist is worthy living with, while homosexuality is a crime. Her astonishment and shock when she discovers Alpesh having sex with Mali reveal her heteronormative programming:

LATA. ...

*A groaning sound. The groaning continues.*

Somebody was in pain. I swear to you that's how it sounded to me.

Somebody ... I really thought they were killing him or something.

*Running to Alpesh's room.*

I tried to turn on the damn flashlight. I was sure he was dying.

*Opening his room door. More groaning.*

*(Speech.)* Oh!

MALI. Aiyo!

*Scramble.*

ALPESH. What are you doing here?

LATA. You!

*(Thought.)* They were ... doing it!

*(Speech.)* You are homo!

ALPESH. Will you turn off that flashlight? No, just point it someplace else ...

MALI. Akka! It was not my fault, Akka.

LATA. Wait till your father gets back!

MALI *(begins to cry.)* I didn't want to do it. He made me do it.

ALPESH. Are you two talking about me? If you are, I want to know.

MALI. Please don't tell appa. He forced me to do it.

ALPESH. Stop crying. I will take the blame. Will you tell me to stop crying?

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

(*CP 152-153*)

However, it is Mali who provides Lata and Alpesh with the cue to their negotiation regarding their individual abominations. Mali urges Lata to marry Alpesh, since Alpesh is “a good man,” and, also, her “happiness lies at [his] feet” (*CP 155*). On the other hand Alpesh denies any love for Lata, who, in turn, denies her love for Alpesh. This makes Alpesh and Lata “see sense” (*CP 155*):

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 155-156*)

The phrase “do the needful” thus gets an ironic turn when Alpesh and Lata find in it the cue to their negotiation. Alpesh acquiesces to Lata’s proposal as he finds it practical to live as a gay and to fulfil his homoerotic desires under the veneer of a heterosexual marriage with Lata. Lata, on the other hand, can carry on with her secret feelings for Salim without anybody’s suspicion. By “doing the needful,” i.e., by marrying each other and living as a happy heterosexual couple, both Lata and Alpesh can fulfil their own “needful.” The heterosexual marriage thus becomes the practical way out in Alpesh’s living as a gay. By acting straight, he negotiates with heteronormativity. Amid the hubbub of guests and the Carnatic wedding music acting as a background for his heterosexual marriage with Lata, both Alpesh and Lata think of their own “needful”:

ALPESH (*thought*). Trilok I don't know how much I am actually going to say to you. I assume you will not understand some of it. I am not certainly going to tell you about Mali. One more lie, I guess. I am used to it.

LATA (*thought*). Salim, I will be meeting you soon. I hope you understand. You had better. At least with you, I can be more honest. And demanding. (*CP 156*)

But, one thing is clearly visible, i.e., Dattani’s critique of Alpesh’s negotiation. Lata remains faithful to Salim, as her “thought” shows; she talks of being “more

honest” and “demanding” with him, but by marrying Lata with Mali as dowry, Alpesh can neither be faithful to Trilok nor to his own gay identity. He will live with “One more lie” (CP 156), and will live in a self-delusion. His negotiation does not add any single positive meaning to his gay identity as he proves faithless to his own gayness by embracing heterosexuality, deceiving his lover Trilok and living with and sexually exploiting Mali only for sex. Alpesh’s homosexual polygamy thus is pitted against the discourse that heterosexual monogamy is the ideal. In other words, he adds to the popular construct of the gay as a highly sexed creature who can sleep with anybody, aggravating the spread of sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS and adding a blot of immorality in society. The conclusion of the play shows the forced nature of his living as a straight and the calculations and equations he has to make in every step of life in “doing” the straight. Had he stuck to his gay identity without negotiating with heteronormativity, he would have lived a much simpler life without the perils of life’s miscalculations:

ALPESH. Quick, let’s get in. you can drop me off around the corner.

*They get in to the taxi. The taxi drives off. Their voices fade out slowly as traffic noises begin to grow.*

LATA. Where do we meet up?

ALPESH. You’ve got my cell phone number, haven’t you? Give me a call when you’re ... through.

LATA. What do we tell baa?

