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R. B.**QUEER ISSUES IN MAHESH DATTANI'S PLAY: ON A MUGGY NIGHT  
IN MUMBAI****MR. RAJENDRA B. SHINDE**Associate Professor  
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College, Ozar- Mig Dist. Nashik**ABSTRACT**

*This research paper highlights the 'invisible queer issues' of modern contemporary Indian society. It focuses on the same-sex love relationship which is unacceptable to the society even today. It also aims to offer some suggestions over the problems of gays, lesbians, bisexuals reflected in Dattani's play **On a Muggy Night in Mumbai**. In India legal section 377 hurdles the homosexuality. Homosexuality was decriminalized and again recriminalized by our law system. On the other hand the US Supreme court has made marriage legal for gay and lesbian couples. Even catholic Ireland voted to approve same sex marriage. In doing so, Ireland joins other members of the EU. Democracies in the developing world including Argentina, Brazil and South Africa protect the human rights of LGBT people. India may be the biggest in the world but its stance on LGBT rights makes it one of the smallest. In December 2013 the supreme court of India upheld Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that criminalizes homosexuality as 'against the order of nature', (**The Sunday Times of India, Nashik-08/02/2016**) Luxembourg Prime Minister Xavier Bettel married his gay partner Gauthier Destenay, a Belgian architect on 14/05/2015. Many countries are legalizing same-sex marriages except India that is rejecting gay rights. (**Sunday Times of India, Nashik, Times Global -17/05/2015**). Former US Senator widower Harris Wofford, 90 years old, will marry his 40 years old male partner Matthew Charlton on 30<sup>th</sup> April. They had 20 year romance. It reminds us **Shakespeare's lines from Sonnet 116** 'let me not to the marriage of true minds/ admit impediments. (**Times Global, The Times of India, Nashik- 27 April 2016**) Italian feminist and film theorist **Teresa de Lauret** is coined the term "queer theory" for a conference she organized at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1990 and a special issue of **Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies** she edited based on that conference. Queer focuses on "mismatches" between sex, gender and desire. The word 'Queer' has been associated most prominently with bisexual, lesbian and gay subjects, but analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, intersex, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery.*

**Keywords:** Queer Theory, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT), Homosexuality, Marginalized Groups of Society, Burning Current Issues.

**Introduction:**

Mahesh Dattani depicts unarticulated, queer social issues associated with gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender (LGBT), eunuchs, the child sexual abuse, AIDS and the gender discriminations in his plays.

**Queer Theory:**

It is a field of post-structuralist critical theory the early that emerged in 1990s out of the fields of queer studies and women's studies. Queer theory includes both queer readings of texts and the theorisation of 'queerness' itself. Heavily influenced by the work of **Lauren Berlant, Leo Bersani, Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, David Halperin, José Esteban Muñoz, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick**, queer theory builds both upon feminist challenges to the idea that gender is part of the essential self and upon gay/lesbian studies' close examination of the socially nature of sexual acts and identities. Whereas gay/lesbian studies focused its inquiries into natural and unnatural behaviour with respect to homosexual behaviour, queer theory expands its focus to encompass any kind of sexual activity or identity that falls into normative and deviant categories. Italian feminist and film theorist **Teresa de Lauretis** coined the term "**queer theory**" for a conference she organized at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1990 and a special issue of *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* she edited based on that conference.

Queer theory focuses on "mismatches" between sex, gender and desire. Queer has been associated most prominently with bisexual, lesbian and gay subjects, but analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, intersex, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery. ( [Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia](#) )

**Queer theory is a brand-new branch of study or theoretical speculation;**

It has only been named as an area since about 1991. It grew out of gay/lesbian studies, a discipline which itself is very new, existing in any kind of organized form only since about the mid-1980s. The word "queer", as it appears in the dictionary, has a primary meaning of "odd," "peculiar," "out of the ordinary.". Queer theory insists that all sexual behaviours, all concepts linking sexual behaviours to sexual identities. Queer theory follows feminist theory and gay/lesbian studies in rejecting the idea that sexuality is an essentialist category, something determined by biology or judged by eternal standards of morality and truth.

(<http://www.colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012Klages/queertheory.html>)

Queer theory, which **Ms. Sedgwick** developed along with **Judith Butler**, a professor at the University of California, Berkley, through which scholars examine literary texts. Queer theorists scorn traditional definitions of "homosexual" and "heterosexual." There is no strict demarcation between male and female, they argue. Instead, queer theorists say, taking their cue from the historian Michel Foucault, sexuality exists on a continuum, with some people preferring sex partners of the opposite sex, others preferring partners of both sexes.

(<http://www.sou.edu/English/IDTC/Terms/terms.htm>)



**Mahesh Dattani's** plays depict unarticulated, queer social issues associated with gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender (LGBT), eunuchs, the child sexual abuse, AIDS and the gender discrimination. His plays like *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Do the Needful*, *Dance Like a Man*, *Bravely Fought the Queen* have queer themes. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is a play that completely deals with gay, lesbian, bisexual like queer themes. A radio play *-Seven Steps Around the Fire* deals with the murder victim Kamala, a beautiful hijra eunuch. *Thirty Days in September* reflects a burning current issue i.e. child sexual abuse. Dattani is the first modern Indian English dramatist to be awarded Sahitya Akademi Award. His plays, like those G.B. Shaw, deal with the burning issues afflicting the society the world over. His plays depict marginalized groups of society, people who are considered misfit in a society where stereotyped attitudes and notions reign supreme. He handles closet issues homosexuality – gayism, lesbianism very boldly. He wrote stage plays, screen plays and radio plays. They deal with the theme of feminism, sexuality and queer, gender issues like LGBT, which are taken as taboo by the mainstream society. Still the LGBTs are treated as 'others' and humiliated. The hollowness, pettiness and ugliness of contemporary modern society have been brought forth by Dattani in almost all of his plays. Dattani reflects the mental anguish and dilemma of the marginalized characters. The gays, lesbians are put on the outskirts of the society. They crave for independent identity, rights, liberty, and justice in the biggest democratic country – India.

#### **On a Muggy Night in Mumbai: Queer Issues**

Dattani's play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* reflects the queer world in contemporary reality. Dattani's characters seek a remedy of their ills and suffering caused by the moral, psychological as well as social discrimination. Dattani advocates the plight of the subalterns. It is a stage play in three acts which was first performed at the Tata Theatre, Mumbai, on 23 November 1998. The play was produced and directed by Lillette Dubey. It was also adapted into a screenplay titled as *Mongo Souffle* by Sanjeev Shah which was released in February 2002 in India and won the best motion picture award at the Barcelona Film Festival the same year. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is the first play to handle gay theme of love, partnership, trust and betrayal. The modern society has undergone metamorphosis. It is a bold attempt to look into the inner lives of those who are excluded and forced to live with anxiety and insecurities in a solitude environment. The setting of the play is a small flat of Kamlesh located in the up market area of Marine Drive. A multi sets on a stage bifurcated into 3 interior spaces - 1) living room 2) bedroom 3) there is also the mental space indicated by the stage direction. Then there is not only the skyline of Mumbai beyond, but there is the real world out there, indicated by the presence of the wedding going on at ground level (heterosexual world). The frequent wedding music is heard, which is forbidden for the homosexuals. Dattani is a radical thinker who endows the 'others' with self-dignity, inner strength and the courage to endure their pains and struggles thus intend to shatter the social norms. The play deals with the sensitive gay relationships and homosexuality. The play presents a group of well-to-do homosexuals in Mumbai, their changing mutual relationships, their revelations, their self-delusions and self-discoveries. Through this play, Dattani tries to soften the attitudes of society towards the gays and tries to arouse compassion for this class at large.



Prakash and Kamlesh had homosexual relations. But Prakash decides to be straight and assumes a double identity with the name Ed and wants to marry Kamlesh's divorcee sister Kiran. It makes Kamlesh frustrated. The separation causes immense pain and distress in his heart but for his sister's welfare he accepts this betrayal done by Prakash. But Prakash promises him that once he is married with Kiran they could see more often without suspicion. **Ranjit**, a gay is working with HIV Counsellors at UK. He has taken an easy way out by moving to Europe where he can be himself more comfortable with his English gay partner freely. **Bunny** is a clandestine bi-sexual TV star. He is doing roles of husband and father in TV sitcom- **Yeh Hai Hamara Parivar**. He is rather more traditional, Indian gay man who is married and well set. He advises Kamlesh to get married with a woman and continue his feelings as a gay. He is a gay in disguise. He does not want to be denied acceptance of the society and its anti-homo attitude. Deepali asks Bunny if he can love his wife as much as he can love a man. He replies that he could not love her in that way but he gives her so much more. More than heterosexual man. I do look after her well. She is content. She boasts about his work to all her neighbours. Their children are popular in school. They love him. At least he is not depressed like Kamlesh. Thus he satisfied with his sexuality as both gay and straight (a bi- sexual).