ALPESH. You’ll do the shopping, right? Just let me know all the shops you’ve been to and tell her I took you there. Here, use my credit card at Benzer’s. I will go there tomorrow and sign the vouchers.

Don't go to the temple, the poojari knows my dad. He is sure to tell him I wasn't with you.

LATA. I won't have time anyway. I have enough to do.

(*Thought.*) Salim!

ALPESH (*thought.*) Trilok! (CP 157-158)

The ordeals of gay existence under the crushing weight and gaze of the heteronormative society, the issue of gay resistance to heteronormativity and the final coming to terms with heteronormativity form the subject again in the play *Night Queen*. A very short play, Dattani here, in spite of the limited scope in developing the twists and turns in the homoerotic relationships between the main characters (as he does in his other plays discussed in this thesis), has taken resort to the symbolic more than the theatrical. On the one hand, there is the refrain-like callings by Raghu's old mother in the offstage and on the other there is the smell of the night queen symbolizing sexual fantasy (here, of course, a homoerotically charged sexual fantasy). The offstage callings by Raghu's mother—sometimes in the form of the simple “Raghu! Raghu?” (NQ 58), sometimes “Raghu! Who is that with you?” and sometimes the vindictive “Raghu! Answer me!” (NQ 62)—give to Raghu's small room the strong sense of a Panopticon in which Raghu's moves, as also his ties with Ashwin (“Ash” in short), are under the surveillance of the normative society symbolized by his mother. Foucault speaks of the “ensemble of mechanisms brought into play in all the clusters of procedures used by power” (*Power/Knowledge* 71) while talking of the Panopticon, and the play produces such “ensemble of mechanisms” in the form of traditionally imposed prohibitions on the blooming of homoerotic ties. Ash says, “My grandmother wouldn't allow us to grow night queen.

She said it attracted snakes. We grew up in a village named—a village” (*NQ* 59). Ash also introduces the symbolism of the night queen:

ASH. I would go to sleep with the blooms on my body. And I would dream. The snake would slither into my bed, curl up over my belly, attracted by the scent. And I would imagine that it was attracted to my body. The warmth of my body. And I was aroused by the presence of the snake. The snake then turned into a man. A man who made love to me. (*NQ* 59)

Raghu acknowledges the phallic signification of the snake: “Wow! I have heard some wild gay fantasies, but this one is something special. Snakes turning into sexy men. Though it should be obvious. I mean the snake being such a classic phallic symbol” (*NQ* 60).

However, the play is all about the pretension to be straight and the sustenance of a gay relationship under the guise of a sex-less male-male *yaari*: Ash is to be married to Raghu’s sister Gayatri, though he nurtures a secret homoerotic desire for Raghu, who also is a gay; Raghu discovers that the man whom Gayatri is going to marry and the man who wants him as lover are the same; and finally Ash decides to become a straight-acting husband of Gayatri secretly having a homoerotic affair with Raghu. Being a one-act play, the story unfolds in the process of verbal exchanges only between Ash and Raghu, and in the process the issues of the ordeals of being a gay, gay-bashing and negotiation with the heteronormative order turn up. Raghu is initially in favour of putting up a bold gay identity and a gay resistance against the hegemonic heteronormativity. For him, a gay breaking the ranks is a gay without the essence of gayness. Sexuality is a choice which one must strictly adhere to: “I just like [the night queen flowers] when they are still up there [in the branches]. Besides, they lose their

fragrance once they fall off. No point in sticking them in vases” (NQ 58). Raghu defines the gay bashers as “Straight guys pretending to be gay so they can pick up someone, bash them up and take all their money” (NQ 60), and puts up a tough resistance against them: “I am trained for combat. I bash up gay bashers” (NQ 61).