*Ed: I will take care of Kiran. And you take care of me. ( Collected Plays: Mahesh Dattani Vol-I -2000 P.105)*

Ed tries to caress and kiss but he grabs Ed by the throat calls him a liar. After a break up with Prakash, Kamlesh, a gay, continues his relation with the security guard and pays him for this. He comes in contact with Sharad a flamboyant gay and develops homoricrelationship with him but Kamlesh can't adjust himself with him. Sharad devotes himself with Kamlesh for a year but in vain. Sharad in mid-thirties looks 25, dressed in designer's kurta. Ed is seen as the most pathetic and self-delved of all characters, but Kamlesh, a protagonist, too deceives himself and exploits others ( the guard, Sharad) He calls all friends to his room to take an oath that they would not disclose his previous relation with Prakash to his sister.

*Sharad sings a verse of a gay song: What Makes A Man A Man. 'So many times we have to pay (urges Kamlesh to sing along)/Forhaving fun and being gay'.*

Sharad loves Kamlesh and Kamlesh does not forget Prakash, though he pretends to be in love with Sharad. Prakash/ Ed loves Kiran as well as Kamlesh. Thus here is possessive sense, deception even in the queer world.

*Sharad: You know I still love you.*

*Kamlesh: Then why did you walk out on me?*

*Kamlesh: I tried Sharad, I ...*

*Sharad: You tried to love me, but...*

*Kamlesh: I do love you.*

*Sharad: Oh ! Spare me the lies ! You could never love anyone because you are still in love with Prakash! You threw me out.*

*Kamlesh: Now don't be...*

*Sharad:(over Kamlesh) And I am not being a drama queen.I wasted a year of my life being a housewife for you and all I get is a kick in the ass! You beast !(P. 56 Vol-I)*



Here reflects the conflict, love , hatred, passion , possessive sense of the gays.They look out through binoculars at the outer world through the window.

**Sharad:** *Oh my Gawd! Those heterosexuals are it again!*

**Kamlesh:** *If you can see them, they can see us. Shut the window. (P. 53 Vol-I)*

**Kiran:** *I really wish they would allow gay people to marry!*

**Ranjit:** *They do. Only not to the same sex.(P. 98 Vol.I)*

Deepali , a sensible lesbian shows affinity towards Kamlesh that works wonderfully , often loaded with irony and humour.

**Deepali:** *If you were a woman we would be in love.*

**Kamlesh:** *If you were a man , we would be in love.*

**Deepali:** *If we were heterosexual , we would be married.(P.65Vol- I)*

Thus the queer /minor community is left in the muggy night, darkness within a closed doors and windows. They are not permitted to marry and love .There is an irony that at the same time two worlds are reflected 1) The heterosexuals are enjoying in light while the homos are forced to confine in the darkness. They are consoling themselves sarcastically. Still Kamlesh loves Prakash. Sharad (a gay) and Deepali (a lesbian) are comfortable with their sexuality. Deepali is quite faithful and content with her lesbian relationship with Tina. Shemocks at the hypocritic society.

**Deepali:** *I thank God. Every time I menstruate I thank God I am a woman..(P.66Vol- I)*

Kamlesh is depressed, nostalgic regarding his love affair with Prakash. He has a photograph containing images of Prakash and Kamlesh nakedly holding each other tightly. Kamlesh tries to get rid of past memories by destroying photographs. But keeps one with him. Now Prakash is a lover of his sister –Kiran. So he feels acute pain and dilemma and sacrifices his feelings for his sister. He approaches a psychiatrist to cope up with illness and anguish.

**The psychiatrist advises him :***It is impossible to change society, but it may be possible for you to reorient yourself. (P.69 Vol. I)*

Deepali and Sharad want to disclose relationship of Prakash and Kamlesh. But Kamlesh forbids and tells them:

**Kamlesh :** *Prakash believes his love for me was the work of the devil. Now the devil has left him.*

The play reveals the gays and lesbians are proud of their being gay, they have a type of hidden anguish suppressed among them. It seriously expresses the concern of society where same sex relationship has no authenticity, which is thought unnatural and illegal in India and many other countries.. The Play portrays how Ed and Kamlesh deceive their surroundings and their relations stand only for their convenience of a kind of sexual compromise. Through this play Mahesh Dattani succeeds in persuading the audience to examine their individual and collective consciousness raising several pertinent questions stressing on the need of introspection of liberal minded people or who blindly follow the pre-determined laws rather prejudices of family and society at large. Dattani represents the mental agony of persons who are by nature ‘gays’ , ‘ lesbians’ or ‘bi-sexual’ and desire on the part of some of them to turn



heterosexual. The following dialogues exhibit the keen love between Kamlesh and Ed/Prakash.