The ordeals of being a gay are exposed in Ash. Centring Ash, the discourse of power, involving the creation of the binaries of ugly/beautiful, bad/good, immoral/moral, works. If in the case of Raghu, his mother’s scream works as the authority figure whose gaze tries to check the flourish of any “deviant” sexual identity, in the case of Ash it is not only his grandmother (whose edicts/discourses on not growing the night queen are meant only to check the flourish of desire), but also his elder brother who works as the authority figure whose moral discourse tries to cure Ash’s deviant sexual behaviour of desiring men and to normalize him:

ASH: My brother beat me up. ... He hit me hard. The next evening, he took me out. To the park. He showed me those guys, looking around, waiting for a sexual partner. A stranger. He told me how unhappy and miserable they were. They looked unhappy and miserable to me. And ugly. And I didn’t want to be so ugly and repulsive! In my brother’s eyes they were worse than lepers. And I was my brother’s favourite. In his eyes, I didn’t want to be so ugly. ... I saw myself in my brother’s eyes and I wanted to die. I promised my brother I would change. I told him to help me. I wanted him to help me get out of the hell. ... (NQ 68)

The urge to get rid of his “ugly” gay identity makes Ash resort to a negotiation with heteronormativity and he decides to turn straight by marrying Gayatri. Raghu plays the role that Sharad plays in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, that of exorcising the

heteronormative code from within Ash: “You are ugly. And you will be uglier. Pretending to love her—” (*NQ* 69). Raghu’s words, in fact, become a critique of a gay’s adopting heteronormative performance for the sake of existence. Straight-acting gays, Dattani feels, deceive not only themselves, but also their female partners by leading her into the same ordeals of a loveless marriage which any loveless heterosexual marriage usually lead women into. Raghu’s fight against the hegemony of heteronormativity and women’s fight against the hegemony of patriarchy should be unified in their common antipathy towards and fight against the discourse of subjugation. A gay’s collusion with heteronormativity, his turning a straight-acting husband, and then leading his female partner into an unhappy married life bring the gay at par with men who, as the authority figure of patriarchy, resort to female subjugation:

RAGHU: (*ignoring him*) Pretending that she turns you on. That you are in love with her. That everything will be alright after marriage. Such pretence! And when you sleep with her, you will be groaning extra loud with pleasure, shutting your eyes, thinking of your snake god or whatever, and penetrating her with those images in your mind. Pretending, pretending all the fucking way! That’s really shitty ugly! And in case you can’t make those wonderful fountains erupt, she will look at you, questioning you. And you will be ugly enough to lead her to believe that she isn’t good enough. That she doesn’t satisfy you. You will watch her being filled with self-doubt. And you will give your ugly sympathy to her. You will say to her it’s alright, you still love her. And she will be grateful to

you! That's ugly. See that! See all that and tell me if that isn't ugly.

(NQ 69)

Raghu's advice to Ash suggests his queer counter-discourse in which the queer (in this case, Ash) as the authority-figure seeks to cure the heterosexual's (in this case, Ash's brother) sexual behaviour as "deviant" by creating the counter-hegemonic discourse of morality:

RAGHU: (*shaking him*) But you never asked [your brother] to change.

Why didn't you beat him when you saw him masturbating? Why didn't you beat him up when you saw him with his girlfriend? Why didn't you tell him that unless he slept with a man, he is as ugly as a leper? Why didn't he go down on his knees and plead with you to help him? Why? (NQ 70)

The three plays thus bring out the trials and tribulations of being a gay in this heteronormative milieu. While some of the gay men are able to fight it out against this milieu and are able to "come out" boldly, some of them fail either to be a gay or "becoming" a straight and thus face an existential crisis. But Dattani's critique is aimed at those who impersonate and approximate straightness by utilizing their gay invisibility as a consciously political strategy.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

“Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments,” writes Shakespeare in Sonnet 116. In this beautiful sonnet on love where the addressee is the Bard’s male friend with whom the Bard is presumed to have had a same-sex love, the speaker’s stand on the meanings of “marriage” and “true minds” has become a debatable issue. The expression, “Marriage of true minds,” may usually be taken to signify the union of two heterosexual minds in marriage. But in Shakespeare’s sonnet it is not so. In the context of Queer theory, the term “minds” does away with the essentialist view of sexuality and establishes sexuality as an identity. In the context of Queer theory, “marriage” (not a straight marriage) is not only the most desired event in the queers’ lives to live a life of their own but also suggests their aspiration for equal rights with the normative sexual identities. In Dattani’s plays discussed in the project the queer sexual identities have been forced to negotiate with the ideology of the heterosexual procreative marriage-centred milieu and how they have been forced to comply with the male/female binary which facilitates the institutionalization of the hetero-marriage as the norm. A realist that Dattani is, his plays have been a grim evidence of the creation of a discourse of power in support of heteropatriarchy which thrives on the propagation of a normative race of human beings through procreative heterosexual marriage and the forceful compliance of the non-normative sexualities with this discourse. Dattani’s plays chiefly get as their target audience the English-educated urban society who might have a broader outlook towards life in their socio-economic conditions of living and who might well be sensitized by Dattani’s plays and the contemporary rise in debates on the Indian sexualities. Side by side it is also necessary to see what developments have been taking place to the scenario involving

the alternate sexualities not only in the urban India but also in India in general since the days Dattani have been trying to sensitize his target audience. Further it is also worthwhile to see what might be expected to be the outcome of this endeavour of Dattani as well as the endeavours of several other writers who write on alternate sexualities or who themselves are queer.

Though in India there has not been any Stonewall Inn riot which launched the gay liberation movement with a vehemence throughout the West in the 1970s, in India the queer writers and activists have been in a persistent struggle against the heteropatriarchal Indian culture upheld by State politics, the media and the film. So, from the 1970s, on the one hand the colonial and postcolonial nationalistic zeal of building the normative nation was being still being continued, the Indian society and law were continuing with the legacy of the Western queerphobia and the popular mass culture was agog with the creation of the masculine macho male built principally by the Hindi films. On the other hand, queer movements were being maintained by legal activism against the Article 377 and its abuses in general and by the proliferation of gay clubs in cities like the erstwhile Bombay. Sporadic incidents of gay marriage, lesbian marriage and gay bashing began to be heard also right from this period. So, at the same time when Amitabh Bachchan's macho male was ruling the public space, congregations of gay men in gay clubs in metros like Bombay caught the attention of the media. So, an article in *India Today* of 31st January 1984 reports:

The New Year's Eve festivities at Bombay's Bandstand Park are somewhat different from the frolics of others celebrating groups in the city. The exclusively male revellers who gather faithfully at the children's park every new year, circle around the pony track,

exchanging greetings with old friends, while some huddle in pairs in the darkness.

They are a diverse lot, in terms of backgrounds, looks and dress. Most seem conventional enough but a few sport such esoteric touches as ballet shoes, spangles in the hair, earrings, cat suits and knickerbockers. For this crowd of several hundred has one thing in common. They all practice what jurist Blackstone once referred to as “the unmentionable crime,” homosexuality.

... The faces of some of those who show up for the ceremony would surprise many non-homosexuals. They include well-known names in the film industry and elite social circles. (Kapoor 150)

The same article also reports the physical aggression towards the gays shown by the so called protectors of social morale who had vowed to keep the city “clean” (Kapoor 150). Organizations like *Lavandebaz-e-Hind* were established in the 1970s to give shelter to the gays bashed by these protectors of social morale who also included policemen, reports the article. In January 1993 Aditya Advani married his gay partner, Michael Tarr, in New Delhi amidst a group of family invitees. Arvind Kumar and Ashok Jethanandani, both pioneering LGBT activists and the former being the founder of the queer magazine *Trikone*, married each other in 1996. Arvind Narrain notes that since 1988 as many as ten cases of women wanting to live together with each other were documented: “Here one is not talking about two women who are silently and unobtrusively living together without the neighbours suspecting anything, but women who want societal recognition of their relationships and hence decide to go in for marriage” (80). Reported to be the first lesbian marriage in the subcontinent, in May 2001, Jaya Verma and Tanuja Chauhan took the bold step of arranging a

Hindu wedding ceremony to marry each other amidst threats from their relatives and neighbours in Ambikapur, Chattisgarh.