**Kamlesh:** *If only they could see how beautiful we are together.*

**Ed:** *Are we?*

**Kamlesh:** *What?*

**Ed:** *Beautiful?*

**Kamlesh:** *Yes*

**Ed:** *I don't know. (Points to the people on the road) They wouldn't thinkso.*

**Kamlesh:** *They don't really see us. (P.81 Vol. I)*

As a result, his own previous relationship with Kamleshas well as his perception of other homosexuals becomes almost incorrigibly violated, as evident from the following outbursts against Kamlesh and his friends:

**Ed:** *Look around you. Look outside. (Goes to the window and flings itopen). Look at that wedding crowd! There are real men and women outthere! You have to see them to know what I mean. Butyou don't want to.You don't want to look at the world outside this...this den of yours. All of you want to live in your own little bubble. (P.99 Vol. I)*

A confidential photo of Kamlesh and Ed falls out of the apartment and comes into the presence of the people who were engaged in their marriage ceremony going on in the ground floor of the same apartment.

**Guard:** *Aap log apna kam sari duniya ko batana chahte hai kya?Aapka wo photo baraat wale ke compound mai gira.Sab bache dekh rahe the! Sab hans rahe the!Aur phir badonne bhi dekh liya. Sabne dekh liya!Mujhe pooch rahe the yaha kaun kaun aate hai.Society waloko sab kal complain karne wale hain.( P. 105 Vol- I)*

The people are going to complain against them to society, thus they always feel insecure .Dattani uses code- switching from English to Hindi. Sharad expresses his anger very severely against the heterosexual worldand dislikestheir ghettoization .

**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- areal man. Now why would I want to give it all? So what if I have to change a little? If I can be 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!(P.101Vol- I)*

The play becomes much more gripping when Kiran gets to know that Kamlesh was identified as she has committed a blunder of marrying Ed already his brother's boyfriend. When Kiran finds the photograph of Kamlesh and Prakash , she collapses. Already she was beaten by her former husband and was going to marry Ed whom she thought a best life partner . But she loses both her brother and Ed.



**Kiran:** *I-I have lost the two people whom I love... ( P.106 Vol- I) Deepali consoles her by saying :*

**Deepali:** *It's not shame, is it ?with us?...It's fear...of the corners we will be pushed into where we don't want to be. I too was once afraid of being a woman .Poor Kiran.!(P.82Vol- I)*

Here Feminism is also expressed through Kiran and Deepali.

*There is a fight between Kamlesh and Ed. Kamlesh . Ed tries to commit suicide by jumping out the window but is pushed in by others. Deepali picks up a rum bottle and hits Ed on the head ED staggers away. The guard puts Ed's arm around his shoulder and helps him to walk out. Sharad goes offstage singing the last verse of the gay song 'What Makes A Man A Man' Sharad: 'I ask myself what I have got/ And what I am and what I am not..'.(P.111Vol- I)*

Thus Dattani depicts two worlds- 1) Queer World and 2) the world of Feminism at the same time. All gay, bi-sexual, lesbian, heterosexual, straight, female and male characters go through various sweet and bitter experiences and feelings like love, hatred, repentance, deception, betrayal, anguish and sense of possession, non- acceptance by society, meaningfulness or vanity of their lives, their ghettoization in a city like Mumbai. In fact Dattani has stressed the extreme requirement for same sex marriage. Kamlesh, Prakash, Bunny, Ranjit, Sharad and Deepali have been assigned biological gender identities, but they have different inner sexual feelings, identities as gay, lesbian, bisexual. He advocates for them.

### Conclusions:

1. According to the historian Michel Foucault, sexuality exists on a continuum, with some people preferring sex partners of the opposite sex, others preferring partners of both sexes. This play applies this queer theory to the characters of this play:Kamlesh, Prakash/ Ed, Bunny, Ranjit, Sharad and Deepali.
2. Queer theorists scorn traditional definitions of "homosexual" and "heterosexual." There is no strict demarcation between male and female.
3. In India legal section 377 hurdles the homosexuality. Homosexuality was decriminalized and again recriminalized by our law system. In existing legal section 377homosexuality is unnatural and the homosexuals are punished for life imprisonment.
4. The Indian Govt. should pass the bill of legalizing homosexuality and make necessary amendment by cancelling existing section 377 in Indian Penal Code. It should be decriminalized.
5. In Indian constitution liberty, equality and fraternity are included; if the gay, lesbian, bi-sexual relations will be legalized they willget proper justice, equal status, liberty, human rights and honour in Indian society.
6. Indian society should change its traditional attitudes towards homosexuals accept them as a part of society, though it will be against Indian culture.
7. The present play advocates the gay, lesbian, bi-sexual relations and Dramatist Dattani also insists on their rights and the extreme requirement for same sex marriage



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