Thus, same-sex love and marriage where the “true minds” meet was making its presence felt since the 1970s. At the same time, discourses were also being built up by the protectors of the national honour against these so-called Western imports like same-sex love and marriage. Classifying it as another form of degeneracy and perversion, medical science in India introduced the conversion therapies which categorized the “patient” as suffering either from ego-syntonic homosexuality or ego-dystonic homosexuality (see the chapter, “Invisibility as Strategy”). There were interventions at the level of the police who on a regular basis subjected the gays, kothis and hijras to constant harassment, intimidation, illegal detention and extortion and often took them to police stations to ask humiliating questions about their gender, raped them and stripped them. There were also threats of using the Article 377 against them by booking them for indulging in “unnatural” sex. With the proliferation in cases of HIV/AIDS, discourses that the dreaded disease was a Western import and a result of homosexual polygamy among gay men, particularly the MSM, also began to be built by the national TV channel, Doordarshan. So, in 1994 when a medical team, under recommendations of WHO, prescribed distribution of condoms among male jail inmates in Tihar Jail to prevent spreading of HIV/AIDS among the inmates, the jail authority did away with such prescription, stating that homosexual behaviours did not exist in the jail and that such a prescription would encourage sodomy among the inmates. Thus, there was a blatant effort on the part of the authority to do away with homosexuality as not Indian. In the 1990s a host of Hindi films also made the gays butts of ridicule by portraying effeminate characters as sidekicks of the male protagonist and also being patronized by him.

In December 1998 a phenomenon occurred. *Fire*, by Deepa Mehta, was released. It brought issues of sexuality open into the Indian household. Lesbianism became a topical issue to be discussed. It was no longer a word derived from Greek mythology and a word denoting an illicit affair taking place among Western women, but became a reality in India. Political parties like Shiv Sena did whatever they could do to oust the issue of lesbianism as Western by vandalizing in the cinema halls where the film was released. Eventually, the lesbian wave was gradually suppressed when another phenomenon happened the next year, the Kargil War of 1999. Terming both the events as “crossing border,” Sibaji Bandopadhyay writes:

The space occupied by the controversy in the newspaper front pages was quickly overtaken by the graphic reports of manly doings of Indian soldiers at Kargil. Talks around “the norm” replacing debates on “deviancy,” “male valour” was reinstated in all its glory. Indian television went wild—the ear-splitting sound of artillery, the flashing discharge of cannonballs on hilltops, the capers of daring TV crews and their eyewitness accounts of the selfless service and sacrifice of Indian soldiers reached Indian drawing rooms without any loss of time. The Indo-Pak skirmish at Kargil became an occasion to *represent* “male gallantry” in its pristine innocence ... (19)

In 2005, *My Brother Nikhil*, a low-budget Hindi film, talked openly about homosexuality and HIV/AIDS. It is around this time that marked changes began to be seen in the attitudes towards homosexuals not only in media but also in popular notions about them. While at the same time gays continued to be ridiculed in Hindi films, the controversies and arguments regarding the Article 377 brought open discussions in social media and news channels. In 2004 a petition filed by the Naz

Foundation to review and reformulate the Article 377 was dismissed by the Delhi High Court which ruled in favour of the central government's opposition to the petition on the ground that homosexuality cannot be legalized in India. By then, same-sex marriages were already legalized in France in 1988, in Denmark in 1989, in Norway in 1993, in Sweden in 1994, in Iceland in 1996, in Germany in 2001, in Switzerland in 2002, in the Netherlands in 1998 and in Belgium in 2003 (Vanita 232-33). On July 2, 2009, the Delhi High Court overturned Article 377, legalizing consensual sex between adults of the same gender on the ground that the Article violated Article 14 of the Indian Constitution which gives every citizen equal opportunity of life and equality before law. But in December 2013 the Supreme Court overruled the decision of the Delhi High Court, asking the Parliament to decide on the matter and re-criminalizing gay-sex. But, even in this tumultuous situation for the gays, it was heartening to see that a number of political parties irrespective of their Leftist or rightist ideologies came forward to promise that they would take the issue seriously to ensure fundamental rights to the citizens of alternate sexualities. The Lok Sabha elections were just months away, and this sudden and feverish political sympathy showered on the country's alternate population suggested that citizens of alternate sexualities are growing in numbers, they are becoming a number to reckon with, and becoming more and more visible.

The traditional religious stance against gay marriage is also witnessing a gradual softening of attitude. While most of the religious gurus, be they Hindus, Muslims or of any other religion, show a vehement unanimity regarding opposition to same-sex marriage, and many of them have even moved the courts against such marriage, some of them are beginning to see the matter on a sympathetic ground. Thus Ruth Vanita writes how at the Kumbha Mela in 2004, *Hinduism Today* reporter

Rajiv Malik asked several Hindu Swamis their opinion of same-sex marriage and one Pandit Shailendra Shri Sheshnarayan Ji Vaidyaka pointed out: “Whatever is done in a hidden manner becomes a wrong act and is treated as a sin. But whatever is done openly does invite criticism for some time but ultimately gains acceptance. Why not give them the liberty to live in their own way, if they are going to do it anyway? After all, we have kinnars, eunuchs, who have been accepted by the society. Similarly these people can also be accepted. Like we have a kinnarsamaj, eunuch society, we can have a gay samaj” (qtd. in Vanita 226).

The latest judgement of the Supreme Court on April 15, 2014, ensuring equal rights for the Third Gender, is a step forward in the recognition which should be given to the people of alternate sexualities. The judgement rules that the state would ensure legal protection for the Third Gender, would ensure their fundamental rights and that the Third Gender would enjoy reservation in education and jobs. Earlier, in 2005, the State had introduced a Category “E” (for “Eunuch”) beside the usual M/F in the Indian passport to ensure a legitimate identity for the Third Gender. When Kamla Jaan had become the Mayor of Katni in 2000, her journey marked an upward movement within the consciousness of the people who voted her to power, who elevated her from the existence in the underbelly of society to its visible—and politically accountable—top. Yet, it did not mean the decrease in all sorts of attitudes of prejudice against the Third Gender. The latest Supreme Court judgement at least gave a feeler to the nation that gender and the behaviours connected with it can at least be thought of as something spontaneous and beyond the society-imposed male/female binary. Hijras can be physically visible everywhere, seen begging or extorting money from others. But what this judgement would ensure is that society at large would see them visible as human beings, with all their struggles for existence in

a vastly unsympathetic universe. It would ensure that any person, who does not think himself/herself as male/female will have the freedom to behave and perform in any way he/she likes. The judgement upholds the Article 19 of the Indian Constitution which gives the citizens the right to self-expression. So, it ensures that any person who wants to change his/her sex to “be” the gender he/she likes will be accepted by the State.

The hijras believe that, as decreed by Lord Rama, they will become kings and rule the world (Reddy 223). With the latest Supreme Court ruling, they can well say that their time has come now. In 1994, one of the first mainstream Hindi films to focus expressly on a hijra’s life was released. *Tamanna* (meaning, “wish”) tells the apparently true story of Tiku, a hijra who adopts and raises a child. As in other Bollywood films, the premise of the plot is relatively simple: Tiku finds a girl-child abandoned and decides to adopt the child and raise her “himself,” as her adopted “father.” He names her Tamanna presumably to symbolize not only his aspirations for her, but also his own thwarted desires. Contriving to keep the knowledge of his “hijra-ness” hidden from Tamanna, and at great financial and emotional cost, Tiku sends her to boarding school. In true Bollywood style, after the usual twists and turns in the plot, Tiku’s love and goodness ultimately triumphs. He is reunited with his daughter, who realizes the value of his strength of character and the purity of his love. Despite the marginalization and subtle vilification of the hijra community in the film, the reclamation of honour that resulted from Tiku’s various trials and tribulations and his “successful” negotiation of this value in the wider society is what ultimately matters. But, post-*Tamanna*, all that the popular Hindi films have done is to carry on with the construct of hijras as criminals and extortionists. Still, quite in opposition, including Kamla Jaan as referred to above, hijras are not only contesting for election to local,

state, and even national office, they are also being actively wooed by mainstream political parties for these positions. They are entering this domain of the public sphere as hijras, explicitly highlighting their identity as emasculated individuals who cannot reproduce. Hijras, in other words, are transforming themselves in the public imagination from objects of ridicule and repositories of shame to ideal citizens of the modern nation-state.

Still, the Supreme Court judgement fails to erase some doubts and speculations. Though it legalizes the Third Gender and gives everyone the freedom to express one's gender, it says nothing about choosing one's sexual partner. So, even after this historic judgement there are apprehensions that the State can still book any person under Article 377 for having "unnatural" sex. Thus, the judgement fails to give any respite to the people of alternate sexualities in general who are not given the freedom to choose their individual sexual behaviour and sexual partner. In a way, thus, the Article 377 keeps itself intact. Yet, owing to the hyperactive media nowadays, the way the worldwide LGBT movements are gaining regular attentions throughout India suggests that India in general is beginning to sympathize with people belonging to alternate sexualities. With more and more icons belonging to films, literature, sports and modelling "coming out" before the press, the common Indian is teased into thinking about the people who are differently sexed or differently gendered. Queer pride parades held regularly in metros are encouraging many to join the alternate rung though they were not once thought to be queer. LGBT people are getting helps from several support groups and NGOs throughout the country. In a word, the queer slogan, "We are queer, we are here," seems to gain ground at least in public life and media coverage.

But still, there are miles to go. The State should come forward to incorporate the so far marginalized people in building the national identity. To that end, not just the marriage and family laws should be reexamined and reformulated, the State should make it a policy to expose the country's queer past which has so far been presented with a heteronormative turn. The age-old hegemonic heteropatriarchal family ideology cannot be reformulated over night. But a new politics of sexuality, incorporating not just the straight but also the differently sexed and differently gendered, can thus well be formed in future, just as the physically handicapped people are incorporated in the normal life as differently-abled people. Just as economics, in its emphasis on the greatest good of the greatest numbers, has forever played a great role in constructing the politics of heteronormativity, today the demands of new economy emphasizes the need to cater to the taste of the "growing" population of gays, lesbians and third gender and their sympathizers, mostly young people. Thus, the media has been utilizing the growing sympathy for these people with a vengeance. The watch-maker Fastrack created the catchline, "The Road to Equality has Never been STRAIGHT," using the word "straight" very creatively. Not only the tech-savvy Indian youths but also the aged people, too, are nowadays interacting a lot among each other about the queer issues. All these prove that there is nowadays a wave of sympathy among people who are at least aware of the queer issues.

But the question is, "Is it enough?" or "Are the common men ready as yet?" The academic circle, the media, the literary world and the legal world are fighting for a good cause. But the fact that their fight is not enough is proved by the bold prevalence of dowry deaths, child sexual abuse and sexual molestation of women, all of which have strict laws against them, all of which receive strong protests from academicians, social media and celebrities. These crimes prevail in spite of protests

across the academic, literary, legal and media circles. The onus thus comes upon the Indian family, which has long been the germinating point, the upholder and the carrier of heteropatriarchal ideologies. How far has the common Indian family been corrected so as to counter these crimes stated above is a big question. A similarly big question is, how far is the Indian family ready to accept and assimilate the queer sexualities so that the latter can be saved from all sorts of compromises with their sexual and gender identities?

While dealing with alternate sexualities, particularly gays, hijras and kothis, *kliba* (or “unproductive man”) is still the umbrella term derogatorily applied. On the other hand in ancient Sanskrit era, *Brihannala*, or the term used to denote the hijras, carried a sense of honour due to such a person, as the word came from Sanskrit *Brihat* (meaning “great”) and *nara* (meaning “man”), meaning “a great man.” It suggests the honour and glory enjoyed by people belonging to alternate sexualities in the past. Dattani’s effort has been to bring back this lost glory of the country’s queer population by pitting them against the present scenario and to sensitize his audience regarding their aspirations, struggles and negotiations. His effort has been to bring the margin to the centre, give back the dishonoured dissident the honour due to them. Though writing as an Indian English dramatist, whose identity itself is a marginal one as discussed before, and though targeting only the urban English educated audience, Dattani’s plays have great contribution in changing the attitude regarding same-sex love and alternate sexualities for the last three decades. Yet, the playwright himself is doubtful whether the aim can be reached at all. While pursuing a research on the hijras in *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, Uma thinks, “Nobody seems to know anything about them” (CP 16). Uma, an educated woman who sympathizes with the hijras, can express her sympathies only through “thoughts” in the play. She thus gives vent to the

playwright's own doubt that such sympathies for the marginalized would only be sentimentally harped through the academic circles without ever percolating to the micro level of the family, let alone percolating to the macro level of the society.

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